

Raymond Aron and the Roots of the French Liberal Renaissance

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2011

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Word Count: 79,567

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By Iain Stewart

*Submitted to the University of Manchester on 28 July 2011 for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy*

Raymond Aron is widely recognised as France's greatest twentieth-century liberal, but the specifically liberal quality of his thought has not received the detailed historical analysis that it deserves. His work appears to fit so well within widely accepted understandings of post-war European liberalism, which has been defined primarily in terms of its anti-totalitarian, Cold War orientation, that its liberal status has been somewhat taken for granted. This has been exacerbated by an especially strong perception of a correlation between liberalism and anti-totalitarianism in France, whose late twentieth-century renaissance in liberal political thought is viewed as the product of an 'anti-totalitarian turn' in the late 1970s. While the moral authority accumulated through decades of opposition to National Socialism and Soviet communism made Aron into an anti-totalitarian icon, his early contribution to the revival of France's liberal tradition established his reputation as a leader of the renaissance in the study of liberal political thought.

Aron's prominence within this wider renaissance suggests that an historical treatment of his thought is overdue, but while the assumptions underpinning his reputation are not baseless, they do need to be critically scrutinised if such a treatment is to be credible. In pursuit of this end, two main arguments are developed in the present thesis. These are, first, that Aron's liberalism was more a product of the inter-war crisis of European liberalism than of the Cold War and, second, that his relationship with the French liberal tradition was primarily active and instrumental rather than passive and receptive. The first argument indicates that Aron's liberalism developed through a dialogue with and partial integration of important strands of anti-liberal crisis thought during these inter-war years; the second that earlier liberals with whose work he is frequently associated - notably Montesquieu and Tocqueville - had no substantial formative influence on his political thought. These contentions are inter-related in that Aron's post-war interpretation of his chosen liberal forebears was driven by a need to address specific problems arising from the liberal political epistemology that he formulated before the Second World War.

It is by establishing in detail the link between Aron's reading of Montesquieu and Tocqueville and these earlier writings that the thesis makes its principal contribution to the existing literature on Aron, but several other original interpretations of his work are offered across its four thematic chapters on 'Political Epistemology', 'Anti-totalitarianism', 'The End of Ideology' and 'Instrumentalising the French Liberal Tradition'. Regarding Aron's relationship with the wider late twentieth-century recovery of liberal political thought in France, it contends that the specific liberal renaissance to which he contributed most substantially emerged not as part of the anti-totalitarian turn, but in hostile reaction to the events of May 1968. This informs a broader argument that the French liberal renaissance of these years was considerably more heterogeneous than is often assumed.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification at the University of Manchester or any other institute of learning.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCF – Congress for Cultural Freedom

CDS – Centre de documentation sociale

CIEL – Comité des intellectuels pour l'Europe des libertés

CIERL – Centre international d'études pour la rénovation du libéralisme

CNR – Conseil national de la Résistance

CVIA – Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes

ENA – École nationale d'administration

EPHE – École pratique des hautes études

IACF – International Association for Cultural Freedom

MRP – Mouvement républicain populaire

PCF – Parti communiste français

PS – Parti socialiste

RPF – Rassemblement du peuple français

SDP – Sozialdemokratisch Partei Deutschlands

SFIO – Section française de l'internationale ouvrière

UDF – Union pour la démocratie française

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

NOTES ON FORMAT AND REFERENCING

For works by Raymond Aron, the first reference in each new chapter is given using the surname 'Aron' followed by the full book or article title, provenance, place and date of publication, and page number(s). Subsequent references within the same chapter are simply given as abbreviations of the book or article title. For example:

First reference – Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris, [1938] 1986), 36.

Second reference - *Introduction*, 45.

For primary sources where first editions have not been used, the original date of publication is given in square brackets beside the publication date of the edition referred to, as in the first example given above. For articles in collections, the original date of publication is given in square brackets immediately after the article title.

When several editions of the same work by Aron are referred to, first references are given as above; subsequent references to editions other than that used in the very first instance are given as follows:

Introduction (1938), 34; *Introduction* (1972), 45; *Introduction* (1981), 67.

For secondary sources, first references are given as above, but using the full author name and without specifying original publication dates where non-original editions are used. Subsequent references within the same chapter give the author's surname, an abbreviated title and page number(s).

All first references to articles and chapters in edited collections give the full extent of the item's pagination followed by the specific pagination for the information alluded to in the main body of the text. Subsequent references within the same chapter give the specific pagination only.

With the exception of names of institutions and indented quotations in the main body of the text, foreign language words are italicised throughout the thesis. Non-italicised foreign words, apart from these exceptions, thus indicate an emphasis added by the original author. Unless stated otherwise, all emphases in all quotations are original.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My most longstanding debt of gratitude is to Tony Luke, history teacher at Fallibroome High School in Macclesfield, whose inspiration ultimately led me to pursue the subject as far as I have. I would also like to record my thanks to Professor Charles Esdaile whose support during and since my undergraduate studies at the University of Liverpool remains very much appreciated. The support and guidance of Professor Stuart Jones, who was my M.A. supervisor before being my principal Ph.D. thesis supervisor, has been fundamental. It was Stuart who first suggested that I read Aron after I contacted him with a few vague ideas concerning the post-war recovery of liberal political thought in 2006. This work would not exist in its present form without his influence.

The researching and writing of this thesis between 2007 and 2011 would not have been possible without the generous support of many other individuals and institutions whose help I am also glad to acknowledge here. Receiving an Arts and Humanities Research Council BGP Doctoral Award in 2009/2010 greatly relieved the financial pressures of the earlier years of my Ph.D research, and additional AHRC funding enabled me to spend two semesters in Paris during the academic year 2009/2010. The AHRC and the University of Manchester also funded travel and accommodation expenses for a trip to the United States where I gave a conference paper on Jean-Paul Sartre's hidden dialogue with Raymond Aron in his *Critique de la raison dialectique* in November 2009. During the first two years of my research the University of Manchester awarded me several other research grants and fees awards for which I am also grateful. My gratitude extends as well to the Royal Historical Society, the Society for the Study of French History, and the Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France, which all provided generous financial assistance towards research trips to Paris during the initial two years of studying for this thesis.

Throughout my various stays in Paris I benefitted from the patience and support of Michèle Le Pavec at the Bibliothèque nationale's site on rue Richelieu, home of the Aron archive. I

am also very grateful to Dominique Schnapper and Henry Kissinger for their permission to read and quote from Raymond Aron's private correspondence. Elisabeth Dutartre at the Centre d'études sociologiques et politiques Raymond Aron has been most helpful in posting me copies of articles that had been difficult to obtain elsewhere, as has Professor Samuel Moyn at Columbia University. Dr Cécile Hatier was similarly kind enough to send me a copy of her own Ph.D thesis, a comparative account of the thought of Aron and Isaiah Berlin. I would also like to acknowledge the help of staff at the John Ryland's University Library in Manchester, the British Library and Bibliothèque nationale de France, the library of the London School of Economics and Political Science, the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Huntingdon and Hornsey public libraries.

During my extended stay in Paris in 2009/2010, Caroline Varin provided friendship and accommodation, and I was very fortunate to have the opportunity of teaching alongside Professors François Cusset and Claire Andrieu at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris. All were generous with their time and support and helped make an initially daunting experience hugely enjoyable. I am especially indebted to Nicolas Bauquet for offering me a lectureship at Sciences Po in 2010, a fantastic professional opportunity, not to mention a tremendous excuse to extend my stay in Paris into the summer of 2010. Dr Jean-Marc Dreyfus at the University of Manchester was instrumental in setting up this institutional affiliation in the first place and I cannot thank him enough for it.

Over the last few years I have benefited enormously from discussing my research with friends and colleagues, both socially and in more formal academic settings. Words of encouragement, advice and friendly criticism from participants at several conferences have improved my work, as have the comments of the anonymous reviewers of the articles arising tangentially from my thesis research and published in *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* and *Sartre Studies International*. From 2007 to 2009 I benefited from regular discussions of methodological issues within intellectual history with Catherine Feely, Matt Adams, Vicky Morrisroe, Joseph Maslen and Ozan Ozavci. My greatest intellectual debt, however, is to my three supervisors at the University of Manchester: Professors Stuart Jones and Bertrand Taithe, and Dr Jean-Marc Dreyfus.

Without their careful reading, constructive criticism, bibliographical suggestions, and general encouragement this thesis would be much the poorer. Suffice it to say that whatever original qualities my work here may be deemed to possess, more often than not the cause can be traced to some suggestion or other made by one of them during one of our panel or regular supervision meetings. Any remaining errors or omissions are, of course, entirely my own.

I would like to extend special thanks to Carol and Neil Crompton and Carlie and Graham Campbell for generosity and kindnesses too many to list here. Finally and above all, Emily Campbell has been a most welcome source of distraction, whose love, support and encouragement throughout the past several years have been invaluable. I dedicate the thesis to Emily in thanks for her very considerable patience.

INTRODUCTION

In 1994, the American historian of ideas Mark Lilla published an article on the post-war recovery of liberal democracy in continental Western Europe that presented an unorthodox take on the idea of French exceptionalism. This recovery, he argued, had been the product of history, chance, shrewd political judgement and the influence of the United States; it was decidedly not the home-grown product of the post-war European mind. Recently, however, France had emerged as the only continental European nation to have finally broken free of its illiberal intellectual history, confirming the Italian historian Guido de Ruggiero's prediction that the liberal spirit would one day find a home on the continent.¹

Lilla was not alone in noting a renaissance of liberal political thought in France, but other observers had been more cautious, warning that this apparent liberal revival might prove ephemeral.² Such reticence was understandable given the historic weakness of liberalism in twentieth-century France. Lilla's claims would have surprised Guido de Ruggiero, for instance, who in 1925 had remarked of contemporary French democracy that it was "utterly unable to grasp the idea of moral liberty, the value of personality, and the capacity of the individual to react upon his environment".³ As early as 1902 the sociologist Célestin Bouglé had written of a crisis of liberalism in France, and by 1934 the literary critic Albert Thibaudet was claiming that "*le terme libéralisme appartient au passé. On est libéral comme on est vidame ou duchesse douairière*".⁴ By this point the works of the last great French liberal Alexis de Tocqueville were not forgotten in France, as is often supposed, but rather were being interpreted to support the agenda of the Action Française.⁵ As if in imitation of this posthumous political reorientation of Tocqueville, many former liberals

¹ Mark Lilla, 'The other velvet revolution: continental liberalism and its discontents', *Daedalus*, 123 (spring, 1994), 129-157, 133-135.

² Thomas L. Pangle, 'Political theory in contemporary France: Towards a renaissance of liberal political philosophy?', *International Political Science*, 20 (autumn, 1987), 999-1004, 999. See also Alain Finkielkraut, 'Le goût perdu de la liberté', *Le messenger européen*, 8 (1994), 7-31, 7-8.

³ Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (London, 1927), 205-210, 207.

⁴ Quoted in Françoise Mélonio, *Tocqueville et les Français* (Paris, 1993), 261; Célestin Bouglé, 'La crise du libéralisme', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, X (1902), 635-652.

⁵ Mélonio, *Tocqueville*, 258-259; Serge Audier, *Tocqueville retrouvé: genèse et enjeux du renouveau toquevillien français* (Paris, 2004), 31-37.

would soon go on to occupy positions of power inside the collaborationist Vichy regime.⁶ The situation hardly seemed to improve after the liberation when, following a visit to France, the economist Joseph Schumpeter remarked upon “a universal reluctance to working in the democratic method” and the “practically complete absence of ‘liberal’ groups” in the country.⁷ France’s intellectual history over much of the next three decades continually confirmed Schumpeter’s analysis, leading historians of post-war French political and social thought to emphasise its systematically anti-liberal character.⁸

Given the weight of the illiberal intellectual history preceding it, one might expect the liberal renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s to have aroused a greater degree of scholarly attention than it so far has. Existing accounts such as Lilla’s have not advanced far beyond explaining the revival of liberal political thought in France as simply a by-product of an ‘anti-totalitarian turn’ provoked by the publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1974.⁹ Michael Scott Christofferson’s recent work has, however, dispelled the myth of this ‘anti-totalitarian moment’, thereby effectively discrediting what was already a fairly rudimentary explanation of the origin of the French liberal renaissance.¹⁰ Christofferson argues that the anti-totalitarian turn did not materialise in spontaneous reaction to Solzhenitsyn’s book, but rather was rooted in direct democratic critiques of communism that had developed within the French left since 1956.¹¹ The principal catalyst for the anti-totalitarian turn of the 1970s was not, according to Christofferson, the publication of *The Gulag Archipelago*, but the return of the Parti communiste français as a potential partner in government following the signing of the *Programme commun* in

⁶ François Denord, ‘Aux origines du néo-libéralisme en France: Louis Rougier et le Colloque Walter Lippmann de 1938’, *Le mouvement social*, 195 (avril - juin, 2001), 9-34, esp. 10, 26 n.106, 33-34; Olivier Dard, ‘Voyage à l’intérieur d’X-Crise’, *Vingtième Siècle*, 47 (juillet – septembre, 1995), 132-146, esp. 145; Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford, 1994), 218.

⁷ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (London, [1942] 1946), 401.

⁸ Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left* (Oxford, 1986), 1-4; Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, (Oxford, 1992), 159, 238-241, Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (London, 1993), 135-136.

⁹ Mark Lilla, ‘New liberal thought’ in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.), *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought* (New York, 2006), 67-69, 68.

¹⁰ Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (Oxford, 2004).

¹¹ Christofferson, *French Intellectuals*, 17-18.

1972.¹² French liberals were, of course, similarly suspicious of the PCF in these years. But this does not mean that the liberal renaissance can be treated as a product of the wider anti-totalitarian movement since many liberals were hostile towards the direct democratic political arguments issuing from and informing that movement. Much scholarly work, then, remains to be done on this important part of France's late twentieth-century intellectual history. The present thesis offers a modest contribution towards this task by examining the political thought of a leading figure in the liberal revival: the philosopher, sociologist and publicist Raymond Aron.

Aron's work offers a useful starting point for exploring the roots of the French liberal renaissance because for most of the post-war period he was France's only self-proclaimed liberal intellectual of note.¹³ This helped win him considerable respect and admiration abroad, particularly in the United States, but it attracted the derision of his French intellectual contemporaries. Aron's domestic credibility with this audience was transformed, however, by the emergence of fashionable anti-totalitarianism in the late 1970s. Mark Lilla presents the overwhelmingly positive reception afforded to Aron's *Mémoires* in 1983 as a watershed in the ideological reorientation of France's public intellectuals, the moment at which, in a reversal of an old cliché, it became fashionable to be right with Aron instead of wrong with Sartre.¹⁴ But while few would disagree with Lilla's assessment of Aron's importance to the French liberal renaissance, this is a question that has yet to be adequately addressed in other than celebratory, laudatory terms. Furthermore, for all that has been written about Aron since his death in October 1983, the

¹² Christofferson, *French Intellectuals*, 113-155.

¹³ The term 'intellectual' is used throughout this thesis in a restricted sense. It *does not* refer to members of a broad socio-economic group that would include, for example, any teacher, lawyer, scientist or other professional working primarily through the application of the (narrowly defined) intellect. It refers instead to individuals from within such a group, often distinguished by their having been taught or employed at elite higher education institutions, who draw upon the prestige attained through the possession of their specialist knowledge to intervene in areas of public political debate, often outside their area of particular expertise. For further discussion of the intellectual along similar lines see Pascal Ory et Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris, 1992), 5-12; David Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation* (Basingstoke, 2005), 1-7; Michel Leymarie, *Les intellectuels et la politique* (Paris, 2001), 11.

¹⁴ Lilla, 'The other velvet revolution', 139-140; Lilla, 'New liberal thought', 68.

earlier development of his own liberalism has not received detailed historical analysis.¹⁵ Given his importance as an icon of the late twentieth-century liberal revival in France, this appears surprising. Yet it would hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that the specifically liberal quality of Aron's political thought has been largely taken for granted. The primary aim of this thesis is, then, to provide an historical account of Aron's liberal political thought; its secondary objective to establish Aron's position in the liberal renaissance and thereby provide a basis for a better historical understanding of that broader development.

Considering why the liberal status of Raymond Aron's political thought has to date been largely taken as given is essential to constructing a credible historical account of his liberalism. Two principal explanations might be advanced here. The first is that his work fits so well within widely accepted understandings of post-war European liberalism, which has been defined primarily in terms of its anti-totalitarian, Cold War orientation.¹⁶ Since Aron was France's pre-eminent intellectual cold warrior and one of the earliest theorists of totalitarianism in any country, it is not difficult to see why his intellectual trajectory fits snugly within this broader narrative. This impression is reinforced by the especially strong perception, noted above, of a correlation between liberalism and anti-totalitarianism in France. Aron's prominence in leading the rediscovery of the country's liberal tradition of political thought offers a second explanation. In a series of books published in the early to mid-1960s he helped reintroduce the work of Alexis de Tocqueville in particular to a French audience.¹⁷ The inaugural recipient of the *Prix Tocqueville* in 1979, he came to be lauded as a twentieth-century Montesquieu or Tocqueville.¹⁸ Aron's name continued to be associated with this liberal revival posthumously as individuals such as François Furet,

¹⁵ The two main historical accounts of Aron's work focus on his atypical approach to intellectual engagement rather than his liberalism. See here Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), 137-182; Jean-François Sirinelli, *Deux intellectuels dans le siècle: Sartre et Aron* (Paris, 1995).

¹⁶ Tom Buchanan, *Europe's Troubled Peace, 1945-2000* (Oxford, 2006), 57-58; Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1985), 68; Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford, 1984), 309-331.

¹⁷ Aron, *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* (Paris, 1962), 33-73; Aron, *Essai sur les libertés* (Paris, 1965), 17-72; Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique: Montesquieu, Comte, Marx, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber* (Paris, 1967), 221-272.

¹⁸ Robert Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: The Philosopher in History, 1905-1955* (Beverly Hills, 1986), 4; Robert Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: The Sociologist in Society, 1955-1983* (Beverly Hills, 1986), 443, 496-497, 586

Pierre Rosanvallon, Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Manent promoted an exploration of France's liberal tradition under the aegis of the Institut Raymond Aron, founded in 1984.

The assumptions underpinning Aron's liberal reputation are not baseless, but they do need to be subjected to a greater degree of critical scrutiny. This problem has shaped the two main contentions made in the present thesis. These are, first, that Aron's liberalism was more a product of the inter-war crisis of European liberalism than of the Cold War and, second, that his relationship with the French liberal tradition was primarily active and instrumental rather than passive and receptive. The first contention indicates that Aron's liberalism developed through a dialogue with and partial integration of important strands of anti-liberal crisis thought during these inter-war years; the second that earlier liberals with whose work he is frequently associated - notably Montesquieu and Tocqueville - had no substantial formative influence on his political thought.¹⁹ These arguments are inter-related in that Aron's post-war interpretation of his liberal forebears was driven by a need to address specific problems arising from the political epistemology that he formulated before the Second World War. Overall, this means that Aron's political thought was in different respects both more and less liberal than has previously been supposed. His liberalism was more longstanding in that it was formed in the 1930s, not under the Cold War, and more ambiguous, because it aggressively critiqued some of the central tenets of European liberalism. In order to grasp how Aron's work could exemplify important aspects of anti-liberal crisis thought from firmly within the parameters of French liberal tradition, an understanding of the national specificity of that tradition is essential.²⁰ Before further outlining the structure, content and methodology of the thesis, it is to this question that we must first turn.

*

* *

¹⁹ On the notion of crisis thought see Bracher, *Age of Ideologies*, 9-25, 39-49, 130-146.

²⁰ The notion of 'tradition' itself is subjected to detailed critical analysis in chapter four. See page 154-158 below.

The definition of liberalism advanced by historian Michael Freeden, an expert on this political ideology, offers a useful starting point for considering the ambiguity of Aron's liberalism and the specificity of the national liberal tradition in which it belongs:

... the vast majority of those claiming to be liberals may be identified and analysed on the basis of a common conceptual configuration. The core concepts they employ are liberty, individualism, progress, rationality, the general interest, sociability, and limited and responsible power ... I know of no recent liberal tradition whose design does not display all those core concepts. Remove one and we are looking at a borderline case. Remove two and it is no longer liberalism.²¹

Judged by this standard, Aron's place as twentieth-century France's greatest liberal appears much less assured: the only of Freeden's criteria that he can be said to have fulfilled unequivocally are the first and the last ones. This highlights the importance of conceptual clarification where the question of liberalism is concerned. Yet such clarification is not altogether straightforward since, even when understood in exclusively political terms, liberalism possesses an extraordinary conceptual elasticity. An ongoing lack of scholarly consensus as to its definition has resulted from this. Typological approaches such as Freeden's are problematic because they struggle to encompass the many national variations of liberalism along with its various temporal mutations.²² Whilst political philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has shown how a typological approach to political ideology might account for major historical changes within continuous political traditions via the notion of the epistemological break, the issue of national variability continues to pose an obstacle towards a universal definition of liberalism.²³ Nowhere are such difficulties more apparent than in the case of France, where the meaning of political liberalism takes on specific characteristics in relation to the post-1789 history of the country.

²¹ Michael Freeden, 'The family of liberalisms: a morphological analysis' in James Meadowcroft (ed.), *The Liberal Political Tradition: Contemporary Reappraisals* (Cheltenham, 1996), 14-39, 16.

²² For a sceptical view of universal typological definitions of liberalism see Blaise Bachofen, 'Introduction: le libéralisme et la question du droit' in Blaise Bachofen, (dir.), *Le libéralisme au miroir du droit: L'État, la personne, la propriété* (Paris, 2008), 7-27. It is, indeed, by no means certain that 'French liberalism' can be taken to constitute a single, coherent political tradition, as Lucien Jaume has indicated in his *L'individu effacé ou le paradoxe du libéralisme français* (Paris, 1997), 11-12. On this point see also Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions*, 208.

²³ Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (Indiana, 1988), 326-348.

The French Revolution, of course, began as a liberal revolution whose objective was the installation of a constitutional monarchy wherein the liberty of citizens could be exercised free from the arbitrary authority of monarchical absolutism. In this sense the philosophical touchstone of the early Revolution was Montesquieu and his promotion of the separation of powers as guarantor of individual liberty. But the Revolution was also driven by demands for the installation of a popular sovereignty which found their ideological justification in Rousseau's theory of the general will. These two prominent aspects of early French revolutionary ideology were not, initially at least, widely perceived to be in conflict, but this changed as a result of the Revolution's subsequent descent into Terror and dictatorship. Nineteenth-century liberal political thought in France developed out of a critical reflection on these experiences carried out by individuals, usually from the social ranks of the old citizen-nobility, who had had direct or familial experience of the Terror. Such experiences led the political reflection of individuals like Germaine de Staël and Benjamin Constant back to Montesquieu's theory of the separation of powers to critique the tyrannical potential pregnant within popular as well as absolute monarchical sovereignty.²⁴

These early nineteenth-century liberals initiated the sense of quite profound ambivalence towards France's revolutionary heritage that would characterise the French liberal tradition from then on. Whilst liberals would defend the achievements of the early Revolution in establishing equality before the law and representative government against critics on the reactionary conservative right, they saw unchecked popular sovereignty as a threat to individual liberty and were generally skeptical towards republicanism and the idea of universal male suffrage. This is not to suggest, however, that nineteenth-century French liberalism was systematically and intrinsically anti-democratic; liberals typically did not so much oppose the notion of popular sovereignty in principle, as they feared its deterioration into tyranny in practice.²⁵ One notable expression of this ambivalence was a preoccupation with the ongoing importance of moral and political education in cultivating a public

²⁴ See principally Benjamin Constant, 'De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes' [1819] in Benjamin Constant, *De la liberté chez les modernes* (Paris, 1980), 491-515. It should be borne in mind that Constant's reflection on this issue was substantially indebted to Germaine de Staël whose reflection on it dates to 1799. See Philippe Raynaud, 'Libéralisme' in Philippe Raynaud et Stéphanie Rials (dir.), *Dictionnaire de philosophie politique* (Paris, 1996), 338-344, 342.

²⁵ For a critique of nineteenth-century French liberalism as anti-democratic see Mark Hulliung, *Citizens and Citizens: Republicans and Liberals in France and America* (London, 2002), 66.

opinion and political culture supportive of a regime wherein individual liberty and popular sovereignty could peacefully coexist.²⁶

This concern with political culture speaks to an issue that is central to the specificity of French liberalism: its ambiguous relationship with republicanism. Liberals and republicans alike were concerned with fostering a political culture supportive of a functioning, stable form of democracy, and, republican pro-democratic rhetoric notwithstanding, both worried that universal suffrage might be a fundamentally reactionary force.²⁷ Yet whereas systematic anti-clericalism was a central pillar of the republican project in this regard, tolerance of religious diversity and a heightened appreciation of the social benefits of religious practice were prominent within liberal reflection on the issue.²⁸ Aggressive anti-clericalism was the hallmark of republicanism in power during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the republican approach to political culture also had a constructive side. Conscious of the need to provide a secular surrogate for the social and moral function that Catholicism, however politically reactionary, had traditionally performed, republican politicians sought a replacement ideology in a combination of positivism and rationalist humanism and transmitted it through the reformed education system of the Third Republic.²⁹ This ideology was generically liberal in that it promoted notions like progress, rationality and individualism that are prominent within Freedman's typology.³⁰ However, in other respects – most notably regarding the issues of pluralism and the interpretation of France's revolutionary heritage – it contrasts starkly with French liberalism as it has been discussed so far here.

²⁶ Jaume, *L'individu effacé*, 18, 63; Lucien Jaume, *La liberté et la loi: les origines philosophiques du libéralisme* (Paris, 2000), 23.

²⁷ On republican fears regarding universal male suffrage see Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France, Volume 2: 1799-1871* (Harmondsworth, 1961), 139-140. Republican fears that a genuinely universal suffrage would be a fundamentally conservative political force also help to explain the exclusion of women from suffrage under the Third Republic.

²⁸ See especially here Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, (London, [1835/1840] 2003), 335-352. It also bears remembering here that prominent French liberals such as Germaine de Staël, Benjamin Constant and François Guizot were all Protestants.

²⁹ Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), 3-8.

³⁰ This helps to explain the view that republicanism was simply the form taken by liberalism in turn-of-the-century France. See for example William Logue, *From Philosophy to Sociology: The Evolution of French Liberalism, 1870-1914* (Illinois, 1983), ix-16; David S. Bell, *French Politics Today* (Manchester, 2002), 7.

This basic ambiguity has fed an ongoing scholarly debate about the status of liberalism under the Third Republic. Historians such as Louis Girard and André Jardin have pointed to the constitutional laws of 1875 as establishing just the kind of mixed constitution long advocated by French liberals.³¹ But if these laws can be taken to represent the successful union of liberalism and republicanism in the short term, republican consolidation following the crisis of *seize mai* in 1877 left liberal centrism an increasingly marginal presence in French political life. This was partly because aggressive anti-clericalism, especially in the field of education policy, encouraged a radicalisation of conservative opposition to the Republic, setting off a dialectic of intensifying political polarisation which reached an early peak during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and created a crisis of political legitimacy for liberal centrism. The Dreyfus Affair was a major catalyst for this process of turn-of-the-century polarisation and as such might be viewed as exacerbating this crisis of liberalism. Yet it is also regarded as the crucible in which a new liberal intelligentsia was forged.³² Thus in 1936 the historian Élie Halévy defined his own pre-1914 political orientation in the following terms: “*J’étais ‘libéral’ en ce sens que j’étais anticlérical, démocrate, républicain, disons d’un seul mot qui était alors lourd de sens: un ‘dreyfusard’*”.³³ In the light of these comments, the view that the Third Republic marked a golden age of French liberalism, which was pervasive in French historiography up to the mid-1970s, becomes understandable.³⁴ Non-French historiography, however, has often been more sceptical, especially where the role of intellectuals in public life is concerned. Historians such as Tony Judt and Sunil Khilnani have traced the fundamental anti-liberalism of much of France’s post-Second World War political and social thought to the long-term influence of the Manichean political culture that re-emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century.³⁵ The unusually strong attraction of Marxism and moral indulgence towards both Soviet communism and the Parti communiste français among much of the

³¹ Louis Girard, *Les libéraux français, 1814-1875* (Paris, 1985), 266-267; André Jardin, *Histoire du libéralisme politique de la crise de l’absolutisme à la constitution de 1875* (Paris, 1985), 402-414.

³² Christophe Prochasson, ‘Intellectuals as actors: image and reality’ in Jeremy Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, (Basingstoke, 1993), 78-79; Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 8. The term ‘intelligentsia’ is used throughout this thesis as a collective noun referring to France’s public intellectuals, as defined in note 13 above.

³³ Élie Halévy, *L’ère des tyrannies: études sur le socialisme et la guerre* (Paris, 1938), 216.

³⁴ Jean-Pierre Machelon, *La république contre les libertés ?* (Paris, 1976), 1.

³⁵ Judt, *Marxism and the French Left*, 1-4; Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 159, 238-241; Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution*, 135-136.

twentieth-century French intelligentsia are here seen to result on the one hand from an inherent poverty of pluralism and civil rights discourse and, on the other, from a reflexive preference for radical revolutionary political solutions, both linked to the eclipse of liberalism by republicanism under the Third Republic.

In recent years this conflictual view of French liberalism and republicanism has received some welcome shading.³⁶ However, while it is important to acknowledge that the reality of their relationship is more complex than an essentially conflictual view suggests, this basic contrast will be retained as the most appropriate conceptual framework for the purposes of the present thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it allows us to properly account for the ambiguities in Aron's relationship with liberalism as indicated by the dissonance of his thought within a generic typological definition such as Michael Freedman's. This means that we shall be able to explain why his inter-war work in particular partially embodies tendencies commonly associated with the crisis of European liberalism whilst at the same time continuing major themes specific to the French liberal tradition. Secondly, such a view is broadly consistent with Aron's own conceptualisation of the relationship between liberalism and republicanism.³⁷ It also basically reproduces a view prevalent within the revisionist historiography that formed an important part of the wider French liberal renaissance.³⁸

On these bases French liberalism, as it is understood in the present thesis, should be regarded as a political ideology promoting limited constitutional government to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals conceived as autonomous beings capable of rational

³⁶ Christofferson, *French Intellectuals*, 1-26; Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford, 2001); H.S. Jones, 'French liberals and the revolutionary tradition, c. 1860-1914' in Tim Blanning, Isabel Divanna and Dawn Dodds (eds.), *Historicising the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2008), 189-203.

³⁷ Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique: démocratie et révolution* (Paris, 1997), 17-18; Aron, *Histoire et dialectique de la violence* (Paris, 1973), 219; Marie-Laurence Netter, 'Raymond Aron and the French Revolution', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2 (October, 2003), 373-382.

³⁸ The importance of François Furet here is well known, but the historical revisionism of these years also extended into the study of the Third Republic, which began to be discussed not in terms of its liberalism, but its republican absolutism, not as a *république des libertés*, but a *république contre les libertés*. See here the above cited work by Jean-Pierre Machelon; Odile Rudelle, *La République absolue: aux origines de l'instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine, 1870-1889* (Paris, 1982); François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris, 1978).

thought. Variation as to the content of those rights and freedoms, and particularly the status of economic liberty within them, has been the principal internal factor influencing the historical development of this ideology. French liberals have also placed differing emphases on the importance of an active citizenry in implementing the principle of limited government. Their occasional democratic ambivalence is rooted in a tension between their abstract recognition of the moral equality of individuals, and thus of the principle of popular sovereignty, and their fears, rooted in the experience of the Revolution, that the application of this principle will lead to tyranny in practice. Finally, liberalism in France has been, in the words of historian Lucien Jaume, “*surtout une éducation, une Bildung de la personnalité et une culture politique*”.³⁹ Here it has differed substantially with republicanism by criticising the polarising effect of the Revolution on French political culture, stressing instead the value of social, political, religious and intellectual pluralism.

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The conceptual elasticity of ‘liberalism’ is amply demonstrated by considering the paradox that within the secondary literature devoted to Aron there is at once universal agreement over the liberal status of his thought and quite radical disagreement as to the significance of this liberalism. The brief literature survey below illustrates this, and also supports the critical claims made so far regarding existing interpretations of Aron’s oeuvre.⁴⁰

Since the 1990s, political scientists Daniel J. Mahoney and Brian C. Anderson have been the principal guardians of Aron’s intellectual legacy in the United States. Both published detailed and insightful analyses of Aron’s thought in this decade, and have since helmed an ongoing programme of translation and re-edition of his works in English.⁴¹ They are conservatives in the lineage of Thomas Pangle, Allan Bloom and Leo Strauss, who present Aron as a liberal conservative offering a realist alternative to the American ‘liberalism’ of

³⁹ Jaume, *L’individu effacé*, 18.

⁴⁰ This survey is not presented as comprehensive; further commentary on the secondary literature is spread throughout the main body of the thesis.

