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This dissertation examines the cohesion of Raymond Aron's political thought and argues that its unifying principles are to be found in certain intellectual problems with which he was confronted early on in his life, thanks to his deep reading of various German thinkers. These intellectual problems consist of the relation between man and history, knowledge and action, and philosophy and politics. These problems are explored in three intertwined facets of Aron's thought – History, Sociology, and Praxeology – which are elaborated by setting Aron in dialogue with three key German thinkers: Wilhelm Dilthey, Karl Marx, and Max Weber respectively. This dissertation demonstrates not only that the roots of Aron's political thought reach back to the 1930s, but that his ongoing meditation on the philosophical problems raised at that time endure and provide the framework for his thought over the course of his entire life.

Diese Dissertation betrachet den inneren Zusammenhang des politischen Denkens Raymond Arons, indem sie dessen vereinigende Prinzipien in gewissen intellektuellen Fragestellungen darlegt, denen Aron besonders früh in seinem Leben durch deutsche Denkweisen und Philosophien begegnet ist. Diese intellektuellen Probleme bestehen aus dem Verhältnis zwischen Menschen und Geschichte, Erkenntnis und Handeln und Philosophie und Politik. Diese Probleme werden in drei verflochtenen Dimensionen seines Denkens – Geschichte, Soziologie, Praxeologie – erforscht, die ausgearbeitet werden, indem Aron in einen Dialog mit Wilhelm Dilthey, Karl Marx, und Max Weber gesetzt wird. Diese Dissertation demonstriert nicht nur, dass die Wurzeln des politischen Denkens Arons in den 1930er Jahren auftauchen, sondern auch, dass er sein ganzes Leben damit verbracht hat, über diese philosophischen Probleme anhaltend nachzudenken.

Table of Contents

Introduction

1. Summary – Raymond Aron

Raymond Aron was a French intellectual of the 20th century who lived from 1905 to 1983. No one doubts his role as a chapter in the history of ideas and intellectuals in France.[1] Although there have been more studies about his counterparts, Aron remains more influential today in many fields of study in France and the Anglo-Saxon world.[2] Exceptionally intelligent from an early age,[3] Aron was a contemporary of other leading French intellectuals at the time such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Emmanuel Mounier. Unlike these other intellectuals, however, Aron was both a French liberal and often characterized as an anti-Communist thinker.[4] While he was most certainly anti-Communist, it would be foolish and hasty to lump him in with the right-wing French Gaullists, for while he sympathized occasionally with de Gaulle – and was at the General's side in London during the Second World War – he was never a Gaullist partisan in the strictest sense of the word, save for a brief period after the war when he worked in Malraux's Ministry of Information.[5] In many ways Aron's political thought hovered in the middle at a time, and in a country, where politics was heavily polarized. For this refusal to align himself with the intellectual establishment, and his steadfastness in remaining a *spectateur engagé*, Aron was rebuked by many and would not come to enjoy the praise that his schoolmate Sartre had enjoyed until late in his life, around the time when Sartre's renown was beginning to dwindle.[6] Reprobation and accusations of cold-heartedness[7] were the price that Aron paid for lucidity and intellectual honesty during the age of extremes – as Eric Hobsbawm termed it[8] – and intellectual disingenuousness.[9] Nevertheless, he did have far-flung admirers, some of whom were in high places.[10]

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[1] See, among others, Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*; Hughes, *The Obstructed Path*; Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron*; Pierce, *Contemporary French Political Thought*; Huguenin, *Histoire intellectuelle des droites*; Chebel d'Appollonia, *Histoire politique des intellectuels en France*.

[2] The various dimensions of his thought have recently been studied in collections such as Colen and Dutartre-Michaut, eds., *The Companion to Raymond Aron*; Bevc and Oppermann, eds., *Der souveräne Nationalstaat*; De Ligio, ed., *Raymond Aron, penseur de l'Europe et de la nation*; Baehr, ed., "Special Issue: Raymond Aron"; Frost and Mahoney, *Political Reason in the Age of Ideology*.

[3] Hepp, "Souvenirs des années 20," 10.

[4] Laloy, "Un libéral passionné," 36-38; Lazitch, "Aron et le communisme," 47-49; Fleischmann, "Ce qu'est un vrai libéral," 103-105; Bloom, "Le dernier des libéraux," 174-182.

[5] For Aron's account of the brief time spent there, see Aron, *Mémoires*, 279-281.

[6] Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 245, 304.

[7] Aron, *Mémoires*, 485-486; Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 13, 133; Winock, "La Tragédie algérienne," 271.

[8] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*.

[9] On the intellectual culture of the time, see, e.g., Aron, *Mémoires*; Judt, *Past Imperfect*; Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*; Hughes, *The Obstructed Path*; Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron*; and Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*.

[10] Aron relates, e.g., Robert McNamara's flattery for him over his book, *Le grand débat*, in Aron, *Mémoires*, 600. Kissinger considered Aron to be his teacher. See Kissinger, "My teacher," 129.

Anyone who has taken the time to study and write on Raymond Aron can surely appreciate the numerous difficulties, not to mention rewards, to be had in analyzing his thought. He wrote on everything from philosophy to sociology, history to international relations. He was more politically active than fellow international relations theorists, more theoretically gifted than other journalists, and managed to combine these various levels of analysis with an acute sense of philosophy.[11] His doctoral dissertation, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*,[12] was directed against the positivism prevalent at the time in French academia, whereby he illustrated, as noted in the subtitle, the "limits of historical objectivity". This concern with history, uncertainty, the subjectivity involved in writing about history, and the unknowable future put Aron in an interesting position to critique Marxism and its totalizing history.[13] *L'opium des intellectuels* contains Aron's damning criticism of Marxism and especially of those, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, who continued to defend the crimes of the Soviet Union.[14] That this book was published prior to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 is a testament to how clear the problems of Communism were to those who were prepared to recognize them. Aron's polemic would only become stronger over time in works such as *D'une sainte famille à l'autre* (containing, amongst other things, his criticism of Althusser's structural Marxism) and *History and the Dialectic of Violence* (a critical analysis of Sartre's attempt to marry Marxism and existentialism in *Critique de la raison dialectique*).[15]

Many of Aron's works also addressed sociological issues such as his *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle*, *La lutte de classes*, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, and his two-volume work, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*.[16] In this field he can be considered "one of the last great sociologists of the classical era who thought both sociologically and politically by encompassing the reality of the modern world in all its dimensions."[17] In the area of international relations he contributed his lengthy work *Peace and War*[18] – "perhaps Aron's most ambitious book"[19] – and later, in a similar vein, he published a work on Clausewitz[20] that remained dear to him for the rest of his life.[21] Aron was an incredibly lucid, eloquent, and down-to-earth professor[22] who taught sociology at the Sorbonne from 1955 until 1968 after which he would teach at the Collège de France and found a trimestral political journal in 1978 called *Commentaire* which continues to be published today. In addition to his academic interests, of which the few books we have just mentioned constitute but a morsel, he also wrote articles during the war, compiled in *Chroniques de guerre*, in addition to working for *Le Figaro* (for which he was also criticized[23]) for thirty years before leaving it for *L'Express*, where he would

[11] Gaspar, "Aron and the Cold War," 46.
[12] Aron, *Introduction*.
[13] Cf., Shils, "Raymond Aron: A Memoir," 14.
[14] Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*.
[15] Aron, *D'une sainte famille à l'autre*; Aron, *History and Dialectic of Violence*, trans. Barry Cooper.
[16] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*; Aron, *La lutte de classes*; Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*; Aron, *Les étapes*.
[17] Paugam, introduction to *Les sociétés modernes*, 10. All translations mine unless otherwise indicated.
[18] Aron, *Peace and War*, trans. R. Howard and A. Baker Fox.
[19] Mahoney and Anderson, introduction to *Peace and War*, xvii.
[20] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1 and 2*.
[21] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 297.
[22] Manent, *Le regard politique*, 52; Besançon, "Raymond Aron à l'oral," 76; Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur," 166.
[23] "How could one write for newspapers, and especially for *Le Figaro?*" Bourricaud, "Entre 1947 et 1950," 33.

continue his journalistic work until his death.[24] Although he did not live long enough to see the end of the Cold War, his work can still be read with great profit today. In the words of an American scholar: "He is an intellectual antidote to any recurrence of the totalitarian temptation, and he teaches the democracies how they can be worthy of their unexpected and somewhat unearned victory."[25]

Aron's thought is an interesting chapter in the history of ideas in that he arrives at his moderate political conclusions by avenues of German thought, some of which can – when taken to an extreme – end up alternatively in dogmatism or in some form of nihilism, where "the true value system does not exist; there is a variety of values which are of the same rank, whose demands conflict with one another, and whose conflict cannot be solved by human reason."[26] Therefore, this dissertation will follow Aron's intriguing intellectual path and explore the ongoing exchange of ideas between him and some of these German thinkers. We should also like to mention that "German thought" does not constitute a monolithic unity; indeed, there are many trends. The interest in studying some of these trends in Aron's own thinking is that it proffers us the opportunity to study the processes underlying intellectual influence. By focusing the spotlight on Aron's lifelong interaction with the themes suggested to him by certain German thinkers, we will also achieve a second objective of imparting to his overall philosophy a coherence that was always latent but not necessarily explicitly expressed.

2. Problems to be addressed and State of the Art

This dissertation will be a work of intellectual biography, offering a new take on Aron's political thought. The problem driving this research project is rooted in the distinctive characteristics of Aron's multifaceted thought. Some of the works on Aron have managed to synthesize much of Aron's prodigious output and focus it on a single theme, whether by finding the unifying principle in his opposition to totalitarianism based on his experience of Germany,[27] his commitment to Europe as a European citizen,[28] his liberal and probabilistic approach to politics as interpreted especially in an exegesis of one of his essays,[29] his "recovery of the political",[30] his political engagement as a public intellectual,[31] or simply his biography (academic or otherwise).[32]

Our project too offers an interpretation of the underlying coherence to Aron's political thought by taking him at his word and availing ourselves of the several times that he mentions the influence that various German thinkers had on him.[33] This engagement, and the themes that

[24] Aron, *Chroniques de guerre*; Aron, *Les articles du Figaro, Tome 1*; Aron, *Les articles du Figaro, Tome 2*; Aron, *Les articles du Figaro, Tome 3*; Aron, *De Giscard à Mitterrand*.
[25] Mahoney, preface to *In Defense of Political Reason*, ix.
[26] Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 41-42. See also Strauss, "German Nihilism [1941]," 353-378.
[27] Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*.
[28] Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*.
[29] Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*.
[30] Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*.
[31] Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 137-182.
[32] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*; Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Sociologist*; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*.
[33] Aron, *Mémoires*, 83-84, 101ff; Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 25ff; Aron, "De la condition historique du sociologue," 1073-1075; Aron, *Les étapes*, 21; Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 304; Aron, preface to the English

preoccupied those thinkers, will endure over the course of Aron's entire life, as this dissertation will demonstrate. The philosophical issues at stake are "the specific features of consciousness of man by man or of human history by an historically situated subject, the relation between knowledge and action and, in the end, between philosophy and politics."[34] We will explore Aron's overarching concern with these topics by showing the interlinkages between three crucial dimensions of his political thought: the importance of his roots in prewar German thought (History – Dilthey), his unconventional sociological approach to modern regimes (Sociology – Marx), and his view of statesmanship as a mean between vulgar Machiavellianism and naïve idealism that allows for the possibility of philosophy and political life (Praxeology – Weber).

2.1 Aron was a politically moderate and liberal French thinker who, despite his interest in the German intellectual world that had a nihilistic tendency in the interwar years,[35] managed to avoid their pitfalls, retained a lifelong interest in the problems posed by the relation between man and history, and was a defender of liberal democracy. He embodies the three defining qualities of French liberalism outlined by a recent scholar,[36] but he arrives at these conclusions by way of German historicism. This is the same category that includes thinkers such as Nietzsche, who emphasizes the will to power over truth; Weber, who recognizes a world eternally beset by warring values; and Heidegger, who sees man's existence as a choice in the face of death. We will demonstrate that Aron, unlike his colleague Sartre, continues to believe that the search for truth is a worthwhile endeavour, all the while acknowledging that values can conflict and violence and revolution can break out. Aron was heavily influenced by German historicism, particularly that of Dilthey, both early on and later in life, and he maintained the limits of knowing the total movement of history; but this does not lead him to demote reason. Our problem, then, will be to demonstrate the pervasive influence of historicism on Aron's thought and understand how he nevertheless continues to defend reason.

2.2 The foregoing will compel us to the study of our present social order. Aron's sociological study (trilogy) of industrial society, as he himself states,[37] takes place on three levels – economic, social, political – in an effort to discern the similarities and differences between the Western and Soviet worlds. Because it is sociological, his classification of regimes is specific to the modern industrial civilization that is the subject of his entire trilogy. His sociological approach and choice of subject are strongly influenced by his study of Marx and his desire to provide a more nuanced and accurate account of modern society. The roots for this study were planted already in the 1930s when Aron was contemplating the issue of class struggle. Our problem will be to examine the economic, social, and political dimensions of industrial society as well as their interconnections. This will allow us to set Aron's sociological method against that of his interlocutor, Karl Marx. It will also allow us to set Aron's study of industrial society in the broader context of the aforementioned overarching philosophical concerns.

2.3 The earlier discussions of regimes, the limits of knowledge and reason, and history, all point to one of the central focuses of Aron's thought: political action. To elaborate a theory of political action, especially action in history, was a project that had long fascinated Aron and

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edition of *History and the Dialectic of Violence*, xi; Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 25-32; Aron, "On Tocqueville," trans. Marc LePain, 176.

[34] Aron, preface to the English edition of *History and the Dialectic of Violence*, xi.

[35] Strauss, "German Nihilism [1941]," 353-378; Wirth, foreword to the English edition of *Ideologie und Utopie*, xxi-xxii.

[36] Siedentop, "Two liberal traditions [1979]," 15-35.

[37] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 753-754.

which he never managed to bring to fruition. To be considered here is Aron's treatment of the means-ends problem and Weber's two ethics. Weber sets up the framework for Aron's praxeological thought in the 1930s, and Aron continues to grapple with it for the rest of his life. The problem of political action was made even more critical for Aron given his experience of the descent of Western regimes into various forms of tyranny. He continues his meditation on political action at the international level as well. At stake in each of these instances is a choice between the politically expedient on the one hand, and satisfying one's ideals on the other. To go too far in the direction of idealism is politically irresponsible, but to go too far in the direction of pragmatism is to sail along avoiding the rocks without aiming for the shore. Our problem will be to consider Aron's prudential treatment of political action as the outgrowth of his debate with Weber. It is in Aron's solution to this problem that we will see how he makes room for philosophy and a reasonable politics in history – a preliminary result to his overriding philosophical concern throughout his life.

Some of the components covered in this dissertation have been discussed in other contexts before. These discussions will appear in the footnotes. A worthy introduction to some of the most current trends in Aron research can be summed up by briefly examining the recently published *The Companion to Raymond Aron*.[38] The editors of this volume divided up Aron's thought into three categories: international relations, the analysis of political regimes, and his contribution to the history of ideas. To date Nicolas Baverez has written the only full scale biography of Raymond Aron, in which he tries to take a closer look at the man and his life.[39] José Colen's work has been key in reminding us of the importance of the study of history in Aron's thought, although he has cast his net far wider than we are able to by examining other thinkers in dialogue with Aron, such as Leo Strauss and Isaiah Berlin.[40]

Of those who contributed to the international relations section we have drawn mostly on Matthias Oppermann's dissertation, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland: Die Verteidigung der Freiheit und das Problem des Totalitarismus*.[41] Oppermann also argues for the critical role that Germany plays in Aron's thought. The two questions governing the direction of his research are: "How did Aron's dual experience of Germany – his scientific experience with German philosophy and his political experience with National Socialism – affect the development of his liberal political thought? On the basis of his political liberalism how did he evaluate Germany's role in the history of Europe in the 20th century?"[42] The second question does not concern us. As to the first, Oppermann is engaged with the importance of Aron's political and intellectual experiences regarding Germany and how they formed his liberalism and resistance to totalitarianism. We, on the other hand, have drawn on Oppermann mainly for historical context and to engage him on his insights with respect to thinkers such as Marx and Weber.

One of the additional benefits of our project is that we shall be presenting some of these insights to an English-reading audience. Our research draws on similar content as some of the other existing German literature;[43] however, one of the currents in the English and French language literature that we should like to address is the common references made to Aron's

[38] Colen and Dutartre-Michaut, eds., *The Companion to Raymond Aron*.
[39] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*.
[40] Colen, "A Edificação do mundo histórico; Colen, *Futuro do politico*; Colen, *Facts and Values*; Colen, *Short Guide to the* Introduction to the Philosophy of History.
[41] Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*.
[42] Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 12-13.
[43] Most notably, Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*.

Aristotelianism, be it in terms of his sociology of regimes or his prudence, and the relativism that seems inevitable once one has drunk from the rivers of German philosophy.[44] We will bring out the importance of Aron's German intellectual heritage throughout his life's work, addressing along the way the matter of how he managed to avoid the extremism, or nihilism or relativism to which other thinkers such as Weber, Marx, and Sartre fell prey. Lastly, we will add to the literature in this respect by emphasizing the role played by German phenomenology and especially Dilthey in Aron's thought.

The second section of *The Companion to Raymond Aron* deals mainly with the question of regimes. Aron's trilogy on industrial society has received scant treatment in accordance with Aron's intentions, that is to say, as a cohesive whole studying industrial society on the economic, social, and political levels.[45] The essays included in *The Companion* have individually gone some way to rectifying this problem by treating of some of the courses that make up the trilogy or by addressing some of the fundamental questions the trilogy was concerned with.[46] One of the additional themes for which there is precedent in the literature is the idea of democracy as essentially conflictual, which derives ultimately from Aron's reading of the neo-Machiavellians.[47] Our Sociology section will draw on this literature but it will also move in a different direction by situating Aron's trilogy on industrial society and his sociological method in the broader framework of his lifelong philosophical project of studying man and action in history.

The third section of *The Companion* does Aron justice by approaching the great debates Aron had with thinkers of the past. He was one of the most generous and prodigious readers of others, and treating of this exchange of ideas has the benefit of presenting both the ideas of Aron's interlocutors as well as the intellectual backdrop for some of Aron's own commentary on politics and society. Our article co-authored with José Colen is an abridged version of the chapter on Max Weber included in this dissertation.[48] Of greatest interest for us is the recent work on Aron's "Machiavellianism" and the relation between Aron and Montesquieu.[49] By contrast, it has been common to situate Aron in the tradition of French liberalism (owing in no small part to the fact that he was willing to consider himself a French liberal) and emphasize Aron's connection to Tocqueville.[50] We find the connections to Machiavelli and Montesquieu more rewarding for the elective affinity that Aron enjoys with the latter in his sociological approach, and for the varied uses to which he employs the former in his praxeology.

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[44] Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*; Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*; Baumann, "Raymond Aron and Jean-Paul Sartre," 49; Manent, introduction to *Liberté et égalité*, 5-26.

[45] An exception to this is Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*.

[46] De Ligio, "The Question of Political Regime," 119-135; Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 149-162; Paugam, "Revisiting Aron's *The Class Struggle*," 163-176; Stewart, "The Origins of the 'End of Ideology?'," 177-190.

[47] The main work here is Audier, *La démocratie conflictuelle*.

[48] Nelson and Colen, "Statesmanship and Ethics," 205-216.

[49] Aurélio, "'Moderate Machiavellianism'," 231-244; Morgado, "Montesquieu and Aron," 245-260.

[50] This along with Aron's political moderation has recently been explored by Aurelian Craiutu. See Craiutu, "Raymond Aron and Alexis de Tocqueville," 261-274; Craiutu, "Raymond Aron and the tradition of political moderation in France," 271-290; Craiutu, "Faces of Moderation," 261-283.

3. Methodology

Regarding the use of the word "intellectual", as Dietz Bering observes, the term intellectual has assumed a wide array of different connotations over the years and also within different countries.[51] We do not mean to use the term in a pejorative sense as does Paul Johnson in his *Intellectuals*.[52] Nor, when speaking of Aron, do we wish to employ the term as referring to a universalist who speaks outside of his profession and beyond his capabilities, commenting on technical fields of which he is ignorant.[53] While such a definition could have been applied to Sartre, it would have inaccurately described Aron. Aron was interested in how to improve the human condition and he was, as Nicolas Baverez calls him, *un moraliste au temps des idéologies*.[54] He could be considered an intellectual in the same group as Sartre, in that both were public commentators, but by going against the grain of mainstream thought (i.e. Marxism), as well as informing himself on a variety of issues before commenting on them, Aron was his own breed of intellectual. We have chosen the word intellectual to describe Aron, as opposed to other common terms such as sociologist,[55] political philosopher,[56] or even simply professor or journalist, because we believe that "intellectual" better describes what he was and what it is that we wish to say about him, namely, that he was a man concerned with the problems of his time (philosophical, sociological, political, etc.), who not only analyzed and commented on them as objectively as possible, but did so also with a view to how the human condition could realistically be improved. In this sense, he was an intellectual who felt the "burden of responsibility".[57]

The scholarship on the methodological approaches to biographical writing is extensive,[58] but there is a brief remark worth bringing up in this connection: Schleiermacher long ago introduced the notion of "understanding an author better than he understood himself".[59] One can achieve a more holistic and meaningful understanding of the author than he had of himself, but first one ought to begin with the author's own understanding of himself. It is in this spirit that we begin our work on Aron. In his study of Marx in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, Aron states that if one is uncertain of one's own genius, then in studying a great mind of the past it is often better to begin by understanding him as he understood himself.[60] Aron's method with Marx was to proceed in "good faith" and take him at his word.[61] He devised a plan for reading an author and so it is wise not to ignore his own idiosyncratic thought or advice on how to approach the study of past thinkers.[62] We are not the first to call attention to the fact that Aron seems to follow Schleiermacher in his study of other authors.[63]

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[51] Bering, *Die Epoche der Intellektuellen*, 15.
[52] Johnson, *Intellectuals*.
[53] Judt, *Reappraisals*, 13.
[54] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*.
[55] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 3.
[56] Mahoney, *In Defense of Political Reason*, viii.
[57] Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*.
[58] One can begin with the discussion in Klein, ed., *Grundlagen der Biographik*.
[59] Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*.
[60] Aron, *Les étapes*, 146.
[61] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 20, 595.
[62] See Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 19-36; Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 17-26.
[63] Mesure, "Aron and Marxism," 227.

As early as Aron's *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* he observed that there is a separation between the reconstruction of the past and an actor's lived experience.[64] Aron was also aware of the fact that an author is not the supreme judge of his own work.[65] Therefore we need not halt our analysis at what Aron said about himself, since his work assumes new life in the hands of his interpreters. In a sense, it no longer belongs to him.[66] We cannot pretend to have understood him better than he understood himself; although, by starting from his self-understanding and his own aspirations for his philosophical work, we will have discovered a greater coherence and significance in the answers Aron furnished to the questions he put to himself his entire life.

A work that is as concerned as this dissertation is with the life of the mind may also be considered a work in the history of ideas, or intellectual history. The history of ideas, however, is something of a hybrid child, unsatisfying both for philosophers and purely theoretical-minded researchers, but also for historians of a more conventional character. In fact, today historians of ideas prefer to study the expression of culture as understood in its anthropological or sociological aspect. Besides, it is sometimes deemed impossible to recover an author's intention, thus leaving us with nothing other than postmodern readings.

We shall avoid the controversies between those who uphold that the thought of a thinker should be understood only in the context of his contemporaries and those who would rather place it in a traditional canon of thought.[67] As mentioned, we intend to take Aron at his word. Part of this involves taking seriously his critique of historical knowledge as laid out in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*. Where he was able to experience his thoughts developing first hand, we have the advantage of being able to look back on his life and his works in retrospect and construct a meaning and unity that we will illustrate was implicit in his texts, though never systematically expressed. Furthermore, we do not believe that ideas are unconnected to one another, as if they were billiard balls colliding on a pool table. We refuse to acknowledge the "myth of the context" or the *Annales* school's idea that great minds are bound by the *mentalité* of their time.[68]

As we will prove, Aron would have been the first to acknowledge that historical actors are *informed* by their time periods, but he would also have murmured in the same breath that there is a plurality of interpretations and causes, and that we are never entirely trapped in our thinking and acting by impersonal forces. Therefore, heading each part of the dissertation there will be a contextual section that will serve to orient the more "philosophical", successive sections. The contextual sections are the most straightforwardly biographical sections and will amplify different dimensions of Aron's public engagement and thought: as a doe-eyed pacifist turned disillusioned realist in Germany; as a sociologist in the postwar rebuilding of the French sociological tradition at the Sorbonne; and, finally, as the *spectateur engagé*, commenting on 20th century history in the making.

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[64] Aron, *Introduction*, 131-132; Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 314.

[65] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 2.

[66] Aron, *Introduction*, 121.

[67] A well-known representative of the former is Quentin Skinner. The most famous presentation of this methodology is in Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 3-53. We could consider, as representative of the latter, Strauss and Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy*.

[68] A summary of some of the different waves of the *Annales* school can be found in Clark, "The *Annales* historians," 177-198.

The majority of our energy, however, will be spent on engaging with Aron's mind and his ideas; for, to suggest – as some of the *Annales* school do by means of *mentalités*, the Marxists by means of socio-economic forces, the Paretians by means of residues, the Freudians by means of drives, the Foucauldians by means of power relationships – that a thinker's ideas are irrelevant in light of some underlying force beyond which their content has no purchase is patently absurd. "Somewhere at some time someone must have decided to do something. 'Vast impersonal forces' are simply abstractions – the sum of an infinite number of small but strictly personal decisions."[69] Although informed by the ideas of his time, Aron manages to go far beyond his contemporaries and the fashion of his time. This is because Aron takes seriously the ideas of his interlocutors, and a history of ideas cannot be properly so called if it refuses at every juncture to take seriously the content of the ideas it is exploring.

To aid us further in our endeavour of achieving the twin goals of tracing the intellectual influence of German thought on Aron and using it as a benchmark for establishing the unity of his political thought, we have assigned three key German thinkers with whom, we argue, Aron was in dialogue in each one of the aforementioned three dimensions: Wilhelm Dilthey for History, Karl Marx for Sociology, and Max Weber for Praxeology. This dialogical method is once again consonant with Aron's own preferred methods.[70] We make no claim to have exhausted any one of these three thinkers' ideas in this dissertation. Nor, for that matter, do we mean to argue that Aron was engaged in debate with one thinker and one thinker alone in the context of each dimension. Arranging these three figures as we have – an arrangement that is suggested by the sources themselves – will allow us to distill the essential features of Aron's thinking as they pertain to his lifelong philosophical concerns.

4. Dissertation Plan

Each part emphasizes some dimension of Aron's thought that falls under the "German influence". Each part will begin with a contextual section followed by a section on Aron's interaction with a particular German thinker. The remaining sections will continue to flesh out the ideas pertinent to that particular part.

4.1 History – Influence of German Historicism

4.1a Context: Pilgrimage to Germany
4.1b Influence of Historicism: Dilthey
4.1c German Phenomenology
4.1d The Pathos of the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*
4.1e Dilthey Revisited: The Incomplete Trilogy

4.2 Sociology – Industrial Society

4.2a Context: The Sorbonne, Modern Society, and Sociology
4.2b Aron's Marx

[69] Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 5.
[70] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 292-293.

4.2c Industrial Society
4.2d Class Struggle
4.2e The Constitutional-Pluralist Regime

4.3 Praxeology – Principles of Political Action

4.3a Context: Drama in History – Thinking like a Statesman
4.3b Max Weber and the Problem of the Conflict of Values
4.3c Aron's Machiavellianism
4.3d Totalitarianism
4.3e Praxeology in *Peace and War*

4.4 Conclusion

4.4a Summary Conclusion
4.4b Final Note: Action in History

Part 1 – History – Influence of German Historicism

1a – Context: Pilgrimage to Germany

Raymond Aron was an immensely cultured individual.[71] Later in life he emphasized the importance of his education in Germany.[72] His pilgrimage to Germany in the early 1930s is acknowledged as a time of great intellectual development.[73] His intellectual upbringing in France was marked by neo-Kantianism and positivism (through Léon Brunschvicg, Aron's doctoral dissertation advisor), and pacifism (Alain), none of which stood up well to the intellectual and political developments he was witnessing in Germany.[74] Aron's political interests, fostered from a young age at home, were only heightened in Germany. His experiences in Germany, both political and intellectual, marked him for the rest of his life in ways that, despite their similar academic upbringing, made Aron depart massively from his companion Sartre.

In this section we will sketch the importance of these intellectual influences as well as his experience of Nazi Germany. We will proceed by examining the following: *Aron's intellectual upbringing in France. The tradition of French scholars in Germany. Political developments in Germany.*

Aron's Intellectual Upbringing in France

Raymond Aron was from the beginning groomed to be a part of France's intellectual elite. In a country and a time when intellectuals prided themselves on weighing in on all political matters from atop their perch, Aron was unique in the sheer breadth and depth of his erudition and his ability to switch between international relations, economics, sociology, and philosophy, without ever forgetting the complexity of their interconnections. He was a bright student in his youth[75] and would find himself surrounded by like-minded and intellectually gifted students

[71] He was, for example, one of the few French intellectuals of the 20th century to have mastered languages other than French (namely German and English) and written articles and given courses in them. See Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 311.

[72] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 40-41: "I became aware of the world. In other words, I had my political education, not my sentimental education. In the spring of 1930 I arrived in Germany an altar boy. In 1933 I returned to France an adult."

[73] See, e.g., Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur," 155-156; Baverez, "Life and Works," 5; Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 37-45.

[74] Aron, *Mémoires*, 66-74.

[75] Raymond's younger years were characterized by a fervent passion for tennis and bridge. As to the former, Léon Brunschvicg humorously related: "Among the Aron brothers there are two excellent philosophers and two excellent tennis players and yet there are only three of them. A polytechnicien friend of mine has never found the solution to this problem…". Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 36.

Aron was instructed by a private teacher until he started attending the Lycée Hoche in Versailles at the age of eight. Here he met two other schoolboys with whom he would maintain a lifelong friendship: Jacques Hepp and Léonard Rist. 1921-1922 were decisive years for him in that he was taken with the study of philosophy and the Left. He completed his *baccalauréat* with a *très bien* at seventeen and then competed in the *concours général* in philosophy, being awarded the fourth place prize. Afterwards he went to the Lycée Condorcet for two years where he excelled in philosophy, French, Greek, Latin, history, and German. Jacques Hepp attests to his early inquisitiveness and intelligence:

from 1924 to 1928 at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS), including Daniel Lagache, Jean Cavaillès, Georges Canguilhem, Paul Nizan, and, most importantly, Jean-Paul Sartre. Aron was enchanted by the latter two "petits camarades", both of whom arrived from the Lycée Henri IV. In fact, Sartre was one of Aron's closest friends before their fallout in the late 1940s.[76] The academic environment at ENS breathed "a spirit of liberty" and, coupled with its small and elite selection of students, provided the perfect ambiance for the dissemination of ideas and rapid intellectual development.[77]

French philosophy at the time was heavily influenced by three academics in particular: Henri Bergson, Léon Brunschvicg, and Alain.

Bergson had already retired by the time Aron entered ENS. He was the leading representative of the French spiritualist tradition and his most influential work was *L'évolution créatrice*, where he puts forward the notion of "élan vital", the force of life that tries to creatively circumvent the resistance of matter.[78] For Aron in retrospect, Bergson was one of those rare philosophers who managed to be both critical and a system builder at the same time. He combined a theory of intuition with a dialectical approach that contrasted antitheses between action and thought, intelligence and instinct, matter and "élan vital", open and closed morality.[79]

However, it was Brunschvicg and Alain who exercised a more considerable influence on Aron during these years when he considered himself "vaguely socialist" and "passionately pacifist".[80]

Alain's personality impressed Aron more than his political thought.[81] His real name was Emile Chartier and he was a firm pacifist by conviction, whose attitude to war, Aron would

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"We were in the first class where the history professor was explaining to us the Dreyfus Affair, and Aron was listening very attentively. His conclusions at the end of his analysis were ambiguous and left room for doubt as to Dreyfus's role, whereupon Aron raised his hand to make a comment. The professor acknowledged him and we began to hear an astounding defence supported with exact quotes, dates, and irrefutable arguments. At 15 years old he had read everything (newspaper articles, pamphlets, trial proceedings), processed everything, and retained everything. We listened to him in fascination. The professor, aware that the class had been disrupted, did not interrupt him. He prudently decided not to stand up to a student who had an exceptional gift for argumentation. In the coming months we would have many other demonstrations of the astonishing maturity of his mind and his highly developed ability to reason." Hepp, "Souvenirs des années 20," 10.
See Aron, *Mémoires*, 39; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 31-32, 45; Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 15-19.

[76] Aron – notwithstanding the calm and "icy" demeanor with which he became rather unjustly associated as he grew older – could reveal a burning passion with respect to his friends. Pierre Bertaux recalls the famous scene at the end of the 1926-1927 academic year: "I was beside him in the entrance hall of the 'Aquarium' school. We had just seen them put up the list of those who passed the philosophy *agrégation*. Aron was at the top of the list, which was in alphabetic order. After the oral exam he would always be at the top by order of merit. I saw Raymond Aron read the list until the end and then he let out a cry of rage and threw his hat on the ground (we hardly ever used to go without covering our heads, and his hat, a beautiful brown castor, was luxurious and valuable), and stomping on it he cried 'ah, the c..ts! the c..ts! They flunked Sartre.' I thought that the serenity of the philosopher had a limit and that it had just been reached; that under the cerebral surface there was what we would call 'a heart', a sensibility, a passion. In short: a man." Bertaux, "Amitiés normaliennes," 14. On his "icy" demeanor see Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 164-165.

[77] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 50. He would later recollect that he had "never met so many intelligent people gathered in so few square metres". Aron, *Mémoires*, 56.

[78] Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 50-51; Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* , 715. Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*.

[79] See Aron, "Réflexions sur la philosophie bergsonienne [1941]," 351-358.

[80] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 23-24.

[81] Aron, *Mémoires*, 69-74. Aron considers Alain's political thought in Aron, "Remarques sur la pensée politique d'Alain," 187-199; Aron, "Alain et la politique [1952]," 111-120.

remark, was not too far from Bertrand Russell's saying that "none of the evils that one tries to avoid by war is as great an evil as war itself."[82] He once told Aron: "Do not take too seriously my political views. There are people I do not like and I have spent my time letting them know that."[83] He was resolutely on the side of "the people" and against the bureaucracy and abuse of power. Indeed,

> a steady, unremitting, indefatigable resistance to injustice and oppression – that is the substance of Alain's political credo…Alain had passed through the conventional selecting-ground of the French literary and philosophical élite, the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He differed from such other *normaliens* as Durkheim and Bergson, however, in never attaining – or apparently seeking – the highest academic honors. He remained all his life a secondary-school teacher – and proud to be one – proud to be in opposition to the Sorbonne and to the constituted powers of the university, as he was in opposition to all other constituted authority.[84]

This general attitude to politics would not square with the more mature Aron, but during his years at ENS it would suffice. In any case, Aron would later account for his intellectual proximity to Alain in these early years as a result of his political ignorance:

> I made use of [Alain's politics] at a time when I knew nothing of societies or the economy and when my sentiments were justified more or less with poor reasons: pacifism, the horror of war, adherence to ideas of the Left, universalism as a reaction to the nationalism of the older generation, hostility to those in power, vague socialism…If I was tempted by Alain's politics it is because it saved me the trouble of acknowledging reality and putting myself in the shoes of the leaders and coming up with a solution to the problems.[85]

Political passions – aside from pacifism and some vague idea of being on the left – were largely absent from ENS in the 1920s anyway.[86] They would appear in stark relief when Aron took up his pilgrimage, so to speak, to Germany.

As for Léon Brunschvicg, he was a neo-Kantian, idealist philosopher who was tremendously influential while he was at the Sorbonne (1900-1939) and who (along with Xavier Léon) founded in 1893 the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, in which Aron sometimes published articles.[87] His three great works, *Les Etapes de la Pensée mathématique*, *L'Expérience humaine et la Causalité physique*, and *Le Progrès de la Conscience dans la Philosophie occidentale*, outline the progressive creation of the mathematical and physical worlds as well as our increasing awareness of said worlds.[88] For Aron and his academic companions Brunschvicg's work commanded respect, despite (or perhaps on account of) the fact that they

[82] Quoted in Aron, "Remarques sur la pensée politique d'Alain," 191. Alain's position can be characterized by what Max Weber called the ethic of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*).
[83] Aron, *Mémoires*, 72.
[84] Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 276.
[85] Aron, *Mémoires*, 71.
[86] Smith, *The Ecole Normale Supérieure*, 99. There appears to be some confusion as to whether Aron was for a brief six months in 1926 a card-carrying SFIO member in the Parisian Fifth Section or just a member of the Etudiants socialistes in order to "do something for the people". On this matter see Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle*, 487-490.
[87] Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 7, 40-48.
[88] Aron, "La philosophie de Léon Brunschvicg," 129. Brunschvicg, *Les Etapes*; Brunschvicg, *L'Expérience humaine*; Brunschvicg, *Le Progrès de la Conscience*.

could not follow the math and physics.[89] It was something of a mix of positivism and idealism combined in a neo-Kantian mélange. Brunschvicg's idealism shone through in his moral attitude which was adamant about removing all roadblocks to the progress of science.[90] And here was evidenced his positivism: although discarding Kantian categories and metaphysics, he believed that the only way to have knowledge of the world was through the spirit which constructs reality by means of science. In other words, science was the only way of attaining to any knowledge at all.[91] Brunschvicg nonetheless had not distinguished between two essentially different kinds of science which would form the bedrock of the entire investigation of the German neo-Kantian school.

From this follows another crucial difference between Brunschvicg's positivism and the German tradition that Aron would confront: Progress is more easily discernible in the natural sciences than in the social sciences. According to some historians the fatal flaw of positivism, and the entire political worldview that it supported, was that it assumed the permanence of the established political order and that any changes were inevitable steps to be taken in order to move forward.[92]

The conflation of these two sciences – or rather, the inclusion of the social under the natural rubric – also fed the illusion that there were solid laws of development in both the natural and social worlds, and that humans were simply along for the ride. Human agency had entirely given way to determinism. But this was not the original perspective taken by the positivists, who were rather inclined to believe that human problems could be resolved by rational action.[93] What both accounts of positivism have in common is the belief in progress. And in an atmosphere charged with the many enthusiastic advances made in the natural sciences in the 19th century, it might have appeared "satanic" or "despairing" to question the very notion of progress.[94]

This facile idea had already come under fire in Germany in the 19th century, but the cloistered academic environment of France had successfully deflected these attacks and some form of positivism therefore remained. Its leading proponent in the field of sociology in France at the time was Emile Durkheim,[95] an intellectual descendant of Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, whose notions of organic solidarity, collective consciousness, and methodological collectivism had left Aron cold.[96]

Finally, it was under Brunschvicg's tutelage that Aron Aron came into contact with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and spent eight to ten hours a day for a year reading his works.[97]

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[89] Aron, *Mémoires*, 66-69.

[90] See Aron's sympathetic and even-handed view of Brunschvicg's philosophy in Aron, "La philosophie de Léon Brunschvicg," 127-140.

[91] As a matter of fact, during Aron's military service (October 1928 – March 1930) he began to study biology—in particular, genetics—a study which he perceived could be manipulated for good or for ill. Ultimately this endeavour was abandoned as he felt he could not add anything to the discipline that the biologists themselves could not already contribute. Aron, *Mémoires*, 82-83.

[92] Lichtheim, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, 70-72; Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 269.

[93] Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 38-39.

[94] Paul Fauconnet, one of the professors present at Aron's dissertation defence, judged his secondary thesis to be "of someone satanic or despairing". See "Compte rendu de la soutenance de thèse de R. Aron," 28-31, cited in Aron, *Introduction*, 441-445.

[95] Although he died in 1917 Durkheim's teachings were absorbed and passed on by his students, a second generation of Durkheimians, such as Maurice Halbwachs.

[96] Aron, *Mémoires*, 103-106.

[97] Aron, *Mémoires*, 45; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 58.

In 1927 he completed his diploma work on Kant entitled "La notion d'intemporel dans la philosophie de Kant : Moi intelligible et liberté",[98] an effort of more than passing importance; for although Aron's interests remained metaphysical at the time, the choice of topic, the notion of time and the opposition between practical and transcendental liberty, would seem already to suggest there was room for a blooming curiosity in the relation between philosophy and politics.[99] The text also explores the idea of a subject free to reinterpret his lived experience at every possible moment.[100] Aron derives two important lessons from his early work on Kant: Kantian universalism is purely formal, and therefore it does not explain or guide political action. Secondly, the universality of values is possible "only if there is but one set of rules that escape the corruption of time."[101] What was lacking in Kant was a practical theory of ethics and action corresponding to how individuals actually experience reality. For Aron it would not be enough to consider freedom purely formally and as if it were simply an extra-temporal category.[102] Instead freedom and morality exist in concrete acts. Thus "by striving to shift liberty from the level of the intelligible to that of personal acts, decisions, and choices, Aron…moves the fulcrum of the moral problem *from the control of law to the self-control of the individual*."[103] Even before his trip to Germany Aron's concern for what he would later term praxeology was already evident. It is also apparent that he was already concerned with freedom and action *within* time or history, as actually experienced by humans. Nevertheless, he was taken with the categorical imperative, and Kant's thought mapped nicely onto the ahistorical universalism of French thought.[104] His early immersion in Kant crops up even at the end of his life, and certain enduring Kantian influences on Aron remain topics of study in the secondary literature.[105]

The Tradition of French Scholars in Germany

Ever since France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, *la Grande Nation* had decided it would be appropriate for young French *agrégés* to complete their studies in Germany in order to familiarize themselves with the most recent research and philosophical currents.[106] There were a number of reasons for this: for one, the French realized that the German officers had a much better knowledge of French and France than the French officers had of German or Germany; secondly, for economic reasons it would be advantageous for the French to know the language of

[98] Aron, "La notion d'intemporel".

[99] The importance of this early work on Kant has been emphasized by the German historian, Matthias Oppermann, in Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 35-36. This thorough work is devoted to evaluating the influence of Aron's experience of German philosophy and National Socialism on the development of his liberal political thought. Above and beyond this, it also examines Aron's take on Germany's role in the context of European history in the 20th century. Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 12-13.

[100] Aron, *Mémoires*, 62.

[101] Colen, *Facts and Values*, 35-36. Colen, a political philosopher and scholar of Aron, also sees this early work as important for the two reasons cited above. His research has focused substantially on Aron's early work, especially as it relates to the problem of historicism, not to mention Aron's dialogue with other cold war liberal thinkers, especially Leo Strauss. He explores these subjects in, Colen, "A Edificação do mundo histórico"; Colen, *Futuro do politico*; Colen, *Short Guide to the* Introduction to the Philosophy of History.

[102] Colen, *Futuro do politico, passado do historiador*, 69.

[103] Camardi, *Individuo e storia*, 33. Italics in original.

[104] Aron, *Mémoires*, 102.

[105] Aron, *Mémoires*, 986. See, e.g., Hassner, "Raymond Aron and Immanuel Kant," 197-203; Raynaud, "Raymond Aron et le jugement politique," 123-131; Boyer, "Le désir de réalité," Loc. 824, Kindle; Canguilhem, "La problématique," Loc. 429, Kindle.

[106] Paugam and Schultheis, preface to *La sociologie allemande*, vi; Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 18-20.

their neighbour; thirdly, the German language had increasingly become associated with philosophy and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the French thus sought to modernize and redress their scientific and intellectual inferiority.[107] This opening to German thought in this last respect had originated in the wake of the French Revolution, where certain thinkers (Kant, mentioned above, being the preeminent example) were assimilated into a specifically French context, and used to various ends.[108]

Both Durkheim and Célestin Bouglé, the advisor for Aron's secondary dissertation, had made this journey,[109] and they were impressed with the thought of Wilhelm Wundt and Georg Simmel respectively, which they brought back to France. Aron's friend, the Germanist Pierre Bertaux (along with another normalien), was one of the first recipients of the Humboldt stipend to study in Germany in 1927,[110] and in the following academic year the number of French graduates seeking to broaden their education had jumped to six.[111]

The path to Franco-German reconciliation was nevertheless beset by crags and marshes. Before Aron and Bertaux travelled to Germany the budding cooperation between a Durkheim and a Wundt or an Einstein and a Langevin, or even a Rilke and a Rodin, was swiftly interrupted by the First World War.[112] The success of attempts to rebuild a working relation – such as the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) established in 1922, in which such luminaries as Einstein, Bergson, and later, Thomas Mann, took part – was often determined by politics. The French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, for example, impeded progress in strengthening Franco-German relations; while it was not until the signing of the Locarno Treaties in 1925 that Germany was permitted to enjoy a greater presence at the ICIC.[113] In the 1920s the academic world also saw the emergence of institutes designed to foster intercultural study, such as the Institut d'études germaniques at the Sorbonne and the Deutsch-Französische Institut in Cologne.[114]

There were also non-international organization and non-academic based initiatives. One such example, in which Aron would also later participate, was the *décades de Pontigny*, three ten-day sessions held every summer at the Abbey of Pontigny in Champagne. Founded in 1910 by Paul Desjardins, these meetings drew together writers and thinkers to debate matters of morality, philosophy, and politics.[115] Some of the better known French participants included André Gide, Roger Martin du Gard, Charles du Bos, and André Malraux, while German writers such as Ernst Robert Curtius, Heinrich Mann, Bernard Groethuysen (who later became a French citizen), and Max Scheler also attended.[116] Participants attested to the positive sociability and atmosphere of the sessions – their lifeblood was personal exchange. The *décades* were furthermore connected to a network of publications that included the *Die neue Rundschau* and the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. The discussions themselves also found an audience not just in

[107] Schmale, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 355; Karady, "Les universités de la troisième république," 325-326.
[108] Espagne and Werner, "La construction d'une référence culturelle," 977.
[109] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 26.
[110] Kracht, "Ein Europa im kleinen," 163.
[111] Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron*, 102-103.
[112] Kracht, "Ein Europa im kleinen," 145-146.
[113] Further information on the development of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation can be found in Scholz, "Das deutsche-französische Verhältnis," 215-223.
[114] The context surrounding the origins of the Institut d'études germaniques can be found in Marmetschke, "Das Institut d'Etudes Germaniques," 119-131.
[115] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 81.
[116] Kracht, "Ein Europa im kleinen," 148-160.

France, but also in German papers and magazines such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Die literarische Welt*.[117] The road to Locarno had been paved by the intellectual exchanges and spirit of Pontigny.

There was therefore a rich tradition of cultural transfers into which Aron entered. Indeed, he too is a particularly fascinating *médiateur*[118] in this respect. It was on Aron's recommendation that Sartre went to Germany to study phenomenology, whose role in framing parts of Sartre's own thought is a matter of discussion.[119]

Sartre and Aron assumed each other's posts – the former taking up Aron's fellowship for a research year in Berlin, while Aron held Sartre's position at Le Havre – for the 1933-1934 academic year. Sartre's ostensible intention before the fellowship committee was to examine the connections between the psychic and psychological in the works of Scheler, Jaspers, and especially Husserl, who occupied his mornings.[120] He took no classes, instead confining himself to working out the second draft of what would become *La nausée* and his early phenomenological work *La transcendance de l'ego*.[121]

Apart from Sartre, Aron's primary dissertation, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, heavily influenced by his reading of several German thinkers, would also be a long-lasting inspiration for the historical-philosophical research of Henri-Irénée Marrou, Paul Veyne, and Paul Ricoeur.[122] It is also worth mentioning that Aron later aroused renewed interest in Clausewitz in both France and Germany.[123] These were not the only importations of German thought into France at the time. The lectures on Hegel offered by Alexandre Kojève were famous and, although not regularly attended by Aron, in his final year at ENS he counted himself as a loyal attendee amongst others like Raymond Queneau, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eric Weil, and Gaston Fessard.[124] Although the conclusions Hegel or Kojève reach about the end of History could not be further from the point that Aron was soon to make in his *Introduction*,

[117] Kracht, "Ein Europa im kleinen," 163.

[118] In the sense given to this term in Espagne and Werner, "La construction d'une référence culturelle".

[119] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, trans. Barry Cooper, xi-xii; Aron, *Mémoires*, 63, 103. See also the story of Aron seducing Sartre with phenomenology in Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, 177-178. Although, it is worth nothing that before Sartre and Aron, German phenomenology had already found a conduit to France in the person of Bernard Groethuysen. See Kracht, "Ein Europa im kleinen," 161. Also related to Aron's role as *médiateur* is the part he played in introducing Max Weber to France, thereby weakening the stranglehold that Comte and Durkheim had on French sociology. In fact, before Aron's *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* there was no work on Weber in the French language. See Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 98.

[120] Flynn, *Sartre*, 58-62. Interestingly, Flynn notes that Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* was not on Sartre's reading list at this time.

[121] Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 120; Sartre, *La nausée*; Sartre, *La transcendance*.

[122] Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 53-61.

[123] "The majority of Frenchmen and many Germans considered Clausewitz a brutal glorifier of war, a 'typical Prussian'; he revealed a subtle thinker, a civilized individual in Europe's most civilized era, who, it is true, was never able to solve the problem of war considered as the continuation of politics by other means and as a process tending to the absolute by its very nature, but he endeavoured painfully to understand the dialectic, which no other theoretician had ever done before or after him. Aron was made to do him justice." Mann, "Aron vu d'Allemagne," 149-150.

[124] Aron, *Mémoires*, 135-138. The notes from these lectures were published in Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*.

yet Hegel initiated the line of thinking that influenced academics of great importance to Aron such as Dilthey and Weber.[125]

Aron was in any case motivated not only by this long-standing tradition but also by his loathing for the interwar French foreign policy that was ruining relations between the two countries. He highly valued Franco-German reconciliation,[126] and Germany was the intellectual leader of the world: "Before 1939 Germany was our destiny. Up until the defeat of the Third Reich in 1945, German ideas made world history."[127] His journey to Germany would trigger an interest in the country and her thinkers that would endure throughout Aron's life.[128]

He arrived in Cologne in March 1930 to take up a position at the university in the Department of Romance Languages. He taught a course on the French counterrevolutionaries Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, discussed with his students the writings of Paul Claudel and François Mauriac, and he began to read some of the works of Karl Marx.[129]

After eighteen months at the university in Cologne Aron moved to the Maison Académique of the Institut français in Berlin, where he would remain until August 1933. The institute had been founded in 1930 less so to stimulate Franco-German youth relations than to provide highly qualified researchers with the opportunity to carry out their research in Germany. In addition to accommodations and food, the nine accepted candidates received a monthly stipend of 1500 francs.[130] It was here that Aron deepened his understanding of Marx by immersing himself in the earlier works. He began to study as well the ideas of the German phenomenologists Husserl and Heidegger and the German sociologists and critical philosophers of history, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, Georg Simmel, and most influential of them all, Max Weber.[131] In both politics and the life of the mind Aron discovered the drama of history that went unnoticed by Brunschvicg and his masters in France.[132]

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[125] In this sense Aron stated late in life that he retained a sort of "diluted Hegelianism" insofar as he subscribed to the notion of "the historicity of man, the historical condition of man, and the philosophical meaning of events and regimes." Aron, "Ma carrière," 518.

[126] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 49.

[127] Aron, *Mémoires*, 997.

[128] See Rovan, "Raymond Aron et l'Allemagne," 248-251.

[129] Aron, *Mémoires*, 84-86. Dipping into these German works was as engaging as the intellectual discussions with his German students were boring – the exact opposite of Aron's situation in France. See Aron, "Lettres d'Allemagne à Pierre Bertaux," 281-282.

[130] Tiemann, "Zweigstelle Paris," 294.

[131] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 52-54. These four critical philosophers of history are the subject matter of Aron's secondary dissertation.

[132] Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 75. Aron would later recall his experience of the changes in Germany: "From 1930 onward, whether as a reader at the University of Cologne or a boarder at the Maison Académique in Berlin, I felt, almost physically, the approach of the historical storm. *History is again on the move*, as Arnold Toynbee says. I am forever marked by that experience that led me to an active pessimism. I ceased to believe once and for all that history obeyed on its own the imperatives of reason or the desires of men of good will. I lost my faith and, not without some effort, remained hopeful. I discovered the enemy that I myself never tire of pursuing: totalitarianism, an enemy no less insidious than Malthusianism. In every fanaticism, even one inspired by idealism, I find a new form of the monster.

In Germany before Hitler, the rise of National Socialism, the revelation of politics in its diabolical essence, compelled me to think against myself, against my personal preferences. It gave rise within me to a sort of revolt against the education I received at university, against the spiritualism of philosophers, against the penchant of certain sociologists to ignore the impact of regimes on the pretext of focusing on deeper realities. Parliamentary developments were superficial when Hitler coming to power meant world war! Economic mechanisms were

Political Developments in Germany

Aron's initial stance on the political developments in the early 1930s displayed greater support for Germany and its plight than for France, this motivated by his strong commitment to pacifism, which "in every respect condemned a politics of strength and thus forgot that the French, just like the Germans, had legitimate interests."[133] Although not motivated by any love for the Nazi regime, the attitude of many pacifists at the time was "preferably servitude than war" and a defeatism that placed all hope in Hitler's desire for peace.[134]

Aron's letters to Jean Guéhenno at the time illustrate his frustration and despair: "I'm sure that at other times I would have rambled on about metaphysical problems, but, like all the youth of my generation, I feel a precariousness and anxiety that does not lightly tolerate games of leisure."[135] Or, on the topic of France's petit-bourgeois slumber and the need for a ray of hope and possibility to act: "I am afraid to admit that I am no longer assured that [social revolution] would mean human progress: with or without revolution we are threatened by an enclosed humanity."[136]

However, Aron's position, particularly in regards to his pacifism, would slowly begin to mature as he came to adopt a more "realistic" perspective.[137] With its roots in a pool of dissatisfaction and resentment owing to the harsh Versailles settlement, fascism and revisionism walked hand-in-hand, with increasing unemployment exacerbating the situation.[138] Aron was not unaware of this enduring problem, although his greater fear seems to have been that even if Hitler could be kept out of power, the impetus that had brought him so much influence to begin with would linger on:

> Let us assume that the negotiations fail and that Hitler does not come to power. Would that be the end of National Socialism? We should have the courage to recognize that, whatever the future of the party is, a part of its ideology will remain. It has penetrated too many milieus and poisoned, as well as awakened, if you will, too many minds to disappear again so quickly. The will to self-sufficiency, or even the will to depend on no one other than oneself, sentimental patriotism, the unification of nationalist and socialist ideas – all of this, whether as an ideal or sentiments, would survive the death of Hitler and his party.
>
> And finally, where are the disappointed voters supposed to go? Back to the bourgeois parties? Would they join the communist groups again? Germany would be no easier to govern in any case. Only an improvement of the economic situation would cripple National Socialism. There are still no signs of this.[139]

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secondary when the Great Depression, and the millions of unemployed, was extended due to errors that students today, before even receiving their licence in political economy, would discern without difficulty…The spirit of my generation [was] both resigned and confident – it was still a descendant of Auguste Comte's positivism: it accepted social determinism as if it were natural determinism, and it was firmly optimistic about the outcome in the long run." Aron, "De la condition historique," 1073-1074.

[133] Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 48.

[134] Villepin, "Le pacifisme intégral," 162, 165.

[135] Aron, "Lettre d'Allemagne à Jean Guéhenno, Cologne, 8 May 1931," 653.

[136] Aron, "Lettre d'Allemagne à Jean Guéhenno, Cologne, [May/June] 1931," 654.

[137] See Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 45-68.

[138] Lichtheim, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, 151-157.

[139] Aron, "Überlegungen zu einer realistischen Politik," 87.

Aron would later echo the change in him that this experience elicited by saying, "it was not Germany as such that changed me. It was Hitler in a Germany that had become Hitlerian."[140] It was this aspect of Germany that constituted Aron's political maturation; for, as the writer George Lichtheim observed,[141] the National Socialist victory in 1933 was not inevitable; the continued state of unemployment spelled the downfall of the Weimar Republic, to be sure, but Germany could have seen the ascendancy of a presidential regime under Hindenburg, with General von Schleicher heading an authoritarian regime thoroughly fed up with democracy. It was Hitler's insidious and electric personality that made the transition a true political revolution. "I do not dare say it, but my masters, whether Alain or Brunschvicg, were no match for Hitler."[142] Against the will of a single individual all of the so-called "laws" of social development propagated in French academia were just as powerless as the international laws that should have kept the peace.[143] Around the time of these letters France felt increasingly hemmed in as it was involved in ultimately fruitless diplomatic negotiations with Germany on the issues of disarmament and security.[144]

Aron intuited the coming of war and realized the futility of his former pacifism. To what other end were so many Germans being put to work? The dissatisfaction caused by the Versailles Treaty and the stagnant economy meant that Germans had much to be aggressive about. And from 1936 onward, the last chance of stopping the war, Aron had become convinced of the high probability of an outbreak of hostilities.[145]

Even while Aron was still in Germany the political atmosphere had quickly begun to worsen and swing the masses in the direction of nationalism and anti-Semitism. Aron was privy to an auto-da-fé organized by Goebbels on 10 May 1933 in the opera square, whose purpose was to purify German literature of its less desirable authors.

> After publicly condemning the authors reputed to be decadent or not German, the students were welcomed to march before the inferno where they cast into the flames the works of Freud, Musil, or Heinrich Mann. A spectacle more ridiculous than grandiose, it made an impression on Aron less for its staging than for the collapse of civilization in a country with a very ancient and rich culture.[146]

Aron was also made more acutely aware of his Jewishness which had hitherto been a weak factor in his cultural identity. At the time it was easy for his detractors to assume that his views were naturally the result of his Jewishness and not of his (strong) French patriotism, and in

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[140] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 41.

[141] Lichtheim, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, 154.

[142] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 27.

[143] On the "laws" of economic liberalism Aron remarked at the time: "While the parliamentary comedy dominated the foreground of the scene, economic development was progressing mercilessly. The banking reform already amounted to de facto nationalization. For better or worse, in July 1931 the state had to put up with the "nationalization of losses" (which the French state tolerates with equal generosity!). The theoreticians of liberalism can certainly protest this by declaring that bankruptcy is a normal phenomenon in the capitalist regime. Recovery requires, so they say, the removal of the rotten parts of the economy, or, in other words, the elimination of the least competitive. But can this automatic recovery still function? Are the laws of the liberal economy still effective in today's social context?" Aron, "Brief aus Deutschland, Berlin, 5. März 1932," 83. On determinism vs human contingency in history, see also his early article in Aron, "Brief aus Deutschland – List der Vernunft, June 1931," 52-54.

[144] See Duroselle, *France and the Nazi Threat*, 8-14.

[145] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 30-33, 64-65; Aron, "Une révolution antiprolétarienne," 53.

[146] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 99.

this way his Jewish identity was imposed on him.[147] He avoided direct anti-Semitic attacks since, with blond hair and blue eyes, he did not fit the Nazi stereotype of the Jew. Hitler's supporters came from all walks of life and were numbered among Aron's students as well – it was striking that such ordinary individuals could applaud the Nazi creed.[148] In his writings at the time he tried to affect scientific detachment – speaking, for example, as a French Germanophile instead of an anti-Nazi Jew – misunderstanding the nature of the anti-Semitism of the epoch and falling into the dichotomies prevalent at the time (German vs Jewish mentality) – all tendencies he would later come to regret.[149]

Having arrived in Germany with ideas of Franco-German reconciliation, Aron departed a firm enemy of National Socialism and found himself disillusioned with the naïve notions of socialism and pacifism that he had been indoctrinated with in France. His more mature political standpoint was beginning already to reveal itself:

> The Frenchman of the Left often uses a language laden with feelings of justice and acknowledgment, which obscure the thankless reality. Because he strives to correct our errors he forgets that our politics does not have to accommodate the past but the present Germany, and that one does not rectify an error by committing a new and opposite one in its place. As for the man of the Right who is trapped in a mentality of 'hereditary' antagonism: he acts as if he forgets that it is only through reconciliation with Germany that France will enjoy security…A good policy is defined by its effectiveness and not by its virtue.[150]

He brought this wisdom with him back to France, along with a healthy aversion to any grandiloquent theorizing that blatantly refused to account for the drama of history and the role played by individuals. This is also one of the reasons why Aron found German thought to be a "revelation" compared to that of Durkheim, which "did not take into account the tragedy of history, [and which] must have seemed behind the times to Aron".[151]

Not every spectator reacted as Aron did: for all of Sartre's later emphasis on political engagement he remained aloof during his stay in Germany, which witnessed at this time the death of Hindenburg and Hitler's steady consolidation of power.[152]

Sartre and his colleagues, including Simone de Beauvoir, regarded with disbelief the irrationalism that fed into the waxing antisemitism and obsession with reclaiming Germany's honour. All this was set against the backdrop of a Berlin whose streets were still bustling with joyous conviviality. Surely the German anti-Nazis were correct in their predictions of Hitler's imminent downfall.[153] In stark contrast, the great themes of Aron's later reflections, be they on liberty, violence, history, or totalitarianism, were results of the political and intellectual lessons he took from Germany. As one scholar remarks,

> The Third Reich (le troisième empire) meant for Germany a new self-awareness and new faith in the future. If we encounter more passion than understanding and a greater inclination to violence than to reflection, we should attribute this to the

[147] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 30-31.
[148] Aron, *Mémoires*, 110-111.
[149] Aron, "La révolution nationale en Allemagne [1933]," 278-279; Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 30-32; Aron, *Mémoires*, 98-101; Granjon, "L'Allemagne de Raymond Aron et de Jean-Paul Sartre," 468.
[150] Aron, "Offener Brief eines jungen Franzosen an Deutschland, Berlin, Januar 1933," 129, 131.
[151] Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 44-45.
[152] Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron*, 116-124.
[153] Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, 233-240, 250-258.

> readiness and willingness of the majority of those youths, who gathered around the Führer, to sacrifice and renew themselves.[154]

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We have seen Aron's education in France, under the tutelage especially of Brunschvicg and Alain. Intellectually he was primed with Brunschvicg's neo-Kantian mix of positivism and idealism; politically, he shared Alain's pacifism. His trip to Germany falls into the post-1871 tradition of French scholars studying in Germany and bringing these influences back to France. Aron is of particular importance in this history of cultural transfers, not least for familiarizing the French with Max Weber and Carl von Clausewitz. Intellectually, German philosophy and sociology complicated Aron's positivism and introduced a division between the natural and human sciences. Politically, the growing irrationalism and increasing sense that Hitler could not be appeased led Aron to renounce his pacifism. History no longer seemed to be eternal progress. It is our contention that Aron's reflections, for all of the various subjects they touch on – international relations, political regimes, war – have history as their starting and end point. We shall demonstrate that Aron was absorbed by this question both in his younger and more mature years, and it behooves us to understand Aron's political thought through this prism. What man can know in history is the question put forward by Wilhelm Dilthey, to whom we now turn.