⁴¹ Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham, 1992); Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Lanham, 1997).

political theorists like John Rawls and Robert Nozick.⁴² Both have suggested that Aron's later work in particular has affinities with American neo-conservatism, and Anderson has even claimed, "It is not an exaggeration to call Aron the first neo-conservative".⁴³ One of the problems with their interpretations is that they understate the foundational importance of Aron's pre-war writings, which occasionally exhibit a form of radical relativism that is difficult to reconcile with their own Straussian political visions.⁴⁴ A second problem derives from their common application of a predominantly 'internalist' approach to Aron's thought.⁴⁵ One of the significant drawbacks to this is that both writers make frequent references to Aron as a liberal in the mould of either Montesquieu, Constant or Tocqueville without making any serious attempt to explain how, when, and why Aron came to interact with the work of such figures.⁴⁶ These same problems are also present in the literature devoted to Aron in France, where much of the sympathetic French commentary on his work has been in broad political alignment with the readings of Mahoney and Anderson. Aron's French biographer, Nicolas Baverez, served as an advisor to presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy at the time of his infamous remarks in 2007 on liquidating the legacy of May 1968.⁴⁷ Baverez's conservative anti-relativism similarly prevents him from fully acknowledging the importance of Aron's earlier work for his liberalism, and his response to

⁴² Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, xi, 127, 131-132; Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 2, 158, 168-180, 186 etc.

⁴³ See e.g. the editor's introduction by Mahoney and Anderson to Aron, *In Defense of Decadent Europe* (Lanham, [1977] 1996), ix-xvii, xv. For the quotation see Brian C. Anderson, 'The Aronian Renewal', *First Things* (March, 1995), 61-64, 62.

⁴⁴ Mahoney's book, for instance, offers no detailed account of any of Aron's pre-war work. His consideration of this work elsewhere treats it as basically flawed because of its relativism. See here Daniel J. Mahoney, 'Raymond Aron and the morality of prudence', *Modern Age*, 43 (summer, 2001), 243-252. Anderson does consider this pre-war work, but, like Mahoney, suggests that Aron's political thought had to overcome its earlier relativism to enter its 'mature' phase. See Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 43-52.

⁴⁵ On the 'internalist' / 'externalist' methodological debate within intellectual history see Donald R. Kelley, 'Intellectual history in a global age', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66 (2005), 155-168.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 84, 127, 143, 158, 168, 170, 192; Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 69-80, 97, 111-114. See here also Allan Bloom, 'Le dernier des libéraux', *Commentaire*, 8 (février, 1985), 174-181.

⁴⁷ "Je veux tourner la page de Mai 68 une bonne fois pour tous"; "[L'héritage de Mai 68 a] imposé le relativisme intellectuel et moral". Quoted in *L'Express*: 'À Bercy, Sarkozy attaque les "héritiers de Mai 68"' [30/4/07]. Text online at: http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/a-bercy-sarkozy-attaque-les-heritiers-de-mai-68_464258.html (last accessed 27/5/11). On Baverez's role as an advisor to Sarkozy see Serge Audier, *La pensée anti-68: essai sur une restauration intellectuelle* (Paris, 2009), 54-55. Aron's original biographer was Robert Colquhoun, whose two-volume study of Aron's life, cited above, takes the form of a summary of all his books and many of his more important articles in chronological order. Lacking in synthesis or overt political interpretation, its principal interest lies in its detailed accounts of the reception of Aron's books by reviewers in the French, British and American press.

this problem is to insist that before 1947 Aron was a committed socialist.⁴⁸ This is, however, problematic because, as the present thesis shows, by 1937-38 Raymond Aron was demonstrably committed to liberalism.

Taken together, these conservative interpretations of Aron's political thought represent what is periodically referred to here as a 'Cold War liberal' reading. None of the authors discussed so far apply this term in their accounts of Aron's thought, but all of their accounts work on the assumption that Aron did not arrive at his 'mature', liberal position until after the onset of the Cold War.⁴⁹ It is primarily by challenging this view that the historical account of Aron's liberal political thought in the present thesis is constructed.

If the principal historical arguments of this thesis are formulated through a critical dialogue with the conservative interpretations of Aron's thought discussed above, its relevance for contemporary French political debate derives from its engagement with questions about Aron's liberalism that have arisen in recent years on the French left. For all the belated public recognition that Aron received towards the end of his life, it is important not to exaggerate his popularity on the left during the 1980s where he continued to be regarded as "capitalism's official thinker", a neo-liberal in the mould of Friedrich von Hayek.⁵⁰ In the wake of the continuing post-Mitterrand failure of the Parti socialiste to win a presidential election, however, there have developed growing efforts towards the formulation of a French liberal socialism, which have explored native liberal and socialist traditions of political thought in search of historical validation. The work of philosophers Monique Canto-Sperber and Serge Audier has been prominent in this regard, and both have referred to Aron in building their arguments.⁵¹ Canto-Sperber is sympathetic towards the Rawlsian

⁴⁸ Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des idéologies* (Paris, 1993), 39, 53.

⁴⁹ For an explicit attempt to situate Aron within a tradition of Cold War liberalism see Jan-Werner Müller, 'Fear and Freedom: On 'Cold War Liberalism'', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 7 (January, 2008), 45-64.

⁵⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Neither an accident nor a mistake', *Critical Enquiry*, 15 (winter, 1989), 481-484, 482. In October 1984, Gilles Anquetil, writing in the left-wing weekly *Nouvel Observateur*, referred disparagingly to an 'arono-hayekian consensus' in French economics. See Luc Ferry et Alain Renaut, 'Droits-libertés et droits-créances: Raymond Aron critique de Friedrich von Hayek', *Droits*, 2 (1985), 75-84, 75.

⁵¹ Monique Canto-Sperber, *Les règles de la liberté* (Paris, 2003); Monique Canto-Sperber, 'Pourquoi les démocrates ne veulent-ils pas être libéraux?', *Le débat*, 131 (septembre - octobre, 2004), 109-126; Monique Canto-Sperber et Nicolas Tenzer, *Faut-il sauver le libéralisme ?* (Paris, 2006), 27, 32, 90; Monique

political philosophy that provokes such scepticism on the part of Aron's main American commentators, but it is the interpretation of Aron offered by Audier that is particularly remarkable. Audier's counter-interpretation, though it is open to some of the same basic criticisms as the conservative readings discussed above, nevertheless departs radically from the approaches of Mahoney, Anderson and Baverez by arguing that Aron's political thought can be interpreted in support of some of the *soixante-huitard* social and political arguments that developed in the wake of May 1968.⁵² Given Aron's prominence in leading the intellectual reaction against the *révolution introuvable*, Audier's claims are surprising.⁵³ But the fact that he has been able to make a coherent, if flawed, case for such a view is indicative of the fundamentally ambivalent character of Aron's political thought, which Cold War liberal readings often understate.

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Finally, a few words on methodology, content and structure. The general methodological stance that has been adopted throughout the thesis is one of weak or post-foundational intentionalism that is borrowed directly from the theoretical writings of the intellectual historian Mark Bevir.⁵⁴ Bevir promotes an approach to intellectual history wherein the major implications of the linguistic turn are accepted whilst avoiding radical forms of interpretative relativism or determinism, and where appeals to authorial intentions are provisionally accepted. Thus extensive use of the concept of 'discourse' is made in chapter three, for example, but not in a way that implies any major denial of individual agency. More fundamentally, the thesis is oriented around the idea that Raymond Aron was intentionally engaged in a recovery of liberal political thought and different aspects of his work examined in each chapter are therefore evaluated with reference to their overall

Canto-Sperber, *Le libéralisme et la gauche* (Paris, 2008); Serge Audier, *Raymond Aron: la démocratie conflictuelle* (Paris, 2004), 14, 61-88, 109, 111-112, 121; Serge Audier, *Le socialisme libéral* (Paris, 2006); Audier, *La pensée anti-68*, 53-76.

⁵² Audier, *Raymond Aron*, 111-112.

⁵³ For a critique of Audier see Marc Crapez, 'Raymond Aron, homme de gauche?', *Controverses*, 10 (mars, 2009), 374-380.

⁵⁴ In particular Mark Bevir, 'Mind and method in the history of ideas', *History and Theory*, 36 (May, 1997), 167-189; Mark Bevir, 'How to be an intentionalist', *History and Theory*, 41 (May, 2002), 209-217.

coherence in relation to this project. Aron's life's work cannot, of course, be reduced to the project of liberal recovery, and recognition of this, together with the voluminous diversity of his writings, necessitates selectivity with regard to sources.

In some respects the selection of themes and sources examined here has been dictated by the quality and extent of their coverage in the existing secondary literature. Thus there is no extensive treatment of Aron's theory of international relations because this area has been exhaustively covered elsewhere by authors with far greater expertise than my own.⁵⁵

Aron's journalistic writings were predominantly, though by no means exclusively, concerned with international affairs; they too have been sparsely drawn upon here, but excellently analysed elsewhere.⁵⁶ Because of the central argument of the thesis, priority has been afforded to Aron's earlier writings. Thus instead of discussing Aron's end of ideology theory, for instance, through its presence in his famous 'Sorbonne trilogy', its roots are traced across works spanning the period 1933 to 1955.⁵⁷ Otherwise, sources have been selected on the basis of their thematic relevance.

The four chapters constituting the main body of the thesis are thematically organised and titled accordingly as: 1. 'Political Epistemology'; 2. 'Anti-totalitarianism'; 3. 'The End of Ideology'; and 4. 'Instrumentalising the French Liberal Tradition'. This structure has been dictated by the need to address the problems already identified with the Cold War liberal reading of Aron's political thought. Thus chapters two and three each take prominent aspects of Cold War liberalism to which Aron made a substantial contribution and demonstrate how in each case his reflection on these issues was rooted in the inter-war period.⁵⁸ Chapter two shows how, during the 1930s, Aron developed his theories of

⁵⁵ Aron's writings in international relations are the subject of numerous articles and are treated extensively in e.g. Reed M. Davis, *A Politics of Understanding: The International Thought of Raymond Aron* (Louisiana, 2009); Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 91-110; Stephen Launay, *La pensée politique de Raymond Aron* (Paris, 1995), 196-243.

⁵⁶ See here Christian Malis, *Raymond Aron et le débat stratégique français, 1930-1966* (Paris, 2005).

⁵⁷ For a recent treatment of this issue from within this later context see Davis, *Raymond Aron*, 58-84. The term 'Sorbonne trilogy' refers to *Dix-huit leçons*; Aron, *La lutte de classes: nouvelles leçons sur les sociétés industrielles* (Paris, 1964); and Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (Paris, 1965). These books were adapted from lectures delivered at the Sorbonne between 1955 and 1958.

⁵⁸ These elements of Cold War liberalism are discussed in general terms in Arblaster, *Western Liberalism*, 309-331.

totalitarianism and secular religion as pathological products of malfunctioning democratic political culture under the influence of anti-liberal authors like Carl Schmitt and Hendrik de Man as well as liberals like Élie Halévy and Albert Thibaudet. Critiquing a central pillar of Cold War liberal readings, it demonstrates that Aron's hesitancy towards describing the Soviet Union or PCF as totalitarian before the end of the war does not indicate any lingering sense of socialist solidarity on his part, but was rather evidence of Aron's political realism. It then traces the polemical reorientation of his writing on these themes after the war, arguing that this was an attempt at reclaiming the legacy of the anti-fascist resistance for anti-communism. Finally, it considers Aron's polemical use of the language of anti-totalitarianism in perhaps his most famous book, *L'opium des intellectuels*, before explaining his often critical reaction to the anti-totalitarian turn of the 1970s in the light of the chapter's earlier analyses.

Chapter three begins by considering Aron's influence within the CIA backed international anti-communist organisation the Congress for Cultural Freedom. After showing how he implemented a strategic reorientation in the language of its anti-communism by promoting end of ideology discourse as a substitute for partisan anti-totalitarian rhetoric, it then shows how Aron developed his end of ideology theory as a result of his involvement with a variety of political and economic non-conformist groups in the 1930s. These engagements place Aron at the centre of the earliest inter-war attempts at formulating a theory of neo-liberalism, further challenging the Cold War centred interpretation of his liberalism. After showing how end of ideology theory represents a renewal based model of neo-liberalism that contrasts with the neo-classical revivalism of Friedrich von Hayek, chapter three considers the problematic question of to what extent Aron was able to formulate a normative political theory from within the perspective of his end of ideology theory.

The themes treated in chapters one and four are dictated by the need, not adequately met in existing accounts of Aron's work, to take seriously two of his own contentions that appear problematic for Cold War liberal readings and the broader tendency to describe Aron uncritically as the descendent of an illustrious French liberal tradition. These are, first, his insistence that his doctoral thesis, published in 1938, provided the basis for all his

subsequent political thought,⁵⁹ and, second, his admission that authors such as Tocqueville and Montesquieu had no formative influence on his thought.⁶⁰ It is by establishing in detail the link between Aron's reading of Montesquieu and Tocqueville and these earlier writings that the thesis makes its principal contribution to the existing literature on Aron.

The first half of chapter one is semi-biographical and establishes the political and cultural context within which Aron formulated the epistemology upon which his liberalism was based. It begins by examining Aron's philosophical education from the perspective of a perceived inter-generational clash between young philosophy students and their teachers, tracing the manifestations of this clash in conflicting philosophical worldviews and similarly conflicting visions of the intellectual's public role, before addressing inter-generational continuity in attitudes towards liberalism. Prior to examining Aron's doctoral thesis, this chapter considers the political and philosophical significance of his stay in Germany from 1930 to 1933, emphasising its effect on his abandonment of pacifism in favour of a nuanced form of political realism, and on his counter-cultural reflection on the social responsibility of the public intellectual. The second half of chapter one considers Aron's problematic attempt at rooting this political realism and ethic of intellectual responsibility in a relativist epistemology.

Chapter four shows how Aron's reading of Montesquieu especially, but also Tocqueville, was oriented so as to contain but not negate the relativism of the political epistemology that he outlined in the late 1930s. This interpretation is informed by the Cold War liberal approach in that it recognises the relativist problem highlighted by Mahoney and Anderson, but is able to reconcile Aron's epistemology with his liberalism by showing how his later engagement with Montesquieu and Tocqueville responded specifically to this problem. Aron's categorisation of these authors as members of an imagined "*école française de sociologie politique*" in his famous work on the history of sociological thought, *Les étapes*

⁵⁹ Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris, 1983), 125.

⁶⁰ See *Les étapes*, 21: "... je ne dois rien à l'influence de Montesquieu et de Tocqueville dont je n'ai sérieusement étudié les œuvres qu'au cours des dix dernières années". See also Aron, 'Tocqueville retrouvé', *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*, 1 (fall, 1979), 8-23, 8; Aron, 'Discours de Raymond Aron lors de la réception du Prix Tocqueville', *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*, 2 (winter, 1980), 117-121, 120.

de la pensée sociologique, is also considered here from the perspective of contemporary French debates about the social and political role of sociology in which conflicting accounts of the discipline's history were prominent.⁶¹ Finally, chapter four links Aron's contribution to the rediscovery of the French liberal tradition to the wider liberal renaissance. The principal argument advanced here is that the particular renaissance to which Aron most substantially contributed responded not to any anti-totalitarian turn, but rather to the near revolutionary upheaval of May-June 1968. This feeds into a broader argument that the liberal renaissance itself was in fact a much more politically heterogeneous phenomenon than has previously been recognised.

⁶¹ *Les étapes*, 295.

CHAPTER ONE

POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Reflecting back in his *Mémoires* upon the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, the doctoral thesis that he defended and published in 1938, Raymond Aron claimed that “*Le livre entier éclairait le mode de pensée politique qui fut depuis lors le mien – et le reste à l'automne de ma vie*”.¹ The foundational importance of this text within Aron's oeuvre has not, however, always been apparent in secondary discussions of his work. Daniel J. Mahoney's *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron* contains no substantial discussion of it, and Mahoney's treatment of the book elsewhere presents it in a negative light compared to Aron's later works because of its occasional tendency towards radical historical relativism.² Brian C. Anderson, though he gives a substantial account of the *Introduction* in his *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political*, echoes Mahoney in suggesting that Aron's political thought had to overcome the *Introduction*'s relativism in order to enter its 'mature' phase.³ These concerns reflect the political positions of Mahoney and Anderson, both conservative admirers of the militant anti-relativism of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom.⁴ The *Introduction* has received more attention from French commentators, but here the focus of analysis has tended to concentrate either upon its internal philosophical argument, as in Sylvie Mesure's *Raymond Aron et la raison historique*, or on its cultural significance in the early history of French existentialism, as in Nicolas Baverez's biography of Aron.⁵ Mesure's account of the *Introduction* is notable for her view that Aron successfully avoids the radical relativism of which he is charged by Mahoney and Anderson, but whilst she provides an excellent exposition, Mesure does not

¹ Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris, 1983), 125.

² Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham, 1992); 'Raymond Aron and the morality of prudence', *Modern Age*, 43 (summer, 2001), 243-252.

³ Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Oxford, 1997), 21-60, esp. 43-52.

⁴ Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 64, 94, 107, 130-138, 171, 176, 187; Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 4-5, 12-14, 173.

⁵ Sylvie Mesure, *Raymond Aron et la raison historique* (Paris, 1984); Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des idéologies*, (Paris, 1993), 127-152. Jean-François Sirinelli's double biography of Aron and Jean-Paul Sartre surprisingly contains no substantial discussion of the *Introduction*. See Jean François Sirinelli, *Deux intellectuels dans le siècle: Sartre et Aron* (Paris, 1995).

substantially account for the *Introduction*'s relationship with Aron's wider oeuvre.⁶ Baverez, on the other hand, continues a well-established tradition of emphasising to the point of exaggeration Aron's supposed influence on the development of Sartre's existentialism.⁷ The problem with this view, however, is that, given the radically anti-liberal politics of Sartre and other prominent French and German existentialist philosophers after the Second World War, it appears difficult to reconcile with the foundational importance that Aron attributed to the *Introduction* for his liberal political thought. Here Baverez effectively rejoins Mahoney and Anderson in eliding this difficulty by claiming that Aron's transition to liberalism occurred at the start of the Cold War and that prior to this he had been a committed socialist, to the left even of Sartre.⁸

The present chapter is concerned with assessing the importance of Aron's *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* as a work of political epistemology and thereby its relationship with his wider political thought and particularly his liberalism. This entails taking seriously Aron's claim that the *Introduction*, although ostensibly a work of abstract historical epistemology, served ultimately as the basis for a concrete political science.⁹ Such an approach does not entail a radical break with existing interpretations so much as a shift of emphasis. It requires a close reading in the style of Sylvie Mesure and must engage with the issue of relativism to which Mesure and Mahoney and Anderson have offered contrasting

⁶ Mesure, *Raymond Aron*, 116-118. See too Stephen Launay, *La pensée politique de Raymond Aron* (Paris, 1995), 35, 43, 50, which also argues that Aron successfully contains the relativist tendencies of the *Introduction*. Mesure's approach to the *Introduction* is compared with that of Mahoney in Philippe Raynaud, 'Raymond Aron et le jugement politique: entre Aristote et Kant' in Christian Bachelier et Elisabeth Dutartre (dir.), *Raymond Aron et la liberté politique* (Paris, 2002), 123-131.

⁷ Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 108, 127. The main source of this tendency is Simone de Beauvoir's account of Aron having introduced Sartre to phenomenology in *La force de l'âge*, (Paris, 1960), 79-80. Sartre had in fact earlier encountered phenomenology when working as a private tutor for a Japanese aristocrat, poet and philosopher, Sūzō Kuki, who had studied under Edmund Husserl in Germany. See Stephen Light (ed.), *Sūzō Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre: Influence and Counter-Influence in the Early History of Existential Phenomenology, Including the Notebook "Monsieur Sartre" and Other Parisian Writings of Sūzō Kuki* (Carbondale, 1987). For other accounts that place a strong emphasis on Aron's existentialist credentials and his influence on Sartre see Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), 142; Reed M. Davis, *A Politics of Understanding: The International Thought of Raymond Aron* (Louisiana, 2009), 13-14. For a Sartrean perspective see Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason: Towards an Existentialist Theory of History* (Chicago, 1997), 4, 6, 23-24, 266.

⁸ Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 55-56; Jean-François Sirinelli, 'Quand Aron était à gauche de Sartre', *Le Monde dimanche*, 17 janvier (1982).

⁹ Aron made this claim during his thesis defence. It is quoted in Gaston Fessard, *La philosophie historique de Raymond Aron* (Paris, 1980), 44.

views. Where appropriate, connections with Aron's later, post-war works will be made, but rather than treating the *Introduction* as essentially a flawed anticipation of his later, mature political thought, the analysis will situate Aron's thesis primarily within its contemporary context. Clearly, this entails substantial analysis of the book's place within a broader cultural milieu, in which the development of early French existentialist thought has a part. However, given that we are mainly concerned with the *Introduction*'s political significance, the contextual analysis offered here will prioritise not so much the wider idea content of French philosophy in the 1920s and 1930s as the development of competing views of the political role of philosophers acting as public intellectuals. The *Introduction* needs also to be situated within the narrower context of Aron's philosophical education and developing political views, and this biographical thread is interwoven with the wider contextual analysis in the first two sections of the chapter. Section I describes the left-leaning pacifism of the majority of students at the École normale supérieure where Aron received his higher education. It examines the political and philosophical effects of inter-generational clash between these *normaliens* and their teachers in the late 1920s and 1930s before considering inter-generational continuity in attitudes towards liberalism. Section II outlines the significance of Aron's stay in Germany between 1930 and 1933 for his political and philosophical development, highlighting contrast and continuity with parallel developments in the wider intellectual milieu in Paris. Section III gives an account of the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* in the light of the contexts discussed in the previous two sections, elucidating its intended political significance and assessing the philosophical limitations that have sometimes been seen to undermine its moderate political arguments.

I. *PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS IN THE LATE THIRD REPUBLIC*

Raymond Aron was born on the 14th of March 1905 in Paris. The third son in a family of wealthy, thoroughly assimilated and non-practising Jews, he recalled feeling the first pricks of political consciousness when, aged ten, he discovered his father's collection of documents relating to the Dreyfus Affair.¹⁰ This was a general political awakening, not a specifically Jewish one: "*L'affaire Dreyfus*", he recalled in his *Mémoires*, "*ne troubla pas mes sentiments de petit Français*".¹¹ These feelings were reinforced by the fact that the Aron household was then swept up in the wider patriotic fervour induced by the outbreak of the First World War. For the next fifteen years Aron remained "*à peine conscient d'appartenir au judaïsme, citoyen français en toute sérénité*", but the nationalistic quality of his earlier childhood patriotism proved more short-lived.¹²

Aron's general political consciousness began to crystallise into more specific political opinions as a result of his entry into the philosophy class at the lycée Hoche in Versailles in 1921. Having reassessed his spontaneous childhood patriotism in the light of this philosophical education, he emerged a convinced pacifist whose political sympathies leant to the left.¹³ After two years preparing for the highly competitive selection exams, Aron entered the École normale supérieure in 1924 where he would study philosophy with such future luminaries as Georges Canguilhem, Daniel Lagache, Paul Nizan and Jean-Paul Sartre until 1928. Describing his political orientation during these years, he later stated that

Moi, j'étais vaguement socialiste. Le sentiment le plus fort chez nous était probablement la révolte contre la guerre, et de ce fait le pacifisme. J'étais pacifiste passionnément, à la fois par révolte contre la guerre, et aussi par révolte contre la manière dont un enfant avait vécu la guerre. J'avais neuf ans au moment où la guerre a éclaté, treize ans lorsqu'elle a été terminée. Après coup je me suis dit qu'à aucun moment je n'avais souffert de cette guerre,

¹⁰ Aron's relatively elevated upper middle class background is indicated by the fact that, like Sartre but unlike the majority of their fellow students, he did not apply for a bursary to support his studies at the École normale supérieure. Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron*, 26-27, 42-43.

¹¹ *Mémoires*, 9.

¹² *Mémoires*, 17-18. See also Aron, 'Conférence prononcée au Bnai Brith de France' [1951] in Aron, *Essais sur la condition juive contemporaine* (Paris, 2007), 27-41, 37-38.

¹³ *Mémoires*, 19, 22.

qu'à aucun moment je n'avais eu, disons, de la compassion pour les malheurs des peuples. Alors j'ai eu le sentiment que l'égoïsme des enfants est quelque chose d'horrible, et j'ai détesté la guerre avec autant de force que j'avais été patriote.¹⁴

Such sentiments were typical of young men of Aron's generation who had been too young to fight in the war and whose subsequent political development was shaped by feelings of guilt arising from this as they entered adulthood.¹⁵ This common experience fostered a heightened self-consciousness within Aron's generation, which manifested itself in the channelling of its sense of guilt into an unusually hostile opposition towards its teachers, men frequently perceived to have acted as cheerleaders during the unprecedented slaughter of the war years.

The organisation of France's higher education system in the 1920s was the product of a series of educational reforms implemented in the late nineteenth century in an attempt to reinforce the commitment of the French population to republican values.¹⁶ Education served a purpose of replacing the traditional conservative values of institutional religion with an enlightened secular worldview, and this had partly entailed building a university system dedicated to the ideals of science, reason and humanism. Academic philosophy occupied a privileged position here, and the two principal doctrines that it promoted were Durkheimian sociological positivism and neo-Kantian idealism.¹⁷ There were important differences between these two schools, but they converged upon an optimistic and

¹⁴ Aron, *Le spectateur engagé: entretiens avec Jean-Louis Missika et Dominique Wolton* (Paris, 1981), 26.

¹⁵ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London, 1980), 30-34. On the prevalence of socialist and pacifist sentiment within the École normale during the 1920s see Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: khâgneux et normaliens dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1988), 308-396. The generational specificity under discussion here has been emphasised in the secondary literature by referring variously to a 'generation of 1905', after the year in which many of its most prominent figures were born; a 'generation of 1914', in reference to the outbreak of the war that so fundamentally shaped its development; and a 'generation of 1930', referring to the decade in which it began to have a substantial political and philosophical impact. On the 'generation of 1905' see Pascal Ory et Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, (Paris, 1986), 72-75; on the 'generation of 1914' see Wohl, *Generation*, 30-34; on the generation of 1930 see Michel Winock, *Le siècle des intellectuels*, (Paris, 1999), 247-258 and Michel Winock, *Histoire politique de la revue Esprit* (Paris, 1975), 76-77.

¹⁶ Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), 3-8. On the structure of French higher education and its impact upon philosophical trends in twentieth-century France, see also Alan D. Schrift, *Twentieth Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Oxford, 2006), 188-208.

¹⁷ A third strand of French philosophy, spiritualism, ought also to be acknowledged; however, because of its ambivalence regarding the educational goals of the Third Republic and its occasional tendency to feed into anti-republican political positions, it will not be discussed here.

progressive form of humanist rationalism.¹⁸ Thus whilst idealist philosophers rejected the deterministic tendencies of positivism, they often placed science at the centre of their philosophical reflection; positivists, on the other hand, rejected purely empiricist epistemology, remaining within the broad outlines of the French rationalist tradition.¹⁹ Léon Brunschvicg, the most senior academic philosopher in inter-war France, exemplified this partial union of positivism and neo-Kantian idealism. For Brunschvicg, science represented the ultimate manifestation of the human spirit and thus the primary object of all philosophical enquiry.²⁰ This inherently optimistic philosophy, positing the potentially unlimited development of human rationality and equating scientific and moral progress, was perfectly matched to the secular, humanist educational goals of the Third Republic.²¹

In the long shadow of the First World War, however, this optimistic, progressive rationalism appeared entirely divorced from historical reality to many students of Aron's age. When he left the École normale in 1928, he felt "*presque désespéré d'avoir perdu des années à n'apprendre presque rien*", sentiments shared by his closest friends at the time, Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Nizan.²² Whilst the rebelliousness of their generation of normaliens tended initially to be expressed in political terms through militant pacifism and varying degrees of socialist commitment,²³ it would later develop a philosophical dimension which partly grew out of the concern for Franco-German reconciliation that was a corollary of its pacifism. Following the re-opening of academic exchanges between France and Germany in 1926, young French philosophers began visiting Germany, absorbing influences that they would subsequently use to implement a thoroughgoing

¹⁸ Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 3, 6, 26; Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca, 2005), 5.

¹⁹ Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 8, 26.

²⁰ See Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 43-46; Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 5-6, and *Mémoires*, 39-40, 51. See also Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 66, where Brunschvicg is described as "*un humaniste scientifique: refusant de succomber aux illusions positivistes*".

²¹ Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, 2010), 40-48.

²² *Spectateur*, 27; Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life*, (London, 1985), 461. Paul Nizan, *Les chiens de garde*, (Paris, [1932] 1974), 37.

²³ Aron's commitment was at first relatively strong: he was briefly a member of the youth wing of the SFIO in 1925 or 1926. See *Mémoires*, 48.

critique of the philosophical tradition in which they had been educated.²⁴ Aron, who would play an important role in promoting contemporary German philosophy and social theory in France in the 1930s, later described the content of his French philosophical training in the following terms:

Qu'apprend-on sous le nom de "philosophie" ? Platon, Aristote, Descartes et les suivants. Presque pas de Marx, sinon un peu en sociologie ! Pas de postkantien ou à peine. Pas de Hegel. Il y avait l'épistémologie, la discussion sur les mathématiques ou la physique, mais pas de cours sur la philosophie politique. Je n'ai jamais entendu le nom de Tocqueville lorsque j'étais à la Sorbonne ou à l'École normale !²⁵

By the 1930s a reorientation of French philosophy was under way based in the importation of much of the post-Kantian German thought that the academic curriculum neglected. Operating from the margins of the academic establishment at institutions such as the École pratique des hautes études, and through journals like *Recherches philosophiques*, this responded directly to the perceived excesses of apolitical and idealistic abstraction characteristic of mainstream French philosophy at the time.²⁶ Phenomenology was increasingly used to criticise transcendental idealism, while interpretations of Martin Heidegger's ontology gradually displaced anthropocentric metaphysics. The cumulative outcome of this reorientation was the development of a new anti-foundational realism, which reframed the relation of subject and world in a way that opposed Brunschvicg's idealist subjectivism as well as the materialistic bias of more traditional forms of philosophical realism.²⁷ Thus anti-foundational realism severely restricted man's access to transcendental absolutes such as Reason and human nature, but, although widely conceived

²⁴ Exiled philosophers living in Paris such as Bernard Groethuysen, Alexandre Kojève, Eric Weil, and Alexandre Koyré also played a major role in importing post-Kantian German philosophy into France between the wars.

²⁵ *Spectateur*, 27. At this time, much post-Kantian German philosophy had yet to be translated into French. See *Mémoires*, 41.

²⁶ Alexandre Kojève's famous seminars at the EPHE, which Aron attended, are especially significant here. Kojève offered a Heideggerian reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that is frequently credited as a major influence on the reorientation of French philosophy initiated in the 1930s. Despite his profound intellectual admiration for Kojève, Aron disagreed fundamentally with his Hegelian vision of the 'end of history', which he critiqued in a presentation at the last of the seminars, held in June 1939. See Fessard, *Raymond Aron*, 52. Aron also published several book reviews in *Recherches philosophiques* in 1934 and 1935 as well as an article: Aron 'L'idéologie', *Recherches philosophiques*, VI (1936-1937), 65-84. This piece contains some of Aron's earliest attacks on Marxism as a secular religion. See especially pages 79-80.

²⁷ The term 'anti-foundational realism' is borrowed from Geroulanos, *Atheism*, 49-99.

as an anti-idealist return to the concrete world, it insisted that man could only ever achieve a fundamentally imperfect, incomplete understanding of this world. A profound, dual epistemological scepticism resulted from this, rendering the philosophical reorientation of the 1930s simultaneously anti-positivist and anti-idealist, a negative image of established academic philosophy.

Increasingly from the late 1920s the younger generation differed from its teachers not only philosophically, but also in terms of the way in which it tended to see the political role of philosophers acting as public intellectuals. Philosophers in Brunschvicg's generation, born within a year or two of the Third Republic itself, had been among the earliest beneficiaries of its new educational system. By the time they reached maturity, however, the Republic was under renewed threat from the reactionary right, first, in the late 1880s, with the rise of Boulangism, then, from the late 1890s, with the Dreyfus Affair. It was during the latter series of events that many of them, along with other academics, artists, writers and musicians, had first mobilised as *intellectuels* in defence of the universal values of truth and justice that the Republic was supposed to embody.²⁸ By the late 1920s, however, this universalistic view of the intellectual's wider social function was perceived to be under threat. In 1927 Julien Benda, a veteran Dreyfusard, published *La trahison des clercs*, attacking engagement along particular class or nationalist lines as a betrayal of the intellectual's public duty to enter the political fray only in the defence of universal, humanist values.²⁹ Benda's polemic, one of the first extended attempts to theorise the public role of intellectuals in French society, provoked a hostile response within the younger generation, serving, ironically, as a catalyst for the counter-theorisation and

²⁸ The noun '*intellectuel*' was initially used as a term of abuse by the anti-Dreyfusard writer Maurice Barrès, but soon became embraced by many of those at whom it had been aimed. Subsequently it has come to refer in a general sense to any academic or broadly artistic figure that uses the public prestige of their formal position in support of political goals outside of their specific area of competence, often in the form of a moral protest undertaken as part of a group, hence the frequency of collective intellectual petitions throughout France's twentieth-century history. For general narrative histories of French intellectuals in the twentieth century see Ory and Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels* and Winock, *Le siècle*. See also David Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation* (Basingstoke, 2005); David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France* (Basingstoke, 2002). For an account of intellectual petitions in the same period see Jean-François Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises: manifestes et pétitions au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1990). For an account of the Dreyfus Affair's impact on French political culture from a relatively detached contemporary observer see Albert Thibaudet, *La république des professeurs* (Paris, 1927). See here page 106: "*L'affaire Dreyfus a préparé une démocratie de professeurs, de normaliens ...*".

²⁹ Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs* (Paris, 1927), 102-104, 121.

application of just the kinds of engagement that he rejected.³⁰ Aron participated in this with his second published article, which criticised Benda's arguments about intellectual betrayal and argued for "an attitude of mind that is attached to truth and inspired by generosity, though nonetheless engaged in action".³¹ It would be Paul Nizan, however, who would write the most infamous rejoinder to Benda in his *Les chiens de garde*, published in 1932. Because of the rationalist universalism underpinning it, Benda's argument has been interpreted as a polemical transposition of Léon Brunschvicg's idealist philosophy into the debate about intellectual engagement.³² Nizan's book, which targeted not just Benda, but the entire French philosophical establishment, supports this view. In it he claimed that the decimation of a generation of students on the battlefields of the First World War testified to the moral bankruptcy of their teachers' philosophical universalism.³³ Whereas Benda had identified the roots of intellectual betrayal in the pernicious influence of German historicism, Nizan, a recent convert to Marxism, argued that philosophers and philosophy could not transcend the times in which they were situated.³⁴ Recognition of this fundamental historicity exposed, for Nizan, the supposed universalism of Brunschvicg's philosophy for the bourgeois ideology it really was.³⁵ It also made a mockery of the limited idealist notion of intellectual responsibility, creating an ethical imperative to descend from the ivory tower and engage in political struggle.³⁶

The gap between Aron and Nizan's generation and their teachers did, then, carry substantial political and philosophical implications. But it ought also to be remembered that intellectual patricide in France, as elsewhere, was not invented in the 1920s, and that the rhetoric of inter-generational clash cannot be simply taken at face value.³⁷ One area where

³⁰ Martin Cornick, 'Catalyst for intellectual *engagement*: the serialisation of Julien Benda's *La trahison des clercs* in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*', *French Cultural Studies*, IV (1993), 31-49.

³¹ Quoted in Robert Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: The Philosopher in History, 1905-1955* (Beverly Hills, 1986), 33. These remarks were originally published in *Libres propos* in 1928.

³² Geroulanos, *Atheism*, 46.

³³ Nizan, *Les chiens*, 37.

³⁴ Nizan, *Les chiens*, 11-12, 19-28.

³⁵ Nizan, *Les chiens*, 23, 25, 35-36, 41, 48, 53-55, 62, 67, 74, 81-82 etc.

³⁶ Nizan, *Les chiens*, 111-113, 119-123.

³⁷ I have argued elsewhere, for instance, that an over-reliance on inter-generational clash in the formative experience of intellectuals in Aron's age group has led to the misinterpretation of Aron's doctoral thesis – see Iain Stewart, 'Existentialist manifesto or conservative political science? Problems in interpreting

this is particularly apparent is in attitudes towards liberalism among the younger generation of normaliens and their teachers. Their inter-generational conflict has sometimes been described as a binary opposition between the liberalism of the older generation and the anti-liberalism of the younger, but this view is misleading and glosses over significant continuity of political worldview across both groups at the most fundamental level.³⁸ Whilst philosophers like Brunschvicg may have considered themselves largely above the political fray, there nevertheless remained an inherent partisanship attached to their positions within a University where academic philosophy served as the bastion of a secular humanism that, although emphatically universalist, was partly conceived as an ideological weapon against reactionary conservatism. The idealist view of the intellectual's wider social role subscribed to by many in this generation was likewise universalist in theory, but partisan in practice. Because of this it is problematic to define either this generation of academic philosophers or the idealist view of intellectual engagement to which many of them subscribed as specifically liberal.³⁹

For the most part, these ex-Dreyfusards were liberals in a rather generic republican sense: they were defenders of parliamentary democracy, the notion of progress, and the principles enshrined in the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*. Many of the younger individuals who participated in the reorientation of French philosophy in the 1930s (including, as we shall see shortly, Raymond Aron) were anti-liberal in a correspondingly generic sense. Thus, for instance, anti-foundational realism was a French manifestation of wider European 'crisis thought' which eroded faith in some of the fundamental philosophical assumptions underpinning liberal democracy including notions of progress and rationality, and the accessibility of the common good to philosophical reflection.⁴⁰

Raymond Aron's *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, *European Review of History - Revue européenne d'histoire*, 16 (April, 2009), 217-233.

³⁸ Mark Lilla, 'The legitimacy of the liberal age' in Mark Lilla (ed.), *New French Thought* (Princeton, 1994), 3-34, 10; Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 8; Sirinelli, *Génération*, 426, 562-589, 632, 640; Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30: une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française*, (Paris, 1969), 183-268.

³⁹ For an expression of this problematic liberal interpretation see Christophe Prochasson, 'Intellectuals as actors: image and reality', in Jeremy Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, (Basingstoke, 1993), 78-79. See also Gutting, *French Philosophy*, 8.

⁴⁰ On the notion of crisis thought see Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1985), 9-25, 39-49, 130-146.

However, nineteenth-century French liberalism's primary emphasis on the separation of powers within a minimal, non-partisan state was, at best, a secondary concern to most philosophers in both generations.⁴¹ More importantly, traditional liberal ambivalence towards France's revolutionary heritage was equally alien to groups on both sides of the generational divide. Many ex-Dreyfusards subscribed to Georges Clemenceau's aggressively celebratory and triumphal interpretation of the Revolution as an indivisible bloc.⁴² This view had been encouraged by late nineteenth-century perceptions of an existential threat to the republic from the reactionary right and a resultant sense that liberal ambivalence, even if voiced by committed republicans, risked legitimising the republic's conservative enemies. However well grounded these fears may have been, the cult of the Revolution that they fuelled exacerbated a tendency for political debate under the Third Republic to lapse into Manicheanism.⁴³

The basic political outlooks of both generations were shaped by this polarised political culture in which a Left that saw itself as the guardian of the legacy of the Revolution, was pitted against a Right that defined itself through rejection of the same revolutionary heritage. In the 1930s this polarisation became dramatically radicalised. By 1934, when the republic appeared under renewed and immediate threat from reactionary and, in places, fascistic forms of conservatism, philosophers from across both the generational divide and the full spectrum of progressive politics combined within the Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes that acted as a forerunner for the Popular Front two years later.⁴⁴ It was during this period that communism shifted from being a fringe movement to become

⁴¹ On the French liberal tradition see Lucien Jaume, *L'individu effacé ou le paradoxe du libéralisme français* (Paris, 1997). It should be noted here that Jaume identifies a significant statist strand of French liberalism, but, with this reservation, his account of the French liberal tradition supports the brief sketch given here. See also Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (London, 1927), 158-210.

⁴² Albert Thibaudet, *Les idées politiques de la France* (Paris, 1932), 235-236. Clemenceau advanced this view during a speech to the Chamber of Deputies in January 1891. See text online (last accessed 5/10/10): http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/Clemenceau_1891.asp

⁴³ Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left* (Oxford, 1986), 1-4. In the long run, this fetishising of the revolutionary heritage also helped pave the way for the extraordinary influence of the Parti communiste français in French political life by encouraging the mental transfiguration of the Russian Revolution into the fulfilment of the French, allowing the PCF to successfully pose as guardian of France's popular democratic tradition. See Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, (Oxford, 1992), 159, 238-241.

⁴⁴ David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (London, 1964), 113-114.

a major part of the French political landscape.⁴⁵ The PCF's ability to convincingly present itself as a leading force in the defence of French democracy relied to a considerable extent upon a credulity within the non-communist left fostered by the longstanding polarisation and Manichean tendency within French political culture. The notion that there could be 'no enemies on the left' was central to this state of mind and helps account not only for the strength of the inter-war anti-fascist movement in Paris, but also for the prevalence of fellow-travelling philo-communism after the war, especially among French intellectuals.⁴⁶ Also important in this respect was a culturally embedded sympathy towards revolution as a privileged vehicle of political change, reinforced under the Third Republic, which encouraged a reluctance to criticise either Soviet communism or the PCF on the parts of individuals who otherwise had very little politically in common with either.⁴⁷

Published in 1955, Raymond Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels*, is built upon the critical dismantling of the political "mythe de la gauche" and "mythe de la Révolution" that shaped this inter-generational continuity in basic political worldview.⁴⁸ It has rightly been described by Nicolas Baverez as a twentieth-century masterpiece in the tradition of French political liberalism.⁴⁹ Its pre-occupation with political culture, promotion of a politics of gradualist reformism based in dialogue and compromise between opposing interests, and ambivalence towards France's revolutionary past all position Aron's most famous polemic within this tradition. What Baverez and others do not adequately recognise, however, is that these were not positions that Aron took up for the first time during the Cold War. As we shall see below, he repeatedly expressed such typically liberal critiques of French political culture and the place of intellectuals within it between 1933 and 1939, a period that authors

⁴⁵ Between 1932 and 1936 PCF membership increased from 25,000 to 350,000. See Caute, *Communism*, 114.

⁴⁶ George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York, 1966), 23, 53, 66-68; Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France, Volume 3: 1871-1962* (London, 1965), 245; Anson Rabinach, 'Paris, capital of anti-fascism' in Warren Breckman et al (eds.), *The Modernist Imagination: Intellectual History and Critical Theory* (New York, 2009), 183-209.

⁴⁷ François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion: essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1995), 81-99.

⁴⁸ Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris, [1955] 2002). For Aron's critique of the myths of the Left and the Revolution see pages 15-45 and 46-77 respectively. The concept of the proletariat is critiqued as a political myth on pages 78-105.

⁴⁹ See page xvii of Nicolas Baverez's preface to *L'opium*.

such as Baverez and Sirinelli have identified as a pre-liberal phase in Aron's political development.⁵⁰

II. *TOWARDS AN INTELLECTUAL ETHIC OF RESPONSIBILITY*

Having completed eighteen months of compulsory military service, Raymond Aron departed France in March 1930 for Germany, where he would spend the next three years teaching and reading, first at the University of Cologne (March 1930 – September 1931), then at the Institut français de Berlin (September 1931 – August 1933). During the stay in Germany Aron sent regular commentaries on the developing political situation there to the journals *Europe* and *Libres propos*. Both of these publications were prominent advocates of pacifism, but it was, ironically, in their pages that Aron's own pacifist commitment marked its terminal decline.⁵¹ This did not begin immediately. Throughout his stay in Cologne, Aron's reports display a consistent pacifism, with repeated demands for the revision of the Treaty of Versailles and a general anti-militarism suffusing their pages. It was not until just under a year into his stay in Berlin, where the socio-economic crisis and rise of Nazism became much more visible, that his position began to change.⁵² In Berlin, Aron had initially continued as he had left off in Cologne, repeatedly advocating French demilitarisation and the writing off of Germany's war debt. By the late summer of 1932, however, he had come to reject demilitarisation in the face of a potential Nazi-led government as dangerous.⁵³ This was the beginning of the end for Aron's pacifism, and that end arrived swiftly. The following January, coinciding with Hitler's appointment to the chancellorship, Aron broke definitively with his former pacifism in what would be his final article for *Libres propos*.⁵⁴ Of course, this timing was not coincidental. But this was not simply a reflex response to the final rise of Nazism; it was also a choice theoretically informed by his contemporaneous

⁵⁰ Sirinelli, 'Quand Aron était à gauche de Sartre'; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 55-56.

⁵¹ For a summary of some of these articles see Colquhoun, *The Philosopher in History*, 55-67. See also Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 84-88.

⁵² *Spectateur*, 31.

⁵³ Aron, 'Désarmement ou union franco-allemande', *Libres propos* (août, 1932), 422-425.

⁵⁴ Aron, 'Réflexions sur le pacifisme intégral', *Libres propos*, (janvier, 1933), 96-99.

reading in Germany's recent tradition of realist political theory, most notably the works of Max Weber and Carl Schmitt.

It is likely that the rapidity and decisiveness of Aron's volte-face on this issue – he had moved from militant pacifism to a biting critique of the same position in the space of about five months – was encouraged by his reading Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* around this time.⁵⁵ The central thesis of this work was that the essence of the political, which Schmitt conceived as a privileged ontological category rather than as one of many social domains, was the distinction between friend and enemy.⁵⁶ Liberalism, on this view, was fundamentally anti-political in its reluctance to recognise irresolvable conflicts of interest and its over-reliance on dialogue and compromise, even when faced with such irredeemably hostile enemies as communism or fascism. By the end of January 1933, the

⁵⁵ See Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz: l'âge européen* (Paris, 1976), 9. Here Aron mentions studying and discussing *The Concept of the Political* in Berlin with a German historian friend who also specialised in Clausewitz. That he simultaneously discovered Schmitt and Clausewitz – famous, of course, for his definition of war as an extension of politics – is significant in itself for Aron's rejection of pacifism. Aron also referred to Schmitt in a presentation at the Société française de philosophie in 1939. See Aron, 'États démocratiques, états totalitaires' in Aron, *Penser la liberté, penser la démocratie* (Paris, 2005), 57-106, 105. During his stay in Berlin, Aron met Leo Strauss, who was very close to Schmitt and could have arranged a meeting. Given Aron's interest in Schmitt at the time, it is not unlikely that such a meeting took place, but there is no direct evidence of this. Ellen Kennedy, a specialist on Schmitt, has claimed that Aron was one of Schmitt's many visitors during his post-Second World War internal exile. See Ellen Kennedy, *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar* (London, 2004), 202. On meeting Leo Strauss see *Mémoires*, 457. Because Schmitt joined the Nazi party in May 1933, Aron distanced himself from him and rarely referred directly to him in his work. However, the two men began corresponding late in 1953 after Schmitt wrote to Aron in connection with Julien Freund, a young French political scientist whose doctoral thesis attempted to combine the influences of Schmitt and Aron in determining the "essence of the political". Thereafter Aron and Schmitt corresponded intermittently, occasionally exchanging comments on each other's books. In January 1954 Aron wrote to Schmitt that he had been an admirer of his work since before the war and that he had recently read his *Nomos der Erde* – a work to which he would refer in his treatise on international relations, *Paix et guerre entre les nations* (Paris, 1962), 97. For other passing references to Schmitt in *Paix et guerre* see pages 213, 295, 740. Aron also organised the first French publication of *The Concept of the Political* through Calmann-Lévy in 1971 and discussed this in letters to Schmitt the same year. His attitude towards Schmitt's past was conflicted. In 1967 he refused to contribute to a festschrift for Schmitt's eightieth birthday because of his past Nazism; however in 1977 he agreed to contribute to a special issue of *Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto* dedicated to Schmitt for his ninetieth birthday, but eventually wrote only a brief congratulatory statement. Strangely, on page 650 of his French *Mémoires*, Aron states that "*Carl Schmitt n'appartint jamais au parti national-socialiste ... il ne pouvait pas être un hitlérien et il ne le fut jamais*". This passage was removed from the English translation – see Aron, *Memoirs: Fifty Years of Political Reflection* (New York, 1990), 411. For Aron's correspondence with Schmitt see *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 28060(208). Letters referred to here are dated 30/12/53, 14/1/54 and 26/1/71. See also Aron's correspondence with Julien Freund dated 17/4/67, 18/11/77, and 6/6/78 on the question of Schmitt's festschrifts: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(38). Freund's thesis was eventually published as *L'essence du politique* (Paris, 1965). On the rapidity of Aron's anti-pacifist conversion in comparison with his peers see Baverez, Raymond Aron, 89.

⁵⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago, [1927] 1996), 26.

Weimar Republic had fallen prey to a party of extremists who, having entered power by constitutional means, would soon destroy German democracy from within. By this point, to an observer such as Aron, domestic German politics would probably have appeared as striking confirmation of Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy and, by extension, urgently posed the question of whether Germany's democratic neighbours would face up to the new political reality presented by National Socialism in power. Whereas Schmitt's political theory may be argued to have oiled the wheels of Aron's anti-pacifist conversion, the particular form taken by his critique of pacifism was Weberian in origin. Max Weber's famous distinction between an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility in politics appeared apposite within a context of widespread French pacifism in the face of a potentially aggressive German neighbour.⁵⁷ Aron's criticism of Alain – the Radical philosopher and lycée teacher who was the figurehead of *Libres propos* and one of France's most prominent and respected defenders of pacifism – bears the mark of this influence.⁵⁸ Alain's view of war as the supreme evil to be avoided at all costs exemplified the idealistic ethic of conviction that Weber had critiqued as liable to result in consequences diametrically opposed to the values it defended, and it was on these grounds that Aron repeatedly attacked his former mentor's pacifism.⁵⁹ By the time of his return from Germany, Aron was convinced that pacifistically inspired policies of appeasement would only serve to embolden Hitler and make war more likely.⁶⁰ Thus, by the summer of 1933, he was advocating a strategy for containing Nazi foreign policy ambitions that would rely on negotiation backed by the threat of military action.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Spectateur*, 27-29, 37-38; Max Weber, 'Politics as a vocation' [1919] in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1991), 77-128, esp. 120-128.

⁵⁸ On Alain as an important twentieth-century French liberal see Roy Pierce, *Contemporary French Political Thought* (Oxford, 1966), 4-11; Jaume, *L'individu effacé*, 19, 72, 98; Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France* (Oxford, 1994), 208-214. See also Sirinelli, *Génération*, 427-496 for Alain's influence on students of Aron's generation.

⁵⁹ 'Réflexions sur le pacifisme intégral', 96-99; Aron, 'Philosophie de pacifisme' [1941] in Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans* (New York, 1944), 111-127, 124-127; Aron, 'Alain et la politique' [1952] in Aron, *Études politiques* (Paris, 1972), 75-84, 81-83. See also Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris, 1967), 525-529. During his years at the École normale, Aron had been a peripheral member of Alain's coterie of young admirers - see Sirinelli, *Génération*, 427-496.

⁶⁰ *Spectateur*, 32, 44-45. See also Aron, 'De l'objection de conscience', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XLI (janvier, 1934), 133-145.

⁶¹ "...notre tâche est claire: quels que soient nos sentiments personnels, il faut bien que nous aidons (et obligeons) le national-socialisme (et le fascisme) à préférer une solution pacifique". Aron, 'La révolution nationale en Allemagne' [1933] in Aron, *Machiavel et les tyrannies modernes* (Paris, 1993), 271-285, 285.

If Aron's abandonment of pacifism in 1933 appears relatively clear cut, the question of his relationship with socialism following the stay in Germany is much less so. Nicolas Baverez argues that Aron remained a committed socialist even after the Second World War and emphasises the militancy of his socialism during the inter-war years in contrast to Sartre's apolitical stance during the same period.⁶² This interpretation may be justified on several levels: Aron voted for the Popular Front, continued to hope for a strong socialist party in the wake of the Second World War, and sometimes offered an interpretation of fascism as the last line of defence of the anti-communist bourgeoisie which echoed standard Marxist accounts.⁶³ Furthermore, in the late 1930s he made a variety of disparaging remarks concerning 'liberalism' in the generic and economic senses of the term. In an article on Vilfredo Pareto published in the journal of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt school, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Aron, though critical in his overall evaluation of the famous Italian social theorist in relation to his influence on fascism, asserted that "*P[areto] a raison contre la métaphysique rationaliste, contre le progressisme simpliste, contre l'humanitarisme démocratique, contre son libéralisme ancien*".⁶⁴ This reinforces the impression given in a book review Aron contributed to an earlier volume of this journal. His review of Henri Hauser's *La paix économique* is highly critical on a number of points, but not "*l'impossibilité du libéralisme*" which he records as a central idea of the work without passing further comment.⁶⁵ It would, however, be inappropriate to consider Aron's political position in the mid-to-late 1930s in simple terms as being anti-liberal or pro-socialist in any programmatic sense. As we shall see in chapter two, his theory of totalitarianism developed along specifically liberal lines during this period, and his immediate post-war support for the SFIO was determined more by the party's potential as a bulwark against communism than by any lingering ideological commitment to socialism. Furthermore, as will be

⁶² Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 55-56; Sirinelli, 'Quand Aron était à gauche de Sartre'.

⁶³ *Spectateur*, 47. This is discussed in more detail in chapter two. See pages 83-90 below.

⁶⁴ Aron, 'La sociologie de Pareto', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 6 (1937), 489-521, 511-512. Aron's involvement with this publication began after Célestin Bouglé offered it an office at the Centre de documentation sociale where Aron worked from 1934 to 1939. His participation in the journal, principally as a book reviewer but also as a point of contact between it and leading members of the Frankfurt school based in the USA, does not signify any wider ideological allegiance with its neo-Marxism. See *Mémoires*, 85-88.

⁶⁵ The term *libéralisme* is here used in its economic sense. Aron, 'Hauser, H. *La paix économique*', review, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 5 (1936), 430.

explored in more detail in chapter three, Aron sided with liberal economists such as Jacques Rueff and Charles Rist in his analysis of the economic policies of the Popular Front, and in 1938 attended the *Colloque Walter Lippmann*, site of the first collaborative European attempts at theorising neo-liberalism.

Rather than attempting to identify any elusive programmatic commitment to liberalism or socialism, a more fruitful starting point when considering Aron's political thought in the 1930s can be found by turning to his reflection on the nature of political commitment as such, irrespective of particular ideological attachments. His preoccupation with this issue was triggered by the sense of political uncertainty that resulted from his critical appraisal of Marxism at the start of the decade. Aron had spent the first year of his stay in Cologne acquiring an extensive knowledge of the writings of Karl Marx, including Marx's earlier, more Hegelian works which were then being published for the first time.⁶⁶ He had hoped that these studies would confirm his spontaneously held socialist beliefs, but after a year of intensive reading was left unsatisfied.⁶⁷ This led Aron to question not just his own socialism, but the epistemological bases of all political commitment. His reading of Marx, having initially been intended as research for a doctoral thesis on the philosophy of socialism,⁶⁸ instead led him to a more fundamental set of problems:

Comment, français, juif, situé à un moment du devenir, puis-je connaître l'ensemble dont je suis un atome, entre des centaines de millions ? Comment puis-je saisir l'ensemble autrement que d'un point de vue, un entre d'autres innombrables ? ... jusqu'à quel point suis-je capable de connaître l'Histoire – les nations, les partis, les idées dont les conflits remplissent la chronique des siècles – et *mon* temps ?⁶⁹

In philosophical terms, the examination of such questions would lead Aron into a detailed study of Germany's recent neo-Kantian tradition of historical and sociological epistemology from which were derived his first book, *La sociologie allemande contemporaine*, published in 1935, and his two doctoral theses, *Essai sur la théorie de*

⁶⁶ Colquhoun, *The Philosopher in History*, 52-53.

⁶⁷ See Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris, [1938] 1986), 66, 68.

⁶⁸ Colquhoun, *The Philosopher in History*, 50.

⁶⁹ *Mémoires*, 53. This account is confirmed by Aron's opening remarks during his thesis defence in March 1938, reproduced in Fessard, *Raymond Aron*, 42-44.

l'histoire dans l'Allemagne contemporaine and *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, both published in 1938. In more immediate political terms, however, this fed into a desire to know historical and political reality as honestly as possible, without recourse to ready-made ideologies, and without reducing politics to morality. Aron's final critique of pacifism in *Libres propos*, where he had asserted that "*le problème politique n'est pas un problème moral*", was the first significant expression of this new outlook.⁷⁰ In an open letter to the recently founded review *Esprit* the following month, it became clear that the realism to which Aron aspired had significant implications for his view of political ideology more broadly:

Je ne suis plus ni de droite ni de gauche, ni communiste ni nationaliste, pas plus radical que socialiste ... Si l'on veut penser ou agir dans le domaine politique, avant tout il faut prendre le monde tel qu'il est et ne pas se fermer avec des idéologies toutes faites l'accès à la réflexion concrète – et peut être efficace. Observer les choses et les hommes, les statistiques, les chiffres du chômage ou le tracé d'une frontière, voilà comme je concevrais l'étude du problème franco-allemand.⁷¹

Here Aron conceives of realism as operating independently of ideology, which is seen as a barrier to perception of the real.⁷² On this basis we can see why attempts to attribute to him programmatic commitments to either liberalism or socialism during the 1930s are problematic. Yet if this passage dissuades us from seeking such specific commitments, it nevertheless hints at a more general liberalism at the level of Aron's basic political worldview since, as we have seen, reluctance to conceive of the political world in terms of a Manichean division between Left and Right had been a hallmark of political liberalism in France since the Revolution. The passage also voices an almost militant commitment to empiricism, but the realism expressed here is not intrinsically anti-idealist in the philosophical sense. Aron goes on to argue that:

⁷⁰ 'Réflexions sur le pacifisme intégral', 99.

⁷¹ Aron, 'Lettre ouverte d'un jeune français à l'Allemagne', *Esprit*, 1 (février, 1933), 735-743, 735, 742.

⁷² This is a position that he would go on to expand upon in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Aron emerged as the originator of the influential notion of the 'end of ideology'. This is discussed in more detail throughout chapter three.

La politique réaliste n'est pas à mes yeux une simple manière d'envisager tel ou tel problème. Elle exprime une volonté spirituelle ... Car la lucidité est bien la loi première de l'esprit, je ne reviens pas au matérialisme. Mais l'idée ne peut prétendre à l'efficacité que si elle exprime les nécessités du moment et sans pitié pour les croyances faciles, précise la route que suggère la réalité. Accepter cette politique sans illusions ce n'est pas trahir, c'est penser jusqu'au bout notre condition.⁷³

The word '*trahir*' in the final sentence of this passage is an implicit reference to Julien Benda's *La trahison des clercs*. Historian Sudhir Hazareesingh has described Aron as an idealist intellectual in the mould of Benda, but given that the second article that Aron ever published was a critique of *La trahison des clercs*, this is problematic.⁷⁴ Published five years on from his initial engagement with Benda's most famous book, Aron's open letter to *Esprit* sees him outlining the beginnings of an alternative model for political commitment situated in between the idealism of Benda and Nizan's Marxist position.⁷⁵ That politics is irreducible to morality does not mean that realism entails the exclusion of the various ideals that animate political action; rather it means that concern with such values should be balanced with an awareness of the material and ideal factors that limit their realisation.⁷⁶ Such awareness is to be sought through a combination of empirical research and philosophical reflection, and should not be prejudiced by ideological preconceptions.⁷⁷ This

⁷³ 'Lettre ouverte', 743.

⁷⁴ Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions*, 58.

⁷⁵ Aron claimed to have been shocked by *Les chiens de garde* and did not approve of the harshness of its attacks on Léon Brunschvicg in particular. See *Mémoires*, 34.

⁷⁶ In this respect Daniel J. Mahoney's nuanced account of Aron's political realism is more satisfying than that of Brian C. Anderson. Compare Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 54-57 and Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 2-8, 121, 169. Aron's correspondence with his friend Henry Kissinger while the latter was US Secretary of State is revealing of Aron's nuanced realism. Whilst Aron was broadly supportive of American foreign policy throughout the Cold War, Kissinger briefly fell out with him during the crisis in Cyprus in the summer of 1974. Aron had accused the American government of complicity in the Greek-backed coup in Cyprus in an article in *Le Figaro*, prompting Kissinger to write complaining about "the propagation and perpetuation of myths that undermine the credibility of the United States". In his reply, Aron wrote that "*Les Etats-Unis doivent-ils, en raison de leurs responsabilités mondiales, ne jamais prendre de positions morales, ne jamais approuver ou blâmer pour d'autres raisons que pragmatiques ? ... j'ai saisi cette occasion pour exprimer une inquiétude que je ressentais de plus en plus depuis longtemps. Une puissance dominante, comme les Etats-Unis, doit aussi incarner des idées. Or, dans la crise de Chypre, ce que j'appelle les deux silences me paraît en contradiction fondamentale avec cette exigence réaliste*". The two silences to which Aron refers are those of the United States government during, first, the Greek-led coup in Cyprus and, second, the Turkish naval response. For the original article see Aron, 'Les pièges du destin', [29/8/74] in Aron, *Les articles de la politique internationale dans Le Figaro de 1947-1977*, troisième tome, *Les crises (février 1965 à avril 1977)*, 1406-1410. For the correspondence see *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(207). Letter from Kissinger to Aron dated 7/9/74; Aron's reply dated 19/9/74.

⁷⁷ 'Lettre ouverte', 743.

entails the application of a rigorous intellectual self-discipline.⁷⁸ Especially in times of national crisis, failure to adhere to this intellectual ethic of responsibility encouraged the polarisation of political debate, thereby weakening the national capacity for collective action. Aron made this point forcefully at the start of an article that he published in November 1937 on the economic policies of the Popular Front:

... pratiquement ceux qui se donnent pour clercs, intellectuels antifascistes ou interprètes des droits de l'homme se conduisent en partisans. Glissement inévitable: il n'y a pas tous les jours une affaire Dreyfus qui autorise à invoquer la vérité contre l'erreur ... D'autre part, dans tous les parties, écrivains et professeurs apparaissent aujourd'hui comme des délégués à la propagande. On leur demande moins d'éclairer les esprits que d'enflammer les cœurs. Ils justifient et attisent les passions, rarement ils les purifient. Ils sont les garants, ils sont les hérauts d'une volonté collective.⁷⁹

Aron's rejection of the political dichotomy of Left and Right in 1933 was already counter-cultural given the recent political and intellectual history of France. To develop upon this theme by criticising the anti-fascist movement that had coalesced in response to the flirtation of far right groups with conservative revolution during the riots of the 6th of February 1934 was even more so. That Aron never joined the Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes and was prepared even to criticise it publicly suggests that his voting for the Popular Front ought not to be over-interpreted to exaggerate his socialist commitment in the 1930s. This may be confirmed by referring to a presentation before the Société française de philosophie given by Aron in June 1939, which developed upon the counter-cultural political worldview expressed in his previous articles. Against the veteran Dreyfusard Victor Basch, Aron contended that the CVIA, rather than having saved French democracy, had exacerbated the political polarisation that posed a mortal threat to democratic stability, and that the economic policies of the Popular Front had further aggravated this situation.⁸⁰ If French democracy were to have a future in the long term, the progressive left would have to undergo a fundamental change of political outlook and rid

⁷⁸ "... la conviction sincère se manifeste dans le scrupule de vérité aussi bien que dans les indignations passionnées. L'essentiel reste la discipline que chacun porte sur soi ...". 'Lettre ouverte', 743.

⁷⁹ Aron, 'Réflexions sur les problèmes économiques français', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XLIV (novembre, 1937), 793-822, 793.

⁸⁰ 'États démocratiques, états totalitaires' [1939] in Aron, *Penser la liberté, penser la démocratie* (Paris, 2005), 57-106, 57-106, 79-85.

itself of the prejudice whereby “on ... prête un coefficient de valeur au terme révolutionnaire et un coefficient de mépris au terme conservateur”.⁸¹

The line of argument developed across the articles and presentations discussed above directly anticipates Aron’s deconstruction of the political mythology of the French left in *L’opium des intellectuels*.⁸² These arguments positioned Aron within the basic political worldview typical of French liberalism with its characteristic scepticism towards revolutionary rhetoric and fear of popular demagoguery’s corrosive effects on a political culture supportive of liberal democratic stability. Some important qualifications must, however, be added to this view if we are to avoid falling into the opposite error to that of Nicolas Baverez and exaggerating the extent of Aron’s liberalism in the mid-to-late 1930s. For instance, whilst Aron’s fundamental political outlook here has much in common with the basic worldview characteristic of much nineteenth-century French liberalism, it was not shaped by any substantial engagement with the writings of his French liberal predecessors. Thus although there are striking parallels between, for instance, Aron’s criticism of his intellectual contemporaries and Alexis de Tocqueville’s critique of the ‘literary politics’ of eighteenth-century men of letters, the intellectual ethic adopted by Aron in the 1930s was drawn from his reading of Max Weber, not Tocqueville.⁸³ Aron’s debt to Weber is most clearly revealed in their common view of political idealism as not only unrealistic but also liable to petrify into support for extremist ideologies.⁸⁴ This justifies applying the term ‘ethic of responsibility’ to describe Aron’s ideal ethic of intellectual engagement. Although Weber had developed this view by reflecting on the vocation of the politician rather than that of the politically engaged intellectual, the term usefully translates across to Aron

⁸¹ ‘États démocratiques’, 79.

⁸² See *L’opium*, 15-77.

⁸³ Aron did not study Tocqueville properly until the mid-1950s – see Aron, ‘Discours de Raymond Aron lors de la réception du Prix Tocqueville’, *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*, 2 (winter, 1980), 117-121, 120. For Tocqueville’s critique of literary politics see Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (New York, 1983), 138-148. For a discussion of the similarities between Tocqueville and Aron in this regard see Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 14-15.