[154] Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 27. Joachim Stark's work grew out of his dissertation, originally published in 1984, at a time when Aron's work – let alone secondary literature on him – in Germany was little known when compared to his reception in the English-speaking world and especially the French world. It is a ground-breaking work for this reason and establishes a unity to Aron's oeuvre by approaching it chronologically, focusing especially on his early German-inspired work (where Stark has important insights, such as the seldom mentioned influence of Alfred Schütz on Aron, p. 103), before discussing Aron in the context of the ideological debates of the 1950s and his trilogy on industrial society.

1b – Influence of Historicism: Dilthey

Aron shares with Dilthey the emphasis on man *in history*: Aron's intellectual journey begins by adding the two words, *in history*, to the three Kantian questions: *What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?*[155] The significance of this historical aspect extends beyond man merely being in history; man is also historical and, finally, man is a history.[156] This pithy observation is the culmination of Aron's primary dissertation, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, which he envisioned as his personal version of the critique of historical reason.[157] The framework of Aron's intellectual journey is laid out in this important work, which showcases Aron's substantial departure from what he had been taught in France.

Along with Edmund Husserl and the phenomenologists on the one side, and Max Scheler and Max Weber on the other, Dilthey's place in this study is justified, for he suggests "the problematic that has fascinated me all my life: the specific features of consciousness of man by man or of human history by an historically situated subject, the relation between knowledge and action and, in the end, between philosophy and politics."[158]

The critique of historical reason begins with Dilthey, therefore we will proceed by examining the following: *The Diltheyan revolution: Dilthey's place in the development of 19th century German thought. Aron's reading of Dilthey's* Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften. *The problem of grasping truth in history*.

The Diltheyan Revolution

For our purposes it is enough to note that, broadly speaking, the German intellectual tradition after Kant remained loyal to the split between idealism – the world of human phenomena and free will – and positivism – the world of natural phenomena and determinism. Right off the bat this divide had entirely sealed shut the door to any explanation of human behaviour by means of general causal laws, and so Aron would already find himself in very different water compared to that in France. Instead, two alternatives presented themselves: either individuals and their actions could be studied in all of their historical specificity, or they could be located within the context of a greater totality.[159]

The first inclination is characterized by the approach of Leopold von Ranke, while the latter is most often associated with Hegel and his notion of the *Weltgeist*. In an age increasingly enthusiastic with the advances made by science, both approaches were inadequate either, in the case of Ranke, because it described everything without explaining anything, or, in the case of Hegel, because it was based on metaphysics.[160] A third trend was to be found in Marx, who uprooted Hegel's metaphysical foundation while attempting to plant a Hegelian philosophy of history with the seeds of science.

Common to all three of these conceptual waves was the importance of studying man in the course of history. At their crossroads, with a residue of romanticism,[161] was Wilhelm Dilthey.

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[155] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 27.
[156] Aron, *Introduction*, 403-404.
[157] Aron, *Mémoires*, 158.
[158] Aron, preface to the English edition of *History and the Dialectic of Violence*, xi.
[159] Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action,* 477-478.
[160] Rossi, ed., *Lo storicismo tedesco*, 16.
[161] Rossi, *Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo*, 5-14. Rossi has worked on German historicism and especially Max Weber. He regularly cites and praises – although not always without criticism – Aron's *La philosophie critique de*

His task was no less than to do for historical reason what Kant had done for pure and practical reason.[162] He was separated from the other stream of critical philosophers of historical reason – the neo-Kantian school of Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert – by his insistence on eschewing all metaphysics and transcendentalism and making *historical* man the object of his research.[163]

We shall take a moment to familiarize ourselves with the major trends in Dilthey's thought before further exploring his relevance for Aron.[164] Dilthey set a substantial intellectual challenge for all who followed him, including Aron. Where Dilthey disagreed with Kant was in the latter's belief in the ahistorical possibilities of reason. For Dilthey, by contrast, all human intellectual endeavours – law, religion, science, morality, etc. – are conducted *in history*, and this applies to reason itself. Critical reason, therefore, is historical reason, which is cognizant of its own historical context and assumptions. Connected to this was Dilthey's project from the beginning, which had been to carve out a space for the human sciences such that they could stand apart from positivism and the natural sciences without falling into metaphysical idealism.[165] To this end Dilthey distinguished between outer and inner experience, with the former referring to sense perception of the outer world and the latter referring to self-awareness of one's own activities. Because knowledge is contained within the boundaries of experience, this distinction is phenomenological, not ontological. For Dilthey the actual existence of nature or the content of the mind is entirely inconsequential for his purposes; it is enough that nature and ideas *appear* as they do, and that people are able to conceptualize and plan their lives on the basis of these appearances.[166] The foundation, then, of all human sciences – distinguished from the natural sciences – would be a discipline dedicated to studying mental states formed by these experiences: psychology.[167]

He would later say that it is "lived experience" (*Erlebnis*) that sets the standard for the human sciences. This includes everything humans experience throughout their lives: what they sense, dream, fear, hope, expect, think, feel, and want (hence it also comprises the realm of values on which the neo-Kantians focused). Unlike the neo-Kantians, however, there is no clear distinction between fact and value, because there is a unity of cognition, emotion and volition.

Dissolving the distinction between subject and object, the problem then becomes how to account for this connection between one's inner experience and society and history, a clash born of Dilthey's contradictory inheritance from both Kant and Ranke:

> This tension goes to the very heart of all Dilthey's thinking, which grew out of two apparently incompatible components: his critical sense, which he acquired from Kant; and his historical sense, which he learned from Ranke. These components appear to conflict: the more critical we are, the more we examine the evidence for all our

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l'histoire in his own work (e.g. pp. 9, 17, 35, 98, 142-143, etc.). Aron was familiar with the work and refers to it on a couple of different occasions, not just because it analyzes the same thinkers that concerned Aron in the 1930s, but also because it moves on to examine others whom Aron would have liked to write about in another work. See Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 13; Aron, *Mémoires*, 159.

[162] Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 193.

[163] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 12.

[164] Here we follow the analysis recently laid out in Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition,* 322-364.

[165] See the Vorrede in Dilthey, *Einleitung*, xv-xx.

[166] Dilthey, *Einleitung*, 20-21.

[167] As Dilthey pithily put it: "We explain nature, but we understand inner life." Dilthey, *Ideen*, 1314. This also had as a consequence – in contradistinction to the neo-Kantians – that Dilthey separated the human sciences from the natural sciences by their respective *object* of research. See Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 190.

> beliefs; but the more we examine this evidence, the more we find that it lies in the contents of the mind; and the more we are thrown back into the dark inner recesses of the mind, the further away we are from the broad daylight of society and history. Ranke, however, had taught him that we cannot know ourselves in abstraction from society and history because our very identity depends upon them. The problem with the critical tradition of Kant is that it could not bring the self into society and history; but the problem with the historical tradition of Ranke, Dilthey often stressed, is that it could not provide a philosophical foundation for history.[168]

To overcome the problem of Kant in regards to man's relation to society, Dilthey distinguishes between systems of culture (traditional forms of behaviour, or *Systemen der Kultur*) and the external organization of society (*die äußere Organisation der Gesellschaft*): the organization of society is built up of individual psychic states or lived experiences that in turn exist in a dialectical relation with that very organization.[169] Individuals are neither entirely unique, i.e. unable to communicate with others, nor entirely the same such that their social activities constitute a unified system. As for man's relation to history, lived experience occurs over time, i.e. in history, and so the human sciences must have history as their foundation. A faithful study of lived experiences requires seeing them in the socio-historical context in which they developed – a context, albeit, that can be properly understood only by understanding the lived experiences of those who create this context. Thus,

> the interpreter must follow a combined inductive and deductive procedure, whereby he formulates his ideas about the whole after carefully studying each of the parts, and whereby he reinterprets the parts in the light of his knowledge of the whole. This was Schleiermacher's famous "hermeneutical circle," which Dilthey would invoke time and again.[170]

In fact, the difference between man's relation to society and man's relation to history is slim; societies extend through history in the form of traditional cultural practices (systems of culture) and institutions (the external organization of society) that live much longer than any individual, e.g. law, religion, economy, etc. Man cannot be understood in a vacuum; man's existence, with others and over time, is relational. Acknowledging the historicity of man and the human world – and that man is a network of moral obligations and relations to others – is the end point of the analysis of the structure of the human world, implied already in Dilthey's *Einleitung*:

> Various persons are in each one of us: the family member, the citizen, the co-worker. We find ourselves in a context of moral obligations, in a legal order, in a context of goals in life, which aims at fulfillment. Only by becoming aware of ourselves do we find in ourselves the unity of life and its continuity, which bears and carries all of these relations. Human society thus has its life in bringing forth and shaping, distinguishing and connecting these enduring elements, without it or its constituent individuals being aware of their context.[171]

However, to overcome Ranke and find a philosophical foundation for history – given the historicizing constraints to which Dilthey has subjected himself – proves to be an impossible task. He is faced with an antinomy: changes in culture lead to changes in philosophy, and yet, each philosophy makes a claim to universal validity. One way Dilthey tries to get around this is

[168] Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 345.
[169] Dilthey, *Einleitung*, 49-64; Rossi, *Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo*, 27-34.
[170] Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 352.
[171] Dilthey, *Einleitung*, 87; Cf., Rossi, *Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo*, 88-93.

to propose that every philosophy is valid in its own context. This does not so much defuse the relativism of the philosophy as shift it to the relativism of the context in which the philosophy emerges – both levels negate philosophy's pretensions to universal validity. Another solution Dilthey comes up with later in life is to view every philosophy from the objective viewpoint of world history. Unfortunately, here he ends up refuting his earlier claim that a philosophy of the totality of history is impossible. "Thus Dilthey laid out a program that no mortal – and certainly no one whose mind had been formed in the third quarter of the nineteenth century – could hope to bring to completion. Like Weber – and less successfully than Weber – he attempted a synthesis too mighty for the human mind."[172] Dilthey's fidelity to seeing everything in the scope of history is the source of both his unique approach and the iron cage created by the logical consequences of that approach. It remains for us to examine Aron's engagement with Dilthey's thought.

Dilthey is doubly relevant in courting a philosophy of man that emerges from his critique of historical reason; indeed, one finds sketched out in Dilthey all of the themes that Aron will explore in both *La philosophie critique de l'histoire* and for the rest of his life: the critique of historical knowledge, the relativism of this knowledge, the historical character of all values, the absolute of the future and the relativism of truth, and the philosophy of man as an historical being.[173]

It was along the banks of the Rhine that Aron experienced something that he describes almost in terms of an epiphany.

> I was searching for an objection of reflection that would interest both the heart and the mind, that would require the desire for scientific rigour and, at the same time, would engage me entirely in my research. One day, on the banks of the Rhine, I decided for myself.
>
> I have so frequently recalled this moment of contemplation that I fear in the end I may have confused my authentic experience with my reconstruction of it. Nevertheless, elevated by the joy of my discovery, I remember writing an enthusiastic and hardly intelligible letter to my brother Robert. In broad terms what I had the illusion or naivety of discovering was the historical condition of the citizen or of man himself. As a Frenchman, a Jew, situated at a moment in time, how can I know the whole of which I am one atom among hundreds of millions? How can I grasp the whole other than from *a point of view*, one among countless others? Hence a quasi-Kantian problem followed: to what extent am I able to know objectively History – the nations, the parties, the ideas whose conflicts fill the chronicles of centuries – and *my* time? A critique of historical or political knowledge should respond to this question. This problem included another dimension: the subject who searches for objective truth is immersed in the matter that he wishes to explore and which penetrates him. He is immersed in the reality from which he, as an historian or economist, extracts the scientific object. Slowly I came to realize my two tasks: to understand or know my time as honestly as possible without ever losing sight of the limits of my knowledge; to detach myself from current events, but without resting content in the role of a spectator.[174]

[172] Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 199.
[173] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 25.
[174] Aron, *Mémoires*, 83-84. Italics in original.

Introduction to the *Geisteswissenschaften*

Seeing the ceaseless philosophical ruminations to which Dilthey's oeuvre gave rise, it is appropriate that we acquaint ourselves with Aron's most in-depth analysis of Dilthey's work, contained in *La philosophie critique de l'histoire*. This work was initially meant to serve as his primary doctoral dissertation, but after Brunschvicg recommended that he would furnish a better analysis of his subject matter if he did not formulate it in an often obscure interpretation of, "ultimately, secondary philosophers",[175] Aron decided to make it his secondary dissertation.

The fundamental question underlying the entire work is: "is it possible to transpose the Kantian method in a way that it renders useless the philosophy of history and lays a foundation for the historical sciences?"[176]

Aron argues that Dilthey's rejection of metaphysics is not a rejection of all philosophical reflection on the human past, but rather only a rejection of those systems of thought that think they can remove themselves from life and reconstruct the universe on the basis of non-historical concepts. Philosophy remains essential to Dilthey's project, albeit it is a philosophy combined with historical science, which ultimately tries to understand man in his past and his works.[177] The creation of man by himself through time is the only thing left to study once one leaves behind Christian dogmas and otherworldly destiny: history thus becomes the place where the spirit manifests itself, and it must be studied scientifically, shorn of metaphysical illusions.[178] Metaphysics makes the error of taking the objectification of relations between phenomena and applying that to a metaphysics of the total object.[179] The entire universe cannot be conceptualized as an object, nor can a critique of knowledge deal exclusively with intellectual activity. Dilthey's counterargument to such pretensions is that the root of the theory of knowledge and philosophy is the examination of lived relations between beings and their milieu. Unfortunately, in dispensing with metaphysics and religious dogma, Dilthey has lost what once united the human sciences. Part of his task, therefore, will also be to furnish a principle of unity that allows the diverse human sciences and their various propositions to form a whole. Where metaphysics founds unity on principles of nature, the unity in Dilthey's critique must be immanent, in man himself.

Man, his works, and his history are the subjects of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.[180] Unlike the natural world, which we perceive from without, the historical world is perceived from within. It is important to remind ourselves that this distinction is based solely on different ways of experiencing the world, and therefore it is purely phenomenological and not ontological.

Dilthey thus reasons on the basis of Kant's view that the limits of knowledge depend on experience. To say, then, that the natural and historical sciences are ontologically different would be to presume a metaphysical world that lies outside the realm of experience.[181] In the natural sciences phenomena such as light and sound can be explained, but their significance becomes

[175] Aron, *Mémoires*, 158.
[176] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 13.
[177] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 24-25. "All history is philosophy." See Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 99.
[178] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 31-34.
[179] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 35-37.
[180] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 38-46. The word *Geisteswissenschaften* is translated variously as moral sciences, human sciences, historical sciences, cultural sciences, sciences of the mind. I have made no attempt to prefer one translation over the others because all of them reflect certain elements that Dilthey would have thought related. As Hughes observes, the *Geisteswissenschaften* would include "both what we would call the humanities and what we would call history or social science." Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 186.
[181] Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 327.

apparent only when reference is given to the consciousness we take of these phenomena. Because we are already in the historical world we cannot be pure spectators in this world; we follow events with passion and we make the same history that we study – it is our very life. The question naturally follows: despite their rootedness in historical reality, are these historical sciences able to grasp their object adequately? This problem is both the unique key to Dilthey's approach as well as its chief deficiency, insofar as his approach seeks scientific objectivity. The *Geisteswissenschaften* emerge from the consciousness that man takes of his activity (grammar, logic, aesthetics, morality), or from social processes (economics, law). There are thus two classes of science: those that have systems of culture as their object (science, religion, philosophy, etc.), and those that have external forms of organization as their object (state, church, community, etc.). Unlike the natural sciences, in the human sciences the singular is just as much a research goal as the general. Theory and history inform one another; neither can be established in isolation from the other. Aron too observes the union of fact and value in the human sciences, a crucial difference between Dilthey and the other thinkers included in his study. Rules and values both emanate from the same activity of the poet, jurist, or logician, and they remain inseparable from science as long as science takes man as a whole for its object. To understand a work of art one must first delve into the psychological laws that explain its creation and how it affects people. The work must also be situated in its milieu. Lastly, if understanding a work of art is to understand beauty, then value judgments must also be derived from canons of aesthetics. The same applies to those studies that operate within the fields of morality and law. A synthesis of theory and practice, facts and values, the universal and the historical, is what constitutes the traditional work of philosophy and obeys the exigencies of positive science.

The historical sciences are also to be distinguished from sociology and the philosophy of history.[182] For Dilthey, the philosophy of history is Christian in its inspiration: it claims to be able to determine both the *meaning* and the *cause* of man's history. Sociology is guilty of the same error in attempting to understand all of social reality by means of a handful of causal relations. This, however, is to ignore that every past moment is unique and irreplaceable. Dilthey will frame his critique of these disciplines by attempting to embrace the totality of history and synthesizing the moral sciences without losing sight of the specificity of each moment in time. This unity that he seeks is in the spirit that evolves through time and becomes aware of itself through historical science. In other words, this unity is in man himself.

If the social sciences were different from the natural sciences in that they explain phenomena on the basis of mental processes, then Dilthey would require a method – a psychology, as he understood it – by which he could penetrate such processes. This method is analytical psychology, which he opposed to the explanatory psychology of the positivists.[183] Because reconstructing experiences is based on hypothesis, one reconstruction can never absolutely exclude others. This reconstruction involves some artifice in order to explain complex sentiments, namely it requires *Verstehen*, or an attempt on the part of the researcher to empathize or feel his way into the world and people he is investigating.[184] This subjective aspect forestalls any absolutely certain conclusions and means that constant verification and vigilant attention are required in these sorts of studies.[185] Explanatory psychology[186] does not recognize these limits

[182] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 46-48.
[183] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 48-52.
[184] Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 310-312. A slew of words designate this process: *Sich-Hineinversetzen, Mitfühlen, Einfühlen*. See Rossi, *Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo*, 73.
[185] Rossi, *Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo*, 77.

since it claims to reconstruct the living whole (*Zusammenhang*) when, in reality, we can only observe, describe, and analyze the whole in parts. Every whole arises from the psychic whole since every relation arises from consciousness. Consciousness itself is not to be understood so much as a thing, but rather as an evolution. We never have the exact same experience twice. Dilthey's critique of explanatory psychology constitutes both a critique of the positivist tradition and its inclination to imitate the natural sciences, and also the foundation of a philosophy because the psychic whole partakes of both the unity of the "I think" and of the unity of an evolving consciousness. The unity and order of the human consciousness ensure that the researcher will never see the object of his research as if it were nothing more than an incoherent mess of events.[187]

Dilthey's philosophy of life surpasses the conflict between rationalism and empiricism and locates reason in intuition.[188] Philosophy cannot be the activity of the unencumbered brain alone, but it must concern itself with life in its entirety. Reason thus loses its primacy because thought is only a function of life. The abstract subject is thus replaced by the living subject, which also has sentiment and will.[189] In the natural sciences the spirit is isolated from the phenomena under investigation, but in the human sciences the psychic whole remains both investigator and investigated. One cannot understand a life, a work, an epoch, without referring to the whole to which it belongs. To understand life, one must make use of concepts, although these concepts must already be present in the data, in life itself. So there emerges an antinomy between the fact of the living, thinking individual, and science's pretension to universality: how can the individual arrive at a point outside of himself? How can he manage to understand others? How is he capable of opening himself up to the universal?

Here Aron points to a problem that we raised earlier, related to the ability of an individual or historical science to grasp its object adequately despite the historical rootedness of the observer: part of the problem with using this structure of psychology as the foundation for the human sciences is precisely that an analytical psychology would have to be understood first as a structure before it could be understood as an individual. Dilthey's analytical psychology aims at deriving general propositions that would create a system of moral sciences; however, the limitless diversity of individual moments in history and the ever-changing wholes through time and space would make any general propositions impossible. In other words, one would first have to understand the structure of the human spirit before one could observe concrete spirits and draw any universally valid conclusions. History would be subordinate to general truths that technically could only be ascertained through history itself. Aron will probe Dilthey's thinking on this circular dilemma at an even higher level when the former comes to discuss the possibility of any universal certainty in Dilthey's philosophy of history.

The Problem of Grasping Truth in History

Dilthey's later writings are devoted to exploring the construction of the historical world. Between his earlier writings and his later ones he introduces a couple of new notions: life expression (*Lebensäußerung*) and dynamic whole (*Wirkungszusammenhang*).[190]

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[186] Or naturalist psychology or materialism.
[187] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 55-56.
[188] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 58-65.
[189] Rossi, *Lo storicismo tedesco contemporaneo*, 43.
[190] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 69-74.

By the former, Dilthey means every tangible reality on which the spirit has made its mark: the paper on which a poem is written; marble that has been given shape; trees that have been chopped down; a face smiling at me. These all contain the spirit made objective, although they can be considered life expressions only once they are considered in relation to life. The human sciences form a whole only insofar as they are able to relate the accidental, the singular, to a necessary and meaningful whole.

By dynamic whole Dilthey understands a complex unity composed of elements connected to one another through human relations and actions. It is the equivalent in the human world to the causal networks that typify natural wholes. Thus it applies to individual unities and supra-individual unities such as the family, group, state, nation, economy, law, religion, morality, and philosophy. Causality is replaced in the human world, or spiritual reality, by *acting*, *energy*, *becoming*, and *duration*. The dynamic whole is always evolving thanks to man's creative will. Every whole has its own meaning and justification; historical moments do not exist with a view to any particular end, rather, the meaning of history is immanent in life, for life does not preserve every last detail of every lived experience; only those events are preserved that have played a role in the evolution of an individual or that express the essence of an individual.[191] Choosing which events are to be preserved is a procedure performed in and by life itself.

It follows from this that the meaning of history, which is the science of life, is established only in retrospect. The relation between the "I" and the past is mediated by understanding (*Verstehen*). Without this understanding, each person would be an entity closed unto himself, cursed never to know himself, let alone others. Knowledge of others requires that there be contact between living beings, and so we discover the human world much as we discover nature, because it resists us and offers us comfort, joy, or pain. Historical beings act on us, and without this living relation there is nothing to connect us to them apart from erudition or curiosity.[192] By contrast, the neo-Kantian school maintains that choosing what to study in history can only be a function of curiosity. Dilthey's connection to the past is far more emotive, because far more holistic in its aim to grasp the whole of man, life, and history.

We too are historical beings because we are evolving.[193] We are historical because we live amongst people and things that have developed over time, and we employ concepts that history has created. Our being is only one of the possible routes we could have taken; what we try to understand are the other paths we could have taken that would have made us different today. The study of history is thus a liberating endeavour.

But does understanding the past not depend on our present attitude? Does man's historicity condemn historical knowledge as nothing more than an infinity of historical perspectives? It is true that no history is entirely universal, but this is not because every present views the past differently, but rather because no history is ever complete, and absolute meaning can be conferred only at the end of the historical evolution. Universal history, then, is biography, the autobiography of humanity. Far from driving us straight into the rut of relativism, this philosophy elevates reason and faith in man. The eternally developing dialogue between past and present – and the various philosophical systems that have grown over time – is progress: man becomes increasingly conscious of himself.[194] Truth resides in the total evolution of history.

[191] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 77.
[192] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 79.
[193] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 87-88.
[194] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 94-95.

All this being said, how does Aron evaluate Dilthey's work? Although the relativist implications are clear, it is a relativism that is perpetually overcome through reason and the study of history; it is not a relativism resigned to the absurd, which Aron associates with Karl Mannheim's approach.[195] Aside from this, one of the problems indicated above revolves around Dilthey's attempt to make psychology the foundation for all human sciences.[196]

Firstly, not every explanation is psychological. To be sure, economics and law proceed from certain psychological assumptions, but the intelligible relations that these disciplines establish betray a logic that is inherent to their wholes.

Secondly, despite the profound recognition that all human sciences end up as a study of man, Dilthey errs in believing that there can be a psychology that is a particular science of historical and concrete man. Such a science would presuppose a critique of the knowledge that man has of himself, i.e. knowledge of both man's essence and his multiple variations. Here we are again faced with the problem that man's essence can be determined only by studying man's many diverse forms over time. To arrive at conclusive answers to the questions posed by the study of man and history would first require the end of history. The neo-Kantian school attempts to avoid this problem by circumscribing the statements made about the past that could be valid for everyone, without trying to comprehend the totality.

At the upper level of history we again come up against the problem that historical science is part of the same history that it tries to study.[197] History's meaning changes as it is studied by people who give different meanings to existence. Dilthey's attempt to tie down absolute truth in the combination of all of history's philosophies appears to Aron to be a concession to the sort of Hegelian philosophy of history he was trying to avoid. An antinomy results: "if one possessed the truth, then would history not already be at an end? But if there is neither truth nor progress, then is there still a history?"[198] Dilthey's system also forks off in two alternatives that he never manages to reconcile: biography and universal history. How, in the last analysis, can a professor of philosophy continue to philosophize when he concedes that truth is attainable only through positive science? It is the constant self-interrogation that characterizes the nature of philosophy itself. Aron foreshadows his *Introduction* in the conclusion to his study of Dilthey: "Life itself is known only indirectly and partially. The privilege of retrospective thought lends primacy to

[195] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 101-102. A fuller expression of Aron's criticisms of the sociology of knowledge, and especially that practiced by Karl Mannheim, are found in Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, 62-79. According to Aron, Mannheim's approach pushes historicism to an extreme, where there are only different "perspectives" in the world. Mannheim also borrows from Marxism the idea that one's perspective is dependent on one's social class, although he is less restrictive in his conceptualization of class than Marx. Where he differs most profoundly from Marx is that he does not believe the proletariat bears the truth of the historical movement. Instead we are left only with various perspectives without any means of deciding which is closer to the truth. The "absurdity" of Mannheim's approach is in his attempt to synthesize these different perspectives by suggesting that someone, such as a professor, distance himself from these viewpoints and translate one perspective into another. However, this obscures the fact that not all perspectives are mutually compatible (Aron uses Marxism and liberalism as his examples). Thus there are only multiple, equally true and legitimate perspectives. Although Aron is not unaware of the relativistic dangers present in Dilthey's philosophy, he does not feel that Dilthey has debased the universalism of truth and reason as much as Mannheim has. Mannheim had taken the next step of replacing classical logic with a "relational" logic that "shook the foundations of dialogue, which was impossible in the absence of common rules and the distinction between true and false." Aron, "Quarante ans après [1978]," xlii.

[196] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 102-104.

[197] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 104-109.

[198] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 106.

contemplation, and yet, the more we have recourse to history, the more we must decide to live, i.e. to choose."[199]

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We have seen that Dilthey shapes the debate that would fascinate Aron for the rest of his life. We established that Dilthey takes the critique from Kant, but maintains Ranke's concern for history, thus he seeks to establish a critique of historical reason, a critique that is aware of its own historical embeddedness. Aron accepts Dilthey's distinction between the natural and human sciences, with the latter ultimately studying the development of life. Aron shares with Dilthey the notion that we cannot examine an object of the human sciences from an objective vantage point; in other words, the subject and object are always intertwined. On the one hand, this precludes the problem of the fact-value gap, since values are an inherent part of the individuals or societies under study; on the other hand, Dilthey is faced with the problem of being unable to justify any philosophy in history, since history is constantly in flux, and yet philosophy seeks to universal truths.

[199] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 109.

1c – German Phenomenology

If the problem that triggered not only Aron's early thought, but which occupied his reflections until very late in life, was posited by Dilthey, the language he uses to explore this problem in his *Introduction* is that of the phenomenologists. We know less about his engagement with this aspect from Aron himself because – unlike in the case of German sociology and philosophy of history[200] - he did not devote any full-length studies to the topic.[201] Nonetheless, when reflecting on this time period, Aron constantly acknowledges his debt to German phenomenology.[202] The importance of this component of his thought cannot be underestimated in light of the fact that the methodology employed in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* is phenomenological.[203] We shall expound on Aron's phenomenological method by examining the arguments and conclusions contained in the first part of the second section of his dissertation, "De l'individu à l'histoire".[204] We will proceed by examining the following: *Knowledge of the Self. Knowledge of the Other. Individuals embedded in Collectives in History.*

Knowledge of the Self

Aron's "phenomenology" is Husserlian in origin, although it has a somewhat different role to play in Aron's philosophy. Husserl's goal starting from about 1908 on had been no less than to "transform philosophy into a rigorous science."[205] To do this he would isolate pure experience, mediated by consciousness, which is the only thing we can be certain about. Thus he applied the notion of the *epoche* in order to suspend judgment on beliefs regarding existence. These beliefs were untested and therefore had to be suspended in the interest of making philosophy a rigorous science. After this process of bracketing we are left with a state of pure consciousness, where we can discover the nature of experience.

Aron does not spend much time on such matters, instead using Husserl to supplement Dilthey's philosophy:

> I was less impressed by transcendental phenomenology or the *epoche* than by the method – I would almost say by the phenomenologist's way of looking. I meditated on History and the immanence of meanings in human reality – a reality that lends itself to deciphering. It seemed to me that Dilthey lacked a philosophy like Husserl's to clarify his intuitions.[206]

[200] Aron, *La sociologie allemande*; Aron, *La philosophie critique*.

[201] There is, however, an article: Aron, "Compte rendu de : N. Hartmann," 150-160. The lack of works Aron devoted to Husserl has been remarked upon by Reed Davis who sees Aron's appeal to phenomenology and especially Husserl as a way for him to restore the immanent intelligibility of the world. Thus Husserl argues that the scientist's concepts are real and rational, whereas Weber believes they are arbitrary. The consequence of Weber's method is then that the scientist is always thrown back to the study of values which, in Weber's schema, are by definition irrational and arbitrary. See Davis, *A Politics of Understanding*, 36-40.

[202] Aron, *History and Dialectic of Violence*, trans. Barry Cooper, xi; Aron, *Mémoires*, 102, 109.

[203] Aron, *Introduction*, 10.

[204] Aron, *Introduction*, 61-105.

[205] Smith and Smith, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, 1.

[206] Aron, *Mémoires*, 103.

While the issue of Husserl's influence on Dilthey is a matter of debate,[207] Aron clarifies that the purpose of his study is not to explain the transcendental ego but rather the knowledge that one has of oneself – and he states this without explicitly refuting the idea of the transcendental ego or sacrificing the *epoche*.[208] But he is also prepared to acknowledge that one cannot know oneself without also changing in the process. Even the retrospective memory of a decision is not the same thing as one's conscious state when having made that decision. "In this sense, life is inaccessible to thought, and each person is alone with himself, trapped in the solitude of moments."[209]

We do not seek to relive past decisions so much as know them and make them intelligible. Doing so requires that we move beyond psychological determinism and furnish an account of our actions that comprises the meaning that we gave to them at the time. To this end Aron borrows a distinction from Alfred Schütz between *motifs* and *mobiles*.[210] The former are understood not as psychologically determined but instead as *intentional objects* that obey intelligible laws. They are the reasons we give for performing actions in the future and the reasons by which we justify past actions. The latter are psychological antecedents that lead us to act. In other words, unlike in the case of *motifs*, we do not reflect on *mobiles* such that even if we can intuit them they remain incommunicable.

Aron soon brings historical knowledge into his phenomenology with the recognition of the reciprocal relation between historical knowledge and knowledge of oneself:[211] "The idea that one has of one's past is related to the way in which this past determines one's present. Our present follows from our past, but in our consciousness our past depends on our present." For a start, to know oneself is not to know oneself as a fragment but as the unity of a unique individual. This is possible only at the point of infinity where subject and object (in the case of self-reflection we are both subject and object) are not constantly in flux. Although we feel that we are the same being through time, this is nothing more than the conceptual translation of a singular state of human consciousness.[212] Finally, knowing oneself is an unending dialectical process:

> It is by a double effort of lucidity and creation that the individual defines himself between a discovery that is always incomplete and a decision that is never triumphant. Because he is always threatened by either self-righteousness or resignation, he can relax neither one nor the other tension. To make his being adequate to his will he never ceases to see himself as an inexhaustible nature or to confirm the choice by which he ceaselessly defines himself.[213]

Knowledge of the Other

[207] See Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 337-339. Beiser argues that Dilthey already knew about intentionality long before encountering it in Husserl, hence Husserl would at most have merely offered Dilthey support for conclusions he had already drawn.
[208] Aron, *Introduction,* 64-65, 75.
[209] Aron, *Introduction*, 66.
[210] Originally called the *„Um-zu"-Motiv* and *Weil-Motiv* respectively. See Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, 93-105.
[211] Aron, *Introduction*, 70-74.
[212] "The confusion between the me subject, which is undetermined and accompanies each moment of consciousness, and the fragments selected by our me-object creates the illusion that one is attaining to the individual essence in oneself." Aron, *Introduction*, 72.
[213] Aron, *Introduction*, 73.

Knowledge of another poses a different set of problems.[214] Aron reminds us that his objective is not to conduct transcendental phenomenology or empirical psychology, still less to discover the *alter ego* by means of philosophical meditation; rather, he takes for granted existence and our awareness of other consciousnesses in order to investigate the more pertinent problem for his study: to what extent can we grasp the lived experience of others? Unlike knowing oneself, which is mediated through memory, knowing others is a question of interpreting signs or meanings, which are presented to us through expressions, gestures, affective communion or sympathy, or anonymously (i.e. through text or through understanding someone based on his function as a postman, salesclerk, etc.). Another difference from knowing oneself is that when it comes to others we have a greater tendency to assume we have touched upon the individual essence of another simply because we immediately understand an expression. To understand, for Aron, is "when *knowledge produces a meaning that, inherent to reality, was or could have been thought by those who experienced it or realized it.*"[215] This is not to say that the observer relives the actor's experience, for our consciousnesses are always separate from each other. This is not a cause for despair, however, because this separation can be overcome in moments of communion or love, and especially by intellectual communication, which requires language. In addition to these ways we can also know others through social systems, institutions, traditions, and customs – the crystallization of ideas – which constitute a language that everyone can understand. We manage to understand others, therefore, because we are members of a group where we have the same *intentions*.

We present different images of ourselves to our friends, and our conception of ourselves can change depending on another's knowledge of us. Similarly, we can understand things about others that we would not otherwise understand about ourselves. Where the retrospective explanation of another's actions is similar to that of one's own actions is in the underlying *motifs* that we identify. What Aron adds at this point is that this understanding is buffered by understanding another's social context. To understand the *motifs* of a merchant, for example, we must have recourse to the social organization in which he is or was operating. Ultimately, however, neither knowledge of self nor knowledge of another is superior to the other because they exist in a dialectical relationship, constantly in flux. A plurality of reconstructions of another individual's life is thus possible. Any reconstruction can be made meaningful and coherent so long as the observer selects a principle of unity, such as the main theme around which to write a biography of a person.

As alluded to earlier, individuals do not exist in isolation but in society. All retrospective explanations or accounts of individuals incorporate an element of time insofar as they are reflections on the past. Aron adds an additional dimension to the dialectical relation between knowledge of self and knowledge of another by emphasizing the inherent sociability of individuals and asking how this changes the object of history and the intentions of the historian.[216] We obey and act on the basis of certain historically variable customs such as laws, traditions, mores, fashions, etc. even if we do not understand them. Aron calls these concretizations of social behaviour the objective spirit.[217] The historian can know the past either

[214] Aron, *Introduction*, 75-86.
[215] Aron, *Introduction*, 59. Italics in original.
[216] Aron, *Introduction*, 87-94.
[217] There is some overlap with Dilthey's terminology here. Dilthey reserved the term "objective spirit" to refer to anything in nature on which the spirit had imprinted itself, e.g. printed paper, a sharpened rock, a painted canvas, etc. (cf. Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt*; Aron, *Introduction*, 90.). Instead, Aron refers to such things

by way of the objective spirit or, in some cases, directly, as when the spirit of a work is inscribed directly in the work itself, e.g. the Mona Lisa. The historian does not need to create the behavioural relations of the objective spirit so much as clarify them, for they have an inherent rationality, which, as we observed above, is owing to the fact that we generally approach objects and situations with the same intentions.[218] Institutions such as the economy function organically according to the reciprocal actions of everyone who is a part of it. As the historian assembles these data he is confronted no longer with a mass of atomized individuals or disparate events, but rather a sharper picture of humans in groups, acting in accordance with the inherent rationality of institutions, laws, traditions, etc. The *motifs* are made intelligible at higher levels: collective works, society, and history.[219]

Individuals embedded in Collectives in History

At this stage we see another dimension of Aron's repudiation of positivism. His eschewal of psychological determinism and his appeal to a phenomenological method that focuses on intentions is in and of itself a rejection of the positivist approach. He also mentions that his aforementioned comments are intended to avoid two classic antinomies: individual-society and collective representations-authentic thought.

The individual-society dichotomy is false because, as observed above, no individual exists in isolation. Indeed, no activity is absolutely closed unto itself. Nevertheless, the objective spirit is multiple, incoherent, and without defined unity or absolute limits. Individuals are part of many different collectives and they can always choose not to conform to certain rules or assumed forms of behaviour.

But even if an individual chooses to break from the norm, he is not somehow acting more authentically: "One can break the ties of family or profession, but one carries within oneself language and the system of concepts or values that are essentially ours, because we define ourselves, albeit by negation, only by using this common richness."[220] His rebellion against one system will have been motivated by and executed within the context of another; therefore, he is not somehow freer or truer to himself – he is not more authentic – if he rebels against the norm. This does not mean that individuals are powerless against the collectives of which they are a part; on the contrary, these common representations and communities are realized in and by

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as "objectivized spirit" (*esprit objectivé*). Where Aron employs the term "objective spirit" (*esprit objectif*) is in describing collective representations, i.e. ways of thinking and acting that are characteristic of a society. Logically, this definition would embrace both Dilthey's systems of culture and his external organization of society.

[218] Cf. the "transcendentally reduced" way in which Husserl describes this intersubjective world in Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 43, trans. Dorion Cairns, 91-92: "I *experience* the world (including others) – and, according to its experiential sense, *not* as (so to speak) my *private* synthetic formation but as other than mine alone [*mir fremde*], as an *intersubjective* world, actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone…Objects with 'spiritual' predicates belong to the experienced world. These Objects, in respect of their origin and sense, refer us to subjects, usually other subjects, and their actively constituting intentionality. Thus it is in the case of all cultural Objects (books, tools, works of any kind, and so forth), which moreover carry with them at the same time the experiential sense of thereness-for-everyone (that is, everyone belonging to the corresponding cultural community, such as the European or perhaps, more narrowly, the French cultural community, and so forth)." Italics in original.

[219] Aron would later go on to enumerate some of these intelligible wholes: events (such as a battle); a series of events (such as the battles of the Revolution); the state; collectives (such as nations or classes), whose real intelligibility is based on shared ways of living or thinking and awareness of their belonging to a common collective; political, social, and economic organizations. See Aron, "De l'objet de l'histoire [1959]," 118-119.

[220] Aron, *Introduction*, 93.

means of the individuals who always precede them and surpass them. This does not imply any sort of metaphysic, like a *national spirit* or a *collective consciousness*, but it does confirm the existence of a reality that is both transcendent and internal to humans, social and spiritual, total and multiple.

In rejecting the individual-society dichotomy, Aron has also consequently rejected the collective representations-authentic thought dichotomy. Here Aron dispenses with, e.g., Heidegger's and Sartre's later concern for authenticity.[221] Heidegger argues that the *Dasein* is thrown into the world without any reason for his existence, and that if he succumbs to this fact with anxiety and flees himself in order to fall into the everyday, impersonal roles of "the they" (*das Man*), e.g. idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity, then he is being inauthentic.[222] In *L'être et le néant* Sartre seems to see authenticity as the flipside of acting in bad faith, where the authentic attitude is defined either by recognizing oneself as the object of another subject (another person), or recognizing oneself as the free project by which the other becomes objectified, i.e. affirming one's own liberty.[223] In fact, Sartre's road to *L'être et le néant* provides a critique of Husserl along the way. One of the results of Husserl's investigation was the creation of a transcendental ego that remains constant over the course of different conscious experiences. In *La transcendance de l'Ego* Sartre objects to the transcendental ego because it undermines the purpose of the *epoche*, which had been to demarcate certain knowledge on the basis of conscious experience. If this knowledge is certain only at the moment of conscious reflection, then how can there be a fixed transcendental ego?[224] In addition, Sartre also argues that it is a mistake to conclude from the act of self-reflection that there has always existed a self that one is now discovering through the act of reflection. Instead, reflection is an act of creation. One of the consequences of Sartre's approach here, however, is to instill a sense of anguish resulting from the consciousness's endless and spontaneous acts of re-creation over which we have no

[221] Although, ironically, as argued by Fred Baumann, Aron was more "authentic" because he "stayed truer to the fundamental insight of phenomenology (which may be the fundamental insight of philosophy itself) than did Sartre, namely, the need to pay respectful attention to the phenomena, to let them, in the first instance, speak for themselves, and to encounter them (and this of course includes, to the extent possible, 'inner' or psychic phenomena as well) with what the Greeks called *pistis*, a kind of trust...The true authenticity and 'spontaneity' of a human being, the true flexibility in the face of phenomena that are always in part mysterious, real fidelity to self, will come to be seen far more in Aron's realism, modesty, candor, self-criticism, and openness to the criticisms of others than in Sartre's melodramatic gestures and rhetoric." Baumann, "Raymond Aron and Jean-Paul Sartre," 67-68. That Aron in some ways continued to be even more faithful to the ideals of his youth – i.e. the need to understand phenomena, be they war, history, totalitarianism, etc. – than were his pacifist or fellow traveler colleagues is one of the themes presented in Bachelier, "Epilogue: Raymond Aron and History in the Making," 275-292.

[222] Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, 272; Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 27, § 38, pp. 126-130, 175-180. However, we should also note that in these passages Heidegger does not suggest that authenticity means separating oneself and overcoming "the they" and everyday reality, but rather modifying one's relation to it. Nevertheless, for our purposes it is enough to observe that Aron dispenses altogether with the authentic-collective representations dichotomy *qua* opposition.

[223] Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 81-106, 330. However, we find it difficult to believe that Sartrean authenticity would really permit of recognizing oneself as the object of another subject's project.

[224] Richmond, introduction to *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Andrew Brown, viii-xi; Sartre, *Transcendence*, 8.

control.[225] This restless quality resurfaces in Aron's critique of Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* is already foreshadowed in his early work.[226]

Aron escapes some of these problems, not only because he does not attempt to be as relentlessly faithful to Husserl's approach and intentions as Sartre, but also because he reasons that if we accept that the individual can be conceptualized only in social relations, then it is impossible for the individual to achieve a point outside of these collective representations where he is being authentic. If this is the case, then the path to self-knowledge is not paved with countless fruitless attempts at defining oneself *against* society, but with understanding oneself *within* society.[227] Freedom is not the destruction of another whom one must understand in order to know himself. This links back to the point made earlier that historical knowledge and knowledge of oneself go hand-in-hand.

The various potential political consequences of Aron's approach vis-à-vis Heidegger and Sartre's are thus manifest:

> There are peaceful eras when people (the majority of them) recognize each other in their milieu. Then there are others when social relations pass for a fatality or a tyranny of things or of a minority. In effect, revolt against society is one of the repercussions of the historical movement. On the other hand, in the order of ends, the communitarian ideal and the individualist ideal represent the two poles of a fundamental alternative. Either the individual realizes himself in and by means of the social life whose obligations he consciously accepts, or, on the contrary, he wishes that the collective leaves to each person as much independence as possible, and he reduces the state, the symbol and executor of the general will, to administrative functions.[228]

Unlike Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre, then, Aron argues that self-knowledge is accompanied by knowledge of another and, nearing Dilthey's position, knowledge of history: [229]

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[225] Sartre, *Transcendence*, 27.

[226] As are some of Sartre's budding political concerns, "suffering, hunger, and war", and his materialism. Cf. Sartre, *Transcendence*, 29.

[227] Aron's insight here is still supported in the secondary literature today on identity formation. See, for example, Lebow, *The Politics and Ethics of Identity*, 282: "Identity formation is best understood as a dialectical process in which we become ourselves by drawing closer to others while at the same time separating from them. At every level of social aggregation identity formation should be studied in the context of relationships, not as an isolated individual or group phenomenon…the self does not form so much in opposition to the "other" as it does in conjunction with it."

[228] Aron, *Introduction*, 93.

[229] While Dilthey and Husserl find themselves in similar camps on the issue of intentionality and their desire for a scientific philosophy, Husserl's phenomenology is opposed to Dilthey's historical philosophy. Aron's fullest exposition of this conflict – and which side attracts him more – is found in a note at the end of *La philosophie critique*, 290: "Both, in a sense, desire a scientific philosophy. Both recognize the theory of science as scientific, the *Weltanschauung* as non-scientific. But phenomenology should permit one to constitute a scientific philosophy that is something other than a theory of sciences. Despite his intentions Dilthey does not have such a philosophy, because, concretely, life is known only through understanding, i.e. historically. And the effort to define life in a supra-historical manner does not go beyond a general theory of categories since life is indeterminable, ungraspable, and unforeseeable.

Without a doubt the opposition holds at first glance to the antithesis between the primacy of life and the primacy of thought. This is not to say that Husserl does not take life as his starting point, but in phenomenology the movement from life to philosophy is accomplished once and for all by the *epoche*, in the sense that each person can accomplish it in his turn and thus accede to the universal and eternal realm of philosophical

> Historical awareness is both component and means for self-awareness; but the latter always follows the discovery of the Other. Only once I have discovered the Other – and, in the last analysis, this includes the community into which I was born – and become aware of its effect on me can I turn to my self-awareness and, finally, in the last step, think beyond the boundaries of even this self-awareness.[230]

We shall conclude with some comments on historical knowledge.[231] Historical knowledge is retrospective and, as with knowledge of oneself and others, it is to be distinguished from lived experience. In contrast to self-knowledge, when it comes to knowing others we tend to have a vaguer and therefore less patient understanding of the complexity of their situation. This simplification of others can also make it easier to dehumanize them.[232]

We would like to suggest in this regard a potential link between Aron's recognition of social complexity and knowledge as a collective endeavour that is subject to many interpretations – in other words, his epistemological pluralism – and his political pluralism.[233] Where the historian enjoys an advantage over a deceased historical actor or his contemporaries is that the historian knows the entire story of the individual's life. To recount this story is to do more than enumerate a series of human impulses; it requires imparting a theme to the story – a theme that is embedded in our relation to others and to the past. If we are able to understand our fellow citizens or contemporaries it is because we all have the same objective spirit, we use the same language, and we have received similar values.

Historical knowledge is the means for self-knowledge, and its origin lies not in memory or lived experience, but in *reflection*. Again, history is reconstructed, not relived. We maintain a certain consistency through time both to ourselves and to those around us through the relative permanence of our affections in addition to continuous reflection on ourselves, those around us, and history in an effort to identify a principle of unity that will in turn act as a benchmark for our future actions and reflections. "The being who evolves is he who enriches himself by preserving, but who must also forget in order to progress. History appears with the awareness of this destiny and with the detachment that breaks the unity of naïve duration."[234] Reflection within society and history – and not violent revolution against society and history – is the key to self-knowledge.

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Aside from the study of the critical philosophy of history, Aron was also interested in the work of Edmund Husserl and especially the phenomenologist's way of looking. His approach in his *Introduction* is phenomenological. We have seen that all philosophy of history departs from

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meditation. On the contrary, the movement from life to philosophy in Dilthey is historical. It is developed historically and, furthermore, its results do not escape evolution; the theory of knowledge alone is supra-historical. In other words, let us say that in the philosophy of life there is neither an absolute spirit nor a transcendental ego; life elevates itself to thought and the critique of the world and itself, but there is never an assured conquest because history continues."

[230] Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 112.

[231] Aron, *Introduction*, 95-105.

[232] See Haslam, "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review," 252-64.

[233] We are joined in this by Franciszek Draus in Draus, "Raymond Aron et la politique," 1207. In this article Draus elaborates what he refers to as a "phenomenology of political action", elaborating the relations between action and knowledge, action and morality, and action and liberty. This allows Aron to walk between the political idealist (revolutionary) and political conservative and embrace a progressive politics aimed at liberty or the completion of man's vocation.

[234] Aron, *Introduction*, 102.

the fundamental given that the individual is in a collective that is constantly developing, and he reflects on himself, his past, and on his own reflection. Understanding is the reconstruction of the consciousness of another or of the works that arise from consciousness (this is to be distinguished from sympathy or affective participation). One understands oneself through memories but others by means of interpreting signs. Understanding, in this case, is about understanding the *intention* of someone else. Rejecting Heidegger and Sartre's individual-society and collective representations-authentic thought dichotomies, Aron stresses that we can only attain to self-knowledge by understanding ourselves within society, because, as evidenced previously, achieving an objective position outside of society and its influences is impossible. This phenomenological reflection has consequences for political action.

1d – The Pathos of the Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire

The movement from knowledge of self to knowledge of the other and historicity does not necessarily end up justifying the abandonment of reason. But the later chapters of Aron's *Introduction* reach their bleakest and most Heideggerian point with the man who determines himself and his mission by measuring himself against nothingness.[235] This is surprisingly taken to be a salvo against pathetic nihilism in that it empowers man to create himself by judging his milieu and choosing himself. "Thus only the individual overcomes the relativity of history by the absoluteness of decision, and he integrates into his essential me the history that he carries within himself, and which becomes his own." Some interpret this as a departure from Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*;[236] while others disagree on this point and suggest that Aron's work "ends just like *Sein und Zeit*".[237] Aron's final words are indeed sombre: "Human existence is dialectical, i.e. dramatic, because it acts in an incoherent world, is engaged despite duration, and searches for a fleeting truth, without any other assurance than a fragmentary science and formal reflection."[238]

He would later amend this statement by reiterating his faith in scientific truth and human universalism, remaining a man of the Enlightenment.[239] These words did not spring fully-loaded from nothing though; their pathos betrays a brooding sense of what history was about to reveal to Aron's academic superiors in their cloistered optimism.[240]

The purpose of the final section of Aron's *Introduction*, with its formula, "man is in history; man is historical; man is a history", is to provide no less than a view of the human condition.[241] Historical consciousness and philosophies must be examined against the flow of time, which is both destroyer of monuments and empires, and wellspring of life and creation.[242] All philosophies that tend either to optimism or pessimism have in common the relation between two things: *man* and *history*. *Man is in history* in that he belongs to a collective that shares a history. *Man is historical* in that he is aware that he is a historical being. *Man is a history* in that all of history is intertwined with humanity, in a constant state of self-creation through time. Like man's relation to himself, history too is free because it is not written in advance or determined by fixed laws of nature.

The backdrop to these statements was highly politically charged, thus accounting for Aron's frequent discussion of political action and his remark that the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* could also have been called "*Introduction to political thought* or *historical thought*".[243] We ought also to recall that Aron's analysis of Dilthey concludes with the idea that action is bound up with reflection.[244] Aron's dissatisfaction with Dilthey's hermeneutical circle is that it does not lend itself to an ethic.[245] This section will move beyond

[235] Aron, *Introduction*, 421.
[236] Mesure, "Notes de l'éditeur et variantes," 504.
[237] Colen, *Short Guide to the* Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 176. Whatever the similarities or differences, Aron would later claim that Heidegger's influence on him was weak. Aron, Interview with Joachim Stark, 7 October 1981, 252.
[238] Aron, *Introduction*, 437.
[239] Aron, *Mémoires*, 980-985.
[240] Aron, *Mémoires*, 180; Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 27.
[241] Aron, *Introduction*, 403-437; Baverez, "Life and Works," 7.
[242] Aron, *Introduction*, 403-404.
[243] Aron, "De l'existence historique (1979),": 147-150.
[244] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 109.
[245] Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 96-97.

Dilthey to reveal Aron's early attempt to address the problem of political action, informed by his study of the nature of historical knowledge. It comes to the fore in the final section of the *Introduction* and foreshadows some of Aron's more mature political thought.[246] We will proceed by examining the following: *Political choices embedded in history. Two ideal types of political action. The ambiguities of choice in history.*

Political Choices embedded in History

To begin with, Aron contends that there is indeed a logic to political action that permits one not necessarily to resolve contradictions in political views (e.g. whether it is better to be a capitalist or an anticapitalist) but at least to reflect on the conditions in which individuals hold these views and act on them. Three illusions prevent one from acknowledging this essentially historical aspect of politics: scientism (providing a foundation for society or morality on some rational form of science); rationalism (believing that practical reason can determine the ideal of collective life just as much as of individual action); and pseudo-realism (maintained by those who pretend to base their views on historical experience and who criticize the idealists for their idealism, all the while failing to recognize that their own understanding of the past is itself a reconstruction – a sceptical one at that – that reflects their own present resignation).

Although Aron does not single out specific policies or individuals for criticism, his criticism of scientism and rationalism – both of which amount to the same thing: the abuse of reason – will form one of the pillars of his critique of Marxism and any totalizing ideology. A moral science would have to posit an ultimate end, such as society being the absolute value,[247] and then it would require conformity amongst society's members. The Marxists claimed that History itself was the end they were fulfilling, and Aron's criticisms centred on their presumption to have discovered the meaning of the total movement.[248] The idea of a single vocation for all men betrays a very Christian conception of the world. It is an illusion to believe that according to reason we can create the image of a society that conforms to eternal rules. By contrast, the error of the pseudo-realists is in assuming that because their *Weltanschauung* is less optimistic they somehow come closer to reality.

Aron would later observe that Weber's conflict-laden view of the world was just as driven by unrealistic preconceptions as the idealist's.[249] Another pseudo-realist, Pareto, was wide of the mark not just because he had reduced all human action to economic rationality, but also because he rejected ideologies entirely as a human motivator.[250] *Motifs*, as Aron had earlier employed the term, are impossible in Pareto's philosophy; there can only be *mobiles*, or what Pareto calls *residues*.[251] In this he misses the quintessential aspect of man and history that Aron seeks to clarify in his *Introduction*: "But shorn of its orientation toward the future, human existence ceases to be humanity, and instead becomes nature."[252] Unlike Weber, who is a pseudo-realist because of his ideology, Pareto comes to his pseudo-realism by way of scientism, in defiance of all ideology. What Aron objects to in all three of these cases is the attempt to

[246] Aron, *Introduction*, 405-415.
[247] This would later be one of the points on which he would criticize Durkheim. See Aron, *Les étapes*, 317-398.
[248] Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, 115-210. This part, revealingly titled "L'idolâtrie de l'histoire", even makes use of some of the ideas developed in Aron's *Introduction* such as the plurality of interpretations.
[249] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 643.
[250] Aron, *Machiavel*, 107-118.
[251] Aron, *Machiavel*, 90.
[252] Aron, *Machiavel*, 103.

introduce a technical schema (be it industrial or medical) into the relations between theory and practice (be they political or moral).

In a different setting (before the Société française de philosophie) from the same time period, although with similar philosophical and political concerns as outlined in the *Introduction*, Aron states: "The totalitarian regimes of the 20th century have demonstrated that, if there is a wrong idea, it is that the administration of things replaces the government of people. What has become abundantly clear is that when one wishes to manage everything, one is simultaneously obliged to govern everyone."[253] Again, the error committed in scientism, rationalism, and pseudo-realism is to believe that the quintessential political problem – the problem of getting people to live together – can be solved once and for all.

> One refuses to recognize here that the ends are not determined by the consent of everyone. The essential point is to know *which* community one wants. One falsifies both the nature of society and that of sociology by imagining the former to be coherent and unequivocal, and the latter total and systematic. In truth, the scholar encounters in the object the conflicts that stir other men and himself.[254]

Human relations pose specific problems that cannot be reduced to abstract ethical laws. This is because our notions are derived from a historical reality and not an abstract imperative. Acknowledging the historicity of politics and morality is a way out of the pretensions of scientism in that it encourages reflection.

Two Ideal Types of Political Action

The historicity of politics and morality also implies that the political choices we are faced with are never between two ideal systems, for example, but between two imperfect forms.[255] The first choice to be made in this regard involves accepting or rejecting the present order as such.

Aron distinguishes between reformists and conservatives (who are defenders of certain values and interests) on the one hand, and revolutionaries (who have a demagogic program, an ideology) on the other. This distinction emerges again when Aron makes the – at the time shocking[256] – claim that democracies are fundamentally conservative while totalitarian regimes are fundamentally revolutionary.[257] Revolutionaries promise more than reformists because their promises are based on dreams, thus explaining why intellectuals tend to be drawn to such ideas.[258] Naturally all societies have been unjust, but what, by contrast, would a just society be? Is it even definable and realizable? This is a serious double-hurdle for Aron: *even if* one could paint a vivid picture of the just society, what would it take to bring it into being, if it could be brought into being at all? And, before that question, can one even philosophically determine what the just society is? If the question itself is open-ended, because it requires philosophy, then the political means used to attain this uncertain end should be mitigated. The future society is nothing more than a dream since we have no evidence of the future society.

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[253] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 69.

[254] Aron, *Introduction*, 406.

[255] Cf., Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1249: "Is it possible to justify simultaneously obedience and the refusal to obey? Authority and the limits of authority? Such is the eternal problem of political order to which all regimes, in fact, are always imperfect solutions."

[256] Aron, *Mémoires*, 214.

[257] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 58.

[258] Cf. Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism [1949]," 371-384. "It is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the intellectual that he judges new ideas not by their specific merits but by the readiness with which they fit into his general conceptions, into the picture of the world which he regards as modern or advanced." (p. 376).

Aron at this point introduces two ideal types of politician: the *politician of understanding* and the *politician of Reason*.[259] The former seeks out certain objectives or wishes to safeguard certain goods: he has tactics without a strategy, like a captain who sails the seas without knowing the port, every situation is new. The latter adapts his tactics to the grand strategy because he believes he knows the causally inevitable goal. Once again, the fault here would appear to be similar to that which Aron uncovered regarding scientism, rationalism, and pseudo-realism: neither the politician of understanding nor the politician of Reason treats politics as an open-ended question because both forestall the possibility of philosophy. The politician of Reason believes he has an absolute answer while the politician of understanding refuses to ask the question.

The purpose of the foregoing has been to illustrate that man, whose future is open,[260] is entrenched in history and history is entrenched in man. Any attempt to reach a vantage point outside of history and impose its conclusions is bound to be politically revolutionary. On the other hand, those who believe to have seen the inner-workings of reality without considering the reasons man gives himself for what he does are simply indulging a pseudo-realist ideology. Both approaches fail to take into account politics and philosophy as enduringly unanswered questions because history itself will not yield a definitive meaning until it is over. In this gap between the future totality and fragmentary reflections we find immense room for both ignorance and liberty. Is this liberty limited by the fact that man is historical?[261] Where the formula, *man in history*, opposes the individual to the social milieu, *man is historical* re-establishes this unity, but in the process also defines the particularity of beings and the relativity of wills. Aron's acceptance of this second formula brings him closer to the pathos noted earlier in this section. He is able to mobilize arguments against dogmatism but at the price of potentially wading deeper into relativism. Let us examine how he proceeds.

The Ambiguities of Choice in History

Choice is historical because the values in whose name we judge the present are also derived from history. Aron's concern is clearly with the impending war and the danger of civil strife, hence his frequent discussion of the relation between political action and revolution, on the one hand, and man and history, on the other. Progressive parties attract three types of people: idealists, anarchists, and true revolutionaries. The first judge based on an eternal ideal and have no patience for the permanent conditions of collective life; the second are opposed to social order entirely; the third wish to overthrow the present order in favour of a different one. All three are united by their dislike for the present order and view revolution as a means of reconciling people with themselves and their milieu. Unfortunately, revolution will not reconcile their ideals with reality.

Aron observes that the revolutionaries, even if they were to succeed, would not necessarily be the same people after their victory. The new order would carry much of the old into it, but who is to say that it would not also change the ideologies and convictions that led the

[259] Cf. his later replication of this distinction in the guise of Machiavelli-Marx in Aron, "Machiavel et Marx [1969]," 93-109.

[260] Cf. Aron, "La philosophie de l'histoire," in *L'activité philosophique contemporaine en France et aux Etats-Unis, Tome II*, 326: "Man is an historical being not only because his existence is a future, because he must choose his destiny, because he is plunged in a social milieu, because he takes in directly the objective spirit, the conquests of his ancestors, but because he defines himself with respect to the other, i.e. with respect to the past."

[261] Aron, *Introduction*, 416-419.

revolutionaries to destroy the old order? "He who wishes for a different society wishes that he himself were other than he is, because he belongs to the current society that has formed him and which he denies."[262]

The revolutionary takes much the same political position as the existential position assumed by Heidegger and Sartre in the previous chapter: "a choice always implies sacrifices and…one chooses *against* something when one chooses revolution."[263] Even if a revolution to change society were to succeed, we would still be stuck with politics. In a typically lucid and somewhat tragic passage, Aron defines politics in such circumstances:

> Politics is both the art of irreversible choices and long-term goals. The man of action, who is open to circumstances, should be unmoved and aim at the goal that he has given himself. Incidentally, one more often sees wisdom at the service of a foolish undertaking or disregard for method compromise a reasonable project…Action, in the end, begins with accepting the fundamental conditions of all politics and the conditions of the given era. One should be capable of both lucidity and faith: to believe in a historical will without believing in myths or masses.[264]

If one chooses *against* society – whether in the quest for self-knowledge or for a new political order as a way of reconciling man with his milieu – then one does not escape the confines of history and society so much as transport many of the norms from the old society into the new. Although Aron does not explicitly align himself with the conservatives and reformists, it would appear that both his political and phenomenological logic lead him in the same direction: the road to self-knowledge and political change must be traversed *within* society and not by overthrowing it.

Nevertheless, by making the concession that man is historical, another problem arises. Can we still adhere to our decisions if we are aware of the particularity of our being and our preferences?[265] It is in this context that the earlier quote about man measuring himself against nothingness is made. In a sense, one avoids one's own particularity as soon as one is aware of it. Meaning can be conferred only on two conditions: either meaning resides within an object itself (such as a work of art) or history has reached a definitive end point. The future, however, only reveals the truth of the past to us bit by bit and never in a definitive manner. Reflection allows us to impart some partial sense to the course of history, but we simultaneously discover the impossibility of an absolute truth of history within history.

At this point Aron's reasoning seems to waver between existential *pathos* and the more moderate conclusion that self-knowledge and knowledge of history are related processes, as observed previously.[266] Despite Aron's attempt to resolve the problem of the particularity of being through the absoluteness of decision – that the individual would overcome relativity through decision and integrating into his essential ego the history that he bears in himself and which becomes his own – the stability of this absoluteness would be lost the moment the decision was taken. Reflecting on the decision would also give it a meaning it lacked when the decision was taken. One is thus caught between chasing one's tail in endless reflection or committing oneself to endless, meaningless action.

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[262] Aron, *Introduction*, 418.
[263] Aron, *Introduction*, 412. Italics in original.
[264] Aron, *Introduction*, 414-415.
[265] Aron, *Introduction*, 419-425.
[266] Aron, *Introduction*, 425-437.

Finally, Aron later claims that choices and decisions never spring from nothingness but are partially determined by the historical situation. Immediately after this, however, he attempts to reconcile man with himself and history: "In order for man to be entirely one with himself he would have to live according to truth and acknowledge his autonomy both in his creation and in his consciousness thereof. It is an ideal reconciliation that is incompatible with the destiny of those who place no idol in the place of God."[267] The conundrum in which Aron has gotten himself is that pure historicism ends by refuting itself: it dissolves all truth and history itself. Aron sets up moralism as the antithesis, which leads to a contrary anarchy because it sacrifices action to ethical imperatives and societies to justice. Nevertheless, despite, or perhaps because of, historicism, we maintain the permanence of man, and this perhaps as a leftover from our Christian past. Can rationalism give us sufficient justification for this fundamental human identity without appealing to religious dogmas and in spite of all the variation in people and practices we see around us?