⁸⁴ “In the world of realities ... we encounter the ever-renewed experience that the adherent of an ethic of ultimate ends suddenly turns into a chiliastic prophet. Those, for example, who have just preached ‘love against violence’ now call for the use of force for the *last* violent deed, which would then lead to a state of affairs in which *all* violence is annihilated”. Max Weber, ‘Politics’, 122. Compare *Introduction*, 416-419, esp. 416: “On objectera que cette violence est la dernière, pour mettre fin aux violences. Pacifistes et idéalistes aiment à se donner de telles justifications”.

because he explicitly conceived of ‘responsibility’ in terms of the intellectual adopting the viewpoint of the statesman.⁸⁵ This is problematic in a general sense in that it raises the question of at what point the rejection of naïve political idealism over-extends into the negation of any significant critical function of the intellectual in relation to established political power. As such it also introduces a further qualification to the argument that Aron occupied an identifiably liberal position subsequent to his return from Germany. This is because Aron’s adaptation of the ethic of responsibility was rooted in his rejection of Alain’s pacifism and promotion of citizen’s resistance to the authority of politicians whom Alain regarded as inevitably corrupted by power.⁸⁶ Alain’s theory of the *citoyen contre les pouvoirs* has been used to argue that he was the twentieth-century heir to the ‘*libéralisme du sujet*’ of Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant, and the fact that it was a view to which Aron was diametrically opposed should remind us of the heterogeneity of the French liberal tradition and the resultant ambivalence of Aron’s relationship with it.⁸⁷

The vision of intellectual engagement that Aron had begun to outline from 1933 was also inherently problematic at a deeper philosophical level. On the one hand, it was fundamentally empiricist, requiring any public political interventions to be based in detailed social scientific research; on the other hand, it recognised that ideals and values act as concrete forces within societies and maintained a space for philosophical reflection on the ends of political action. What made this nuanced realism problematic was that as Aron developed the epistemological reflection in which it was to be rooted, he slid towards a radically relativist position which risked fundamentally undermining the possibility of both rational arbitration between competing values and the objective social scientific knowledge upon which informed political action was to be based. To consider this epistemology in

⁸⁵ *Mémoires*, 59; *Spectateur*, 185. This aspect of Aron’s thought has especially drawn the approbation of his American admirers. See Allan Bloom, ‘Le dernier des libéraux’, *Commentaire*, 8 (février, 1985), 174-181; Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 14-16; Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 10-12.

⁸⁶ Alain, *Le citoyen contre les pouvoirs* (Paris, 1926), 143, 154. During the war, Aron published a highly critical article on Alain in which he excoriated his former mentor for having “*formé des générations de jeunes Français dans une hostilité stérile à l’État*”. See Aron, ‘Prestige et illusions du citoyen contre les pouvoirs’ [septembre, 1941] in *L’homme contre les tyrans* (Paris, 1946), 98-112, 99.

⁸⁷ Jaume, *L’individu effacé*, 19, 72, 78. See also Thibaudet, *Les idées politiques*, 55: “*Le citoyen libéral d’aujourd’hui, c’est le Citoyen contre les pouvoirs ...*”.

more detail, we turn now to Aron's first major philosophical work: the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*.

III. THE INTRODUCTION À LA PHILOSOPHIE DE L'HISTOIRE

In Germany, having become increasingly sceptical of Marx's claims to have demonstrated the historical necessity of socialism, Aron continued to seek a grounding for political commitment through philosophical reflection on history, but did so with less of an overt ideological agenda than when he had first arrived in Cologne. In so doing, his principal point of reference shifted away from Marx and towards the neo-Kantian critique of historical reason initiated by Wilhelm Dilthey in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁸

The implications of Dilthey's oeuvre extended far beyond the study of history: his life's work had been an attempt to found the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) on a separate basis to the natural sciences. This entailed a fundamental break with the positivist assumption that methods of causal explanation borrowed from the latter could be applied in the former to provide results of comparable objectivity. Whereas positive science legitimately isolated individual causes and effects in order to explain the relationships between them by reference to causal laws, the application of such a process in the human sciences amounted, for Dilthey, to a mutilation of historical and social reality.⁸⁹ Human phenomena were not to be *explained* via any falsifying process of atomisation, but *understood* intuitively and integrally as part of the wider wholes to which they belonged.⁹⁰ This argument was highly influential within the German academy where it helped to establish the institutional and methodological independence of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, informing the manifold disciplines contained therein, and being drawn upon by thinkers

⁸⁸ See principally Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History* (Detroit, [1883] 1988).

⁸⁹ Dilthey, *Introduction*, 72.

⁹⁰ "One must never forget the relation of the partial content ... to the organism of reality in which life pulsates; on the contrary, knowledge can give exact form to concepts and principles and assign them their appropriate cognitive value only from this standpoint". Dilthey, *Introduction*, 105. See also 92-93.

from across the political spectrum. On the left, in the 1920s, the theory of understanding began to inform neo-Marxist critiques of the positivistic economic determinism that had characterised the ‘scientific’ Marxism of the Second International.⁹¹ Dilthey’s holistic notion of understanding, it was thought, might save the idea of a dialectical, totalising historical development towards socialism without relying on a unilateral economic determinism that the success of the revolution in Russia and its failure in Germany had so discredited. Given the route by which he had arrived at Dilthey’s hermeneutics, one might expect Aron to have been sympathetic to such arguments, but the relativist reading of Dilthey offered in his secondary thesis entails an implicit refutation of the totalising claims of the Marxist philosophy of history:

L’historien saisit, ou du moins croit saisir, le tout d’une époque, d’une œuvre ou d’une évolution. Or, l’intelligibilité des successions historiques, l’immanence de la totalité aux éléments n’impliquent nullement l’adéquation des concepts scientifiques au réel. Au contraire, *le fait que le passé humain est immédiatement intelligible a pour inévitable conséquence la pluralité des interprétations rétrospectives et la nécessité du découpage.*⁹²

To fully clarify the importance of this view in relation to Aron’s wider political thought it is necessary to consider its significance within his *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire*. This book, Aron’s primary doctoral thesis, represents the first systematic attempt by a French philosopher to reflect upon the political implications of the anti-positivist epistemology founded by Dilthey.⁹³ Although nominally a work of historical epistemology,

⁹¹ Two pivotal works in this regard, both published in 1923, are Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* (London, 1971), 37, 81 and György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London, 1971), 153. Aron comments on this development in Marxist theory in his article ‘The impact of Marxism in the twentieth century’ in Milorad M. Drachkovitch, (ed.), *Marxism in the Modern World* (Stanford, 1965), 1-46, 18.

⁹² Aron, *La philosophie critique de l’histoire: essai sur une théorie allemande de l’histoire* (Paris, [1938] 1987), 104. This book, Aron’s secondary doctoral thesis, consists of an exposition of the neo-Kantian critique of historical reason as practiced by Dilthey, Georg Simmel, Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber. The *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire* represents an original attempt to come to terms with some of the issues arising from this body of work, including the nature of historical relativism, the applicability or otherwise of causal explanation in the human sciences, and the question of value-laden selectivity in defining the objects of research within those sciences. See *La philosophie critique de l’histoire*, 296-297; *Mémoires*, 111.

⁹³ Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2006), 120.

Aron stressed that the *Introduction* ultimately served as a reflection on the basis of political commitment, whose own logic was revealed through the critique of historical reason.⁹⁴

From the outset, Aron situates the *Introduction* within the anti-positivist epistemological tradition by defining its object as human rather than natural history before outlining the methodological implications flowing from this distinction.⁹⁵ He defines the uniqueness of human history by referring to the presence of historical consciousness both on the part of the historian and as a major constituent part of the object upon which he focuses. Whereas the natural historian might study the unconscious evolution of various animal species, the student of human history faces a humanity conscious of the historical development in which it is caught up and free, within certain as yet unspecified limits, to shape its own fate. Actions performed by human individuals and groups are not, on the whole, arbitrary, but meaningful because undertaken with reference to more or less freely chosen values and goals. If human action is thus *meaningful*, causal explanation cannot fully account for it: it possesses an intrinsic intelligibility and cannot be reduced to any causal law because the choice of a course of action could always have been otherwise.⁹⁶ Human history is, then, subject primarily – although not, as we shall see later, exclusively – to interpretative understanding rather than causal explanation. Aron’s definition of understanding is quite broad: “*La compréhension désigne la connaissance que nous prenons de l’existence et des œuvres humaines si longtemps que celles-ci restent intelligibles sans élaboration de régularités causales*”.⁹⁷ This broadness is deliberate: it avoids deciding between competing definitions such as Dilthey’s holistic view, which emphasised the inter-relation of parts and whole, and that of Karl Jaspers, whose more individualistic use of the term referred to the identification of intelligible relations between means and ends.⁹⁸ The significance of this definitional flexibility will become apparent when we turn to Aron’s account of the inter-relation of sociological and historical knowledge.

⁹⁴ See Fessard, *Raymond Aron*, 42.

⁹⁵ *Introduction*, 17-54.

⁹⁶ *Introduction*, 57-60.

⁹⁷ *Introduction*, 59.

⁹⁸ *Introduction*, 59.

Aron next undertakes a phenomenological description of the stages of human historical consciousness from self-knowledge to knowledge of others and of collective realities, and, finally, historical knowledge as pursued by the historian.⁹⁹ The starting point in this enterprise is deliberately chosen since he regards self-knowledge as “*la source commune et de la connaissance scientifique et de la connaissance morale de l’homme par lui-même*”.¹⁰⁰ Thus his description of self-knowledge in the *Introduction* provides the basis from which his subsequent conclusions regarding the nature of socio-historical knowledge more broadly are drawn. Aron begins by making a distinction between *being* and *knowing*: “*nous ne nous connaissons pas nous-mêmes, nous sommes nous mêmes*”.¹⁰¹ This immediately establishes a basic limitation: the possibility of retrospectively knowing oneself with perfect clarity is rejected since “*Si ... un fragment du passé, dans son intégralité, était transporté dans notre conscience présente, ce miracle de la résurrection rendrait inutile la connaissance, au sens propre du terme. Nous serions à nouveau le même moi que nous avons été*”.¹⁰² This example illustrates the fundamental problem that the unity of the object of self-knowledge and the subject pursuing it rules out knowledge of self that is fully objective in the strict philosophical sense of the term. Furthermore, such self-knowledge as is accessible is, in fact, only conceivable because its object exists temporally. Here we begin to see the significance of the reference that Aron made in his earlier critique of Dilthey to “*la nécessité du découpage*”.¹⁰³ The temporality of individual human existence renders self-knowledge fleeting and momentary because, once attained, it immediately transforms its object: “*celui qui se connaît n’est déjà plus ce qu’il était avant la prise de conscience*”.¹⁰⁴ Knowledge of self is, then, subject to a dual ontological limitation owing to the unity and temporality of its object and subject.

Aron’s phenomenology of individual self-knowledge is significantly indebted to Martin Heidegger’s chapter on ‘historicality’ in *Being and Time*, reworking some of its main

⁹⁹ *Introduction*, 61-105.

¹⁰⁰ *Introduction*, 64.

¹⁰¹ *Introduction*, 63.

¹⁰² *Introduction*, 66.

¹⁰³ *La philosophie critique de l’histoire*, 104.

¹⁰⁴ *Introduction*, 63.

arguments from a humanist perspective.¹⁰⁵ The fundamental distinction between being and knowing and the identification of the unity of the subject and object of self-knowledge that results translates into language specific to *human* being Heidegger's assertion that "... *Dasein* can *never* be past, not because *Dasein* is non-transient, but because it essentially can never be *present-at-hand*".¹⁰⁶ Aron's claim that such knowledge of self that is attainable can only be fleeting and momentary because of the essentially temporal quality of human existence is another such adaptation from Heidegger. Here he reworks, again from a humanist perspective, Heidegger's insistence that "[*Dasein*] is not 'temporal' because it 'stands in history' ... on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist only because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being".¹⁰⁷ In his account of the French reception of Heidegger, historian Ethan Kleinberg states that "Aron's understanding of Heidegger's historicity would play a major role in Sartre's understanding of the term and serve as the basis of his [Sartre's] existentialism".¹⁰⁸ Although Kleinberg does not specify where in *L'être et le néant* this influence is present, one can see, for example, how Sartre's view that the for-itself and the in-itself can never coincide echoes Aron's insistence on an unbridgeable gap between being and knowing which, in turn, derives from Heidegger.¹⁰⁹ We shall return to the philosophical relationship between Aron and Sartre later. For now, the important point to emphasise concerning the Heideggerian origin of Aron's description of self-knowledge is that it brings to light the ultimately ontological roots of the historical relativism described in the *Introduction*. In the final analysis, rather than deriving from qualities uniquely associated with the raw data of socio-historical analysis, this relativism is

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (London, [1927] 1962), 424-455. Identifying the influence of Heidegger on Aron is subject to similar limitations to those pertaining to the relationship with Carl Schmitt. The *Introduction*, published in 1938, after Heidegger had joined the Nazi party, contains no explicit references to him. However, we know that Aron read Heidegger in Germany and continued to engage with his thought as an attendee of Alexandre Kojève's famous lectures at the École pratique des hautes études, which offered a partially Heideggerian reading of Hegel. See *Mémoires*, 68, 73, 94. The link between Heidegger's chapter on historicity in *Being and Time* and Aron's account of self-knowledge in the *Introduction* is suggested in passing, but not examined in detail, in Kleinberg, *Generation*, 94.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 428.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 432.

¹⁰⁸ Kleinberg, *Generation*, 94.

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant* (Paris, 1943), 109-120, 665.

inseparable from the human condition itself: “... *l’histoire est inséparable de l’essence même de l’homme*”.¹¹⁰

After establishing the dual ontological limitation of self-knowledge discussed above, Aron explores its implications on the terrain of epistemology by considering two means by which such knowledge might be sought. The first of these methods is based in the search for *motifs* – the rational motivations directing human behaviour –; the second in the discovery of *mobiles* – the sub-conscious forces shaping our actions. The pursuit of self-knowledge via *motifs* represents the application of interpretative understanding at the most basic elementary level of individual human existence; the pursuit of self-knowledge via *mobiles* indicates the application of a method closer to causal explanation at the same elementary level. The exclusive use of one or other of these methods leads, Aron argues, to absurdity: one emphasises the irreducible freedom of action, the other its determination by sub-conscious forces. “*L’une et l’autre doctrine nous paraissent négliger une part du réel. Nous sommes à la fois ces pulsions que le psychanalyste nous a révélées et cette décision à laquelle le philosophe fait appel*”.¹¹¹ The explanation of individual acts by reference to *mobiles* is, Aron claims, essentially indeterminate because they are the temporal products of a potentially infinite causal regression.¹¹² On the other hand, interpreting past behaviour by reference to *motifs* reveals that one’s view of one’s own past is determined by the perspective of an ever-changing present. Thus, to use Aron’s example, the retrospective significance attributed to youthful religious anxieties will vary depending on whether or not they are followed by a conversion experience in later life.¹¹³ This example illustrates the plurality of retrospective interpretations referred to in Aron’s critique of Dilthey: historical interpretation is unavoidably conditioned by the temporal position from which it departs; thus the truth of such interpretation can never be definitively established so long as human historical development has not come to an end.¹¹⁴ In the *Introduction*, Aron repeatedly suggests that individuals who claim the contrary - that the meaning of history, whether of

¹¹⁰ *Introduction*, 43. The term ‘raw data’ is, strictly speaking, problematic in this context, but will be retained so as to clarify Aron’s relativism by comparison with that of others, notably Max Weber.

¹¹¹ *Introduction*, 74.

¹¹² *Introduction*, 69.

¹¹³ *Introduction*, 69-70.

¹¹⁴ See Aron’s critical remarks on Dilthey in this regard in *Introduction*, 186-187, 421-422.

an individual life or of History as a whole, can be established from an absolute point of view - effectively presume to occupy the position of God, an argument he would revive in his later polemical accounts of communism as a secular religion.¹¹⁵

Aron's ontological account of self-knowledge having ruled out the possibility of attaining pure objectivity, the epistemological analysis that follows appears, then, to extend this basic limitation into a potentially infinite relativism, leaving the self as little more than a formless aggregation of ever-changing ideas and emotional states. However, Aron attempts to moderate this relativism through a consideration of the place of self-knowledge within lived experience. Whilst it may not be possible to relive past thoughts and deeds, we experience the movement from past to present not as a series of disconnected instances, but as a constantly developing whole.¹¹⁶ At this experiential level our pasts are not radically incoherent; the difficulty intervenes only once we seek to objectify subjective experience.¹¹⁷ It is at this point that we encounter an unbridgeable gap between experience as lived and as reconstituted in knowledge. This presents an insurmountable obstacle to pure objectivity, but Aron insists that substantial, though partial, self-knowledge remains within our grasp because the various psychological models and classifications through which the objectified self is approached are not arbitrary but reflective, albeit in an imperfect, incomplete manner, of the actual internal structures of the mind.¹¹⁸ This argument for the proximal adequacy of concepts in relation to the real, which Aron later extends from the psychological to the sociological domains, inserts a basic ambiguity into his epistemology. It marks a significant shift of emphasis from the relativist interpretation of Dilthey cited earlier, highlighting now the limits of relativism rather than those of epistemological objectivism. As we shall see shortly, Aron's fluctuations between radical and tempered forms of historical relativism in the *Introduction* are indicative of a problematic epistemological agnosticism. However, it is first necessary to consider the significance within lived experience of the dual ontological limitation of self-knowledge discussed earlier. From this perspective, the momentary and fragmented character of such

¹¹⁵ *Introduction*, 71-72, 85, 123, 137, 328; *L'opium*, 145-171.

¹¹⁶ Again, compare against Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 426: "Dasein does not exist as the sum of the momentary actualities of Experiences which come along successively and disappear".

¹¹⁷ *Introduction*, 70-71.

¹¹⁸ *Introduction*, 71.

knowledge indicates not its relativity, but the freedom of the individual to constantly define him or herself through an ever-renewed dialectic of reflection and action.¹¹⁹ Here the function of self-knowledge is not merely retrospective; it is the means by which individuals judge their pasts in the hope of determining their futures:

Le moi, ensemble de nos manières d'être, nous échappe toujours partiellement parce qu'il n'est pas encore fixe. Il continue à vivre, il se transforme. Mais nous sommes toujours capables de nous posséder parce que nous sommes en mesure de nous déterminer. Et, en effet, toute prise de conscience est efficace: le jugement que nous portons sur notre conduite passée est partie de notre moi et il influe sur notre avenir. La connaissance de soi ne poursuit pas un idéal de contemplation pure: se connaître c'est définir ce que l'on veut être et s'efforcer de rejoindre l'idée que l'on a de soi-même.¹²⁰

This passage, which also anticipates Sartre's existentialism, indicates how Aron's ontology, whilst it leads into a skeptical epistemology, does not produce a skepticism that is essentially pessimistic. Relativism at the abstract epistemological level is the expression of freedom at the level of lived experience. Here the inseparability of retrospective reflection and future-facing action becomes apparent, and, by extension, so too does the link between the critique of historical reason and the theory of political commitment, since the pursuit of self-knowledge is inextricably bound to an evaluative understanding of the society in which one lives. To elaborate on this connection in more detail it is necessary to first identify the relationship between individual self-knowledge and the remaining stages of historical consciousness.

Aron's analysis of the limits of historical objectivity may have been rooted in a phenomenology of individual self-knowledge, but he was not a methodological individualist in the mould of later Sartrean existentialism or, indeed, of comparable contemporary liberals such as Karl Popper or Friedrich von Hayek.¹²¹ He argues forcefully

¹¹⁹ Introduction, 74.

¹²⁰ Introduction, 72.

¹²¹ See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London, [1936] 1957), which shares the *Introduction*'s rejection of positivist social science, but is also suspicious of the sociological perspective as such. See also Friedrich von Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (Indianapolis, [1952] 1979). Aron criticised the methodological individualism of Popper and Hayek in *Histoire et dialectique de la violence* (Paris, 1973), 229, 239, and in *Leçons sur l'histoire: cours du Collège de France* (Paris, 1989), 274-333. By the time he published the *Introduction*, Aron had met Hayek at the Colloque

in the *Introduction* that the pursuit of self-knowledge pre-supposes knowledge of others against which to compare and define oneself.¹²² This in turn relies on the presence of a shared “*esprit objectif*” constituted by socially conditioned ways of thinking and acting.¹²³ “*Un fait*”, he writes, “*est pour nous fondamental: la communauté créée par la priorité en chacun de l’esprit objectif sur l’esprit individuel est la donnée historiquement, concrètement première*”.¹²⁴ Clearly, then, Aron did not reject the sociological perspective; he embraced it. But he disagreed fundamentally with Durkheimian sociological positivism about the way in which the *esprit objectif*, along with its reifications in collective realities like the church or judicial system, ought to be studied. Whereas Durkheim had famously enjoined sociologists to treat social facts as ‘things’, Aron countered that:

Si transcendants soient-ils par leur étrangeté ou leur puissance, les faits sociaux de type institutionnel conservent le privilège des événements psychiques; ils sont compréhensibles, ils ne sont pas comparables à des phénomènes naturels qu’il faudrait assembler selon les régularités ou reconstruire, mais à des œuvres ou des actes humaines, qu’il convient d’interpréter à la manière d’un texte littéraire ou philosophique.¹²⁵

Durkheim’s ‘social facts’ are here presented as products of human consciousness and thus subject primarily to interpretative understanding. The *esprit objectif* is not conceived as some hypostasised super-entity, but as the historical sedimentation of past human action. From this perspective any simplified antinomy between individual and society appears false:

Dans et par les individus, les représentations communes arrivent à la clarté, dans et par eux se réalisent les communautés qui toujours les précèdent et les dépassent. La description ne justifie aucune métaphysique, ni celle des *âmes nationales*, ni celle d’une *conscience*

Walter Lippmann, which is discussed in chapter three on pages 131-132 below. He met Popper at the London School of Economics at the end of the Second World War, but apparently never thereafter – see Popper’s letter to Aron, 22/6/82, *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(74).

¹²² “*À tous les niveaux, la connaissance de soi est dernière, elle marque l’achèvement de la connaissance d’autrui*”. *Introduction*, 101. See also pages 77, 83.

¹²³ The term *esprit objectif* is borrowed from Dilthey, but applied to mean the “*ensemble des idées, croyances et mœurs d’une époque ou d’un groupe*” as opposed to “*les choses de la nature sur lesquelles l’esprit a gravé son empreinte*”, which was Dilthey’s original usage. See *Introduction*, 90.

¹²⁴ *Introduction*, 88.

¹²⁵ *Introduction*, 90.

collective, mais elle confirme l'existence d'une réalité à la fois transcendante et interne aux hommes, sociale et spirituelle, totale et multiple.¹²⁶

We can see now why Aron had earlier been reluctant to choose between Dilthey's holistic and Jaspers' individualistic approaches to understanding. If social realities are neither pure totalities nor mere aggregations of individual practices, then they should be approached using both holistic and individualistic varieties of understanding, the former to interpret the meanings of institutions and practices in relation to the social whole, the latter to account for the historical development of communities through collective and individual action that expresses but also judges the social milieu in which it is embedded. Such action is regarded as conditioned but not entirely determined by the institutions, values and practices of the society it is executed in; thus is maintained an important margin of liberty for individuals and groups to shape their historical destinies. The political dimension to this argument is made explicit in Aron's rejection of socialist and nationalist forms of mythical holism. In emphasising the multiplicity of the *esprit objectif*, there is a latent, liberal commitment to social and intellectual pluralism that Aron would make increasingly explicit in his wartime writings.¹²⁷

Aron's discussion of the *esprit objectif* in the *Introduction* indicates a double break with the anti-historical sociological realism that he attributes to Durkheim.¹²⁸ First, by insisting that the pursuit of sociological knowledge involves the application of an historical method, Aron is effectively restricting the scope of Durkheim's sociological determinism and retaining a space for free individual and collective action. Second, Aron's historical sociology breaks with Durkheim's sociological realism by undermining its underlying assumption that 'the social' or 'society' are amenable to precise scientific definition.¹²⁹ Aron's claim that social realities cannot be treated in the same way as natural ones, that they are not subject to comprehensive classification and explanation, reflects his view that no pure social reality exists because such reality is in fact socio-historical, containing

¹²⁶ *Introduction*, 94.

¹²⁷ On this point see Richard Gowan, 'Raymond Aron, the history of ideas and the idea of France', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2 (2003), 383-399, 387.

¹²⁸ *Introduction*, 249-252.

¹²⁹ *Introduction*, 406: "On fausse à la fois la nature de la société et celle de la sociologie, en imaginant celle-là cohérent et univoque, et celle-ci totale et systématique".

elements of determinism and contingency. These elements are so intertwined that it is impossible to isolate and then systematise pure social or historical causes into bodies of laws comparable to the laws of physics.¹³⁰ This is not to say, however, that Aron excludes the principle of causality from his historical sociology; it simply means that such causal relations as it is possible to identify through social scientific research can only be described in probabilistic terms. Thus he criticises Durkheim's claims regarding the determination of suicide rates according to purely social causes not because there is no relation between the effect and the causes identified, but because that relation can only be said to be probable and partial.¹³¹ The same critique is exercised in Aron's rejection of Marxist historical determinism in the *Introduction*: he does not oppose the view that any society's political structures are shaped by the organisation of economic life; he rejects the assertion of a unilateral causal determination of the former by the latter.¹³² Any given causal antecedent might be said to *favour* a given outcome with a greater or lesser degree of probability, but the principle of necessary causality as it operates in the natural sciences is inapplicable to the study of socio-historical realities.

The *Introduction*'s probabilistic critique of sociological and historical determinism is substantially indebted to Max Weber. This becomes especially apparent when Aron's focus shifts away from the irreducible element of contingency permeating the objects of socio-historical knowledge, and towards the subjective freedom of the social scientist in defining and arranging these objects. In the first instance, sociological causality is probable because of the indeterminism inhering within the object; in the second, probabilistic conclusions are derived from the interpretative freedom of the sociologist. Probabilism in this latter sense is implied in Weber's definition of sociology as "a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences".¹³³ Aron also adopts this position in the *Introduction*, where he

¹³⁰ *Introduction*, 257.

¹³¹ *Introduction*, 258-261.

¹³² *Introduction*, 307-312. For an earlier example of this argument see Aron, 'Politique et économie dans la doctrine marxiste' [1937] in *Études politiques*, 85-103.

¹³³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (Berkeley, [1922] 1978), 4.

insists that sociological and historical explanation presuppose understanding.¹³⁴ What this means is that relations of causality posited in the human sciences are reliant upon a prior conceptual elaboration through which the objects of explanation are defined and arranged. These conceptual constructs are what Weber referred to as ideal types. The results obtained through causal enquiry in history or sociology may be said to be objectively valid within the confines of the interpretative schema in which they are organised, but such schema, or ideal types, are themselves established via an unavoidably subjective, value-laden process of selection and definition.¹³⁵ This provides another angle of attack for Aron's critique of Durkheim and Marx, both of whom he accuses of failing to acknowledge the non-scientific presuppositions upon which their deterministic accounts of social and historical reality are based.¹³⁶ In both instances, a determinism that poses as scientific and objective is actually based upon a metaphysical view of the relationship between man and society. Marxism, for example, is rooted in a view of man as being defined above all by his labour, his position in society being determined by his place in the system of production, and the social evolution of mankind as being determined by the development of that system of production. Aron, following Weber, argues that these kinds of propositions may contain partial truths, but they are not open to scientific verification, and any science built upon such claims can legitimately claim only to be partial and probable.¹³⁷

Before elaborating upon the political significance of the *Introduction*'s historical epistemology, it is first necessary to summarise how the limitations identified in Aron's phenomenology of self-knowledge translate into the consideration of knowledge of wider socio-historical realities. The relationship established between the various stages of historical consciousness in the *Introduction* is a circular one: self-knowledge presupposes knowledge of others and the presence of an *esprit objectif*, but the *esprit objectif* is itself the historical product of collective and individual action containing an irreducible element of indeterminacy. From this circularity it follows that the limitations attached to self-knowledge re-appear in different guises at the different levels of historical consciousness.

¹³⁴ *Introduction*, 112, 114.

¹³⁵ Max Weber, 'Science as a vocation' [1918] in *From Max Weber*, 129-156, 153.

¹³⁶ *Introduction*, 171, 292, 311-312, 375. See also Aron, 'Remarques sur l'objectivité des sciences sociales', *Théoria*, V (1939), 161-194, 185.

¹³⁷ See in general *Introduction*, 195-330.

Just as the objectivity of self-knowledge is severely limited by the unity of its object with the subject pursuing it, so wider socio-historical knowledge is restricted because it forms part of a community's consciousness of itself.¹³⁸ Like self-knowledge, socio-historical knowledge is inevitably relative to the temporal situation from which it is sought, but it is also subject to a positional relativity. This is because it forms both a part of and a means towards the self-knowledge of every member of a given society: "*Le passé de ma collectivité, je le découvre partiellement en moi-même: quand je m'intéresse à lui ... je m'efforce de découvrir comment ma collectivité est devenue ce qu'elle est, comment elle m'a fait ce que je suis*".¹³⁹ The methodological implications drawn from the analysis of self-knowledge also translate over into the pursuit of wider socio-historical knowledge. Just as self-knowledge derives from the identification of *motifs* and *mobiles*, so socio-historical knowledge is built from narrative interpretation of individual and collective acts in terms of the relation of means and ends combined with analysis of the deeper structural forces shaping the field of human action. Socio-historical knowledge is subject to a plurality of retrospective interpretations comparable to that relating to the understanding of individual *motifs*. It also faces the problem posed by the potentially infinite extension of causal explanatory regressions. As at the level of self-knowledge, then, Aron's socio-historical epistemology tilts towards radical relativism, expressed in its most extreme form when he writes:

Une idée fondamentale se dégage, nous semble-t-il, des analyses précédentes: *la dissolution de l'objet*. Il n'existe pas une *réalité historique*, toute faite avant la science, qu'il conviendrait simplement de reproduire avec fidélité. La réalité historique, parce qu'elle est humaine, est *équivoque* et *inépuisable*. Équivoques, la pluralité des univers spirituels à travers lesquels se déploie l'existence humaine, la diversité des ensembles dans lesquels prennent place les idées et les actes élémentaires. Inépuisable la signification de l'homme pour l'homme, de l'œuvre pour les interprètes, du passé pour les présents successifs.¹⁴⁰

It is not difficult to see why this passage has contributed to the *Introduction*'s reputation for promoting a radical form of historical relativism. But when Aron, who later regretted the expression '*dissolution de l'objet*', tried in his *Mémoires* to contest such an interpretation,

¹³⁸ *Introduction*, 105.

¹³⁹ *Introduction*, 100.

¹⁴⁰ *Introduction*, 147.

he was not simply re-imagining his thesis in the light of his post-1968 leadership of French political anti-relativism.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere in the *Introduction*, as well as in some other texts predating it, one can find justification for his insistence on the book's essentially rationalist inspiration forty-five years later. The problem here lies with the epistemological agnosticism alluded to earlier: there are points, such as in the above passage and in the previously cited critique of Dilthey, when Aron leans towards a form of relativism that would seriously undermine the moderate political conclusions that he later draws from his epistemology. But the *Introduction* is also explicit in its aim of transcending relativism and the tension between these opposing epistemological inclinations invites the misunderstanding of which Aron would subsequently complain.

Aron's first book offers a useful starting point for approaching the controversial issue of his relativism. Published in 1935, *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* contains a withering critique of Karl Mannheim's relativist sociology of knowledge. Dismissing Mannheim's "*prétendue sociologie de la connaissance*" as variously naïve, absurd and banal,¹⁴² Aron's critique also hints at a significant epistemological disagreement with Max Weber when he writes that:

¹⁴¹ *Mémoires*, 122. Although Aron never removed the passage from subsequent editions of the book, in 1978 he made several changes to its layout with the intention of moderating the impression of extreme relativism that it sometimes conveyed. Thus in the 1938 edition, Aron had titled the concluding chapter of the second part of section two '*La dissolution de l'objet*'; in 1978 this title was removed – compare *Introduction* (1938), 120 / *Introduction* (1978), 147. The second part of the book's third section was headed with a quotation from Paul Vidal de la Blache – "*En fait, tout ce qui touche à L'homme est frappé de contingence*" – in 1938. This was removed from the 1978 edition – compare *Introduction* (1938), 190 / *Introduction* (1978), 235. In 1938 the conclusion to section four, part one was titled '*La relativité de la connaissance historique*'. This was removed from the 1978 edition – compare *Introduction* (1938), 291 / *Introduction* (1978), 363. The appendix to the 1986 edition of the *Introduction*, introduced and annotated by Sylvie Mesure, includes copies of the 1938 and 1978 tables of contents for comparison.

The appearance of these changes in the first post-1968 edition of the *Introduction* inadvertently confirmed its own arguments concerning the fluidity of textual meaning in changing historical contexts. It is significant that the relativism expressed in the *Introduction* reacted against the contemporary hegemony of Durkheimian sociological positivism; by 1968 positivism had become almost a dirty word in the human sciences in France, and structuralism, in its various incarnations, had come to dominate. In his polemical analysis of the events of May 1968, Aron is scathing towards structuralist and post-structuralist relativism, which he regards as operating a pernicious influence over students – see Aron, *La révolution introuvable: réflexions sur les événements de Mai*, (Paris, 1968), 122, 136. This argument subsequently became a central pillar of the wider conservative reaction against the events and their legacy in France and elsewhere – See especially Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La pensée 68* (Paris, 1985). The anti-relativism of some of Aron's principal French and American admirers, many of whom were drawn towards him as a result of his stance on May 1968, also helps to explain why the importance of the *Introduction* for his post-war thought has often been understated. This issue is explored in more detail in chapter four on pages 193-200 below.