Aron's conclusions leave us little hope. On the one hand, it would appear that he later appeals to some sort of faint Kantian faith on the horizon, though it is hardly dogmatic.[268] On the other hand, in spite of the variation in people and practices the dialogue of metaphysics and historical ideologies proves that, at least within a certain culture, there is a community that values the search for truth, a truth that would be above the plurality of activities and values, lest it collapse among particular and contradictory wills. This is perhaps the truth to be found beyond the political horizon, the idea of Reason.

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We have seen that Aron's primary doctoral dissertation, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, introduces to his French academic superiors radical theses that would destroy the foundations for objective knowledge. It draws heavily on his German readings and reveals the many limits to man's knowledge of himself, others, and history, especially the possibility of knowing the movement of the historical totality. It nevertheless displays a deep concern with the possibility of truth and action – particularly political action – in history. It wavers between an ethic of incessant reflection and one that is resigned to the absoluteness of decision. It simultaneously ventures an outline of a theory of political action with its focus on idealism, anarchism, and revolution, in order to act on the basis of a reasonable, albeit imperfect, political sense, accepting the society into which one has been cast. This will not be the last time Aron confronts this problem.

[267] Aron, *Introduction*, 437.
[268] Aron, *Mémoires*, 986.

1e – Dilthey Revisited: The Incomplete Trilogy

We have but fragments of the great philosophical project that Aron initiated in his early years and picked up once again in the 1960s and 1970s. We can trace some of the outlines of where his interests would have led him had history not driven him to choose a different path. Still in 1964 Aron had envisaged his *Philosophie critique de l'histoire* as the first part of a study that would move from the critical philosophy of history to historicism, that is, the philosophy of historical relativism.[269] It would have examined four additional thinkers: Ernst Troeltsch, Max Scheler, Karl Mannheim, and Oswald Spengler.[270]

His *Introduction* was also to be succeeded by a work on the social sciences that would stamp out the relativism with which his dissertations had been charged.[271] This sequel would move from a theory of the social sciences to a theory of historical interpretations of epochs, civilizations, and humanity in history.[272] If the 1940s and 1950s saw fewer purely philosophical reflections in this vein, it is because Aron was putting into practice his methodology and trying to understand the world in which he lived, on every level from journalism all the way up to the more academic writings of the time.[273] The historical approach itself, however, is never absent from his work; if anything, it is reinvigorated by his stressing the primacy of the political.[274]

Come the 1970s Aron works out his formal meditation on man and history with some complete books and additional lectures: his two-volume work on Clausewitz,[275] a critique of

[269] Aron, preface to *La philosophie critique*, 9.
[270] Aron, *Mémoires*, 159.
[271] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 30. Where in the 1930s Aron's concern had been to address the problem of positivism, by the 1960s the problem had become relativism. According to Mesure, his solution was that an historical interpretation would be more objective if it were directed by values that could be shared by all of humanity. Historical judgment can be discussed, which presupposes certain principles of judgment that are in a sense objective. Their objectivity is not one of knowledge, but one born of the demand for universality. See Mesure, "De l'antipositivisme à l'antirelativisme," 471-478. Mesure sees these epistemological insights forming a bridge to Aron's political progressivism in Mesure, "Objectivité théorique et objectivité pratique," 11-23. The progressivism to which she refers is that outlined at the end of "Histoire et politique" where Aron situates progressivism, which rejects neither the idea of an end nor the idea of historical continuity, between millenarianism and conservatism. It has the benefit of allowing for irregular and undefined transformations in a society that point to the horizon that has been justified by abstract principles. Aron, "Histoire et politique [1949]," 535-537.
[272] Aron, *Dimensions de la conscience historique*, 29.
[273] And already by the 1960s we are treated to some additional philosophical work in the form of his *Dimensions de la conscience historique*, the unpublished course from 1963-1964, "Histoire et philosophie", and the Gifford Lectures in 1965 and 1967, "De la conscience historique dans la pensée et dans l'action". The syllabus for the Gifford Lectures can be found in *Leçons sur l'histoire*, pp. 509-558. It was with the Gifford Lectures beginning in 1965 that Aron wished to make "a truly new theoretical investment" in the subject matter. The trilogy that was to come about of this investment commenced only in the 1970s with Aron's *History and the Dialectic of Violence*. See Mesure, introduction to *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 5-6; Aron, *Mémoires*, 979 and ff.
[274] Simon-Nahum, "Raymond Aron and the Notion of History," 114. Perrine Simon-Nahum, along with Sylvie Mesure, is another of the Aron scholars whose work has focused on the importance of the study of history for Aron. In addition to this recent publication in *The Companion to Raymond Aron*, in which she puts the role of history front and centre, she has also written the preface to one of Aron's theoretical, although mainstream, reflections on history – a collection of essays in *Dimensions de la conscience historique*.
[275] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1 and 2.*

Sartre's *La critique de la raison dialectique*,[276] and the two Collège de France courses from 1972 and 1974 – "De l'historisme allemand à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire" and "L'édification du monde historique" – which form the bulk of *Leçons sur l'histoire*.[277] *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*, Aron's critique of Sartre's work, would serve as an introduction to a trilogy whose second volume would explore the phenomenology of history and analytical philosophy, before concluding with a volume on the theory of historical action or politics in history, the issue left open in the fourth part of Aron's *Introduction*.[278] The closest we can come to what some of this may have looked like is to be found in the lectures in *Leçons sur l'histoire*, which cover some of those very themes. This idea had been germinating since Aron's early interest in German thought and had been given a new lease on life in the form of the Gifford Lectures in 1965 and 1967.[279] His final foray directly into this subject matter was in "De l'existence historique" of 1979, which would have accompanied his reflections on human historicity and the philosophy of politics.[280] By this point, in the interest of making good use of the time remaining to him, Aron had decided to shelve the second volume and skip straight to the final volume.[281]

Although his more philosophical reflections on man and history are scattered and many are incomplete, we should recall that this vast topic enthralled him his entire life. This theoretical work was the philosophical backdrop to his concrete sociological analyses and political commentary. It is therefore not surprising that, of his own works, his favourites were *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*, and *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*.[282] Again, the second of these – otherwise comparatively undervalued in the secondary literature – is pertinent in this respect given Aron's grand intentions surrounding it and that its subject matter, Sartre's *Critique*, was, in Aron's view, the endpoint of the project begun long ago by Dilthey.[283]

The purpose of this section, therefore, will be to explore Aron's mature reflections on the issue that had fascinated him his entire life: man and history. We shall consult mainly his *Histoire et dialectique de la violence, Leçons sur l'histoire*, and his unpublished lectures at the Sorbonne (1963-1964) called *Histoire et philosophie*. We will proceed by examining the following: *Aron's interpretation of Sartre's* Critique de la raison dialectique. *The development of Aron's epistemological reflections (micro vs macro level analysis). Freedom between historical relativity and universal truth.*

Aron's Interpretation of Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*

[276] Aron, *History and the Dialectic of Violence*.

[277] In addition to these works of more formal historical reflection Aron also tries his hand at writing a history of American foreign policy in Aron, *République impériale*.

[278] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, xxv; Mesure, preface to "De l'existence historique," 145; Aron, "De l'existence historique," 161-162. Although Aron never gets around to the formal reflection on action in history, we are able to piece together some of his insights in this matter, which will be presented in the conclusion.

[279] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, xvii; Aron, *Mémoires*, 979 and ff.; Mesure, introduction to *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 5-6.

[280] Mesure, preface to "De l'existence historique," 145.

[281] Aron, "De l'existence historique," 154. By the end of his life he had lost his taste for the analytical philosophers anyway. See Aron, *Mémoires*, 978.

[282] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 297. Cf. Aron, *Mémoires*, 978-979.

[283] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 29-30, 252. This connection to Dilthey and Aron's original interest in the problem of historical understanding is also indicated in Raynaud, "Raison critique et raison dialectique," 151.

Let us recall that the grand problem Dilthey sets for himself is to be able to give a total account of history on the basis of the consciousness man has thereof. As we have seen, Dilthey is unable to overcome the fact that man is at all times situated in history, and any account that he would give of that history is but one perspective among many possible perspectives.

Aron's reading of Sartre's *Critique* interprets the latter's work as the attempt to do two things:

> The transfiguration of Marxism into a *Marxism of understanding* in order to elaborate the status of collectives and the relations of individual consciousnesses with collectives, and secondly, the movement, whether possible or not, from this Marxism of understanding to action in history and to the intelligibility of a *single* History, understood as the advent of Truth.[284]

As mentioned above, Sartre's *Critique* is to be a critique of historical reason along the lines of Dilthey:

> Like Dilthey, Sartre strives to bring concepts, the necessary *universals* for the intellection of the historical world, into existence. Like Dilthey, he wishes to safeguard the particularity of each existence and of each era; he does not wish to reduce the new to the known, or to explain the concrete by the abstract. Like Dilthey, he dreams of going from biography to universal History, which together are both totalization and unique adventure.[285]

Aron believes that Sartre takes three steps to move from Sartrism to Marxism: *materiality* (or *alterity*), *plurality of consciousnesses*, and *scarcity*.[286] Every being has his own project[287] (*praxis* being the jargon for "a-self-aware-being-with-a-project" or the "for-itself") to impose on the material environment and he recognizes that everyone else around him is in the same condition.

Because Sartre's goal is to give a critique of *dialectical* reason,[288] he will also need to provide a negative that can activate the historical process. So far consciousness is pure freedom, project, and totalization; the negation of this freedom – the factor that brings about humanity – is scarcity. Scarcity is the motor of conflict insofar as it modifies the relations between beings. Without scarcity beings are separate but have the same essence; with scarcity they become the Other, a threat. At this point we should mention that while there is nothing to suggest that history *must* have materiality and scarcity as its basis, yet we begin to see how these concepts might begin to marry existentialism and Marxism: the need perceived by each consciousness in a world of scarcity is what leads to poverty, which in turn causes the struggle that can be resolved only by socialism.[289] Without being able to establish unequivocally the truth and necessity of materiality and scarcity, however, Sartre's project will not succeed in fulfilling Dilthey's work.[290] Nor, for that matter, has Sartre seriously critiqued the economy; rather he has assumed

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[284] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, xxv.

[285] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 13-14.

[286] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 25-53.

[287] This must be so because existence precedes essence, the latter of which is created through action. See Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*.

[288] A form of reason that Aron rejects. See Aron, *Mémoires*, 756.

[289] It will not be our task to demonstrate all of the divergences and convergences between Sartrean existentialism and Marxism. For our purposes it is enough to understand that Sartre's intention is to move from ontological individualism to the total understanding of History, and it is with this project that Aron finds fault.

[290] And seeing as how Sartre never completed the second volume on the intelligibility of history the problem of fulfilling Dilthey's work by this avenue remains – necessarily, as Aron demonstrates – open.

the arguments of Marx's *Kapital* to be self-evident.[291] Finally, he has argued that historical totalization is based on the class struggle, but this "is insufficient to establish the totalization of a *single* History, for it is a totalization without a totalizer, a totalization without absolute knowledge"[292] – without absolute knowledge because the absolute truth of Marxism has not been proved.

Nonetheless, let us continue to explore Sartre's thinking to see where it leads. Man must make use of the materials in his environment, some of which have been worked on by other *praxeis* and which therefore still contain traces of the projects of others. This external world – our banal and hellish day-to-day life – is called the practico-inert, the necessary source of our alienation.

Sartre's project will be to find a way to escape this intolerably prosaic existence. The way to do so is through collective action.[293] When individuals band together and become collectively aware of their common purpose, they become a *group* (unlike a *series*, which is a crowd without this collective awareness of their common purpose), like the masses that stormed the Bastille. They are bound by their spontaneous common purpose and are equals, and through their action they are free. This freedom is purchased in action that must identify an external enemy that can be rebelled against.

The group can form only if it manages to find an enemy:

> Common action or constituted *praxis* surges forth in reply to an experienced threat; it is only achieved in fighting against an equally active externality and so inexorably involves violence, only this time it is not passive violence inscribed upon the practico-inert, but active violence that becomes self-conscious by discovering the violence it suffers rather than by discovering the impossibility of living an impossible life…As violence against the outside enemy and hope against the violence materialized within the practico-inert, the revolutionary crowd symbolizes the effort of humanity to overcome the past of crystallized practices and to refuse to suffer bondage to seriality and materiality.[294]

Of course – provided the goal is not freedom by means of perpetual revolution[295] – this group action will eventually crystallize and constitute a new practico-inert. In this process Aron believes Sartre has distinguished four steps: "first is the *oath*, which creates the situation of terror-brotherhood; then comes the *organization*, which marks the first stage of the formation of the group-in-fusion; the organization hardens into an *institution*; the institution first arises as *authority*, and later becomes *hetero-conditioning* and *bureaucracy*." A new and oppressive practico-inert materializes and maintains its dominance by violence. Overcoming this new practico-inert requires violent revolution. History is the story of violence, and one must choose one's violence. Sartre is on the side of working class violence because of the oft-asserted, although never proven, unsurpassable truth that is Marxism.[296]

One of the curiosities of Sartre's attempt to wed existentialism and Marxism is that the iron cage of capitalism or colonialism is not an example of macro-level unintended consequences

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[291] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 18.
[292] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 87.
[293] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 55-56.
[294] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 58-59.
[295] A state of continuous revolution in an effort to remain free would appear to be the frightening consequence of Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*.
[296] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 81-86.

of micro-level actions, or Hayek's spontaneous order, or the Marxist infrastructure that has come to determine the actions of individuals; rather, it is directly imputable to the projects of capitalists and colonialists. Thus it is not just the system that is corrupt or unjust, but the humans who benefit from it are themselves evil and enjoy full moral culpability for their actions. They deserve the violence that their projects unwittingly perpetuate.

By so many twists and turns freedom ends up justifying a philosophy of violence. One of the first errors Sartre makes is to disregard a simple phenomenological account of individuals in their given circumstances.[297] Stripped of the tormented language of oppression and helplessness in the hellish practico-inert, people standing in line waiting for a bus or listening to the radio or watching TV are precisely that: people standing in line waiting for a bus or listening to the radio or watching TV. Some do it out of pleasure, others out of necessity, others in order to acquire information, etc. What grates some observers of this situation is the gap between micro-level intentions and actions, and macro-level outcomes and wholes:[298]

> History is made up of individual actions, but global history is not necessarily the result of the actors' intentions. And I would even add that actors' intentions, save for in a small number of cases of individual decisions, are never the scientific explanation of social facts…men make their history, but they make a history that they know only after the fact and with difficulties.[299]

The Development of Aron's Epistemological Reflections (Micro vs Macro Level Analysis)

Exploring this gap is one of the major purposes of his later reflections contained in *Leçons sur l'histoire* and *Histoire et philosophie*,[300] which present some differences in contrast to the *Introduction*. For one, he claims at least in his Sorbonne lectures (*Histoire et philosophie*) no longer to be interested in the problem of action and science. He is nevertheless quick to add that this should not be taken to mean that his position on the relation between science and action has fundamentally changed.[301] In any case, if we take Aron at his word at this point in time, it would seem that he changed his mind a mere year later in the Gifford Lectures on historical knowledge in thought and action. He seems willing to concede to the problem of the historicity of man that so vexed Dilthey, yet without succumbing to nihilism. What he *does* consistently try to distance himself from are the bits of existential anguish or excessive scepticism and relativism that we saw emerge from time to time in the *Introduction*.[302] Aside from differences in tone, Aron's discussions of historiography are less tersely written and incorporate examples absent in the *Introduction*, e.g. Thucydides.[303] We should also like to point out that Aron weighs in on the debate concerning the scientific seriousness of *histoire événementielle*: the debate seems rather silly to him since those who spurn this type of history in favour of a more "rigorous" socio-economic analysis tend to do so out of the mistaken belief that they are somehow being more

[297] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 97-106.

[298] Aron prefers the distinction between micro-level analysis and macro-level analysis to the distinction between history and sociology or socio-economic history and *histoire événementielle* because micro/macro-level analyses can be found in every realm of historical reality. See Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 6, 105.

[299] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 273.

[300] This is the entire purpose of "L'édification du monde historique" in Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 251-506. Cf. Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçons 4-7.

[301] Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 2, 14-16.

[302] See, for example, Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 2, 16ff; Leçon 8, 175;

[303] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 130-141; Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 3, 51-56; Aron, "Thucydide et le récit historique," 127-159.

scientific.[304] One of the many upshots of writing history as a good old fashioned account – apart from generally being more enjoyable to read – is that it does not neglect the role played by individuals and accidents in history. This is a crucial point in his balanced view of history, between necessary process and drama.[305]

Leçons sur l'histoire and *Histoire et philosophie* continue to maintain the cornerstone propositions of the *Introduction*, such as theory preceding history,[306] the plurality of interpretations because we reconstruct history and do not relive it,[307] the reciprocal relation between historical and sociological methods,[308] the essential difference between the natural sciences and the social sciences,[309] and the different ways of writing history.[310] One of the new additions, however, is Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy in the discussion of understanding and explanation. This was meant to be an instance of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy meeting German phenomenology, although in his *Mémoires* Aron confesses to have lost interest in the Hempel-Dray debate.[311]

It seems doubtful that he would have resurrected his interest in this debate since he seems not to have reached conclusions any more insightful than those suggested by his application of phenomenology. Hempel's position is that history is made up of statements and events that logically follow one other, while Dray maintains that history must be explained rationally, which requires delving into actors' means and ends. Hempel errs in positing universal laws of necessity instead of accepting probability and the plurality of causes. In wishing to derive decisions from general laws Hempel misses what is most interesting and essential to day-to-day historical accounts, namely that decisions could have been different from what they were. If Aron had to choose between the two he would be closer to Dray because at least Dray acknowledges the need to examine the actor's intentions. However, Drays errs in trying to find necessity in rationality; the essence of explaining actors and their decisions is that they are not necessary but only intelligible. Furthermore, intelligibility does not necessarily equal rational: an actor's decision may or may not have been rational by our standards, by the standards of his time, or even by his own standards. But the foundation for these objections was already established in Aron's *Introduction* in the sections on understanding and causation.

Another concept Aron explores in the context of the gap between micro-level and macro-level analysis is methodological individualism.[312] He summarizes its tenets thus: "1) the reality that constitutes the object of the human and moral sciences is composed of opinions or individual attitudes; 2) social wholes are not realities but constructions; 3) the final explanations are always explanations by way of the behaviour of individuals."[313] What is of greatest interest to us here is his thoughts regarding the second proposition. As one might expect, Aron dispenses with the extremes – methodological individualism on the one hand, and sociologism on the other:

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[304] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 329-333.
[305] Cf., Aron, "L'aube de l'histoire universelle," 229-255.
[306] Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 6, 117-118; cf. Aron, *Introduction*, 111.
[307] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 430-432; cf. Aron, *Introduction*, 109-116.
[308] Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 4, 61-62; Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 428; cf., Aron, *Introduction*, 285-293.
[309] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 320-321; Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 8, 162-164; cf., Aron, *Introduction*, 39-46.
[310] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 134-145; cf. Aron, *Introduction*, 394-396.
[311] Aron, *Mémoires*, 978. Aron's discussion of historical explanation and understanding in terms of this debate can be found in Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 154-194.
[312] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 274-311.
[313] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 294.

> I am not one of those people who would like social engineers to manufacture our happiness in spite of us, but, seeing as how I am always given to the middle way, I am also not inclined to sanctify the decisions of individual economic subjects as if these individual decisions were "the law and the prophets", as if they were not also at least partially determined by social phenomena that, in their turn, are also partially manipulated.[314]

One can argue in favour of Comte's sociologism just as easily and absurdly as one can argue in favour of Hayek's methodological individualism. It may be that methodological individualists maintain their views out of fear that there are forces in reality that can influence us.[315]

Aron's starting point, just as in the *Introduction*, remains phenomenological – he continues to avoid the antinomies of individual-society and collective representations-authentic thought – but he is also willing to concede that certain social organizations develop an intelligible logic of their own without creating *necessary* causal relations, such as the university, which is real by virtue of the unchanging functions that its personnel fulfill, or the nation, which is real because it exists in the consciousness of men and it influences their actions.

These are Dilthey's external organization of society. But Aron is more specific in his classification. He identifies three types of objective spirit that are developed with methodological individualism as their starting point: language (which is a precondition for human communities and communication), collectives/classes (which are ways for us to differentiate ourselves from each other – they are both subjective, as in feelings of identity, and objective, as in the specific professions we have in society), and organizations (such as the postal system, railroad system, university system – any construct with rules that allow individuals to change their roles within the system without the system itself changing).[316] These types of objectification can be further divided into ideal systems (language, works of art, science) and action systems (those resulting from the spontaneous actions of individuals, and those that result from voluntary organization or orders). Perhaps the most complex level of social organization is that of international relations because it presents the most original characteristic of social relations: the legal and legitimate use of force against one another.[317] International relations appears in both *Leçons sur l'histoire* and *Histoire et philosophie*.[318]

There is a wealth of insights into the functioning of society and the motives of men that Sartre overlooks.

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[314] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 290. Alain Boyer lists four potential reasons for Aron's resistance to embracing entirely the methodological individualism of a Hayek, for instance: its dogmatism; Aron's scepticism towards purely methodological debates; his desire not to reduce sociology to psychology or economics; and his attraction to Marxism, where he could at least partially concede that actors are partially determined by the social structures of which they are a part. See Boyer, "Le fait des hommes," 110-111.

[315] Aron is sceptical that methodological individualism is a solid enough defence against totalitarianism: "The defenders of methodological individualism are probably wrong to believe that methodological collectivism more or less necessarily leads to the philosophies of history that they detest – those of Hegel, Marx, or Toynbee. But are they right to believe that methodological individualism prevents one from succumbing to the temptations of such philosophies? Sartre's ontological individualism adds the implications of a philosophy of empty freedom, a freedom without bounds or criteria, to the possible implications of an historicist philosophy inspired by totalitarian claims." Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 212.

[316] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 454-459.

[317] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 340.

[318] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 334-440; Aron, *Histoire et philosophie*, Leçon 13, 239-255; Leçon 14, 257-260.

> The sociologist is intensely aware of the weight of institutions that mould individuals, who nevertheless insure that institutions continue to function. By the ontological reduction of all sociality to *praxis*, Sartre supplies an ideology, if not a philosophy, to establish the basis of a Promethean sociology: man makes himself at each instant by making the society that makes him.[319]

Those who operate in these institutions are not necessarily guilty or responsible[320] for the outcomes that result, for one's rational intentions on the micro-level can always produce unintended and irrational consequences on the macro-level.[321]

Freedom between Historical Relativity and Universal Truth

Men are never entirely free in history – Sartre's mistake is to try to achieve this impossible freedom by violently overthrowing the practico-inert, such as the three types of *esprit objectif*, which last through time and which Aron concerned himself with in *Leçons sur l'histoire* "For Sartre freedom can *recognize* neither another than itself nor itself even as having a past. It finds itself simply condemned to liberty in an ever recurrent *now* of Cartesian pure thought."[322] Aron is not unaware of the common intellectual roots he shares with Sartre,[323] and yet they arrive at diametrically opposed views. We earlier suggested that the intellectual reason for this was rooted in the divergence between their phenomenological approaches. Sartre, like Heidegger, is concerned with authenticity, while Aron, accepting the idea that the individual can be conceptualized only in social relations, concludes that it is impossible to reach the objective point outside of these interactions (the practico-inert) where one would be authentic. We argued on that basis that the road to self-knowledge was not for one to define oneself *against* society, trying to overthrow it violently, but rather to understand oneself *within* society, thereby requiring the concrete examination of society and history. This is the path to true liberation, incomplete as it may be. Our analysis has led us to conclude that Aron's phenomenological approach has not changed in essence from what it was in the *Introduction*. We have seen the end result of Sartre taking one path while Aron takes the other:

> History is in man as man is in history; he makes it by making himself; he is liberated from it by willing himself a future in the light of which he gives himself another past…Sartre used to maintain his conception of freedom and the choice of his being by each individual only by denying all psychological heredity…Freedom, in his view, existed, operated, and was realized in the forward flight of the project. Even though it is delayed and, therefore, denies the instantaneousness of Cartesian freedom, freedom creates neither the person nor permanence but remains for ever open towards new futures. To the extent that motives, the confrontation of pro and con, emerge from the project rather than determine it, it is spontaneity much more than choice. According to Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre refuses to admit 'that he has any identity whatsoever with his own past'. I have quite another experience that I too call freedom. Each of us is born with his chromosome heritage and into his family milieu that is already half

[319] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 136.
[320] The notion of responsibility is itself variable. Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 356-377.
[321] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 478-479. The example cited is a Keynesian one: an individual who saves more will have more to invest, but when this principle is writ large of society as a whole, then greater savings can lead to a decrease in investment.
[322] Blanchette, "Dialectic: Violence or Dialogue?," 72.
[323] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 160.

> determined or is being half determined before we reach a thetic self-consciousness. I put the effort of liberation not in the spontaneity of the for-itself but in the reflective decision, taken on the basis of a me-object who is and is not *I*, and of whom I am not the unconditional master…I have never sensed myself to be 'condemned to freedom' rather than condemned to an always incomplete liberation, as external constraints limit our power and internal ones our efforts of detachment…What I hate is not the choice, *hic et nunc*, at a particular conjunction of circumstances, in favour of violence and against negotiation, but a philosophy of violence in and for itself, not as means that is sometimes necessary for a rational politics, but a philosophy that lays claim to an ontological foundation and psychological function or effectiveness.[324]

Sartre opts for an endless absoluteness of decision. He tries to resolve the two antinomies that Dilthey uncovers: that between historical relativity at the macro-level, which appears to be a fact, and universal truth, which is demanded by reason at the micro-level; and that between the many individual and partial perspectives at the micro-level and the totality of the evolution at the macro-level.[325] Intellectually, Aron appears to accept these antinomies – insofar as one of his great intellectual projects can be considered the study of man in history – even if sentimentally he sometimes evokes a transcendentalism reminiscent of Kant.[326] It is perhaps precisely these antinomies that allow for continued dialogue and communication across cultures and through the ages.[327] However, it is noteworthy that Aron does not *need* to appeal to transcendentalism in order to reconcile historical relativity and the universal truth demanded by philosophy; that man seeks out universal truth is a fact *observable in history*. If we restrict the discussion to political philosophy, there are some other universal themes that can be teased out of historical analysis. Aron borrows a couple of ideas from Eric Weil, who suggests that every political thinker was obsessed by what he viewed as a fundamental evil in his time, and that each one also sought to

[324] Aron, *History and Dialectic*, 185-186, 192. Cf., Aron, *Mémoires*, 762-763; Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 8, 24-25.

[325] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 286, 290.

[326] E.g. Aron, *Mémoires*, 986.

[327] Cf. Aron, "La philosophie de l'histoire [1946]," 40: "Let us stop interpreting the knowledge of the past according to the schema of a transcendental ego, inquiring in a static manner; let us place the historian back into historical reality and let us refer to the structure of this reality…Lived human existence is as rich in the same meanings, the same plentiful ambiguities as historical knowledge. This knowledge does not manage to give a unique and universally obligatory version of societies, epochs, and cultures that are no more; this unique meaning has never existed on the earth or in the sky. The incessant discovery or rediscovery of the past expresses a dialogue that will last as long as humanity itself and that defines the essence of history: collectives, like individuals, recognize each other and are mutually enriched by their contact with each other." Cf. also *Aron-Foucault Dialogue*, 16-17, 19: "I think…that all human existence is socialized. In a certain sense perhaps the grandeur and tragedy of human destiny is that we cannot conceive of a humanity independent of a certain society. Perhaps one of the reasons why wars are so difficult to eliminate is that man cannot not give an absolute value to what he is. What he is most profoundly is made by the society to which he belongs…This also means that no sociology is ever final…When I try to defend both an empirical sociology and a philosophical sociology I say that it is given that our consciousness is inevitably socialized, but when we become aware of this socialization we are obliged to question ourselves about something that would overcome each particular socialization…I would be tempted to suggest to you that the episteme of every epoch, or the way of thinking of every epoch, comports all the same as a seed the ways of thinking of the other epochs. This is to say that ways of thinking are less radically different than you would have me believe."

preserve the state.[328] Their various attempts to deal with the different fundamental evils they observed also seem to disclose "a necessary element of the total system of politics, Plato the rule of philosophers, Machiavelli the necessity of action, even of violence to found and maintain the state, Hobbes the inevitable absolutism of sovereignty, Rousseau the need for consent as the root of legitimacy, Marx the elimination of the servitude of man by man in society itself."[329] Aron believed that the fundamental evil of his time was "the refusal of particular theories to recognize their particularity, the universalist pretention of ideologies, derived from Marxism."[330] Even if we must forego the possibility of achieving eternal truths, this does not mean that we are unable to define themes of eternal meaning.[331]

Aron cultivates and promotes two intellectual virtues lacking in Sartre: respect for facts and respect for others.[332] His constant reflections indicate that his riposte to Dilthey's challenge remains much the same as it was in the 1930s: liberation and knowledge through reflection. Existential anguish results only when one insists on finding a perfect, unchanging answer. We have thus far studied the formal outline of Aron's view of man and history. We have indicated the problems with Aron's early attempt to overcome relativism through the absoluteness of decision. He would also later question the helpfulness of a philosophy that does not aim at an ideal of virtue or wisdom, but only at liberty and choice.[333] How can existentialist philosophy determine which regime is preferable when it cares not for the content of a choice, but only the resolve with which the choice is made? But as one of the leading American scholars on Raymond Aron has observed, the absoluteness of decision is only one strategy for overcoming relativism.[334] The other, more promising, approach is to study empirically the regimes or societies of our time, which, as we have noted, shape us and from which we cannot escape.

We move next to fill in this outline of knowledge of man and history with some content where Aron will debate with Marx – who also had his own view of man and history – to explore what is specific about modern society; for there is much more to such social wholes than what is understood by the actors within them, which is why we study them to appreciate their richness and complexity.[335] Before changing the world one must interpret it.

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We have seen that the first half of Aron's secondary dissertation is more or less devoted to Dilthey alone because Dilthey most fully explored the conundrum of the relation between man and history without ever managing to solve the fundamental problems he had raised for himself.

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[328] Aron, "De la vérité historique," 81. Although, contrary to Weil and Aron, we would argue that not every political thinker presupposed the preservation of the state (e.g. Marx, anarchists, etc.).

[329] Aron, "De la vérité historique," 88.

[330] Aron, "De la vérité historique," 91.

[331] Aron, "De la vérité historique," 92.

[332] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 769. These are the two virtues that Aron wishes to transmit to his students.

[333] Aron, *D'une sainte famille à l'autre*, 109-110.

[334] Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 1-2. Mahoney's work, according to Oppermann, is to date the unsurpassed standard when it comes to Raymond Aron's thought (Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 14). He surveys Aron's thought from his early years, through to his understanding of liberty and international relations, with an exegesis of Aron's "L'aube de l'histoire universelle", tying together the main themes of his thought, and a nuanced concluding chapter on the similarities and differences between Aron and Aristotle. He has spoken of Aron's probabilism and his prudence as the midpoint between doctrinairism and historical relativism (Mahoney, "Raymond Aron and the Morality of Prudence," 243-252).

[335] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 475-476.

Aron renewed his interest in this project in the 1970s with the publication of a critique of Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* called *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*, intended to be the first part of a trilogy that would conclude with a discussion of action in history. Aron felt that Sartre's work could be interpreted as an attempt to complete Dilthey's project. We found that Sartre's perennial attempts to escape the practico-inert end up justifying a philosophy of violence. By contrast, Aron spent time in the 1960s and 1970s trying to account for the gap between micro-level intentions and actions and macro-level outcomes. Within this gap we sometimes encounter tragedy. Aron seeks to give more substance to the objective spirit by breaking it down into three categories: language (a prerequisite for communication), collectives/classes (groups with which we identify, whose foundation is both partially subjective and partially objective), and organizations (which continue to exist even if their members switch roles or retire from the organization). Aron refuses to countenance either a pure methodological individualism or collectivism; individuals exist in a dialectical relationship with society, which they partially manipulate, and by which they are partially determined. Aron traces the limits of knowledge, reasonable action, and freedom within the confines presupposed by Dilthey's philosophy.

Part 2 – Sociology – Industrial Society

2a – Context: The Sorbonne, Modern Society, and Sociology

We shall proceed by examining the following: *Sociology in France after the Second World War. The study of modern and industrial society in postwar Europe. Two ideal types for studying industrial society: Marx and Tocqueville. Aron's Montesquieuan approach to sociology. The primacy of the political.*

Sociology in France after the Second World War

The French world of sociology into which Aron set foot in 1955 was little different from the one he remembered on the eve of the war.[336] Sociological work had been conducted largely outside of the context of the university, for instance at the Centre d'études sociologiques, a

[336] Aron, *Mémoires*, 448-451; Cuin and Gresle, *Histoire de la sociologie 2*, 56-61. Aron was elected to the Georges Davy Chair of Sociology in 1955. The election process itself consisted of every department in the Faculty of Letters selecting a potential candidate who would then move on to the next round to compete against the other chosen candidates. The faculty professors would then elect one of the candidates with an absolute majority vote – failing that, a relative majority in the following round. Politics was, naturally, a factor: those on the Left, and the Communists especially, could not see past the author of *L'opium des intellectuels*. It took the acumen of the historian Henri-Irénée Marrou to remind the others that the Aron of *L'opium des intellectuels* was also the Aron of *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*. Of course, what the two works share in common is their destruction of "Marxism's pretention to endow the historical actor with knowledge of his own action, were the latter inspired by the laws of historical materialism." (Furet, "La rencontre d'une idée et d'une vie," 54.) We could thus underwrite Tony Judt's statement that *L'opium* "is in certain respects a companion volume and successor to his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*." (Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 143.) In any case, it was not the polemicist, but the philosopher, who was elected to the Chair of Sociology at age fifty. (Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Sociologist*, 3-4.) As a professor, according to his students, Aron was equanimous and direct. He wrote as he spoke and, indeed, he spoke so eloquently and passionately that his words were ready to be written and published just as they were vocalized. (Manent, *Le regard politique*, 52; Besançon, "Raymond Aron à l'oral," 76.) "Aron the journalist has the incomparable art of using a few words – without invective or pathos or as a malevolent *ad hominem* attack – to show the chinks in the armour, whether it be the imprudence of a certain diplomatic approach, or the absurdity of a certain economic policy, or simply the crux of an argument. In the never-ending confusion of political debate in a democratic country that loves words, he has the ability to penetrate just like what Erasmus emblematically called 'the sparrow hawk of the night', who 'sees very clearly in the midst of shadows'." (Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur," 166.) Aron's criticisms, however, were not superfluous, and he maintained the same control and ability to grasp the core of an issue as a thesis advisor. (Freund, "Raymond Aron directeur de thèse," 55-58.) He cared more for truth and nourishing a young scholar's intellectual curiosity than for converting his students to his way of thinking. Taking the plurality of interpretations as his starting point, he sought to convince his interlocutor of the reasonableness of his argument, instead of imprisoning or seducing him through intellectual and rhetorical bravura. (Palle, "Il y a cinquante ans…," 16-17.) Disagreeing with him provoked more disapproval than wrath: "(I was a *Mendèsiste*, later a Gaullist, and my views of nuclear strategy and of American diplomacy are not at all those Aron held in his last years). He resented this, and yet remained loyal and warm, behind his familiar manner combining irony and indignation." (Hoffmann, "Raymond Aron (1905-1983).") All the same, when a young and gifted Pierre Manent wished to pursue an alternative academic path to that in which Aron excelled, the latter happily directed him to Leo Strauss, fully aware that such a move would loosen the intellectual bond already established between the two, and push Manent closer to Strauss. (Manent, *Le regard politique*, 55.)

division of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), founded in 1946 by Georges Gurvitch.

During Aron's tenure as a sociologist at the Sorbonne, sociology began to plant deeper institutional roots with the creation of three important journals – *Sociologie du travail*, *Revue française de sociologie*, and *Archives européennes de sociologie* (this last one set up by Aron and de Dampierre in 1960) – and sociology institutes such as the foundation for the Société Française de Sociologie,[337] le Laboratoire de Sociologie Industrielle, le Groupe de sociologie des organisations, and le Centre de Sociologie Européenne (this last one also set up by Aron in 1959). The relative adolescence of the institutes meant that the individuals running them were disproportionately influential in shaping the sort of work that would be done and their general direction. It was thanks to Aron that a *licence de sociologie* was created in 1958, a further step in formalizing the independence of sociology in French academia.

Together with Jean Stoetzel, Georges Gurvitch, and Georges Friedmann, Aron would form what has come to be called the "sociological square" (*le carré sociologique*), whose influence on the development of French sociology after the war should not be underestimated.[338] All four were philosophers by academic upbringing, three of whom (Gurvitch being the exception) had completed the typical French *cursus honorum* in philosophy, and three of whom (Friedmann being the exception) would teach concurrently at the Sorbonne (Gurvitch from 1948 until his death in 1965; Aron and Stoetzel from 1955 and 1956 respectively until 1968).

Sociological work and teaching up until Aron's entrance were of two different schools. One was concerned with research and classes on mainly Durkheimian themes such as work, professional relations, and the division of labour, city and urbanization, religious practice, suicide, and classes or class struggle. Georges Davy, Aron's predecessor, was himself a respected student of Durkheim. However, the Durkheimian era was steadily giving way to a second school, heavily influenced by American empirico-pragmatism and quantitative methods, which lay greater emphasis on fieldwork. CNRS spearheaded this new development, and *savants*, formerly concerned with large-scale synthesizing, were turning into specialist *chercheurs* who sought to study rigidly circumscribed areas of society with a view to quantifying the data before them.

Part of the reason for this shift may be due to a younger generation of researchers whose background was increasingly less likely to be in philosophy. Another factor was the need to rebuild the French sociological tradition after the war and – contrary to the anti-Americanism fashionable in French intellectual circles at the time – the United States and her academic practices were heralded as the vanguard of modernity and progress, of which France was in dire need. The result of this was a proliferation of research on more targeted areas such as the rural world, education, leisure activities, organizations, means of mass communication, mental illnesses, and the condition of women.[339]

Stoetzel was the preeminent representative of this new penchant for scientificity at the Sorbonne. Already there was a fault line between Stoetzel's "managerial" and a-philosophical approach on the one hand, and Aron and Gurvitch's more traditional approach on the other.[340]

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[337] Formerly L'Institut français de sociologie and today L'Association française de sociologie.

[338] Farrugia, *La reconstruction*, 132ff.

[339] Farrugia, *La reconstruction*, 150-155, 242; Cuin and Gresle, *Histoire de la sociologie 2*, 60.

[340] Farrugia, *La reconstruction*, 212-216, 244-264. Aron and Gurvitch were more similar in their outlook in regards to the new trend of empiricism in sociology than Aron would have us believe in his *Mémoires*. Their differences are more apparent when we take into consideration their dispositions and political views.

The extensive application of statistical and expert analysis was intended to impart the dignity of objectivity to the new approach; Aron and Gurvitch nevertheless feared that such techniques might in fact jeopardize the critical distance they were supposed to guarantee. Facts must be interpreted by the observer, and their interpretation will in turn depend on the philosophy the observer brings to bear on the data: theory precedes history.[341]

Three deficiencies of the American sociological tradition relative to the European ones were that it was insufficiently historical, unwilling to recognize social wholes, and little concerned with class rivalry.[342]

It was not so much the narrow focus solicited by the American tradition that Aron deemed problematic, even if it was indeed the case that nowadays "one spends more and more time and money to demonstrate increasingly rigorously propositions of ever less interest."[343] The problem was rather that it was not self-critical and pretended to overcome philosophy by claiming not to philosophize at all, which itself constitutes a philosophical position. "Every respectable sociologist who has not confined himself to questionnaires and percentages has within himself a certain idea of man and society, a certain conception of the relations between the person and the group, and the subsystems and the systems' system."[344] This new sociological trend seemed to deviate from what could be considered the unscientific and messianic pretensions of Marx's approach. It was not out of mere nostalgia that Aron continued to appeal to Marx (or Montesquieu, for that matter), but because Marx and the other thinkers of his generation shared in common with Aron a general humanist and philosophical education that the new generation of researchers at the Sorbonne no longer believed. Marx spoke to Aron because he still strove to understand the whole of society and history and their interconnections, and the overall significance of this for man. Understanding an aspect of society requires reference to the whole (and ultimately to philosophy) of which it is a part:

> These phenomena – the family, social stratification, the relations between the sectors of society – in a sense concern the whole of society. One cannot study social stratification, i.e. the division of individuals into subgroups in a social entity or a hierarchy, without considering the whole that is simultaneously economic, political, and religious. These phenomena, which are essentially the concern of sociology, appear, after one takes a deeper look, characterized by their global character. They are total social phenomena, as it were.[345]

Gurvitch, for his part, saw the problem with the sociological method in practice as a "crisis of explanation", a criticism that could mean several different errors: a too ambitious and messianic explanation (such as Marxism); an erroneous explanation due to inadequate abstract models; a lack of explanation entirely due to the reduction to a simple constant or because the empirical research offered up a list of data without explaining anything (i.e. sociology having become sociography).

Aron's criticisms of the empirico-pragmatic tradition run on similar lines even if they do not force him to embrace the Durkheimian school. Of this other, older tradition he criticized one of its central contradictions: Durkheim wished to be positivist, treating social phenomena as objective facts (just as natural scientists do), but he also saw society as both the ideal and real

[341] Aron, *Introduction*, 111.
[342] Aron, "La société américaine et sa sociologie [1959]," 131-132.
[343] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 759.
[344] Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, xlv.
[345] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 760.

object of moral and religious faith.[346] Aron's approach to sociology was more Weberian inasmuch as he recognized that facts are constructed, he was not a methodological holist (but also not a strict methodological individualist), and he did not imbue society with a religious mission. Aron's sociology relies heavily as well on his interest in the economy and politics, hence his deference to Marx and Weber and not to Durkheim.[347]

Aron's sociological project began as courses on industrial society, *Le Développement de la société industrielle* (1955-1956), *La Stratification sociale* (1956-1957), and *Sociologie des sociétés industrielles : esquisse d'une théorie des régimes* (1957-1958), which, together, constitute a trilogy studying the economic, social, and political aspects of industrial society in the West and in the Soviet Union.[348] They were later published in 1962, 1964, and 1965, respectively, as *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle*, *La Lutte de classes*, and *Démocratie et totalitarisme*. They had their provenance in Aron's earlier reflections on Marx, Pareto, and class struggle.[349] His sociological work continued with *Trois Essais sur l'âge industriel* and the two-volume *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, published in 1966 and 1967 respectively. The latter was composed of chapters on Montesquieu (who would replace Comte as having been the first major sociological thinker), Comte, Marx, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Pareto, and Weber. In France it encouraged the recognition of Tocqueville as a sociological thinker and increased awareness of Pareto and Weber, while dethroning Comte and Durkheim from their formerly hallowed position as masters of sociology.[350]

The Study of Modern and Industrial Society in Postwar Europe

Aron was not the only scholar interested in the phenomenon of modern society. Postwar Europe was awash with literature trying to get at the spirit of the time and grasp the nature of modern society. This was not a new movement; the intellectual origins of this study can be traced back to the rupture between man and society, observed by Rousseau, for whom "society is evil and the evil is social."[351] This issue was later examined from various angles by the thinkers included in Aron's *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*. Invariably they felt they had come across the key to unlocking the secret of modern society. Comte was enthusiastic about the positivist progression of industrial society; Tocqueville soberly analyzed the novel phenomenon from the perspective of its democratizing tendencies; Marx railed against capitalist exploitation and coupled short term pessimism with a long term vision of ultimate happiness.[352] Durkheim,

[346] Aron, *Les étapes*, 389.

[347] Paugam and Schultheis, preface to *La sociologie allemande contemporaine*, xiii. We might also point out that Aron was at odds with Gurvitch over the creation of a mandatory certificate for political economy as part of the *licence de sociologie*. Gurvitch and others were opposed to it based on Durkheim's critique of economy. See Aron, *Mémoires*, 450.

[348] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Sociologist*, 7. It was not unusual for Aron's published works to enjoy their genesis as courses.

[349] Aron, *Mémoires*, 451: "Through these courses I wanted to prepare the *magnum opus*, Marx-Pareto, on which I had been reflecting and writing for years. I wanted to demonstrate in actuality the possibility of a synthesis of growth theory (Colin Clark, Jean Fourastié), the theory of regimes (capitalism-socialism), the theory of social classes, and finally the theory of elites on the economic, social, and political levels."

[350] Boudon, "Raymond Aron et la pensée sociologique," 222.

[351] Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, 195.

[352] Aron, *Les étapes*, 295-296.

Pareto, and Weber conducted their analyses in light of the relation between science and religion, with more than half an eye to the consequences that this had for man and his values.[353]

When we arrive at the years when Aron was teaching at the Sorbonne, we witness various attempts in the Western world to conceptualize modern society, focusing on a wide array of facets, such as the creation of a technostructure due to the rise of the modern corporation,[354] the corroding effects of industrial society on the individual's capacity for critical thought,[355] and the changed nature of human relations.[356] "Grand theory" had returned:

> During the past generation, Utopian social philosophies have once again been practised as well as preached; Marxism has revived and flourished in an almost bewildering variety of forms; psychoanalysis has gained a new theoretical orientation with the work of Lacan and his followers; Habermas and other members of the Frankfurt School have continued to reflect on the parallels between the theories of Marx and Freud; the Women's Movement has added a whole range of previously neglected insights and arguments; and amidst all this turmoil the empiricist and positivist citadels of English-speaking social philosophy have been threatened and undermined by successive waves of hermeneuticists, structuralists, post-empiricists, deconstructionists and other invading hordes.[357]

It was in this atmosphere – in fact, even before the aforementioned insights had been published – that Aron took it upon himself to understand industrial society and thus embarked on a series of lectures that would later be published as books whose incompleteness he never failed to lament.[358] Aron's unavoidably severe self-criticism notwithstanding, the three books that emerged from these lectures remain an excellent sociological survey of industrial society in its economic, social, and political dimensions. In Aron's words:

> The three courses…encompassed the themes in which I had been interested for some ten years: comparison of the economies and societies on both sides of Europe; the diversity of regimes and the types of growth; the diverse periods of growth; the social structure of the regimes and the moments of growth; the relative autonomy of the political regime; the influence of the political regime on the way of life and the relations between the classes, etc.[359]

There was nothing unique about Aron's interest in these themes. His reflections on economic development were partially influenced by Colin Clark's *The Conditions of Economic Progress*, W. W. Rostow's *The Process of Economic Growth*, and the growth theory put forward by Jean Fourastié.[360] Class conflict was being studied simultaneously by Ralf Dahrendorf in

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[353] Aron, *Les étapes*, 597.

[354] Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*.

[355] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. Aron's estimation of Marcuse's "great refusal" was that it was composed of a series of radical and disputable critiques: there was a critique of the socio-economic organization, a critique of mass society, a critique of resource waste, a critique of violence, and a critique of the rivalry between antagonistic regimes. Because the great refusal deplored the absence of a radical negation but also held peaceful human relations as the supreme ideal, it was wholly unable to take account of historical reality. It neither interpreted the world nor changed it but only denounced it. Aron, *Trois essais*, 403-409.

[356] Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, *The Lonely Crowd*.

[357] Skinner, introduction to *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, 5-6.

[358] See Aron, *Mémoires*, 461 and the preface to *Dix-huit leçons,* 753-754.

[359] Aron, *Mémoires*, 512-513.

[360] Clark, *The Conditions of Economic Progress*; Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth*.

Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society.[361] Technology's increasing capacity to connect humans all around the world, such that they were beginning to live a universal history, was observed by many,[362] and this led some to conclude that ideology had therefore come to an end.[363] The pre-industrial world had been lost[364] and it must have seemed to some that these changes were the defining feature of the age, with economic development strongly tied to a democratic system of government.[365]

Aron's attempts to understand industrial society are in some ways both less and more grandiose than those of his contemporaries. On the one hand, his analysis does not embrace such topics as the profound effects of industrial society on human consciousness or human relations, but on the other hand, his study does not restrict itself to examining economic or social factors alone; instead, he wishes to clarify the complex interconnections between the economic, social, and political realms in industrial societies. Of equal importance is the fact that he treats phenomena such as democracy and development as variable across space and time. Therefore, any study that would make use of such concepts would also have to take into account their historical contingency.[366]

Although the trilogy deals ostensibly with "industrial society", Aron indicates in the conclusion of the first lecture that he could just as easily have termed the subject of his study "technological or scientific or rationalized society".[367] After all, the application of science to increasing production was the essence of development.[368] The crucial point was that the forces at work could not be reduced to the simple binary capitalism-socialism, and this observation was reinforced by his trip to Asia, from where he saw that capitalism and socialism, Western society and Soviet society, were two variations of industrial society.[369]

Aron follows in the footsteps of thinkers such as Marx, Tocqueville, Montesquieu, Pareto, and Weber in attempting to distil the essential characteristics of our time and our society. His synthesis and development of these various strands of thought make his account of our time in many ways more complete than any of the interpretations taken on their own. At the same time Aron's keen sense of history constantly forestalled him from boldly declaring that our time was definitively different from all previous eras (had he done so he would not have been willing to carry on conversations with these great thinkers of the past); there are political questions that all human collectives have always had to face, regardless of technological advancement, and it is the answers to these political questions that constitute the decisive gap between Western society and Soviet society. It remains for us to consider Aron's own sociological approach.

Two Ideal Types for Studying Industrial Society: Marx and Tocqueville

Had it not been for the war and Aron's desire to approach concrete history in the making, he would have mitigated the relativistic consequences of his *Introduction* with a sequel serving

[361] Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict*. Aron would later write the preface to the French translation of this work: *Classes et conflits de classe dans la société industrielle*, xiii-xxv.
[362] See, for example, McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*; McLuhan, *Understanding Media*; Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*.
[363] Bell, *The End of Ideology*.
[364] Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*.
[365] Lipset, *Political Man*.
[366] Colen and Nelson, "Theory, History, Philosophy," 102.
[367] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 982.
[368] Aron, *Trois essais*, 325.
[369] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 781.

as an introduction to the social sciences.[370] His first four lectures in *Dix-huit leçons* serve as good a substitute as any. Just as Aron praised Max Weber in *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* for having synthesized systematic and historical sociology, so too Aron's method has been lauded for having brought together analytical empiricism and theory.[371]

If Aron's project is intended to be a work of sociology then the first question must be: what exactly does sociology mean to him? The difficulty of finding a workable definition seems to be the one point on which all sociologists can agree, so Aron attempts to define it by distinguishing it from philosophy and political economy.[372] Sociology is between these two disciplines insofar as it does not assume a rational actor (as political economy does) although it remains a particular science (unlike philosophy).

Sociology will come to be seen as more or less the decisive social science depending on whether one's definition of the social is meant to embody all other social sciences (Durkheim) or if it will restrict itself to studying the historical development of the diverse economic, political, and legal structures built upon intersubjective relations (Weber). The danger of the former approach is "sociologism", whereby the researcher presumes that all phenomena can be explained as a result of society. What he gains in tautological irrefutability he loses in scientific instructiveness: a theory explaining everything explains nothing at all. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that we are partially conditioned by the society in which we live. As Aron already observed in the *Introduction* we see that the key to overcoming this subjectivity is in acknowledging it, and thus resisting the temptation to assume that one's interpretation is the most honest, authentic, and the sole universally valid interpretation.[373]

Aron's interpretation of his time leads him to zero in on industrial society as the decisive factor of our age. He summons Auguste Comte and the Saint-Simonians, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Karl Marx – all of whom were profoundly influenced by the social changes wrought by the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution – to guide him in beginning to understand industrial society in the 20th century.[374]

To recall the wisdom of a century past was hardly an arbitrary move; on the contrary, the stock of the political and social ideologies in vogue in Aron's time was developed in the 19th century. For Comte the key question was how it would be possible in the age of science to reconstitute the unity of religious faith. For Tocqueville it was obvious that Western and Christian societies had an egalitarian tendency, therefore the critical issue was what their political and social nature would be. Marx saw class struggle at the heart of industrial society and so for him it was a matter of clarifying the conditions under which social and economic unity could be restored. What the three of them shared in common was the sense that the essential forces they had identified were inevitable: for Tocqueville, the democratic movement; for Comte, the decline of traditional religious belief; for Marx, the intensification of the class struggle. Aron draws on the insights of Tocqueville and Marx to help frame his thoughts over the course of the trilogy.

Tocqueville had observed that the suppression of social inequalities would lead to an increase in the powers of the state because the state would be called upon by the underprivileged to attenuate the consequences of their lower status. What political regime could be expected from

[370] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 27.
[371] Cuin and Gresle, *Histoire de la sociologie 2*, 64-65.
[372] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 757-759.
[373] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 764-769.
[374] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 770-781.

this democratization? For Tocqueville it was an open question as there was nothing inherent to the nature of democratization that would guarantee a liberal society; it could just as easily bring about tyranny. Society would channel its aggressive energies in more commercial directions, with the desire for riches replacing the desire for glory or ambition (like Saint-Simon, Tocqueville saw the primacy of economic values as a result of democratization). Wealth would be redistributed and, under the auspices of democratization and industrialization in tandem, the middle class would grow and form a wellspring of mediocrity. A society obsessed with aggrandizing its material wealth would be less prepared for war but all the more intractable in its belligerence once the war had begun. Tocqueville feared the conformism and tyranny of the majority that could result from these developments, even though he could not dispute the inevitability of these changes.

Marx was one of Aron's first and certainly his most important intellectual sparring partner.[375] In many respects he was probably the most influential thinker of both the 19th and 20th centuries. Where Tocqueville had briefly acknowledged the conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat created by industrial society, Marx made this conflict the cornerstone of his thinking. It was crucial that one examine the fundamental contradiction at work between the forces and relations of production. Everything else – politics, religion, ideas – was only so much superstructural triviality determined by and resting upon a socio-economic bedrock that would have to implode. Where Tocqueville saw 1789 as accidental and whose post-revolutionary order adapted many of the institutions erected in the *ancien régime*, the German economist-cum-prophet saw it as an historical event of the greatest significance, for it had brought the third estate into power. It was only logical to expect that the future would bring about an even greater upheaval whose denouement would be the liberty and unity of the fourth estate, or mankind.

Aron's Montesquieuan Approach to Sociology

Having been assisted by Marx and Tocqueville in identifying industrial society as the object of his sociological research, Aron zooms out to focus on the larger concentric circle in which this study is hedged.[376] Aron is closer to Montesquieu in his own sociological approach, which is to say that, unlike in the case of Marx, a rigorous sociology is possible without pretending to grasp the whole of society.

Brunschvicg declared Montesquieu to be "the sociologist *par excellence*".[377] Not unlike Aron's, Montesquieu's thought is difficult to grasp. A recent description of Aron's oeuvre might just as easily be applied to that of Montesquieu: "The work of Raymond Aron is like politics itself: seemingly simple to access, and yet difficult to understand at its source and in its ultimate ends."[378] The comparison between the two thinkers was also not lost on Aron's contemporaries: André Maurois stated of Aron that "he would be our Montesquieu if he consented to lifting himself from reality."[379] Aron situates himself in the French liberal tradition founded by Montesquieu[380] and he sets the tone for his magisterial work on international relations with a

[375] And while Aron concedes that Western Europe in the 1960s most closely resembles Tocqueville's vision, in the 1930s Marx's vision appeared a more appropriate representation. See Aron, *Les étapes*, 229.
[376] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 782-795.
[377] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 788.
[378] Manent, introduction to *Liberté et égalité*, 5.
[379] Aron, *Mémoires*, 960. Aron immediately follows up this citation with a typically elliptical interjection that reveals as much as it conceals: "This statement is half true: I have never lifted myself enough from reality."
[380] Aron, *Les étapes*, 21.

phrase from Montesquieu: "International law is based by nature upon this principle: that the various nations ought to do, in peace, the most good to each other, and, in war, the least harm possible, without detriment to their genuine interests."[381]

In stark contrast to Tocqueville, who "is one of those great thinkers who are defined by a single question", Montesquieu "wrote about everything, and he is ultimately marvellous in the details, but obscure in the whole."[382] Montesquieu represents Aron's preferred sociological approach: his analysis of the different types of governments and their animating principles is the intermediary between the pure analysis of indefinitely multiplied causal relations and the synthetic character of explaining societies on the basis of a single factor. His sociology differs from Marx's in that the various components of social reality – climate, number of inhabitants, religion, mores, manners, constitution – form a complex network of causation. Montesquieu's three different types of government are ideal types. They are *intelligible wholes* or *significant relations within a whole*, whose absence would make understanding a society impossible. Ideal types, as Weber had observed, are something of a utopia, with certain characteristics having been amplified, and against which a specific socio-historical example can be measured.[383] As such, they are not ends in and of themselves, but solely heuristic means, and to consider them as valid norms or *Weltanschauungen* is both risible and dangerous for our treatment of reality.[384] Clausewitz – the subject of Aron's grand two-volume work – had once said in this regard:

> Theory exists so that one need not start afresh each time sorting out the material and plowing through it, but will find it ready to hand and in good order. It is meant to educate the mind of the future commander, or, more accurately, to guide him in his self-education, not to accompany him to the battlefield; just as a wise teacher guides and stimulates a young man's intellectual development, but is careful not to lead him by the hand for the rest of his life.[385]

The Primacy of the Political

There is a connection worth observing between a sociology advocating the plurality of interpretations and thus the limited extent to which our equally limited knowledge can be implemented on the one hand, and on the other, those patterns of thinking that start from the individual (methodological individualism) or assume that the acquired knowledge must

[381] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, I, 3, cited in Aron, *Peace and War*. He would later state (reflecting on the Algerian war) that all conquerors should bear in mind Montesquieu's maxim: "It is up to the conqueror to repair a portion of the evils that he has wrought. I define thus the right of conquest: a necessary, legitimate, and infelicitous right that always must pay an immense debt to acquit itself as regards human nature." Aron, *Mémoires*, 505.

[382] Aron, *Portrait-Souvenir*, video documentary.

[383] "Substantively, this construct in itself is like a *utopia* which has been arrived at by the analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality. Its relationship to the empirical data consists solely in the fact that where market-conditioned relationships of the type referred to by the abstract construct are discovered or suspected to exist in reality to some extent, we can make the *characteristic* features of this relationship pragmatically *clear* and *understandable* by reference to an *ideal-type*." Weber, "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy," eds. and trans. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, 90.

[384] Weber, *Die „Objektivität"*, 212.

[385] Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 141. Cf. Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 293: "The theory of a practice must…serve this practice. It cannot provide a recipe, rather it must shape the mind." Aron proceeds thereafter to discuss necessary laws vs laws of probability, theory and history, and the solidification of theory as doctrine. It is also worth pointing out that he concludes his first volume on the German strategist by comparing him to Montesquieu.

somehow be translated into action. It is this link that makes the methods of Weber, Montesquieu, and Clausewitz so congenial to Aron's own approach, which, like that of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, continues the tradition of classical political philosophy. The counterexample to this is Durkheim who castigates Montesquieu for taking into account the role of individual agency. And this is why Montesquieu opts for classifying his regimes on the basis of politics and not economics. "It is not incidental that neither Auguste Comte nor Emile Durkheim wrote anything important about politics, particularly on the regime that they would have considered appropriate to the spirit or demands of modern society. Because Tocqueville aimed at the political in the last analysis he still has something to tell us."[386] This "primacy of politics", a popular notion in the recent literature on Raymond Aron,[387] and one of the cornerstones of his entire philosophy of history, is for both Aron and Montesquieu more anthropological than causal: man is essentially a political animal and how men govern themselves is the essential phenomenon.[388]

Politics is the theory or art of having people live in a community and ensuring the existence and longevity of these organized groups; yet, politics also has as its end that everyone participate in the community.[389] The fundamental antinomy of the political order (to which all regimes are imperfect solutions) is the desire to reconcile the multiplicity of tasks and the inequality of power and prestige with the participation of everyone in the community. Human societies have hitherto sought to resolve this contradiction in one of two ways: either they sanctify social inequality and designate society's members to various social categories in the hierarchy that they must accept (e.g. caste system), or they assert the political equality of people in the form of democracy and then try to work towards social and economic equality. What is important is to recognize inequality as the inevitable result of the structure of our society instead of denouncing it and the "system" as such from atop the soapbox. This temptation is made all the greater by the democratizing tendency identified by Tocqueville: in our egalitarian age all actions are carried out in the name of freedom, and those that do not benefit us as we feel we deserve become so many signs of the essential hypocrisy of the political system itself. What

[386] Aron, *Mémoires*, 460.

[387] See, e.g., Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility*, 146. Tony Judt wrote extensively about the French Left and Parisian intellectuals, of whom he held Aron in especially high regard. He considered him to be a "peripheral insider", at once a quintessentially French cosmopolitan thinker but also consistently at variance with his intellectual contemporaries. Judt interpreted Aron's notion of the primacy of the political as a rally to the French liberal school in order to avoid the deficiencies of the excessively systematic German tradition. Judt connected this to Aron's concern for the fragility of liberal democracy and his clear-headed realism, be it in his evaluation of the usefulness of nuclear weaponry in the French arsenal, the rearming of Germany and European unity, the independence of Algeria, France's place in the world, or even in his recognition of the role played by ideas. While Judt was correct to acknowledge the crucial part played by Sartre and his works in Aron's life, as well as Aron's estimation of his own favourite works, he stopped short of indicating the reason why Aron chooses the works he does: it is not just because he prefers to be considered a philosopher, but more importantly, because the problem with which he grapples most explicitly in these works is the one suggested to him by his early Germanic influences and which remains with him his entire life.
On the "primacy of the political", see also Baverez, "Life and Works," 8; Mouric, "'Citizen Clausewitz'," 77-90; Colen and Nelson, "Theory, History, Philosophy," 101-103; Simon-Nahum, "Raymond Aron and the Notion of History," 114-115; De Ligio, "The Question of Political Regime," 119-135; Nelson and Colen, "Voices of the Great Men," 191-195; Morgado, "Montesquieu and Aron," 245-252.

[388] Naturally, given Aron's commitment to probabilism, we most certainly should not understand the "primacy of politics" as an equally one-sided determinism replacing Marx's economic determinism. Cf. Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1235-1238.

[389] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 803-808.

better alternative than to lay the axe to the root of all government and start over again by planting the seeds of a new order? But hypocrisy is not the preserve of a particular political arrangement, and if hypocrisy appears so much more blatant to us, it owes as much to our inflated expectations as to what the government can and should do for us. The proper role of government in society is still a question of great pertinence. One of the contradictions of democracies is that they want wise rulers but they also want to conform to the desires of the governed. One school of thought holds up the consent of the governed – the general will – as the supreme principle, even if it is unreasonable; another school believes that the true end of politics is the good and not the subordination of governors to the demands of the governed – the representative would betray his people if he gave them his industry but not his judgment – and thus rulers should govern in order that the citizens be both good and virtuous. These inherent contradictions in a domestic order are upset further when taking into account the necessity of armed forces to ensure the survival of the collective. Power is an ever-lingering factor and becomes all the more vital when examining international relations – it might be the case that power and justice are contradictory claims. These problems do not permit of an easy solution, but knowing that they are ever-present, if even in the background, is a part of Aron's sociological method.