¹⁴² Aron, *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* (Paris, [1935] 2007), 66-78, 68, 73, 74, 75.

En fonction des faits connus et des formes logiques, un jugement sur le réel est vrai ou faux. Et s'il risque de subsister une multiplicité de théories rivales, c'est uniquement à l'impossibilité d'une vérification absolue qu'il faut l'attribuer, non à l'existence de vérités multiples, 'perspectives', également légitimes. [Et aussi au fait que les jugements de valeurs, si souvent mêlés aux théories économiques et politiques, ne sont peut-être pas susceptibles de vérité ou de fausseté.]¹⁴³

The first and final sentences of this passage implicitly agree with Weber's theory of ideal types, but the middle section hints at an important divergence from Weber's nominalist epistemology.¹⁴⁴ Here, rather than attributing interpretative plurality to the incoherence of the data from which the social scientist selects, Aron ties it to the impossibility of arriving at absolute verification. As we have already seen, in the *Introduction*'s phenomenology of self-knowledge Aron seeks to moderate relativism by referring to the proximal adequacy of scientific concepts in relation to the real. This assumption carries over into the discussion of socio-historical knowledge, indicating that Aron did not follow Weber to the extreme position wherein the reality studied by the sociologist is conceived as radically incoherent prior to its conceptual organisation. In fact, he rejects Weber's nominalism as "naïve", stating that:

... nous admettons, au point de départ, l'objectivité des évolutions comme des ensembles, mais aussi leur pluralité et leur équivoque. L'historien ne compose pas artificiellement des totalités à l'aide d'éléments dispersés et incohérents, mais il recompose des totalités immanentes au monde historique.¹⁴⁵

The source of this difference between Weber and Aron may be partly traced to the latter's use of a phenomenological method derived from Edmund Husserl. Husserlian phenomenology, through the role that it attributes to intentionality in all human consciousness, presupposes an immediate connection between consciousness and its objects, asserting that the world as immediately revealed to consciousness is rational, meaningful and coherent. Thus it has been suggested that Aron used phenomenology to

¹⁴³ *La sociologie allemande*, 74. Bracketed section reproduces the text of the footnote that follows the word "légitimes" in the original.

¹⁴⁴ See Weber, 'Science as a vocation', 147, 152-153.

¹⁴⁵ *Introduction*, 150. See also page 92: "On voit donc à quel point est inexact l'argument selon lequel les données historiques, fragmentaires et informes, seraient comme une poussière".

moderate the nominalist implications of the Weberian influence at work within the *Introduction*.¹⁴⁶ This argument is persuasive, but, in reducing the difference between Aron and Weber to a question of methodology, it neglects a more fundamental contrast between their respective positions. Weber's nominalism was primarily epistemological in origin in the sense that it was rooted in a presupposition concerning the data from which the sociologist or historian selects: namely its infinite, scattered and incoherent quality.¹⁴⁷ The ultimate source of Aron's relativism, on the other hand, does not lie in a presupposition concerning the raw materials of historical and sociological analysis; indeed, Aron repeatedly argued against Weber that socio-historical realities possessed a partial coherence independent of the organising hand of the social scientist.¹⁴⁸ His relativism ultimately refers back to the partially Heideggerian ontology discussed earlier, to the essential historicity of human existence. This lends it the paradoxical character of being a sometimes quite radical form of relativism that is nonetheless rooted in the universality of man's historical condition, a "*relativité transcendante*" or "*subjectivité transcendante*" as Aron calls it.¹⁴⁹

There is a familiar irony to the fact that Aron's modified Heideggerian ontology ultimately led him towards a kind of minimally humanist existentialism.¹⁵⁰ This characteristic of the *Introduction* was hinted at in a review article published by Aron around the time that he finished writing his thesis.¹⁵¹ In a literature review marking the three-hundredth anniversary of René Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* in 1937, he challenged the relativism of Karl Jaspers' critique of Descartes' contemporary philosophical influence, claiming that Jaspers

¹⁴⁶ Reed M. Davis, 'The phenomenology of Raymond Aron', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2 (October, 2003), 401-413. See also Davis, *Raymond Aron*, 36-40.

¹⁴⁷ In this respect, Weber was a disciple of Heinrich Rickert. See *Les étapes*, 508-509.

¹⁴⁸ *Introduction*, 92, 150, 163, 339-341. Thus Aron's claim during his lectures on industrial society that "Dans l'Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire, il y a vingt ans, j'avais accepté intégralement cette [Weber's] épistémologie relativiste" is repeatedly contradicted in the *Introduction* itself. Aron, *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* (Paris, 1962), 26.

¹⁴⁹ *Introduction*, 207, 363.

¹⁵⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, of course, also reinterpreted Heidegger's ontology along humanist lines, most explicitly in *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris, 1945). To the extent that this was a wider tendency in the French reception of Heidegger may be partly attributed to the translation of 'Dasein' as 'réalité humaine' in French editions of his work during the 1930s. See Geroulanos, *Atheism*, 53.

¹⁵¹ Although he defended his thesis in March 1938, Aron finished writing it during the Easter of 1937. See *Mémoires*, 115.

“renonce trop vite à saisir l’unité de l’homme et de la doctrine morale”.¹⁵² In concluding the review article, he implicitly revealed a major preoccupation driving the thesis that he was then finishing:

À lire la littérature cartésienne du troisième centenaire, on mesure et l’impuissance du rationalisme scientiste et la pauvreté dangereuse d’un anti-rationalisme qui négligerait les sciences de la nature, donnée fondamentale de notre civilisation autant que de notre pensée, ou qui méconnaîtrait au profit d’expériences incommunicables le pouvoir de la raison. Il ne devrait pas être impossible de renouveler le rationalisme en le rattachant à l’existence concrète et à l’histoire.¹⁵³

Aron attempted to reconcile rational humanism and historicism in the fourth and final section of the *Introduction*. Here he expanded on the claim made at the start of the book that “... *l’histoire est inséparable de l’essence même de l’homme*” by identifying three dimensions to the fundamental historicity of human existence.¹⁵⁴ First, “[*L’homme*] *est dans l’histoire*”: he lives in societies that, continuing through the course of time, accumulate their own histories.¹⁵⁵ Second, “*L’homme est historique*”: he is shaped by the socio-historical milieu into which he is born.¹⁵⁶ Third, “*L’homme est une histoire*”: humanity as a whole embodies the unfinished story of a species that has developed from pre-historic, carnivorous cave dwelling towards industrial civilisation.¹⁵⁷ The first dimension of human historicity tells us that human existence is essentially social and, by implication, political; the second suggests that the values towards which political life may be oriented are not universal but particular to each society; the third, however, with its emphasis on the universal history of humanity, moderates the relativism implied by the second. This idea of universal history should not be confused with an optimistic theory of progress. Aron rejects such notions, arguing that the irrational aspect of human behaviour and the absence of any universally accepted standard by which to define ‘progress’ itself

¹⁵² Aron, ‘Troisième centenaire du *Discours de la méthode*’, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 6, (1937), 648-653, 653. Aron is referring to the aggressively critical account of the contemporary philosophical influence of Descartes in Karl Jaspers, ‘La pensée de Descartes et la philosophie’, *Revue philosophique*, 124 (1937), 39-147.

¹⁵³ ‘Troisième centenaire’, 653.

¹⁵⁴ *Introduction*, 43.

¹⁵⁵ *Introduction*, 403.

¹⁵⁶ *Introduction*, 403.

¹⁵⁷ *Introduction*, 404.

prevent scientific advancement from guaranteeing wider human progress, whether social, moral, or political.¹⁵⁸ But whilst he dismisses the optimistic fatalism of a generic liberal faith in rational progress, Aron is also concerned with avoiding an opposite, pessimistic fatalism wherein human historical development would be radically irrational, incoherent, and independent of all human efforts to affect its course.¹⁵⁹ The plurality and incommensurability of values, he argues, reveals not only the impossibility of discovering universal philosophical truths, but also the impossibility for man of *not* philosophising.¹⁶⁰ Taken together with man's universal desire for causal explanation of which the development of science is the expression,¹⁶¹ this indicates an identity of human reason at the most formal level, a "*communauté qui appelle une recherche de la vérité*".¹⁶²

Cette vérité devrait être au-dessus de la pluralité des activités et des valeurs, faute de quoi elle retomberait au niveau des volontés particulières et contradictoires. Elle devrait être concrète, faute de quoi, comme les normes éthiques, elle resterait en marge de l'action. À la fois théorique et pratique, à l'image du but qu'avait conçu le marxisme. Par le pouvoir acquis sur la nature, l'homme parviendrait peu à peu à un pouvoir égal sur l'ordre social. Grâce à la participation aux deux œuvres collectives, l'État qui fait de chaque individu un citoyen, la culture qui rend accessible à tous l'acquis commun, il réaliserait sa vocation: conciliation de l'humanité et de la nature, de l'essence et de l'existence.¹⁶³

Let us now finally return to the question of the relationship between historical epistemology and politics in the *Introduction*. Aron's description of historical consciousness operates on four levels: knowledge of self, others, objective mind and collective realities, and historical knowledge. The separation of these levels is a conceptual abstraction from the concrete reality of lived experience wherein all the stages of historical consciousness are shown to be interdependent. It is by showing that socio-historical knowledge is integral to self-

¹⁵⁸ *Introduction*, 381-385, 397

¹⁵⁹ *Introduction*, 377. See also page 415: "*Il faudrait être capable de lucidité et de foi: croire à une volonté historique sans croire ni aux mythes, ni aux foules*".

¹⁶⁰ *Introduction*, 376, 392, 428-429.

¹⁶¹ *Introduction*, 371, 425.

¹⁶² *Introduction*, 429. On Aron's argument regarding the formal identity of reason see Sylvie Mesure, 'De l'antipositivisme à l'antirelativisme: Raymond Aron et le problème de l'objectivité historique', *Commentaire*, 35 (1986), 471-478, 478: "*Valables pour tous, les principes de la réflexion historique sont intersubjectifs, et en ce sens ils définissent, dans le jugement historique, un moment d'universalité qui est la condition transcendante de la possibilité de la prétention du jugement à l'objectivité. C'est à cet égard que le relativisme peut être surmonté*".

¹⁶³ *Introduction*, 429.

knowledge that Aron initially indicates a connection between historical epistemology and politics. This connection appears clearest within lived experience where the conceptual separation of past, present and future is revealed to be an abstraction from the concrete reality of life's finite continuity. Here historical consciousness at every level merges into a future facing projection of consciousness that is partly political. What this means in practice is that no political commitment is conceivable without some kind of understanding of the past of the society in which it is exercised. To think or act politically is to think or act in terms of the values and goals expressed historically within a given community, even if it is to reject them. This, at the most general level, is the connection established in the *Introduction* between the critique of historical reason and the logic of political thought and action. But Aron also linked socio-historical epistemology and political action at a practical level. He argued that “*L’homme d’action utilise simultanément la sociologie et l’histoire*” in the sense that the politician acting in pursuit of a given end must develop an awareness of structural constraints together with the margins of freedom for effective action within them.¹⁶⁴ This position expresses what Aron defines later in the *Introduction* as “*le politique de l’entendement*”, one of two conceptualisations of political action based in two opposing views of socio-historical knowledge that are contrasted in the book's fourth and final section. This politics of understanding is rooted in a fragmented, partial, and uncertain vision of history, and its exemplary exponent is Max Weber. It represents a reformulation of Weber's ethic of responsibility in that it is based in the constantly renewed calculation of means towards the realisation of chosen ends within historical contexts that change over time without the overall historical development being open to human comprehension. It is also the achievement of the model of nuanced political realism that Aron first outlined in his open letter to *Esprit* in 1933. The opposite of this moderate, gradualist, reformist position is defined as *le politique de la Raison*, based in a total view of human historical evolution and represented in its purest form by Marxism.¹⁶⁵

Aron attempts to refute Marxism as a basis for reasonable political action in the *Introduction* by two principal means: first, an *a priori* denial of the possibility of any

¹⁶⁴ *Introduction*, 292.

¹⁶⁵ *Introduction*, 413-414.

individual or group situated within History knowing its final destination; second, a rejection of the proposed mechanism by which the overall historical evolution is to be discovered. This latter refutation is based in Aron's arguments that the ultimate basis of historical materialism is metaphysical, not scientific, and that the causality upon which it is based can be only partial and probable, not globally deterministic. These are the same basic arguments that Aron would subsequently reformulate in his Cold War polemics against fellow travelling intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.¹⁶⁶ The *Introduction*'s critique of Marxism applies not just to economic determinism, but also to more sophisticated neo-Marxist explorations of consciousness. Aron's discussion of the limitations of understanding as a means towards knowledge of others, where he repeatedly denies that understanding provides a route towards genuine inter-subjectivity, is significant in this regard.¹⁶⁷ This also has a prospective importance because later attempts to fuse existentialism with Marxism, especially in Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*, partly relied on a view of understanding as just such a path to inter-subjectivity.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Sartre privately admitted that the *Critique* was written as a refutation of Aron's *Introduction*, whose relativist use of the theory of understanding it countered with an adaptation of Dilthey's method oriented towards the aim of confirming the unified meaning of History in broadly Marxist terms.¹⁶⁹

Although Aron's preference for the politics of understanding over the politics of Reason in the *Introduction* is obvious, what is less clear is just how substantial the philosophical basis for this choice is. Sylvie Mesure has argued that Aron overcomes the relativism that would otherwise undermine this commitment to a reasonable, moderate politics by elaborating the

¹⁶⁶ See most famously *L'opium*, 115-210.

¹⁶⁷ *Introduction*, 78-81, 103-105.

¹⁶⁸ For Sartre, the privileged situation wherein this fusion of otherwise atomised consciousnesses was to be realised was the revolutionary crowd. See his *Critique de la raison dialectique, tome 1: théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris, 1960), 449-505, 626-627. On the *Critique*'s covert dialogue with Aron's *Introduction* see Iain Stewart, 'Sartre, Aron, and the contested legacy of the anti-positivist turn in French thought, 1938-1960', *Sartre Studies International*, 17 (summer, 2011), 41-60.

¹⁶⁹ For Sartre's private admission concerning the origin of the *Critique* see Pierre Verstraeten, *L'anti-Aron* (Paris, 2008), 9. For his implicitly anti-Aronian adaptation of Dilthey see Sartre, *Critique*, 52, 69, 817-818; Sartre, *Questions de méthode* (Paris, [1957] 1986), 80-150. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has also been shown to have engaged in a covert, critical dialogue with the *Introduction* shortly after the Second World War – see Kerry H. Whiteside, 'Perspectivism and historical objectivity: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's covert debate with Raymond Aron', *History and Theory*, 25 (May, 1986), 132-151.

highly formalised universal ideal of progress quoted above.¹⁷⁰ But the most that may be claimed on this basis is a kind of victory by default: the politics of understanding at least leaves open the possibility of a minimal rational progress whereas a Marxist politics of historical Reason, Aron suggests, precludes it by its very nature. Daniel J. Mahoney has been more critical of the *Introduction* with regards to its relativism and argued that Aron's preference for a politics of understanding is based in an ungrounded existential choice.¹⁷¹ Here, as with the question of his relationship with Weber's nominalist epistemology examined earlier, a basic ambiguity results from Aron's concern with balancing rationalism and historicism. Thus whilst he criticises Weber's decisionism in his secondary thesis,¹⁷² the *Introduction* itself offers ample justification for Mahoney's criticism:

Ce n'est donc ni céder à la mode de philosophie pathétique, ni confondre l'angoisse d'une époque bouleversée avec une donnée permanente, ni sombrer dans le nihilisme que de rappeler comment l'homme se détermine lui-même et sa mission en se mesurant au néant. C'est là, au contraire, affirmer la puissance de celui qui se crée en jugeant son milieu et en se choisissant. Ainsi seulement l'individu surmonte la relativité de l'histoire par l'absolu de la décision, et intègre à son moi essentiel l'histoire qu'il porte en lui et qui devient la sienne.¹⁷³

Just as we saw earlier with regard to knowledge concerning the raw data of socio-historical enquiry, Aron oscillates between radical and moderate forms of relativism when he approaches a more normative epistemology, sometimes concurring with Weber's theory of the 'war of the gods', sometimes trying to mitigate its nihilism.¹⁷⁴ Aron himself subsequently admitted the *Introduction*'s ambiguity in this regard in his *Mémoires*, and the differing opinions offered in the secondary literature reflect this.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Measure, *Raymond Aron*, 116-118.

¹⁷¹ Mahoney, 'Raymond Aron and the morality of prudence', 246-247. See also Mahoney, *Raymond Aron*, 2: "This solution is somewhat of a word game in which resolute decision is dressed up in the garb of absoluteness and the problem is said to disappear....One is left to conclude that the emperor still has no clothes and that this tactic will not do".

¹⁷² *La philosophie critique de l'histoire*, 272.

¹⁷³ *Introduction*, 420-421.

¹⁷⁴ See e.g. Weber, 'Science as a vocation', 147: "... the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other"; 152: "... the ultimately possible attitudes towards life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice".

¹⁷⁵ *Mémoires*, 118-119.

IV. CONCLUSION

Towards the beginning of this chapter we saw how the political and philosophical development of young normaliens in the late 1920s and 1930s was shaped by a sense of shared generational identity forged through the rejection of the optimistic progressive rationalism of their teachers. Although Raymond Aron does not readily fit into this paradigm because of his substantial differences with age groups on both sides, this has not prevented his doctoral thesis from being read through the lens of inter-generational intellectual politics. This context shaped its contemporary reception, as well as its later reputation within the secondary literature. Thus in contemporary reviews the *Introduction* was described as expressing “*le pathos de la nouvelle génération*” and praised for enabling the demolition of positivism by a new generation of French historians, whilst eyewitness accounts of the thesis defence have similarly described the event as “*un heurt entre deux générations*”.¹⁷⁶ Yet despite such primary evidence, Nicolas Baverez’s claim that Aron was “*le plus précoce des jeunes turcs de la philosophie française lancés à l’assaut du positivisme et le contestataire le plus vigoureux des mandarins de l’entre-deux-guerres*” remains problematic.¹⁷⁷ This is because exaggerating the sense in which the *Introduction* made a clean break with the older generation of philosophers and paved the way for Sartrean existentialism distracts us from what is its defining and most problematic feature: its attempt to carve out a middle ground between the complacency of optimistic, progressive rationalism and the despair of pessimistic, incoherent irrationalism.

Considered in the context of Aron’s political itinerary during the 1930s, we can relate this philosophical centrism to a parallel political centrism articulated around his refusal to conceive of politics in the polarised, Manichean terms characteristic of the age. Of course, within the confines of the *Introduction* itself, we have seen plenty of evidence that would support a reading of Aron’s thesis as exemplifying a French form of inter-war crisis

¹⁷⁶ See respectively Bernard Groethuysen, ‘Une philosophie critique de l’histoire’, *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 313 (octobre, 1939), 623-629, 626; Henri Davenson, ‘Tristesse de l’historien’, *Esprit*, 79 (1939), 11-47, 17-18; Fessard, *Raymond Aron*, 37.

¹⁷⁷ Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 128. For a similarly paradigmatic account of the *Introduction* see Furet *Le passé d’une illusion*, 511-514.

thought. Although its promotion of interpretative pluralism was anchored to a minimum faith in universal reason, it often came across as radical relativism. “[L’]’auteur qui explicite la théorie de sa propre théorie ou élabore l’épistémologie de sa recherche”, he would later write, “*risque toujours de se tromper, je veux dire de faire autre chose que ce qu’il croit faire*”.¹⁷⁸ Aron’s subject here is ostensibly the strategic thought of Clausewitz, but we can see that he writes from personal experience.

The *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire*, notwithstanding the problems arising from its ambiguous epistemological agnosticism, remains fundamental to Aron’s liberalism. Its first principal argument is for the promotion of intellectual pluralism as a fundamental good that stands as a necessary but not sufficient cause of the advance of reason and of human societies governed thereby. This ideal is, of course, highly formalised; it is a Kantian idea of reason situated at infinity and should not be confused with more optimistic forms of faith in human progress. The *Introduction*’s second major argument is for the moral autonomy and freedom of the individual within the complex of structural forces surrounding him. But Aron’s optimism in this regard is significantly tempered by his heightened sensitivity to the power of irrational influences over human behaviour, and this helps explain the purely formal nature of his limited faith in progress.

Whilst both of these arguments may be used to situate Aron within a longer tradition of French liberal political thought, it is important to remember that at this stage in his career he had yet to engage substantially with the works of celebrated predecessors such as Tocqueville or Montesquieu. As will become apparent in chapter four, his subsequent interpretation of these predecessors during the 1950s and 1960s was fundamentally shaped by the epistemological and moral concerns that the *Introduction* was unable to address in an entirely satisfactory way. Where Aron did consciously engage with French liberalism between the wars, it was to challenge the position of Alain, both concerning his pacifism and his theory of the *citoyen contre les pouvoirs*. This serves as a reminder of the plurality within French liberalism itself and the need to specify what kind of political liberalism Aron may be said to have promoted. This problem will be returned to in chapter three. It is,

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Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz: I, L’âge européen*, (Paris, 1976), 156.

however, first necessary to approach in detail the question of political culture by considering Aron's theories of political religion and totalitarianism.

CHAPTER TWO

ANTI-TOTALITARIANISM

Although it has everywhere ranked among the most contested and politicised concepts of the twentieth century, the concept of totalitarianism has been unusually prominent in the intellectual politics of France. In particular, the “anti-totalitarian moment” of the mid-to-late 1970s has come to be regarded as a decisive turning point in post-war French intellectual history, the dawning of a new age wherein intellectuals abandoned their earlier predilection for revolutionary politics and embraced liberalism.¹ Raymond Aron’s rising prestige during these years has often been taken to symbolise the momentousness of this change and, as noted earlier, this has helped encourage a view that anti-totalitarianism was the main component of his liberalism.² Aron was certainly an important figure in the inter-war theorisation of totalitarianism and the leading proponent of political anti-totalitarianism in France during the early Cold War. But it remains important to avoid reducing his liberalism to anti-totalitarianism, especially if the latter is understood in Manichean terms. It is frequently forgotten, for instance, that Aron was the principal architect of the Congress for Cultural Freedom’s move away from polemical anti-totalitarian rhetoric and towards the comparative, less obviously partisan analysis of industrial societies during the mid-1950s.³ Furthermore, his subsequent reaction to the emergence of fashionable anti-totalitarianism in the mid-to-late 1970s was often critical.⁴ This might appear incongruous, but Aron’s criticism of the Manichean tendencies within the anti-totalitarian movement was consistent

¹ See e.g. Mark Lilla, ‘The other velvet revolution: continental liberalism and its discontents’, *Daedalus*, 123 (spring, 1994), 129-157, 133-135. For a critical reappraisal of this period see Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Anti-Totalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (Oxford, 2004).

² Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), 137; Jeremy Jennings, ‘Of treason, blindness and silence: dilemmas of the intellectual in modern France’ in Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch (eds.) *Intellectuals in Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London, 1997), 65-85, 75-79. See also pages 16-17 of the present thesis where this issue is also discussed.

³ Aron’s influence within the CCF is discussed in detail on pages 116-124 below.

⁴ This was particularly true of his attitude towards *nouveaux philosophes* such as Bernard-Henri Lévy, André Glucksmann and Jean-Marie Benoist. Aron wrote to Friedrich von Hayek that “*les nouveaux philosophes constituent, me semble-t-il, davantage une mode parisienne qu’un événement intellectuel*”. Letter from Aron to Hayek, 26/9/78, *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 28060 (70). See also Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris, 1983), 705.

with his critiques of the political culture within the French intelligentsia stretching back to the inter-war years.⁵

The purpose of the present chapter is to evaluate the long-term development of Aron's writing on totalitarianism from the early 1930s up to the publication of *L'opium des intellectuels* in 1955 and to reconsider its relationship with his liberalism. One of the problems that this poses is that of describing the relationship between Aron's theoretical reflection on this issue and the more aggressively polemical form of political anti-totalitarianism that he espoused during the early Cold War. Since strong politicisation is a problem affecting the conceptual history of totalitarianism in general, Aron's writings on this theme will be situated within the context of that history, which is outlined in Section I below. Sections II and III respectively consider Aron's early reflection on totalitarianism and his subsidiary theory of political and secular religion, highlighting the anti-liberal influences on his work in these areas. The first three sections serve to establish the argument that Aron's anti-totalitarianism, though it shifted up a gear with the onset of the Cold War in 1947, was not a product of this conflict, and that its relation to his liberalism was more complex than Cold War liberal interpretations suggest. This complexity is further explored in the latter half of the chapter, which considers the polemical reorientation of Aron's anti-totalitarianism during the early Cold War. Section IV narrates his rapid transition from neutralist to cold warrior during the immediate post-war period. Section V considers his Cold War anti-totalitarianism as participating in a wider French contestation of the legacy of the Resistance. The polemical post-war reorientation of Aron's writing on secular religion is considered in section VI. These latter sections argue that, although Aron enthusiastically adopted the position of intellectual cold warrior from 1947 onwards, this did not entail embracing a form of proselytising pro-liberalism. The demands of polemical effectiveness in post-war France instead required a distinctive combination of aggressive anti-communism alongside substantial concessions to radical critiques of liberalism from the right and left.

⁵ See especially Aron, 'Pour le progrès: après la chute des idoles', *Commentaire*, 1 (1978), 233-243; Aron, 'Remarques sur la gnose léniniste' [1981] in Aron, *Machiavel et les tyrannies modernes* (Paris, 1993), 388-402, 401; Aron, 'Intervention de Raymond Aron en conclusion des assises du CIEL de juin 1982', *La lettre du CIEL*, 5 (1983), 6-7.

I. *THE EARLY CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF TOTALITARIANISM*

Totalitarianism and the notions of political or secular religion that have often served as component parts in its theorisation are some of the most essentially contested concepts of the twentieth century. Especially since the end of the Second World War, the remarkable heterogeneity of their application has been matched by the peculiar intensity of their politicisation. This helps to explain the fluctuations in the academic respectability afforded to these concepts since they were first theorised during the inter-war period.⁶ After intense politicisation in the propaganda of the early Cold War, their academic use dropped off significantly until the collapse of communism and the new archival possibilities that this opened up.⁷ The early nineties witnessed a return of totalitarianism and secular religion as legitimate tools for the comparative study of twentieth-century dictatorships,⁸ but also their re-politicisation in the service of a growing liberal-conservative triumphalism.⁹ This conceptual double existence renders any attempt at general evaluations problematic, especially when, as has often been the case in the French history of these concepts, the boundaries between polemic and comparative political science have not always been easy to identify. Since this is a difficulty that also pertains to Raymond Aron's work on this subject, it is important to consider the development of his reflection on totalitarianism within the context of the concept's wider pre-Cold War history.

Use of the concept of totalitarianism began in the 1920s, partly in response to the perceived inadequacies of the classical language of tyranny, despotism and dictatorship as means of describing the new forms of dictatorship that had spread in Europe after the First World

⁶ For a recent narrative survey see Anson Rabinach, 'Moments of totalitarianism', *History and Theory*, 45 (February, 2006), 72-100, 87-97.

⁷ The French anti-totalitarian turn of the 1970s stands as a partial exception to this more general trend and is discussed on pages 193-200 below.

⁸ A large body of post-communist work in this area is collected in Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships*, three volumes, (Abingdon, 2004, 2007, 2008).

⁹ Richard Steigmann-Gall, 'Nazism and the revival of political religion theory' in Constantin Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London, 2010), 297-315, 298.

War.¹⁰ After being coined by the Italian journalist and politician Giovanni Amendola in a newspaper article in May 1923, the term soon entered the political discourse of liberal anti-fascists in Italy. Polemical in origin, from 1925 it began to be appropriated by the Fascist movement itself, where Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile led the earliest systematic attempts at its theorisation. The concept's peculiar political promiscuity and mixed polemical and theoretical connotations were thus identifiable during its earliest Italian history. This ambiguity carried over into the usage of the term elsewhere in continental Europe. In the late 1920s it entered German political vocabulary where it was applied to cover both Fascism and National Socialism from 1931. Although ultimately rejected by official National Socialism, the concept was adapted by the future president of the Union of National Socialist Jurists Carl Schmitt as well as by opponents of Nazism from the Christian right to the Marxist left. A similarly heterogeneous range of individuals, including the Dreyfusard intellectual Julien Benda and the Action Française affiliated historian Jacques Bainville, also made early use of the term in France during the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹¹

Whilst concerted efforts towards the theorisation of totalitarianism were everywhere subsequent to more journalistic and polemical applications of the term, these later theorisations exhibited nationally specific traits. Despite the political heterogeneity just alluded to, German approaches to the issue showed a preoccupation with understanding totalitarianism as a dialectical product of forces operating within liberal democracy itself. Categorisation of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian regime originated primarily in the earliest theories emanating from Great Britain and the United States, where Soviet communism came to be described as “Red fascism” during the early 1930s.¹² This association would not become a prominent feature of the theory in continental Europe until after the Second World War, partly because of the largely successful attempts of the USSR to position itself as the leader of international anti-fascism in the mid-1930s. The French case is instructive in this regard since France's status as a relative latecomer in the

¹⁰ Hans Maier, ‘Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships: “totalitarianism” and “political religions”’ in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume 1), 199-215.

¹¹ Christian Godin, *La totalité: tome 6, la totalité réalisée. L'Histoire* (Seyssel, 2003), 47.

¹² Constantin Iordachi, ‘Introduction’ in Constantin Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London, 2010), 29.

theorisation of totalitarianism may be partly explained by a widespread reticence towards criticising the Soviet Union resulting from the strength of the Popular Front movement there. Thus when the liberal historian Élie Halévy categorised the USSR alongside Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as a modern tyranny during a meeting of the Société française de philosophie in November 1936, he met with a critical reaction.¹³

In his presentation, titled ‘L’ère des tyrannies’, Élie Halévy argued that the outbreak of the First World War had marked Europe’s entry into an era of tyrannies characterised by an extraordinary extension of the state’s interference in economic life combined with severe restrictions on intellectual freedom and the “*organisation d’enthousiasme*”.¹⁴ Although the birth of this new era had been triggered by the war, Halévy traced its intellectual roots to a fundamental internal contradiction that had been at the centre of socialist thought since Saint-Simon: the promise of liberation through compulsory organisation. This latter argument would later have an important influence over the neo-classical economist Friedrich von Hayek’s polemical account of socialism’s allegedly totalitarian implications in *The Road to Serfdom*.¹⁵ Halévy is better known, however, as the main progenitor of French theoretical reflection on totalitarianism during the inter-war years. It was by critically engaging with Halévy’s writings in the light of his experience in Germany that Raymond Aron became the first Frenchman to rearticulate the theorisation of the ‘new tyrannies’ in the language of totalitarianism.¹⁶

¹³ Élie Halévy, *L’ère des tyrannies: études sur le socialisme et la guerre* (Paris, 1938), 215-227.

¹⁴ Halévy, *L’ère des tyrannies*, 214.

¹⁵ H.S. Jones, ‘The Era of Tyrannies: Élie Halévy and Friedrich von Hayek on socialism’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 1 (2002), 53-69. For Hayek’s interpretation of the totalitarian implications of socialism see his *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago, [1944] 1994), 97-111.

¹⁶ Hans Maier, ‘On the interpretation of totalitarian rule, 1919-1989’ in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume 3), 3-21, 9. On the same point see also Hella Mandt, ‘The classical understanding: tyranny and despotism’ in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume 3), 25-100, 72-73.

II. ARON'S EARLY WRITING ON TOTALITARIANISM

Aron attended Halévy's presentation at the Société française de philosophie and was among those who criticised its categorisation of the USSR as a modern tyranny alongside Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.¹⁷ This criticism reflected the moral superiority that he then attributed to the universal egalitarian ends of communism over the nationalist, racist and militaristic ends of fascism. His consequent belief that the Soviet Union should not be judged by the same standard as fascist dictatorships partly informed the exclusion of the USSR from his own earliest writings on totalitarianism. This moral explanation for the absence of the Soviet Union from most of these writings has been used to support an influential Cold War-centric interpretation of Aron's liberalism.¹⁸ On this view, Aron's evolution from 'youthful socialism' to 'mature liberalism' was realised with the onset of the Cold War and symbolised above all by his acrimonious break with Jean-Paul Sartre in late 1947. That Aron's liberalism has tended to be indelibly associated with militant anti-communism in general and polemical opposition to Sartre in particular testifies to the influence of this narrative.¹⁹ Such a view, however, understates the extent to which political rather than moral reasons increasingly determined Aron's reluctance to openly criticise the USSR or the Parti communiste français during the immediate pre-war years. From 1936 to the summer of 1939 he saw the Soviet Union as a potential military ally of France and the United Kingdom in an increasingly probable war against Germany. Aron consequently held back from describing it as an equivalent regime to Nazi Germany because to do so would have been politically insensitive.²⁰ Similar considerations informed his hesitancy towards openly criticising the PCF in these years.²¹ By attributing disproportionate weight to the

¹⁷ Aron, 'Contribution d'Aron à *L'ère des tyrannies*' [1936] in *Machiavel*, 307-308.