It is our contention that this sociological method and the content of Aron's reflections on industrial society are presented in response to Marx. In the next section we shall see that Aron's interest in Marx was born very early on when he was in Germany, and that his *Introduction* already contains a formal critique of Marx's sociological method. In this sense, we might understand the "second sociological period of his career",[390] initiated by his study of industrial society, as following naturally from his first infatuation with German sociology in the 1930s. For all his professed similarities to the French liberal tradition represented by Montesquieu and Tocqueville, it is still primarily to the influence of these early German thinkers, such as Marx and Weber, that he gives credit for the formation of his thought.[391] It is Marx who proposed both the content of industrial society as well as a way of studying society and history. In the previous section we explained Aron's use of Dilthey and the phenomenological method to reject a revolutionary politics as propounded by Sartre. This rejection applies also to Marx's call for revolution. With that out of the way, there remains Marx's analysis of society and history. Aron began his early work – especially his *Introduction* – with the hope of refuting Marx's *approach* to history. We shall explore this refutation in the following section, after which we shall proceed to Aron's critique of the *content* of Marx's ideas, as presented in the trilogy on industrial society.

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Aron was part of a small group of French sociologists at the Sorbonne who began taking the discipline in new directions after the end of the Second World War. The time was rife with theories focusing on various aspects of modern society. Aron would join this debate with his own unique approach to sociology, which is situated between philosophy and political economy. In some ways his attempt is quite encompassing in its embrace of the economic, social, and political realms of industrial society. The discussion of his approach in *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* is about as close as we come to Aron's unfulfilled desire to write a sequel to his *Introduction*, introducing the social sciences and mitigating the relativistic conclusions that

[390] Paugam, introduction to *Les sociétés modernes*, 17.

[391] Aron, *Les étapes*, 21; cf. Aron, "On Tocqueville," 176. That Aron's liberalism derives squarely from the continental tradition of philosophy and that its strength is precisely in its lack of specific conclusions is the argument upheld in Strong, "History and Choices," 179-192.

he had reached in his dissertation. Aron frames his discussion in response to Marx and in so doing finds himself aligned with the French liberal tradition represented by Tocqueville and Montesquieu. The latter's nuanced view of causation, as a complex network, is similar to Aron's own take. Finally, they both oppose Marx in the primacy they accord to the political sphere.

2b – Aron's Marx[392]

We will proceed by examining the following: *Marx in the context of Aron's* Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire. *Causal systematization: Aron's critique of Marx's sociology and view of history. Marxism as existential choice.*

Marx in the Context of Aron's *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*

We return to the influential German years. It was in 1931 during his stay in Germany that Aron would begin his lifelong dialogue with Karl Marx, whose influence on the young French scholar's intellectual trajectory would be unmatched.[393] He delved into this great German thinker's works "less in order to arrive at an opinion on the Soviet Union than to mark out the borderline between the analytics and dialectics (in the Kantian sense) of historical knowledge."[394] He also wondered if a reading of *Das Kapital* might aid him in explaining the economic crisis.[395] Sadly, Marx's analysis provided neither a sufficient explanation for the crisis nor much of a boost to Aron's vague socialism.

What it *did* offer, however, was a bold and comprehensive philosophy of history, which is precisely the sort of project at which Dilthey's critique was aimed.[396] Aron was ahead of almost all of his compatriots in his reading of Marx's earlier texts which, fortunately, were published in 1932 in Berlin during his sojourn there.[397] This wide range of material would likely have indicated to Aron very early on three crucial components of the totality of Marx's thought: his philosophical-anthropological assumptions, his socialist teachings, and his economic analysis, corresponding to German dialectics, French socialist thought, and the English analysis of political economy.[398]

As banal as this division may be,[399] it is sufficient to make the equally banal statement that Marx's thought encompasses a number of different disciplines (philosophy, sociology/history, economics) and – considering the frequency with which Marx switches between the various disciplines in his works – we should try to take it as a whole. There are three motifs that dominate Marx's thought: the romantic, the Faustian-Promethean, and the rationalist, determinist Enlightenment.[400] Marx's construct claimed to explain not only the present, but also the past and predict a better future, lending it a mystical allure that was inversely proportional to its scientific plausibility; indeed, the very ambiguity of some of his terms (materialism, ideology,

[392] This section has already been published in a slightly modified form as "Scientist or Seer? Raymond Aron's Critique of Vulgar Marxism in *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*," *Kairos Revista de Filosofia & Ciência* 9 (April 2014): 29-44.
[393] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 304.
[394] Aron, "De l'existence historique," 147.
[395] Aron, *Mémoires*, 85-86.
[396] As the historian Tony Judt remarks: "Were it not for his sense that the errors of Marxism were part of a larger, and more interesting, set of problems in social analysis and historical explanation, it is unlikely that he would have attended to them quite so fully, or written about them with such moral and analytical intensity." Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 149.
[397] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 162.
[398] Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, trans. P. S. Falla, 9.
[399] Aron, *Les étapes*, 172.
[400] Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 335-341. Cf. Aron's three themes of Marxism – Christian, Promethean, and rationalist – in Aron, *The Century of Total War*, trans. E. Dickes and O. Griffiths, 117-118.

social classes, dialectic) accounts for both the difficulty and charm of interpreting Marx,[401] and Aron would have plenty of time in the future to combat the various apparitions that were Marx's progeny.[402]

All that lay ahead of him, however, and France's enchantment with Marx would have to wait until after the war. In the meantime, he contented himself with critiquing Marx directly, and his early articles bear witness to some of his fundamental insights not only about Marx, but about the world itself, such as the lack of a *primum movens*, the reciprocal relation between the economic and political spheres, and the primacy of politics.[403] These observations indicated that our understanding of the world and causality was perhaps more complex than many cared to admit. Consequently, they suggested that there were certain limits to historical objectivity, and that we constantly renew our perspective on history as we go on living in history.[404] As we have seen, this was the topic of Aron's *Introduction*.

We originally analyzed Aron's *Introduction* insofar as it concerned how one comes to know oneself, others, and history, and what consequences this might have for political action. The *Introduction*, however, also contains a valuable discussion of causation and determinism that is relevant for our purposes now.[405] While the *Introduction* cannot be said to contain a formal refutation of Marxism – Aron is willing to concede as much himself[406] - it raises enough questions about historical objectivity as to constitute a powerful criticism of the Marxist philosophy of history. A word must first be said about Aron's inability to refute formally Marxism in his *Introduction*. Once it has been admitted that Marxism is more of a philosophy than a science then it becomes obvious that Aron's analysis of causality has little to do with Marxism's foundation, which is a philosophy of man, and not the primacy of a particular cause.[407] It is this observation that permits Aron later on to state that "authentic Marxism", i.e. that which deems itself a philosophy, would be compelled to recognize causal complexity and the plurality of interpretations.[408] The problem begins when Marxism is interpreted as a science, an error for which its founder is not entirely blameless.[409] The moment it comports itself as a science is the moment that it becomes accountable to the rules of causality, and it is this vulgar

[401] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 543-545.

[402] See, for example, Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels, Marxismes imaginaires : D'une sainte famille à l'autre,* and *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*.

[403] Aron, "De Man, Au-delà du marxisme," 43-47; Aron, "F. Fried, La Fin du capitalisme," 647-648; Aron, "Comptes rendus de: A. Cornu," 509-511; Aron, "Politique et économie dans la doctrine marxiste [1937]," 121-138; Aron, "Le concept de classe [1939]," 461-472. Some of these sources have been taken from Colen, *Short Guide to the* Introduction to the Philosophy of History. All involuntary traces or paraphrases of this work have the permission of the author.

[404] Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 140.

[405] Aron, *Introduction*, 195-330, esp. 283-324.

[406] Aron, *Introduction*, 312.

[407] Aron, *Introduction*, 312. See also the affiliated endnote on pp. 495-496.

[408] Aron, *Introduction*, 387-388.

[409] See Aron, "Politique et économie dans la doctrine marxiste," 133. Aron justifies his distinction between authentic and vulgar Marxism on the basis of the latter's proclivity to seek after the prestige of a positive science. He claims that this was an error Marx himself did not make, provided that one is willing to take seriously the texts of his youth in which he outlined his definitive philosophy. This argument is unconvincing as long as we count *The German Ideology* as one of Marx's youthful texts (and Aron himself seems to do so—see Aron, *Les étapes*, 145) wherein he makes it quite clear that the premises on which is based the materialist conception of history are real and "can thus be verified in a purely empirical way." See Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 36.

Marxism that Aron's *Introduction* has the capacity to critique.[410] This is most readily apparent in the third part of the third section, on causal thought, when the *Introduction* discusses historical laws, causal systematization, and historical determinism.

Causal Systematization: Aron's Critique of Marx's Sociology and View of History

His first task, therefore, is to establish the difference between a law and a cause. Related to French positivism's lack of distinction between the natural and human sciences was the conflation of law and cause. Marxism was characterized by a similar omission, thus permitting Aron to mount a case against it analogous to the one he was making against positivism. The distinction between the two terms depends on the inevitability of a particular effect resulting from a particular cause, or a particular cause always existing prior to a particular effect. If B results from A as certainly as night follows day, then we are in the presence of a law. If generalization is impossible, then we have likely come across but a cause for a unique effect located within an historical whole where many unique factors are at work. One speaks, for example, of the causes, and not the laws, of suicide, for we recognize that suicide is an act located at the convergence of many particular factors in an historical whole. Similarly, there are not laws, but effects of devaluation which are contingent on the circumstances in which devaluation occurs.[411] Nonetheless, these examples aside, are there laws in history? Aron concludes negatively: it is not possible to discern laws in the historical totality. This is not to say that there are no partial laws, for example in linguistics; but the assertion that there are laws that apply to the historical totality, such as the inevitability of cycles, is as incontestable as it is meaningless if that is the extent of its explanatory power.[412] The best we can hope for then is a fragmentary determinism.

And yet Marxism pretended to be way beyond this point as it had already isolated the cause of primary importance – the economic order – and, by virtue of a sweeping philosophy of history, had demonstrated both how history could be explained in terms of this cause and how the contradictions inherent to the present economic order were doomed to inch closer to that extreme point at which the current bourgeois society would collapse under the weight of its own injustice, bringing about an order free of alienation and oppression and thus essentially different from all previous societies.

Such an exhaustive causal systematization begs three questions: does the primacy of a single cause even exist and, if so, can one discover it? Can one identify *all* of the causes of any given occurrence? Can one discern constant relations amongst typical causes? In brief, to what extent is causal thought amenable to systematization?[413] The second and third questions can be consigned to irrelevance in the Marxist schema because of the affirmation of the first question. What, then, constitutes the primacy of the economic order? Marx states clearly that

> in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a

[410] Given that we will endeavour in this section to explore primarily Aron's critique of vulgar Marxism and the *Introduction* does not contain a detailed critique of Marx's economics, Marx's economics-heavy works, namely *Das Kapital*, have been excluded from this analysis. Furthermore, "Marxism" will henceforth refer to vulgar Marxism and its philosophy of history, while the name "Marx" will be reserved for the aforementioned "authentic Marxism".

[411] Aron, *Introduction*, 294.

[412] Aron, *Introduction*, 300-301.

[413] Aron, *Introduction*, 307.

> given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.[414]

To begin with, how are we to understand the forces and relations of production? Do they include political and legal institutions or are they merely technology and the economic order? If political and legal institutions are incorporated in the terms – which is perfectly acceptable, for everyone can initially define his terms however he likes and then is obliged to be consistent – then it can be said that the cause is inherent to the system, or that the system's very own contradictions are the cause.[415] Yet, if the forces and relations of production *include* political and legal institutions (and our consciousness of material forces), then one can do no better than arrive at the vapid conclusion that the forces and relations of production effect themselves. And then how is the superstructure distinct from this all-inclusive infrastructure?

But Marx does not leave us with such a finding. Besides, he makes eminently clear in the aforementioned quote that the interaction between the forces and relations of production, which constitutes the economic structure of society (infrastructure), are the foundation of the superstructure (political institutions, law, consciousness, etc.). With these two entities' separateness established, it remains to be seen how the infrastructure determines the superstructure. Aron outlines two different ways of going about this: the sociological and the historical methods.[416]

The former approach would require one to demonstrate that a particular economic situation has a particular political regime, ideology, etc. as its result; similarly, one should be able to determine, on the basis of a particular political regime, ideology, etc., the particular economic situation that is its cause. But it is undeniable that many capitalist regimes have different political systems or constitutions which are also sometimes transformed without having been stimulated by the economic system. Can the multiple political regime changes in France since 1789 be explained by economics alone?[417]

The latter approach involves tracing historical events back to economic antecedents. The trouble here is that there is no scientific reason why one should arrest his investigation once the desired economic cause has been found. Furthermore, causal regression is bound to discover an economic antecedent at some point. To suggest, then, that it is the *first* and/or *only* cause says more about the analyst's curiosity or scientific disingenuousness than about the phenomenon in question.

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[414] Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya.
[415] Aron, *Introduction*, 308.
[416] Aron, *Introduction*, 308.
[417] Aron, "Politique et économie dans la doctrine marxiste," 131.

Karl Marx himself was too intelligent to fall consistently into the same trap that some of his disciples did. The closer he got to the complexities of history in the making, the more clearly the contradictions shone between the in-depth analysis required by his journalistic integrity and the sweeping generalizations demanded by his theory. *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* is a testament to the difficult balancing act he tried to perform. On the one hand, the work is loaded with allusions to continual class conflict and the folly inherent in any effort on the part of the socialists to achieve parliamentary compromise – what Marx derisively referred to as "parliamentary cretinism".[418] On the other hand, he is compelled to admit that the Legitimists and Orleanists – whose conflict, Marx maintains, is provoked by the rivalry between landed property and industrial property, respectively – are able to come to terms with each other in a parliamentary republic, hence granting that a change of political regime can effect a reconciliation. But if the struggle between the two classes boils down to socio-economic factors alone, then any sort of compromise should be impossible regardless of the political regime.[419]

What this example illustrates is that one cannot give a total explanation of society on the basis of the relations of production, but only a partial explanation. "If the economy obeyed a purely autonomous law then prediction and explanation would be equally possible",[420] in much the same way that the physicist points indifferently to the formula $F = ma$ both when asked with what force an object of given mass hit the ground, as well as when asked with what force an object of a different mass *will* hit the ground. It is therefore true to say that the economic and political spheres interact, but a more precise analysis of *how* exactly is beyond the scope of Aron's dissertation.[421]

The relation between the infrastructure and the superstructure is manifested on the historical stage as the class struggle. Even if one were to be swept up into a state of euphoria by those declarative and audacious words – "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"[422] – one would still be tempted, in a moment of clarity, to inquire after the content behind them. How, for example, does one designate a class? There is a brief enumeration to be found in *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, 1848 bis 1850*,[423] and a more comprehensive outline (dealing with the lack of a peasant class, properly speaking) in *Der achtzehnte Brumaire*.[424] It goes without saying that a class is composed of many families living in similar conditions with similar interests; however, the peasants do *not* constitute a class because they lack class consciousness.[425] According to Marx, they lack the consciousness requisite for a class because "each individual peasant family is practically self-sufficient, directly producing the majority of their own consumption and thereby sustaining themselves more in interacting with nature than society."[426]

But can a class become self-conscious only through economic interaction in society? If one answers negatively, then it stands to reason that there are other, potentially non-materialistic, ways of creating a class, and this would undermine the Marxist assertion that the infrastructure

[418] Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire*, 173.
[419] Aron, *Les étapes*, 290-292.
[420] "If the economy obeyed a purely independent law then forecasting and explanation would be equally possible." Aron, *Introduction*, 309.
[421] This is covered in Aron's Sorbonne trilogy on industrial society.
[422] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 73.
[423] Marx, *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, 12-13.
[424] Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire*, 198-199.
[425] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 531.
[426] Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire*, 198.

determines the superstructure and, thereby, the course of history. However, if one answers affirmatively, then the relation between infrastructure and superstructure is left intact, but one is then obliged to move to the level of history and ask whether it is indeed the case that class struggles characterize the history of all hitherto existing societies. Is the class the only sort of social grouping into which individuals can be organized? Are there other groupings or forms of collective consciousness that have the potential to override the purely materialistic factor connecting people, such as national prejudices or religion? Marxism's intense focus on only class struggle suffers, on the level of historical explanation, from the same defect that plagues his conception of the relation between the infrastructure and the superstructure on the level of sociological explanation: reality is too complex to permit only a single cause or perspective.

This innate complexity also hinders our ability to list every cause for any given phenomenon, not to mention guarantee constant relations amongst the typical causes (the reader will recall that these two additional conditions – deemed irrelevant in the Marxist schema – are also necessary to foresee the future, in all of its specificity, beyond a reasonable doubt). On the one hand, one could always have recourse to faith in order to escape the narrow confines of causal reason's cage, but only at the cost of demoting one's science. In this way at least the teleology would be preserved. On the other hand, once Providence has been sacrificed on the altar of science there is no longer any reason to believe that history has an end.[427] As for the existence of a *primum movens* in the world, there is no reason, scientific or based on the rules of causality, i.e. analysis and comparison, to believe that the historical totality has a first cause, much less an economic one at that.[428] We, and not History, then, are responsible for our actions and our own destiny.

This realization does not leave us to wade through a swamp of uncertainty. There are still partial laws and fragmentary determinism, punctuated by chance and individual acts, i.e. probabilism, and it walks the fine line between absolute regularities and total incoherence. As Aron notes:

> Once we realize there are no necessary relations, we are brought back to the antithesis of the part and the whole, because if a causal connection can coincide with an observed succession only by losing all of its generality, it is because the constellations in which a regularity manifests itself are unique, and each constellation belongs to an historical totality which is both unique and relatively unified. Therefore, probability would be the result, in this instance, of the contradiction between the *necessity of classification* and the *impossibility of isolation*.[429]

Room is thereby made for some of Marx's predictions *qua* predictions, and not *qua* prophecies, to be proved correct, provided they are predictions which recognize the fundamental impenetrability of the logic of History and instead readjust themselves to account for only a part of reality. Would Marxism be proved or disproved if capitalism, burdened by its own internal contradictions, finally did come to a standstill, but the proletariat opted for a political regime other than communism?[430] Is the increasing dissolution of the family today a victory for Marxism?[431] Such questions cannot expect a scientific answer when Marxism itself has been

[427] Aron, *Introduction*, 322.
[428] Aron, *Introduction*, 316.
[429] Aron, *Introduction*, 328.
[430] Aron, *Introduction*, 309-310.
[431] Hobsbawm, "On the Communist Manifesto," 112.

subject to so many different interpretations and poses at one moment as a science and, at the next, as a religion.

Long-term extrapolations meant to paint a detailed picture of the future in broad strokes are the result of mistaking a simple tendency for a law. And when the prophecy comes to naught, the high priest need only declare that this historical event was, in fact, not the moment ordained in Scripture and that we must continue to wait. All doomsayers proclaiming the end of civilization or the world operate on the same craven calculation: they cannot be proved wrong.

Marxism as Existential Choice

By this point it should be quite obvious that the Marxist obsession with the relations between the infrastructure and the superstructure, forces of production and relations of production, class conflict, etc. is the result of a preference that precedes science and causal analysis. Whether the question is on what level one should analyze a phenomenon[432] or whether there are universal laws in history,[433] the curiosity and prejudices of the researcher are reflected at all times in his work.

In the case of Marx there is a clear predilection for materialism over idealism.[434] While scientifically illustrating which of the two precedes the other is bound to be an exercise in futility, it is evident enough that, early on, Marx was trying to distance himself from the imperious influence of Hegel and the Young Hegelians' idealism.[435] In his mind, after Hegel, no one had made any significant theoretical contributions to German philosophy other than Feuerbach.[436] And with Feuerbach one gets the impression that, for all of his materialism, he had still failed to overcome Hegel in at least one respect that was absolutely essential for Marx: action. "The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that thing [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, *or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity*, *practice*, not subjectively."[437]

Marx's call to action and his desire to subject consciousness to material reality, not to mention a grave concern for the state of Germany, are already to be found in some of his earliest letters and works.[438] He began with a critique of religion, that opium of the people,[439] and progressed by way of a critique of politics and law to a critique of the economy. This last critique was the most important because it aimed at revealing the exploitative nature of the present socio-economic order, and so Marx's theoretical contributions post-1848 were very much concerned with analyzing the economy.[440] His fundamental contention in *Das Kapital* was that labourers

[432] Aron, *Introduction*, 285.
[433] Aron, *Introduction*, 306.
[434] It is worth noting that, in Aron's view at least, Marx's interpretation of history in 1848 did not strictly imply materialism. See Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 56.
[435] See his polemical works *Die heilige Familie* and *The German Ideology*. This does not mean that he effected a total break from Hegel's influence on all counts. After all, desperately trying to escape from under the wing of an individual's influence is also an indication of that very influence and is, in a sense, to pay homage to the predecessor. Marx's notion of alienation derives from Hegel (see Aron, *Les étapes*, 176) and the absolute validity that Marxism is meant to represent is a literal interpretation of Hegelianism (see Aron, *Introduction*, 393).
[436] Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, 468.
[437] Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, 572.
[438] See, e.g., Marx, "Letter from Marx to Ruge, Cologne,"; Marx, "Letter from Marx to Ruge, Kreuznach,"; Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegel'schen Rechtsphilosophie*.
[439] Marx, *Zur Kritik*, 378.
[440] The key works are the *Grundrisse*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and *Das Kapital*.

were clearly being paid less than the value of what they were producing – this was the peculiarity of labour as a commodity.[441] The products themselves were crystallized labour and so their value was equal to the amount of labour required to produce them (theory of labour value), while the labourer's wages were equal to the amount required to sustain the labourer and his family (theory of wage value). Given that labourers were not being remunerated at the price of their goods, they must have been working partly for themselves and partly for someone else, namely the employer (theory of surplus value), who enjoyed the privileged position of being able to extract this additional effort from the workers because he owned the means of production. This critique allowed Marx to explain profit – the very essence of capitalism – and it also laid bare the perverted core of the capitalist system.

These critiques were necessary in order to penetrate the many illusions of our existence and get at reality. Philosophy itself was one of these illusions insofar as it remained contemplative – not rooted in practice – and thereby alienated man,[442] with this alienation permeating man's material (economic) existence as well. Bourgeois society was predicated on the market, composed of proprietors and wage-labourers whose only human connection to each other was money. In the older guild system, the more limited interaction between towns, coupled with the less advanced division of labour, meant that craftsmen could really involve themselves in their work which could assume a more artistic and personal human value.[443] Bourgeois society diminished this level of human involvement in their products and rendered social interaction and human life in general as nothing more than making a living, as opposed to allowing individuals to realize all of their aptitudes.[444] And because humans are defined by what and how they produce, individuals were, in effect, becoming dehumanized.[445]

The group most adversely affected by this phenomenon was, according to Marx, the proletariat. The proletariat is given a momentous role for the first time in *Zur Kritik der Hegel'schen Rechtsphilosophie*. "It is here that he expresses for the first time the idea of a specific historical mission of the proletariat, and the interpretation of revolution not as a violation of history but as a fulfillment of its innate tendency."[446] Marx, ever the opponent of injustice, must also have been appalled when, in 1850, he arrived in London to see first-hand the working conditions of the proletariat: workdays over 16 hours long, every day of the week, with men, women, and children as young as ten working and sleeping in the factory for a wage that could hardly sustain them – life was grueling work and nothing more.[447] Bourgeois society had simply prolonged the oppression of one class by another, and whether the disadvantaged class was called slaves, serfs, or wage-labourers did little to conceal their servility. What was perhaps most despicable, however, was that this order of things was supposed to be progressive and liberal.

Karl Marx surely thought that the capitalism of his day was an outrage, a crime against humanity that could be answered only by revolutionary action. Marxism is rather an existential

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[441] Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 211. The following summary of some of the salient concepts of *Das Kapital* draws heavily on Aron, *Les étapes*, 160-164.
[442] Lichtheim, *Marxism*, 44.
[443] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 74.
[444] Aron, *Les étapes*, 178.
[445] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 37.
[446] Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 105. See Marx, *Zur Kritik*, 391: "A thorough Germany cannot make a revolution without making a revolution thoroughly. The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy; its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be realized without the transcendence of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy."
[447] Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber,* Loc. 1296-1304, Kindle.

attitude[448] where choice – the refusal of capitalism and the wish to destroy it – precedes theory.[449] Therefore Marx spent his life trying to dispel the many insidious illusions that had developed and were obscuring the true nature of reality. In so doing he created an enormously impressive and infectious *Weltanschauung* that was easily ransacked for insights to supplement whatever ideas suited the fashion of the time. Aron remains a faithful reader of Marx, and part of that fidelity consists in taking Marx at his word,[450] and therefore treating both the early and mature Marx as the same individual who has shifted focus from his more philosophical musings to economic analysis.[451] Marx is the interlocutor in the background of Aron's reflections on industrial society, which we will cover by following Aron's own tri-partite division, beginning with the area dearest to Marx: the economic dimension.

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We have seen that Aron's dialogue with Marx and Marxism lasted his entire life. His primary doctoral dissertation, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, is designed to explore the way in which our view of history changes on the basis of the present; however, this work also contains a critique of Marxism interpreted as a science of historical development. We have explained that Marxism as a science is forced to submit to the rules of causal analysis, which is an integral part of Aron's dissertation. We explored the complexity of determining causal primacy and that there is no justifiable reason for asserting the supremacy of the economic realm. The faults of Marx's sociological method are replicated at the level of historical analysis. Marxism is thus more of an existential choice or philosophy than a comprehensive and rigorous science. In order for it to qualify as a science it would have to be cognizant of the limits of its

[448] Not to mention a detailed interpretation of capitalism.

[449] Aron, *Introduction*, 389.

[450] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 449, 595.

[451] This is one of the recent verdicts on Aron's interpretation of Marx, explored in Mesure, "Aron and Marxism," 217-230. Mesure argues that Aron contends the one-sidedness of both Sartre's existentialist interpretation of Marx as well as Althusser's structuralist interpretation. Her article is couched in the broader context of understanding an author and his work, where we see a complex relation between Aron's thought and that of Marx, where the former finds himself at times siding with the latter in his dialogue with Friedrich Hayek, for example, or in his *Essai sur les libertés*, where he partially acknowledges Marx's point about real freedoms. Nevertheless, as Mesure also observes, Aron pushes his understanding of Marx further and ultimately believes that Marx bears some responsibility for the horrors of the twentieth century, which were consequences of his views as both economist and prophet.
Another recent interpretation of Aron and Marx is found in Mahoney, "Aron, Marx, and Marxism," 33-46. Mahoney explores the then recently published *Le Marxisme de Marx*, which showcases Aron's very balanced treatment of Marx, particularly in his Sorbonne lectures of 1962-1963. This gives way to an increasingly critical attitude towards Marx and the consequences of his thought in Aron's writings especially from the 1970s. Mahoney extends Aron's thinking by setting Aron's sobriety and recognition of the limits of reason in opposition to Marx's Promethean ambitions and "the militant, dogmatic, and even irrational atheism at the heart of the Marxist enterprise." (p. 42). We are encouraged to read Aron's analysis of Marx and Marxism as a criticism of Marx's entire "critical" project, which seeks "to abolish all human antagonisms, that is, to eliminate the political and economic realms of human existence altogether". (p. 45). As Aron himself remarks, "this promethean ambition is one of the intellectual origins of totalitarianism." Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, 210.
Matthias Oppermann, too, situates his discussion of Marx in the context of its tendency to tyranny despite its pretensions to freedom. He attributes Aron's restraint in the 1962-1963 course on Marx as the result of Aron's attempt to give a "marxological" reading of Marx. As soon as the discussion turns to liberties or the necessary consequences of the prophetic aspects inherent to Marx's work, Aron's judgment becomes much more severe. See Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 302-321.

capacity to explain. Aron's critique of Marx, especially the latter's economics, is more fully developed in his mature works (such as *Le Marxisme de Marx* and *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*), but his prime criticism remains what it always was from the very beginning: that Marxism fails to account for the movement of the historical totality.

2c – Industrial Society

We have noted that Aron believes Marx made his mature analysis of the economy the cornerstone of his thinking for a reason, and that this does not necessarily negate his earlier philosophical reflections. For Marx, man is defined by labour. His economic theory, however, fails as a scientific project and its predictions are not borne out by the empirical evidence. Nevertheless, it is inspiring as a sociological project, misdirected as it may be. The previous section was devoted to exposing the theoretical weaknesses in Marx's sociology even though Marx's approach remained valid at least to *begin* thinking about modern society. What follows is Aron's own conceptualization of modern society, or industrial society, using Marx as his starting point. We shall proceed by examining the following: *Theories of capitalism's demise. The economic nature of industrial society. The principle of industrial society: growth. Aron's reflections on growth in Europe and sociology.*

Theories of Capitalism's Demise

Many of Aron's students were Marxists, or well on their way to changing the world, and Aron was a marked man, having made his way as a journalist of the right – he had to make his research palatable.[452] History gave him a hand, as it sometimes does, in the form of Khrushchev's secret speech and the Hungarian Revolution.[453] Aron's carefully unbiased sociological investigation of industrial society in both the East and West was a perfect match for those who, in light of recent events, wished to desert the god that failed but still entertain a partially Marxist interpretation of society. We, living in different times, no longer need be so wary of directly criticizing the great German economist-cum-prophet, and so we will start off this section by jumping to the heart of the matter: Marx predicted that capitalism would self-destruct and yet it has not. Why not?[454]

Aron delineates three different levels on which the future of capitalist regimes can be addressed: 1. Historical (i.e. what will become of the British, American, European, etc. capitalist societies?). 2. Socio-economic (i.e. to what extent do social classes, created by growing wealth, and relations between classes due to the development of capitalism, tend to paralyze the functioning of the regime?). 3. Strictly economic level (i.e. does a more developed capitalist society tend to have more difficulties functioning?). The three levels must not be confused, for a capitalist regime might very well be able to continue functioning regardless of its phase of growth, but this does not necessarily mean that it will not be destroyed anyways. In this sense one is reminded of Schumpeter: there could be social and political reasons for capitalism's destruction.[455]

There are three different versions of the economic theory of capitalism's self-destruction. 1. Classic formulation of the contradiction between forces and relations of production: capitalism will become unable to absorb its own production because the productive capacity will overwhelm purchasing power. 2. Insufficient investment: demand will fall for consumption and production goods and hence employment will also fall. 3. Economic growth will get rid of the competition necessary to the capitalist regime itself, or private property will become an obstacle to growth. A fourth variation that could be classed under one of the preceding three is that put

[452] Aron, *Mémoires*, 451-452.
[453] Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 220-221; Aron, *Mémoires*, 516.
[454] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 912-939.
[455] Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 59-163.

forth by Rosa Luxemburg, namely that capitalism must continually expand and find new resources and territories to exploit, and once there are no more to be found, it will self-destruct.

The first theory is the Marxist one and it tends to crop up in times of crisis; indeed, there will always be a portion of the population unable to purchase products. However, production automatically creates purchasing power equal to that of production. This purchasing power is realized in expenses, either salaries or purchases of machines or material, etc. The real problem for the Marxist is the unequal redistribution of wealth that sometimes occurs. This is referred to as relative pauperization, which means that labour wages steadily decrease. It is negated, however, by the theory of marginal productivity; and as far as inequality between workers in different countries is concerned, the salary differences tend to be a function of the uneven levels of productivity between the two countries.[456] For Marx, salary is determined by what is necessary for a worker and his family. An effort to determine what this is in each case cannot be based on economic analysis alone; it will require taking into account social and psychological factors. If there is no scientific way to determine the value of the worker, i.e. his salary, then there is also no scientific way to claim that he is being exploited.[457] The industrial reserve army is meant to be Marx's demonstration of growing pauperization: the increasing availability of unemployed workers will keep pushing wages lower. This ignores the unions that protect employee wages. These counterarguments are weighty because of the emphasis Marx lays on capitalism's self-destruction due to economic (infrastructural) reasons.

The second theory rests on falling investment due to lack of goods to consume or produce. This can happen in times of crisis like the Depression, when investor confidence is at an all-time low. This is the Keynesian explanation of the Depression. But what are the causes of stagnation? One potential cause is the disappearance of frontiers (i.e. Luxemburg's argument). Another cause is that growth slows to a stop because the easiest investments have already been made and so with fewer investments in the future there will be fewer opportunities for profit. This seems to presuppose that the most important technological advances have already been made. The argument was made in the 1930s and since then, up until Aron's time, at least three new industries had developed: chemical/plastic, electronic, and atomic.[458] A third cause is lack of population growth. This could happen if the population no longer thinks about the future or if the entrepreneurs are no longer interested in enlarging their enterprises. In any case, if capitalism should self-destruct it will not be because of economic causes; nevertheless, this is not to say that capitalism cannot self-destruct at all.

The third theory revolves around the idea that capitalism would be paralyzed by monopolies. This theory has its roots in the work of Schumpeter. First of all, technically one could argue that there is always a monopoly – to the extent that a firm has established a particular spot for selling and presents the product to consumers at a given place – and that there is never a monopoly because there are always substitute goods. This banal point is meant to underscore the ambiguity when discussing monopolies to begin with. It is also not always the

[456] Aron cites the creation of an auto industry in India to argue that the phenomena Marx had noticed regarding poverty of the population and the major divide between productive and purchasing capacities were in fact more typical of economies in the initial phases of industrialization as opposed to those in the mature phase.

[457] Aron, *Le Marxisme de Marx*, 455-456.

[458] Although, at least one piece of recent research argues that such innovations were part of a wave whose benefits to growth are a one-time deal, suggesting that in future we could return to pre-industrial levels of practically no growth. See Gordon, "Is US Economic Growth Over?."

case that imperfect competition is worse than theoretically perfect competition; and besides, there is always competition between the big corporations.

The Economic Nature of Industrial Society

However, it is not the self-destruction of capitalism that interests Aron most about his study of industrial society. For Aron, capitalism and socialism are two sides of the same coin, and for all of their differences there are certain similarities that Aron believes are critical to our time. Without denying that Marx is on to something in pointing at the economy, Aron feels that this is part of a greater movement that he clarifies in his trilogy on industrial society. The essential aspects of industrial society that were shared on both sides of the Iron Curtain and which remain largely the same today are the following: 1. Separation of workplace and family. 2. Introduction of another division of labour, i.e. not just the division between the different sectors of the economy but now also the technological division of labour within the enterprise itself. 3. The industrial enterprise presupposes the accumulation of capital for the purposes of investment and expansion. 4. Economic calculation is applied with a view to increasing capital. 5. Concentration of workers in the workplace and hence arises the question of the ownership of the means of production.[459] We might adopt Montesquieu's terms – in this section as well as the following two[460] – and consider these qualities constitutive of the *nature* of industrial society. By industrial society Aron does not mean to refer to a historically singular society or to a period determined by contemporary societies, but rather a social type that appears to hail a new era in the history of man.[461] This is why he later hesitates to buy into the notion of a post-industrial society. While it is true that we live in an age of greater information flows and more advanced technology, our society nevertheless continues to function according to the characteristics outlined above. Finally, all societies have seen disparity between the rich and powerful few and the poor masses. What differentiates industrial society from previous ones, in Aron's mind, is that the focus on growth and production means that the privilege of the former group will no longer impede improvement in the situation of the latter.[462]

The two ideal types that are variations of this type of modern society are the capitalist regime on the one hand, and the command economy on the other. We might begin by listing some of the essential characteristics of capitalism:[463] 1. Means of production are privately owned. 2. Regulation of the economy is decentralized. 3. Employers and employees are separate from one another. 4. The prevailing motive is profit. 5. Prices fluctuate on the market and sometimes there are crises. The critics of capitalism reproach it for exploiting workers, being an immoral system whose foundation is the search for profit, leading to extreme inequality of income, being dominated by anarchy and the risk of crises, and finally, being self-destructive, which we have just discussed. These objections and their putative solutions continue to be trumpeted more often than they deserve. The allegedly exploitative surplus value exists perforce in both types of economic regime because it is the sum that is reinvested back into the economy.

[459] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 811-812.

[460] Aron was not unaware of Montesquieu's notions of nature and principle influencing the third course of his trilogy on industrial society (Aron, *Mémoires*, 522); in fact, we have found that the three courses can be conceptualized using Montesquieu's notions of nature and principle and that they seem to be structured in such a way that the nature of the subject is explored (and how it may differ on either side of the Iron Curtain), followed by a discussion of the subject "in motion", driven by its principle.

[461] Aron, *Trois essais*, 354, 359.

[462] Aron, *Trois essais*, 408.

[463] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 820-833.

If shareholders were no longer to be given a cut of the profits so that workers could earn the value of their products, then the latter would gradually work themselves into obsolescence as their cumbersome wages began to stifle investment. The real problem is ascertaining how much of this surplus is consumed by the privileged, how effective privatized vs. nationalized production is, and if the redistribution of investments by a centralized bureau is better or worse than through the market. A competitive market will see the constant reinvestment of funds to ensure that some producers stay ahead of others, and this reason, coupled with the influence of the unions, explains why in Aron's day one did not see as much luxury spending and hoarding of capital as one would expect. And while the profit motive is usually decisive, it is not necessarily the only goal in a capitalist economy; there is also prestige, and profit and prestige are at times mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the need for revenue to exceed expenditures by the end of the fiscal term is not the preserve solely of capitalist regimes.

These comments, however, say nothing about the inherent *desirability* of thinking in terms of profit. Where political theorists of the past considered the good society to be one in which people were virtuous, the sociologist of today tends to think that a good society is one that uses individual vice to achieve the common good, and this view is not entirely innocuous either. Inequality – for all its detractors then and now[464] – is inevitable in capitalist society due to its nature, and considering the practice of the USSR, it was apparent there as well. It incites productivity and is probably necessary as a cultural condition in order to ensure a minority the ability to partake in activities of cultural progress. Even our material progress is dependent on our allowing a talented minority to reap the monetary rewards of innovations whose benefits accrue to the rest of society.[465] As for the anarchy of capitalism – or market mechanism, as its supporters would say – the complaint seems to be that there is no overall plan to the economy; prices and production fluctuate constantly and unpredictably. These incessant changes can render one's position in the job market very uncertain, and indeed unemployment may be the result. Thus there will always be Marx's industrial reserve army whose absence would require the planning authority to absolve the workers of the pain of freely choosing their profession. What is less tolerable are moments of extreme unemployment – in other words, crises. Whether they are *inherent* to a market economy is another matter. Economists were pessimistic about the survival of the capitalist regime during the Depression and optimistic after 1945. Therefore, it was an open question at the time of Aron's lectures; it was occasioned again by the economic crises of the 1970s;[466] it had been laid to rest with the fall of the USSR; and with the financial crisis of 2007-2008 it has returned. It is difficult to satisfy the Marxist and give a categorical answer to this problem.

On the other side of the coin are the command economy and the criticisms levied against it.[467] A command economy would encounter difficulties rationally calculating wages and the costs of goods if it did not have complete control over the economy as a whole.[468] Therefore, the link between central planning and despotism or tyranny is intelligible enough, though it is not

[464] There have been at least three major recent works on this topic: Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer; Atkinson, *Inequality: What can be done?*; Reich, *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few*.

[465] Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 96-98.

[466] Economic crises notwithstanding, Aron's late work, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente*, would suggest that, on the balance sheet, capitalism has come out with more positives than negatives.

[467] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 833-842.

[468] As Aron acknowledges, this is the insight emphasized by neoliberals such as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich A. Hayek.

necessarily certain. However, is it possible to maintain certain elements of democracy (such as the multiparty system) with a more authoritarian redistribution of national resources? This is the balance of any welfare state, and our experience with the long-term efficacy of this tenuous balance has proffered us more questions than answers. The existence of mixed economies is proof of our willingness, to different degrees and in different forms, to sacrifice a slice of liberty and economic efficiency to secure greater job and wage protection against the vagaries of the market. Another way of arguing that a planned economy precludes a multiparty system is to say that it ends up overstepping legal boundaries by telling companies what and how much they should produce. Where the law is subservient to the planning authority, the line separating general laws and particular orders becomes increasingly vague. Producers might not have the means or resources at their disposal to carry out the orders from above, and so they would be forced either to break the law or to disobey the orders, both of which amount to the same in a single-party regime. The outcome is some degree of illegality and a black market. In any case, it is irrefutable that the Soviet Union did function for a period of time, illustrating that central planning cannot be rejected out of hand as impossible. Aron is careful to remind us repeatedly that neither system of economic organization can be proved to be objectively better or worse in the abstract: "In order to arrive at reasonable opinions one must first know what one is talking about and never forget that all systems are imperfect solutions to a problem that, so far, has not found a perfect solution, which perhaps does not even exist."[469]

The Principle of Industrial Society

Earlier we mentioned the traits that constitute the *nature* of industrial society. Continuing to apply Montesquieu's categories we would say that *growth*, and the consumer-hedonism that goes with it, is industrial society's *principle*.[470] This he defines as "*a qualitative transformation whose results are measurable*".[471] The problem of growth is perhaps the central problem of the science of economics.[472] In previous eras the area of concern was the quantity of precious metals, understood to be the principal source of wealth and power; this was followed by an age focused on freedom of commerce and trade and the natural laws underlying the increase in wealth; and then emerged the theories based on equilibrium and the price mechanism. Since the Great Depression we have stressed different aspects of the modern economy that we have seen as essential to maintain (or to rein in) so that steady growth and economic prosperity can be sustained, be it employment, inflation, or more recently, debt. In any case, growth – and the concomitant movement of labour from the primary to secondary and tertiary sectors; the accumulation of capital; and the increasing productivity of the worker – is the driver of industrial society. Growth imposes a certain dynamism or progressivism on industrial societies. This progress is defined by technological advancements or increase in labour income, all of which is buffered by a rational-scientific attitude toward production. These transformations are occasioned by the successive saturation of different needs, transfers of demand from one sector to another, according to increases in revenue, and the unequal rate of technological development in the different sectors. Aron calls our attention to the increases in consumption in both the US and France from the mid-19th century up through to the mid-20th century. One of the key

[469] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 836.
[470] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 849-884.
[471] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 873.
[472] Aron prefers using the term *growth* instead of *development* or *progress*, the latter being reserved for specific types of growth or development.

phenomena that Aron notes in his statistical enumeration is the greater number of students in secondary and higher levels of education. This fact should remind us of the many consequences, not necessarily related to industrial output, that arise from industrialization.[473] Aron is also careful to caution us against debating in the abstract. This is wise advice at any time and in any sphere of political debate, although in his case he refers to the issue of free trade vs protectionism. The problem depends on the phase of development; indeed, a country that opens itself up too quickly to foreign manufactures might find its own manufacturing industry paralyzed due to its own inferior economies of scale.[474]

Quantitative growth does not always equal human progress or even economic progress. A war economy sees great development in arms and munitions but one would not necessarily call that progress.[475] One might say that there are instances when growth occurs without any accompanying economic progress: one such example is when products do not render greater satisfaction to the needs of individuals; another example is when general economic growth leads to a more unequal redistribution of GDP. The empirical evidence of Aron's time indicated that greater output corresponded to a greater redistribution of wealth; there is no logic mandating, however, that one must follow the other, and today even the empirical evidence supporting such a connection is considerably weakened.

One of the delights of Aron's analysis is the consideration given to the, strictly speaking, non-economic infrastructure required to stimulate growth. A modern scientific economy, for example, requires a more complex banking system, a more elaborate insurance system, and more developed research and development services than an older and simpler economy. He takes Japan as his model. Reformers in the Meiji era wanted to adopt the Western economy to preserve their independence. They saw that emulating the West in building up a strong army meant developing a Western economy. They introduced a Western education system and taught everyone to read. They noticed that a Western economy also needed a juridical, individualist, and rational system, which they learned from the French and Germans. Science would also have to be applied to industry and so they created technical schools. Furthermore, private enterprise could be constructed only on an administrative bedrock with a communication and transport system like that found in the West. Lastly, they recognized that it was important to have an increasing national product for the purposes of investing.

This example with Japan is meant to illustrate that it is difficult to identify all of the causes of growth. It also illustrates that the growth of every nation constitutes its own unique (*einmalig*) and individual (*einzigartig*) history.[476] It is to Aron's enduring credit that he realized

[473] The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean made a case in favour of industrialization in the less developed countries on the basis of the many non-economic benefits that would also accrue to the industrializing countries: "The benefits included social cohesion as cities and factories developed, a more highly skilled labor force, higher levels of political knowledge and involvement, and other such advantages. The spillovers could also be economic, as industries encouraged the formation of backward and forward linkages. A firm making shoes developed links 'backward,' to the producers of leather, rubber, and other inputs, and 'forward,' to the wholesalers and retailers of the finished products." Frieden, *Global Capitalism*, 310.

[474] Here Aron points to a major issue of developing economies in his time, import-substituting industrialization, or ISI, which continues to be discussed today. See Frieden, *Global Capitalism*, 301-320; Krugman and Obstfeld, *International Economics*, 250-265.

[475] Although, in the United States, the increasing amount of funds diverted to ever flashier, and perhaps increasingly impractical, military equipment would seem to suggest otherwise. See Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military."

[476] Aron, *Trois essais*, 311.

one of the decisive factors to be a certain attitude of economic subjects, i.e. a way of being and thinking about work. He grouped the literature on economic growth and its factors into two types of books: economics books and historical books. Of the former Aron mentions W. W. Rostow's *The Process of Economic Development*,[477] in which the author enumerates six variables leading to growth: propensity to scientific discovery; propensity to apply science to economic ends; propensity to accept possibilities for innovation; propensity to seek out material improvement; propensity to consume; and propensity to have children. This definition is not very workable – it concedes too much to factors exogenous to the economic system (and how does one quantitatively measure propensity anyways?) to be useful for economists, and it is too formal and unable to explain how a variable affects growth in a given circumstance to be useful for sociologists. On the other hand, the historical works on growth – in this connection Aron mentions Weber's work on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism and Sombart's work on the role of Jews in economic life[478] – remind us that national growth is a history unique to the country in which it occurs – a country with its own specific scientific knowledge and technology.[479]

In Aron's mind there are three aspects characteristic of modern economic rationality and, subsequently, growth. Above all, growth depends essentially on *the attitude of economic subjects*. With the zeal of a scholar determined to overturn the dogmatic Marxist sociology that emphasizes infrastructural causes, Aron indulges (as he often does) in the typically French penchant for grouping everything into three. Thus his three aspects, which evoke hints of Montesquieu, Weber, and Schumpeter, are: spirit of science and technology, spirit of economic calculation, and spirit and taste for progress, change, and innovation. As for the conditions that encourage the development of this spirit, there are again three: 1. Institutional framework: the desire to calculate, innovate, and be scientific requires a relatively rational and predictable administration and form of justice. 2. Incentives: the worker needs to feel that his work will somehow bring him something in return. In practice there is no political or social institution that incites production. An excessively burdensome income tax can also stifle production. Some level of inequality can act as an incentive. Finally, private property can be advantageous or not, depending on the proclivity of the property owner to produce. 3. Capital and population.

Aron goes on to say that this spirit and these conditions do not prefer one regime to the other. Here we must disagree, specifically as concerns his second condition, incentives. Aron's own statement precludes any political or social institution from incentivizing production, plus he notes that some inequality can act as an incentive. The Soviet economy, by its very nature, cannot incentivize workers, therefore incentive would have to come from a political or social institution, which, in practice, as Aron states, does not exist. And even though the Soviet regime

[477] Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth*. Aron would also criticize Rostow's classification of five different phases of growth: traditional society, appropriate conditions for take-off, take-off, nearing maturity, and the age of mass consumption. The problem with such a classification is that it not only isolates all pre-industrial societies into a monolithic block known as "traditional society", but the distinctions between the pre-take-off and take-off stages are unclear (even when one takes into account the development of the already-industrialized societies), as are the distinctions between the almost-mature society and the society of mass consumption. The phases are difficult to work with, although Aron does mention that one could say a particular phase *favours* a certain type of regime. For example, the Soviet regime might be better during the take-off stages while a Western regime would be better at a more advanced stage. Aron, *Trois essais*, 307-309, 382.

[478] Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik*; Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*.

[479] Aron's classification of the literature in this respect is reminiscent of his early categorization of contemporary German sociology into the systematic branch vs the historical branch. See Aron, *La sociologie allemande*.

does have some inequalities, workers are not permitted to jump from one income to another purely on the basis of their rate of production; the order to reward them with more has to come from above, and this order will not necessarily have anything to do with the workers' own efforts. By Aron's own admission then – incentives are a condition integral to stimulating growth – a capitalist regime is superior. However, it should not be forgotten that Aron's purpose in not drawing any cut-and-dried conclusions is to inject the neutrality of scientific investigation into a debate dominated by dogmatists: "All that I mean to say is that even the simple analysis of the factors of growth leads to this result, which dogmatists will find difficult to accept: there is no simple relation between the opposing regimes and the rate of economic growth."[480] And there is nothing to say that growth is an absolute good in and of itself.[481] Categorical conclusions are impossible to derive both abstractly and, therefore, also historically; for national differences and the particularities of each economic phase demarcate the limits of any universal theory of growth.

Growth in Europe and Sociology

In the case of Europe Aron noticed that some of the socialist transformations had brought about the reduction of income inequality, redistribution of wealth by the state, reduction of work hours, organization of labour unions, fixing of certain prices, partial administrative control of foreign commerce, and the responsibility on the part of government for full employment.[482] Not all developments were necessarily good though. Aron also envisioned some of the negative consequences (in terms of growth) of a semi-socialist capitalism, namely that the organization of production could become more static, making it more difficult to recalibrate the relative importance of the different sectors of the economy, more difficult to change the organization of production, and more difficult to let companies expand freely with legislation in place that tries to protect individuals against the vicissitudes of life. Moreover, the restrictive practices of labour unions and lack of entrepreneurial initiative that could result in a semi-socialist system would also hamper growth.[483]

As for the Soviet Union Aron observed that investment was greatest in heavy industry as opposed to consumption, and so the capital coefficient was higher.[484] Soviet industrial growth was higher than American industrial growth because their goal was economic-military power. If the Americans had stressed this goal more than they did, then they would have seen growth rates superior to those of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the contention that the Russian standard of living was superior to that of the European standard was false. In order for this to have been the case there would have needed to be transformations in four sectors: agriculture, housing, goods and services, and means of transport. As for how Soviet economic growth would progress, Aron felt there were some fundamental questions that would need to be answered: 1. What will the state of natural resources be down the line? Will the mines be depleted? Will one have to invest to obtain the same level of production? 2. Industrial growth has been achieved largely by transferring manpower from agriculture to industry. What will happen when there is no longer a surplus of manpower in agriculture? 3. If one can no longer contribute additional workers to

[480] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 883.

[481] The ends of human existence are to be considered philosophically, and therefore we will touch briefly upon them only when we come to discuss the constitutional-pluralist regime.

[482] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 940-952.

[483] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 953-965.

[484] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 966-977.

production then worker productivity will have to be increased. But this increase raises problems different from those involved in simply creating new factories. 4. Will it be possible, politically and socially, to maintain the same division of investments? As the standard of living rises and as the urban population grows and the number of people in industry grows, it will become necessary to accord to different groups of the population the satisfactions that they demand.

The role played by demand is another argument in refutation of Marx: demand sets the price of labour, goods, and services, and demand is in turn determined by the consumer. The consumer's freedom to choose is ultimately what dictates the result in the economy. And although Aron was careful not to suggest that socio-economic factors *determine* the political regime or set the course of history, he felt it was more likely that Khrushchev's grandchildren would live in a Kennedy-style regime than vice versa.[485] There was no reason for an opulent society like that of the United States to subject itself to the rigours of Soviet society. Furthermore, the more the revolution became a distant memory in Soviet society, the less attached the people would be to its underlying ideology. The more the regime provided its citizens with a higher standard of living, the more it would have to provide its consumers, and thus it would be forced increasingly to calculate its investments economically and permit its citizens and their ideas more freedom. And the more they come to enjoy these liberties, the less willing they will be to risk their disappearance. These liberties, of course, could not encompass the political liberties that would permit one to question the very legitimacy of the single party and the ruling ideology, i.e. the very nature of the regime itself. Nevertheless, the industrial mode of production leads irresistibly to the aspiration for well-being, which in turn leads to the aspiration for additional liberties. But once again, while these tendencies are at best probable, they are certainly not laws.[486]

Let us follow Aron by concluding this section with his reflections on sociology and let those serve as a segue into the next section.[487] Aron maintains that historical knowledge is rooted in the society to which the historian belongs. As for sociological knowledge and economic knowledge in particular there is greater objectivity (within certain limits). This is because economic variables escape historical relativity. As for the tendencies we observe on the basis of such variables, their historical relativity depends on their level of abstraction. Such laws as supply and demand or bad money driving out good exist in all economic systems; on the other hand, those laws relative to economic crises in the 19th century might not be directly applicable to Western economies, for example, at a particular phase of their own economic evolution. Economic laws must therefore be distinguished on the basis of their level of abstraction and understood within a particular historical context.

One loses objectivity when one condemns the capitalist economic system outright on account of its creation of surplus value; one loses objectivity when one praises the liberal economic system as being the perfect representative of the free market idea because no actual regime in practice represents the theory exactly. Despite the statistical richness with which such studies (including Aron's) are often endowed, one should not forget that measurable phenomena have many causes that are not all quantifiable. There were many other differences between the Soviet economy and the Western economy than simply central planning vs competition. Viewed from the Third World the West and the Soviet Union were both industrial societies, and all industrial societies tend to embourgeoisement, the reduction of income inequality, and a rising

[485] Aron, *Trois essais*, 318-319, 370.
[486] There is, after all, always the example of Hitler, where greater well-being did not liberalize the regime.
[487] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 978-989.

standard of living, which could force extreme forms of despotism to weaken, but this would not say anything about the two regimes converging, nor would it say whether they would be on the same page morally. The political superstructure is not necessarily determined by the socio-economic infrastructure – the causal network is complex, and Aron is particularly impervious to any suggestions as to the irresistible movement of history, so common among founders of economic and sociological thought.[488] In the next section we shall move from the economic dimension to the social dimension to evaluate another of Marx's claims: that the bourgeois order would be overthrown by class struggle turned to revolution.

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We have demonstrated the nature of industrial society, which both the East and West share in common. We have argued that the self-destruction of capitalism à la Marx has not come to pass because of errors in Marx's economic and sociological thought. Aron sees capitalism and socialism as two sides of the same coin, neither of which can be scientifically proven to be superior to the other. The driver of both types of economic regime is growth – not necessarily an end in and of itself – which is stimulated by a variety of factors dependent on historical context and location. Nevertheless, its spiritual underpinning is buffered by the correct institutional framework, incentives, and capital and production. In guessing at the potential future of Europe and the Soviet Union, the best Aron could do was enumerate certain factors to bear in mind. This is because even somewhat more objective economic "laws" are heavily dependent on the historical context.

[488] Stoffaës, "La « société industrielle » trente ans après," 238. A conflicting view, however, is to be found in Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 194, who argues that Aron viewed increasing social restlessness as an unstoppable process in democracies in industrial societies.

2d – Class Struggle

Aron's second part of the trilogy, *La lutte de classes*, is a continuation of the themes elaborated in the first part and their effect on social class in the two regimes, specifically, the ways in which class struggle is manifested on either side of the Iron Curtain. Aron judged this part of the trilogy to be scientifically superior to the other two,[489] which makes it doubly unfortunate that it was never translated into English and does not feature prominently in the secondary literature.[490] Nevertheless, it is a crucial steppingstone from Aron's analysis of the economy and the particularity of industrial society in history, to his reflections on the political regimes of his era. The starting point is a combination of Tocqueville and Marx: the levelling of society and political equality coupled with class struggle, the hierarchy of consumers and producers, and inequality of outcome.[491] But this time there is a disturbing third participant: Pareto.[492] The inclusion of this neo-Machiavellian is meant to introduce the uncomfortable political element to compensate for the insufficiencies of Marx's purely socio-economic conceptualization of class struggle. Uncomfortable because, while there are governments *for* the people, there has never been government *by* the people: all regimes have always been oligarchic to some extent.[493] Consequently, aside from the struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie, there is also the conflict between circulating elites and the masses. And – because it is worth making this clear from the start – there is no reason to assume that wiping away private ownership of the means of production will prevent class struggle; there will always be conflict between classes.[494] Marx and Pareto also represent two opposite ends of historical philosophy, where the former sees class struggle and revolution as part of a dialectical process leading to utopia, and the latter sees these phenomena as constants in the permanent struggle between the masses and the elite. Aron observes that these two historical philosophies are reflected in two of the most important ideologies of his time, Communism and fascism.[495]

This section will proceed much as the previous one. It will focus more on Marx than Tocqueville because the subject is *class struggle*, which is integral to the Marxian philosophy of history. We will proceed by examining the following: *Class struggle: Marx and the notion of*

[489] Aron, *Mémoires*, 516.

[490] However, it has recently received some attention in Paugam, "Revisiting Aron's *The Class Struggle*," 163-176. In this article Paugam takes up three themes in *La lutte de classes* – the increasing heterogeneity of the working class, the transformation of social conflicts, and the problem of sustained poverty in wealthy societies – and examines to what extent Aron's analysis still holds true today by discussing his own work on the issues and other contemporary research.

[491] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1005-1006.

[492] It has been observed that Aron's impression of Pareto changes over the course of his life (see Campbell, "The Four Paretos of Raymond Aron," 287-298). This observation is supported by Aron's assessment of Pareto in the 1970s, where he identifies four different interpretations of Pareto's work: the fascist, the authoritarian, the liberal Machiavellian, and the cynical interpretation (see Aron, "Interpreting Pareto," 52-53). Campbell's article traces Aron's changing interpretations of Pareto – from a fascist enemy to an anti-Communist ally who demasks secular religions and was a cynical theorist of oligarchy, providing a salutary antidote against utopian illusions – before concluding that Aron's vacillating opinions were the result of his own changing interpretation of his time. It is not our object to survey each interpretation of Pareto; it will suffice to note that the Pareto found in these pages is first the cynical theorist of oligarchy and then, in the section on Machiavellianism, an enabler of fascism.

[493] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1006.

[494] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1008.

[495] Aron, "Structure sociale et structure de l'élite [1949]," 473-474.

class. The social nature of industrial society. Class struggle: Pareto and the ruling elites and masses.

Class Struggle: Marx and the Notion of Class

The first question is why we should focus on class at all. Social reality is ambiguous; a class is a group containing many individuals who are not assembled in the same location; it is neither organized nor legally constituted and one can enter and leave it without even knowing it. Part of this obsession over class had to do with the fascination with Marxism. If our concern with class has not abated, notwithstanding the fall of Marxism, it is because modern societies, to the extent that they are industrial and democratic, are affected by a double contradiction: convinced of the power of endless production, they are shocked by the pockets of poverty that have not yet disappeared; they proclaim the fundamental equality of individuals but are struck by the inequality that exists between citizens – in short, the contradiction between *de jure* equality and *de facto* equality is massive.[496] Debates surrounding socio-economic inequality are consequently intertwined with the progressive democratization of society.

As with the first part of the trilogy it is necessary first of all to have a working definition of "class". We introduced this problem in the earlier section on Marx and the same difficulties emerge.[497] The *Communist Manifesto* presents history as a never-ending war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the exploiters and the exploited; the final chapter of the third volume of *Capital* lists three classes, distinguished by how they make money: wage-earners, capitalists, landowners; in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* the peasants are acknowledged, albeit not accorded the status of a class interestingly enough because they do not enter into complex relations with each other and are not aware of being a class; *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* has an even more complicated division, including the feudal nobility, the bourgeoisie, the petite bourgeoisie, the large and middle peasantry, the small and free peasantry, the servant peasantry, the agricultural workers, and the industrial workers; yet another classification is to be found in *The Class Struggles in France*: financial bourgeoisie, industrial bourgeoisie, commercial bourgeoisie, petite bourgeoisie, peasants, proletariat, *Lumpenproletariat*. This wide array of definitions proves how difficult it can be to pin down the idea of class.

Aron's own time saw a proliferation of theories broaching the notion of class.[498] One of the reasons for the incredible variety is that classes are no longer categorized on the basis of law, as they were in the *ancien régime*. As we observed above, class is both objective and subjective – a point that Marx was on the cusp of making, and he would have made it were it not for the rigid confines of his theory. One has recourse both to the essential reality as well as the individuals' consciousness of it, and this latter aspect can be manifested differently: Aron observed that in the US more people identified themselves as middle class, while in France it was more common for people to call themselves working class. In accordance with the methodological comments with which Aron opened *Dix-huit leçons*, and which derive ultimately from his *Introduction*, we are reminded that distinguishing the "real" situation of the individual from his idea of his situation is impossible because his idea is a part of the reality that the sociologist must study. Therefore, in considering what makes up the reality of a group, one can examine the situation, the attitude of the group's members, one's conscious state, the conscious

[496] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1043-1046.
[497] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1009-1020.
[498] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1021-1042.

state and judgment imposed upon a member by the milieu, etc. These perspectives are not created by the sociologist; they exist in the reality itself. Thus the reality forms an intelligible whole only insofar as people's perception of the reality is taken into account. Therefore, when we discuss class, we can speak of three components: an objective material component (type of work, property, income level, etc.), an objective ideal component (the unity or lack of unity in a class's values, morals, and ideals), and a subjective component (class consciousness, particularly of the sort that would pit one class against another).

We begin with the classes to be found in capitalist society.[499] There are traditionally four: the upper/bourgeois class that typically owns the means of production (the capitalists who exercise a dominant influence over the state); the working class; the middle class(es); the peasant class(es). This division, made partially based on the ownership of the means of production, first of all betrays certain Marxist roots. The working class would be wage-earners and factory workers who, for the most part, do not own property. The upper/bourgeois class could consist of the old aristocracy, politicians, capitalists, managers (who do not own the means of production), and artists and intellectuals (with a bad conscience, of course). The middle class usually comprises small businessmen or industrialists, tradesmen and the self-employed. As for the group divisions in agriculture, one could say that there are the landowners (who are not exploiters), the farmers (who are the agricultural equivalent of the capitalists and industrialists), and the farmworkers.

This taxonomy is obviously open to debate, which is why the notion that the people within these classes feel class consciousness is a bridge too far. The reality of the situation is that each class is divided up into many different subgroups and professions whose interests might all be radically different. This is not to say that a newspaper or intellectual speaking of a class as if it were unified cannot possibly drum up some sense of class solidarity[500] – in fact, intellectuals are needed for this very purpose – but rather that it is misleading to assume the solidarity is there from the beginning. If there would appear to be a fundamental struggle between workers and capitalists, it is because the theory itself has been constructed with this idea in mind. But there is not necessarily an *essential* conflict of interest. And to the extent that there is, the conflict could appear between wage-earners of different companies who have different salaries. On the other hand, interests between workers and capitalists might even converge to the extent that both are benefited when the economy grows, consequently creating additional revenue for the capitalists to reinvest. Class conflict erupts should three conditions be satisfied: the individual believes that his own efforts will not change his future, but rather that his future depends on the class of which he is a part; the non-privileged believe that violence is the only way for them to get ahead; the members of a class must feel a greater connection to their class than to the national community, and that their future is better benefited by the transformation of the global organization of society.[501] This being the case, the *reformist* struggle to better a society's living conditions is inseparable from the capitalist regime; and although revolution is possible, it is not inherent to the structure of this society.