¹⁸ Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des idéologies* (Paris, 1993), 118; Jean-François Sirinelli, *Deux intellectuels dans le siècle: Sartre et Aron* (Paris, 1995), 208-211.

¹⁹ Sirinelli, *Sartre et Aron*, 208-211; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 53, 118; Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham, 1992), 80-84; Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Oxford, 1997), 61-119.

²⁰ Aron, *Le spectateur engagé: entretiens avec Jean-Louis Missika et Dominique Wolton* (Paris, 1981), 50; *Mémoires*, 91.

²¹ See Aron, 'Réflexions sur les problèmes économiques français', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XLIV (novembre, 1937), 793-822, 793 (note 1); *Spectateur*, 46.

moral over the political explanation for Aron's reticence on this issue, Cold War-centric interpretations of his liberalism run counter to the basic development of Aron's political thought. As has been shown in chapter one, this development was characterised by a shift away from a moralistic view of politics and towards a position of tempered Machiavellian realism.²² By reconsidering the development of his early reflection on totalitarianism, it is possible to reach a more balanced view that acknowledges the importance of Aron's early moral bi-focalism regarding left- and right-wing totalitarian regimes without presenting his later militant anti-communism as the product of a spurious moral epiphany.

Close examination of Aron's response to Halévy's categorisation of the Soviet Union as being of the same basic regime type as Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany suggests that his opposition to this analysis was not absolute. Rather than denying that the USSR was a totalitarian regime, Aron's argument was that its totalitarianism differed sociologically from that in Italy and Germany.²³ The sociological differentiation that Aron made between the two varieties of totalitarianism was based in their opposite orientation with regard to class struggle: Italian and especially German fascism were committed to protecting the interests of capital and the continuation of capitalist class relations, whereas Soviet communism sought to overturn these relations in favour of the proletariat. This response positioned Aron firmly within the parameters of standard progressive interpretations of fascism at the time, which emphasised its significance as a capitalist reaction to the rising threat of socialism, a front for the interests of big business and so on. As such, it continued along similar lines to an article that he had published in September 1933 in the left-wing journal *Europe*. This article had largely agreed with the interpretation of Nazism advanced by Leon Trotsky in the pages of the same publication two months earlier.²⁴ The following year Aron had expressed himself in similar terms during a presentation at the Centre de documentation sociale, describing National Socialism as an instrument of "big capital".²⁵

²² See pages 44-54 above.

²³ Unless indicated otherwise, the points discussed in this and the following paragraph derive from 'Contribution d'Aron à l'ère des tyrannies', 307-308.

²⁴ Aron, 'La révolution nationale en Allemagne', *Europe* (septembre, 1933), 125-138. The earlier article by Trotsky to which Aron refers is Léon Trotsky, 'Hitler et le désarmement', *Europe*, 11 (juillet, 1933), 440-451.

²⁵ Aron, 'Une révolution anti-prolétarienne' in É. Halévy et al., *Inventaires: la crise sociale et les idéologies nationales* (Paris, 1936), 24-55, 47, 53-54.

At the Société française de philosophie, Aron presented his objection to Halévy as being based in hard scientific analysis; Halévy's liberal standpoint, he suggested, was legitimate but ultimately sentimental:

Sans aucun doute il y a entre tous les régimes totalitaires des points communs; le fait même qu'ils sont totalitaires et tyranniques implique certaines analogies. Mais celles-ci, décisives pour le libéral qui réagit sentimentalement contre la perte des libertés formelles et des libertés démocratiques, sont moins importantes pour le sociologue qui analyse l'ensemble. ... La lutte des classes constitue donc, même et surtout dans les pays démocratiques, le problème décisif, beaucoup plus que celui du libéralisme, auquel on s'intéresse moins.²⁶

This analysis was, however, ultimately rooted in an essentially moral differentiation between the ends towards which the different totalitarian regimes were oriented. Although all three regimes tended towards a totalitarian extension of state control over the economy, only in the Soviet Union did this serve egalitarian rather than militaristic ends. In concluding his remarks Aron went on to align himself unambiguously with the prevalent progressive mindset of the Popular Front era:

Quelles que soient les réserves à faire, ... on n'entamerait pas, je crois, l'opposition fondamentale: sur le plan de l'histoire, pour l'avenir de l'humanité, la tyrannie communiste et la tyrannie fasciste représentent bien des ennemis inconciliables. À mes yeux, c'est la haine idéologique et non la sagesse du politicien libéral qui a sur ce point raison.²⁷

Élie Halévy died in August 1937 and his 'L'ère des tyrannies' was published posthumously in a collection bearing the same name the following year. Reviewing this work for the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in 1939, Aron's reaction was more sympathetic than it had been three years earlier. Whilst he continued to set Soviet communism aside from Fascism and National Socialism, Aron's moral indulgence toward the USSR was more limited. He no longer insisted on an essential separation of communist and fascist regimes on moral grounds, although he still argued that it would be unfair to entirely ignore such

²⁶ 'Contribution d'Aron', 307, 308.

²⁷ 'Contribution d'Aron', 308.

considerations.²⁸ In a passage that probably reflected the influence of recently published accounts of political persecution in the Soviet Union, Aron now admitted that the USSR was capable of the same kind of cynical realism as fascist regimes.²⁹ His consideration of the impact of the totalitarian state on personal and political liberties was correspondingly more sympathetic than had earlier been the case when he had described the liberal perspective on totalitarianism as sentimental.³⁰

Aron's earlier criticism of Halévy had been consistent with his developing epistemological reflection, which was then moving towards a position of interpretative pluralism influenced by his reading of Max Weber. He had never denied the legitimacy of categorising the various totalitarianisms together from a liberal perspective; he had only argued that such a perspective missed the point that had been essential for him at the time: the radically opposed value orientations of the left- and right-wing totalitarianisms. One of the consequences of this earlier, more socialistic interpretation had been to regard communism and fascism as ideological enemies of the first order whilst relegating the mutual anti-liberalism of the left- and right-wing totalitarianisms to an ideological opposition of secondary importance. By 1939, however, the value orientation of Aron's anti-totalitarianism had shifted significantly. The early indications of this change in his review of 'L'ère des tyrannies' were confirmed in the first major statement of his own theory of totalitarianism, given in a presentation to the Société française de philosophie in June 1939. Here Aron placed the anti-liberalism of the totalitarian states centre stage and no longer made any substantial case for the moral superiority of Soviet communism.³¹ This marked a decisive shift in his thinking about totalitarianism. That Aron had now moved away from his earlier socialistic interpretation and towards a liberal position became clear from early on in his presentation as he rejected the economic explanation of fascist imperialist

²⁸ Aron, 'L'ère des tyrannies d'Élie Halévy', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XLVI (avril, 1939) 283-307, 304.

²⁹ 'L'ère des tyrannies d'Élie Halévy', 304. For contemporary descriptions of persecution in the USSR see e.g. André Gide, *Retour de l'URSS* (Paris, 1936); Boris Souvarine, *Cauchemar en URSS* (Paris, 1937); Victor Serge, *S'il est minuit dans le siècle* (Paris, 1939). Aron refers to these and other similar texts in *Mémoires*, 102, 355-356, 721.

³⁰ 'L'ère des tyrannies d'Élie Halévy', 305.

³¹ Aron, 'États démocratiques et états totalitaires' [1939] in Aron, *Penser la liberté, penser la démocratie* (Paris, 2005), 57-106.

ambitions and presented a functionalist account of fascist anti-communism that differed significantly from his earlier essentialist explanation. Now he argued that the German and Italian regimes were primarily anti-liberal rather than anti-communist, even positing the desirability of an international fascist-communist alliance from the fascist point of view.³²

Although Aron did not include the USSR in his comparative account of democracy and totalitarianism at the Société française de philosophie in 1939, by this stage it is clear that he was motivated primarily by political concerns relating to the immediacy of the threat of war against Germany. Whereas in the early months of the Popular Front he had pronounced the ‘sentimental’ liberal interpretation of totalitarianism legitimate but of secondary relevance, on the eve of the Second World War his analysis shifted into an unreservedly liberal position. For Aron, what now separated totalitarian and democratic states was the contempt of the former for the liberal values of respect for the dignity of the individual and the rejection of arbitrary unlimited government.³³ In stressing the anti-liberalism of these regimes over their anti-communism, Aron had effectively abandoned precisely the reasoning that had earlier led him to reject Halévy’s equivalent categorisation of the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. That Aron no longer subscribed to his previous position on this issue may be confirmed by referring to an unfinished book on modern Machiavellianism that he had been working on since the spring of 1937. Here not only did Aron assert the fundamentally anti-liberal character of totalitarian regimes, but he also referred openly to the USSR in these terms, using the example of Kerensky’s Russia to illustrate an infiltrational model for the transition from democracy to totalitarianism which he contrasted with the electoral route followed in Germany.³⁴ Thus on the eve of the Second World War Aron demonstrably categorised the USSR as a totalitarian regime in private but continued to discuss totalitarianism in public as a fascist phenomenon for reasons of political sensitivity rather than out of moral or scientific conviction.

³² ‘États démocratiques’, 63-64.

³³ ‘États démocratiques’, 70, 79.

³⁴ This work was published posthumously as Aron, ‘Essais sur le Machiavélisme moderne’ in *Machiavel*, 59-154. See in particular pages 123-125, 147-148.

Such an understanding of the political orientation of Aron's early writing on totalitarianism contradicts the view that he did not arrive at liberal anti-totalitarianism until the Cold War. The latter view arguably exaggerates the extent of Aron's moral accommodation of communism and rests on an assumption that he was closer to the mainstream of progressive French intellectual politics than was actually the case. Aron was in fact an increasingly marginal and critical figure with regard to the progressive intelligentsia following his return from Germany. As we have seen in chapter one, between 1933 and 1939 he had repeatedly rejected the Left/Right dichotomy, withheld his support from the Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes, backed the Blum government's policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War while attacking its economic policy, and criticised the Manichean tendencies of French intellectuals of all political persuasions.³⁵ His presentation to the Société française de philosophie in 1939 is especially significant because it integrated some of these criticisms into a broader theory of totalitarianism.

In this presentation Aron drew upon France's recent past to consider the risks of totalitarianism developing out of the clash of contradictory social forces within a democratic society. Here he criticised what he regarded as the demagoguery of the anti-fascist movement for provoking a rise in pro-fascist sentiment and contributing to an intensifying and mutually reinforcing political polarisation that might prepare the ground for a fascist coup. Echoing the sentiments he had expressed in his critical article on the Popular Front in 1937, Aron placed a substantial emphasis on the damaging role of French intellectuals in exacerbating this trend by effectively acting as propagandists contributing to the seemingly exponential intensification and polarisation of political culture.³⁶ By now Aron's explanation for the potential drifting of democracy into totalitarianism had shifted far from the materialist, class-based interpretation that he had suggested three years earlier and come to occupy an idealist position which emphasised the importance of political culture and the influence of intellectuals in shaping it. A renewed French democracy would, he argued, require a different kind of intellectual engagement characterised by political restraint, the

³⁵ See page 47-54 above.

³⁶ 'États démocratiques', 67-68,

resistance of ideological propaganda-mongering, and a dedication to exploring the concrete problems faced by French society and the realistic possibilities for resolving them.³⁷

This emphasis that Aron placed on political culture as a decisive factor in accelerating or resisting the tendency for malfunctioning mass democracies to slide towards totalitarianism is symptomatic of an important difference between his theory of totalitarianism and the prototype theory of Élie Halévy. Aron's most significant departure from Halévy was to reject the latter's emphasis on the determining influence of the First World War in bringing about the rise of the new tyrannies. Instead, Aron suggested that the war had served as a catalyst for the development of tendencies pregnant within mass democratic societies since the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁸ In this respect his analysis of totalitarianism was partly rooted in a conservative German tradition of reflection on this issue. Whereas Halévy's examination of the organisation of enthusiasm had emphasised the influence of the First World War in the development of the kind of mass propaganda techniques that the fascist and communist dictatorships had subsequently adapted to their radical ends, Aron's treatment of the issue extended beyond the technical domain to consider the deeper historical reasons for the receptivity of the populaces of mass democracies to totalitarian propaganda.³⁹ The theory of secular religion was the eventual product of his reflection on this issue.

³⁷ 'États démocratiques', 71. Aron would return to this theme in his writings after the Second World War when he emphasised the importance of the social function of independent-minded, impartial intellectuals as an essential condition for the effective functioning of a modern democratic society. See Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique* (Paris, 1997), 133-134. These remarks were made in 1952 during Aron's posthumously published lectures at the École nationale d'administration.

³⁸ 'L'ère des tyrannies d'Élie Halévy', 292.

³⁹ Halévy, 'L'ère des tyrannies', 214, 220-221.

III. ARON'S EARLY WRITING ON POLITICAL AND SECULAR RELIGION

Although Aron did not formulate the beginnings of a systematic analysis of political religion until 1941, he began to use religious metaphor in a descriptive way in a variety of scattered remarks about right- and, more rarely, left-wing totalitarian regimes from the mid-1930s. In his aforementioned presentation at the Centre de documentation sociale, Aron described National Socialism as a “*religion temporelle*” and in his review article on Élie Halévy’s *L’ère des tyrannies* he used the term “*religion politique*” to describe Nazism.⁴⁰ In his unfinished book on modern Machiavellianism, written between 1937 and May 1940, Aron referred to all three totalitarian regimes as “*religions élémentaires et fanatiques*”.⁴¹ Aron used religious metaphor in relation to Marxism for the first time in 1937 when he claimed that it transformed philosophy into dogma and a legitimate faith – moderate socialism - into fanaticism.⁴² Whilst these isolated remarks were by no means organised into a unified theory, the various contexts in which Aron used religious metaphor do point towards what would be an ongoing eclecticism in his application of the terms political and, later, secular religion. This eclecticism is itself significant. It has been criticised by scholars participating in the revival of studies in political and secular religion since the end of the Cold War who have largely regarded it as inconsistency deriving from the relatively underdeveloped conceptualisation of religion implicit in Aron’s understanding of secular religion.⁴³ In this respect Aron’s writing in this area has been unfavourably compared to the German protestant philosopher Eric Voegelin’s gnostic theory of political religion.⁴⁴ What

⁴⁰ ‘Une révolution anti-prolétarienne’, 43, 55; ‘*L’ère des tyrannies* d’Élie Halévy’, 306.

⁴¹ ‘Essais sur le Machiavélisme moderne’, 118.

⁴² Aron, ‘L’idéologie’, *Recherches philosophiques*, VI (1937), 65-84, 79-80.

⁴³ This critique reappears in virtually every discussion of Aron’s theory of secular religion across all three volumes of Maier (ed.) *Totalitarianism*, for instance. See Maier, ‘Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships’, 204; Hans Maier, ‘Introduction’ in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume two), 3-4, 4; Klaus-Georg Riegel, ‘Marxism-Leninism as political religion’ in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume two), 61-112, 62. Also in volume two see Riegel’s comments in the concluding discussions on page 114 and comments by Harald Seubert in the same discussion on page 167. See too Hans Otto Seitschek, ‘The interpretation of totalitarianism as religion’ in Maier (ed.) *Totalitarianism* (volume three), 121-163, 143; Harald Seubert, ‘Recalling the ‘engaged observer’ in changed times: on Raymond Aron as a theoretician of totalitarianism and the global nuclear situation’ in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume three), 283-329, esp. 296-298.

⁴⁴ Constantin Iordachi, ‘Introduction’ in Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 1-50, 35-39.

these scholars failed to adequately recognise, however, was the polemical context in which Aron's writing on political and secular religion were increasingly framed. To describe Nazism, Fascism or Marxism in religious terms was not only to theorise, but also to delegitimise them for a French audience. Thus whilst Aron did produce the beginnings of a substantial theory of secular religion in some of his wartime articles for *La France libre*, this polemical dimension was a background presence which moved into the foreground once the war was over and Aron came increasingly to subordinate the demands of theoretical rigour and consistency to those of polemical effectiveness.

The eclecticism of Aron's references to political and secular religions also partly reflects the variety of sources from which he appears to have drawn in developing his theory. For all that he is viewed as a pioneer of such notions, it is worth remembering that more optimistic variants of the theory of secular religion had been prominent in the history of modern French political thought since Rousseau expounded on the need for a civil religion in *Du contrat social*.⁴⁵ Although variously reincarnated in republican political and social thought thereafter, especially within the positivist tradition, French liberalism had tended to be sceptical towards such schemes.⁴⁶ Thus, by writing about secular religions in a pessimistic register, it might be expected that Aron drew upon the works of Alexis de Tocqueville, the original theorist of the sacralisation of politics.⁴⁷ But Aron had yet to study Tocqueville when he began to reflect on this issue.⁴⁸ This is not to say that his critical use of religious metaphor was uninformed by French liberal predecessors. Albert Thibaudet, the famous literary critic turned political commentator for *La nouvelle revue française*, was one such figure who repeatedly foreshadowed Aron's critical application of religious metaphor during the early to mid-1930s.⁴⁹ Aside from Thibaudet, however, the

⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (Paris, [1762] 1966), 170-180.

⁴⁶ See especially Auguste Comte's religion of humanity as well as the Durkheimian concern with sociology as a potential substitute for religion in matters of public morality. Both of these are discussed in Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris, 1967), 77-140, 317-405.

⁴⁷ Emilio Gentile, 'The sacralisation of politics: definitions, interpretations and reflections on the question of secular religion and totalitarianism' in Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 257-289, 272.

⁴⁸ Aron's first substantial interaction with Tocqueville came in the mid-1950s, see Aron, 'Discours de Raymond Aron lors de la réception du Prix Tocqueville', *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*, 2 (winter, 1980), 117-121, 120.

⁴⁹ In October 1934, for instance, Thibaudet wrote that "*le communisme et le fascisme ont acquis en Europe une force d'expansion qu'on ne peut comparer qu'à celle des religions, ou plutôt qui appartient bien*

predecessors from whom Aron drew in his reflection on political religion tended to be individuals more or less closely associated with fascism.

Aron's earliest descriptive uses of religious metaphor in relation to totalitarian political movements applied to both their propaganda techniques and the unprecedented extent of the intrusiveness of totalitarian ideology into the private and spiritual lives of the populations subjected to it.⁵⁰ In a general sense, Aron's reflection on the manipulation of populations via the propaganda apparatus of cynical governing elites was rooted in his study of the neo-Machiavellian elite theories of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca.⁵¹ But in applying this analysis to Marxism in particular and using religious metaphor to describe communist propaganda technique, Aron repeated the analyses of the conservative philosopher of history Oswald Spengler and the Belgian neo-socialist and future fascist Hendrik de Man. Thus Spengler, whom Aron studied whilst preparing his doctoral theses had written that:

Marxism too is a religion, not in the intention of its originator, but in what the revolutionary following has made of it. It has its saints, apostles and martyrs, its church fathers, bible, its mission; it has dogmas, courts for heretics, an orthodoxy and scholasticism. Above all, it possesses a popular morality, or, more precisely, two: one pertaining to believers and one pertaining to unbelievers. Yet this is something that only a church of some kind would have.⁵²

Hendrik de Man, whose influence will be considered in more detail later, met Aron in Germany.⁵³ In his book *Au delà du marxisme*, which was very positively reviewed by Aron for *Libres propos* in 1931, de Man had stated that "Marxist doctrine ... has come to play a part analogous to that played by religious rites in a church that has gained temporal power.

à l'ordre religieux, qui tend à superposer demain des guerres de religion à des guerres politiques". Albert Thibaudet, 'Réflexions', *La nouvelle revue française*, 22 (décembre, 1934), 894-900, 898-899. That Aron had met and read Thibaudet since the late 1920s has been established by Richard Gowan in his article 'Raymond Aron, the history of ideas and the idea of France', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2 (2003), 383-399.

⁵⁰ 'Essais sur le Machiavélisme moderne', 117-118.

⁵¹ 'L'idéologie', 65-84; 'Essais sur le Machiavélisme moderne', 84-118.

⁵² Quoted in the lexicographical survey in Maier (ed.), *Totalitarianism* (volume 3), 347. Aron was working on another book that would have treated Spengler in detail on the eve of the Second World War, but this project was abandoned. See *Mémoires*, 112-113.

⁵³ Aron, 'Henri de Man: *Au delà du marxisme*', *Contrepoint*, 16 ([1931]1975), 161-169, 166-169.

Whereas it used to be the motive force of action, it has now become nothing more than an auxiliary means of propaganda”.⁵⁴

Some of Aron’s earliest applications of religious metaphor are also used to describe the intensity of the emotions that totalitarian movements were capable of arousing in their believers. What is interesting here is the emphasis that he placed on the mobilisation of political hostility towards a common enemy and his reference to religiosity to identify when that hostility has reached its most extreme point.⁵⁵ Here again it is likely that Aron’s use of religious metaphor was informed by German conservative thought, in this instance Carl Schmitt’s definitions of the political as the distinction between friend and enemy and of political concepts as secularised theological concepts.⁵⁶

Published in July 1941, Aron’s first efforts towards a systematic theorisation of political religion also exhibit Schmittian characteristics. In an article for *La France libre* entitled ‘Bureaucratie et Fanatisme’ Aron described how National Socialism had successfully channelled a pre-existing irrationalist revolt against the disorienting and isolating effects of rationalisation on interpersonal relations. Nazism presented the ideal of a mythic community based on a form of social relations that seemed an exact opposite to the atomised dislocation of bureaucratised working life and had consequently succeeded in mobilising masses of individuals by appealing to their nostalgia for a lost community. The idealised new community of National Socialist propaganda, however, was cemented through the identification of a common enemy:

À ces hommes résolus à agir, lutter, marcher ensemble, on désigne un ennemi, principe de tout le mal, sur lequel s’épancheront les réserves de haine et de ressentiment, toujours

⁵⁴ Henry de Man, *The Psychology of Socialism* (London, [1927] 1928), 20. This was originally published as *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* in 1927, and the French translation, with its title amended to *Au delà du marxisme*, was published in 1929.

⁵⁵ ‘Une révolution anti-prolétarienne’, 43, 55.

⁵⁶ Aron referred to Schmitt during the discussion following his presentation to the Société française de philosophie in 1939 - see ‘États démocratiques’, 105. For a detailed account of Aron’s reading of and relationship with Carl Schmitt see note 55 on page 45 of chapter one above. For Schmitt on the friend/enemy distinction see Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago and London, 1996), 26. On political concepts as secularised theological concepts see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge Mass. and London, 1985), 36.

disponibles dans les masses malheureuses, on présente un prophète sur lequel on concentrera les trésors de confiance et de ferveur que recèle le cœur des hommes, on propose un petit nombre de principes sociaux simples, répondant aux revendications immédiates et aux aspirations profondes des collectivités, primat de l'intérêt général, travail et justice pour tous, etc. Ainsi naît une religion politique.⁵⁷

By emphasising the way in which National Socialism had channelled deep-seated emotional trends that had emerged in reaction against the advance of modernity over a period of many decades, Aron shifted away from Halévy's conceptualisation of the organisation of enthusiasm as a function of war mobilisation, arguing for the gradual emergence of politics as a surrogate vehicle for impulses previously channelled through religion:

À notre époque, les croyances politiques servent parfois de substitut aux croyances proprement religieuses, ou encore les sentiments religieux, sans emploi lorsque la foi a disparu, entretiennent et transfigurent les convictions politiques. La connaissance scientifique du monde progresse, l'organisation rationnelle de la société se perfectionne, mais l'homme ordinaire comprend souvent d'autant moins les mécanismes sociaux que ceux-ci sont techniquement plus subtils, et les malheurs qui le frappent, crise, chômage, guerre lui restent tout aussi mystérieux que les phénomènes cosmiques. Dès lors, les religions politiques avec leur livre sacré, avec leur diable et leurs saints, leurs interprétations historiques et leurs prophéties, ne sont paradoxales qu'en apparence: elles expriment la révolte contre un destin que l'on ne comprend pas, elles recueillent les ferveurs sans objet.⁵⁸

Aron's first full article dedicated to what he now termed secular rather than political religion was published in July 1944 with the liberation of France already underway.⁵⁹ This new context is reflected in the more expansive way that Aron here used religious metaphor to describe both radical political ideologies of the right and – with a greater emphasis now for the first time – radical ideologies of the left.⁶⁰ The change in terminology to secular

⁵⁷ Aron, 'Bureaucratie et fanatisme' [1941] in Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans* (New York, 1944), 68-88, 79. See also Aron, 'Du renouvellement des élites' [décembre, 1943] in Aron, *L'âge des empires et l'avenir de la France* (Paris, 1945), 87-119, 113: "... à mesure que décline la foi religieuse, la politique est devenue le lieu des ferveurs et des espérances, souvent même celui des suprêmes croyances".

⁵⁸ 'Bureaucratie et fanatisme', 79-80. This analysis is reprised in Aron, 'Du renouvellement des élites' [novembre - décembre, 1943] in *L'âge des empires*, 87-119, 113.

⁵⁹ Aron, 'L'avenir des religions séculières' [juillet, 1944] in *Chroniques de guerre: 'La France Libre', 1940-1945* (Paris, 1990), 925-948. Aron is commonly regarded as having coined the term 'secular religion' in this article, but, as Emilio Gentile has shown, the expression had been in use since the early 1930s. See Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton, 2006), 1-2.

⁶⁰ 'L'avenir des religions séculières', 926-930, 932-933, 941.

from political religion also reflected a shift in emphasis away from the long-term historical factors leading to the initial emergence of political religions as vehicles for a flight from modernity and towards a more marked concern with the future of secular religion in the context of post-war France. Whilst Aron's notion of secular religion has been criticised for being oxymoronic,⁶¹ this new choice of words was most probably made deliberately for this very reason. Aron regarded French intellectuals as being particularly susceptible to political religions of the left because of the diffuse cultural influence of the Jacobin tradition, which both normalised the idea of civil religion and encouraged a sense of revolution as a privileged agent of political change and human emancipation. Although this was an idea that he would not fully develop until *L'opium des intellectuels* in 1955, Aron had begun to target this influence of Jacobinism on French political culture in his presentation to the Société française de philosophie in June 1939.⁶² The use of the oxymoronic expression 'secular religion' was probably designed to counter the sense that left-wing revolutionary politics could be seen as a legitimate heir to the national republican tradition by implicitly referencing another aspect of that tradition – anti-clericalism and the separation of church and state – to suggest the absurdity of political religion in the context of modern France. As a corollary of this negative argument, Aron offered a positive redefinition the French national political tradition by adapting Albert Thibaudet's notion of the "*République des idées*" to promote a vision of intellectual pluralism as the defining principle of a healthy French political culture.⁶³ The purpose of this ostensibly inclusive definition was in the first instance to de-legitimise the Pétain regime, but it was also a vision that in the longer term could be used against the PCF.⁶⁴ Aron's adaptation of Thibaudet made sense in this context because Thibaudet's own positive promotion of intellectual and political pluralism had also been coupled with a negative appraisal of the Manichean tendency within French political culture and the aggravating influence of intellectuals in this regard.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in making this appraisal, Thibaudet too had made polemical recourse to religious metaphor.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Riegel, 'Marxism-Leninism as political religion', 62.

⁶² See especially Aron's debate with the then President of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, Victor Basch, in 'États démocratiques', 79-85.

⁶³ Aron, 'De la liberté politique' [avril, 1942] in *L'homme*, 343-364.

⁶⁴ Gowan, 'Raymond Aron, the history of ideas and the idea of France', 392.

⁶⁵ Thus in 1919 Thibaudet had written that "*L'intelligence française, dans cet état de mobilisation permanente, risquerait bientôt non seulement de ne plus être l'intelligence, mais de ne plus être française*". Quoted in Michel Leymarie, *Albert Thibaudet: l'outsider du dedans* (Villeneuve-d'Asq, 2006), 167-168. He

Aron's discussion of socialism as a secular religion in 1944 drew a number of parallels with secular religions of the far right. First, both used similar mass propaganda techniques, although in socialism there had historically been an emphasis on propaganda as education, whilst Nazi propaganda had been conceived as indoctrination.⁶⁷ A second similarity was that both types of secular religion offered their believers membership of a fraternal community defined in Manichean terms through irreducible opposition to an external enemy.⁶⁸ Finally, both forms of secular religion were doctrines of collective, temporal salvation attached to comprehensive philosophies of history. In this final respect the emergence of secular religion had marked the definitive crossing of the moral threshold that the traditional Christian separation of celestial and terrestrial existence had served to maintain. Through the relocation of a replacement kingdom of heaven onto the horizon of human history and the promise of collective terrestrial salvation, secular religions had exploded the moral separation of means and ends, justifying any and all means by the unassailable justification of the final goal.⁶⁹ This new eschatological dimension to Aron's theory bears close resemblance to Hendrik de Man's social psychology of Marxism, which treated its subject as displacing Christianity as the privileged object of an eschatological hope deeply rooted in Judaeo-Christian culture, and criticised the resulting inclination to justify any means towards the final end of socialism.⁷⁰ The eschatological aspect of Aron's writing on secular religion would become more prominent as his focus shifted increasingly towards Soviet totalitarianism from 1944 onwards, culminating in *L'opium des intellectuels* in 1955, whose polemical attack on the triple mythology of the Revolution, the Left, and

considered that the Dreyfus Affair had produced "*une démocratie de professeurs*" whose "*dreyfusisme éternel*" exacerbated the Manicheanism of French political culture. Albert Thibaudet, *La république des professeurs* (Paris, 1927), 106, 150-178, 231-232; Leymarie, *Albert Thibaudet*, 167-174, 196-200, 208.

⁶⁶ In addition to his remarks from 1934 cited earlier, Thibaudet also wrote that "*L'idéologie radicale, soit la France considérée comme la France de la Révolution, la Révolution tenue pour la mystique et la religion de la France*". Albert Thibaudet, *Les idées politiques de la France* (Paris, 1932), 235-236. Two years earlier he had described the Dreyfus Affair as "*notre dernière guerre de religion*". See Leymarie, *Albert Thibaudet*, 170.

⁶⁷ 'L'avenir des religions séculières', 931-932.

⁶⁸ 'L'avenir des religions séculières', 932.

⁶⁹ 'L'avenir des religions séculières', 932-933.

⁷⁰ De Man, *Psychology of Socialism*, 110-111, 125-166.

the proletariat also echoed de Man's argument that such notions functioned primarily as mythical symbols.⁷¹

In 'L'avenir des religions séculières' Aron describes secular religion as ideology operating at a maximum of political intensity such that it takes on a religious character. For socialist forms of secular religion, however, he argued that this level of political intensity had been harder to maintain than had been the case with National Socialism, referring to the separation of social democracy and communism in the early 1920s as an illustration of this point. Whereas social democracy had evolved in an increasingly moderate, reformist direction since then, communist parties, nourished by their fundamental double hostility to both capitalist democracy and their erstwhile social democratic colleagues, had maintained ideological intensity of a religious nature. The proof of this had been the rigid party discipline of communists through a succession of brazen political volte faces from the abandonment of the hard line class war rhetoric of the later 1920s in favour of the united left anti-fascism of the mid-1930s to falling in line behind the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact before returning to broad-based anti-fascism in 1941. This degree of party loyalty suggested a continuing devotion to the movement that was religious in its intensity.⁷² For much of this discussion Aron had been referring explicitly to the Parti communiste français and, whilst he moderated his language and acknowledged the heroic contributions of communists to the resistance, he nevertheless presented the PCF as a potential long-term threat to the recovery of French democracy. He did this by using a veiled argument emphasising the continued religiosity of communist political commitment in a general sense without suggesting that the PCF had immediate anti-democratic designs; since the test of religiosity had been precisely the unquestioning loyalty of French communists to the PCF and of the PCF to the USSR, the implication here was that French communists could not necessarily be relied upon in the long term to act in the interests of French democracy.⁷³

⁷¹ De Man, *Psychology of Socialism*, 142-166. For Aron's eschatological interpretation of Marxism see e.g. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris, [1955] 2002), 78, 82, 96-97.

⁷² 'L'avenir des religions séculières', 938-941.

⁷³ 'L'avenir des religions séculières', 941. Aron restated this argument more explicitly in December 1944 in two articles for *La France libre*. Noting that the PCF appeared committed to national renewal and had so far exercised the kind of restraint necessary for its integration into post-war French democracy, he expressed cautious optimism that this state of affairs would persist, but suggested that the PCF's continued adherence to a secular religion meant that its commitment to democratic methods could not be taken for

A crucial determining factor in this regard would be what Aron here described as “*l’hypothèse d’une intervention extérieure*”, in other words, the post-war strategy adopted by the leadership of the Soviet Union.⁷⁴ It was in reaction to the subsequent development of that strategy and its implications for French domestic politics that Aron’s anti-totalitarianism and the role of his theory of secular religion within it evolved rapidly in a polemical and militantly anti-communist direction after the Second World War.