The Social Nature of Industrial Society

[499] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1046-1054.

[500] Aron observes that Lenin came to this realization in the early years of the 20th century, and therefore resolved to convince the workers to give up maximizing their present income in favour of pushing through the interests of the revolutionary struggle. See Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1063.

[501] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1058-1065.

Just as we observed in previously the *economic nature* of industrial society, so here we shall enumerate the components of industrial society's *social nature*, of which Aron identifies four.[502] The first is urbanization or industrialization, which is characterized by the movement of people from the agricultural sector to the industrial and service sectors. The second major tendency of social evolution is "salarization", a term Aron prefers to proletarization because the growing number of wage-earners do not all work in factories. Salarization refers to the growing number of wage-earners on the one hand, and on the other, the decreasing number of independent earners. The other reason why Aron prefers the term salarization to proletarization is because the latter suggests the uniformity of working conditions and the misery of the workers; however, this does not square with the other two tendencies that Aron has observed: differentiation and embourgeoisement. Economic progress has created more complex tasks to be fulfilled and a corresponding need for a more educated workforce. Hence more and more positions open up in more and more types of jobs for those with an increasingly specialized skillset. There are many differences between employees in a steel factory, a hotel, or truck drivers, not to mention after Aron's time, the proliferation of opportunities in finance and information technology, to take two burgeoning examples. Within an industry itself, the division of labour has become more diversified. Lastly, embourgeoisement refers to the increasing standard of living of the majority of the population.

One of the other new factors Aron observes in industrial societies is that, despite the unequal redistribution of capital, there is still the tendency for income to level out. Nevertheless, there will always be those who declare that it is scandalous that a country with the resources to provide for everyone should still have a poor part of the population. Another critique made on principle – even if those critical are aware that profit redistribution ends up benefitting the masses – is that capital income is reprehensible in and of itself because it has not been gained through hard work. Ultimately, the essence of capitalist societies, to the extent that they are materialist and therefore scorn frugality, is to argue over the redistribution of wealth in society. However, as industrial societies acquire more resources and become less unequal, this rivalry should diminish in intensity and violence. Where in the previous section we identified *growth* as the *spirit* in the *economic* dimension of industrial society, here we might say that *equality* is the *spirit* in the *social* dimension of industrial society.

Industrial societies thus witness three trends in regards to the struggle for the redistribution of national income: 1. Reduction of passivity: as tradition declines people begin to demand more; moreover, the system requires people to want more than they have, and so they are simultaneously compelled to demand even more. 2. Intensification of demands: the essence of democracy, combined with industrial civilization, is a state of constant agitation. The recourse to absolute power in order to prevent demands is a permanent possibility and temptation in industrial societies; nevertheless, it is not their natural state, which prefers to tolerate conflicts whilst preventing them from becoming violent. 3. The propensity to violence and revolution weakens: trade unions and representatives of different social groups recognize that compromise works better than conflict (provided that the issue at stake is exclusively redistribution of income). Unions can peacefully bargain for higher wages while managers and corporate leaders can content themselves with their financial situation and enjoy a position of prestige and power. Much more liberty and personal security is vouchsafed to all than if a revolution were to occur and power were to be surrendered to the state. All of this is not to say that perpetual growth at

[502] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1109-1119.

the rates Aron had witnessed (or that we witness today) will always be guaranteed,[503] or that there are not occasional moments of violence such as strikes. Two conflicting and yet compatible sentiments are needed to enter the phase of revolution: hope and despair. Despair at the present situation and hope for another reality.

Whether this struggle for the redistribution of national income will play out in the form of *class conflict* brings us back to the three components of class discussed above: objective/material, objective/ideal (or what Aron refers to as "social distance"), and subjective.[504] We shall follow Aron's analysis of the dynamics of each of these aspects in turn.

By and large, in the long run, as differences in income diminish then differences in ways of life will also diminish. However, first of all, poor societies have hitherto been unable to get rid of pitiable life conditions. In India, for example, it is impossible to rid the country of mass poverty because of the massive discrepancy between the huge population and the country's limited resources. In these circumstances Aron maintains that it is more humane to create riches and improve agriculture and industrialization instead of giving aid to the many unfortunate millions. Throwing cash at countries is hardly sustainable when the infrastructure is not yet in place to use such donations efficiently. What is more, there is no rigorous proportionality between global economic growth and the extinction of pauperism. Eliminating poverty requires first a minimum level of development of the whole collective, but this alone is not enough. The US has a "sub-proletariat" on account of its racial and national diversity, thus attenuating its class consciousness. Britain used to be the greatest world power yet a third of its population was undernourished.[505] By Aron's time it was a second rate power, but one that had eliminated undernourishment and was living more peacefully and comfortably than ever before. France saw greater poverty levels than Britain because of rent-fixing since 1914, and because it was more heterogeneous (some economic sectors and regions were not modernized). In the richest societies enlarged fractions of the population had begun to resemble each other more and more in their external manner of living.

Regarding the relation between material disparity and social distance (or what we have termed the objective/ideal component), if we take the case of Britain, a reduction in the former did not necessarily lead to a reduction in the latter. This was due to history and the survival of quasi-aristocratic traditions. The institution that maintained this social distance more than any other is the school system in Britain; consequently, different accents and ways of speaking are strong indicators of different status levels, although this does not erupt into class conflict. In the US there is social distance on account of race and nationality, but on the other hand, it is mitigated by the egalitarian psychology of the people. Therefore, despite the great economic inequality in the US, about half of Americans still consider themselves middle class.

When it comes to class consciousness, an increasing number of individuals living more alike does not mean that they will have a stronger sense of belonging to a group called a class. To employ the Sartrean vocabulary we came across earlier, a collection of individuals living in like manner might be nothing more than a series, a being-in-itself that is nothing more than an object for another, and not a group, a being-for-itself with a project.[506] The English working

[503] Indeed, he felt that European growth rates of 5% to 6% in the 1950s and 1960s could not last indefinitely. Aron, *Mémoires*, 531.
[504] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1131-1141.
[505] It would seem that a third of its population is once again undernourished or in poverty. See Franceschini, "Un inglese su tre è povero."
[506] Aron, "La classe comme représentation et comme volonté [1965]," 529.

class, for instance, became more homogeneous. On the other side of the coin, any proletarianness about them tended to disappear due to the existence of the trade unions. The steady increase in wages can also make wage-earners less homogeneous, thus decreasing their class consciousness.[507] TV and radio have played an interesting role in fostering some sort of collective consciousness. They lead to a certain uniformity of thinking and living, resulting from a sort of vulgarization of high culture. On the other hand, with the ever increasing wide array of choices put before us thanks to the internet, it may be the case that this uniformity is fracturing again. TV can have the interesting effect of depoliticizing the masses.[508] The internet has bequeathed to us the choice of ignoring the abundant sources of decent reporting in favour of the current fad on YouTube or Facebook. Sometimes politics too is the flavour of the month. Regardless, the state is always distant from people, and at the end of the day, people can only manage those affairs that are close to them. Moving from a being-in-itself to a being-for-itself requires a free human decision that is ultimately influenced but not determined by a common situation.[509]

What are the variables that change people's attitudes with respect to these intermediate steps, and to what extent does mobility within a society favour one or the other?[510] There are two different forms of acceptance of one's class position: traditional (non-reflected, i.e. decreed by destiny) and conscious (this latter form is the next step from traditional due to economic development). The next question is how one determines class stability and satisfaction. Class stability depends on worker satisfaction, which depends on the organization itself. In the US a widespread theory is that people rebel because of psychological problems or difficulties adapting to the community. A normal person, then, is someone who is perfectly integrated into society. In Europe, and especially in France, the tendency is to the other extreme, i.e. a normal person rebels. As always, the truth as to what constitutes normality is probably somewhere between the two extremes. Another way of evaluating class stability and satisfaction is by looking at how workers judge their bosses, even though this can be difficult to measure. Yet another way is considering how an individual or group acts towards society as a whole, in which case political opinion and ideology are integral to understanding their perspective. An industrial economy, however, with full employment and regular growth, leading to better standards of living and with powerful trade unions, is more inclined to pacification of rivalries than escalation. While some worker classes (e.g. in France) were somewhat attracted to the communist ideology, it is often the case that the revolutionary idea was discredited by communist ideology due to history and the fact that it was the state that was expounding the revolutionary idea, which clearly was not working.

Class mobility is linked to the aforementioned because, the greater the chances for promotion, the more likely it is that people will accept their condition; furthermore, regardless of whether it is true or not, if people believe that it is easy to move from one group to another then there is no point in overthrowing society. There are two forms of mobility: horizontal (changing profession or region without a raising or lowering of one's standard of living) and vertical (climbing or descending the social hierarchy). The United States sees high levels of horizontal mobility, with many workers regularly moving from one state to another, or from one job to

[507] Aron, "Structure sociale et structure de l'élite [1949]," 498.
[508] This is perhaps the sad rebuttal to those who would like to blame America's TV news programs for that country's current political gridlock. See "Lexington: What does the Fox say?," *The Economist*.
[509] Aron, "La classe comme représentation et comme volonté [1965]," 530, 538.
[510] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1142-1156.

another. Vertical mobility is further divided into vertical mobility from one generation to the next (the son has a higher post than his father) and vertical mobility within a generation (an individual can climb the ladder within his own lifetime).

Class Struggle: Pareto and the Ruling Elites and Masses

The purpose of the aforementioned has been to illustrate the various complexities inherent to the study of class to begin with, and also to extinguish the Marxist idea of class struggle bringing about revolution and the overthrow of the capitalist regime. This is not to say that Marx errs in choosing to focus on class. Marx is not wrong in his realization that the economy has assumed a greater importance in our time, and it was the purpose of the previous section to demonstrate how this was so. Again, in this section, Marx's initial insight – the importance of class – is of value but, as Aron demonstrates, it does not lead where he wants it to go. Aron instead draws on Pareto to study industrial society's (particularly democratic industrial society's) elites or ruling classes.[511] Of these there are several in charge of various functions. Here Aron introduces a more detailed discussion of *power* than what is found in Marx. He takes his lead from Comte, who distinguished between temporal power and spiritual power: the former based on constraining, the latter on convincing (though they are not mutually exclusive, and often in history one will find that someone exercising one type of power will never totally abandon the other). A third type of power is economic, those who grease the wheels of society and provide for its well-being and growth. A fourth power is political power and, nodding at Weber, this is split between men of state and functionaries. In industrial society these forms of power are manifested in slightly different categories: 1. Spiritual power is held by priests, intellectuals, and scientists. 2. What Aron refers to as the political leaders (*dirigeants politiques*) are two sorts of functionaries: either administrators or heads of army/police. 3. Work directors are either the owners of the means of production or managers, i.e. those qualified for organization and direction. 4. The leaders of the masses try to rally the people and aspire to temporal power and sometimes even spiritual power.

In democratic industrial societies these powers are separated into three forms: 1. The plurality of spiritual powers is characteristic of modern societies. Rarely, however, do the members of the same collective, even if divided as to the content of supreme truth, not have a certain hierarchy of values in common. 2. Radically civil power whose holders accept that its exercise is precarious: those who exercise power in a democracy know they owe this power to the election and are bound to represent the citizens. If they lose the next election then they must accept their defeat. So while democratic societies remain democratic as long as debate is permitted on all topics, yet power is stabilized because of the unanimous, or almost unanimous, acceptance of the principles on which the organization of the state itself is based. 3. The permanent organization of the non-privileged with a view to demanding something, e.g. trade unions. This phenomenon is characteristic of our age.

This separation of power was smoothed over in Soviet society, where the leaders of the masses tried to take control of the various forms of power (political, spiritual, and economic). They banned party conflict and any sort of plurality. All authoritarian revolutions of the 20th century were attempts to restore unity: the unity of the supreme truth; the unity of social classes in a single party; the unity of society and state. The Soviet revolution is well explained by the Machiavellian theory:[512] a minority took control of the state and then an economic and social

[511] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1088-1097.
[512] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1107-1108.

revolution followed. The usefulness of the Machiavellian theory is that it reminds us that political power is always wielded by a minority and that this power counts for as much as economic power. Where this theory falls short is that industrial societies, unlike aristocratic ones, are no longer characterized by the natural unification of the governing class. Where in the *ancien régime* the orders and hierarchy were fixed, now things are in flux and several different governing classes can spring up at any one time: those who organize work, those who manipulate public opinion, the administrative or technical directors, and political leaders. One must study how the governing groups are organized in each collective, to what extent they are separate or unified, and how they compete. Two important insights follow: first, power is increasingly diffused at the increasingly complex macro-level, making it increasingly difficult to apportion blame or responsibility at the micro-level. Second – and here we arrive at the core of Aron's argument in this part of the trilogy and the reason for its intense study – the analysis of social classes leads to an analysis of governing classes and, in turn, to an analysis of political regimes.[513] At this juncture we see the subject of Aron's study both at its most historically unique (industrial societies sharing in common their focus on growth) and as it connects to the ancient question of regime (industrial societies distinguished by their regime).

It remains for us to lay out Aron's conclusions regarding to what extent the ruling classes are transformed given the aforementioned underlying conditions of industrial society.[514] In the long run, as economic development continues, the traditional aristocracy declines. The *political* power of the church declines because the state tends more to secularism and economic activity. This does not mean, however, that the growth of modern industry is incompatible with faith, because essentially the fundamental problem with all industrial societies is the changing and variable relations between the managers of the means of production, the leaders of the masses, politicians, and intellectuals. Therefore, the tendency is toward the type of person who can *manage* all of these variables. This person will not need to have a fantastic technical knowledge of how everything functions in society, nor will he be elected because of his illustrious heritage; rather, he will need to know how to listen and make decisions. Schumpeter had felt that at least aristocrats knew how to govern, whereas capitalists and intellectuals would make for poor politicians. The bourgeois lacked the essential qualities: to know how to speak to simple people, establish authentic relations, and impose himself on others through simple personal authority. In power the bourgeois would show no resolution or will.

Aron is less pessimistic in believing that parliamentary democracy can be sustained as long as elected politicians are not in conflict with other governing classes and the leaders of the masses agree to play by parliamentary rules. Of course, the maintenance of parliamentary rules is

[513] A similar conclusion as to the "primacy of the political" is reached in Stark, who argues that the thrust of Aron's argument in this part of the trilogy is that any extent of class struggle in industrial society is not an economic, but a political problem. See Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 198-199. In a similar vein Hennecke argues that the infeasibility of a planned economy or the potential failure of capitalism is not, in Aron's eyes, unavoidable for economic reasons. Rather, the danger of a planned economy would have more to do with the incompetence of the political leaders; similarly, the danger that capitalism would collapse would have more to do with the possibility of political democracy allowing people to enforce the consequences of their eroded faith in the market system. See Hennecke, "Ein unsicherer Kantonist?," 80-81. Cf. also Aron, *Mémoires*, 519: "The dominant and perhaps the least banal idea of the second course was the connection between the social structure and the political regime – an idea that arose from reflecting on Marx-Pareto. To the extent that class struggle implies the consciousness and organization of classes, whether the struggle manifests itself or not, and even, to a certain extent, whether it exists or not depends on the state, on legislation."

[514] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1157-1168.

itself a concession to tradition, as Aron seems to admit.[515] The second condition is that economic problems not be excessively complex and that problems of foreign policy not be inexpiable. Parliamentary regimes, led by elected bourgeois, are accustomed to times of peace and prosperity. Refuting Schumpeter's pessimism is a tall order because it depends on three conditions: the leaders of the masses accept the methods of the bourgeoisie; the leaders of the economy pose problems that the politicians can resolve; and there be no crises comparable to those experienced between 1919 and 1939.

As for the future of the ruling classes in the West and the Soviet Union, democracies of the 20th century were privy to the division between parliamentarians and demagogues.[516] This conflict is most typical of industrial societies and is a modern transmutation of a phenomenon which was not unfamiliar to the ancient Greeks. They too saw the permanent threat of tyrants, knowing that demagogues were just as capable of capturing the popular will as parliamentarians. The tug-of-war between the two types is inevitable because both of them represent two different sides to democracy: the representative, rule-respecting, prosaic side; and the other side that sees the parliamentarians as an oligarchy, and believes itself to be the true incarnation of the people. Nonetheless, both forces seem inherent to democracy such that the best to be expected might be a stable combination of these two types of people. The union leaders, party leaders, and managers tend to be more moderate and respectful of traditional procedures of legitimacy. The leaders of the masses (who do not necessarily have to be demagogues) are typically university-educated. If they have chosen a political path with the danger of demagoguery, it is generally because they have reached a dead-end in their search for employment, or in their ability to climb the social ladder. Their desires – determined partially by the level of their education and the time and money spent thereon – are out of sync with what they can reasonably expect in the future. Therefore, the more that opportunities for promotion are offered to these people, the less likely it is that a revolution will break out. Thus nothing serves the interest of a conservative politics better than democratization and reforms to education.

Western and Soviet societies evolved according to certain common trends: economic growth, rising standard of living, burgeoning middle class, and means of consumption for the masses. However, Soviet society presented certain similarities to pre-revolutionary Russia: the mass of the population was supervised by a ruling and privileged class, which embodied the state. The Soviet regime was a fusion of state and society, and it represented a compromise between the traditional forms of the Russian state and the novelties of a modern economy. This combination remained stable as long as certain conditions were satisfied: the standard of living of the masses would continue to rise; the privileged class would maintain its solidarity; no rival groups would form to challenge the current ruling class.

The ruling class was composed of four categories: 1. Technicians, engineers, managers, business directors, and directors of the ministry; 2. Party members; 3. Intellectuals; 4. Military. These groupings were not fixed: some technicians were also party members, for example. Thus it was not the case that they would fight against one another. But to what extent was it possible to maintain central planning along the lines of the five-year plans? Moreover, how long could the ruling class continue to sustain the regime on an orthodoxy that was providing ever less nourishment? It was probable that the will to power and the willingness to make sacrifices would

[515] "I am thinking of Great Britain where the union and socialist leaders end up accepting the aristocratic rites of tradition. The conservative deputy rejoices that Westminster contributes to the education of the union leaders. Symbolically, Westminster is tradition." Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1168.
[516] Aron, *La lutte de classes*, 1169-1180.

weaken progressively with the embourgeoisement of the revolution. The more that one wishes to pursue industrial growth along Soviet lines (i.e. heavy industry to the exclusion of consumption and well-being), the more one will be obliged to lower the standard of living of the masses, and the more difficult it will be to pass up means of constraint. Relaxing the pressure on the countryside would mean that Soviet leaders had begun to place their faith in the price mechanism. Aron observed that there was a progressive tendency to "liberalization" or a relaxation of the methods of terror, indicating that Soviet *practice* was beginning to bend ever so slightly in the direction of the West. If that was the case, what was going on with Soviet *ideology*? Can one maintain the economic, political, and ideological rigidity of a society where the level of culture of its entire population does not stop increasing?

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The thrust of this section has been to take us from issues of the economy in industrial society, motivated by considerations of growth, through the social dimension, motivated by considerations of greater equality, to the level of the ruling classes whose job is to ensure that they manage to fulfill these aspirations. We have seen that Marx provided crucial starting points for Aron's investigation but that his conclusions, both economic (pauperization) and social (class conflict), were incorrect. The definition of a class is complex, and Aron's attempt has the merit of taking into account both objective and subjective criteria, making it both stable enough to be workable but also flexible enough to accurately resemble the changing reality. Marx's understanding of power is overly simplistic in that it is allotted to the capitalists alone. Aron draws on Pareto's theory of elites in order to open up another dimension of class struggle (elite vs masses) as well as additional ways to think about power, which becomes increasingly diffused at an increasingly complex macro-level in this day and age. We also saw that class conflict and revolution is not necessarily a first resort for workers with grievances. There is a third dimension that Marx's sociology overlooks because it is relegated to a predetermined superstructure. This is the political realm, where the ends of human existence are not told in advance.

2e – The Constitutional-Pluralist Regime

The third part of Aron's trilogy is a sociological (not philosophical) analysis of political regimes.[517] It avoids the ancient question of the best regime,[518] but it also does not permit of the Machiavellian cynicism that would reduce the study of politics to the study of the competition for power alone. Political regimes in industrial societies are differentiated on the basis of the number of parties: one or many. The number of parties is the key variable for Aron for a number of reasons: it is the *institutionalization of the democratic principle*;[519] it is loyal to the ancient taxonomy of political regimes; it draws on Montesquieu's recognition of representation – the role of parties being to represent the people – as a novel feature of modern societies; all modern societies have in common that there is one or more political parties; and parties are the active element in politics, in that political conflicts occur within or between parties.[520] In this section we shall examine only multi-party regimes,[521] which Aron prefers to call constitutional-pluralist regimes (instead of democratic regimes), for that term is a more accurate description of the functioning of modern democracy, i.e. legally organized and peaceful competition for the exercise of power and where the party in power acts in conformity with the constitution and the laws.[522] Elections form the battleground that determines how power is to be apportioned.

We will proceed by examining the following: *The nature, principle, and ideals of the constitutional-pluralist regime. The constitutional-pluralist regime in motion: its weaknesses and corruption. Industrial society in its economic, social, and political dimensions.*

The Nature, Principle, and Ideals of the Constitutional-Pluralist Regime

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[517] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1248.

[518] On the one hand, Aron is hesitant about philosophical attempts to declare the best regime, noting that such pretensions lie at the root of totalitarian tyranny. See Aron, "La responsabilité sociale du philosophe", 259-260; cf. Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 210-212. On the other hand, it should be noted that elsewhere Aron does believe the constitutional-pluralist regime to be the best, for reasons that derive from both the pessimistic and optimistic defenders of constitutional-pluralism. See Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 135-137. There is also reason to believe that his sociological analysis compels him to conclude that, given the similarity of ends both constitutional-pluralist regimes and monopolistic party regimes set before themselves, that it is the latter that is inferior both in practice and in essence. See Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1446-1447. Cf. also De Ligio, "The Question of Political Regime," 126: "When [Aron] mentions the reasons that led him to 'discard' the philosophical search, a search whose sense he wishes on the other hand to extend, Aron means to say that he has discarded the search for the best regime 'in the abstract.' He does not reject the question 'sociologically' because it 'is part of the reality itself.'" In this article De Ligio locates Aron's teaching about regime and society at the nexus between sociology and political philosophy where the primacy of the political is reasserted.
Mahoney, by contrast, argues that Aron's comparative politics is more Montesquieuan than Aristotelian in that Montesquieu and Aron are less concerned with finding the best regime than with avoiding the worst regime. See Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 145.

[519] This insight also draws on Weber's forms of domination insofar as, formerly, the principle by which power was conferred was based, for example, on birth, an instance of traditional domination; our modern preference for democracy can be understood as a form of rational-legitimate domination.

[520] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1279-1281.

[521] We shall address the issue of single-party regimes within the framework of praxeology.

[522] Aron, *Mémoires*, 521; Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1264-1267. In Aron's earlier lectures given at ENA in 1952 he was still referring to constitutional-pluralism as democracy. See Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*.

The formal beginning to Aron's analysis has us bear in mind four key points in studying constitutional-pluralist regimes: the political system should be taken as a particular social system, with party structure, assemblies, and the choice of ministers mediating the gap between the election and decisions taken by the government; the political system is related to the social infrastructure, made up of social groups and their various conflicts and agreements; one must also study the administration or bureaucracy because it is here that decisions are discussed and executed; finally, we must study the historical environment of the political system because each political system is influenced by traditions, values, and ways of thinking and acting that are specific to each country.[523] The principle variables of the constitutional-pluralist regime are the constitution, the parties, the method of functioning (elections, the workings of parliament, and the relations between the assemblies and the government), pressure groups, and the political class (i.e. who are the people who conduct politics? Who are accepted as leaders?).

Already we see that such considerations do not allow for a clear-cut theory; indeed, they suggest that the political system *does* require us to understand what is going on in the infrastructure (even if this cannot be conferred the level of importance that the Marxists suggest) – and so Aron's preceding analyses of the economic and social particulars of industrial societies will not have been for naught – and they emphasize the variability among constitutional-pluralist regimes due to their different histories and traditions. The trilogy, with its culmination in the sociology of political regimes, is Aron putting into action the insights that formed the basis of his critique of Marxist causation, as we saw earlier. Furthermore, these criteria take seriously the role played by the specific individuals in power. Aron's take on political regimes is not to see them as static sets of mechanical institutions, but rather as breathing organisms whose continuance depends on their members acting according to the regime's respective *principle*. The principle of constitutional-pluralist regimes is respect for law and a sense of compromise, without which the peaceful competition for the exercise of power is doomed to degenerate into civil war or revolution.[524] Aron's "organic" view of the constitutional-pluralist regime also makes him particularly concerned with how this regime develops over time, and the majority of his analysis is geared to examining how it maintains its stability or is alternatively corrupted.

Before proceeding to examine the constitutional-pluralist regime in time, having noted the institutional structure and lifeblood of this regime, let us briefly say a word about the ideals it is intended to defend.[525] These ideals, or at least our interpretations of them, are the result of changing attitudes in history. To some extent they are eternal but also very rooted in our time in their present manifestations. They are the ideals of popular sovereignty, equality, and liberty. In all three cases the reality of constitutional-pluralist regimes does not quite reach the ideal, at times because the ideal is unattainable, and at times because the ideal itself is equivocal. In the case of popular sovereignty the ideal of direct democracy is plainly impossible in this day and age, and for that reason we have representatives. The ideal itself, though, can also be understood in contradictory fashions: it can refer to power expressing the will of the people, or at least of the majority of the people; it can also mean that power should be constitutional and that there are certain judicial principles that apply to all citizens and can never be infringed regardless of the opposition. The first interpretation can lead to the dictatorship of the people, while the second

[523] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1289-1301.
[524] Cf., Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 50-53.
[525] Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 58-75; Cf., Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1250-1254. Morgado observes that the "goal" or "object" of the regime was also integral to Montesquieu's analysis. See Morgado, "Montesquieu and Aron," 248-249.

reinforces respect for the opposition. The ideal of popular sovereignty is buffered by the ideal of equality, which considers all humans equal, and a natural consequence thereof being that they should all have the right to participate in the political process.[526] There is nothing, however, to restrain this logic from penetrating every sphere of social interaction such that we are unsure whether we are talking about equality before the law or equality of outcome in every respect. The inevitable march toward some vague egalitarian ideal also says nothing about whether the regime will be liberal or tyrannical.[527] As a matter of fact, Aron would comment in his 1976 afterword to his *Essai sur les libertés* that a doctrinaire egalitarianism seeking to efface all hierarchies created by biological or social nature would result in tyranny.[528] This brings us to the next point: these ideals are not always mutually compatible. In this vein Aron mentions two different strands of democracy, one common to the French tradition, which elevates equality and thus the expansion of the state as its ideal, and the other common to the English tradition, which elevates individual liberty as its ideal.

Liberty itself has long been a notion subject to much debate.[529] Aron enumerates different conceptions of liberty at different points in his life. In his 1952 lectures at ENA he outlines four types of liberty: political liberty (participation in the political process); liberty as security (in the Montesquieuan sense where one is ruled by laws and not the arbitrary dictates of men); liberty as power (a rather vague notion of self-realization in society);[530] and liberty as autonomy (where one can choose whether or not to participate in different social groups, including that of the nation itself). In *Démocratie et totalitarisme* he addresses the fact that both single-party and multi-party regimes claim liberty as one of their values.[531] Here he lists the following types of liberty: liberty as security (again in the Montesquieuan sense); political liberty (in the Rousseauian sense where one can participate in public affairs and have the feeling that, in obeying the state, he is in fact obeying himself); freedom of opinion and thought; liberty as a minimum of social mobility; and liberty in the workplace (whereby one feels he is being treated equitably and receiving payment proportional to his efforts). These last two liberties are included as a concession to those who consider the first three too classical and philosophical that they do not concern anyone other than the privileged classes. The addition of these liberties also indicates that the novelties explored in the first part of the trilogy have exerted an influence on how we think about politics. In other words, Aron's concepts are not formulated in the abstract, but are firmly tied down to the historical uniqueness of industrial society. In Marx's distinction between formal freedoms – the right to vote, assemble, protest, etc. – and real freedoms, where each individual has the wherewithal to realize himself fully as "master and possessor of all

[526] Elsewhere Aron remarks that "all the regimes of our time align themselves with a democratic *formula*…The 'democratic formula' in our time includes two main translations: the constitutional pluralist regime with multiple parties and the ideocratic regime with only one party." Italics in original. Aron, "La mitraillette, le char d'assaut et l'idée [1961]," 1016.

[527] Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 35. This, Aron notes, is the central problem of our civilization observed by Tocqueville.

[528] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 240.

[529] See, e.g., Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, 21; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, XI, 3; Mill, *On Liberty*; Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 57-72; Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty [1958]"; Pettit, *Republicanism*.

[530] One begins to confuse liberty and equality once liberty is understood to be the capacity or power to do something. Aron would stress in the 1970s that people should be given the minimum means necessary for the exercise of the liberties available to everyone, albeit *within certain limits*. See Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 239-240.

[531] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1451-1453.

institutions in which, all through the centuries, he has been alienated",[532] Aron is willing to go halfway and concede that formal liberties do not necessarily always afford us the feeling of freedom or the sense that we can forge our own destiny.[533] Nevertheless, he does not conclude from this criticism that formal liberties are empty; on the contrary, he seems to indicate that such formal liberties are more real than we would think, and they become ever more necessary as a bulwark against the Promethean impatience to bestow upon us "real liberties".[534] The attempt to forcibly reconcile the consumer, who is a slave to the vagaries of the market, and the citizen, who is equal to all other citizens and in control of the political process, would create the very servitude it was meant to overcome.

To this group of political liberties Aron also adds personal liberties (safety and protection of individuals, freedom of movement both within the country and to other countries, freedom to choose between different forms of employment, including other economic freedoms such as freedom to consume and entrepreneurial freedom, and religious liberty, or more generally, freedom of expression and opinion) and social liberties (right to certain material conditions that would allow one to enjoy the other liberties, e.g. education, health care; this group of liberties also includes the rights of groups such as unions).[535] Aron notes that increasingly liberty has come to be seen as liberation from the state or from any power that would limit our desires or our personalities – a somewhat pessimistic observation made in a pessimistic decade. Above and beyond these three categorizations there is philosophical liberty, which places reason above the passions.[536] It is worth observing how historically grounded some of these conceptions of liberty

[532] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 37.

[533] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés,* 55.

[534] Aron, *Liberté et égalité*, 39; Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 213. See also Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 56: "But the day when the authority of the state extends to the whole of society, on the pretext of securing real liberty, and it no longer recognizes the private sphere, it is the formal liberties that are demanded by the intellectuals and the masses themselves." As Mahoney observes, "Pristine liberalism – the liberalism of Locke or Montesquieu – is suspicious of power. 'Power' must be watched by society and institutionally divided and checked. But Marxist Prometheanism wants to empower Power in order to essentially transform society, to establish human 'wholeness' and the 'real freedoms.' Its spirit challenges 'the separation of spheres and respect for forms' that are at the core of the liberal definition of freedom." Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 79. Mahoney sees Aron's liberalism as unique in being post-Marxist and post-Nietzschean, i.e. in having "self-consciously faced the challenge posed to liberal rationalism by Marxist historicism and Weberian demonism." (p. 73). In it he sees a refusal of Marx's disgust for formal freedoms, an opposition to totalitarian ideology, and a tempered belief in progress in a regime that provides for prosperity, opportunity, and respects rights. (pp. 73-89). Stephen Launay distinguishes Aron's liberalism from traditional liberalism in defining the former as having an historical link between democracy and liberalism and the capacity for renewal in new situations. Launay, *La pensée politique de Raymond Aron*, 146.

[535] It is also noteworthy that Aron does not view economic freedom and parliamentary competition (i.e. political freedom) as inexorably intertwined. See Aron, "La société industrielle, humaine ou inhumaine ?," 454. In fact, on another occasion Aron expressed that a perfectly liberal economic order on Hayekian lines would require a political dictatorship. His reasoning was that the proliferation of interest groups in our time meant that any policy that would lead to a rise in unemployment was bound to be political suicide. See Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 127-128.

[536] The plethora of liberties that Aron recognizes is also the foundation of some of his criticisms of Hayek's narrow definition of liberty in *The Constitution of Liberty*. See Aron, "La définition libérale de la liberté", 627-646. Oppermann writes that Aron reproaches Hayek for his overly optimistic (because economic) view of man. Küppers, by contrast, suggests that Hayek's view is anything but optimistic; it is in fact a realist's perspective that is juridical in its emphasis on the abstractness, generality and formality of law. Anderson and Mahoney point to Aron's observation that even law presupposes a society with shared mores: "No collectivity can attain existence and consciousness, i.e., with respect to common values, without an education which often makes people toe the line.

and elements of democracy are, and that the trick to a healthy constitutional-pluralist regime is to maintain the regime's principle as incremental modifications are made to the institutional framework in response to changing conceptions of these ideals – ideals that are sometimes contradictory and often never absolutely and clearly defined, such that they are always unattainable. Some additional goals are suggested by the very conjunction of industrial society (whose focus is production and growth) with a constitutional-pluralist regime. These include a minimum of education for everyone,[537] coupled with providing as many people as possible a chance for social mobility and a higher standard of living.[538]

However, we should not push too far the historicist implications of the aforementioned. Aron *does* consider protection against arbitrary police interference and against limitations on intellectual freedom to correspond to irrepressible needs of human nature.[539] These protections, especially of freedom of opinion, are particularly important since they are the necessary means to realize higher values, reason, and morality.[540] Similarly, a precondition for free action is the knowledge of what the repercussions of one's actions will be. As Montesquieu maintains then, security is the first form of liberty insofar as one must first know if a particular act will be subject to legal retribution before one can know and enjoy this particular freedom of action. Such

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The ideal of a society in which each one would be able to choose his gods or his values cannot flourish before its individuals are educated in the common life. Hayek's philosophy presupposes, as already acquired, results which past philosophers considered as the primary objects of political action. In order to leave everyone a private sphere of decision and choice, it is still necessary that all or most want to live together and recognize the same system of ideas as true, the same formulation of legitimacy as valid. A society must first be, before it can be free." Aron, "The Liberal Definition of Liberty", trans. Paul Seaton with Daniel Mahoney, 86. What all of the secondary literature shares in common regarding Aron's differences from Hayek is that Aron takes into account the nature of politics and historical reality, as opposed to speaking about liberty as an abstraction. See Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 564; Küppers, "Negative und positive Freiheit," 22; Mahoney, "Introduction: Aron on Hayek," 67-71; Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*, 180-186.

[537] As for what kind of education, Aron feels that "the supreme virtue of the mind in a scientific society and in a revolutionary era is perhaps neither one kind of education nor another [i.e. neither scientific nor humanist], but rather flexibility, imagination, the capacity of not being a prisoner of stereotypes, of remaining open to new developments…I would be tempted to put the accent less on the content of education than on the intellectual virtues it should inculcate: rigor of method and flexibility of mind; to know enough about science and to know that it is irreplaceable without ignoring its real limits; the search for truth and the rejection of dogmatism." Aron, "The Education of the Citizen," 260, 262-263.

[538] Aron, "La société industrielle, humaine ou inhumaine ?," 456.

[539] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 99-100.

[540] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 215. As Serge Audier observes: "The state of parties presupposes a confidence in reason that could be qualified as dialogical or communicational". Audier, *La démocratie conflictuelle*, 27. In this work Audier, a scholar who has published on Aron, Tocqueville, Machiavelli, republicanism, liberalism, and socialism, posits a Machiavellian-Tocquevillean framework as a way to understand Aron's liberalism. He argues that Aron combines Machiavelli's method with Tocqueville's intuition in his conflictual view of democracy. Audier also makes the case that Aron, in maintaining the delicate balance explored in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* between the politician of understanding and the politician of Reason, advances a liberal-socialist understanding of liberty that maintains his core defence of political liberty coupled with a reformist approach that is open to socio-economic liberties. Audier argues that this tendency in Aron's understanding of liberties was latent as far back as his reading of De Man, and that he would have been exposed to ideas of liberal socialism in his youth, particularly through his contact with Célestin Bouglé. Lastly, Audier claims Aron not just for the tradition of French liberalism, transmitted through Elie Halévy, but also for a Kantian inspired French liberal socialist and republican tradition.

a guarantee obtains only if people are ruled by laws and not arbitrarily by men.[541] In a television debate in 1982 with John Kenneth Galbraith, Aron states that in the industrial/democratic societies in which we live the possibility of the individual is always potentially threatened by large collectives. Therefore, Aron defines his liberalism as the "defence of representative institutions, plurality of parties, and the effort of social and economic organizations to safeguard the chances of the individual and fundamental liberties".[542] We have just indicated what Aron considers to be some of these fundamental liberties. Nevertheless, he cautions us against pushing any particular ideal – including popular sovereignty, equality, and liberty – too far. Again, in support of his conviction that the essence of the constitutional-pluralist regime is legality and not popular sovereignty, in an earlier work he raises the danger of popular majorities abusing their power and bringing about despotism instead of liberty.[543] And this is why he rejects both dogmatic democracy – an unwavering adherence to democratic procedure that can lead to a very illiberal and tyrannical majority – as well as dogmatic liberalism, where a policy might bring about circumstances that are deemed oppressive, since some will refuse to compare the liberties gained by one group with the liberties lost by another.[544] As we have established, all regimes are imperfect in practice. Aron sums up the problem thus:

> As with all known political regimes, democracy is something that can be perfectly defined, analyzed and observed without recourse to confusing, transcendental words that leave it open to all sorts of interpretations and criticisms. Democracy is a human reality, and therefore it is imperfect. It is also an irrational reality. The only method – or the only utopia – of rationality would be to take the best people and tell them: "Govern in the common interest". Unfortunately, we have never managed to find the way of knowing who the best are and what the common interest is.[545]

The Constitutional-Pluralist Regime in Motion: its Weaknesses and Corruption

One of the imperfections of constitutional-pluralist regimes – of all regimes, in fact – is that they are oligarchic.[546] Aron takes his cue from the neo-Machiavellians, Pareto, Mosca, Michels, and Burnham. Regardless of the regime, it is increasingly the case that the essence of politics is that decisions are taken *for*, and not *by*, the collective. The question then becomes: who makes up the oligarchy? What privileges do the ruling minority enjoy? What guarantees are given to the governed? Who actually holds power? Not every citizen can join this ruling minority, although favour is usually conferred based on one's social standing. However, it is ever more the case that constitutional-pluralist regimes take people who are not from the "aristocratic" ranks. These regimes have seen a revolution in social and economic life, resulting in a rising standard of living, the generalization of work, and the rupture of traditional hierarchies. And the more those democratic ideas are espoused as being the foundation for modern society the more they move societies in a democratic direction. It is inevitable that those in government will take a little more than they deserve, only to be visited by scandal and public

[541] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 204. However, respect for legality should also include a way of distinguishing between the quality of different laws, or else it risks devolving into a resigned conservatism. See Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, in *Chroniques de guerre*, 648. And, it goes without saying, Aron believes we could not coexist peacefully without law and order. Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 218.
[542] *Libéral ? Vous avez dit libéral ?*, video interview "Apostrophes".
[543] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 70.
[544] Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 209-211.
[545] Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 52-53.
[546] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1302-1314.

outrage if they are unlucky. As for who actually holds power, it depends what one means by "holding power". Capitalist interests do indeed put pressure on statesmen, but Aron emphatically refuses to countenance the idea that the minority controlling the large industries constitute a unified group with a unified representation of the world and a *single* political will that dictates the policy of the regime.[547] This power is best decentralized in constitutional-pluralist regimes and it gradually moves out of the hands of the economically privileged minority as the regime overcomes the preliminary phase of industrialization. Because of the separation of powers, which constitutes a widening gap between the micro and macro levels, it is difficult to ascertain who is really making the decisions – a muddle that nourishes conspiracy theories.[548]

With this being the case, the real problem is preventing power from becoming so dispersed that the regime is left unstable or ineffective.[549] The stability of the regime requires that everyone agree on the constitutional rules and party system, and that these square with the social infrastructure and the preferences of the collective. These preferences are like a moving target, for the level of unemployment or inflation deemed acceptable varies from country to country and era to era. Stability should not be confused with apparent peace. Aron quotes Montesquieu to argue that the dissonance caused by internal squabbling can be good, provided everyone is focused on the general good of the society.[550] As for the efficacy of the regime, Aron identifies three potential threats: the risk of conservatism or paralysis due to excessive concessions made to private interests; the perpetual temptation to opt for the easy way out, e.g. sacrificing necessary military preparation in favour of comfort and wellbeing; inability to choose a coherent policy, thereby surrendering economic and collective prosperity. It is not incidental that Aron discusses these three threats in the context of the decadence of the constitutional-pluralist regimes, especially France, in the 1930s. Institutions alone are not enough to bring about or prevent a regime's collapse. In the 1970s Aron became concerned once more with the decadence and absolute refusal of any authority that he was witnessing.[551] The institutions

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[547] Again, we should forestall ourselves from suggesting that Aron does not see *any* danger in the concentration of political and economic power, the expansion of state activity, the many links between functionaries and industry, etc. Nevertheless, the socialist solution to such problems would aggravate them more than resolve them. See Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 114-115.

[548] Cf. Aron, "Classe sociale, classe politique, classe dirigeante [1960]," 521: "If the ruling categories came to treat each other as enemies and if the state were no longer run by a minority that was resolute and aware of a mission, then the masses would not enjoy, for all that, the exaltation of liberty. On the contrary, they would imagine a mysterious elite spinning the threads of their destiny, where a few are all powerful since there are so many millions that are powerless."

[549] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1315-1326.

[550] "Whenever we see everyone tranquil in a state that calls itself a republic, we can be sure that liberty does not exist there. What is called union in a body politic is a very equivocal thing. The true kind is a union of harmony, whereby all the parts, however opposed they may appear, cooperate for the general good of society – as dissonances in music cooperate in producing overall concord. In a state where we seem to see nothing but commotion there can be union – that is, a harmony resulting in happiness, which alone is true peace. It is as with the parts of the universe, eternally linked together by the action of some and the reaction of others." Montesquieu, *Considerations*, trans. David Lowenthal, Ch. IX; Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1316. Some scholars recently have seen this as evidence of a Machiavellian streak in Aron's thinking about constitutional-pluralist regimes. See Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 149-162; Aurélio, "'Moderate Machiavellianism'," 231-244.

[551] Aron, *In Defense of Decadent Europe*, trans. Stephen Cox, xv-xvii, 224-251. In an earlier essay he remarks: "A collective has the choice between the types of constraint. If it refuses all types simultaneously, it chooses decadence in the end." Aron, "Electeurs, partis, élus [1955]," 759.

remained, but without their animating spirit, which we could include along with the other principles of constitutional-pluralist regimes: "Is it not *virtù*, in the Machiavellian sense, the capacity for collective action and historic vitality, that now, as always, remains the ultimate cause of the fortune of nations and of their rise and fall?"[552] But modern societies are hedonistic and they foster self-interest, and so Aron's faith in constitutional-pluralist regimes seems to waver – in *Liberté et égalité* he comments:

> Our societies are legitimate in the eyes of their members, but they have no other ideal than permitting each individual to choose his own path. I share this ideal and this way of thinking about the society in which I live. But as an observer of societies in history I ask myself: is it possible to stabilize democratic regimes whose principle of legitimacy is the election and whose ideal is the right or freedom of each individual to choose not just his path in his life, which is just, but even his conception of good and evil? The fact is that today it seems extremely difficult to me, whether in the schools or the universities, to speak seriously about the duties of citizens. I think that someone who would risk doing so would appear as if he belonged to a forgotten world.[553]

The problem here is that liberty has gone off the rails, without any possible way or reason for discussing good and bad any longer.[554] Constitutional-pluralist regimes provide us with the greatest number of liberties, but these regimes are also prosaic because their greatest virtues are negative. They underscore the imperfections of human nature, they limit authority, and they accept that power is the result of competition between groups and ideas. Their solutions are always imperfect. Is the aforementioned indicative of their corruption, and, if so, is this corruption inevitable?[555] One way of categorizing corruption is as follows: corruption of political institutions, or public spirit, or social infrastructure. Another way of categorizing corruption is to speak of either excess oligarchy or excess demagogy. These two ways present categorizations that are abstract and make it difficult to determine to which category the corrupt regime belongs. Aron's preference is to speak of *not yet* and *no longer*. Those regimes that are corrupt in the sense of *not yet* are corrupt because they have not yet taken root in the society and so they have an excess of oligarchy. Those regimes that are corrupt in the sense of *no longer* are corrupt because they are worn down by time, overuse, habituation, and so they function no longer. There are thus two difficulties to consider: that of *taking root* and that of *decomposition* or dissolution.

In the case of taking root, Aron identifies five preconditions that must be in place in order to plant a constitutional-pluralist regime. First of all, the constitution and its institutions must be accepted on principle, especially by the most powerful in the country. Second, seeing as how a powerful minority will likely rule in the initial stages, it will be necessary that the oligarchy not manipulate the constitution to its own ends and that it be in favour of the democratic institutions

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[552] Aron, *In Defense of Decadent Europe*, xvii.

[553] Aron, *Liberté et égalité*, 57.

[554] Aron discusses, in the aftermath of May 1968, the consequences of liberty misunderstood and the undermining of all legitimate authority in Aron, "Liberté, libérale ou libertaire ?," 665-701. In this article he outlines the transition from the older Marxist left to the New Left, as represented by followers of Marcuse, Mao, Castro, or the hippies. They alternatively overpoliticize civil society (by advocating greater democracy in companies, universities, the church, etc.) or they seek to retreat from political life entirely. What the various manifestations share in common – and what crucially separates them from a more classical liberal tradition – is their rejection of common respect and authority as such. They demand that "inequality before instruction" be swept away so that everyone can achieve the same honours and position in life; but they also seek to overthrow the repressive social structures and the manipulation that control us. Theirs is an impatient and youthful rebellion against reality.

[555] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1327-1350.

and modernization of the economy and society. Third, those groups that enjoyed some measure of influence and power in the previous regime must also find a place in the new regime lest it crumble amidst their infighting. Fourth, in the initial stages popular demands must be limited. Finally, the administrative apparatus, including administrators, must be in place to ensure the smooth day-to-day functioning of the government. The second through fourth measures are designed to facilitate an equitable distribution of power: if too much is accorded immediately to the masses then the regime can implode; if too much is accorded to the ruling classes, then they will manipulate the regime for their own purposes. It is therefore paramount that the ruling classes in particular be convinced of the justice of the constitution and its institutions. Another way of looking at avoiding this type of corruption is to see it as finding the middle point between an excess of elitism and an excess of populism.[556] And – as obvious as this point should be, it is worth repeating – constitutional-pluralism cannot simply be airlifted into a new society; the process of taking root requires time.

As for the decomposition of a constitutional-pluralist regime, Aron breaks down this risk into three different categories: decomposition on the level of political institutions; decomposition on the level of principle or public spirit; and decomposition on the level of social infrastructure or the regime's ideals. One should note here that these three categories of decomposition correspond to the three categories by which Aron defined the essence of constitutional-pluralist regimes: institutions/structure or nature, principle/animating spirit, and ideals, which are variable in history.[557]

If the regime is threatened on the institutional level, it is because an important part of the country feels that the constitutional law, the party system, or the discord between the two is responsible for the weakness and instability of the executive such that it is incompatible with the common good. Aron does not treat the institutions as lifeforms in and of themselves. They are effective only insofar as the individuals who make up the institutions are willing to invest them with their energy and confidence. Aron's analysis always leaves room for the individual human element in any institutional setup, and so it never reduces the study of political regime or society to cold structuralism.

On the level of principle we can no longer expect modern societies to be virtuous in Montesquieu's meaning of the term. Industrial society requires that we be anything but frugal and so, when we factor this aspect of the socio-economic infrastructure into our analysis of the constitutional-pluralist regime, we find that our principle is abundance. Nonetheless, there is one trait in common between ancient and modern virtue, and that is respect for the laws. Citizens of constitutional-pluralist regimes must respect the laws, in particular the constitution (which is the framework of their conflicts and their unity); they must have demands and opinions and one could almost say they must have partisan passions to animate the regime and prevent it from slipping into uniformity; however, they must not have partisan passions to the point that they destroy any possibility of understanding, i.e. they must be able to compromise, though this should not be excessive either: "An excess of the spirit of compromise is manifested in a corrupt regime when one no longer searches for the solution to the problems on the ground, but searches only for the parliamentary solution."[558] Compromise is futile if one's political opponents do not

[556] Note the similarity to Aristotle's analysis of the breakdown of democracy and oligarchy in *Politics*, 1304b20-1306b22.

[557] Aron's discussion of decomposition in terms of ideals will focus more on how the ideals engendered by the unique fact of industrial society have affected the constitutional-pluralist regime.

[558] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1334.

believe in compromise.[559] Compromise also implies willingness on the part of all parties to listen to the various cases put forward and honestly to acknowledge their share of validity, in addition to requiring the reconciliation of all interests.[560] Where in the problem of constitutional-pluralism taking root we observed that the trick was to find the happy medium between excess elitism and excess populism, so here too we see that the trick is to find the mean between excess partisanship and excess compromise.[561]

On the level of social infrastructure Aron takes a page from Weber in commenting on the steady disappearance of traditional social hierarchies, replaced with rationalist and materialist thinking.[562] There is no longer a closed ruling minority with a single political will, but rather various ruling groups (leaders of masses, functionaries, members of parliament, intellectuals, high level businessmen). These groups understand that peaceful competition is a permanent part of the constitutional-pluralist regime – an understanding they would not have if they did not accept on principle the institutions of parliamentary procedure and representative government. The novelty of mass civilization has also dispelled any fears that non-stop propaganda would engender the inevitable evolution of parties toward extremism or totalitarianism. Aron's intention here is once again to defuse the notion that the changed socio-economic infrastructure will unequivocally corrupt the constitutional-pluralist regime. One of the other challenges he takes up on this score is whether the tasks that a modern state must fulfill have surpassed the constitutional-pluralist regime. The first task is social legislation, which is essentially an administrative task; but it is fallacious to argue that a parliamentary regime prevents the development and functioning of the welfare state and its social services. A second task is partly managing the economy, especially when it comes to industry. Here Aron argues that there is no reason that nationalization, as long as it does not destroy the market mechanism, is incompatible with the maintenance of a parliamentary regime. A third task is the semi-direction of the economy by public powers. The danger here is that the administration might be arbitrary and violate the rights of individuals, or on the contrary, that it might not efficiently do its work. It would seem that constitutional-pluralist regimes favour moving toward a semi-socialist regime to prevent the market from harming any one group too brutally. Hence, as we saw earlier, Aron's inclusion of social mobility and job security as two additional liberties to take into account in industrial society.

It should be noted that a corrupt regime is not necessarily doomed to fall apart immediately; indeed, it can last for some time, and its duration – however imperfect it may be –

[559] Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 100-101.

[560] Audier, *La démocratie conflictuelle*, 35-36.

[561] Elsewhere Aron remarks thus on the fragility of the constitutional-pluralist regime: "Every political regime is an artificial and fragile construction. The American regime demands respect for the work of the *founding fathers*, the acceptance of practices that are contrary to technical rationality and whose modification is forbidden by tradition. It requires obedience to law and moderation in competition, which the violence of certain conflicts and the excesses of politicians never cease to endanger. The decline from democracy to demagogy, which the Greeks loved to describe, is not inevitable, but democracy is never permanently assured because it represents an eternally precarious compromise between consensus and the free expression of opinions and interests. Moreover, events – war, racial conflicts, economic crisis, grandstanding demagogy – can derail politics and leave behind scars that might never be erased." Aron, *Trois essais*, 375.

[562] Ironically, though, one of Aron's arguments in defence of the constitutional-pluralist regime's longevity – the regime is reinforced over time simply because it has so far withstood the test of time – is based on the same traditionalist thinking that he argues is being overthrown by rationalist thought.

may be preferable to the alternative.[563] Giving absolute power to an individual or group in order to restore order to the regime might appear preferable to a paralyzing anarchy; however, it also risks severing the silken thread of legality that guarantees civil peace. Without this fragile consensus on rule of law there is only rule by the strong.

In light of the aforementioned, are Aron's later musings on Western decadence credible? He partook of the pessimism of the 1930s, followed by the optimism of the 1950s, and again the pessimism of the 1970s.[564] While the general direction of modern society and the liberties afforded to us in constitutional-pluralist regimes can weaken our resolve or sense of civic duty, or be uninspiring because they are essentially negative virtues, they do not inevitably destroy the possibility of the citizen. A recent commentator has summed up the problem of liberal democracy thus:

> So to assess the health of liberal democracy, we must keep in mind two opposing thoughts: It is strong because it opens the way to the satisfaction of the real needs and desires of most people, most of the time; and it is weak, ultimately, because its own intellectuals no longer truly believe in it and because there are seemingly ineradicable longings of the human soul that it ignores or pretends do not exist – and, indeed, that its own liberality encourages into expression. Our only defense against [these weaknesses], in the long run, is the inculcation in the body politic of a sense of moderation that understands the inherent limits of politics in the search for human happiness.[565]

The enemies of constitutional-pluralist regimes are those who are impatient or dismissive of the prosaic nature of these regimes. Fortunately, in the case of the traditionalists, the economically privileged, and the ideologists of class, these groups tend to weaken over time as industrial society continues to develop, in that they recognize they have more to lose by overturning the system than by defending it. Three groups that are fundamentally opposed to the nature, principles, and ideals of constitutional-pluralist regimes are the pure (opposed to the regime's nature, they maintain a noble resistance to materialist regimes and are a minority), the violent (opposed to the regime's principles, they are disgusted with compromise and feel that force should be used), and the utopians (opposed to the regime's ideals and the imperfections of reality, they long for a different regime). The constitutional-pluralist regime transitions to a different regime when a minority intent on overthrowing it has either the support of the army, the support of the established powers, or help from a foreign army.

Industrial Society in its Economic, Social, and Political Dimensions

We have analyzed industrial society in its economic, social, and political dimensions, with a view to showing how Aron demonstrates the simplicity of Marx's historical sociology by examining modern society and coming to a much more elaborate and nuanced understanding of its inner workings than can be found in the German bourgeois' writings. Aron's more advanced approach was already announced in his *Introduction*, but it was not until the 1950s that he applied it in his trilogy on industrial society. Nevertheless, Marx plays a crucial role in Aron's entire endeavour, in that it is his ongoing debate with Marx that prompts him to think about

[563] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1349; Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 236-237.

[564] Although we should also note that he was firmly against the "cheap pessimism" that began to flow from the pens of the "new philosophers", leading him to reaffirm his faith in progress in a rare and delightful instance where he gives voice to his exasperation. See Aron, "For Progress," 157-173.

[565] Shulsky, "Liberalism's Beleaguered Victory."

industrial society – acknowledging the importance of the economic factor that Tocqueville ignored – and the notion of class struggle. Marx's construct is at its weakest when we arrive at the final dimension of industrial society: the political regime. In the Marxist schema there is no reason to prefer one regime to another because they are all tools used in the class struggle.[566] Marx forgets politics. Pareto accords a role to politics and recognizes the role of the elite, but he reduces politics to nothing more than the struggle for power, without assigning any importance to the meanings or values that people give themselves for their actions. Aristotle and Montesquieu are aware of the political realm but they are unable to comment on the ways in which industrial society, particularly in the economic sphere, has affected the politics of our time, and to that extent they miss what Marx is getting at.

The strength of Aron's analysis lies in its ability to encompass the various spheres of industrial society, giving each their due, while also illustrating how they are interrelated. We observed earlier that growth and production are the goals of industrial society, although Aron always hastens to add that they are not necessarily ends in and of themselves.[567] Production is in turn a means to realizing further goals such as well-being, equality, or collective power.[568] Each industrial society chooses how it will prioritize these three goals in conjunction with the ideals of its respective political regime. None of these goals, however, can be achieved without first adopting industrial society, technological-bureaucratic rationalization and the rationalization of work through the application of science, urbanization, large organizations, the objectification of human relations, anonymity in the workplace, and increasing solitude and atomization of human interaction.

Industrial society has indeed alienated us. This is not because we have lost our essence or humanity but because we are increasingly a part of complex organizations in a social order in which we cannot realize all of our desires.[569] We cannot escape this order to find our authentic selves or become whole again. Part of the appeal of the totalitarianism that emanates indifferently from Sartre's and Marx's designs is in its claim to bring about a false unanimity.[570] Nevertheless, industrial society does indeed sever the traditional bonds of community, leading individuals to group themselves along other lines such as nationality or race.[571] Industrial society provides us with the opportunity to avoid the choice between conservatism and fanaticism, opting to use scientific, technological, and rational methods to improve our lot.[572] Sacrificing an ideology that impresses the need for a radically different social order does not leave us bereft of ideas and victims to simple pragmatism; on the contrary, it allows ideas and reasonable discussion to flourish once more. Aron's study of industrial society in its various spheres has been able to indicate certain tendencies and ideals toward which the various industrial societies may be directed. Science, however, can only go so far; it cannot determine what the best government is. It is a servant to the quest for ends, which is undertaken by prudence.[573] We thus arrive at the philosophical horizon which forms the backdrop to all political discussions and

[566] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1239-1249.
[567] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 883; Aron, *Trois essais*, 342; Aron, "Risques et chances de la civilisation industrielle," 426; Aron, "La société industrielle, humaine ou inhumaine ?," 456.
[568] Aron, "La société industrielle, humaine ou inhumaine ?", 445.
[569] Aron, *Trois essais*, 401-403.
[570] Aron, "Risques et chances de la civilisation industrielle," 424.
[571] Cf. Aron, *Les désillusions du progrès*, 1597.
[572] Aron, *Trois essais*, 409. Cf. Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, 100. Aron had a keen idea of the limits of science (and historical objectivity) and the philosophical horizon from his early engagement with the work of Max Weber.
[573] Aron, "Progrès technique, progrès économique, progrès social", 438-439.

whose themes are eternal: the relation between the individual and the collective, and the relation between society and state.

Industrial society has modified people's values and ideals. When ideals come into conflict within a regime they are mediated by the laws and the force of the state. Between states there is no universally acknowledged arbiter. From sociology we move to praxeology, the study of action, on the political battlefield where value systems collide and must be reconciled with political necessity. Having come to grips with the similarities and differences about our time in history, we are faced again with the problem of action. Marx's analysis and solution, as we have seen, were simplistic and therefore unsatisfying to Aron. There was, however, another thinker of supreme importance in Aron's life who confronted this same conundrum and will therefore serve as Aron's interlocutor as we proceed: Max Weber.

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We have seen that constitutional-pluralist regimes are defined above all by a constitution and a plurality of parties. Their principle is the respect for law and a sense of compromise. They claim to defend the ideals of popular sovereignty, equality, and liberty, which are ambiguous terms and sometimes mutually contradictory. We have seen that an attempt to push any one of them to their logical conclusion leads to absurdity. Aron distinguished between two different forms of corruption: one caused by the regime not yet having taken root, and the other caused by the regime beginning to decompose. For a regime to successfully take root we saw that the key is to maintain a balance of power between the elite and the masses. Decomposition, on the other hand, can occur on the level of the regime's political institutions (nature), its public spirit (principle), or its social infrastructure or ideals. Constitutional-pluralist regimes' virtues are negative, which is the source both of their fragility as well as their ability to provide most of the time for people's needs. A citizenry that would wish to preserve the institutions of such a regime must first come to grips with the essential imperfection of all regimes and thus temper their own expectations.

Part 3 – Praxeology – Principles of Political Action

3a – Context: Drama in History – Thinking like a Statesman

In this section we will proceed by examining the following: *Beginning to think like a statesman. The postwar order. Decolonization and nationalism. May 1968.*

Beginning to Think like a Statesman

Germany was where Aron experienced political upheavals firsthand. The Weimar Republic was the model example of the decomposition of a constitutional-pluralist regime. We already noted in passing Aron's moralistic support of Germany that was quickly tempered come 1932 by a more realistic approach to politics. His "Simple Principles of Pacifism" read like an impassioned and naïve *cri de coeur* of a true moralist of conviction (*Gesinnungsethiker* – just the sort of person Max Weber considered unfit for public office).[574] They are a list of propositions intended to promote the pacifist cause, such as France disarming in order that Germany not have any justification in arming itself. In light of Aron's reputation for political lucidity such early articles make for strange reading indeed.

Perhaps one of the turning points in the transition from what he later considered "political naïveté" to maturity was the embarrassment Aron felt at being unable to answer a simple and succinct question from Joseph Paganon, the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs in the government of Edouard Herriot. The meeting in 1932 was arranged by Emmanuel Arago, who rubbed elbows with politicians and was a friend of Aron's older brother Adrien. Aron elaborated at some length on the problems of nationalism in Germany and the threat to European stability that Hitler would pose if he were to assume power. When he finished, the minister replied, "The prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, has exceptional authority and is an extraordinary man. It is a propitious moment for all initiatives. But you who have spoken so well to me of Germany and the dangers that loom on the horizon: what would you do if you were in his place?"[575]

If Aron wished to be taken seriously he would have to learn to think politically. This meant putting oneself in the shoes of the statesman and taking into account all of the lack of information and constraints to which he is subject. The process by which one understands an historical actor is the same as that by which one understands a political actor today: one must begin with an act of *Verstehen* or understanding, as Dilthey would put it. His involvement in political commentary up to this point had been typical of the intellectual without responsibilities.[576] Armed now with what Weber called the ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*), Aron would try to take the view of the statesman. In his memoirs he was no longer embarrassed by the articles written after 1931.[577] We find him, for example, a turncoat to his earlier pacifism a year and a half later (in an article written in August 1932):

> If we disarm then who will guarantee us that Schleicher's Germany, if not Mussolini's Italy, will not embark on war adventures to fulfill their all-too-openly

[574] Aron, "Einfache Grundsätze des Pazifismus [1931]," 36-39.
[575] Aron, *Mémoires*, 91.
[576] The readership of *Libres propos*, in which many of his early articles were published, numbered only around 1000 anyway. See Stark, introduction to *Frühe politische Schriften,* 11-12.
[577] Aron, *Mémoires*, 92.

> declared ambitious plans? … Present disarmament…no longer has much to do with the material and moral disarmament dreamt up immediately after the war by the pacifism of Wilson and all the idealists. This dream has failed just as the pacifist ideology has failed as an independent belief, and the moral and political will is bankrupt. We should have the courage to acknowledge this. Perhaps peace will be realized despite all of this – we want to believe it and we do believe it, but it will above all be the work of realistic policies.[578]

The dream of a pure pacifism based on an ethic of conviction – to which Aron held in his earlier text on pacifism – is now disavowed.[579] "The political problem is not a moral problem" – a terse sentiment, not to be understood as some cheap and cynical amoralism, that Aron continued to underwrite in his old age.[580] His other writings at the time showed that he was in opposition to the morally and politically imprudent reparations policy, the harsh treatment meted out on the Germans in the Versailles treaty, especially the War Guilt clause, in support of Franco-German reconciliation and economic assistance for Germany in order to lessen the effects of the world economic crisis, and warning against Hitler.[581]

Aron's growing interest in political leadership led him to undertake a study (left incomplete) of Machiavelli, Machiavellianism, and its relation to modern tyranny.[582] He was unafraid to admit that there were indeed lessons that democracies could learn from totalitarian regimes concerning political resolve.[583] He spent most of the Second World War in London, writing articles for the voice of the Free French Forces, *La France libre*.[584]

The Postwar Order

After the war Aron turned down the Chair of Sociology at the University of Bordeaux, a decision he would later regret, for he had caught the "virus of politics", and so the *spectateur engagé* opted for a career in journalism, as opposed to academia, to comment on history in the making.[585]

In 1948 he published *Le Grand Schisme*,[586] discussing the French Fourth Republic and the diplomatic and ideological cleft that was the bipolar, Cold War world. It is the source of the pithy phrase that Aron applied to the Cold War: "impossible peace, improbable war". Without any time for peace the postwar focus was no longer on multipolar Europe but on the bipolar

[578] Aron, "Abrüstung oder deutsch-französischer Bund? [1932]," 113, 115.

[579] In an article that appears half a year later Aron compares various forms of pacifism that all conform to the ethic of conviction, with the ironic result that some of those who would support a revolutionary pacifism endorse revolutionary war while they condemn interstate war. See Aron, "Reflexionen über den „integralen Pazifismus" [1933]," 136-140, and Stark, introduction to *Frühe politische Schriften*, 14. Cf. Aron's later categorization of pacifisms in Aron, *Peace and War*, 704-709.

[580] Aron, *Mémoires*, 90. Cf., as well, further evidence of his more "realist" turn in political analysis in Aron, "Überlegungen zu einer realistischen Politik – Brief aus Deutschland [1932]," 86-89.

[581] See, e.g., Aron, "Über das Problem der Reparationen [1932]," 61-63; Aron, "Wieviel hat Deutschland bezahlt? [1932]," 95-99.

[582] These incomplete articles are included in the compilation, Aron, *Machiavel*.

[583] See, especially, Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires [1939]," 55-106.

[584] These are collected in Aron, *Chroniques de guerre*.

[585] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 308. Regarding *spectateur engagé* Aron says: "*Spectateur* for me means trying to understand reality and events as objectively as possible. *Engagé*, because I was engaged in all of the great battles of the century: Stalin, Hitler, Algeria, the Left, the Right, etc." See Aron, *Raymond Aron*, video interview "JA2 dernière".

[586] Aron, *Le Grand Schisme*.

world.[587] Europe would be the new theatre for a potential war, and its countries were much weaker on the new international scene. Technological progress and the political and military solidarity of the continents meant that policies had global effects. Mutual suspicion would reign between the two dominant blocs on the periphery of Western civilization, the United States and the Soviet Union. Peace was impossible in this bipolar situation, although it did not necessarily make war inevitable. Aron would later formulate the implications of this radical shift from a multipolar to a bipolar world thus:

> The multipolar and bipolar configurations are as radically opposed as they are pure types. At one extreme, each principal actor is the enemy and the possible partner of all the rest. At the other, there are only two principal actors, enemies by position if not by ideology. In the first case alliances are temporary, in the second they are lasting; in the first case the allies do not recognize any leader, in the second all the political units, save the two leaders, are subject to the will of the latter. In the first case several units remain outside the alliance, in the second all units are willy-nilly obliged to lend their allegiance to one or the other of the leaders, to aggregate themselves into one or the other of the blocs…[A bipolar] system may not, as such, be more unstable or more belligerent than a multipolar system, but it is more seriously threatened by a generalized and inexorable war. Indeed, if all the political units belong to one camp or the other, any kind of local conflict concerns the whole of the system. The balance between the two camps is affected by the behavior of many small units. Lacking a 'third man,' whether arbitrator or contributor, the two great powers are perpetually in conflict, directly or through intermediaries…Lastly, this system which, by the absence of the 'third man,' makes a generalized war more likely, also makes it almost inevitable that a generalized war becomes ideological.[588]

In this new situation it would not do for France to pretend to some morally superior neutrality; on the contrary, politically, strategically, economically, and diplomatically they were on the side of the US, and their vanity would have to take a backseat to this fundamental truth.[589] Aron found it key that Europe as a whole overcome its nationalisms and cooperate economically, which did not imply total state interventionism.[590] Nor, for that matter, did it imply the return to a "dead liberalism".[591] The order of the day was to increase production and productivity. To combat the allure of the secular religion of communism Aron recommended, amongst other measures, the strengthening of unions, works councils, and conferring benefits to workers.[592]

His writings on international politics at the time were geared towards three ends: 1. To make clear the danger of the secular religions to democracies; 2. To liberate France from its obsession with framing foreign policies around the question of Germany; and, 3. To give France a dignified place in the world in accordance with its past and ambitions.[593] He supported the tri-zone division of West Germany and urged his French compatriots to see the USSR and not Germany as the greater threat. Aron understood that times had changed and that postwar

[587] Aron, *Le Grand Schisme*, 13-31.
[588] Aron, *Peace and War*, 138-140.
[589] Aron, "Le pacte Atlantique [1949]," 402.
[590] Aron, *Le Grand Schisme*, 288-291.
[591] Aron's middle of the way economic outlook has recently been studied in Stewart, "The Origins of the 'End of Ideology?'," 177-190.
[592] Aron, *Le Grand Schisme*, 302.
[593] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 266. These writings are found in Aron, *L'âge des empires*, 693-1002.

France's way forward was in the context of Europe, which meant accepting Germany and keeping it within the Western orbit.[594] France would have to moderate its worldly ambitions and most likely sacrifice its colonies; it was now only a regional power at best and would do better to focus on the economy, for the major international issue at this point was the Cold War.

He continued his analysis of the international context in *Les Guerres en chaîne*,[595] which was published in 1951 and pitted Aron against a "holy alliance of communists, progressives, and neutrals, which made him completely isolated."[596] It examined the causes and consequences of the two world wars and then analyzed the present and perspectives on the future, portraying the respective parts played by necessity and accident in history: "The two wars of the 20th century were marked by the nature of the societies that waged them and the wars transformed these societies, but neither the underlying cause, nor the trigger, nor the stake of these wars is to be found in the economic rivalries of the large capitalist countries."[597] In this sense the work was the concrete application of the principles Aron had laid out regarding historical determinism in his *Introduction*.[598] It achieved some success in the United States and was the first of Aron's works to be translated into English as *The Century of Total War*.[599] While it was reviewed with admiration by General de Gaulle, Duverger claimed that Aron incorrectly argued that the USSR was expansionary and, as such, the main threat to the peace. Aron's rebuttal was that one needed only to observe the Sovietization of Central and Eastern Europe, inciting civil wars, mounting

[594] Aron, "Politique allemande : I. La tâche essentielle," 195-199; Aron, "Politique allemande : II. L'éternelle menace," 199-202; Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, 173. In this work Joël Mouric focuses on Aron's engagement with Europe. He draws parallels especially between Aron and Clausewitz, seeing them both as teachers of moderation and prudence. He argues that Aron was not, strictly speaking, an Atlanticist or Cold War liberal. From his very first published text ("Ce que pense la jeunesse universitaire d'Europe") onwards Aron is consistently concerned with maintaining the peace in Europe, hence his interest in Clausewitz, whom Aron considered anything but a warmonger. This would not, however, have made Aron an unabashed supporter of the present European Union. Indeed, one of the recurring themes in the book is Aron's understanding of the relation between political liberty and national traditions, which forms part of the backdrop to his criticism of the Europe of Six, for example. One of the problems with the European experiment is that it does not foster attachment to Brussels.

Mouric is also one of the few scholars to have indicated that Aron's *Introduction* was already amply supplied with tools to fend off threats: it rejects Hegelianism, it recommends the prudent reconciliation of critical philosophy and Kantian morality with an understanding of history, and it acknowledges that man lives constantly surrounded by the remains of the past (p. 105). Here Mouric comes close to our position in the first part, where we observed that man is in an inescapable dialectical relation with his society and his history, making futile any attempt to overthrow the present order and establish a new one. This insight, which we have argued was latent in Aron's understanding of the German authors he studied at the time, has more recently been raised to connect Aron to the thinking of Edmund Burke, not just in Mouric's work, but also in Oppermann, "Burkeanischer Liberalismus," 157-179.

[595] Aron, *Les Guerres en chaîne*.

[596] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 319.

[597] Aron, *Mémoires*, 388.

[598] Cf., Aron, *Le Grand Schisme*, 327ff. For Pierre Hassner, a student of Aron and a scholar of international relations, this mix of the theoretical and the concrete in *Le Grand Schisme* and *Les Guerres en chaîne* is one of their great strengths: "Neither abstract theory nor ephemeral journalism, these works, which are sometimes more or less hybrids, put the concepts of abstract theory into motion and the judgments of journalism into perspective, thus allowing one better to understand both Aron's intellectual endeavour as well as the historical meaning of our age, in their respective combinations of multiplicity and unity, necessity and contingence." Hassner, "L'histoire du XXe siècle," 226.

[599] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Philosopher*, 392; Aron, *The Century of Total War*, trans. E. Dickes and O. Griffiths.

campaigns in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Korea, and set these examples against America's quick disarmament between 1945 and 1946 and the Marshall Plan to see that it was untenable to maintain that both superpowers were equally belligerent.[600]

Decolonization and Nationalism

1956 was a turbulent year for both the West and the East: Britain and France were made aware of their international impotence vis-à-vis the United States during the Suez Crisis, while the Hungarian revolution led that country – and consequently, the rest of the Soviet satellite states – to the sober realization that the West would play no direct, military role in the liberation of Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union. The Communists justified the Russian intervention while castigating France and Britain for their occupation of the Suez Canal Zone; those in support of the French and British governments were diametrically opposed to the Communists' position on both issues; Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, took a more critical stance on Franco-British aggression, perceiving Western imperialism as their motive; finally, many French intellectuals, save for, naturally, the left-leaning ones, disapproved of both actions, but felt that the Russians were more culpable than the French and British.[601] Aron fell into this final category of opinion, although his initial stance following the surprise nationalization of the Suez Canal in July 1956 had been to defend the idea of the French and British use of force.[602] Within months, however, he would direct his ire against France and Britain's late military intervention since this manoeuvre coincided with one of the most telling events in the history of post-Stalinist Soviet hypocrisy – a moment that called more than ever for Western solidarity: "The Hungarian Revolution belonged to universal history; the nationalization of the Suez Canal was an episode in the conflict between the Arab-Muslim world and the West. History will be severe, not because of the intentions but because of the blindness of the French and English ministers."[603]

Simultaneously, the question of Algerian independence was tearing apart the country and would become so grave that it would lead to the return of General de Gaulle, who would establish the Fifth Republic in 1958 and become its first President. Algeria was part of the greater issue of decolonization, which was supported for both culturally sensitive and economic reasons.[604] Unlike the case of Indochina, however, France's roots in Algeria were deep, making for a far more emotionally charged political matter.[605] A younger, more nationalist generation of Arab nationalists formed the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in 1954 with the goal of independence from France. Unfortunately, there were many Europeans who had been in Algeria for a long time, and some of the French in France still entertained hopes of keeping this sentimentally valuable colony as French Algeria. Brutal fighting broke out between the French army and the FLN which brought de Gaulle back to power. His initial position on the future of Algeria was ambiguous, but in the wake of other decolonization efforts on the part of the British and Belgians he took action to secure an end to the war and independence for Algeria by bringing the FLN to the table to agree on the Evian Accords in 1962.

[600] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 326-329.
[601] Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Sociologist*, 34.
[602] Gaspar, "Aron and the Cold War," 52-53.
[603] Aron, "Une Révolution antitotalitaire," i.
[604] Schmale, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 369-371.
[605] Judt, *Postwar*, 285-289.

Prior to the war's conclusion, *Le Figaro*'s official stance on Algeria was to support French Algeria. Aron, for his part, managed early on to offend the Right, by declaring himself in favour of Algerian independence, as well as the Left, by appearing to embrace a position bordering on defeatism.[606] His "icy tone"[607] manifested itself in two works on Algeria published in 1957 and 1958 (respectively, *La Tragédie algérienne* and *L'Algérie et la République*),[608] in which he was at one with the Left's conclusion, but for entirely different and amoral reasons. They were three in number: 1. Raising the Algerian people's standard of living to that enjoyed by the French, as well as giving them equal political representation, would intolerably burden taxpayers and also necessitate some Arab influence in French politics; 2. The Algerian rebels were fighting in the name of an independent nation, and nationalism is a passion far stronger than any consideration of interests; 3. Acknowledging the high probability of separation meant that it was illogical to wait any longer.[609] If integration were conceded to be impossible, then independence was inevitable sooner or later: "To say that Algeria is not France, and to recognize an Algerian political personality is to admit, at base, that tomorrow there will be an Algerian state. And if there must be an Algerian state tomorrow, then sooner or later it will be independent in theory."[610] And as Aron pointed out in *Peace and War*: "The formula 'Algerian War' was already an implicit recognition of the claims of the Algerian nationalists."[611] In any case, it was not necessarily true that Algerian independence would damage French trade and destroy the French economy. After all, Indonesia played a greater role in the Dutch economy than Northern Africa in the French, and the Dutch managed to make do after Indonesian independence. Besides, if the French economy suffered due to Algerian independence, this would merely have put on display the inefficiencies of the French economy.[612] France stood to lose more economically and in terms of diplomatic and military prestige by staying in a fight that it could not win. What pervades Aron's analyses of the Algerian war is this argument coupled with the admission that at times people desire collective freedom even if it risks compromising individual freedom and economic prosperity.[613] Also not to be underestimated – in Aron's time and in our own – is that victory in a conflict is not dependent solely on material forces, but also on the determination and will of the belligerents.[614]

As a result of his commentary some of the more extreme factions on the Right considered Aron a traitor to the country. He even received a threatening letter from the Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) – a French paramilitary group opposed to Algerian independence – menacingly recommending that he remain silent on the issue.[615]

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[606] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 437.
[607] The phrase is François Mauriac's. See Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 301.
[608] Aron, *La Tragédie algérienne*; Aron, *L'Algérie et la République*.
[609] Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 165-166.
[610] Aron, *La Tragédie algérienne*, 583-584.
[611] Aron, *Peace and War*, 328.
[612] Aron, *La Tragédie algérienne*, 582.
[613] Aron must have had Algeria in mind when reviewing Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*, wherein Aron suggests that liberty in their time has been understood in more ways than Hayek is willing to admit, such as "the independence of a population governed by men of their own race or nationality, who reject foreign masters…". See Aron, "La définition libérale de la liberté," 628.
[614] Aron, *Peace and War*, 35. Aron further distinguishes between different aspects of the moral and material dimensions of force in Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 195-235.
[615] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 457-458.

Aron's renown—or notoriety—extended beyond the borders of France and he partook in many debates and meetings that brought together a wide variety of people in Milan, Paris, Oxford, Rhodes, Berlin, the United States, and even the Far East. In addition to Kennan, Oppenheimer, and Polányi, he also had the opportunity to meet Henry Kissinger, on whom he had an enormous intellectual influence.[616] In 1960, on sabbatical, he participated in a joint seminar between Harvard and MIT, where the concept of flexible response was born, which would eventually be employed by the US under the Kennedy administration.[617] The idea behind it was that the continual threat of massive retaliation, which characterized American deterrence strategy in the 1950s, increasingly came to be seen as a hindrance to military manoeuvring.[618] After all, would the threat to retaliate with an all-out nuclear attack be taken seriously in every instance? Were Asia or Latin America worth as much as Europe, not to mention American or Soviet soil? And were any of them worth risking the breakout of a general nuclear war whose consequences would be unimaginable and terrible? In short, the credibility of massive retaliation – and consequently its usefulness as a form of deterrence – had been called into question.[619] Flexible response was designed to broaden the scope for action, thereby according a place to non-nuclear forms of military engagement.

At this time there was also talk of the French developing their own nuclear arsenal. This was a move supported by de Gaulle. Whatever the military virtues or drawbacks of such a move, de Gaulle's intentions seem to have been to encourage his vision of an independent and genuinely European Europe, even if the ultimate consequences were only to underscore France's emancipation from the United States.[620]

While Aron was a French patriot (and *ipso facto* a friend to de Gaulle) and an unconditional supporter of the Atlantic alliance (in this sense he was different from de Gaulle), he questioned France's alleged need for their own nuclear arsenal (*force de frappe*). Why waste time and money assembling nuclear weapons only to aggravate our allies? France's real conflicts lay in Africa and the Middle East where nuclear weapons would be useless.[621] Moreover, if there were a need for nuclear action on the part of the West against the USSR, the US would come to their aid anyways, and with a far greater nuclear payload than anything they could ever muster themselves. The French nuclear arsenal would achieve nothing in damage or deterrence that could not already be surpassed by the Americans, therefore, its only function would be to create further instability by adding another nuclear power to the mix: "In a context where crime and punishment are approximately equal, raising the atomic threshold for either of the duelists will inevitably result in the disproportionate cost of thermonuclear war."[622] Under the guise of achieving greater independence from the US, the *force de frappe* would also alienate the Americans on whose support France's very independence and security depended.[623] Aron was well aware that such a debate could not and should not be carried on in the abstract: one must also acknowledge the difference between the sheer size of the US and the Soviet Union compared to France. In a nuclear showdown the larger countries would undergo losses while the

[616] Kissinger, "My teacher," 129; Kissinger, foreword to *Memoirs*, trans. George Holoch.
[617] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 399-400.
[618] Aron, *Mémoires*, 597.
[619] Cooper, "Raymond Aron and nuclear war," 213.
[620] Hoffmann, *Decline or Renewal?*, 297-300.
[621] Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 159.
[622] Aron, *Le Grand Débat*, 142-143.
[623] Aron, *Le Grand Débat*, 123-126.

comparatively smaller ones would perish entirely.[624] On the other hand, from de Gaulle's perspective, it could be argued that while the time and money spent on the *force de frappe* would not in any way change the geopolitical situation, it would accord *prestige* to France.[625] Or was it time for France finally to grow up and realize it was no longer a world power? Algeria was proof enough that even the most rational interest is sometimes powerless compared to the quest for glory.

May 1968

And sometimes the quest for glory takes on the qualities of farce. In December 1967 Aron resigned from the Sorbonne, dedicating himself entirely to the Ecole pratique des hautes études from January 1968 onwards. His grievances revolved around the lack of reforms to the education system. Reforming the system had three necessary preconditions: that the students not have a say in the election of teachers; that the students not assume the competences of examiners; that the teachers' representatives not be elected by committees on which students or administrative personnel sat.[626] The Sorbonne itself was a dilapidated building whose worn and tired appearance seemed to reflect the obsolescence of its education system. The formerly steady influx of students had escalated to a tidal wave of young and eager bourgeois minds that benefited from the economic boom of the post-war recovery and were equipped with time, money, and egalitarian ideals that flew in the face of any form of authority. The walls of the decrepit institute would not be able to dam this torrent for long.

The cracks began to widen starting in the autumn of 1967 at Nanterre, where students protested the separate male and female residences. Later, on 22 March 1968, five students were arrested for the bombing of the Chase Manhattan Bank and American Express in Paris. Nanterre students censured the arrests and formed a movement with Daniel Cohn-Bendit as one of their leaders. The closing of Nanterre for the second time on 2 May caused the general protests to spill over into the Sorbonne. The police arrived in the Latin Quarter the following day to rid the Sorbonne courtyard of the Union Nationale des Etudiants Français (UNEF) and arrested some protesters, prompting an improvised riot on the part of the students. The police continued to make arrests and responded with tear gas. By 6 May both sides were beginning to stand their ground more firmly.[627] There were skirmishes on 10-11 and 24-25 May (the latter was called the "Night of the Barricades"), headed by advocates of the Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire (JCR) and student union members. "But the accompanying Marxist rhetoric, while familiar enough, masked an essentially anarchist spirit whose immediate objective was the removal and humiliation of authority." [628] Aron called the entire fiasco a "psychodrama", a repeat of the farce of 1848 with Aron playing the part of Tocqueville;[629] however, what began as a simple and usual

[624] Aron, *Le Grand Débat*, 119, 152. For a fuller discussion of Aron and the nuclear debates see Cooper, "Raymond Aron and nuclear war," 203-224.

[625] Aron was not unaware of this argument. See Aron, *Peace and War*, 628-629.

[626] Aron, "La crise de l'Université : Contre l'institution du terrorisme [14 June 1968]," 175-177.

[627] Kedward, *La Vie en bleu*, 417-419.

[628] Judt, *Postwar*, 409.

[629] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 33; Aron, "Immuable et changeante [29 May 1968]," 161-162. The similarities and differences between Aron and Tocqueville, including a discussion of Aron and May 1968, have been analyzed recently in Craiutu, "Raymond Aron and Alexis de Tocqueville," 261-274. Craiutu sees a great deal of overlap (which Aron himself had admitted) between Aron and Tocqueville. His research has been on French liberalism and political moderation, where both Aron and Tocqueville fit most appropriately. Aron and Tocqueville are patriotic defenders of liberty who, unlike Marx, also take into account the primacy and complexity of the political order, the

student protest was becoming ever more serious with each passing day as its spirit had pervaded aircraft manufacturing plants, industries, and Renault factories on the outskirts of Paris: their workers decided to strike.[630] Trade unionists and students were at one in their derision for what they perceived to be de Gaulle's authoritarianism: "Dix ans ça suffit"; "Bon anniversaire, mon général." De Gaulle referred to the entire affair as "la chienlit", which the students playfully turned around on posters to read "la chienlit, c'est lui!"[631] The general feeling that the authorities had lost control was swiftly put to rest at the end of May when de Gaulle called an election, leaving it to the French to decide whether they set greater store by legitimate authority or unbridled chaos. The Gaullists came out on top in the elections; the workers went back to work; the students went home.[632]

Alain Duhamel, who interviewed Aron about the episode of May, suggested that Aron compile his views and publish them. The result of this suggestion was *La Révolution introuvable*, completed in two and a half weeks, whose four principal themes were "Psychodrame ou fin d'une civilisation", "La révolution dans la révolution", "Mort et résurrection du gaullisme", and "Gaullistes et intellectuels en mal d'une révolution." These four themes centered on the absurdity that was May 1968. His analysis of the event was praised by André Malraux, Francis Ponge, Jean Guitton, and his older brother Adrien. His critics seemed less tolerant of the cool, detached form of his analysis than of its critical content: "Raymond Aron is the ultimate inconvenience: the man who stays sober at your Saturnalia and who will afterwards give everybody else an intellectual hang-over."[633] Sartre published a particularly vituperative attack in *Le Nouvel Observateur* called "Les Bastilles de Raymond Aron", in which he declared his former friend to be "unworthy of being a professor."[634] Why was Aron so empty of emotion and ardour at a time that demanded it? Precisely *because* he was so passionately against sacrificing clarity and political reasoning to ephemeral outbursts. He felt that the "revolution" was of a dual nature, meandering between the students' desire to attain power in the university (a desire that would quickly evaporate once they found out how many boring meetings and how much bureaucracy is involved in wielding power) and their general dissatisfaction with the political system (and modern society) as such.[635] At the university the uprising was supported not just by the students but by some professors as well, whose priority had shifted from teaching subjects such as constitutional law to overthrowing the oppressive state that guaranteed them their positions.[636] It ballooned from psychodrama to drama due to the relative weakness of the unions in France, coupled with the inability of the Parti communiste français (PCF) to ward off more extreme actions on the left-wing fringe (such as a mass strike that the activist minorities forced them into anyways), on top of the French penchant for revolution.[637]

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need for moderation in politics, and the role of the intellectual in both 1848 and 1968, not as an emotive voice denouncing the present order, but as someone who must "understand *sine ira et studio* the functioning of [capitalist civilization's] institutions [and] how the demands for equality and justice could be reconciled in practice with freedom and rights." (p. 270). Craiutu also explores these themes from different angles in Craiutu, "Raymond Aron and the tradition of political moderation in France," 271-290; Craiutu, "Faces of Moderation," 261-283.

[630] Judt, *Postwar*, 410.

[631] Kedward, *La Vie en bleu*, 421-422.

[632] Judt, *Postwar*, 411-412.

[633] Leonard, "Books of The Times; Esthetes, Luddites, Leftists on the Barricades."

[634] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 513.

[635] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 64.

[636] Aron, "L'université libérale en péril [28 June 1968]," 183-185.

[637] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 38-40.

What was perhaps most enraging about Aron's book was the cavalier way in which he dismissed the "admirable youth" and refused to take seriously their incoherent grievances.[638] It was precisely by his attempt to "demystify" and "desacralize" the events that his critics were most offended.[639]

For his part, Aron was most disgusted with the preference given to violence in response to stuffy traditionalism and perceived social injustices. This was the budding manifestation of Sartre's group-in-fusion, for whom true freedom could be found only in overthrowing oppressive structures.[640] Aron's analysis of these events comes from a man who had already lived through attempts to go beyond liberalism – attempts that, in spite of their ideals, brought about a totalitarian ending.[641] Authority comes to mean oppression, the oppression caused by the very bland nature of constitutional-pluralist regimes, whose greatest virtues are negative and which require some measure of authority and cooperation in order to function.[642] As Roger Scruton relates of his experience of May 1968:

> What, I asked, do you propose to put in the place of this "bourgeoisie" whom you so despise, and to whom you owe the freedom and prosperity that enable you to play on your toy barricades? What vision of France and its culture compels you? And are you prepared to die for your beliefs, or merely to put others at risk in order to display them?…She replied with a book: Foucault's *Les mots et les choses*, the bible of the *soixante-huitards*, the text which seemed to justify every form of transgression, by showing that obedience is merely defeat. It is an artful book, composed with a satanic mendacity, selectively appropriating facts in order to show that culture and knowledge are nothing but the "discourses" of power. The book is not a work of philosophy but an exercise in rhetoric. Its goal is subversion, not truth, and it is careful to argue – by the old nominalist sleight of hand that was surely invented by the Father of Lies – that "truth" requires inverted commas, that it changes from epoch

[638] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 133.

[639] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 12. His book precipitated three incidents. The first occurred at the University of Tübingen where he was to receive the Prix Montaigne. Student protests (due to Aron's presence and the topic of his presentation: academic neutrality) forced them to move the ceremony to the Institute of Biology, located outside of Tübingen. Professor von Beyme, who was to give the *éloge*, took advantage of the opportunity to lambaste the guest of honour on account of the views expressed in *La Révolution introuvable*. The second was on the occasion of Jean-William Lapierre's thesis defence. Though Aron was no longer working at the Sorbonne, he had been Lapierre's thesis advisor and, therefore, was present at his defence. After an hour students began to interrupt the proceedings, yelling out "the foundations of power are in the street!" and accusing Aron of rigging the statistics he cited in his articles. Amassed outside, the students proclaimed "This is only the beginning. We will continue the fight!" and began to break the windows of the lecture hall. "'You have all been witnesses to our patience', Aron declared to some of the journalists who were present. 'The university will function when the minister of education understands that one does not negotiate with red fascists'. Upon exiting the Sorbonne Aron was shoved and insulted by a handful of extremists 'Aron fasciste!'." The third incident was in 1971 when Aron's lecture at ENS was cancelled because Maoist students burned down the school library. Aron was prohibited from entering ENS again until 1982, after the publication of *Le Spectateur engagé* and at the behest of students, where he gave a lecture on "La bêtise dans l'histoire." Compared to 1971, "the calm returned, but what had not returned was the life." On the balance sheet, the events of May were a grandiose nothing that almost collapsed the government and gave voice to the many latent vicissitudes of modern society – voices that failed to harmonize in a single, coherent theme. See Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 520-525.

[640] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 136.

[641] Cf. Aron, "Student Rebellion," 289-310.

[642] Aron, *La révolution introuvable*, 45.

> to epoch, and is tied to the form of consciousness, the *episteme*, imposed by the class which profits from its propagation. The revolutionary spirit, which searches the world for things to hate, has found in Foucault a new literary formula. Look everywhere for power, he tells his readers, and you will find it. Where there is power there is oppression. And where there is oppression there is the right to destroy. In the street below my window was the translation of that message into deeds.[643]

This should remind us of a key theme in all of Aron's work: the relation between knowledge and action. It is a problem that goes all the way back to his *Introduction*.[644] But Aron was not the only one to contemplate this problem.

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We have examined the profound effect wrought by the simple question from the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs in 1932: what would you do if you were in a position of power? After this moment we saw that Aron's political positions were always taken assuming the constraints of those who must make these decisions. He perceived early on as the Second World War drew to a close that the new conflict would be between the West and the USSR, in which he found himself squarely on the side of the Atlantic alliance. His foresight was no less penetrating when it came to the issue of Algeria, and, albeit for completely different reasons than those held by other supporters of independence, he advocated letting Algeria go. His appreciation of the not always rational role played by national sentiment was also on full display in his analysis of the Hungarian revolution. Aron's concern for the stability and health of the nation-state came to a height during May 1968, when the only thing more perturbing for the protesters than firm opposition was Aron's dispassionate analysis of the psychodrama that was shutting down the country.

[643] Scruton, "How I Became a Conservative [2005]," 5.

[644] "I had decided to be a 'spectateur engagé'. Both spectator of history in the making; to try to be as objective as possible in regards to the history that was unfolding, and at the same time not to be totally detached, to be engaged. I wanted to combine the double attitude of the actor or the spectator. I wrote the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* to show the limits in which one can be both a pure spectator and an actor. These were 'the limits of historical objectivity'. The subtitle did not mean that I spurned objectivity; on the contrary, it meant that the more one wished to be objective, the more necessary it was to know from what point of view or position one expressed oneself and viewed the world." Aron, *Le spectateur engagé*, 298.

3b – Max Weber and the Problem of the Conflict of Values[645]

Raymond Aron discovered Max Weber around the same time that he discovered Karl Marx in the early 1930s during his sojourn in Germany. It was in Max Weber's writings that Aron eventually found the resources and the words to express the relationship between politics and action.[646] There are genuine trade-offs between a profession that demands the absolute pursuit of truth and one that demands the willingness to compromise not only one's own morals (anathema to the moralist) but even the truth itself (anathema to the scientist). This variance at the root of science and politics is probably why Aron was so fond of "failed" statesmen: Thucydides, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, and Weber himself. All of them partook to some extent in politics or war, and they were incredibly gifted thinkers who reflected on the nature of politics or war.

In this section we will examine Aron's ongoing interaction with Max Weber's thought. We will proceed by examining the following: *Aron's discovery of Weber. Weber's two ethics. Weber's vision of world politics and Germany's role. Aron revisits Weber's two ethics in the 1970s. Politics and the conflict of values.*

Aron's Discovery of Weber

The 1930s were rife with political agitation and a looming war, and thus Weber confirmed Aron's intuition that history was once again on the move. Unlike Durkheim, for instance, Weber had caught on to the spirit of the time in a most stimulating way:

> What fascinated me about Max Weber was a vision of universal history, the elucidation of the originality of modern science, and a reflection on man's historical or political condition…reading Max Weber I heard the rumbling and creaking of our civilization, the voice of the Jewish prophets, and, in a pathetic echo, the screaming of the Führer. Bureaucracy on the one side, charismatic authority on the other: the alternative presents itself in every century. In 1932 and 1933 I perceived for the first time, elaborated by a sociologist who was also a philosopher, my hopes and the debates in my conscience.[647]

The young Aron paid his respects to the imposing German thinker by showering him with unabashed admiration and giving him pride of place in his first published work on German sociology.[648] Thirty years later he could not help continuing to evince a profound, albeit mitigated, respect for Weber, even when he disagreed with him.[649] Weber's general view of history was not the only attractive point about him though: his methodology was also more congenial to Aron's approach because it takes individuals and their intentions as the starting point. Hence, both thinkers can preserve some degree of freedom for their actors. This freedom is crucial, for if they want to cross the bridge from knowledge to action, then they must believe that actors have at least *some* role to play in forming the future. This in turn necessitates a view of history that is partial, for what is now our past was once the uncertain future for others.

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[645] A compressed version of this text was published with José Colen as "Statesmanship and Ethics: Aron, Max Weber, and Politics as a Vocation," in *The Companion to Raymond Aron*, 205-216.
[646] Draus, "La philosophie sociale de Raymond Aron," 9.
[647] Aron, *Mémoires*, 105-106.
[648] Aron, *La sociologie allemande,* 81.
[649] Aron, *Les étapes,* 21.

> The complex event has always been the simultaneous result of a great many circumstances. At the crucial moments in history a man made decisions. Similarly, tomorrow other men will make decisions. And these decisions, influenced by the circumstances, always contain a margin of indetermination in the sense that another man, in the same place, could have made a different decision. At every moment there are fundamental tendencies that nevertheless leave men with some measure of free action.[650]

It is partially in light of Weber's focus on the relation between knowledge and action that his solution to Dilthey's problem of historical knowledge – a solution that permeates Aron's *Introduction* – was not to ask, as had Dilthey, Rickert, and Simmel, "under which transcendental conditions is the science of the past universally valid?", but rather, "which parts of this science are independent of the perspective and will of the historian such that they are universally valid?"[651] In other words, the solution lay in emphasizing the *limits of historical objectivity*.[652] For Weber, maintaining some measure of objectivity was possible as long as one did not seek to play the positivist and determine historical *laws*, which was impossible in any case, but instead *partial causal relations* that are tested by postulating counterfactual scenarios.[653] Such scenarios are plausible insofar as history is not determined in advance but by the freely chosen actions of individuals. This component of action was missing from the purely contemplative approach to ensuring objective knowledge, associated with Dilthey.[654]

There is much of the content of Weber's sociology that we will have to leave out of our study, especially those aspects concerning religion and the wealth of information to be found in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.[655] For our purposes it is enough to raise this elective affinity between Weber and Aron,[656] both in terms of their sociological approach, and in terms of their concern with the relation between the never-ending scientific endeavour and the application of its partial conclusions to political decision-making. It is nevertheless not only as a guide for informed action that science is related to political decision-making. The relationship is reciprocal insofar as admitting a realm of freely chosen action has the partial indeterminacy of history as its corollary. Once political action enters the picture, it becomes impossible to speak of the meaning and predetermination of history. There is a final way in which science and action are intertwined: they both have a value reference (*Wertbeziehung*) or affirmation of values as their starting point.[657] It is because of this value reference that Weber's schema is thrown back to subjectivism. This creates a philosophical problem for Weber because of his understanding of science, which is an essentially ever-renewed quest for knowledge and clarity, and which serves as a method for determining adequate means, but not the ends to which these means should be applied, much less the *meaning* or *necessity* of man's life and works.[658] Aron does not dispute

[650] Aron, *Les étapes*, 514.
[651] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 19.
[652] This is the subtitle to Aron's *Introduction*.
[653] Weber, "Die »Objektivität« sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis [1904]," 178ff; Weber, "Kritische Studien auf dem Gebiet der kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik [1906]," 282-283.
[654] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 105-106; Stark, *Das unvollendete Abenteuer*, 97.
[655] Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.
[656] Aron himself notes this *Wahlverwandtschaft* between himself and Weber. See Aron, *Mémoires*, 103.
[657] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science [1959]," trans. Charles Krance, 337.
[658] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," 597-613.

this understanding of the role of science, although he objects to the philosophy that grows out of such a methodology.[659]

For all of Weber's importance to Aron in *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* and *La philosophie critique de l'histoire*, Weber's crucial role is not in treating of problems of historical knowledge alone, but in the grander question of the relation between this limited knowledge, political action, and the values that underlie these decisions. Aron thought that Weber might be considered an existentialist philosopher.[660] Unlike the other great existentialist philosopher, Sartre, Weber was closer to Aron in that both took the time to study everything, although Weber arrives at a *Weltanschauung* of conflict, with which Aron disagrees. Both Aron and Weber were social scientists who commented on the politics of their day and yet never managed to adapt to the conditions necessary to partake fully of political life. We will now turn to Weber to investigate those conditions.

Weber's Two Ethics

On 28 January 1919, against the backdrop of the November Revolution of 1918, Weber gave his famous *Politik als Beruf* lecture before the Münchner Freistudentischer Bund. One could even say that politics surrounded the origins of the lecture itself: Weber initially did not want to give the talk and recommended Friedrich Naumann in his stead. Naumann was ill at the time and it seemed like the opportunity might be passed to Kurt Eisner, whereupon Weber, who cared deeply about the success of the new German democracy, rose to the occasion in order to prevent Eisner from adding any more to the revolutionary fervour of the students.[661] Weber defines politics early on in this lecture as "striving for a share of power or influence over the division of power, be it between states or between groups of people within states."[662] It is here that Weber also sets forth the three qualities that are prerequisites to embarking on a political career: passion (*Leidenschaft*), feeling of responsibility (*Verantwortungsgefühl*), and sense of proportion (*Augenmaß*).[663]

As far as Aron's engagement with this particular teaching is concerned, he focuses primarily on the dichotomy and implications of Weber's ethic of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) and ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*). These two ethics follow on Weber's discussion of the relation between ethics and politics. That the ethic required for effective statesmanship might be different from the personal ethic necessary to be a good Christian, say, is an idea that goes as far back as Machiavelli. Unlike his Florentine predecessor, the fulcrum of political morality in Weber's construct is not only about having the fortitude to choose potentially disagreeable means in order to achieve desired ends, but also having the fortitude to take responsibility for the consequences, intended and unintended, of political action.[664]

In fact, Weber manifests a sincere concern very early on in his life for the consequences of political action. In an early letter, written when he was only fourteen years old, the young Weber complains about the irresponsibility and foolishness of Cicero in his Catiline Orations. Cicero's grave error was to squander his time before the Senate, whimpering and lamenting in the presence of the greatest threat to the republic. Did he honestly think that this moral outburst

[659] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 372.
[660] Aron, *Les étapes*, 312.
[661] Dahrendorf, afterword to *Politik als Beruf*, 85-86, 89, 92-93.
[662] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 506.
[663] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 545.
[664] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 549-552.

would compel Catiline to change his mind? It hardly could have. If anything, Weber suspected, Cicero's speech would lay bare the terror in the ranks of the Senate and, far from dissuading Catiline, such an approach would encourage him and his co-conspirators in their course of action.[665] Surely Cicero's intention was not so short-sighted, but that was precisely the point for Weber: a politically responsible individual must, to the best of his abilities, take into account all of the potential consequences of his actions, both intended and unintended. And if unexpected and unpleasant consequences should arise, the statesman must be ready to take responsibility for them all the same. This theme of unintended consequences also colours Weber's view of history: "What one generation has freely opted for becomes inexorable fate for the next generation. The Puritans chose to be craftsmen; the men of today have to follow suit."[666]

The moralist of conviction (*Gesinnungsethiker*), by contrast, seems at first glance to be content to turn a blind eye to the consequences of his actions – even if such behaviour is counterproductive to his goals – so long as his actions do not betray his conscience. Weber gives the example of the syndicalist who would be unmoved by the fact that his actions could provoke a greater reaction against his class and their interests.[667] One might scoff at the absurdity of the moralist's tendency to abrogate concern for the repercussions of his actions, but what is undeniable is that, within his own moral framework, he is doing right.

Aron thought that Weber had in mind two different types of people when he elaborated his ethic of conviction: the pacifists of Christian inspiration and the revolutionaries. Weber's contention with respect to the former was that if they entirely swept away the moral position of the defeated party, they would be inviting the victors, now in complete control of the moral high ground, to force them into a treaty so unfair that it would sow the seeds of discontent and, in effect, undermine the very pacification that was their creed. As for the latter, the revolutionaries were guilty of positing their goal as an absolute value whose price of attainment could never be too high.[668]

We cannot separate these two ethics so easily, for conceptual problems seem to abound. On the one hand, how can there be an ethic of responsibility without a reference point toward which responsibility is directed? Conviction is therefore a precondition for responsibility.[669] On the other hand, to the extent that the ethic of conviction also means satisfying one's conscience, and not just the exigencies of one's faith, how can we be so certain that one's conscience would not be adversely affected by the failure to achieve an outcome consonant with one's convictions? In this sense conviction could potentially presuppose responsibility, i.e. a concern for consequences.

For Aron these two ethics might not only be conceptually flawed, but even destructive, since they offer a sort of justification to the false realists and false idealists: the former can disregard moral injunctions with impunity, while the latter can wantonly blind themselves to the critical role they are playing in contributing to the collapse of the existing order, thereby paving the way for revolutionaries or tyrants to rule. There is an additional problem worth highlighting: if the dividing line between the two ethics is characterized more or less by concern (or lack thereof) for the consequences of any given action, then it must be assumed that the actor in question has had the opportunity to consider (or refuse to consider) the potential consequences of

[665] Marianne Weber, *Max Weber*, 55-58.
[666] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 349.
[667] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 552.
[668] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 349-350.
[669] Aron, *Les étapes*, 528.

his actions. This assumption prompts Aron to observe that Weber has conflated two different antinomies: political action vs. Christian action and reflected decision vs. immediate choice.[670]

Weber himself seems to have an ambiguous view of the reconcilability of the two ethics. At first he states the decisive point is that there are two "fundamentally different, irrevocably opposed maxims," which are the two ethics.[671] He is, however, also quick to add that neither ethic implies the absolute absence of the other, i.e. the ethic of conviction is not equivalent to a lack of responsibility and the ethic of responsibility is not equivalent to a lack of conviction. In this sense they seem to function almost more as heuristic tools to acquire a keener understanding of the inevitable trade-offs that characterize politics as a vocation.

Towards the end of the lecture though, Weber declares that politics is not conducted with the head alone, and at that point it would seem that it is not enough, as one might earlier have thought, for a statesman to act according to the ethic of responsibility, but that the true statesman must combine both ethics. More pointedly, the statesman's conviction must be not just sterile excitement (*sterile Aufgeregtheit*), but real passion (*echte Leidenschaft*) for the responsibility that defines political life.[672] For Weber it is a stirring sight when a politically mature man, "who feels with his whole soul the responsibility he bears for the real consequences of his actions, and who acts on the basis of an ethics of responsibility, says at some point 'Here I stand, I can do no other.'"[673]

One scholar believes that Weber was hereby indicating a third ethic which he has termed the "responsible ethic of conviction."[674] The statesman must act with a feeling of responsibility but also awareness of the values he is preserving or destroying in acting thus.

> He has to make it clear to himself what ethical (religious, aesthetic, etc.) norms he is violating by, for instance, declaring war in the name of (political) national interest; and conversely, he must know what political demands he neglects by refusing on (for instance) ethical grounds to declare war or to use force at all in the situation.[675]

Lastly, he must bear two other inconvenient facts: once he has initiated the causal chain, he may bring about consequences *contrary to his intentions*, and the causal chain cannot necessarily be stopped at will once it has been set in motion.[676] This all amounts to a very heavy moral burden for the statesman.

Weber's Vision of Politics and Germany's Role

Politics presents aspiring officeholders with certain pitfalls. It can be all too easy to enjoy the feeling of empowerment and let oneself be swept away by projects of self-aggrandizement as opposed to dedicating oneself fully to the task at hand. Like the revolutionary syndicalist and the Christian pacifist, Weber feels that the man who works in politics only to serve his own vanity is

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[670] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," in *Les étapes*, 654.
[671] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 551.
[672] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 558-559.
[673] Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," eds. and trans. Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, 367. Cf. Aron, "Discours aux étudiants allemands," 415: "The man of action is he who stays the course of a grandiose task through daily mediocrities. The European community or the Atlantic community is not the theme for the enthusiasm of a day; it is the final destination of the effort that gives meaning to a life or fixes an objective for a generation."
[674] See Bruun, *Science, Values and Politics*, 270-274.
[675] Bruun, *Science, Values and Politics*, 273.
[676] Bruun, *Science, Values and Politics*, 53.

weak and unfit for the role.[677] What, then, should be the goal of the statesman's constant struggle?

> He can serve a national goal or the whole of humanity, or social and ethical goals, or goals which are cultural, inner-worldly or religious; he may be sustained by a strong faith in 'progress' (however this is understood), or he may coolly reject this kind of faith; he can claim to be the servant of an 'idea' or, rejecting on principle any such aspirations, he may claim to serve external goals of everyday life – but some kind of belief must always be *present*. Otherwise (and there can be no denying this) even political achievements which, outwardly, are supremely successful will be cursed with the nullity of all mortal undertakings.[678]

Weber lays out a platter of viable political ends but, in his case at least, it is quite clear that devotion to Germany and its national interest is supreme. He goes as far as to open one of his political writings by plainly declaring that he has always viewed all politics from the national perspective.[679]

We can detect two major areas of concern that pervade Weber's political writings with respect to Germany's national interest: the preparation of the ruling elite and the civilizing role of German culture. The first area is in domestic politics and is related to the problem of the power vacuum caused by Bismarck's dismissal from politics in 1890 by Emperor Wilhelm II. Weber's chief concern was that Bismarck, in pursuing policies of economic development and the first modern welfare state, had also inadvertently spared his citizens from having to worry about public affairs by hindering the power of the German parliament and creating a stifling bureaucracy that was the only force that could step in to govern after Bismarck's departure.[680] In effect, Bismarck had left behind a politically immature class.[681] In response Weber called for a constitutional democracy that would allow men with the aforementioned prerequisite characteristics for political leadership to compete for office and use the bureaucratic entity as a means to govern (where hitherto it had been in the driver's seat of policy-making). Nationalism was a force that could support a mass political party and transcend the useless parliamentary squabbling of the time. The fatherland was not just any old value amongst others, but rather one of the few serious (unlike the vain pursuit of power), non-illusory, this-worldly (unlike Christianity) political goals to which one could devote oneself.[682] In his impassioned fury, Weber sought out that charismatic *Übermensch* who would rescue Germany from Christian servility, revolutionary stupidity, and bureaucratic sterility.[683]

The second area concerns Germany's prestige in Europe. Max Weber seems to take it for granted that the international order is anarchic by nature and that relations between nations are a function of the nations' power. Indeed, as Aron remarks, the closest Weber ever comes to a sociology of international relations is a few unfinished pages of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.[684] That the international order is characterized by power relations between nation-states is hardly a surprising conclusion for those of the realist school of international relations theory. One might

[677] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 547.
[678] Weber "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," 355.
[679] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 157.
[680] Eliaeson, "Constitutional Caesarism," 134-135; Strong, *Politics without Vision*, 115; and Weber, "Parlament und Regierung, 311-320.
[681] See Weber, "Parliament and Government in Germany," 144.
[682] Turner, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Weber*, 17.
[683] Gerth and Mills, introduction to *From Max Weber*, 43; Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, 107.
[684] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 645; and Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 520-530.

fancy Weber's pessimistic view of the world as a type of realism but Aron is right in reminding us that it is unrealistic not to see the world as it is, but as one wants it to be, and therefore Weber's conception of a world shaped solely by savage power politics is just as far removed from reality as the extreme idealist's view of the world.[685]

Where Weber's conception of world politics sounds much more dated and indubitably *German* is in his emphasis on the uniqueness of German culture. The link between German grandeur and power and culture never seems very rigorously defined – we do not suspect that it would have demanded a thorough, theoretical treatment at the time. Power appears to be the means to German grandeur, which has less to do with the triumph of force than with the spreading of German culture.[686] This propagation of German culture is made to be a moral imperative which the German nation *must* shoulder in its capacity as a *Machtstaat*. Germany is in turn a *Machtstaat* because it has 70 million people.[687]

> The demands placed on a people organized as a *Machtstaat* are inescapable. Future generations, and particularly our own successors, would not hold the Danes, the Swiss, the Dutch or the Norwegians responsible if world power – which in the last analysis means the power to determine the character of culture in the future – were to be shared out, without a struggle, between the regulations of Russian officials on the one hand and the conventions of English-speaking 'society' on the other, with perhaps a dash of Latin *raison* thrown in. They would hold *us* responsible, and quite rightly so, for we are a *Machtstaat* and can therefore, in contrast to those 'small' nations, throw our weight into the balance on this historical issue. That is why we, and not they, have the accursed duty and obligation to history and to the future to resist the inundation of the entire world by those two powers.[688]

It is obvious from this passage that Weber's political thought centres on nationalism, albeit a nationalism that transcends state borders and encompasses greater cultural or ethnic wholes. Aron also points out the liberal and imperialist currents in Weber's thinking.[689] As for the latter he was not of the *mission civilisatrice* stripe, nor did he advocate geopolitical speculation or the plunder of far-off lands for the sole purpose of economic exploitation.[690] As

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[685] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 643. In this sense Aron is more of a realist than Weber. Alessandro Campi has written about Aron's "heterodox" realism in many of its different facets. He argues that Aron's realism, or moderate Machiavellianism, is framed in three different intellectual steps: during the phase of his *Introduction*, his analysis of totalitarianism and secular religions, and his study of international relations. While Aron accepts certain tenets of realism – the perennial significance of power, the critique of ideology, politics' inherently conflictual nature, the primacy of the political, state-centrism, etc. – his own brand displays particularities that make it unique. For example, realism does not negate the role played by ideas or even their normative importance in politics and international relations; hence it refuses to reduce all state motivations to national interest or utilitarian calculations. It is also not inextricably connected to a conservative politics. Because it is a realism that does not focus exclusively on power, it also acknowledges the realistic need for wisdom and the morality of prudence in international affairs. See Campi, "Raymond Aron et la tradition du réalisme politique," 235-248.

[686] Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, 105.

[687] Weber, "Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten," 176.

[688] Weber, "Between Two Laws," 76.

[689] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 644.

[690] Armellini, "Max Weber: scienza e realismo politico," 71. But he did have certain imperialist ambitions such as maintaining military bases in locations as distant as Warsaw and having the German army occupy Liége and Namur for some twenty years. See Gerth and Mills, introduction to *From Max Weber*, 39.

for the former a brief look at Weber's liberal side might shed some light on the peculiarities of the German situation at the time.[691]

Unlike liberalism elsewhere, in Germany the liberal tradition was not rooted in metaphysics or natural law. Weber was a liberal in that he valued the individual as an autonomous cultural being but he did not indulge the conceit of elevating this preference to the level of a universal principle. Therefore the rationalistic liberalism of the French Enlightenment and Revolution, bestowed upon all of humanity, was quite foreign to German sentiments. Similarly, English utilitarianism conflicted with Germany's conception of the role of the state, and so it should come as no surprise that the latter rejected the negative liberty of the former in favour of positive liberty. Because principles in general were something of an embarrassment, German liberalism accepted the primacy of the pragmatism of power as a matter of fact and consequently admitted only a liberalism of *results*. Weber would not live long enough to see the destructive and nihilistic implications such a political position could have; Aron, by contrast, had direct experience of the outcome.

Whether it concerned Weber's stance on German domestic politics or his feelings with regard to Germany's position in Europe, he was steadfast in his loyalty to the German national interest alone, with everything else serving an instrumental purpose. It is for this reason that there is a conspicuous lack of ideological justification in Weber's political arguments.[692] Any ideological justification would have to rely on the unstable foundation of an arbitrary value. The problem with using German power and grandeur alone as the justification is interpreted brilliantly by Aron when he asks:

> By setting the power interests of the German nation as the final end, does Max Weber not wind up sliding into a sort of nihilism? The nation's power, we are told, furthers the prestige, not the quality, of the culture. From that point forward can the nation's power be a final end, the god to whom one sacrifices everything? This is not to deny the rivalry between nations and the need to preserve the standing of the nation on the world stage. But if the nation's power is the supreme value, regardless of the nation's culture, regardless of its leaders, regardless of the means employed, then on what grounds can one say *no* to what Max Weber would have rejected with horror?[693]

And this is perhaps the great tragic irony in Weber's position on world politics: he expected that Germany's acquisition of power would promote German culture and grandeur, though he never conceived of power in terms of national prosperity, for instance, instead of force of arms, and therefore he never thought that the naked pursuit of power could destroy the culture he desperately wished to defend.[694] This oversight is a consequence of a metaphysics rooted in struggle and conflict, at times Darwinian, at times Nietzschean:[695]

> We do not have peace and human happiness to hand down to our descendants, but rather the *eternal struggle* to preserve and raise the quality of our national species. Nor should we indulge in the optimistic expectation that we shall have completed our task once we have made our economic culture as advanced as it can be, and that the process

[691] Eliaeson, "Constitutional Caesarism," 136-139.
[692] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 647.
[693] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 655.
[694] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 656.
[695] Aron, "Max Weber et la politique de puissance," 650.

> of selection through free and 'peaceful' economic competition will then automatically bring victory to the more highly developed type.[696]

This vision of struggle penetrating every sphere of human activity pervades Weber's work, both political and scientific. Aron noticed that it was one of the great faults of the German thinker's impossible philosophy – whose foundation lay in his methodology – that he never considered that one could reconcile one's values.[697] Indeed, there is something curiously Christian about Weber's insistence that one must choose one's *god* (or demon, for that matter), and not one's *gods*.[698] Once a man has chosen his value he must never waver in his devotion. This unwillingness to compromise is fitting for the seeker of truth but not for the statesman.[699]

This would not be the last time that Aron would engage with Weber's mind on the ethics of conviction and responsibility. In two unpublished courses he gave at the Collège de France Aron would explore the theory of political action and this would lead him to re-examine the antinomies of conviction and responsibility, means and ends. It is to Aron's later meditation on Weber's work that we now turn.

Aron Revisits Weber's Two Ethics in the 1970s

In general, it is said that Aron searched for an eternally valid, timeless reference horizon with the resources of Kantian ethics, the highest expression of Christian or formal morality that was not subject to the corruption of history.[700] Aron may be called Kantian in two senses, one theoretical, and the other practical.[701] In his writings it is possible to find a Kantian epistemology, grounded on the primacy of method over being, that leads him to discard both historicist dogmatism and all kinds of irrationalism.

Alongside this Kantian methodology, he also presents a practical philosophy that is not a Kantian orthodoxy – not least for the room he finds for *Realpolitik* – but that retains some traces of Kant and, in particular, the regulatory idea of Reason directing ethics in international relations. This idea is the universal dignity of man, and even a little hope in the idea of Man at the end of History. But Aron did not believe that Kantian ethics were able to establish the idea of the timeless validity of values, unless they remained purely formal.

Aron's near-Kantianism appears behind the criticism of Weber,[702] who could have found in Kant the resources to escape relativism and defend an ethical universalism rather than particularistic values, like his German nationalism. But Aron's return to Kant is rather a rhetorical support. He did not elaborate the theory about his own practice, and never completely abandoned a certain Weberian historicism.

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[696] Weber, "The Nation State and Economic Policy," 16.

[697] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 371-372.

[698] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," 609; Antoni, *Dallo storicismo alla sociologia*, 142-143.

[699] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 352: "The vocation of science is an unconditional appeal to truth. The avocation of the politician does not always tolerate the utterance of truth."

[700] The subject of Aron and his relation to Kant has been explored recently in Hassner, "Raymond Aron and Immanuel Kant," 197-203. Hassner explores the similarities and differences between Aron's and Kant's political thought. The latter is less political than "a legal philosophy based on a moral philosophy and guaranteed by a philosophy of history." (p. 200). Unlike Kant, Aron does not subscribe to any notion of the "cunning of nature" or Providence guiding the course of history, although, Hassner notes, he never forgot Kant's categorical imperative. Hassner concludes with the intriguing idea that by the end of his life it was Kant who had become more Aronian.

[701] Raynaud, "Raymond Aron et le jugement politique," 123-127.

[702] Cf. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 9; Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*, 50.

In two courses in 1972-3 and 1973-4, respectively entitled *Théorie de l'action politique* and *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, two of his most original texts on political theory, in spite of their being unfinished, Aron returns to Weber's ideas and proceeds to a reinterpretation of the problem of political morality.[703] He begins by contrasting the approach of what a political theory of action might be, with an analysis from an aerial perspective of inter-state relations or political regimes. The latter describe systems or constitutions, although not precisely in the legal but rather the sociological sense, as "sets of rules under which a certain state functions", both domestically and internationally.[704] But there is another approach to the political, which roughly corresponds to what we would call policy, which seeks to examine the action of individuals, or parties, or states, within those systems.[705] Of this analysis of political behaviour in a strategic sense, "employing a range of means in accordance with a certain plan," or to achieve certain ends, we can find models in Thucydides, Machiavelli or Clausewitz.[706] It is this analysis that often appears in the form of advice to princes, i.e. how to win and how to succeed, and Aron calls it "praxeology" from *Peace and War* onward.[707] Political action has restrictions of its own, and its own efficacy and internal logic.

In the first of these courses Aron comments on the arguments found in Raymond Polin's book, *Ethique et politique.*[708] In this work, his colleague at the Sorbonne argued that it was impossible to make separate judgments about means and ends, since all techniques – including the political technique – do not in themselves have an intrinsic moral significance, and are a mere assemblage of methods to obtain a certain effect. A technique, as such, would be radically amoral if it were not part of a human action. A human action is always performed in view of certain ends, with which it forms a whole: "The use of a knife to cut meat is a technique; it acquires a moral significance only when the knife is handled by a butcher, a dinner-guest, a surgeon or a murderer."[709] According to Aron, Polin errs in assuming that means cannot be evaluated both for their effectiveness as well as for their ethical significance.

Polin's approach is typical of moral consequentialism: human acts are not, intrinsically, good or bad; they acquire a moral value depending on the results and purposes sought. The author of the work further adds: "the idea that there may be a moral opposition between means and ends always comes from the same confusion; it is considered that a certain conduct may bring into play a purpose, or means, which are not in agreement with them." However, Polin does not help his case any by concluding that "there is no conflict between means and ends; there is just an opposition between two conceptions of moral education, two global conceptions of war," in the end, two *Weltanschauungen*.[710]

Aron presents and criticizes this position. He defends the legitimacy of evaluating means in themselves, an evaluation very distinct from the legitimacy of the ends.[711] It is true that the teleological calculation used implicitly in the political technique of men endowed with free will implies the assessment of possible effects. Aron gives an example, following the same line of

[703] Both texts are posthumous and only summaries by Aron, which were published in the Collège de France Annuaries, but the texts are at BNF, *Manuscrits,* NAF 28060 (024) and NAF 28060 (027).
[704] Aron, *Théorie de l´action politique*, Leçon 1, 2.
[705] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique,* Leçon 1, 3.
[706] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique,* Leçon 1, 4.
[707] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique,* Leçon 1, 12.
[708] Polin, *Ethique et politique*.
[709] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 6, 6.
[710] Polin, *Ethique et politique*, cited in Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 6, 6-7.
[711] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 6, 5.

reasoning as Polin: "Does the knife, or the use of a knife, have a moral meaning, an intrinsic moral value, when it is wielded by a soldier in the trenches? In other words: what order of violence is it morally legitimate to use in war?"[712] In war we are not just soldiers with a duty to overthrow the enemy; we also remain human beings endowed with a sense of dignity and respect for others. Therefore, "even in war there is the question of judging what is non-human, inhuman, what we morally condemn, and what we do not morally condemn." This is an issue that the political philosopher cannot ignore. Is it indeed the case that the ends justify the means? Even if the end is sublime, is it not the case that there might be a "fundamental contradiction between what we ultimately want to achieve and the means that we employ"?[713]

Aron rejects two doctrines that he considers extreme. The first is that "of certain moralists – and Maritain at times seemed to think along these lines – who want to convince us that nothing good can ever come out of evil and that certain means, obnoxious in themselves, always corrupt action and are not conducive to achieving a valid end."[714] The other extreme is "the cynicism which suggests that it is always the crueler or more radical means which are the most effective," and this also seems misplaced to him.[715] This discussion fits into Aron's broader dissatisfaction with the distinction between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction.[716] He came to feel the flaw was that Weber did not acknowledge that the ethic of conviction might incorporate both the absolute wish for certain ends, but also the absolute refusal to use certain means.[717] The question of where to draw the line at what means are permissible in attaining a particular end is an eternal question of political action.[718]

The starting point for Aron's own examination of the relationship between morality and politics is instrumental thought. This instrumental thought is characteristic of transitive action, i.e. "what we use, even without thinking, when it is a question of achieving an end external to the action itself."[719] What he is investigating is how a man of action evaluates his action, a man who wants to achieve certain ends and employs certain means. The question is twofold: on the one hand, how to define the purpose, and, on the other, which means one has the right to use.

According to Aron, the starting point for Weber is not the same, because for him the ends are immediately given in world history.[720] In *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Aron explains his reinterpretation of Weber's argument. This argument distinguishes between two types of ethics. The first is an "ethic of personal perfection," with a universal and timeless meaning, "subject as little as possible to specific social institutions."[721] The second is an ethic "connected to the plurality of values," the roots of which are "the problems of action in this world," not any difficulty in determining the ends. The ends are written in activities themselves: the wise man seeks the truth, the artist beauty. Only in the political field is there a serious problem regarding the knowledge of values, or purposes, due to the "historical condition of man."[722]

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[712] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique,* Leçon 6, 6.
[713] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 6, 6, 7, and 10.
[714] Regarding the controversy with Maritain, see Aron, *Machiavel*, 367-378, 405-416. See also Audier, *Machiavel, conflit et liberté*, 73-87.
[715] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 6, 11.
[716] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique,* Leçon 6, 21.
[717] Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique,* Leçon 7, 3; and Leçon 6, 21-24.
[718] Aron, "De la vérité historique," 92.
[719] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 2, 1.
[720] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 3, 5-6. See Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 79.
[721] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Leçon 3, 7.
[722] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 3, 8.

> In the case of politics, it is whether the proper ends of politics can be easily determined and, on the other hand, even if an end is determined, if it follows that the means we employ are in axiological agreement, in value agreement, with the objectives we have set for ourselves.[723]

Apart from these intrinsic difficulties of the political order, Weber introduces a radical incompatibility between certain values, the contradiction between values, in which Aron does not believe and which does not seem essential to him.[724] This opposition between the ethic of personal perfection and the difficulties of political action "is a truism that we must often repeat, for the essence of the intellectual, humanist, and utopian is to refuse it,"[725] and to build models in which an ideal society and the moral and political conduct of a person are in harmony. There is thus a close connection between the pacifist and the revolutionary in that both refuse the world as it is and end up trying to remake the world so that they no longer have to put up with the political ethic of the plurality of values and can instead live purely according to the ethic of personal perfection.[726] For Aron, there is no "pre-established harmony between the determinism of the historical world and the desire for value," i.e. progress does not have to coincide with the good, and the trends of history do not imply the creation of a human ideal.[727] Nevertheless, he strives to reconcile the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility, as the opposition between them does not need to be radical. He does so by following a path we laid out above: it is conviction that determines the choice of ends for which one is responsible.[728]

Secondly, the ethic of conviction also implies the "unconditional refusal to employ certain means." Since Weber often uses the aphorism "every person chooses his own god or

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[723] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 3, 9.

[724] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 3, 12-13.

[725] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 3, 13.