IV. *THE EMERGENCE OF A COLD WARRIOR*

Aron’s guarded comments about the potential dangers posed by the PCF in post-war France in the second half of 1944 suggest that the view that he did not regard either the PCF or the USSR as posing a meaningful threat to rebuilding a post-war democratic order during 1944-46 is incorrect.⁷⁵ Although for the remainder of 1944 to late 1945 Aron did not adopt an overtly anti-communist stance and promoted a neutralist international position for France in relation to the USA and Soviet Union, his reasons for doing so were dictated by the political sensitivity of the issue which he regarded as being so divisive as to potentially risk leading France into civil war.⁷⁶ Aron’s urging of restraint during the political purges that accompanied the demise of the Vichy regime were similarly motivated by a concern to ensure conditions favourable to national reconciliation.⁷⁷ However, whilst he maintained a consistent position on this latter issue, Aron’s commitment to French neutralism soon began to weaken.

granted. See Aron, ‘Révolution et rénovation’ [décembre, 1944] in *L’âge des empires*, 209-236, 215; Aron, ‘Signification des problèmes français’ [décembre, 1944] in *L’âge des empires*, 237-251, 241-243.

⁷⁴ ‘L’avenir des religions séculières’, 941.

⁷⁵ Stuart L. Campbell has put forward this argument in ‘Raymond Aron: The Making of a Cold Warrior’, *Historian*, 4 (August, 1989), 551-573, 551-552.

⁷⁶ Aron, ‘Introduction’ in *L’âge des empires*, 7-27, 12-18. It should, however, be acknowledged that Aron had yet to entirely abandon his moral bi-focalism regarding Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism at this stage: “*L’Union soviétique, qui provisoirement recourt à des moyens qui nous répugnant, du moins invoque un idéal universel. Quand elle aura surmonté la pauvreté, elle renoncera peut-être à certains procédés de contrainte et de violence, à l’aide desquels elle a édifié son économie*”. ‘Introduction’, 24. He later attacked this view in Aron, ‘La société soviétique et l’avenir de la liberté’, *Preuves*, 80 (octobre, 1957), 33-40.

⁷⁷ Aron, ‘La désagrégation du régime de Vichy’ [1943] in *De l’armistice à l’insurrection nationale* (Paris, 1945), 239-250; Aron, ‘Garanties de la liberté’ [octobre, 1944] in *L’âge des empires*, 151-166, 158.

A year on from the liberation of France, Aron's equivocal commitment to neutralism began to slip as he became increasingly mistrustful of the direction in which Soviet diplomacy appeared to be evolving. Since 1944 he had identified the importance of gauging the international intentions of the USSR in order to judge the position of the PCF in French political life. Now his rising concerns about the intentions of the USSR translated into an increased readiness to criticise the PCF whose attitude towards the political purges in France he likened to those of pro-Soviet groups then using a less than discriminate form of violent political retribution to prepare the ground for communism in Eastern Europe.⁷⁸ In an article written before the October 1945 elections to the Constituent Assembly but published in *Les temps modernes* in November, Aron further criticised the PCF, alluding to its questionable long-term loyalty to the French national interest in the light of its history of obedience to the demands of the international policy of the USSR.⁷⁹ In this article, he contrasted the positions of the SFIO and PCF: the former was committed to the intellectual and personal liberties that were indispensable components of the national political tradition which in turn tied France to the 'Western family'; the latter were cynically realist, brutal and obsessed by the model of the USSR to whose cause they were loyally devoted.⁸⁰ While Aron's attitude towards the PCF hardened, he softened his position on Gaullism, which he had earlier presented as potentially fascistic, such that by the eve of the elections he was arguing for a coalition between Socialists and Gaullists.⁸¹ After the PCF polled twenty-five percent in the October elections, Aron further hardened his tone, describing France as undergoing a struggle between defenders of freedom and pluralism against the totalitarian designs of the Communists.⁸² Whilst he was initially sympathetic to the difficult political situation in which the strength of the PCF had left the Socialists, by April of 1946 he had declared himself an anti-communist and argued for an end to tripartite government, accepting the likelihood that excluding the PCF from the government would split the SFIO. As the year wore on he became critical of the Socialist party's unwillingness to break with

⁷⁸ Aron, 'Les désillusions de la liberté', *Les temps modernes*, I (octobre, 1945), 76-105, 81.

⁷⁹ Aron, 'La chance du socialisme', *Les temps modernes*, I (novembre, 1945), 227-247, 232, 237.

⁸⁰ 'La chance du socialisme', 234, 236-239, 245.

⁸¹ Compare Aron, 'L'ombre des Bonapartes' [1943] in *L'âge des empires*, 67-84 and 'La chance du socialisme', 244-247.

⁸² See Campbell, 'The making of a cold warrior', 563. Unless stated otherwise, the remaining narrative of Aron's evolution towards militant anti-communism is owes a significant debt to this article by Campbell.

the PCF and form an alliance with the Mouvement républicain populaire in order to check the totalitarian ambitions of the Communists.

Aron's position against the French Communists further hardened in late 1946 when, reintroducing polemical religious metaphor, he described the PCF as a semi-warlike sect intent upon colonising the state with a view towards establishing total and radically partisan control.⁸³ However, whilst his anti-communism had become increasingly explicit and hostile since the elections in late 1945, Aron's fragile commitment to French neutralism, which he continued to regard as an unfortunate but unavoidable consequence of internal French political divisions, remained. This changed, however, soon after the announcement of the Marshall Plan in April 1947. Whilst he would later deny that his decision to join the atlanticist ranks of *Le Figaro* instead of the neutralist *Le Monde* in June of that year was deliberately symbolic of his definitive taking of sides in the emerging Cold War, this was certainly the consequence in effect, if not in intention, of the initiation of Aron's longstanding association with France's best-selling conservative newspaper.⁸⁴ His earliest articles in *Le Figaro* centred on the international and domestic implications of Marshall aid. For Aron, the Marshall Plan represented the salvation of France and Western Europe and its opposition by the USSR confirmed the latter's position as a hostile enemy state. The support of the PCF for the Soviet position confirmed the Communists' status as traitors serving the interests of an enemy state with the intention of making France into a satellite of the USSR.⁸⁵ Henceforth Aron's anti-communism, now militant, radical and systematic, would take precedence over his earlier concern for maintaining what remained of the fragile unity of the Resistance.

In 1948 Aron published *Le grand schisme*, his interpretation of the new Cold War whose significance he famously encapsulated in the phrase "*paix impossible, guerre*

⁸³ See Campbell, 'The making of a cold warrior', 565-566.

⁸⁴ *Spectateur*, 135-136; *Mémoires*, 217-218.

⁸⁵ Aron, 'Pour convaincre l'opinion américaine' [1/10/47] in Aron, *Les Articles du Figaro. Tome I: La Guerre Froide, 1947-1955* (Paris, 1990), 50-53. See also from the same volume: 'Le plan Marshall est-il artificiel?' [4/10/47], 54-57; 'Maurice Thorez bat sa coulpe' [8/11/47], 61-64; 'La tactique du Kominform' [28/11/47], 68-71; 'La tactique de résistance' [2/12/47], 71-74; 'Vers un nouveau reniement?' [10/12/47], 75-78; 'Bilan' [12/12/47], 79-82 etc.

improbable".⁸⁶ Judging that the Soviet Union would use any means short of open warfare to destabilise West European democracies, he suggested that in the likely absence of war a bellicose peace characterised by incessant communist propaganda, sabotage and infiltration would reign over Western Europe. In these circumstances, he repeatedly claimed, communist parties had to be regarded as fifth columns.⁸⁷ Aron was especially preoccupied with the susceptibility of fellow-travelling French intellectuals to communist propaganda propagating the myth of a united anti-fascist Left and exploiting their inherent weakness for verbal revolutionary posturing.⁸⁸ Expanding on this theme in *Les guerres en chaîne*, Aron presented the USSR as prosecuting a "*quasi-guerre*" in which it sought to contaminate the West with its ideology, deliberately targeting intellectuals as part of its long-term strategy of conquest.⁸⁹ What separated Soviet imperialism from Nazi imperialism, he had earlier argued, was not the scope of its ambition, but its patience in the pursuit of its global objective.⁹⁰ The bellicose peace was in fact a propaganda war:

L'Union Soviétique emploie effectivement, même durant la prétendue paix, toutes les techniques de propagande, de sabotage, d'infiltration ... On doit livrer cette guerre que l'agression stalinienne nous impose et les moyens militaires ne sont qu'une des armes de ce combat polymorphe. Les militaires de l'Occident ne sont pas dégagés suffisamment des conceptions traditionnelles, ils continuent de se demander s'il y aura la guerre, alors que celle-ci fait rage chaque jour. La bataille contre la propagande et le noyautage doit être livrée infatigablement ...⁹¹

By the end of 1947 Aron was fully committed to fighting this propaganda war. The vast majority of his work thereafter reflected the view, famously expressed in *L'opium des intellectuels*, that "*toute action, au milieu du vingtième siècle, suppose et entraîne une prise de position à l'égard de l'entreprise soviétique*".⁹² This was particularly apparent in his application of the terms 'totalitarianism' and 'secular religion', which he used predominantly in relation to communism from 1947 onwards. While this did not require a substantial change of approach - as we have seen, Aron's earlier reluctance to describe the

⁸⁶ Aron, *Le grand schisme* (Paris, 1948), 13.

⁸⁷ *Le grand schisme*, 34-38, 143-144, 235-236, 252.

⁸⁸ *Le grand schisme*, 110, 175, 223-224.

⁸⁹ Aron, *Les guerres en chaîne* (Paris, 1951), 106, 172.

⁹⁰ *Le grand schisme*, 31.

⁹¹ *Les guerres en chaîne*, 302.

⁹² *L'opium*, 66.

USSR as a totalitarian regime had been predominantly motivated by political realism - his Cold War writing on these themes largely subordinated the demands of theoretical rigour to those of polemical effectiveness. As will be described below, this entailed adapting the language of anti-totalitarianism to discredit communist attempts at exploiting pacifist and anti-fascist sentiment to the strategic advantage of the USSR.

V. *ANTI-TOTALITARIANISM AND THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF THE ANTI-FASCIST RESISTANCE*

Raymond Aron's application of the concept of totalitarianism evolved considerably between his first reference to it in 1936 and the use that he would eventually come to make of it during the early post-war and Cold War years. Whilst he never fundamentally objected to the term, his earliest comments, as we have seen, reflected the commonplace view that to categorise the USSR alongside Hitler's Germany overlooked the fundamentally different moral orientations of the two regimes, whose use of comparable totalitarian techniques of ruling was thus at best a secondary issue. Although Aron became increasingly sceptical about the USSR in the later 1930s, he mainly restricted his first attempts at a systematic theorisation of totalitarianism in 1939 to the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy for reasons relating to the political sensitivity of the issue in light of the memory of the Popular Front and the anticipation of war. Towards the end of the war Aron slightly relaxed his self-censorship in this regard in his important article on secular religion which alluded to communism as a form of secular religion and comparable as such with National Socialism. Nevertheless, he refrained from openly criticising the PCF and the USSR for much of the first year after the liberation of France because of his concerns about maintaining national unity. This changed quite rapidly from late 1945 onwards when Aron began to openly and repeatedly refer to the USSR as a totalitarian regime and the PCF as its French agent. By 1948 and the publication of *Le grand schisme* he had declared hopes for a reconciled

national community to be dead and joined the Gaullist Rassemblement du Peuple Français.⁹³

Aron's decision to join the RPF, an organisation widely regarded as fascistic on the left and which operated as a major destabilising influence in the young Fourth Republic, is remarkable both in indicating the extent of his Cold War anti-communism and in its contradiction of his own earlier arguments about the role of intellectuals in contributing to a political culture favourable to the smooth functioning of democracy. The association with fascism in particular was significant, not so much because of its debatable accuracy, but because it pointed to one of the key territorial disputes in the emerging intellectual Cold War in Paris: control of the legacy of anti-fascism. The adoption of the rhetoric of anti-totalitarianism by intellectuals such as Aron was largely geared towards associating communism with fascism and presenting anti-communism as a continuation of the anti-fascist resistance of the war years. However, given the prominent role of communists in the Resistance, the prestige of the USSR resulting from its disproportionate contribution to the war effort, and the lingering influence of romanticised memories of the Popular Front movement, the reorientation of anti-totalitarianism in an anti-communist direction met with substantial opposition.

During the early Cold War, one of the most common ways of de-legitimising anti-communism was to associate it with fascism.⁹⁴ Even when anti-communists had strong resistance credentials, as with Aron, the case here, though not honestly put, was not difficult to make. Prior to the liberation, aggressive anti-communism had been the preserve of the far right in France as elsewhere in continental Europe, so communist propaganda associating anti-communism with pro-fascism found a receptive audience among fellow-travelling intellectuals partly owing to its confirmation in recent historical experience. This impression was reinforced by the relatively half-hearted efforts towards de-nazification in the Western controlled zones of Germany and public anger over the perceived leniency of

⁹³ *Le grand schisme*, 174, 304.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur: essai sur le problème communiste* (Paris, 1980), 49.

the legal *épuration* in France.⁹⁵ American support for authoritarian conservatism as a bulwark against communist expansion in Greece also contributed towards the reinforcement of the association of anti-communism with fascism, as did the support of anti-communists for a rapid German recovery once the Cold War had started. Aron recognised the potential of this kind of argument in favour of anti-anti-communism as a surrogate for anti-fascism and repeatedly argued against the fascistic view of the RPF in *Le grand schisme*.⁹⁶ However, his frank admission that the logic of anti-communism implied collaboration with fascists, just as the logic of anti-fascism in the 1930s and earlier 1940s had implied collaboration with communists, provided ammunition for the growing ranks of anti-anti-communist intellectuals among whom Aron's former friends and colleagues at *Les temps modernes* were beginning to take a leading role.⁹⁷

Aside from equating it with pro-fascism, anti-anti-communists could, with a somewhat greater degree of good faith, accuse anti-communist intellectuals of adopting a position that would increase the likelihood of war. Here too communist propaganda played a significant role, the newly formed Cominform reprising its predecessor the Comintern's approach of forming international pacifist front organisations, exploiting genuine fears of a return to war to mobilise widespread pacifist sentiment against the United States.⁹⁸ It was in response to this increasingly successful mobilising of progressive intellectual opinion under the banner of pacifism that the Congress for Cultural Freedom was founded in West Berlin in June 1950.⁹⁹ Covertly funded by the CIA, the Congress for Cultural Freedom coordinated an international attempt to promote the discourse of anti-totalitarianism through a series of high-profile international conferences and the founding of journals such as *Encounter* in the United Kingdom and *Preuves* in France. Aron played the leading role

⁹⁵ Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation* (London, 2006), 344-345.

⁹⁶ *Le grand schisme*, 225-226, 259-60, 267, 317.

⁹⁷ *Le grand schisme*, 92.

⁹⁸ On the communist manipulation of international pacifist movements from the 1930s to the 1950s see Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-1940: From Red Square to the Left Bank*, (London, 2007); Pascal Ory et Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris, 1992), 97-98; David Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation* (Basingstoke, 2005), 112-113; David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Postwar France* (Basingstoke, 2002), 79-80.

⁹⁹ Pierre Grémion, *Intelligence de l'anti-communisme: Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris, 1950-1975* (Paris, 1995), 1-22.

in the founding and direction of the latter publication, which situated itself politically in direct confrontation with the neutralist, philo-communism of *Les temps modernes* and *Esprit*.¹⁰⁰ His presentation to the first meeting of the CCF examined the relationship between neutralism, anti-communism and peace. Rejecting the majority view among the Parisian left intelligentsia that to choose sides in the standoff between the superpowers would be to increase the likelihood of war, Aron argued that neutralism was a form of weakness and indecision comparable to the appeasement of the 1930s. Since the scope of Stalin's imperialist ambitions was ultimately equal to those of Hitler, it was neutralism rather than aggressive anti-communism that carried the greater risk of encouraging a return to war by inviting Soviet aggression.¹⁰¹

The anti-totalitarian counter-propaganda of the CCF was often oriented towards exposing the reality of Soviet repression in Russia and Eastern Europe by publicising the accounts of dissidents and survivors of Soviet labour camps. CCF-affiliated intellectuals thus engaged wholeheartedly in the polemics arising from the Kravchenko and Rousset affairs when libel cases between the communist paper *Les lettres françaises* and the authors of books exposing the presence of forced labour camps in the USSR effectively put the Soviet Union on public trial for the use of concentration camps. Aron exploited the publicity arising from these trials to push the anti-totalitarian message that despite the anti-fascist posturing of the PCF and USSR, both were directly comparable with the National Socialist Party and Hitler's Germany; indeed, "*Auprès du totalitarisme soviétique*", he wrote in *Les guerres en chaîne*, "*le totalitarisme hitlérien n'était qu'une imitation d'amateurs*".¹⁰² This political exploitation of the controversies arising over the issue of concentration camps in the Soviet Union stands in contrast to Aron's near total silence over this question when it first arose in relation to Nazi Germany. Not only did he not discuss Nazi concentration camps at any length in his writings for *La France libre*, but as a Jewish theorist of totalitarianism his

¹⁰⁰ François Bondy, 'Une revue française pas comme les autres' in Pierre Grémion (dir.) *Preuves: une revue européenne à Paris* (Paris, 1989), 555-574, 556.

¹⁰¹ Aron, 'Neutralité ou engagement?' [1950] in Aron, *Polémiques* (Paris, 1955), 199-217.

¹⁰² *Les guerres en chaîne*, 294. Here Aron's position regarding the comparative extremity of Nazi and Soviet forms of totalitarianism represents a reversal of his view expressed in December 1944 that Nazism presented "[le] totalitarisme sous sa forme la plus extrême". See here 'Signification des problèmes français', 246. On the issue of forced labour camps in the USSR see also *Le grande schisme*, 146-147.

work stands out in comparison to, for example, that of Hannah Arendt, for its total neglect of the issue of anti-Semitism.¹⁰³

One area where continuity between his pre- and post-war writing on totalitarianism was polemically useful was in Aron's references to Vilfredo Pareto, whose theories of ideology and the circulation of elites he had referenced extensively in his accounts of fascism in the late 1930s. Returning to the Italian social theorist in his more polemical writings on totalitarianism from the late 1940s, Aron emphasised Pareto's reputation as a proto-fascist before arguing that the Bolshevik revolution conformed more closely to a Paretian (and by implication fascistic) analysis than a Marxist socialist one.¹⁰⁴ Aron's post-war use of Pareto encapsulates the basic duality of his writing on totalitarianism from 1947 onwards as both comparative political science and a systematic, polemically oriented effort at counter-propaganda aimed at discrediting the reflexive association of communism and anti-fascism in the minds of progressive intellectuals. His Cold War reformulations of the theory of secular religion, also partly informed by the influence of Pareto, similarly combined the polemical and the scientific. It is to this issue that we must now turn by considering the application of religious metaphor in Aron's most famous polemical work, *L'opium des intellectuels*.

¹⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, [1951] 1973), 3-120. Aron discusses his reticence in this regard in *Spectateur*, 97-103. For his comparative critique of Hannah Arendt and Isaac Deutscher's theories of totalitarianism see Aron, 'L'essence du totalitarisme' *Critique*, 80 (1954), 51-70.

¹⁰⁴ *Le grand schisme*, 125-126, 131, 135; *L'opium*, 53, 124. On the development of Aron's reading of Pareto see Stuart L. Campbell, 'The Four Paretos of Raymond Aron', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (April – June, 1986), 287-298.

VI. *L'OPIUM DES INTELLECTUELS AND THE COLD WAR USES OF THE THEORY OF SECULAR RELIGION*

L'opium des intellectuels, published in 1955, completed the post-war anti-communist reorientation of Aron's writing on the themes of totalitarianism and secular religion. In its first section, Aron sought to expose the political myths underpinning the fellow-travelling reluctance to criticise the Soviet Union or the PCF. He attacked the Marxist interpretation of fascism as a development of capitalism to counter the related view that anti-fascist resistance was a phenomenon exclusively of the left. The notion of a united left was itself a political myth exploited by communists when the adoption of a conciliatory approach to social democrats suited the strategic interests of the USSR, a regime which the progressive prejudices of left-wing intellectuals prevented them from recognising as essentially totalitarian.¹⁰⁵ A second political myth that Aron identified as contributing to the fellow-travelling mindset was that of revolution.¹⁰⁶ The intimate relationship between revolution and French national identity made French intellectuals especially tolerant of political violence, and this had been one of the factors contributing towards the readiness of philo-communists to excuse the state violence of the USSR. French tolerance for revolutionary violence prevented intellectuals from perceiving that terror was not simply incidental to the early consolidation of the Soviet regime, but integral to its functioning over the long term, an observation which again suggested commonality between the USSR and Hitler's Germany.¹⁰⁷ Reprising an argument from his presentation to the Société française de philosophie in 1939, Aron argued that whilst democracy might issue from revolution, once established the two phenomena were radically opposed.¹⁰⁸ Attacking the myth of the proletariat as the privileged agent of revolutionary change, he suggested that the occurrence of communist revolution in a democratic society would amount to an historical regression. The loss of formal liberties that this would entail would not, he argued, be compensated by

¹⁰⁵ *L'opium*, 15-45.

¹⁰⁶ *L'opium*, 46-77.

¹⁰⁷ *L'opium*, 138.

¹⁰⁸ *L'opium*, 21, 50-51; 'États démocratiques', 58, 79.

the implementation of ‘real’ socialist freedom and the advent of the proletariat to power, but would in fact be imposed by the domination of a tyrannical elite.¹⁰⁹

Aron made varied and extensive use of religious metaphor in *L’opium des intellectuels*, but the emphasis had shifted in a more aggressively polemical direction since his theorisation of secular religion at the end of the war. Where previously he had placed a Schmittian emphasis on religiosity denoting an extreme degree of political animosity, here his uses of religious metaphor centred primarily on the Marxist philosophy of history. Since 1944 Aron had associated the appeal of communism as a secular religion with the notion of progress; intellectuals in particular were morally indulgent of both the PCF and the USSR because they were perceived to be on the right side of history.¹¹⁰ Much of his polemical use of religious metaphor during the Cold War targeted this reflexive assumption that communism represented an essentially progressive social and political force. Here the aforementioned polemical significance of the oxymoronic character of secular religion was evident, especially, for instance, in Aron’s discussions of the Moscow show trials, which he likened to the Spanish Inquisition.¹¹¹ In *L’opium des intellectuels* he supplemented his ongoing polemical attempts to paint Soviet communism as an historical regression, an “*Église étrangère*” seeking to reverse the progression of Western civilisation, by integrating his earlier historical epistemology into the theory of secular religion.¹¹² Aron had described his *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire* as a plea for methodological atheism in 1938 and ten years later in *Le grand schisme* he had highlighted the contemporary political relevance of interpretative pluralism as an invitation towards moderation at a time when conflicts between political parties were being amplified into fundamental metaphysical disputes.¹¹³ He devoted the second section of *L’opium des intellectuels* to a polemical reformulation of some of the principle arguments of his doctoral thesis in the light of the intellectual Cold War in France.¹¹⁴ Here he described the Marxist philosophy of history as a

¹⁰⁹ *L’opium*, 53, 124, 111.

¹¹⁰ ‘L’avenir des religions séculières’, 927; *Le grand schisme*, 165; ‘Superstition de l’histoire’ [1953] in *Polémiques*, 516-523.

¹¹¹ *L’opium*, 130-131.

¹¹² *Les guerres en chaîne*, 172; *L’opium*, 102-105.

¹¹³ *Le grand schisme*, 328. On the *Introduction* as a plea for methodological atheism see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre: septembre 1939 – mars 1940* (Paris, 1995), 430.

¹¹⁴ *L’opium*, 115-210.

secularised theology and its adherents as idolisers of History. Marxism, he argued, denied the plurality of possible interpretations of human history and promoted a spurious unity of purpose that justified a potentially murderous fanaticism. Where previously Aron had leaned towards a radical form of historical relativism that sometimes seemed to deny the possibility of grounding political choices in objective knowledge of either facts or values, here he attacked Marxism emphatically as false historical consciousness and emphasised the moral duty towards tolerance that the recognition of the irreducible plurality of historical interpretations necessitated.¹¹⁵

However, much as Aron mounted a value emphatic moral attack on the effects of Marxism in *L'opium des intellectuels*, his critical engagement with the fellow-travelling left intelligentsia also entailed significant concessions to the Marxist critique of liberalism. In this respect it is useful to consider Aron's polemical writings during the late 1940s and 1950s as exercises in competitive anti-ideology and de-mystification. In referring to Marxism as a mystification, for example, Aron was responding to the same charge being levelled against liberalism, whose ideology of formal freedoms was seen on the left to mask systemic capitalist exploitation.¹¹⁶ Aron accepted the legitimacy of the Marxist critique of the formality of liberal freedom, but countered that in the USSR workers were deprived of individual political liberties without compensation in terms of any identifiable 'real' liberties.¹¹⁷ His anti-totalitarianism was never coupled with a proselytising form of pro-liberalism, but rather a combative minimal liberalism whose only unequivocal insistence was on the centrality of the freedom of criticism and the minimum of individual political liberties essential to its ability to function. For such a form of liberalism the acknowledgement and partial absorbing of anti-liberal critique was a badge of honour indicating an openness and self-criticism that secular religions manifestly lacked.

As early as 1952 Aron had warned of the limitations of partisan anti-totalitarian rhetoric as a means of convincing progressive intellectuals to embrace anti-communism, and even his own most vehemently combative polemical writings were careful to avoid presenting

¹¹⁵ *L'opium*, 204-205.

¹¹⁶ See e.g. Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur*, ix-xi.

¹¹⁷ *L'opium*, 87-90, 128; Aron, 'La grande peur du mal-pensant' [1952] in *Polémiques*, 17-38, 30-31.

liberal-democracy as anything more than the least bad form of political system available.¹¹⁸ *L'opium des intellectuels* is remarkable in this respect because it represents both the culmination of Aron's anti-communist reorientation of his anti-totalitarianism, whilst also heralding a shift of approach away from polemical anti-totalitarianism towards a more value-neutral social scientific approach to the comparative study of Soviet communism and Western democracy as two forms of industrial society.¹¹⁹ This shift of emphasis, which will be discussed at greater length in chapter three, marks a second politically motivated reorientation of Aron's writing on totalitarianism, but as with the Cold War reorientation that preceded it, it did not entail a fundamental reworking of his theory of totalitarianism, but rather a shift of emphasis in recognition of a changing political context. The death of Stalin in 1953 whilst Aron was finishing *L'opium des intellectuels* raised the question of to what extent the Soviet regime might undergo a limited normalisation whereby the religiosity of its ideological antagonism to the West might decrease. This new context combined with his longstanding recognition of the limitations of hard line anti-totalitarianism encouraged a more conciliatory approach. Aron subsequently de-emphasised the significance of secular religion in his writings on the USSR in the later 1950s and 1960s, presenting it in more prosaic terms as one modality of industrial society among others.¹²⁰ When in the 1970s he began once more to emphasise the importance of ideology in defining the Soviet Union as a regime apart, his shift of emphasis was again politically motivated. Two factors were at work here: first, the domestic re-emergence of the PCF as a potential party of government through its electoral alliance with the Parti socialiste; second, Aron's growing international concern that the pursuit of détente fostered complacency in the West regarding the USSR's long-term strategic objectives. As we have seen, in 1944 he began to emphasise the religiosity of the PCF and USSR's ideological commitment in order to caution that communist tactical manoeuvring in the short-term should not obscure long-term strategic commitment to a revolutionary agenda. Aron returned to this line of argument in the 1970s to make the same basic point in the new set of circumstances

¹¹⁸ Aron, 'Séduction du totalitarisme' [1952] in *Polémiques*, 501-515.

¹¹⁹ See especially the final chapter, which imagines an end to ideological politics as a result of the equitable management of economic growth: *L'opium*, 315-334.

¹²⁰ See in general Aron's trilogy on industrial society: *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* (Paris, 1962), *La lutte de classes: nouvelles leçons sur les sociétés industrielles* (Paris, 1964) and *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (Paris, 1965). These books are based on lectures delivered at the Sorbonne between 1955 and 1958.

provided by détente and the *Programme commun*.¹²¹ But whilst Aron re-intensified his language in a militantly anti-totalitarian direction during the 1970s, his critical response to the radically Manichean anti-totalitarianism of the *nouveaux philosophes* serves as a reminder that since 1939 his own anti-totalitarianism had always combined radical anti-totalitarian polemic with a consistently self-critical attitude towards liberal democracy.¹²²

VII. CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to re-consider the origins and orientations of Raymond Aron's anti-totalitarianism in order to furnish a better understanding of its relation to his liberalism than has been offered in the Cold War centred interpretations of commentators such as Nicolas Baverez and Jean-François Sirinelli.¹²³ With regard to origins, it has argued that his anti-totalitarianism was rooted in the experience of the inter-war crisis of liberalism. This timing is important because it serves as a reminder that Aron's writing was deeply informed by a sense of the inherent weakness of liberal democracies; indeed, his theorising of totalitarianism was characterised less by its Manichean opposition to liberal democracy than by a marked concern for the totalitarian tendencies pregnant within modern mass democracies themselves. His reflection on this issue thus arguably owed more to radical conservative thought from Germany than it did to the French liberalism of Élie Halévy whose *L'ère des tyrannies* nevertheless provided the initial stimulus for Aron's earliest attempts at theorising the new tyrannies in the language of totalitarianism. However, this eclecticism of intellectual influence should not detract from the fundamentally liberal character of Aron's anti-totalitarianism from 1939 onwards, but rather encourage a more serious attempt at defining Aron's anti-totalitarian liberalism than simply equating it with the militant anti-communism of the Cold War years. First, Aron's anti-totalitarianism became identifiably liberal in 1939 by virtue of his tacit recognition that the opposition between left- and right-wing totalitarianisms was of secondary importance to their primary

¹²¹ Aron, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* (Paris, 1977), 13-153, 381-393.

¹²² 'Pour le progrès', 233-243.

¹²³ Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 53, 118, Sirinelli, *Deux intellectuels*, 208-211.

mutual hostility towards liberal democracy. Second, his anti-totalitarian liberalism emerged in 1939 as a combative minimal liberalism and continued as such into the Cold War. This means that it was forged in the context of a fundamental existential threat at a time when it was not at all clear that liberal democracies would survive in Europe. Consequently it must not be understood in programmatic terms, but as an attempt at defining which of the liberal values under threat from the totalitarian menace were absolutely essential: Aron identified economic liberalism and the ideal of popular sovereignty as of secondary importance and promoted an anti-totalitarian liberalism centred on personal and intellectual liberty guaranteed by limited constitutional government. The salient feature of Aron's combative minimal liberalism as it operated in the context of the Cold War was that it openly accepted many aspects of radical left-wing critiques of liberalism, notably the distinction between 'formal' and 'real' freedoms, embracing limited self-criticism to expose the ideological rigidity of Marxists by comparison. Finally, Aron's anti-totalitarianism rejoined the French liberal tradition through its critique of both the Manichean Left/Right divide in French politics and the tendency to afford a privileged status to violent revolution as a vehicle of political change, both cultural traditions which exacerbated totalitarian tendencies pregnant within French democracy. In this respect it would have an important influence in the longer term over the liberal revisionism of the ex-communist historian François Furet's analysis of the French Revolution.¹²⁴

As far as the different orientations of Aron's anti-totalitarianism are concerned, this chapter has shown that whilst the basic outline of what Aron understood by totalitarianism did not substantially change between 1939 and the anti-totalitarian turn of the 1970s, the polemical orientations of his anti-totalitarianism responded to specific political circumstances. Insufficient appreciation of this fact in much of the secondary literature has led to an excessive significance being attributed to the shift from fascist to communist oriented anti-totalitarianism as the moment when Aron supposedly completed the journey from youthful socialism to mature liberalism. His polemical use of the language of totalitarianism was

¹²⁴ François Furet, 'Aron réintroduteur de Tocqueville' in Jean-Claude Chamboredon (dir.), *Raymond Aron, la philosophie de l'histoire et les sciences sociales*, colloque organisé à l'École normale supérieure en 1988 (Paris, 2005), 37-47; François Furet, 'La rencontre d'une idée et d'une vie', *Commentaire*, 8 (février, 1985), 52-54.

politically sensitive and it was this sensitivity rather than any fundamental change in his understanding of the meaning of totalitarianism that explains both Aron's early reluctance to describe the USSR as a totalitarian regime and the enthusiasm with which he increasingly came to apply this language to the political left after the war. His reticence in the first instance was a product of the need to promote French unity in the face of German aggression and the expectation that the USSR would be a likely ally in the anticipated war; latterly Aron's description of the PCF and USSR as totalitarian was intended to counter the association of communism and anti-fascism in the minds of left-wing French intellectuals and politicians, as well as among the wider public. In this respect Aron regarded himself as engaged in a war of counter-propaganda against the Cominform and PCF and he engaged enthusiastically with the international association of anti-communist intellectuals, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which served to co-ordinate this propaganda war using the language of anti-totalitarianism. However, increasingly convinced that militant anti-totalitarianism on its own could be counterproductive with its intended audience, Aron sought from 1955 onwards to refocus his writing on the relationship between Soviet communism and Western liberal democracy in a less overtly combative direction. In so doing he aligned himself and, through his leadership, the Congress for Cultural Freedom with reformist tendencies in the British Labour Party and German Social Democratic Party to promote the idea that the equitable management of sustained economic growth could expose the redundancy of ideological politics. This development, which is discussed at length in the following chapter, runs counter to the idea that Aron somehow broke definitively with socialism in 1947 and reinforces the view that Aron's anti-totalitarian liberalism ought to be understood not in programmatic party political terms, but as a fundamental minimal position compatible with a wide variety of non-revolutionary political agendas.