[726] The connection Aron establishes between the pacifist and the revolutionary is worth quoting at length: "This progression from pacifist opponent to intransigent revolutionary seems psychologically understandable to me. To begin with, many of those who were revolutionaries in our time were rebels either because of the injustices of the existing order or because of the violence itself. Many of the men of the 1914 generation became pacifists and, up until a certain point, they were unconditional pacifists in opposition to the unlimited violence of the First World War; but many of these pacifists adhered to a revolutionary movement. Once they were integrated into this revolutionary movement they in turn became unconditional revolutionaries. This progression seems to me both psychologically and ideologically instructive. One begins by refusing the ethic particular to politics, i.e. the second ethic [the political ethic of the plurality of values]. One begins by refusing the ethic of responsibility and the inevitable impurities that accompany it in the struggle for power. One refuses the ethic particular to politics because one wishes for a world where one can act according to the first ethic [the ethic of personal perfection]. One refuses the professional ethic of politics because one would like a world where each person can act morally, and because one realizes that the world cannot be transformed by refusing to accept it, one decides to transform it by acting in it, and from that moment on the desired goal takes on an absolute value. The desired goal, revolution, becomes an absolute value as such. But once one attributes to the desired end an absolute value, and once one sees in the society that one is going to create the necessary condition for everyone to be able to act morally, one logically consents to all means of the ethic of responsibility to attain this absolutely valid end. In other words, total Machiavellianism becomes morally justified once the security of the society or a certain social transformation becomes the necessary condition for all moral values. It is thus that a great number of unconditional pacifists were transformed into militant revolutionaries and, as revolutionaries and militants, finally became ready to accept any means. One of many examples of the indefinite casuistry of political action." Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Leçon 4, 8-9.

[727] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 3, 13.

[728] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 4, 3-4.

demon,"[729] he authorizes or suggests an interpretation of his philosophy as being a "decisionist or, strictly speaking, nihilistic" philosophy, in which "determining the purposes completely escapes rational argument," and so the ends become a mere arbitrary choice.[730] Aron chooses not to interpret Weber in this way. For him, above or beyond the political decision in terms of consequences, the German sociologist strives to preserve an ethical sphere, which in itself has its own rewards.

Politics and the Conflict of Values

Let us draw some general conclusions from the aforementioned comments on Aron, Weber, politics, and the conflict of values. In his critique of Weber's philosophy Aron presents some of the ideas that are central to his own political philosophy. First of all, the "heterogeneity between instrumental rationality and axiological rationality," i.e. there is a rationality of means that can be assessed on the basis of their fitness for the purpose, but means can also be evaluated in terms of moral standards.[731]

Nevertheless, this heterogeneity between efficacy and moral value should be corrected or limited by the axiological consequences of the choice of means. The ethic of conviction therefore applies to both means *and* ends. Aron's riposte to Weber's differentiation between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility is a distinction that, on the surface, would appear to be quite similar: the suprapolitical ethic of personal perfection vs the political ethic that acknowledges the plurality of values. Weber's ethic of responsibility implicitly recognizes the plurality of values in politics and asks the statesman to take responsibility for the outcomes, intended or not, of his actions.

The ethic of personal perfection, too, would appear to be akin to the ethic of conviction: both pretend to a realm higher than politics; however, we believe that the essential difference lies in the open-endedness of the ethic of personal perfection. Weber seems to speak of the ethic of conviction as if the individual adhering to it were a closed system unable or unwilling to act any differently, lest he compromise his ethical devotion. People are not closed to reason or persuasion from others, and indeed, one might convince the ethicist of conviction that his conviction is ill-founded or that departing from it would allow him to satisfy a higher conviction. Conviction, or aiming at what an individual considers to be the good, is not an end point but an *ongoing process*. Aron's ethic of personal perfection captures this never-ending attempt on the part of man to attain to the good.

This consideration brings us to our second point: there is an "inevitable plurality of ends that can be proposed in the specifically political arena."[732] However, *contra* Weber, there is nothing to suggest that these human ends are always incompatible, nor are they a mere matter of preference. It is enough to study modern society and the various common concerns that men have, to see that there is room for reasonable debate among the plurality of values:

> Concern for the equal dignity of all individuals and, in our societies, for the reduction of economic inequalities; acceptance of natural inequalities and the need to encourage the development of individual talents; awareness of the social hierarchy accompanied by the will to make it equitable through the proper selection of rulers, and acceptable to those that are ruled, by restrictions on the prerogatives of the powerful: whoever

[729] Aron, *Les étapes*, 550.
[730] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 4, 5.
[731] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 4, 9.
[732] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 4, 9.

> chooses to ignore one or another of these fundamental ideas may not be guilty of scientific error or moral deficiency, but he *is* unreasonable. Perhaps Weber would simply reply: certainly, but why is it better to be reasonable than impassioned?[733]

Aron provides his own counterattack to this hypothetical challenge:

> Max Weber tends to make the choice of reason or science an existential one among other possible choices, but it seems to me that the ethic of responsibility logically requires the preference given to rational thinking.[734]

Not only would it be unreasonable to accord to reason or science the status of just one choice among others, but it would also represent a betrayal of Weber's life work. The nihilistic trend in Weber's thought is the result of "the impossibility of scientifically demonstrating a value judgment or a moral imperative."[735]

> The expression *war of the gods* is the result of translating an indisputable fact (individuals have conjured up incompatible representations of the world) into a philosophy that no one lives by nor subscribes to, because it is contradictory (all representations are equivalent, none being either true or false).[736]

Indeed, all cultures have been interested in truth. Refusing to accord some form of primacy to science, technology, and reason is to ignore the way we actually live and what has

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[733] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 368.

[734] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique,* Leçon 4, 10-11.

[735] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 361. Weber's nihilism posed a problem for Aron especially in his *Introduction*. Aron's distancing from Weber, passed through a reading of Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History* and the sober school of Tocqueville, is a common theme in the literature. The argument is that Aron parted ways with Weber, who represented a nihilistic dead end. Aron sees the folly in Weber's fact-value gap, his decisionism, and his war of the gods; instead, Aron refuses to surrender his belief in reason and offers equity or fairness as a replacement for Weber's vain search for objectivity. To strive for equity, as Anderson explains, is an attempt to "*reduce bias* in the exploration of historical and social reality rather than pursuing an illusory ideal of neutrality." (p. 48, italics in original). There are five forms of this bias: arbitrarily choosing one's facts; presuming the results of one's research in the very definitions employed; claiming to know with certainty phenomena that are by nature equivocal; arbitrarily deciding what is important in an analysis; and letting one's judgment of a given social order infect one's study of that order. See Aron, "Science et conscience de la société," 62-71; Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 1-16; Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*, 43-52; Colen, *Facts and Values*, 103; Judt, *Burden of Responsibility*, 144-147. Oppermann also touches refreshingly on these themes, positioning Aron between Strauss and Weber, insofar as Aron rejects both the notion of radically incoherent historical diversity as well as the idea that a suprahistorical order exists. Aron's concern for "statesmanlike prudence" leads him to a moderation that Weber's philosophy excludes. Because Oppermann's goal is to integrate his discussion of Weber into his overarching argument concerning liberty and tyranny he also draws heavily on Aron's "Max Weber et la politique de puissance" and Weber's own political writings. The consequences of Weber's philosophy certainly do not lead him to liberalism, although Oppermann correctly points out that this does not lead Aron (as it does Strauss) to throw the baby out with the bathwater and entirely reject Weber's methodology because his philosophy errs; nor, for that matter, does his philosophy lead to Hitler, even if it is not well enough equipped to hinder one's journey down that path. For all of the Tocquevillean overtures, Aron's probabilism can also be connected to his early reading of Weber, as Oppermann argues. Aron rejects a couple of offers to revisit Max Weber later on in his life, indicating a waning interest compared to the 1930s. It would have been difficult for Aron to trump his youthful affection for Weber, although Weber's interest in the relation between science and politics, knowledge and action, remained a going concern for Aron his entire life, and his reworking of Weber's ethics in his unpublished lectures from the 1970s is proof of his lifelong dialogue with the German sociologist on praxeology and the problem of the conflict of values. See Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 321-342.

[736] Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 371.

allowed us to advance beyond our animalistic roots – embarking on the search for truth and practicing science are activities in which all humans can partake.[737]

Finally, we arrive at a third general conclusion of this subsection. Part of the strength of Aron's critique of Weber is that he challenges the German sociologist on his own ground.[738] Aron approaches the study of man and society by examining the reasons that man gives himself for his social actions. An individual could not be a consistent nihilist or relativist without betraying the tenets of nihilism or relativism. Indeed, the conflict of values is inevitable only if one assumes that the values currently in play are fixed. In other words, it is only by conceding that the work of science is complete that we must arrive at the conflict of values. But this work, for both Weber and Aron, is an ongoing process that is always incomplete. Thus, as Aron concluded about Dilthey above, historical relativism is perpetually overcome by reason.

As Weber stresses, science cannot *impose* values on us, but it can certainly work towards *clarifying* what they are, what we hold dear, and assist us in our quest for self-knowledge. This process, however, is by nature ongoing and incomplete. In this sense we believe Aron accepts Weber's understanding of science and is perhaps even more faithful to it than the German sociologist himself. By acknowledging the open-endedness of reason, scientific research, and political interaction, Aron surpasses Weber in rendering a more accurate depiction of man's political existence. Lastly, by staying true to Weber's methodological individualism[739] Aron is able to avoid attributing a nihilistic unity to the social whole that none of its individual members experiences.

> Historical existence is essentially creation and affirmation of values. The cultural sciences try to understand this existence and approach it with value references. Human life is made up of a series of choices by which men construct their system of values. The cultural sciences try to reconstruct and understand the human choices that have built up a universe of values.[740]

We have already seen this division between the micro and macro levels of analysis. Weber is led to his philosophy because he laments the irrationality and futility of what he sees on the macro level, all the while forgetting that the macro level is built up of individual intentions

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[737] Aron, *Trois essais*, 341, 349. Cf. also Aron, *Mémoires*, 972: "If the ambitious and precarious civilizations must realize the dreams of the prophets in the distant future, what universal vocation could unite them other than Reason?" Elsewhere in his *Mémoires* Aron would also modify the more nihilistic portions of his dissertation, separating social values from moral virtues, reinforcing the foundations of scientific truth and human universalism. See Aron, *Mémoires*, 985.

[738] This is similar to the conclusion reached by Philippe Raynaud, who has written on both Aron and Weber, in Raynaud, "Raymond Aron et Max Weber," 213-221. In this article Raynaud shows how Aron decouples Weber's epistemology from the quasi-nihilism it appears to bring about. As we saw at the beginning of this section Weber was an early hero partly for shifting the emphasis on the search for the foundations of the human sciences to the search for those parts of these sciences that were independent of the perspective of the observer and hence could be considered universally valid. Weber emphasizes partial causality, explored in the section on Marx, which precludes any idolatry of History, which can never be known in full. As we have seen, Weber's epistemology leaves room for both reflection on the limits of historical objectivity as well as liberty of action. Raynaud argues that the common thread in Weber's work is the formal rationalization of social relations, lending his interpretation of history an essentially dramatic or tragic character. For Aron, on the other hand, the common thread is a certain unity of history that "points to the hope for a reconciliation between the different ideas that humanity has had of itself." (p. 221). Using this unity of human history as a regulatory principle, Aron is able to avoid both historicist idolatry and the pathos of incoherence.

[739] Let us also note that this breed of methodological individualism is less extreme than that of Hayek and Popper.

[740] Aron, *Les étapes*, 523.

and actions on the micro level, the level at which his own sociological method is supposed to begin. Aron's awareness of these two distinct levels allows him to preserve Weber's phenomenological method, while still accounting for the social whole – the political realm – without subscribing to a pathetic philosophy of man and history.

The gap between these two levels – between honourable intentions and the potential for unexpected negative outcomes – is what constitutes Aron's tragic view of history.[741] Tragedy, however, is possible only to the extent that one is concerned with good intentions to begin with. It is because Weber does have this concern at heart – as evidenced by the opposition he creates between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility – that the politics of this "German Machiavelli" nevertheless tends to be more heroic than realist.[742] We turn now to a strain of thought that also addresses the means-ends problem, but without necessarily concerning itself with any values beyond success.

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Max Weber's importance in Aron's thought, especially in his early years, is inestimable. Weber shaped Aron's thinking about epistemology and the social sciences and also helped him conceptualize the relation between knowledge and action, science and politics, which would remain central in Aron's thinking for the rest of his life. We have focused on Aron's lifelong dialogue with Weber on the subject of knowledge and action, drawing on Aron's many writings on the German sociologist as well as some unpublished lectures from the 1970s on political action and ethics where he revisits Weber once more. We have focused especially on Weber's exposition of his two ethics and the connected conflictual view of politics. We then outlined Aron's understanding of these ethics and his rejection of Weber's conflict-laden view. We have demonstrated that the insufficiency Aron discovered in Weber's political thinking is rooted in the latter's misunderstanding of politics and human behaviour at the micro-level. At the root of politics lie values and reason, which we employ to interrogate and communicate our values. We have also shown that Weber curiously misses an essential point about the nature of science: that it is always ongoing and incomplete.

[741] Cf. Aron, "Discours aux étudiants allemands," 414: "Tragic, once again, is the necessity to make certain decisions whose short-term risks are clear, without being able to discern clearly whether one will achieve the desired outcome. But this is the essence of politics, and it was Max Weber, more than anyone else, who showed that for the actor politics is defined by wages on the future and that it appears to the historian like a series of intentions betrayed by events."

[742] Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, 108-110.

3c – Aron's Machiavellianism

Many of the points made previously regarding Max Weber were the result of a lifetime of reflection. Weber's probed the limits of value conflict and the means/ends paradigm for thinking about politics. When he discovered him in Germany Aron's initial impression of Weber, as we have mentioned, was one of nearly unequivocal admiration. When he returned to France in the 1930s he led a happy life although he despaired of the future of his country. He had seen the failure of the Weimar Republic and the weakness of the French republic in the face of its troubles from within and the growing tyrannical threats from without. Machiavellianism was the cliff from which he would survey the fragility of liberal democracy and the rise of totalitarianism, and he would begin to sharpen his thinking about means and ends by viewing politics as technique.

In this subsection we will proceed by examining the following: *Approaching Aron's Machiavelli. Aron's conflictual view of politics and the role played by* virtù. *Machiavellianism and totalitarianism.*

Approaching Aron's Machiavelli

The literature on Raymond Aron and Niccolò Machiavelli is slimmer compared to other areas of the French writer's thought.[743] In 1993 Rémy Freymond compiled four unedited texts (one unfinished) that Aron had written between 1938 and May 1940 on Machiavelli and Machiavellianism, and paired these with other essays by Aron on topics such as Machiavellianism, Pareto, and totalitarianism.[744] This collection has not been the object of much attention,[745] perhaps partly because Aron's only mention of it is in his *Mémoires* when he states that his thirty-some pages on Machiavelli written in the late 1930s[746] were not worth much and that his knowledge of Machiavelli's oeuvre was insufficient.[747] However, he sprinkles many of his writings with Machiavelli's name: most of these references in his *Mémoires* are made in passing,[748] but his postwar journalism is awash with references to Machiavelli, some serving only to compare the Florentine and his advice with some figure or policy of Aron's day;[749] others are often accompanied by some Machiavellian maxim related to unarmed prophets[750] or being feared as opposed to loved;[751] still others crop up simply to reassert the perennial relevance of

[743] E.g. most recently there is Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," and Aurélio, "'Moderate Machiavellianism'." Prior to this there was Oppermann's reading that follows Aron's early work in tracing a line from Machiavelli's theory of means through its systematization in Pareto and the tyrannical ends to which it was put (Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 91-114). There was also Mahoney's introduction to the quarrel between Aron and Maritain on Machiavellianism in Aron, *In Defense of Political Reason*, 49-52; and Morgado, "The Threat of Danger," 93-111.

[744] Aron, *Machiavel*. The four unedited texts were to form part of a larger book on Machiavelli and Machiavellianism, *Essais sur le machiavélisme moderne*.

[745] Some treatments of it include Freymond's extensive introduction to the work itself; Hassner, "Raymond Aron: Machiavel et les tyrannies modernes," 144-147; and Freschi, "Raymond Aron e Niccolò Machiavelli," 41-65.

[746] This refers to the first text in *Machiavel et les tyrannies modernes*, "Le machiavélisme de Machiavel".

[747] Aron, *Mémoires*, 210.

[748] Aron, *Mémoires*, 222, 267, 433, 660, 736, 840, 863, 900, 936, 991.

[749] Aron, "Machiavel et Talleyrand," 1172; Aron, "Les hostilités ambiguës," 98; Aron, "Tiers-mondisme," 557; Aron, "Kissinger : Le mémorialiste et l'homme d'Etat," 670.

[750] Aron, "Principes sans défenseurs," 1353; Aron, "Le prophète désarmé," 238-240.

[751] Aron, "Il ne déplaît pas toujours à M. « K. » d'être craint plutôt qu'aimé," 899.

power politics.[752] Aron's academic works also incessantly appeal to Machiavelli's ideas and maxims[753] and use him as a means to frame Aron's own insights, usually in contradistinction to Kant[754] or Marx.[755]

More can, and should, be said about Aron and Machiavelli. For Aron Machiavelli "is perhaps the greatest political thinker, or at least one of the greatest".[756] His later assessment of the Florentine seems to have been rather favourable indeed. In *Jeux et enjeux de la politique* he defines Machiavellianism in the following manner:

> One can say that a Machiavellian is someone who does not like the dreams of the utopians, but I would say that, in my mind, the Machiavellian is essentially someone who reflects on politics and asks himself how one should act, what one can do, and what problems result from the necessity of making decisions in situations that one has not chosen…I would say very exactly that the Machiavellian is someone who knows that he can perhaps define philosophically the best regime, but that when he is in action, he cannot choose the situations; he undergoes them and if he undergoes situations and enters into action it is necessary to react to a situation that he detests with measures that he might not necessarily like.[757]

He then goes on to claim the adjective "Machiavellian" for himself.[758]

But this was not always Aron's impression of Machiavelli. He first began to write about the Italian thinker on the eve of the Second World War. It is in this crucial period that "Aron becomes Aron":[759] he completes his dissertations, witnesses the outbreak of the war, and finds his philosophical musings faced with political reality. "The uncompleted book on Machiavelli [*Essais sur le machiavélisme moderne*] is the first full expression of the political voice of the mature Aron. It is the bridge between his prewar philosophical work and his postwar turn to political, historical, and sociological reflection."[760] Several of the themes that arise in Aron's postwar writings – secular religions and the future of empires, democracy and totalitarianism, and international relations – are already present here.[761] Finally, it is praiseworthy for being one of the first theoretical analyses of the totalitarian phenomenon in France.[762]

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[752] Aron, "Une semaine de manœuvres," 227; Aron, "De Machiavel à Gribouille," 957; Aron, "La V^{e} République et l'Alliance atlantique," 1276; Aron, "Une jungle sans monstres," 1459. Machiavelli is not the only name dropped on this occasion to show up Giscard d'Estaing's political naïveté; in the same article, one page earlier, Aron writes: "In this respect he seems to me neither Gaullist nor anti-Gaullist, but a-Gaullist, so to speak. General de Gaulle permanently used to live the dramas of history. M. Giscard d'Estaing, a product of Polytechnique and ENA, who knows Keynes better than he knows Thucydides, keeps to the main elements of Gaullist policy, but in a totally different spirit." Thucydides, unlike Giscard d'Estaing, understood that history is tragic; Aron, "Machiavel au Proche-Orient," 1732-1734; Aron, *The Century of Total War*, 22; Aron, *Espoir et peur du siècle*, 292-293.

[753] See, for example, Aron, "Structure sociale et structure de l'élite (1949)," 474; Aron, "Remarques sur l'évolution de la pensée stratégique (1945-1968)," 1029; Aron, "Nations et empires [1957]," 225; Aron, *Peace and War*, 61, 75, 133, 245, 254; Aron, "L'Europe, avenir d'un mythe," 141-142.

[754] Aron's entire section on praxeology in *Peace and War* is considered more or less in light of the "Machiavellian problem" on the one hand, and the "Kantian problem" on the other. See Aron, *Peace and War*, 577.

[755] Aron, "Machiavel et Marx," 93-109; and Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 532-558.

[756] Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 13.

[757] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Leçon 3, 3-4.

[758] Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Leçon 3, 11.

[759] Manent, "La politique comme science et comme souci," 9.

[760] Mahoney, "Aron and Machiavellianism," 51-52.

[761] Freymond, introduction to *Machiavel*, 13.

[762] Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 197.

One interpretation contends that Aron's wartime take on Machiavelli is quite negative, suggesting that the Florentine's controversial view of politics inspired the very pessimistic sociology of Pareto and the totalitarian practices of the time.[763] This negative assessment fades away and then emerges the positive interpretation of his postwar thoughts on conflict's place in liberal democratic regimes as deriving from Machiavelli.[764] We shall begin by reviewing this postwar positive interpretation – some of whose elements we found central to Aron's conceptualization of constitutional-pluralist regimes – before examining Aron's original incentive for studying Machiavelli and his legacy.

Before beginning, let us note, as we pointed out earlier, that Aron's later use of Machiavelli is often as a form of opposition to simple-minded moralism. In his article, "Machiavel et Marx", Machiavelli is the advisor to the Prince while Marx is the confidant of Providence.[765] This use of the two authors is meant to contrast two different ways of conceptualizing history, politics, and action, and it is reminiscent of Aron's distinction between the politician of understanding and the politician of Reason in his *Introduction*. This shift in Aron's use of the Florentine writer to symbolize the necessity of power and the imperfect nature of politics seems to have occurred as early as 1943 in the article "La querelle du machiavélisme", concerning Aron's debate with Maritain, whose roots lie even as far back as the 1939 talk "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires", indicating that Aron's more constructive use of Machiavelli as a representative of political wisdom may have been latent from the very beginning.[766] In any case, it has been fashionable as of late to speak of Aron's "moderate Machiavellianism" and his conflictual view of democracy, therefore we shall proceed by reviewing this issue and especially the important role played by *virtù*.

Aron's Conflictual View of Politics and the Role Played by *Virtù*

One of the central insights in most of the secondary literature is that Machiavelli and Aron recognized that republics or constitutional-pluralist regimes are *essentially* conflictual.[767] Humans are ambitious and have an insatiable desire for riches, power, and honour.[768] Again, following one interpretation that places Aron in the conflict tradition expounded by James Burnham and Gaetano Mosca, these natural human passions must be reined in by the laws. The laws themselves are based on force – the very same force that would undo the laws if given the chance, and therefore this chance must be taken away by opposing force with force.[769] Conflict is inevitable because it stems from human nature. Tyranny, which pretends to eliminate conflict, in reality eliminates law and liberty.[770] This well-established narrative of the mixed regime is crystalized in governance as the separation of powers or checks and balances and is to be found

[763] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 249-252.
[764] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 252-259.
[765] Aron, "Machiavel et Marx," 99-101.
[766] Aron, "La querelle du machiavélisme [1943]," 367-378; Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires [1939]," 55-106.
[767] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 252-259; Audier, *Raymond Aron : la démocratie conflictuelle*, esp. 15-59; Aurélio, "'Moderate Machiavellianism'," 390-394; Freschi, "Raymond Aron e Niccolò Machiavelli," 55-57.
[768] Aron, *Machiavel*, 69.
[769] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 255.
[770] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 266.

going all the way back to ancient political thought.[771] It is predicated on the same ambition and attraction to power inherent to man.

Therefore, it is correct to assert that the Machiavellian element cited in Aron[772] comports conflict and also the recognition that all regimes are essentially imperfect and oligarchical;[773] that this conflict and essential imperfection mean that liberal democracy's virtues are largely negative;[774] and that the fragility Aron observes in constitutional-pluralist regimes seems best to be tended by a mixed government, balancing individual liberty and social equality, while ensuring the growth of the economy.[775]

We would add that Aron's and Machiavelli's statements on conflict are not only scientific but also normative. Conflict is inherent *and* required. Republics and constitutional-pluralist regimes constructively redirect man's belligerent tendencies, and legislation favourable to liberty is the result.[776] Of equal importance for the two thinkers is the idea that conflict reflects and promotes the *virtù* of the people.[777] *Virtù* is here understood as willingness to commit oneself to the public good and is a measure of the strength and vitality of a population.[778] Aron at one point defines it as "the capacity for collective action and historic vitality, that now, as always,

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[771] See, e.g., Aristotle, *Politics*, 1293b22-1294b41; Polybius, *Histories*, VI, 3, 10-18; Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, II, 42-43; Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, II, 143-159; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, XI, 6; *The Federalist*, No. 47.

[772] The passages often cited in this regard are from Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 130-137.

[773] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 261; Aurélio, "'Moderate Machiavellianism'," 392-393; Freschi, "Raymond Aron e Niccolò Machiavelli," 63.

[774] Audier, "A Machiavellian Conception of Democracy?," 262.

[775] Freschi, "Raymond Aron e Niccolò Machiavelli," 56. Freschi shows the most appreciation for the context in which Aron places his discussion of conflict. The conflict for Aron is more complex than for Machiavelli: political conflict is intertwined with a social conflict, the latter characterized by rising expectations on the part of society for a more prosperous life – expectations that are meant to be fulfilled by an entity whose powers are progressively being reduced, and whose purpose is increasingly to function as a mouthpiece for interest groups. "To me the contradiction appears to be the following: the political evolution of the parliamentary system tends to weaken power, while the economic evolution of the democratic system tends to extend the functions of the state. There consequently results, with an apparent necessity, an increasingly large and increasingly weak state, or a state whose prestige and ability to act diminish, but whose functions increase." Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 130-131. Cf. Audier, *Raymond Aron : la démocratie conflictuelle*, 32, who argues that this conflictual view also extends to the social realm and interest groups who are part of a "space of argumentation" where they need to defend the legitimacy of their various demands.

[776] Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I, 4. One might argue that the flipside to this is that liberal democracies have best been able to limit arbitrary government. Cf. Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 136.

[777] Cf. Aron's ambiguous thinking related to this matter on the issue of violence amongst humans in Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 13, 21-22: "Of course man is violent, but he is not only violent like animals. He is also violent through faith and refusal. Should we wish for dreams, refusal, and faith to stop making man violent so that we would have a peaceful society? Or would man cease to be man if he stopped dreaming and refusing? Or even still: there are wars that resemble commercial operations; there are wars with a view to plunder, conquest, or fortune, but as you know, the truly human wars are those for recognition. These are the wars about not taking it lying down while knocking the other guy down…So of course if man became a being of reason, as the philosophers believe, he would obey reason. But as long as societies are violent there are men who refuse to take it lying down, and I hope there always will be."

[778] Machiavelli, *Discorsi* III, 8; Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 180. We will not spend any additional time trying to decipher the famously elusive notion of *virtù*. For our purposes it is enough to discuss it in terms of how it is understood and used by Aron in his own works. The reader interested in the various ways in which Machiavelli uses *virtù* would do well to start with Price, "The Senses of Virtù in Machiavelli," 315-345.

remains the ultimate cause of the fortune of nations and of their rise and fall".[779] As Machiavelli reminds us, it is fostered through good laws and education[780] and a civic religious spirit.[781] It both supports and is supported by liberty.[782] Tyranny brings about not only a loss of liberty but also worse men.[783] Those *magna ingenia* disappear where the populace cannot create "tumults" and "let out their ambition".[784] But, of course, these ambitions must be disciplined.[785] We believe these concerns are very present when Aron discusses the corruption of constitutional-pluralist regimes.[786] His three sources of ineffectiveness in constitutional-pluralist regimes are all symptomatic of a lack of *virtù*: catering excessively to private interests, taking the easy way out (i.e. sacrificing military preparedness for material well-being), and surrendering the collective good by being unable to pursue a coherent policy.[787] This ineffectiveness was what prompted him – shockingly to his listeners at the Société française de philosophie – to state that democratic regimes must be capable of the same virtues as totalitarian regimes if they hope to survive.[788] As we observed earlier, it was also this loss of *virtù* that Aron lamented in the 1970s. This corresponds to a return to the pessimism that Aron felt in 1930 when he saw that history was on the move and his compatriots refused to accept it.[789] His second cause of decomposition is when the regime's principle or public spirit, i.e. *virtù*, has become corrupt.[790] We observed previously that, for Aron, frugality – the watchword of public virtue for republican thinkers – is inimical to the modern spirit of industrial society, whose emphasis is on profit and economic growth.[791] We learned that there is nonetheless a link between ancient and modern virtue in that both demand respect for the law, particularly the constitution, which is the framework for the citizens' conflicts and unity. The citizens must have demands and opinions – one might almost say they must have partisan passions – to animate the regime and prevent it from slipping into uniformity; however, they must not have partisan passions to the point that they destroy any possibility of understanding, i.e. they must be able to compromise, although this should not be excessive either.

[779] Aron, *In Defense of Decadent Europe*, trans. Stephen Cox, xvii. The "collective capacity for action" is also one of Aron's criteria for determining a state's power. See Aron, *Peace and War*, 54. For further work on Aron and his thoughts on *virtù* and decadence, see Morgado, "The Threat of Danger," 93-111. Morgado also emphasizes the need to separate "vulgar" Machiavellianism from Machiavelli's own thought, which Aron knew was more complex. Morgado connects Machiavellian *virtù* to Aron's concern for Europe's decadence and "loss of 'historical vitality'". By the 1970s Aron had grown increasingly worried that Americans, but more especially Europeans, and their obsession with equality and human rights alone, had forgotten how to think politically.
[780] Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I, 4.
[781] Aron, *Machiavel*, 79.
[782] That *virtù* is the best means for maintaining the regime is already noted early on in Aron, *Machiavel*, 79.
[783] Nelson, "The problem of the prince," 327.
[784] Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I, 4.
[785] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1318.
[786] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1327-1362.
[787] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1320-1321.
[788] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 67-71.
[789] Gaspar, "*Fin de siècle*," 94-95.
[790] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1333-1338.
[791] Aron, *Dix-huit leçons*, 811-812.

Another component of avoiding excess compromise is the need to be decisive. *Virtù* is in this respect an *active* quality.[792] Opting for the intermediate policy can lead to more problems than would be the case if a firm policy on one side or the other, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, had been chosen. Aron recalls the example of France's middling conduct during the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, when his country, wavering between a hawkish and dovish response, decided that the aggressor was to be saddled with sanctions, albeit of such mildness so as not to provoke a military reprisal, with the result that Italy was not dissuaded from her conquest and felt pushed closer to Germany.[793] Around the same time when Germany remilitarized the Rhine France was faced with choosing between a military response and acceptance: the former would be difficult because elections were coming up; the latter would be difficult because of the gravity of the situation. France compromised its policies and "solemnly declared that it would not accept what it had already accepted *de facto.*"[794] Man gravitates by nature to half-measures[795] and this tendency is compounded by the dynamics of constitutional-pluralist regimes.[796] *Virtù* cements the will to fight for one's convictions together with decisive action to promote the public good. It is a creative energy deserving of the highest praise, and Aron duly notes that Machiavelli reserves much adulation for founders of religions or states, while he scorns tyrants, who know only how to destroy – and what they destroy against the dictates of nature, moreover, is political life as such.[797] *Virtù* can exist only in a free regime, and a regime is free only where there is conflict. As mentioned before, conflict is inherent to such regimes to a certain extent, but it must also be continuously nurtured. This dual aspect of conflict is what is unique to Aron's Machiavellian inheritance.

Machiavellianism and Totalitarianism

None of the aforementioned, however, is what originally drew Aron to Machiavelli. "As a contemporary of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, I re-read the *Prince* and the *Discourses* and sought out the secret of Machiavellianism."[798] It is undeniable that Aron's project in the *Essais* is to trace a line from Machiavelli through to modern totalitarianism. The link exists, although we should like to nuance it somewhat and spare Machiavelli the charge of being "a teacher of evil",[799] especially when the use to which Aron puts him for decades afterwards is as a most necessary teacher of political reality whom we disregard at our own risk. The remainder of this section will walk the path from Machiavelli through to Pareto and then totalitarianism and conclude with a discussion of the role of the elite.

Let us start by saying that the "responsibility" imputed to Machiavelli for the totalitarian phenomenon is indirect and owes more to what Audier has termed the "Machiavellian rupture". This rupture consists of "a certain conception of men and politics" and "the *rationalized systems*

[792] "The worst characteristic of weak republics is that they are irresolute, so that all of the decisions that they make they are forced to make, and if they do anything right, it is because they were forced to do so and not because they were prudent." Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I, 38.
[793] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1272.
[794] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1326.
[795] Aron, *Machiavel*, 68.
[796] "Every regime of this type will always be inclined to substitute a verbal refusal for an effective refusal and believe that the world is not what it is." Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1326.
[797] Aron, *Machiavel*, 71.
[798] Aron, *Machiavel*, 59.
[799] Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 9.

according to which modern Machiavellians conceive and realize the government of peoples."[800] But we believe that this rupture is possible only by way of Pareto. Aron's own position on how Machiavellian Machiavelli really was is ambiguous to say the least.[801]

On one side of the coin, Machiavelli shares much in common with Pareto: belief in regularities in history rooted in human nature (Pareto's *residues* and Machiavelli's sentiments and passions);[802] indifference to substantive truth of beliefs or ideas;[803] *virtù*, not money, decides military victories and the destiny of nations.[804] Aron even goes so far as to equate them more or less in their rationalist methodology and scorn for the ends of political action, effectively reducing all politics to nihilism and "*technique de pouvoir*".[805] Where Weber sees politics as the inexpiable conflict between values, the Machiavellians see values to be employed as a distraction for the masses in the inexpiable conflict for power, which is the true stuff of politics. It is a view of politics and statesmanship that Weber scorns and Aron feels falsifies the political experience.[806]

On the other side, there is enough evidence to indicate that Aron wished to shield Machiavelli from the same charges that he would levy against the vulgar Machiavellians, such as Pareto, and the totalitarian regimes.[807] One such example is his constant reminder that Machiavelli's *Principe* and *Discorsi* are hardly contradictory; in fact, one is liable to have a seriously warped vision of Machiavelli's true thought if one's conclusions are derived exclusively from the former work.[808] When Aron discusses Machiavelli's ends and values outside of the comparative context, Machiavelli is found to prize power – it is true – but also the longevity of the polity and its public interest.[809] He advances the principle *salus populi suprema lex* and can be considered a purveyor of the principle of *raison d'état*.[810] His love of liberty and the republic is unquestionable.[811] Securing these ends may necessitate means at variance with Christian morality, but Aron felt neither in his earlier years nor in his later years that such means would pollute the end and the action themselves.[812]

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[800] Aron, *Machiavel*, 119-120.

[801] Even in his later reflections on Machiavelli Aron's position is frustratingly obscure, which could say a great deal about our inability to say anything conclusive at all on this most controversial and perspicacious of political thinkers. "Machiavelli had the courage to follow through to the end a logic of action against which the reader seeks refuge in lines of inquiry for which there is no answer." Aron, "Les antinomies de la politique [1962]," 387. Cf. also Aron, "Machiavel et Marx," 108-109; Aron, "Les antinomies de la politique," 383-387.

[802] Aron, *Machiavel*, 85. It is noteworthy that Aron also subscribes to man's essential immutability. See Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 239.

[803] Aron, *Machiavel*, 100.

[804] Aron, *Machiavel*, 111.

[805] Aron, *Machiavel*, 105-106.

[806] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 546-547; Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1249.

[807] In *Peace and War* Aron even finds room for a "philosophy of civilized Machiavellianism", by which he is referring to European interstate relations prior to 1914. See Aron, *Peace and War*, 298.

[808] Aron, *Machiavel*, 61, 119; Aron, "La querelle du machiavélisme," 367; Aron, "Les antinomies de la politique," 384.

[809] Aron, *Machiavel*, 81-82. It is well worth noting that maintaining power and exercising it to serve the common interest are the two goals that Aron attributes to government in *Démocratie et totalitarisme*. See Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1316.

[810] Aron, *Machiavel*, 77.

[811] Aron, *Machiavel*, 61, 72; Aron, "Machiavel et Marx," 105-106; Aron, "Les antinomies de la politique," 384.

[812] This is the core of the dispute between Aron and Jacques Maritain. Cf. Aron, "Etats démocratiques et Etats totalitaires," 77-79; Aron, "La querelle du machiavélisme," 367-378; and Aron, "Sur le machiavélisme," 408-416.

Unlike Machiavelli, Pareto's disgust for all ends removes the barrier that would prevent him from condoning tyranny. His political solutions are reserved for the elite and must be kept secret – the masses must never wise up to the wool being pulled over their eyes.[813] Aron's Machiavelli is not so one-sided: the masses are blind, weak without leaders, and useless in an army if they are not led, but they are also less ungrateful than princes, more likely to defend liberty than the elite, and clearheaded in particulars.[814] Pareto falls far short of his goal of elaborating a comprehensive explanation of human action; Machiavelli, by contrast, at times manages a narrow explanation of human action,[815] and at other points he presupposes a certain uniformity of human action, with a view to advising the prince or people. The pessimism in the sociologist reveals the inadequacy of his approach and condemns his work because he fails to achieve what he set out to do; in the political advisor, however, such pessimism is caution, for grave political mistakes cannot be rectified. Machiavelli differs from Pareto, and shares in common with Aron the desire to study the possibilities for political action in a history that is circumstantial.[816]

Aron is not insensitive to Machiavelli's caveats in promoting a certain view of politics. He makes sure to couch the teaching that men are evil in its appropriate context as an admonition to lawgivers: "As is demonstrated by all those who have treated of politics and by the numerous examples furnished by history, it is necessary for him who would lay the foundations for a state and give it laws to assume first of all that all men are evil and given to practicing their perversity whenever they have the opportunity to do so."[817] The state presupposes that men do not act morally, so its foundation must be the threat of violence.[818] This view of man does not preclude the possibility of attaining to collective *virtù* – defined as dedication to the common good, respect for laws, and a sense of the public interest – through a good education in the family and a good constitution in the city.

We can say, then, that Machiavelli inspired Pareto – to the extent that a man who denigrates ideas in general can be inspired by other writings at all – but it seems to be Aron's objective to deflect criticism away from Machiavelli and lay the fault for modern tyranny squarely at the doorstep of Pareto and the vulgar Machiavellians. Nevertheless, Aron rightly asks if scepticism and cynicism are the natural consequences of Machiavelli's scientific methodology.[819] One could say that the purely objective and scientific study of reality saves the observer the trouble of concerning himself with the ends, thus implying that totalitarianism is just as permissible an outcome as liberal democracy, and Pareto clearly demonstrated his distaste for the latter. However, as we have seen, Machiavelli's ends are liberty and the republic, and this is not to be scoffed at since Aron's own justification for adopting the virtues of the totalitarian

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This does not mean that Aron himself would have been able to use particularly questionable means. But this is why he remained a scholar and not a statesman. Unlike Kissinger, for example, he reached the boundary earlier where he had to declare, "Here I stand, I can do no other".

[813] Aron, *Machiavel*, 101.

[814] Aron, *Machiavel*, 70.

[815] Aron, *Machiavel*, 83.

[816] Another benefit of Freschi's article is that it elaborates on precisely this point: the relevance of Machiavelli – someone concerned with human action – with respect to Aron's *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* and its emphasis on action in history. See Freschi, "Raymond Aron e Niccolò Machiavelli," 41-44.

[817] Aron, *Machiavel*, 67.

[818] Aron, *Machiavel*, 69.

[819] Aron, *Machiavel*, 116.

regimes in 1939 is that the ends sought by the liberal democracies are different.[820] The problem, then, may be that the Machiavellian methodology falsifies the political experience, as we mentioned earlier. Its obsession with eschewing values in its analysis – in other words, its attempt to maintain a value-neutral study – leaves it missing the mark in its study of politics, for values are inherent in the reality under study, a criticism that Aron makes of Weber's supposedly value-free sociology. Ultimately, we must preclude any categorical conclusions, for Aron's knowledge of Machiavelli paled tremendously in comparison to his knowledge of Weber. In addition to providing him with a springboard from which he could dive into the study of totalitarianism, Machiavelli and his descendants also indicated to Aron the importance of the political elite and the essentially oligarchic nature of all political regimes.

The elites come into view because for both Machiavelli and Pareto the past has a uniform nature, with history serving as the cemetery of aristocracies that are invariably defeated in battle or corrupted by pushing their principle to the extreme (e.g. democracy becomes demagogy) or because a conflicting principle develops.[821] Society is permanently divided into two classes: the masses (which are the energy) and the elite (which direct this energy), which interact with each other as if they were two foreign nations.[822] They both have their respective roles to play: the virtue of the masses is geared to patriotism, respect for laws, sense of religion; the leaders must be intelligent and have a sense for calculation, innovation, and science. Pareto's political doctrine is reserved for the elite and must be kept secret – the masses must not know they are being deceived.[823] Values are stripped of any real meaning. Even reason serves no purpose other than to cover the elite's actions. The elite must have power as its supreme end – government's function is to keep the people in a certain state of mind, without any concern (aside from its usefulness) for virtue or education or keeping the passions in balance. Modern Machiavellianism is based on the fundamental irrationalism of human nature, the almost limitless credulity and blindness of the masses, and the function of violent and dishonest elites who instill a faith and an idealism which they do not take seriously. "Part of a rationalist realism, Machiavellianism ends up as a *technique de pouvoir*, nihilism, a will, at the end of the day, that cares for nothing beyond power but which is unable to find any reason or value-based justification for the power to which it aspires."[824]

If Aron did not discard Machiavelli later in life, it is because Machiavelli had at least identified a fundamental truth: politics *does* require playing the game for power, and there are those who take this to the extreme and treat politics as nothing more than techniques for attaining power, and this can bring a constitutional-pluralist regime to heel. This nihilistic and narrow vision of human existence is undesirable, to be sure, but it must be taken into account by the statesman who must both play the game and not succumb to a cynical view of politics that could potentially threaten the health of the regime. It was in this spirit that the young Aron, on the eve of the Second World War, approached the study of Machiavelli and Machiavellianism: as a way of understanding and resisting modern totalitarianism.[825]

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[820] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 77-78.
[821] Aron, *Machiavel*, 85-90.
[822] Aron, *Machiavel*, 90-97.
[823] Aron, *Machiavel*, 101.
[824] Aron, *Machiavel*, 106.
[825] Hassner, "Raymond Aron: Machiavel et les tyrannies modernes," 147.

We have seen that Machiavelli's name, or the term Machiavellianism, was invoked on numerous occasions by Aron. His original plan to write a work on Machiavelli never panned out. Machiavelli nevertheless remains a crucial reference point for Aron whenever Aron wishes to discuss statesmanship, ethics, and political action – in this he serves as a counterweight to Maritain, Kant, or Marx. This section has studied Aron's most profound reflections on the Florentine, which happen to be from his earlier years when he was very concerned with war and totalitarianism. We traced the connection between Machiavellianism, Pareto, elites, cynicism, and the roots of totalitarianism. Beyond this matter the secondary literature has more recently been drawn to the notion of a "moderate Machiavellianism" in Aron's writings. We have addressed this new development in Aron scholarship, and in so doing suggested that what Aron may have found so appealing about Machiavelli, beyond his concern for offering politically workable advice, was his understanding of history, conflict in republics, and the role of *virtù* in a healthy polity.

3d – Totalitarianism

We concluded the preceding section by discussing the role of the political elite. As we mentioned, Pareto's political elite scorns values as nothing more than tools to direct the masses. This is not an inevitable consequence of the mere existence of a political elite; as we have noted, all regimes are oligarchic to some extent. Nevertheless, it is the cynical attitude of this approach to politics that paves the road to totalitarianism. For the statesman who would seek to avoid totalitarianism the first step is to understand it. In this section we shall proceed by examining the following: *Machiavellian techniques for acquiring power. The nature of totalitarianism.*

Machiavellian Techniques for Acquiring Power

Max Weber cites approvingly the example of a Florentine hero allegedly recorded in Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine* who praised those citizens for whom the greatness of their fatherland was more important than the salvation of their souls.[826] The statesman does not have the luxury of valuing his own soul over the greatness or survival of his country, but he should ask himself of what his country's greatness consists. We observed earlier that the tragedy of Weber's political views was that he never imagined Germany's military greatness could undo the greatness of her culture. The country survived under Hitler, but her soul had been extinguished. A regime that would make a mockery of values finds itself nothing more than the cold hard shell of bureaucratic procedures and rationalism without an end. If this end be only power, then it is potentially limitless and implies an imperialist foreign policy.[827] Similarly, a regime that disregards constitutional and legal procedures would quickly find itself subject to the whims of Weber's charismatic men. There is a series of political techniques that lead to this end.[828]

The first step is to attain power within the state.[829] The first technique is the peaceful coup d'état, which involves taking power by abusing democratic procedures. As long as popular discontent and economic woes go untreated by the parliamentary system, the idea is to reinforce the inability of the regime to cope with these problems in any way.

Part of this consists of creating a party of the masses, organized in a different structure, but nevertheless demanding that the regime treat it as any other party. It thus uses the very same principles that it wishes to do away with once in power. It recruits members as if for war, although the war is of a specifically *psychological* nature, waged through incessant propaganda that aims at fostering a civil war which the revolutionary party alone claims to be able to resolve. This appeal to the masses is meant to jolt their emotions: they are to be bombarded constantly with messages telling them of the injustices they have suffered (e.g. the treaty of Versailles) and they are to be united in their hatred for the source of these injustices. Hatred and violence become an obsession. These consequences follow from the pessimistic outlook of the Machiavellians: "The masses are won over by a mix of intimidation and promises. They are made to submit to the will of their tamer and they satisfy their instinct for domination at the cost of their inferiors. Irrational tendencies are transformed into permanent madness; credulity becomes fanaticism, and emotionalism becomes hysteria."[830]

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[826] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 558.
[827] Aron, *Machiavel*, 121.
[828] Cf., Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 421-425.
[829] Aron, *Machiavel*, 124-133.
[830] Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 476.

The government is further undermined when the usurpers begin to take strategic points such as public and government buildings, post offices, train stations, radio stations, etc., thereby assuming control over the dissemination of information as well as the very buildings that symbolize the legitimacy and power of the government. Preventing these tactics requires that the other political parties band together to defend the constitution and that the government have the political will to fight back with the help of the police and the army.

Once in power the new party must turn legal power into absolute power by marginalizing the other contenders.[831] This means destroying rival organizations, assuming all positions of authority such that subordinate branches of power all feed back to the tyrant, and populating public positions and administrative branches with two sets of people (in addition to the military): those loyal to the tyrannical regime and those with technical competence. Then there is the matter of ensuring the longevity of the party that rebelled against the laws of the previous regime. Any usurper who would take the reins of power and hope to keep them in the long run must find some way of legitimizing himself.[832] In a day and age when "the people" in some capacity are taken to be the sovereign, legitimation must perforce depend on acceptance by the people. To this end the Nazis instituted *plebiscitary caesarism*: through plebiscites the party could demonstrate that they continued to enjoy popular confidence and were thereby justified in their further conquests. The Soviets preferred to rely on their ideology that claimed equality. Both methods are, in the last analysis, a part of the system of propaganda.

The Soviet Union underwent a similar process in order to arrive at Stalin.[833] The first phase unfolded before the party took power, when the party was still revolutionary. Lenin realized he could not let the labourers be seduced by reforms, and so he had to convince them that their only hope lay in the wholesale overthrow of capitalist society. The party, therefore, had to be composed of professional revolutionaries subject to the chief of staff and democratic centralism. Congress delegates were elected but the elections were controlled by Lenin who for the most part managed to impose his will.

After victory in the civil war the party had to stabilize the regime. In this second phase the debates in the Congress became more intense, factions developed, and Lenin not infrequently found himself sidelined in the Politburo or the central committee. The party began to assume a more ossified bureaucratic organization as the real authority passed from the mass of militants to a small number of rulers in the central committee, Politburo, or secretariat.

Constant bickering would no longer do, and thus the period between 1923 and 1930 was characterized by Stalin's victory over potential successors and the steady consolidation of power. Leaders were now appointed and no longer elected. The general secretariat – run by Stalin – became the position of power that dominated the whole of the party. Theoretically, the principle of majoritarian formalism was still in effect and could have brought back a constitutional regime, but in practice it was too late. Stalin appointed sycophants to sing his praises, and these men, fit to be slaves, duly obliged.

The fourth phase witnessed rule by *one* man from 1930 until 1953. No longer content with putting factions to rest politically, Stalin saw fit to exterminate them physically. Traitors, imagined or real, were discovered within the party. Rule of law was respected as long as the traitors were willing to confess their crimes; if they were unwilling, the punishment was the same. The fifth phase began with Stalin's death. The struggle between successors returned and

[831] Aron, *Machiavel*, 138.
[832] Aron, *Machiavel*, 145-150.
[833] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1387-1391.

the party had been purged of the terror. In this sense it came to resemble the rivalry between successors in the earlier phases.

These Machiavellian techniques can be used to whatever end the rulers choose. Machiavellianism alone, however, seems to fall short as an adequate account for the totalitarian phenomenon Aron was witnessing. The Nazi regime, for example, was the result not just of vulgar Machiavellianism; it was combined with the rejection of rules and all values, the heroic will to power (Nietzsche), a biological politics linked to an "obsessional hatred"[834] for other races, and a romantic and instinctual violence, all atop the Germans' sense of themselves and their history.[835] However, to the extent that Machiavellianism comports a pessimistic view of human nature and treats individuals solely as means, it opens the door to a political philosophy that extols the cult of action and violence over reflection, not far removed from the philosophy of constant rebellion we discussed in connection to Sartre.

The Nature of Totalitarianism

By the time Aron arrives at *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, he has formalized his understanding of totalitarian regimes. In 1939 he was able to claim that the constitution of new ruling elites was the fundamental aspect of totalitarian regimes and that totalitarian regimes are authentically revolutionary while democracies are essentially conservative.[836] This means that totalitarian regimes are opposed above all to democracies and not to communism. And indeed, these regimes had managed to achieve technical successes in the economic, political, and military fields, which served as a lesson to democratic regimes. In *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, we find three ideal types of totalitarian – or, to employ his sociologically more neutral term: monopolistic party – regimes, whose prevention would require strengthening those elements (both material and ideological) of the state that they seek to undermine.[837]

The first is opposed to the *pluralism* of the parties more so than to their *constitutionality*. The second is hostile to the pluralism of the parties but in favour of a *revolutionary party* that embodies the state (Hitler's regime). The third type is hostile to the pluralism of parties and in favour of a revolutionary party, but the objective of this party is the unification of society in a unique class. The Portuguese regime was an example of the first type. It eliminated party competition but also limited the powers of the rulers and was subordinate to laws, morality, religion, and assumed a traditionalist ideology. It tried – without entirely succeeding – to be liberal without being democratic.

The second regime matches fascism and, in contrast to the first, seeks not to depoliticize the people, but to engage them politically and fanaticize them. This encompasses Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, all of which opposed the liberal and democratic ideals of the French Revolution. Within this categorization, however, there are some differences. The Spanish regime was an intermediary between the first and second types of regime in so far as it

[834] Aron, "Is There a Nazi Mystery?," 38.

[835] Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 464, 466-478. Cf., Strauss, "German Nihilism [1941]," 353-378; Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*, 166-177.

[836] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 57-58. Cf. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, 54: "An accomplished reform changes something. A revolution appears susceptible of changing everything because no one knows what it will change. For the intellectual who is looking for fun, an object of faith, or to gamble in politics, reform is boring and revolution exciting. One is prosaic while the other is poetic. One passes for the work of functionaries while the other is the work of the people risen against the exploiters. The Revolution suspends the customary order and has us believe that finally everything is possible."

[837] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1369-1376.

was traditionalist, maintaining the role of the church, and it advocated top-down authority even though it opposed the totalitarian state. The Italian regime was statist but less revolutionary than the German regime in that it safeguarded traditional structures while granting government the arbitrary authority needed to suppress parliamentary assemblies and support the single party. The Nazi regime was the purest form of this secondary variety and was revolutionary to the extent that it tried to overturn the social and ideological structures of the Weimar Republic. Its principle of unity was not the state but rather race and nation. The third type of regime was the communist regime as represented by the Soviet Union, which, contrary to the second type of regime, pretended to fulfill the liberal-democratic ideals professed by constitutional-pluralist regimes.

These three different types of regime can be conceptualized in different ways. One way of thinking about them is to oppose the first regime to the second and third regimes, the former being conservative in the style of Salazar, the second two being revolutionary. So on the one hand the former regime aims at the restoration of a traditional society with an absolute but limited state, while the latter regimes are revolutionary and conflate the state with a particular party.

Another way of grouping these regimes is according to ideology. In this breakdown the first two regimes are opposed to the third regime. Salazar, Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler all resisted liberal-democratic ideas. The difference between the first and third regimes in this grouping is that the former is a non-dialectical negation of the constitutional-pluralist regime, while the latter is the dialectical negation. Finally, the three regimes can be categorized such that they each represent a different idea. They are each defined by the manner in which they combine inevitable social differences with the need for a single political will. The first type accepts natural differences in certain social spheres such as the family, corporation, and region, but it maintains unity through a strong, albeit not limitless, state. The second type is less organic and imposes national or racial unity through a single party in order to overcome the diversity of social groups caused by industrial civilization. The single party, and the arms and ideas behind it, is the cement of society. The third type asserts that class conflict is caused by a certain economic regime and that if one does away with class diversity then unity will be present in the collective. We can draw some of the similarities and differences between fascist and communist regimes as follows: they both have a single party with a monopoly on political activity, the party has a revolutionary ideology, and they both combine ideology and terror. They are different in that the communist party seeks to recruit members from the working class, whereas fascist parties mobilize the masses but then recruit primarily from other classes. Fascist parties also tend to enjoy support from the ruling classes and those worried about losing their wealth, such as the great industrialists. Lastly, for all of their similar political techniques, they are worlds apart in their respective ideologies and objectives. Fascism is exclusionary, nationalistic, and an irrational rejection of everything it hates in industrial civilization; communism is universal, an outgrowth of the liberal-democratic mentality, and the logical conclusion of industrial civilization. To employ the vocabulary we used earlier when discussing constitutional-pluralist regimes, they are similar in their institutions/structure (nature) and principle, but differ in their ideals.

We can enumerate the essential features of a totalitarian regime:[838] 1. The totalitarian phenomenon intervenes in a regime that gives a single party a monopoly over political activity. 2. The monopolistic party has an ideology that it considers absolute and which is thus the official truth of the state. 3. To enforce this official truth the state has a monopoly on the means of force and the means of persuasion (communication, radio, television, the press). 4. The majority of

[838] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1407-1408.

economic and professional activities are subordinated to the state and thus become a part of the state itself. They are thereby tinted by the official truth since the state is inseparable from its ideology. 5. Any fault committed in the economic or professional realms is immediately an ideological fault, leading to authoritarian reprisal and ideological terror. The principle of just such a regime, as in Montesquieu, is fear or terror.[839] Terror has certain qualities:[840] the imprisonment of suspected counter-revolutionaries; administrative tribunals that leave no possibility for defence or appeal; and the deportation of entire populations. Terror itself comes in three forms: "normal" terror, as in the French Revolution or in the Russian civil war between 1917 and 1921 – in order words, the moment when a party or faction terrorizes other parties or factions that are in opposition; a second form is that witnessed during the agricultural collectivization (1929-1930), meant to eliminate those who were class enemies, essentially the kulaks; the third sort is that practiced against political or class adversaries, opponents or dissidents (be they real or imaginary), within the communist party itself. It was this third form that Khrushchev condemned. 70% of the central committee, between 50% and 60% of all the delegates at the Congress of the Communist Party, were eliminated between 1917 and 1938 – shockingly or abnormally, the revolutionary terror escalated the more the regime stabilized.[841] This all culminated in the concentration camps and Moscow processes.

While one can see the essence of a totalitarian regime in the monopolistic party, or the nationalization of the economy, or ideological terror – and one can also understand how all of these could be interrelated – it is not necessarily the case that every single party regime causally brings about a totalitarian regime, even if the risk is always there.[842] What is particular about industrial society is the steady wasting away of traditional authority, and the corresponding need for rulers to justify their authority to the governed. Any monopolistic party regime must draw the line somewhere on freedom of speech since it will inevitably be faced with the question of why the people cannot be represented by any other party. Their monopoly will have to be justified by an ideology. The monopolistic party runs the risk of having to commit increasingly radical acts if its original intention was to transform society as a whole. It is for this reason that fascist Italy never saw the same ideological proliferation or totalitarian tendencies witnessed in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. The greater the ideological promise, the more the regime must clamp down on society and free speech in pursuit of this promise.

Having discussed the nature and principle of totalitarianism, we might point out that one area where both the communist regime and constitutional-pluralist regimes are similar is in their ideals:[843] both constitutional-pluralist regimes and communist regimes claim to represent the will

[839] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, III, 9.

[840] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1400-1402.

[841] Contrary to Aron, this is perhaps to be expected. If the principle of a despotic or totalitarian regime is fear, then the overlords must always ratchet up the tension in order to maintain this fear, otherwise it will come to be seen as customary and the subjects of the regime will grow used to it, thereby diminishing their fear. This, for example, was the natural outcome observed in Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*, where the revolutionary terror-brotherhood begins to normalize into the practico-inert.

[842] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1408-1409.

[843] However, we should also mention at this point that this commitment to a similar ideal needs to be qualified with more than simply pointing out the "essential imperfection" of totalitarian regimes. On this see Mahoney, "The Totalitarian Negation of Man," 137-148. In this article Mahoney traces the development of Aron's grappling with the totalitarian phenomenon. Despite Aron's attempts at sociological neutrality, Mahoney points out that Aron's own writing indicates that the single party is not a solid enough explanation for totalitarianism. One must also bear in mind the role played by the ideology and how "violence and lies were the twin pillars of the

of the people. Furthermore, they both claim to stand for liberty and equality and are the result of Enlightenment optimism. They both leave political wrangling to a smaller group of representatives. If the aforementioned episode culminating in Stalin's reign of terror seemed almost inevitable then its causes are to be discerned in the divergences between the two regimes.[844] Economically, as pointed out earlier, investment, for example, is subject to the will of the various investors in a constitutional-pluralist capitalist regime, whereas in a communist regime investment rains down from above. Politically, the defining characteristic of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the Western regimes is that the latter have a plurality of organizations independent of the state; in the former, all organizations were linked to the state and therefore to the party and its ideology, which in turn was a vision of history. This vision of history was not the only one that could be called Marxist: Aron relates that when he was in Germany in 1932 and heard a social democrat claim that they could afford to wait because the dialectic of history was on their side (this was the opinion of some of the social democrats of the Second International), he found out a few weeks later after Hitler had come to power that said social democrat was now in a concentration camp. Lenin and the Third International were also card-carrying Marxists, but they placed more faith in the will to power than in the dialectic of history. The Soviet Union departed in other ways too from Marxist doctrine, specifically when it came to the arts and sciences, about which Marx had nothing to say in his capacity as a prophet. The USSR instead censured various forms of artistic expression and the search for truth for being too bourgeois.[845] The scientific community had been forced to betray its vocation.[846]

Similar to our observation in the section on Marx, history seemed to have left a lot of politics out, and the irony is not lost on Aron:

> But one of the consequences of this form of the doctrine is that, little by little, the action of individuals is introduced into the vision of history in place of determinism or objective forces. The sacred history of Soviet doctrine is less and less that of the development of productive forces, and more and more the history of the party itself. The sacred history that leads to the revolution is that of the Bolshevik party, of its internal conflicts, and even the history of the satellite parties.[847]

However, this is not to say that the ideology served as nothing more than a tool in the acquisition of power.[848] There is a dialectical relation between ideology and force, one serving as the means at one moment and as the ends at the next.

It is not inevitable that such a regime must persist in perpetuity. Aron believed there were a few different scenarios under which a change of regime could be effected.[849] The first argued that an increasing standard of living and culture of the population would bring about more liberal-democratic institutions.

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monopolistic party state". (p. 142). Later Aron would evaluate the "monopolistic party regime" as something far more sinister: the attempt to remake man and man's social organizations on a whim. Such an attempt to perfect the human condition can lead only to perfect disaster.

[844] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1392-1405.

[845] Such was the case with their condemnation of abstract art and Mendelism in the final phase of Stalin's reign.

[846] Cf., Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 343.

[847] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1397.

[848] When Aron discusses Stalin's paranoia and the terror that came about he confesses: "Personally, I think that even at this extreme point one would be wrong to discard the ideology. The fact is that these pathological forms of despotism are not conceivable outside of an ideological frenzy, even if it inspires in the majority more scepticism than faith." Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1407.

[849] Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 1434-1440.

While it is true that such increases are *favourable* to the liberalization of a regime, one need only think back to Hitler's Germany to see that it is not always the case. The second argued that revolutionaries could not be revolutionary forever and would have to find a stable order – a process Weber termed *die Veralltäglichung der Revolution*.[850] Aron felt this was likely to happen and that future Soviet leaders would be more bourgeois, although none of this implied changes in the essential structural traits of the regime; furthermore, the leaders would probably continue to employ a Marxist vocabulary. The third argued that the regime would transform into a more rational regime, retaining traditional elements but leaving behind the more terroristic ones. Uprisings in the satellite states had also exposed the fundamentally *nationalist* character of the Soviet regime.

We shall make a final comment on totalitarianism before moving on. Totalitarianism is something more sinister than just another regime; indeed, it is the "negation of man".[851] We noted earlier that part of the Machiavellian approach involves a certain ultra-rationalistic view of man and his relations, without any reference to his values or ideals.[852] This joins Weber's bureaucratization or Marx's alienation, which makes people in modern society more susceptible to romanticism or religious extremism (secular or sacred).[853] This need for the sacred or transcendental or romantic goes untreated by constitutional-pluralist regimes; as we have said, their greatest virtues are negative. A totalitarian regime fulfills this need, but in so doing it crowds out civil society:

> Abandoned, individuals lose the organic bonds that tie them to their families, their neighbours, their work colleagues, or their colleagues in misery. The wife or the children call for the death of the father; no one trusts his neighbour anymore; the secret police is present in every factory, every office, even at the heart of the home. In the camps this "massification" reaches its extreme form, where the individual is anonymous and lost in the midst of the crowd where productive solitude is forbidden. The administration regulates the life of these ghosts who exist in shadows until they die, without anyone feeling that their existence is human or meaningful.[854]

A statesman who would prevent this situation from coming about would have to ensure for the survival of civil society, where individuals are as free as possible to pursue their own solutions to their spiritual needs. He must also keep with the changing times: earlier we said that Aron had added job security and job satisfaction to his list of liberties in his time – he had experienced the consequences of mass unemployment and understood that job security would

[850] While Aron writes "die Veralltäglichung der Revolution", Weber speaks of "die Veralltäglichung des Charisma". The two are connected, however, insofar as the process of stabilization is the same. See Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 142-148.

[851] Mahoney, "The Totalitarian Negation of Man," 137-148.

[852] And insofar as reason can tell us something about the ends Aron felt that certain ends, such as genocide, rule out reason. See Aron, "Is There a Nazi Mystery?," 37. Although, interestingly, the context in which Aron makes this remark (in a footnote) is when speaking of the "rationality" of Hitler's decision to divert resources from the eastern front in a later stage of the war in order to expedite the gas chamber exterminations. Aron remarks that to the extent that mass extermination is one's goal – outweighing even the war itself – then this was indeed a "rational" move. Such a statement led Claude Lefort later to comment that this was a remarkable example of Aron's concern "not to be surprised by anything, and to detect the rationality of human behaviour by separating it from any inquiry as to the meaning of history." Lefort, "Raymond Aron et le phénomène totalitaire," 92.

[853] Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 458.

[854] Aron, "L'essence du totalitarisme [1954]," 205.

mitigate the social conflicts that were eating away at representative institutions.[855] It is for this reason that he recommended state involvement in the economy in order to get France up and running again properly after the Second World War.[856]

Above all, a constitutional-pluralist regime must have the resolve to defend itself and its most precious assets, independence and prosperity. This requires the spirit of patriotism, willingness to sacrifice oneself for a common cause, courage, and discipline – *virtù* – all of which are deceptively bought or coerced in a totalitarian regime, but which must be freely chosen in a constitutional-pluralist regime.[857] As Aron observed on the eve of the Second World War, this requires a ruling elite that "is neither cynical nor lax, that possesses political courage without falling into Machiavellianism pure and simple. Therefore a ruling elite is required that has confidence in itself and has a sense of its own mission."[858] Great leaders can be integral to fostering this sense. Whether their efforts are laudable or deplorable is a question of their intentions and whether they seek to unite a political community or exclude those who do not accept their particular principle of legitimacy.[859] On what is this legitimacy to be based? It appears to be a perennial question. "Every social order is one of the possible solutions to a problem that is not scientific but human, the problem of community life. Every civilization is animated by beliefs that transcend reason."[860] In 1939 Aron declared that this legitimacy was to be found in what was essential to the constitutional-pluralist regime, which, in his mind, was legality, respect for the people, and a system of representation that controlled the rulers.[861] The problem of community life is put before us every day because, as Aron observes in his *Introduction*, human destiny is achieved only in the community.[862] If borders can somewhat restrain the flow of people, they have much more difficult time restraining the flow of ideas. What of the problem of community life on the international level?

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We have seen the challenges potentially posed to the constitutional-pluralist regime by the unreflecting cult of action and violence of Sartre, the dogmatism of Marx, the philosophical nihilism of Weber, and the cynicism of the Machiavellians. Maintaining the constitution, the laws, and the pluralist political system should be foremost in the mind of the statesman who wants to prevent the decline of a constitutional-pluralist regime into despotism. We have examined the inner workings of totalitarianism to alert us of the dangers we would seek to avoid. From here we move to the international realm where the international actor seeks stability, among many other things, but does not even have a constitutional order to fall back on.

[855] Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 517.
[856] Stewart, "The Origins of the 'End of Ideology?," 180-184.
[857] Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 518, 653.
[858] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 70.
[859] It is on this basis that Aron is able to praise the revolutionary and restorative genius of General de Gaulle. See Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 13, 14.
[860] Aron, *The Century of Total War*, 325.
[861] Aron, "Etats démocratiques et états totalitaires," 70.
[862] Aron, *Introduction*, 418.

3e – Praxeology in *Peace and War*

We have examined Aron's critique of vulgar Machiavellianism and Weber's political vision. As we have seen, one must study totalitarianism and learn from it. We have now to lay out Aron's own prescriptions for political action in the international sphere. His massive work on international relations, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, comprises a final part on what he has termed "praxeology".[863] This part – "in many ways the most profound of the book"[864] – follows Aron's multi-layered analysis of international relations in the thermonuclear age, in an effort to distill advice for statesmen who must act. International relations is of particular interest to Aron because it operates at the most complex level of social reality.

The problem of understanding international disorder could be framed thus: "How do you give an account of what has been done or what should be done in a realm where laws are unavailable and which lacks the (relative) stability and predictability of a cohesive society?"[865] International relations does not constitute a system, and therefore lacks a theory comparable to that of economics or of the natural world.[866] Unlike in economics, the end is not set in international relations.[867] That Aron is abundantly aware of the difficulty inherent to studying the field adequately can make his text seem opaque to some,[868] while continuously relevant to others.[869] A science of this order cannot furnish absolute maxims for political action, and Aron has been criticized for raising more questions than he answers.[870]

This source of dissatisfaction for some is, on the contrary, one of Aron's great strengths as a political thinker, for it exposes "the antinomies of human existence as they have always been interpreted by the ancient and modern philosophers",[871] and thus Aron succeeds in "teach[ing] us which questions are significant".[872] The key in international politics will be to act in a way that is consonant with the national interest in a Hobbesian environment with neither a universally accepted tribunal nor a universally accepted law enforcer, without eschewing the goal of peace

[863] Aron, *Peace and War*, trans. R. Howard and A. Baker Fox.
[864] Mahoney and Anderson, introduction to *Peace and War*, xiv.
[865] Manent, foreword to *The Companion to Raymond Aron*, x.
[866] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 503.
[867] Aron, *Peace and War*, 16; Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 422-423.
[868] See, e.g., Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity*, 209-214.
[869] See, e.g., Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, 21n75; Holeindre, "Raymond Aron on War and Strategy," 23-24. Shortly after its publication Leo Strauss wrote a letter to Aron in which he stated that *Paix et guerre* was "the best book on the subject which is in existence: no other book I know of is as broad and as profound, as free from delusions and as humane as yours." Leo Strauss to Raymond Aron, June 11, 1963.
[870] See, e.g., Morgenthau, review of *Peace and War* by Raymond Aron, 1110-1112. Or, as David Thomson puts it: "As the outcome of so lengthy and elaborate an inquiry, [Aron's conclusions] are extremely cautious. They are modest to the point of being disappointing." Thomson, "The Three Worlds of Raymond Aron," 53.
[871] Aron, "Qu'est-ce qu'une théorie des relations internationales ? [1967]," 874-875.
[872] Kissinger, review of *Peace and War* by Raymond Aron. Aron initially evinced a great pride in *Peace and War*, although that would dwindle over time as he came to admit of some of its deficiencies (the underdeveloped chapters in the sociology section and the tendency to associate a collectivity with the individual actor or statesman). At the time, however, it was reviewed rather favourably by Alfred Grosser, Etienne Borne, Jacques Julliard, Carl Schmitt, Golo Mann (who, writing in *Die Zeit*, compared the work to Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege*), Leo Strauss, Stanley Hoffmann, and Henry Kissinger (Aron, *Mémoires*, 590-595, 974). Criticisms of the work centred primarily on its difficulty and modest conclusions, with one particularly acerbic review from Oran Young, who considered it to have epically failed to construct a deductive theory of international relations and, in so doing, to have brought about more confusion than clarity (Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Sociologist*, 194-196).

or succumbing to a vulgar *Realpolitik* that scorns an international order whose maintenance is conducive to the national interest.

Following Clausewitz, the further one moves up the ladder of social complexity, from tactics to strategy, the more significant politics becomes as a factor.[873] Foreign policy is influenced by strategic indeterminacy, which is itself a function of two causes: the total situation has a more profound effect on decisions, and there is a plurality of objectives (security, power, glory, ideas, etc.).[874] Complicating the situation even more – and this is the essential difference between domestic politics and international politics – is that states take the law into their own hands. Where Weber defines the state on the basis of its "monopoly of legitimate physical violence",[875] Aron adapts this to characterize international society by "the absence of an authority that possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence".[876]

Bearing in mind this state of affairs and the hurdles involved in grasping the subject matter adequately enough, the question that Aron addresses in this final part is: what should one do? He frames this discussion in the form of two praxeological problems: the problem of legitimate means (the Machiavellian problem) and the problem of universal peace (the Kantian problem, i.e. the desired end).

In this section we will examine Aron's understanding of praxeology in the international realm by looking more closely at his discussion of the means and ends in international relations, otherwise understood by him as the Machiavelli-Kant problem. We will proceed by examining the following: *The means: force, realism, and the morality of prudence. The end: the possibility of peace.*

The Means: Force, Realism, and the Morality of Prudence

The means can be conceptualized broadly by two different approaches: idealism and realism. Aron's analysis commences with the former.[877] Diplomatic-strategic relations comport both social and anti-social elements to the extent that states tend to acknowledge each other's humanity all the while retaining the right to use force to determine the outcome of a conflict, and this in turn becomes the basis of a new norm established by a treaty. Already Aron cites a fact – that actors try to justify their actions – while putting to the question its normative purchase: "What role do nations and statesmen accord, or should they accord to principles, ideas, morality, necessity?" This question is always lurking in the background in the foregoing analysis.

Contra the idealist, Aron is of the persuasion that the statesman's duty is to look after his own country, which is an inevitable and ongoing concern given the state of nature that obtains among states. Aron is Hobbesian on this point, although, as we have established, he abandons the latter in ascribing to international actors goals more diverse than simple survival. Indeed, international relations are not cynical – blind to ideas, norms, and principles. Nor, by the same token, are they idealistic, where idealism here comes in two forms: 1. Ideological: assuming that a precedent created in history, e.g. right of peoples to self-determination, is sufficient in determining what is just and unjust; 2. Juridical: assuming that laws not backed up by force are enough to control states. Any international status quo based on ideological or juridical idealism can be put to the test by recourse to arms or even conflicting interpretations of ideology or the

[873] Aron, *Peace and War*, 575-578.
[874] Aron, *Peace and War*, 71-93.
[875] Weber, "Politik als Beruf," 506.
[876] Aron, "Qu'est-ce qu'une théorie des relations internationales ?," 860.
[877] Aron, *Peace and War*, 579-585.

law. It is difficult, then, on both moral and historical grounds, to condemn the use of force. This is so for two reasons: force may be the only way to fight off a deadly attack; moreover, there is no international arbiter that can state the bottom line as to what is just and unjust, much less enforce this interpretation. Above and beyond such pragmatic justifications for the use of force, idealism can be criticized on moral grounds too. It can easily morph into fanaticism and reshape the discussion of international politics in terms of good vs evil and exaggerating the crimes of the enemy. Once the world has been presented in such stark binaries then the justification for *not* acting aggressively becomes increasingly immoral, and thus there is the danger of escalating the chances for a war that one might otherwise have avoided. In any case, rare are the instances where all the faults of a conflict can be attributed to one belligerent alone.

Aron's principle for action is his oft-cited morality of prudence, which he defines thus:[878]

> The first duty – political, but also moral – is to see international relations for what they are, so that each state, legitimately preoccupied with its own interests, will not be entirely blind to the interests of others. In this uncertain battle, in which the qualifications of the participants are not equivalent but in which it is rare that one of them has done absolutely no wrong, the best conduct – the best with regard to the values which the idealist himself wishes to achieve – is that dictated by *prudence*. To be prudent is to act in accordance with the particular situation and the concrete data, and not in accordance with some system or out of passive obedience to a norm or pseudo-norm; it is to prefer the limitation of violence to the punishment of the presumably guilty party or to a so-called absolute justice; it is to establish concrete accessible objectives conforming to the secular law of international relations and not to limitless and perhaps meaningless objectives, such as "a world safe for democracy" or "a world from which power politics will have disappeared."[879]

To the limitation of violence as both means and ends we might also add two additional comments: peace is superior to war and pacifism is an insufficient guarantee of peace; war is to be avoided through dissuasion and the equilibrium of forces.[880] Prudence is the highest virtue of the statesman because it takes account of the specificity of the situation and that there is always the potential for recourse to force that is ideally exercised in conformity with international law and custom. Prudence here is contrasted with the illusions of idealism and not with idealism itself. As with Aristotle, prudence is not to be construed as the absence of any ideals or desirable ends at all, for that would be mere cleverness.[881] In fact, the desired end – peace, or the reduction of violence – will occupy Aron in the final two chapters of the praxeology section. For the moment we shall direct our attention to the other means: realism.[882]

His breakdown of realist thought is more elaborate than his initial comments on idealism because realism comes in multiple varieties: a German version and an American version, and in the first case its expression, power politics, is believed to be a noble end in itself, while in the second case it is purely a means for avoiding an uglier state of affairs. It is not just the complexity, then, of realist thought that leads Aron to spend more time here dissecting it, but

[878] Cf. Baverez, "Life and Works," 13; Oppermann, "In the 'Era of Tyrannies'," 40-41; Frost, "Forward to the Past," 64-65; Mahoney, "Raymond Aron and the Morality of Prudence," 243-252.
[879] Aron, *Peace and War*, 585.
[880] Hassner, "Raymond Aron et la philosophie des relations internationales," 66-67.
[881] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a23-37.
[882] Aron, *Peace and War*, 586-600.

also Aron's reluctance to fall into a cynical mode of thinking – all too tempting once one has emerged from the cave of idealist illusions – that claims to be more "realistic" than it really is.

For Aron, the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke is representative of the same German realism we witnessed in the political writings of Max Weber. "According to Treitschke, power politics is not a bondage but an authentic expression of Providence: *Man fulfills his moral vocation only in and through the state, states realize their essence only when they come to grips with each other, war, in fact, is not barbarism but a holy ordeal which rightly determines the destiny of peoples.*"[883] Treitschke's view is based on a certain philosophical anthropology whose consequence is that politics and morality are not separate, but both are intertwined such that this perspective is hardly a concession to vulgar Machiavellianism; honest and legal policies are indeed desirable and effective. The state must take its honour very seriously, and it does so not just through blind aggression on the international stage, but also by maintaining internal stability, which at times is facilitated by respecting international law. Another realist, the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, seems to combine aspects of the spiritualism common to Treitschke's realism with resignation in face of a greater evil that is more characteristic of the American brand. His criticism of a liberal and overly optimistic foreign policy lies in his sin-based conception of human nature. Furthermore, using force in the name of humanitarianism or to make the world safe for democracy risks fomenting greater violence in that the ultimate objective is something that is impossible in reality. Ironically, viewing war as something unnatural risks transforming belligerents into *guilty parties* as opposed to *enemies*, which raises the stakes of the conflict.[884] Where the American realists such as Niebuhr, as well as Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Robert Osgood differ from Treitschke is that unlike the German realist, they do not think collective selfishness is a value in itself, but are driven to condone it simply because the alternative, idealism, is more dangerous. Their sense is that idealism lacks self-awareness and masks a will to power. Their realism nonetheless parts ways with cynicism (even though both join hands in their opposition to idealism's pretensions to know man's future) since it urges respect for humanity and the limits of knowledge and power, and respect for justice, which reins in prudence and prevents it from being conflated with opportunism.

Although Aron is commonly placed in the realist camp,[885] he has reservations of his own when it comes to what he sees as American realism. He feels that in their intense opposition to idealism, American realists err in constructing an anthropology based on power, which permits them to set up the false dichotomy between power and law/morality.

> The thesis of the constant contradiction between what is good for the collectivity and what is in accord with morality is indefensible, even if we wrongly define the *useful* exclusively by reference to the power of the collectivity. When candidates for the exercise of power or those who possess it act contrary to the rules which subjects or citizens spontaneously regard as valid, they weaken the respect for law and morality, which is a source of strength for the collectivity itself, at the same time that they

[883] Aron, *Peace and War*, 586. Italics in original.

[884] This point, attributed to Carl Schmitt, is evident in Aron even if it is not attributed to the German theorist (for reasons of academic prudence). See Raynaud, "Raymond Aron et le droit international," 121-122.

[885] See, e.g., Griffiths, *Fifty Key Thinkers in International Relations*, 3-7; Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity*; Hoffmann, "Raymond Aron and the Theory of International Relations," 13-27; Brand, "Realists Make Strange Bedfellows," 277-283; Hall, "The nature of sophisticated realism," 191-201; Cesa, "Realist Visions of the End of the Cold War," 177-191. This, of course, is not to say that those who place Aron in the realist camp ignore what is different and most valuable in his particular brand of realism.

> undermine their own credit. A people which thereby comes to despise its own laws and its masters is certainly not a strong people.[886]

But we must always remember that prudent politics depends on the situation: "But when an order has collapsed and must be built anew from nothing, those who have the best chance of prevailing are those who possess the least Christian virtues, the capacity for command, the aptitude for brutality and cunning, fanatic confidence in themselves and in their cause. The victors believe in a government by men, not in government by law."[887]

Aron takes Hans Morgenthau as a representative of American realism. According to Aron, the problem with Morgenthau's theoretical construct as outlined in *Politics among Nations*[888] is that his most fundamental concept, power, is interpreted variously as a means, an inherent objective, and an immediate aim. If we take power to be an immediate aim, then it is also a stepping stone to some greater end. But we are also told that power is the primary element in all politics, that is, both domestic and international politics. If this were the case however, then would one not lose sight of the fundamentally different essence of international politics? If the essence of domestic and international politics is the same, and if war within the state can be eliminated, then it should also be possible to eliminate it on the international level. The second problem concerns Morgenthau's statement that all states through history generally have the same kind of foreign policy, i.e. one based on survival. Even if Aron were inclined to buy into this – and he most certainly is not: "What life does not serve a higher goal? What good is security accompanied by mediocrity?"[889] – survival can mean many different things: independence, the identity of the political regime or of the historical culture, or the preservation of the lives of individuals. It is precisely because states are concerned with both power as well as the "search for an equitable order",[890] that the international system can be either homogeneous or heterogeneous.[891]

Aron concludes that Morgenthau makes these conceptual errors because he too is more preoccupied with praxeology than with theory, carrying high the banner of realism against the equally passionate defenders of idealism. It may indeed be the case that if statesmen thought more like realists à la Morgenthau, then humanity would suffer less from rivalry for power. But by mixing theory and praxeology the American realists have also arrived at an ideology similar to the one they criticize. Aron reiterates his conviction in the morality of prudence, which does not always imply moderation, peace by compromise, negotiation, or indifference to the internal regimes of other states. Realism, for Aron, "takes into account the whole of reality, dictates diplomatic-strategic conduct adapted not to the finished portrait of what international politics would be if statesmen were wise in their selfishness, but to the nature of the passions, the follies, the ideas and the violences of the century."[892] It requires acknowledging the role that ideology plays in diplomatic-strategic conduct. It has been observed that Aron's realism differs from that of the American realists, or Machiavelli or Hobbes, in its more nuanced understanding of power (as means and as an end), his nestling of theory within the confines of history, and his

[886] Aron, *Peace and War*, 783.
[887] Aron, *Peace and War*, 783.
[888] Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*.
[889] Aron, *Peace and War*, 598.
[890] Aron, *Peace and War*, 50.
[891] Aron, *Peace and War*, 99-104.
[892] Aron, *Peace and War*, 600.

recognition of the role that the domestic regime plays in influencing foreign policy.[893] What the American realists fail to do is study the intrinsic meaning of human activity and reflect upon history itself. It is fine and well to conceive of history as the progression from tribes to nation-states and finally a universal empire, although this is only one side of the story. The problem with the realist school, then, is that it tries to offer a finished conception of international politics without posing to itself some of these fundamental questions, that is, unlike Aron they ignore the philosophical assumptions that underlie all politics. This is also how Aron is able to establish the connection between the domestic regime – and its ideology – and a state's foreign policy. Aron's phenomenological method, as we saw in his *Introduction*, is part of what differentiates him from other international relations theorists, in that he never forgets to inquire after the meaning that political actors give themselves and the world around them.[894] In an instance of typically Aronian reasoning we witness common sense cutting through the Gordian knot of academic theorizing:

> Is it true that states, whatever their regime, pursue "the same kind of foreign policy"? This statement is admirably ambiguous. Are the foreign policies of Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin of the same kind as those of Louis XVI,[895] Adenauer or Nicholas II? If one answers *yes*, then the proposition is incontestable, but not very instructive. The features which all diplomatic-strategic behavior have in common are formal, they come down to selfishness, to the calculation of forces, to a variable mixture of hypocrisy and cynicism. But the differences in degree are such that a Napoleon or a Hitler suffices with the help of revolutionary circumstances to change the course of history.[896]

One of the central antinomies of diplomatic-strategic action in Aron's day (and in ours as well) revolves around the justified use of force.[897] To condemn power politics outright would be to condemn all of political history; on the other hand, justifying it would require recognizing the right to use force. Contrary to the wishes of international jurists, it is not so simple a matter to establish an opposition between law and force, for the law has its origins in the use of force, and is indeed backed up by the use of force. To miss this point is to write history as one giant string of injustices. The justifiability of the use of force is, therefore, not to be judged in the abstract; one must have recourse to the historical circumstances in which force was used. "In short, the *ethical* judgment of diplomatic-strategic conduct is not separable from the *historical* judgment of the goals of the actors and the consequences of their success or failure."[898] What this quote illustrates is not only that the intentions of the actors must be taken into account – which is innocuous enough – but also, perhaps more disconcertingly, that whether they succeed or not

[893] Hoffmann, "Raymond Aron and the Theory of International Relations," 15-17. Gwendal Châton has also pointed out these differences and calls Aron's realism, situated between cynicism and moralism taking the best parts of the Machiavellian and Kantian traditions, a "post-Kantian Machiavellianism". See Châton, "Pour un « machiavélisme postkantien »," 389-403.

[894] Cf. Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*, 130: "Aron's normative theory is deeply embedded in his descriptive, indeed phenomenological, analysis of international relations, and…is never severed from considerations of feasibility or the real dilemmas of statecraft."

[895] Probably supposed to be Louis XIV, as indicated in the index. This error also exists in the French original. Aron, *Paix et guerre*, 585.

[896] Aron, *Peace and War*, 597-598.

[897] Aron, *Peace and War*, 600-610.

[898] Aron, *Peace and War*, 605.

will reflect on the ethical judgment of their conduct,[899] and success is just as much a function of luck as it is of skill. Aron also shows himself to be sceptical of any long-range foreign policy ideology, such as some of the prescriptions of F. S. C. Northrop, which evaluate diplomatic-strategic conduct favourable as long as it conforms to man's natural right to freedom, the supremacy of freely accepted law and morality over force, and the unjustifiability of force used beyond one's own borders. Such prescriptions require the assent of all international actors, but even if such assent were granted, problems of interpretation would arise (does freedom refer to freedom of the individual within a community, or a community within another community? are all populations allowed to become sovereign states?), not to mention the temptation simply to disregard such weakly binding maxims when they conflict with the national interest. And these pitfalls are not necessarily avoided by rigorously upholding international law at every moment: "A rare event in itself, respect for the law is too readily explained by national interest. If acted upon more frequently, this same respect would multiply wars and make them inexpiable."[900] According to Aron, the safest and surest prescription remains the morality of prudence, a morality based on both facts and values, and which considers concrete particularities, principle and opportunity, and forgets neither the relation of forces nor the will of peoples.

The End: The Possibility of Peace

So much for the Machiavellian problem of the means. What about the Kantian problem of the ends? Unlike Weber's view of international relations, for Aron the goal is peace.[901] Aron's defence of peace is not philosophical but historical:[902]

> The horrors of twentieth-century war and the thermonuclear threat have given the rejection of power politics not only an actuality and an urgency, but also a kind of obviousness. *History must no longer be* a succession of bloody conflicts if humanity is to pursue its adventure. Never has the disproportion appeared so striking, so tragic, between the possible catastrophe and the stakes of inter-state rivalries.[903]

Achieving this peace requires either radically changing states and the stakes of war (land, wealth, men, etc.) or changing the Hobbesian nature of international relations. To be fair, Aron recognizes the role that industrial society has played in changing the stakes of war, insofar as one can amass wealth by conquering through the economy instead of by arms. However, given the unlikelihood of stamping out all inducements to war and radically changing the nature of states, one might base a doctrine of peace on the Hobbesian situation by means of law or empire, neither of which particularly excites Aron.

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[899] Cf. Machiavelli, *Il principe* XVIII: "In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no tribunal where one can appeal, one looks to the result. Therefore let a prince conquer and maintain the state, and the means will always be judged honourable and praised by everyone."; Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I, 9: "It is indeed fitting that when the act accuses him [a prudent organizer of a republic], the effect excuses him. And when the effect is good, as in the case of Romulus, it will always excuse him, because he who is violent in order to lay waste, and not to restore to order, should be rebuked."

[900] Aron, *Peace and War*, 609.

[901] Aron, *Peace and War*, 703-709.

[902] Contrast this with Aristotle, *Politics*, 1271b1-10 and 1334a15-16.

[903] Aron, *Peace and War*, 703.

International law has always been weak both in theory and in practice.[904] If sovereignty is absolute, then on principle there is nothing that would set international law above state sovereignty or states doing what they consider to be in their interest. In practice there is no arbiter whose supremacy is acknowledged in legal interpretation and in enforcement. Moreover, dealing legally with collectives that wish to revolt and attain autonomy is something of a grey area.[905] Not only is it unclear if there is a point at which nationalism is an insufficient justification for revolution, but the reactions of other states will differ depending on whether the international system is homogeneous or heterogeneous. If the system conforms to the latter, then other states may have a vested interest in backing either the revolutionaries or the challenged authority. Peace between states becomes increasingly less likely when peace within states is difficult to achieve. For Aron international law has been woefully inadequate at maintaining peace. At the end of the day, we still associate more with our groups and enflamed passions than with some vague notion of all of humanity. Peace by law, then, might be an *idea of reason* in the Kantian sense:

> An idea that can never be entirely realized, but which animates action and indicates a goal…Law is a regulation of social life, resulting from custom, justified or inspired by a conception of the just and the unjust, consolidated by systematic formulation and jurisdictional system, whose means of constraint normally permit assuring its respect…Common values unite those who were originally victors and vanquished.[906]

Peace by law would necessitate a homogeneous system: a great deal of common ground with republican constitutions in the great states at least, coupled with similar goals and the willingness to lay down arms and accept the judgments of a universal tribunal. Already some progress has been made with the development of industrial society – no one disputes the desirability of growth and a strong economy, and indeed wars for resources are now often waged in the less bloody venue of the market. As one ascends from the economic to the political level, however, the old questions about human existence and how peoples ought to be governed persist.[907]

This issue is no less problematic when it comes to achieving peace by empire, be it by an agreed upon federation or by the domination of a single state.[908]

> The widening of the functions of the state, the principle of international law that forbids open interference in the internal affairs of independent states, the nationalization of culture – these three characteristic facts of our century preserve for national independence, despite technical-economic interdependence, despite supranational blocs and transnational ideologies, a meaning which we may deplore but not ignore. Must we, in fact, deplore it?[909]

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[904] Aron, *Peace and War*, 720-736. Aron was under no illusions when it came to the United Nations. He was in fact downright impatient with it when its piddling procedures meddled in French affairs. See Aron, "Le scandale de l'O.N.U.," 83-86.

[905] We should remember that Aron is writing these lines as France is embroiled in the Algerian War

[906] Aron, *Peace and War*, 735.

[907] Cf. Aron, *Les désillusions du progrès*, 1729: Industrialization will not get rid of the diversity of systems of norms and values (as they are called these days), of customs and mores (as they were called in the 18th century)." Unlike the French version, the English translation goes on to say: "Science will never answer those final questions man is forever asking; and the answers provided by the various religions, secular and otherwise, are not unanimously accepted." Aron, *Progress and Disillusion*, trans. E. Halperin, 291-292.

[908] Aron, *Peace and War*, 749-758.

[909] Aron, *Peace and War*, 749.

The nation-state – not to be lazily conflated with the idealist's disdain for power politics, in which all nation-states have engaged at one point or another[910] – is for Aron greater than a mere configuration of institutions; it has a collective personality that has an end in itself,[911] and while this is not incompatible with man's duty to humanity, man's duty to humanity is prefigured by the nation that has made him what he is. The nation, over and above other groups, enjoys this special status because it is defined by a shared culture, beliefs, and actions. It is able to unite (however imperfectly) culture and politics, history and reason. "The nation has its language and its law, which it has received from the past and which express a unique calling. Citizens seek to live together, to establish their own laws in order to make a contribution to the human enterprise which, without them, would not exist. In this sense, the nation, as Father Fessard writes, has a vocation which class does not possess."[912] Effacing the world of nation-states by way of a gigantic federation would not necessarily do away with war; we would simply call it civil war instead of interstate war. Nor would it be such an easy task to do away with nation-states, for they are invested with the spirit of a people, who are bound together by traditions and beliefs that are longer lasting than the pragmatic decisions of a moment.[913] In Aron's mind peace is dependent on fulfilling three criteria: non-use of nuclear weapons, equitable distribution of resources, and mutual acceptance and respect amongst different races, peoples, nations, and religions, none of which has yet been fulfilled, nor whose fulfillment can be guaranteed by peace through law or empire.[914]

Aron's prescriptions for political action are highly dependent on historical contingency, not just because determining the appropriate means requires a keen eye for circumstance, but also because the ends are shaped through time:

> Morality, too, is born in history, has been developed through time. It is the very progress of our moral conceptions which leads us to judge severely the practices of states and gradually to transform them. It is in the concrete morality of collectivities

[910] Aron, "Une citoyenneté multinationale est-elle possible ? [1974]," 795. The idealist in this instance is Weber's moralist of conviction. Aron observes that "unilateralists" (who favour unilateral disarmament) fit this description quite well. Where they perhaps differed in Aron's day from the revolutionary unionists and Christian pacifists of Weber's day was in the scientific expertise that they employed to argue that their conclusions were the only ones reasonable because they were proclaimed by scientists. What Aron's analysis displays is that they often conflate the *possibility* of nuclear war and its potentially devastating effect with the *certainty* of its outbreak and the annihilation of the human race. This confusion makes it logical for them to embrace unilateral disarmament without acknowledging that none of the other presumably desired goals – universal disarmament, world peace, survival of the West, survival of the nation-state, etc. – would be achieved in acting thus. Consequently, unilateral disarmament is moral and reasonable *only* on the basis of the ethic of conviction. But a pure moralist of conviction – whose morals are otherworldly – is never fit to be a statesman, whose morals must be political, of this world, and therefore a morality of responsibility. See Aron, *Peace and War*, 611-635.

[911] Aron seems sceptical of the view that the state is a political collective whose only goal is to secure the well-being of its members. See Aron, "Une citoyenneté multinationale est-elle possible ? [1974]," 788.

[912] Aron, *Peace and War*, 751.

[913] Cf. Aron's comments on European diversity in Aron, "Universalité de l'idée de nation et contestation [1976]," 312-313. One of the reasons why Aron was so keen on the Hungarian revolution – apart from the obvious service it performed in demonstrating the hypocrisy and unremitting tyranny of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union – was because it was nationalist and showed a country in tune with its national history, unwilling to submit to decadence. See Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, 229. This discussion of the nation-state has been interpreted by some as one of the roots of Aron's "Euroscepticism". See Kende, " « L'euroscepticisme » de Raymond Aron," 213-219.

[914] Cf. Aron, *Les désillusions du progrès*, 1728-1730.

> that universal morality is realized – however imperfectly. And it is in and by politics that concrete moralities are achieved.[915]

Aron's morality of prudence is a far cry from Weber's one-dimensional view of politics – one-dimensional because it is impervious to the possible but not foreordained reconciliation of the ends for which men fight.

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We have seen that the uniqueness of international relations lies in the plurality of objectives it contains. Nowhere more so than in international relations is it clear that statesmen live and act in a dialectical relation with history. Because of the sheer complexity of international relations, the gap is large between micro-level intentions and macro-level outcomes and meanings. We have seen that Aron's solution is to moderate our expectations and goals, while acting in the best interest of our nation-state. This is his renowned morality of prudence. It manages to avoid a naïve and dangerous idealism that risks doing more harm than good by imposing its impossible ideals on reality. Aron's morality of prudence also manages to avoid the other extreme of "realism", in its "idealist" German form, as well as in its "pragmatic" American form. The German variation comes too close to extolling the virtues of war, while the American variation, in its eagerness to avoid idealism, sets up a false dichotomy between power and law/morality.

[915] Aron, *Peace and War*, 780-781.

Part 4 – Conclusion

4a – Summary Conclusion

We shall conclude by summarizing the main ideas in each section followed by a final note on action in history, which is the culmination of Aron's analysis of history in the making and the problem he had revisited in various forms since his encounter with German thought in the 1930s.

This dissertation was divided into three parts, History, Sociology, and Praxeology, to reflect the three main interconnected areas of Raymond Aron's thinking. Our argument throughout has been to take Aron at his own word and demonstrate that his intellectual inheritance from Germany first laid the foundation for these cornerstones of his thought, which were crucial for helping him frame his answers to his lifelong philosophical problem of man and action in history. To this end, we associated a German thinker with each one of these areas – Dilthey (History), Marx (Sociology), Weber (Praxeology) – to better explain the most salient concepts and points that concerned Aron within each area. These three German thinkers served as interlocutors for Aron and we can certainly not pretend to have explored every dimension of their own thinking. Their importance, however, lies in the fact that Aron spent his lifetime engaging with them and the answers they furnished to problems that interested all of them.

As we have seen, in Aron's mind, Wilhelm Dilthey set the stage for historicist thought and he carried its arguments to their antinomic conclusion. Here we saw Aron's trip to Germany provide the answers he needed to the Comtean and Durkheimian positivism he had been taught in France. He was intrigued by these answers specifically for the emphasis they placed on phenomenology and history. For the most part he managed to avoid the extreme pathos and existentialism of Sartre (and Heidegger as well) by seeing the possibility for self-knowledge only within the context of knowledge of others and historical knowledge, as he makes clear in the second section of his *Introduction*; nevertheless, the final section of his *Introduction* betrays a nihilistic tone that he would later regret. He would pick up his theoretical work on history periodically later on in life, although, save for a critique of Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*, he never managed to complete his planned trilogy on historical knowledge and action, which would have constituted the continuation of his doctoral work in his more mature age. This work would have unfolded in response to the problem set by Dilthey. One of the later developments in Aron's historical thinking was the separation between micro and macro-level analysis, corresponding to an earlier antinomy he observed in Dilthey: at the macro-level historical relativity appears to be a fact, while at the micro-level individuals seek out conclusions of universal validity. He embraces this conclusion while never abandoning the historical framework set up by Dilthey. One of the additional lessons that is emphasized especially in his later critique of Sartre (but which is already present in his *Introduction*) is our inability to use violent revolution to find an authentic vantage point of existential freedom outside of society. Aron's approach acknowledges the interconnectedness between the individual and the society or regime of which he is a part. This study of the texture of history necessitates a study of the regime in which the individual finds himself, which is covered in the Sociology part.

In the second part, Sociology, we situated Aron in the narrative of the postwar reconstruction of French sociology and laid out over the course of these sections his unique

approach. As a contrast we set up Karl Marx as Aron's main interlocutor. While Marx had a great many interesting things to say, his insights into what defined modern society, his sociological method, and his ideas on class struggle piqued Aron's interest in the 1930s and later led him to publish a trilogy on industrial society, which is part of his account of what is unique about our time. This trilogy not only evaluates the claims of Marx, but also tests Aron's own sociological method by analyzing industrial society on three levels: economic, social, and political. In the economic sphere we saw Aron outline the similarities between the Western and Soviet blocs, distinguishing industrial societies in general from pre-industrial societies. We saw that industrial societies are set in motion by growth and production. In the social sphere we saw Aron begin with Marx's notion of class struggle and its conceptual flaws before addressing a neo-Machiavellian-inspired theory that focuses on the elites and masses, emphasizing that all regimes are oligarchic to an extent. In the political sphere Aron executes a study of the constitutional-pluralist regime, albeit sociologically, thus circumscribing his field of analysis within industrial society. We analyzed its essential components, its principle (rule of law and compromise), its occasionally contradictory ideals, and the source of its struggles and weaknesses in that its virtues are negative. Contrary to Marx's sociological method that emphasizes the causal superiority of the infrastructure to the superstructure, we saw that it was overly simplistic to conclude that the socio-economic relations of industrial societies had unilaterally determined their political regimes. Part of Aron's critique of Marx is based on his more complex view of causality, as outlined in the third section of his *Introduction*. We observed the complex interconnections between the various spheres of industrial society while agreeing with the secondary literature in its focus on the primacy of the political, for it is the political that comes closest to the realm of values and philosophy.

In the third part, Praxeology, we relied on Aron's ongoing dialogue with Max Weber. Weber had sought to recover some realm of certainty amongst the problems posed by Dilthey and – what was also of great attraction to Aron – he was concerned with the relation between action and knowledge. Aron posits dichotomies, such as Machiavelli-Kant or Machiavelli-Marx, to show the insufficiency of policymaking on the basis solely of cynicism or idealism, or pragmatism without vision or vision without pragmatism. Weber appears to advocate both a pragmatic and vision-based approach, although Aron eventually disagrees with it, particularly in its emphasis on irreconcilable values or the war of the gods. The fault he finds in Weber's political approach is conceptual and ultimately based on the German thinker's departure from the phenomenological approach and his misunderstanding of the nature of politics, which always comports an element of philosophy. We also explored Aron's various uses of Machiavelli, focusing especially on his early study of the Florentine, where Machiavellian cynicism makes some of the same errors as Weberian nihilism – namely, both ignore philosophy and the nature of politics. Totalitarianism is the regime that the statesman must avoid because of its obliteration of philosophy and political life. When we came to the international stage we saw that the complexity of the political order increased because of the lack of an internationally recognized tribunal that is both the sole interpreter and enforcer of the law. Aron positions himself between vulgar Machiavellian "realism" in both its German and American forms and the naïve Kantian idealism that sometimes dangerously tries to bring about impossible ends. Instead he recommends moderating our aims and expectations, part of his morality of prudence. Beyond the limitation of violence there is an element of Aron's praxeology that remains open to determining ultimate values in the context of the history that shapes us and that we shape in return: we thus return to History.

Holding these three areas in balance we have elaborated a perspective on Raymond Aron that emphasizes knowledge of what is unique and different about our time with a view towards prudent political action. Unlike Dilthey, Marx, and Weber, Aron's thinking allows for the possibility of politics because possibility of philosophy. His political thought is therefore, of necessity, open-ended. He escapes the nihilism of historicism since he never doubts the power of reason, by nature a continuous process.

4b – Final Note: Action in History

We observed earlier Aron's three Dilthey-modified-Kantian questions: "*What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?*" They are Dilthey-modified because he adds "*in history*" to each of them, thereby indicating that he attempts to work at least within the Diltheyan framework.[916] Much of this essay has been consumed by an effort to address the first question, although we have also periodically pointed to preliminary answers to the other questions. However, Aron does seem to leave some indications as to how he would answer the latter two questions on a more philosophical level (i.e. beyond his running political commentary). Prudence should characterize the approach of the man of action.

Aron's prudence has been well documented. Manent sees it between the temptations of revolutionary undertakings and reactionary fights. It is the principal virtue of political order and is associated with moderation: "it alone guarantees the salutary influence of reason and guards against the temptation of petrifying social life by using violence to impose 'rational society', which is in fact the enemy of all reason and all humanity."[917] Anderson refers to Aron's prudence as "antinomic prudence", situating it between vulgar Machiavellianism (realism) and naïve Kantianism (idealism). In so doing he places Aron in the venerable "prudence tradition" of foreign policy, where the French intellectual finds himself in the agreeable company of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas and Edmund Burke.[918] Mahoney locates Aron's prudence between doctrinairism and historical relativism.[919] Although the roots for this distinction are already to be found in Aron's *Introduction*, Mahoney feels that that early work goes too far off in the direction of historicism and must be supplemented by other works such as *L'opium*, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science", "Science et conscience de la société", and "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi".[920] Oppermann too has used prudence as the hinge on which depends Aron's connection to both Aristotle and Burke.[921] And indeed Aron uses Burke's phrase, "the god of this lower world",[922] at the end of "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi".[923]

We do not disagree with what any of these authors have said thus far, although we should like to temper Mahoney's judgment of Aron's early work: Mahoney is aware that Aron's *Introduction* does try to address the problem of historicism but Aron ultimately fails. It is worth pointing out, however, as Mouric does, that Aron's *Introduction* is already equipped to fend off threats: it rejects Hegelianism, it advises the prudent reconciliation of critical philosophy and Kantian morality with an understanding of history, and it acknowledges that man lives surrounded by the remains of the past. Its call for moral decision is more Kantian than Nietzschean, for the free act is par excellence moral decision.[924] Aron's objective spirit is not unlike Burke's traditions and prejudices (or Dilthey's systems of culture and external

[916] Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*, 27.
[917] Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur," 167. See also the association between prudence and moderation in Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, 52.
[918] Anderson, *Recovery of the Political*, 121-165.
[919] Mahoney, "Raymond Aron and the Morality of Prudence," 243-252.
[920] Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*; Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science"; Aron, "Science et conscience de la société"; Aron, "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi," in *D'une sainte famille à l'autre*, 107-146.
[921] Oppermann, "Burkeanischer Liberalismus," 157-179.
[922] Burke, "A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, on the Affairs of America," 28.
[923] Aron, "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi," 146.
[924] Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, 105.

organization of society for that matter), and it is these that Sartre wishes to destroy at every turn (for they, the practico-inert, prevent man from being truly authentic and free), but which Aron wishes to preserve, and which are essential to rebuilding Europe after the Second World War.[925] Mouric establishes these connections between Burke, tradition, and Aron on a few occasions.[926]

We analyzed earlier Aron's discussion of the morality of prudence in the context of praxeology in international relations, which is, after all, the highest level of social complexity where laws are not as enforceable as within a state, and where rules of behaviour are made up as states go along. As Aron recognized long ago in his dissertation, we are partially subject to the constraints imposed on us by (international) society, but our actions can also alter this society, much like we are both creators of and created by history. In the context of moral action, it behooves us then to act in ways that are expedient but also mindful of the fact that our actions become precedents for future actions, and so it is in our interest always to tend to those actions that are morally good, insofar as it is possible.[927] And, of course, the flip side is that we should not make securing some abstract notion of the good our only goal, not only because we must make compromises in order to maintain power, but more importantly because attempting to attain perfection of any kind in a social order is bound to harm that order. This is not unlike the opposition Mahoney creates between prudence and literary politics.[928] A few years after the Second World War Aron wrote:

> There is no perfect society, but there are degrees in the imperfection. Often the prophets of the perfect society are precisely those who construct the most oppressive society. To attain an absolutely valid end the prophets of the absolute require unlimited power. They persecute millions of guilty people for not recognizing in the new regime the completion of the human vocation. He who has no other pretention than to lessen as much as possible the evils that are inseparable from the condition of men, and who does not forget the part played by malice, will do more for the happiness of his fellow citizens. The race of optimists in the end produces Robespierres and Trotskys. The race of pessimists produces Talleyrands or Louis-Philippes.[929]

Can we proceed any further beyond the "absoluteness of decision" presented in Aron's *Introduction*? In "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi" he says that the two cardinal virtues of the *homo existentialis* are authenticity and reciprocity. The problem with such a philosophy (that does not refer to an ideal of virtue or wisdom, to the categorical imperative or good will, but is dependent purely on liberty and choice) is that the content of this liberty and choice becomes subordinate to simply having the resolve to do *something*.[930] We must then ask ourselves if we can say anything about the content of prudence and its ends – a question that interests Aron, and

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[925] Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, 147.

[926] See, e.g., Mouric, *Raymond Aron et l'Europe*, 140, 240.

[927] Cf. Kissinger, *World Order*, 367: "To strike a balance between the two aspects of order – power and legitimacy – is the essence of statesmanship. Calculations of power without a moral dimension will turn every disagreement into a test of strength; ambition will know no resting place; countries will be propelled into unsustainable tours de force of elusive calculations regarding the shifting configuration of power. Moral proscriptions without concern for equilibrium, on the other hand, tend toward either crusades or an impotent policy tempting challenges; either extreme risks endangering the coherence of the international order itself." See also Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 5, 18-19.

[928] Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 13-16, *passim*.

[929] Aron, "Histoire et politique," 533.

[930] Aron, "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi," 108-109.

which Aristotle does not put to himself. In this respect a comparison can be drawn between Aron and Cicero:

> It seems to me that the relation between Aron's political role and philosophical role is analogous to that between Cicero as a politician and Cicero as a philosopher: the *orator* knows that the stars exists, but most of the time he lets others worry about describing the movement of the constellations; or, if he himself sometimes gets caught in the debate, his voice conceals a saddened irony. His own task is to introduce some order and clarity into the sublunary world: to do this it is just as necessary to forget the stars as it is to remember them. A higher Reason and Justice perhaps preside mysteriously over the destinies of the world, even if this is improbable; but, given the constraints of uncertainties of effective action, the task of human reason and justice is to limit the powers of the inhuman. In a way Raymond Aron never ceased developing his thesis on the 'limits of historical objectivity' in the most difficult manner possible: by interpreting day after day history in the making.[931]

Although we should tread carefully – for "an inquiry into the first principles or ends of prudence…would necessarily lead beyond prudence"[932] – we maintain that Aron managed to fill in some of the content as to what prudent action and good statesmanship would entail. We have already indicated that Aron emphasizes *limits*, and so it is appropriate that he gives as an epithet to *Peace and War* the phrase of Montesquieu: "International law is based by nature upon this principle: that the various nations ought to do, in peace, the most good to each other, and, in war, the least harm possible, without detriment to their genuine interests."[933] Additionally, making the limitation of violence the goal in international affairs will also reduce the possibility of provoking an escalation to extremes.[934] Avoiding the escalation to extremes also requires respect for custom, homogeneity of modes of government, a reciprocal trust born of a certain familiarity, and the intelligence of the state coupled with constant communication between enemy states: all of these conditions vanish in revolutionary (and totalitarian) periods.[935] Because one can hope only for a gradual limitation of violence, one must direct one's efforts to this more realistic standard. The answer to "*what may I hope?*" provides the framework for an answer to "*what should I do?*".

But there is more: the History section outlined the texture of history and our knowledge thereof: it is fragmented and limited. Dilthey frames the discussion of history and sets before himself a problem that he is unable to solve. It is true that it has relativist implications, but as Aron points out, it is a relativism that is perpetually overcome through reason and the study of

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[931] Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur," 166. This bears some resemblance to Joseph Fornieri's description of Abraham Lincoln's prudence: "While Lincoln's theoretical wisdom consisted in his ability to articulate and defend a vision of self-government, free labor, and free society on philosophical and theological grounds, his practical wisdom or prudence consisted in his ability to realize as much of this noble vision as possible given the prevailing laws, customs, and opinions. Prudence harmonizes universal principles of right reason with the particularities of time and place." Fornieri, *Abraham Lincoln: Philosopher Statesman*, 55.

[932] Mansfield, "Edmund Burke," 693. Although it certainly could not be more presumptuous and foolhardy than the attempt of a juvenile PhD candidate to pretend to advise statesmen.

[933] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, I, 3.

[934] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 184-185. On a somewhat similar note, a recent explanation for the Iraq War finds its genesis in the conjunction of path dependency and momentum, the logic of which presents certain similarities to the escalation to extremes. See Harvey, *Explaining the Iraq War*.

[935] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 298-300; Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Leçon 2, 20.

history (i.e. it is not resigned to absurdity, like Mannheim's relativism).[936] We learn as well from Dilthey and Aron's studies of phenomenology that one is unable to achieve a vantage point outside of society and history. One is thus unable to achieve Sartrean authenticity, which is predicated on rejecting everything that does not have me alone as its sole author. On the contrary, for Aron, one achieves greater self-awareness by studying oneself and one's embeddedness in society and history and the dialectical relation between man and history. Far from being a hindrance, the practico-inert is part of who we are. A politics that tries to overcome this is doomed to perpetual revolution. One must proceed with caution in pursuing any policy that presupposes knowledge of the direction of history – knowledge that we can never have and that remains fragmented at best.[937]

From the Sociology section we are taught to see what is both unique about the societies of our time and what is the same. Here Aron straddles classical philosophy and modern sociology. He is a classical philosopher insofar as he analyzes regimes, but without selecting the best regime. He is a modern sociologist in terms of his method of analysis, but he never forgets that there are philosophical assumptions that always underpin our behaviour in these regimes. For example, growth is desirable in industrial society, but Aron knows that growth is not necessarily a human good in and of itself. Similarly, at various points in his life he surveys the different meanings we give to such notions as liberty and equality: our understanding of these terms changes in history as well. The statesman must be aware of such changes. The statesman must also bear in mind that we are not just citizens but also consumers. As Aron says in the trilogy, our societies are hedonistic, and the statesman will have to appeal to such behaviour above and beyond simply bemoaning the decline in citizen virtue.[938] Growth and employment are essential goods in our society, even if they are insufficient for human fulfillment. Moreover, during the Cold War and in our time as well a premium is placed on various conceptions of liberty and equality. Aron's analysis of society is so rich precisely because it shows the complex interplay between three different levels (economic, social, political) and, even though he subscribes to the primacy of the political, he does allow for the other levels to influence the political partially as well (unlike Marx's analysis). There may also be something to be said about Aron's analysis of class, above and beyond how he discusses class in order to refute Marx. His definition of class is more adaptable than modern discussions of identity, in that it is not entirely subjective. This is important for the statesman because not every division between people in society is as noteworthy or regime-threatening as every other. In any case, divisions are inevitable in any society, and they are even welcome, for liberty exists precisely in the diffusion of power among the plurality of social and political groups, elites and masses.[939] Lastly, in the

[936] Aron, *La philosophie critique*, 101-102.

[937] Cf. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, 167: "He who acts in history without knowing the final word will sometimes hesitate before a desirable enterprise whose cost would be too great. Men of the church and men of faith ignore these scruples. The sublime end excuses the horrible means. A moralist against the present, the revolutionary is cynical in action. He rages against policy brutalities, the inhuman pace of production, the severity of bourgeois courts, the execution of defendants whose guilt has not been demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt. Nothing, outside of total 'humanization', will appease his hunger for justice."

[938] Cf. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science*, 143: "Aron recognizes that the values that modern society upholds are those of personal and political liberty, juridical and social equality, and industrial productivity and efficiency…Weighing and balancing these objectives is one of the tasks of modern prudence."

[939] Aron, "Social Structure and the Ruling Class: Part 2," 143: "A classless society may be efficient and imposing, it may give millions of men, who feel sure that they are building the future, joy and pride and even the feeling of fulfilling themselves in their activity, which may be called a sense of freedom. Such a society breeds soldiers,

final part of the trilogy Aron lists signs to watch out for of a constitutional-pluralist regime either becoming decadent or failing to take root.

The final section, Praxeology, has us pull together these issues from the statesman's perspective and with a view to the ultimate values that inform our actions. Moral action is an integral part but it is also inevitable that Machiavelli rear his head in this section because he does hit on an essential point: one must acquire and maintain power in order to play the game of politics. This is one of the reasons why Machiavelli is a constant presence for Aron over the course of his life. But in his early writings he was also not unaware of the Machiavellian path to totalitarianism. The danger is that one will come to see politics as nothing other than a bid for power and grow cynical about values and morality entirely, which is one possible route to totalitarianism. There are naturally many reasons to avoid totalitarianism, but one of them, on a more philosophical level, is that it prevents one from being able to think politically, or even think at all. Political prudence, philosophy, liberty, search for truth, etc.: some of the most fundamental human needs become impossible in a totalitarian system. Max Weber could have been Aron's interlocutor in any one of the three sections, but he seems most interesting in the section on praxeology, not least because, unlike Dilthey and Marx, he took seriously the issue of political action in a world of conflicting values, which he attempted somewhat to resolve by drawing up the ethic of conviction and ethic of responsibility. Aron returns repeatedly to this dichotomy.[940]

One of the problems Aron identifies in Weber's philosophy is that Weber confuses the micro and macro levels of analysis. Moving from the micro-level – how a given historical actor experiences events – up to the macro-level – where meaning is conferred on those events that was not immediately apparent to the actors who partook of them – is important to Aron in his unpublished course, "Histoire et philosophie", as well as his lectures in "L'édification du monde historique". Aron is fond of someone like Thucydides for his ability to tell a story purely at the micro-level, but all the while hinting at the macro level meaning through the force of his narrative.[941] At the micro-level Weber is concerned with analyzing the meaning actors impart to their acts (and at this level actors never impart a relativist meaning to their acts; they make the choices they make because they truly believe them to be preferable to others). When he zooms

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workers, devotees, but I am afraid it may stifle the individual man, responsible to his conscience and master of his own fate. Leaving out of account this argument, which is above politics, the theory of divided and united élites brings us back to the old idea that freedom depends on a system of checks and balances. That theory must, however, be transferred from the constitutional organization to society as a whole. A unified élite means the end of freedom. But when the groups of the élite are not only distinct but become a disunity, it means the end of the State. Freedom survives in those intermediate regions, which are continually threatened when there is moral unity of the élite, where men and groups preserve the secret of single and eternal wisdom and have learnt how to combine autonomy with co-operation."

[940] Aron, *La sociologie allemande*, 100ff; Aron *La philosophie critique*, 261ff; Aron, "Max Weber and Modern Social Science," 348ff; Aron, *Les étapes*, 525ff; Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 6, 21-24; Aron, *Jeux et enjeux de la politique*, Leçon 3 and 4.

[941] Aron, "Thucydide et le récit historique," 136-137: "The intelligibility of the action, whether instrumental or adventurous, is communicated in the eyes of the observer to the event that was neither desired nor foreseen by any actor, whether it be the 'accidental' result of a chaos of individual actions (as in the case of the night battle), or whether it be the cunning of one of the parties that threw the other into confusion, or, finally, whether it be natural causes, such as the night, the wind, or the eclipse of the moon, that precipitated reactions that one understands by reference to, and negation of, the decision taken. The passage from the individual act to the supra-individual event is effected through the story without any break in continuity or the substitution of general propositions for the reconstitution of the facts, but rather by a simple comparison between what the actors wanted and what happened."

out to the macro-level he sees a multitude of actions with no way of evaluating their inherent goodness or badness aside from how well they conform to the ethic of conviction or responsibility. From this macro-level pluralism he concludes with a nihilism that he ends up re-imposing on human behaviour at the micro-level. This is why Aron states that Weber's methodology suggests an impossible philosophy. The space between the micro and macro levels is where we encounter tragedy: the notion that an individual's micro-level good intentions and actions have created a macro-level disaster, and, worse yet, that there may have been no way to see it or prevent it in advance. A sense of tragedy and history is what the economist, the rationalist, the professor, etc. lack.[942] The statesman must take on Weber's ethic of responsibility: "By accepting the burden of power [the statesman] has accepted to be judged for his actions, not his intentions. He has submitted himself to the *rule of responsibility*, the grandeur and servitude of the man of action."[943]

The statesman bears some similarities to the general in war.[944] He must not ignore uncertainty, which is an essential part of reality. He must calculate probabilities and make decisions on the basis of imperfect information, hence courage and resolution are necessary virtues:

> In determining the ends the statesman must above all be intelligent, know the situation, compare his resources to those of his adversaries or his allies, and understand his time. But if intelligence dominates at a higher level, it alone does not rule. Intelligence alone is never enough to give one the courage to decide…the supreme responsible individual, in this case, has no less a need for courage, resolution, and even boldness than the general on the battlefield.[945]

But resolution requires reflection first:

> It is not enough that men easily make decisions so that they deserve to be called resolute. It is necessary that they arrive at their decisions after reflection and having overcome their doubts. Resolution is the understanding that, fully aware of reasons for doubt, has recognized the necessity of decision and the fatal consequences of hesitation. Thus resolution is rather the result of solid minds than brilliant minds. *Coup d'œil* and *présence d'esprit*…are united in resolution and together define what I will call the virtue of intelligence of the war leader…Without a compass nobody can face the storm: danger, suffering, and uncertainty risk obscuring judgment, reinforcing doubt, and paralyzing resolution. Sensitivity must give the understanding the power to remain faithful to itself and to trust its carefully acquired convictions, strengthened by experience. Character is defined in moments of doubt by following one's principles rather than one's impressions and not giving in until compelled by clear conviction. This steadfastness degenerates into stubbornness when the leader

[942] Aron, *Penser la guerre 2*, 283-286.
[943] Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans*, 490.
[944] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 197ff. However, they are not identical: "Napoleon the statesman had gambled in the manner of a general. The latter is by nature an adventurer, the former must not be." Aron, "Reason, Passion, and Power in the Thought of Clausewitz," 620. Manent has also observed the relevance of Aron's *Penser la guerre* in the context of an effort to "reconquer the field of practical philosophy or of practical reason," where Clausewitz "embodies the golden mean capable of harmonizing judiciously constraints and liberty of action." Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur," 163.
[945] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 198-199.

> refuses to recognize his error or the facts, not because of intellectual deficiency, but because he wishes to be right and to impose his will on others.[946]

He can boil everything down to neither rationalism nor irrationalism. One cannot decide what to do simply by abstracting from the situation and not taking into account the historical specificities. The "rational" solution to these problems cannot necessarily be found using models alone because neither the theorist nor the actors themselves know the values attached to the different results, and because the game does not obey the rules accepted by the adversaries, the end and beginning are not fixed. The players would probably rather stop playing the game if they could anyway.[947] What the number crunchers and violent revolutionaries have in common is that they do not see that behind all of the "variables" they calculate, or the "system" they wish to destroy, there are real human beings: both the economist and the revolutionary risk losing their moral sensibility by abstracting reality in their attempt to control it perfectly. The leader does not necessarily need to know everything down the line (e.g. how bullets are made), but he must know their effects, their usefulness, their variety, their combinations, etc. He also needs to know his country, its tendencies, its habits, its interests, its unresolved questions, its personalities; and he must also be a subtle observer of humans, their ways of thinking and their mores, their errors and the specific qualities of the people he seeks to govern. The statesman must make sure that his political intentions are not in conflict with the means. He is of a critical mind more so than a creative one, i.e. one whose thinking encompasses the whole more so than one who looks only in one direction.

In addition to these virtues, the ability to play the Machiavellian game when necessary, and properly comprehending changing times, the statesman must be able to identify what is *essential* in each whole. The categories of each whole – e.g. growth/productivity/employment/etc. in economics, or violence/Clausewitzian trinity in war – remain the same, although the details change over time. For instance, the notion of growth is still integral to our economic thinking, although it remains uncertain whether we will ever be able to reckon with the same outstanding levels of growth that we saw after the Second World War. Similarly, since the end of the Cold War, conflicts have tended even more so to confrontations (which are longer lasting because the political goals are absolute), and it has become of the utmost importance to win over the enemy's people, i.e. to destroy their Clausewitzian triangle by winning the hearts and minds of their people. Without their people the number of bombs dropped on them becomes irrelevant, especially when the people double as an army (e.g. guerrilla fighters, terrorists, etc.).[948] But the Clausewitzian categories for understanding war, e.g. the trinity, violence as means, etc., are fundamentally the same as they have always been. The statesman must be able to identify the *essence* or the *nature* of the whole and understand how its details change over time. He must also be able to see the relations between the wholes and never lose sight of the larger wholes in which they are encased. For example, the tactical whole is inside the strategic whole, which together make up the war as a whole, which in turn is within the political whole. Winning the war does not necessarily mean that one has reached the desired

[946] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 224-225. On this score we find Aron admiring even the revolutionary genius of a figure such as Lenin, since he knew when to compromise and when not, and when to tolerate other men attaining glory, because he was sure enough of his own superiority that he never felt insecure. See Aron, *Théorie de l'action politique*, Leçon 11, 19-20.

[947] Aron, *Penser la guerre 2*, 179-182.

[948] The gist of these arguments and the altered nature of conflict and the use of force are explored in Smith, *The Utility of Force*.

political outcome, and it may not have been worth it if the material and human costs were too great. Production and growth are goals in the economy, but the economy is part – admittedly a very important part – of a greater whole, politics, where the ends are not as clear cut (beyond, perhaps, trying to ensure "peace, order, and good government", which might be safer and more moderate than "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness").[949] Identifying the *essence* is what Aron (and Clausewitz) call *genius* (or good sense).

Is there an *essence* of history? Aron spent much time arguing against those who claimed to have discerned it and the ultimate course of history. He nevertheless averred that we are living a universal history, where we may increasingly speak of human society.[950] In his universalism too Aron departs from Aristotle and finds himself closer to Kant or Cicero.[951] And just because we cannot know the future with certainty does not mean that we are ignorant of the principles of a human society,[952] one that extends through time. The increasing complexity of our world – fatuous platitude that it is – has widened the gap between our actions and intentions and their ultimate consequences and meaning. This only further necessitates the need for a sense of tragedy and history. There will also be the need for *fortuna*, both to present *occasioni* for greatness, but also to present fortuitous circumstances. What role should the statesman have when so little can be controlled? Is there room for the statesman with vision? Or is the great statesman someone who neither interferes nor possesses vision, but simply lets things run on their own?[953] Or does increasing complexity make any sort of planning and organization increasingly futile?[954] Or should we perhaps give up the idea of the great leader entirely?[955] How hopelessly antiquated it must sound to speak so of statesmanship when so much of politics is made up of bureaucracy and buffoonery. And yet, one need look no further than Aron's era (or our own) to see that the history of nations has been transformed tremendously by the actions of individuals. In a world that has become so short-sighted and emotive because of technology and democratic society perhaps what is needed is a statesman who can play the long game, undertake a journey with character and courage, vision and determination,[956] aided by *fortuna*, and aim at the *essential* at a given moment in history.[957] And, if he is fortunate, history will be kind to him.

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[949] Aron, *Penser la guerre 1*, 292. Regarding the difference between the Canadian and American principles of government and how the two countries' respective forms of conservatism differ, the Canadian former senator Hugh Segal remarks: "[Canadian conservatism] was moulded through evolution with the Crown, not against it. It is, in its Canadian modesty and pragmatism, very different from the divine right of kings and the exclusive embrace of the natural order that dominated European conservatism. Most importantly, it is the inverse of the 'life, liberty and pursuit of happiness' exceptionalist neo-liberalism that fuels American neo-conservative excess. Canadian conservatism adopts responsibility as an equal value to freedom, not as an after-tax thought. Canadian conservatism puts nation and community first. It justifies personal and corporate wealth creation on the grounds that they are instruments that help expand the greater good – not instruments that are to be pursued exclusively and for their own sake." Segal, *The Right Balance*, 200.

[950] Aron, "L'aube de l'histoire universelle," 255: "Never have men had so many reasons not to kill each other anymore. Never have they had so many reasons to feel united in one and the same undertaking."

[951] Cf. Cicero, *On Duties*, III, 28: "There are [those] who say that account should be taken of other citizens, but deny it in the case of foreigners; such men tear apart the common fellowship of the human race. When that is removed then kindness, liberality, goodness and justice are utterly destroyed."

[952] Aron, "Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi," 145.

[953] Cf. Scruton's admiration for Lord Salisbury, "because he did no damage". Quoted in Adams, "Roger Scruton."

[954] Cf. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 48-49.

[955] Cf. Walt, "It's Time To Abandon The Pursuit For Great Leaders."

[956] Vision of what? This will partly be determined by the historical context and country in which the statesman finds himself. It will no doubt comprise securing the freedom, prosperity, and virtue of the citizens. It also takes us

beyond the scope of this dissertation into the realm of which Aron was consistently aware but into which he rarely ventured himself: philosophy.

[957] Cf. Kissinger, *World Order*, 349ff. Cf. also Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 97: "It is the task of the student of philosophy to articulate and express the permanent conditions and the real interests of a well-ordered society. It is the task of the statesman, however, to discern these conditions and interests in practice. The statesman sees deeper and further than most others and grasps what needs to be done. The statesman must get it right, or nearly so, and then hold fast from this vantage."

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