CHAPTER THREE

THE END OF IDEOLOGY

This chapter examines the long-term development of Raymond Aron's end of ideology theory between 1933 and 1963, treating it as an alternative form of neo-liberalism to the kind of free market radicalism with which the latter term is usually associated. Whereas this theory is typically viewed as an innovation belonging to Cold War liberalism and corresponding with a 'golden age of capitalism',¹ it will be shown to have emerged out of some of the central debates within the often profoundly anti-liberal crisis thought of the French non-conformist movement of the early 1930s. Treating end of ideology theory in this long-term perspective allows us to re-evaluate it in relation to the criticism that it amounted to "the ending of political reflection itself as a public fact", contributing to a wider post-war crisis of normative political philosophy.²

Building on the analysis begun in the previous chapter, end of ideology theory will first be considered here as a discourse promoted within the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in the mid-1950s. This facilitates differentiation between important variants of the theory and helps to explain why it invited the criticism mentioned above. Considering it in this context also casts light upon Aron's rise to pre-eminence within the CCF and the question of his awareness or otherwise of its covert CIA funding. By contrasting the opposite positions of Aron and the neo-classical economist Friedrich von Hayek within the internal CCF debate over this issue, end of ideology theory, which was ultimately endorsed by the CCF against Hayek's wishes, is shown to represent an alternative neo-liberalism to that promoted by Hayek and endorsed by the Mont Pelerin Society.

Section II explores the roots of Aron's end of ideology theory in French political and economic non-conformism in the 1930s. Beginning with a critical description of this

¹ Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, (Oxford, 1984), 322-326; Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997), 189-208.

² C. Wright Mills, 'Letter to the New Left', *New Left Review*, 1 (September-October, 1960), 18-23, 19; Andrew Vincent, *The Nature of Political Theory* (Oxford, 2004), 56.

heterogeneous movement and its equally mixed political legacy, significant continuity in personnel is identified between prominent non-conformist groups and the CCF. Focussing next on Aron's position within the debates fuelling non-conformism, his interaction with its neo-socialist and neo-liberal strands is examined by considering his experience working at the Centre de documentation sociale and peripheral involvement in the non-conformist economic think tank *X-Crise*. As a result of participating in that group's critique of Popular Front economic policy, a critique that has since come to be regarded as the origin of French neo-liberalism, Aron was invited to the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* in August 1938. At this conference he is shown to have belonged to a more collectivist and interventionist form of neo-liberalism than the neo-classical variant represented there by Hayek, an argument that is supported by considering a critique of this neo-classicism by Aron from 1939. The remainder of section II traces the influence of non-conformist neo-liberalism in Aron's wartime writings, showing how they comprehensively anticipated the end of ideology theory that he later promoted at the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Section III evaluates Aron's end of ideology thesis against the charge that it amounted to "the ending of political reflection itself as a public fact".³ Here it is asked what kind of political theory Aron was able to advance from within the perspective of the end of ideology thesis, and how this responded to a broader crisis of political philosophy contemporaneous with and sometimes attributed to the influence of the end of ideology argument.⁴ Exploring the adequacy of his political theory as a response to the empirical and normative dimensions of a long-term value crisis of liberal democracy, it shows that Aron was restricted to advancing a philosophical defence of liberal regimes on the basis of a negative political morality.

³ Mills, 'Letter to the New Left', 19.

⁴ Vincent, *Political Theory*, 56.

I. *END OF IDEOLOGY DISCOURSE AND THE CONGRESS FOR CULTURAL FREEDOM*

The end of ideology discourse which formed the primary basis of CCF anti-communist propaganda in the mid-to-late 1950s exemplifies what historian David Ellwood has termed the “canonization of the growth idea” in post-war Europe.⁵ The degree of optimism with which it was articulated varied, but its different proponents shared the fundamental assumption that sustained economic growth, managed by a moderately interventionist state in cooperation with labour and enterprise, could simultaneously deliver increasing levels of wages, benefits, profits and investment. By thus aligning the interests of workers and employers, a new politics of productivity would replace the old politics of class conflict, rendering traditional ideological distinctions between left and right redundant in the process.⁶ The end of ideology thesis was thus not in itself a positive political theory, but rather an attempt at redefining the discursive parameters of political reflection in modern, industrial societies so as to de-legitimise revolutionary Marxist socialism and, to a lesser extent, neo-classical economic liberalism.⁷ End of ideology discourse did not represent an especially original contribution to post-war political thought; rather, it reproduced a technocratic worldview prevalent within the elites coordinating the European recovery effort and repackaged it for the consumption of intellectuals on the non-communist left. But the immediate historical roots of both these phenomena were entangled, stretching beyond the “golden age of capitalism” with which they have become associated and into the much less propitious era of the Great Depression.⁸ End of ideology theory therefore needs to be

⁵ David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America, and Postwar Reconstruction* (London, 1992), 222.

⁶ The term “politics of productivity” is taken from Charles S. Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge, 1987), 121-152.

⁷ Giles Scott-Smith, ‘The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the end of ideology and the 1955 Milan conference: “defining the parameters of discourse”’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37 (July, 2002), 437-455.

⁸ For the “golden age of capitalism” see Sassoon, *Socialism*, 189-208. In Europe, its roots in fact stretched still further back into the 1920s. The analysis presented here will, however, focus on the 1930s onwards because it was during these years that the individuals with whom we shall be concerned began to engage in the debates out of which the end of ideology theory directly emerged. For a survey of European theories of economic planning, technocracy and industrial democracy in the 1920s see Charles S. Maier,

studied both in the immediate context of the CCF's ideological development during the 1950s and from this longer-term perspective. Raymond Aron was, as we shall see, an important figure in both of these contexts.

The adoption of the end of ideology argument at the CCF's 'Future of Freedom' conference, held in Milan in September 1955, has a double significance. First, it showed the Congress positioning itself as the leading public forum for the intellectual justification of the Marshall Plan.⁹ Especially since the outbreak of the Korean War, the European Recovery Programme had placed an increasingly strong emphasis on improving efficiency, promoting major productivity enhancement programmes in all its recipient countries.¹⁰ Thus by preaching the gospel of productivity the CCF set itself in close alignment with wider American policy in Europe. Second, the promotion of end of ideology discourse marked a shift away from the militant anti-totalitarianism that had characterised the Congress for Cultural Freedom's propaganda campaigns since its inception in 1950. This change of approach reflected concern within the CCF leadership that partisan anti-totalitarian rhetoric had become increasingly counter-productive with its intended audience on the intellectual non-communist left since the death of Stalin in 1953 and the bad publicity surrounding the rise of McCarthyism in the United States.¹¹ Pierre Grémion, the French historian of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, aptly notes that "*À Milan, le totalitarisme n'était plus dénoncé, il était analysé*", but the fact that this indicated a tactical adjustment rather than a fundamental attitudinal shift is reflected in Aron's observation at a later CCF conference that "*il suffit d'être ... scientifique dans l'observation de la réalité*

'Between Taylorism and technocracy: European ideologies and the vision of industrial productivity in the 1920s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (April, 1970), 27-61.

⁹ Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and Post-War American Hegemony* (London, 2002), 149.

¹⁰ A focus on encouraging economic productivity had always been present within the Marshall Plan, but received much greater emphasis in the early-to-mid 1950s. The annual budget of its productivity and technical assistance department rose from \$4 million in 1949 to \$43 million in 1952, leading to the establishment of national productivity centres in recipient countries and a dramatic increase in technical assistance programmes, with thousands of Europeans visiting the USA to study industrial practices there and hundreds of American productivity consultants working in Europe to impart their efficiency expertise to civil servants, leaders of enterprise, and trades unions. See Anthony Carew, 'The politics of productivity and the politics of anti-communism: American and European labour in the Cold War' in Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (eds.), *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960* (London, 2003), 73-91, 74-76.

¹¹ Scott-Smith, 'The Congress for Cultural Freedom', 438.

soviétique, pour être agressif.¹² It would, then, be mistaken to suppose that the adoption of end of ideology discourse entailed a complete jettisoning of the CCF's earlier anti-totalitarianism; indeed in some respects the theory was itself an outgrowth from earlier theories of totalitarianism associated with the Congress. Thus the American sociologist Daniel Bell, whose *The End of Ideology* was published in 1960 but partly based upon his contributions to the Milan conference, explained his version of the thesis as an extension of the theory of secular religion first propounded by Raymond Aron.¹³ Furthermore, Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels* was itself at once a reflection on secular religion and a major influence on the adoption of end of ideology theory by the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Aron had participated in CCF activities since its founding conference in Berlin in 1950, and his early Cold War texts, *Le grand schisme* and *Les guerres en chaîne* had been widely read within the Congress during its infancy.¹⁴ His decision to become involved in the CCF makes sense given the argument for organised, systematic anti-communist counter-propaganda expressed in these works.¹⁵ Whilst his claims of ignorance regarding the organisation's covert CIA funding are supported by the absence of any evidence to the contrary in his archived private papers relating to the CCF, they have been contradicted by a CIA caseworker, John Hunt, interviewed by the investigative journalist Frances Stonor Saunders.¹⁶ However, while it would not be unreasonable to assume that Aron's ignorance on this issue was wilful,¹⁷ his parallel claim never to have been censored or instructed what

¹² Pierre Grémion, *Intelligence de l'anticommunisme: Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris, 1950-1975* (Paris, 1995), 171; Aron et al, *Colloques de Rheinfelden* (Paris, 1960), 84-85.

¹³ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York, [1960] 2000), xiv-xv, 400-415. Whilst living in Paris in 1956-1957, Bell cooperated closely with Aron on the programming of the international seminar programme that grew out from the Milan conference. See Bell, *End of Ideology*, 448. It was during this period that Bell persuaded Aron to study the writings of Tocqueville more closely than he had done to that point. On this issue see page 166 of chapter four in the present thesis.

¹⁴ Grémion, *Intelligence*, 89.

¹⁵ These are discussed on pages 100-102 of the present thesis.

¹⁶ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 2000), 394. For Aron's account of the CCF and the question of its funding see Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris, 1983), 237-241.

¹⁷ Aside from the testimony of John Hunt, multiple sources claim that CIA involvement with the CCF was an open secret prior to its exposure by the New York Times in April 1966. Furthermore, given Aron's view that, under a heterogeneous international system such as presented itself during the Cold War, permanent psychological warfare was entirely normal, and considering his earlier exhortations towards anti-communist propaganda, this is a reasonable supposition. For Aron's views on psychological warfare see Aron, *Paix et guerre entre les nations* (Paris, 1962), 170-171. See also pages 70, 515, 531, 543, 557-558, 650, 680. For the CIA-CCF relationship as an open secret see Saunders, 353-358. McGeorge Bundy wrote to Aron

to write during his CCF activities remains credible.¹⁸ Aron's anti-totalitarianism had developed along increasingly polemical lines prior to his involvement in the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and his reflection on the end of ideology, although not couched in these exact terms, predated the formulation of this argument within the CCF by two decades. Indeed, rather than writing to order for the American intelligence services, Aron increasingly shaped the agenda of the Congress in line with his own interests. Formally, the peak of his rising influence within the organisation came in September 1966, five months after the revelation of its CIA funding, when he was appointed as its President.¹⁹ But the moment at which he shifted from being simply one of many prominent anti-communist intellectuals associated with the CCF to become the most influential member within its executive committee occurred in 1955.²⁰ The decisive factors here were, first, in May, the publication of *L'opium des intellectuels* and, second, in September, the 'Future of Freedom' conference. It was across these projects that Aron promoted the end of ideology discourse that would transform the language of CCF sponsored anti-communism.

Historian Giles Scott-Smith has rightly argued that the Milan conference drew its primary thematic inspiration from *L'opium des intellectuels*.²¹ The anticipation of CCF end of ideology theory in this text was not restricted to its famous concluding invocation of "[la]

"I was astonished to learn, after the recent story in the New York Times, that the [CCF] Executive Committee itself was unaware of what had been café gossip in New York for years". See letter from McGeorge Bundy to Raymond Aron, 18/7/66, *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060 (177).

¹⁸ *Mémoires*, 237-238.

¹⁹ On page 237 of his *Mémoires* Aron claims that he distanced himself from the CCF following the New York Times' exposé. His appointment as the organisation's President contradicts this. His initial response was to accept a greater degree of formal responsibility within the organisation before eventually resigning in September 1967, seventeen months after the scandal initially broke. The CCF subsequently ceased to exist under its original title, changing to the International Association for Cultural Freedom before finally dissolving completely in 1979. Aron held no formal position within the IACF, but organised its conference, 'L'historien entre l'ethnologue et le futurologue', held in Venice in April 1971. For Aron's acceptance of the CCF presidency see his letter to McGeorge Bundy dated 20/9/66. For his subsequent resignation see his letter to Michael Josselson dated 1/9/67. Both are held in the Aron archive: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(177).

²⁰ That Aron became the most influential figure in the CCF's ideological development is corroborated in the accounts of two ex-CCF intellectuals: Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (London, 1989), 38; François Bondy, 'Une revue française pas comme les autres' in Pierre Grémion (dir.) *Preuves: une revue européenne à Paris* (Paris, 1989), 555-574, 556.

²¹ Scott-Smith, 'The Congress for Cultural Freedom', 441-442, 447-448.

fin de l'âge idéologique".²² The book articulated all of the main arguments that would come to be associated with this discourse, reassessing the progressive ideologies of the Left, the Proletariat, and the Revolution in the light of post-war economic growth to argue that such notions, at least as they were understood from a Marxist perspective, retained only a mythical significance.²³ One of the striking parallels between Aron's writing on secular religion and the end of ideology was his continuing subordination of the demands of theoretical rigour to those of polemical effectiveness when writing across both of these themes. In the latter instance this becomes apparent through his inconsistent application of the term 'ideology', which he used to define both "... *la mise en forme pseudo-systématique d'une vision globale du monde historique*" synonymous with 'secular religion' and, more prosaically, "*une mise en forme, apparemment systématique, de faits d'interprétations, de désirs, de prévisions*" such as classical economic liberalism.²⁴ This inconsistency was a feature of CCF end of ideology theory more broadly, as its contrasting articulations by the American sociologists and Milan conference participants Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell shows.²⁵

The kind of post-ideological political reflection that Aron sketched out in *L'opium des intellectuels* focussed primarily on the technical issues arising from the demands of maintaining individual liberty within a partially socialised economy.²⁶ From this perspective, traditional political categories appeared increasingly redundant:

Libéralisme et socialisme continuent d'inspirer des convictions, d'animer des controverses. Il devient de plus en plus malaisé, raisonnablement, de transfigurer de telles préférences en doctrines. ...

Économie de marché et planification totale sont des modèles que ne reproduit aucune économie réelle, non les étapes successives de l'évolution. ... Les régimes mixtes ne sont pas

²² Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris [1955] 2002), 315-334.

²³ *L'opium*, 15-112.

²⁴ Aron, *Trois essais sur l'âge industriel* (Paris, 1966), 190; *L'opium*, 246, 317.

²⁵ Whereas Lipset's discussion of the end of ideology refers primarily to the end of liberal and socialist forms of economic dogmatism, Bell places a greater emphasis on ideology as secular religion. See Bell, *End of Ideology*, 400-415, 448; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (London, 1960), 403-417.

²⁶ *L'opium*, 39.

des monstres, incapables de vivre, ou des formes de transition vers un type pur, mais l'état normal.²⁷

Four months after the publication of *L'opium des intellectuels*, Aron's speech at the opening session in Milan set out the themes of the conference in similar terms:

... les règles économiques en fait différaient moins que les théories ou les doctrines, qu'il y avait des oppositions fondamentales dans l'abstraction. Nous étions partis de l'idée que le doctrinarisme libérale était mort au même titre que le doctrinarisme socialiste et que les économies du monde occidental différaient moins dans leur action que dans leurs propos.²⁸

Aron had sat on the conference's organising panel, which selected the event's 140 delegates and set an agenda that aimed to "forward the process of breaking the encrustations of liberal and socialist thought, to discover their common ground, and to push forward with the task of formulating more realistic and more inclusive ideas on the conditions of the free society".²⁹ A renewal of CCF efforts to engage reformist tendencies within West European socialist parties was central to this agenda, and the presence of a senior delegation from the revisionist wing of the British Labour Party was important in this regard.³⁰ Party leader Hugh Gaitskell spoke on the relation between political and economic liberty at Milan's opening session, denying that political freedom was conditional upon the implementation of unrestricted economic liberalism and suggesting that the contemporary scope of realistic macro-economic policy debate was restricted to discussions over the degree, not the principle, of state intervention.³¹ Senior delegates from the Italian, German and French socialist parties also attended the conference and, during the later 1950s and 1960s, CCF

²⁷ *L'opium*, 319, 321.

²⁸ Quoted in Grémion, *Intelligence*, 175.

²⁹ Edward Shils, 'The end of ideology?', *Encounter*, 5 (November, 1955), 52-58, 52. For the full conference agenda see Grémion, *Intelligence*, 178-179.

³⁰ Reform-minded socialist politicians such as Richard Crossman and Carlo Schmid had been present within the CCF's leadership from its inception, but had been somewhat marginalised prior to the Milan conference. See Grémion, *Intelligence*, 15-16, 157-158. This Labour presence was presumably organised by C.A.R. Crosland, who was also on the organising panel. Aron was an admirer of Labour revisionism – see his endorsement of the post-ideological socialism of the *New Fabian Essays* in *L'opium*, 37-38.

³¹ Grémion, *Intelligence*, 171-172. Also present in the Labour delegation were Denis Healey, Roy Jenkins, Richard Crossman and C.A.R. Crosland, the latter of whom was part of the planning committees for both the conference itself and the international seminar series that grew out of it. Crosland was in the process of writing the fundamental revisionist text *The Future of Socialism* during the Milan conference. See Grémion, *Intelligence*, 225, 320, 348.

journals such as *Encounter*, *Preuves*, *Tempo Presente* and *Der Monat* provided important platforms for socialist politicians who wanted to distance their parties from Marxism.³²

The American sociologist Edward Shils played an important role in solidifying the identification of the new direction of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in the language of the end of ideology. Partly an exercise in politico-intellectual branding, his official conference report, published in *Encounter*, described how

The papers, despite their diversity of viewpoint and subject matter, circled over a single theme. Almost every paper was in one way or another a critique of doctrinarism, of fanaticism, of ideological possession. Almost every paper at least expressed the author's idea of mankind cultivating and improving its own garden, secure against obsessional visions and phantasies, and free from the harassment of ideologists and zealots. It was the intention of the conference's organisers to move thought further around the turning point to which we have come in the last years. This turning point might be described as the end of ideological enthusiasm.³³

Shils' report mirrors the articulations of end of ideology discourse by the other CCF affiliated intellectuals discussed so far in that the notion of ideology is applied in turn to both communist extremism and radical laissez-faire liberalism, and in doing so he notes that the common basis upon which both were rejected by the majority of delegates in Milan was "the idea that liberty rests on an economic basis".³⁴ But his review of the 'Future of Freedom' conference also identifies some conspicuous absences in the range of political enquiry carried out in Milan. In particular, the near-total absence of normative political reflection struck Shils, who notes that "calls for a renewal of faith or a system of beliefs which we could offer in competition with Bolshevism were very few and were either rejected or disregarded".³⁵ The conference had, he claimed, "the atmosphere of a post-victory ball" wherein the superiority of Western liberal democracy was regarded as self-evident and beyond the need for normative philosophical justification.³⁶

³² On this basis Pierre Grémion has interpreted the historic abandonment of Marxist doctrine by the German SPD in 1959 as a major victory for the Congress for Cultural Freedom. See Grémion, *Intelligence*, 226, 400.

³³ Shils, 'The end of ideology?', 53.

³⁴ Shils, 'The end of ideology?', 55.

³⁵ Shils, 'The end of ideology?', 54.

³⁶ Shils, 'The end of ideology?', 54.

This sense of complacent optimism would be especially pronounced in Seymour Martin Lipset's later interpretation of the end of ideology thesis, which argued that "the fundamental political problems of the industrial revolution have been solved" and that contemporary Western democracy represented "the good society itself in operation".³⁷ Lipset, whose *Political Man* (1960) represents the optimistic extreme to which end of ideology theory could stretch, clearly invites the accusations later levelled at "the NATO intellectuals" of the CCF that the end of ideology amounted to "the ending of political reflection itself as a public fact", contributing to an extended crisis of post-war political philosophy in the West.³⁸ Yet despite the complacent tone of *Political Man*, its account of the 'Future of Freedom' conference usefully reveals that Shils' official review had glossed over a significant element of dissension within the ranks of the delegates in Milan:

On the last day of the week-long conference, an interesting event occurred. Professor Hayek, in a closing speech, attacked the delegates for preparing to bury freedom instead of saving it. ... Hayek, honestly believing that state intervention is bad and inherently totalitarian, found himself in a small minority of those who still took the cleavages within the democratic camp seriously.³⁹

The end of ideology discourse promoted by Aron within the Congress for Cultural Freedom was, then, not as universally accepted as Shils had suggested. Furthermore, its proponents varied quite widely in terms of the optimism with which they articulated it. In particular, a distinction needs to be made between American variants such as Lipset's and European variants, such as Aron's, which never approached the kind of optimism with which Lipset would express this argument in *Political Man*. Rather than representing the achievement of the good society, Aron insisted that Western liberal democracy could not, in practice, help but betray the abstract values of freedom and equality to which it laid claim in theory.⁴⁰ Whereas Lipset implied that political philosophy in the classical mould was redundant due to the realisation of the good society, Aron was, as we shall see, highly sensitive to the

³⁷ Lipset, *Political Man*, 403, 406.

³⁸ Mills, 'Letter to the New Left', 19.

³⁹ Lipset, *Political Man*, 404-405.

⁴⁰ *L'opium*, 76.

criticism that end of ideology theory reduced modern democracy to “a system of technique *sans telos*”.⁴¹

In order to understand the specificity of Aron’s contribution to end of ideology theory, it is necessary to treat it not as a new beginning for the CCF, but as the culmination of a prolonged reflection on the inter-war crisis of French democracy and the methods appropriate for its post-war renewal. This longer-term analysis roots the end of ideology argument not in Cold War liberal triumphalism, but in the inter-war crisis thought of the controversial non-conformist movement of the 1930s. In so doing it also reveals its origins within the earliest European attempts at formulating a coherent neo-liberal economic policy, identifying it as an alternative neo-liberalism to the variant promoted by Friedrich von Hayek, the chief dissenter in Milan.

II. *THE END OF IDEOLOGY AS NEO-LIBERAL NON-CONFORMISM*

The medium-term historical roots of French end of ideology discourse in particular, and of the governmental, technocratic worldview that it reproduced, stretch back to the rise of political and economic non-conformism during the early 1930s. This phenomenon, which peaked in 1932-34 as the French economy belatedly succumbed to the Great Depression, is typically regarded as a manifestation of the inter-generational conflict discussed in chapter one.⁴² The shared generational experience of its proponents helped give a degree of coherence to what was in other respects a heterogeneous strand of inter-war French political thought. Non-conformists of various stripes united in their rejection of the “*désordre établi*” and spoke a common language of political renewal characterised by its

⁴¹ Stephen W. Rousseas and James Farganis, ‘American politics and the end of ideology’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 14 (December, 1963), 347-362, 349.

⁴² Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: khâgneux et normaliens dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1988), 394; Michel Winock, *Le siècle des intellectuels* (Paris, 1999), 247-258; Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford, 2001), 57, 63; Johan Heilbron, ‘Les métamorphoses du durkheimisme’, *Revue française de sociologie*, 26 (avril-juin, 1985), 203-237, 227-228. On the issue of inter-generational conflict see pages 36-44 in chapter one of the present thesis.

rejection of the ideological dichotomy of Left and Right.⁴³ Prominent non-conformist journals such as *Esprit* presented the industrial impulse towards rationalisation as feeding into a crisis of civilisation, but it would be mistaken to follow the historian Michel Winock in generalising from this to conclude that non-conformism as a whole was fundamentally anti-productivist.⁴⁴ The fact that it provided the primary locus of inter-war French debates around economic planning as a third way between laissez faire capitalism and Marxian socialism suggests that it was more concerned with harnessing such impulses in the service of the person and the community than with suppressing them altogether.⁴⁵ Partly as a corollary of this preoccupation with *le planisme*, non-conformism also exhibited a strong concern with elite renewal and the reinforcement of the executive over the legislative power in French government.⁴⁶ But whilst it had a significant technocratic dimension, this tendency co-existed alongside a pronounced sense of utopian, spiritualist revolt to which the appellations of journals such as *Esprit*, *L'Homme Nouveau*, and *L'Ordre Nouveau* attest.⁴⁷

The political legacy of this movement was mixed to say the least. Historian Zeev Sternhell has famously presented it as the seedbed of French fascism and, whilst this view is somewhat controversial, the fact that several prominent non-conformists became Nazi collaborators is not.⁴⁸ Philip Nord has recently added shading to this picture by following the trajectories of some prominent non-conformists from the esoteric reviews of the early 1930s into successive policy advisory roles under the pre-war government of Édouard Daladier, Vichy, the Resistance and the Fourth Republic.⁴⁹ Prominent ex-non-conformists such as Bertrand de Jouvenel, Thierry Maulnier and Denis de Rougemont later became

⁴³ Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30: une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française* (Paris, 1969), 107; Philip Nord, *France's New Deal From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton, 2010), 108, 211.

⁴⁴ Winock, *Esprit*, 77-79; Winock, *Le siècle*, 251.

⁴⁵ On non-conformism in relation to economic planning see Nord, *New Deal*, 26, 33-40; Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1981), 93-118; Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (London, 1994), 122-124.

⁴⁶ Nord, *New Deal*, 39, 91.

⁴⁷ Winock, *Le siècle*, 254.

⁴⁸ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton, 1986).

⁴⁹ The eminent French statistician Alfred Sauvy is one such figure, although it should be noted that Nord refrains from charging him with active, enthusiastic collaboration. See Nord, *New Deal*, 20-22, 42-46, 65, 96-97, 118-119, 179-184, 210-211.

regular participants in the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the Milan conference of 1955 was notable for its high concentration of such figures. At least seven out of twenty-one French delegates had published in non-conformist reviews two decades earlier, and a further five individuals on draft invitation lists fall into the same category.⁵⁰ Although Raymond Aron had only published one such item, an open letter to *Esprit* in 1933, his end of ideology theory was initially formulated through a critical pre-war dialogue with non-conformism. Its neither-right-nor-left quality, its attendant promotion of expertly managed mixed economies as a means of integrating capital and labour into a national community, and the ambivalence arising from its parallel awareness that the obsessive pursuit of productive efficiency entailed both moral risk and material reward were all standard tropes of non-conformist discourse. But if the neither-right-nor-left political discourse of non-conformism was inherently fascistic, or at least fundamentally hostile towards parliamentary democracy,⁵¹ then referring to Aron's use of such language as evidence of his liberalism appears problematic. Detailed examination of Aron's interaction with non-conformism assuages such concerns, allowing us to situate him at the emergence of French neo-liberalism from within this heterogeneous political and economic renewal movement.

The open letter to *Esprit* offers a useful entry point for these enquiries. Here Aron had declared himself “*ni de droite ni de gauche*” and voiced a paean to pragmatism oriented by social scientific research and the rejection of ready-made ideologies that foreshadowed later CCF end of ideology discourse.⁵² Aron's anti-ideological pragmatism and assertion that “... *je me méfie des révolutions morales si l'on y cherche refuge contre les servitudes de notre situation historique*” positions him towards the technocratic end of the non-conformist spectrum, as does his earlier role in popularising the work of Hendrik de Man,

⁵⁰ Raymond Aron, Denis de Rougemont, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Alfred Sauvy, André Philip, Robert Buron, Raoul Girardet and Charles Morazé attended the conference in Milan. Robert Marjolin, André Siegfried, François Goguel, Georges Friedmann and Alexandre Marc were all present on draft invitation lists. See Grémion, *Intelligence*, 157, 160-167. The participation of these individuals in non-conformist groups and publications may be cross-referenced by referring to the indices of Nord, *New Deal* and Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes*.

⁵¹ In addition to Sternhell cited above, see Nord, *New Deal*, 34; Winock, *Le siècle*, 257.

⁵² Aron, ‘Lettre ouverte d’un jeune français à l’Allemagne’, *Esprit*, 1 (février, 1933), 735-743, 735. This letter is quoted at length in chapter one on page 49 above.

who was the chief inspiration for non-conformist *planisme*.⁵³ The eventual Nazi collaboration of de Man and Marcel Déat, his most infamous French acolyte, has retrospectively encouraged the view that he bears prime responsibility for “moulding the fascist outlook” in France,⁵⁴ but this does not exhaust the inter-war influence of de Man, not all of whose French admirers followed Déat into collaboration.⁵⁵ Aron is an important case in point here, and we may gain clarification of his position within the technocratic, *planiste* part of the non-conformist milieu by considering some of his working relationships at the Centre de documentation sociale (CDS), where he was chief secretary and archivist from 1934 to 1939.

This centre, based at the École normale supérieure from 1920 to 1940, contained France’s first specialist social sciences library, which, together with the connections of some of its staff, helped to position the CDS at the intersection of technocratic non-conformity’s neo-socialist and neo-liberal strands. In 1924 its director, Célestin Bouglé, had republished a nineteenth-century exposition of Saint-Simon’s doctrine in an attempt at promoting a non-Marxist form of French socialism.⁵⁶ This enterprise, undertaken with Élie Halévy, made a modest contribution to the ideological formation of Marcel Déat’s anti-Marxist neo-socialism.⁵⁷ Déat, a protégé of Bouglé’s, was one of Aron’s predecessors as secretary of the CDS, which had subsequently become an important resource for the development of

⁵³ ‘Lettre ouverte’, 742; Aron, ‘Henri de Man: *Au delà du marxisme*’, *Contrepoint*, 16 ([1931] 1975), 161-169.

⁵⁴ Sternhell, 119-141, 141.

⁵⁵ Richard Griffiths, ‘Fascism and the planned economy: ‘neo-socialism’ and ‘planisme’ in France and Belgium in the 1930s’, *Science and Society*, 69 (October, 2005), 580-593. Paul Desjardins, who organised the famous Pontigny *décades*, was a great admirer, inviting de Man to Pontigny in August 1929 and establishing annual conferences there for the advancement of the wider European neo-socialist planning movement. Hugh Gaitskell attended one of these conferences in October 1937. See Rolf Nordling et Georges Lefranc, ‘L’activité sociale de Paul Desjardins’ in Anne Heurgon-Desjardins (dir.), *Paul Desjardins et les décades de Pontigny: études, témoignages et documents inédits* (Paris, 1964), 215-222. André Philip, like Gaitskell, attended these conferences as well as the CCF’s Milan conference in 1955. Philip, whose resistance credentials were impeccable, was the leading French expositor of de Man’s thought before playing a leading role on the left of resistance debates about planning in post-liberation France. For André Philip’s exposition of de Man see his *Henri de Man et la crise doctrinale du socialisme* (Paris, 1928); for his importance in later planning debates see Nord, *New Deal*, 101-102.

⁵⁶ Célestin Bouglé et Élie Halévy (dir.) *La doctrine de Saint-Simon. Exposition, Première Année, 1829* (Paris, 1924); Myrna Chase, *Élie Halévy: An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 1980), 125.

⁵⁷ Donald M. Baker, ‘Two paths to socialism: Marcel Déat and Marceau Pivert’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (January, 1976), 107-128, 113.

planiste neo-socialism.⁵⁸ Another of Bouglé's protégé's at the CDS, Robert Marjolin, was connected to both neo-socialist and neo-liberal *planisme* via his membership of the socialist *Révolution constructive* group and his contacts with the neo-liberal economists of the Groupe X-Crise.⁵⁹ Later to join Jean Monnet and Étienne Hirsch in the triumvirate behind France's post-war economic recovery plans, Marjolin was the figure at the CDS with whom Aron worked most closely, the two men shaping each other's political and economic thought to the extent that, by the late 1930s, as Marjolin remembered, "*nos univers moraux et intellectuels, nos systèmes de valeurs étaient les mêmes, non seulement dans l'ensemble mais même dans le détail*".⁶⁰

Considering the development of Robert Marjolin's attitude towards planning helps us to situate Aron in relation to non-conformist *planisme* because Marjolin later attributed the evolution of his thought in this regard to Aron's influence.⁶¹ His enthusiasm for comprehensive planning initiatives waned significantly just as the planning vogue peaked in the summer of 1934, soon after having met Aron at the CDS. In conversation with Marjolin, Aron had criticised the idealisation of planning for creating unrealistic *images d'Épinal*.⁶² These were broadly the terms in which Marjolin explained his late refusal to endorse Jules Romain's *Plan du 9 juillet*, the most famous of the non-conformist planning manifestos of the 1930s, accompanying his withdrawal from the Groupe 9 juillet with a warning against "empty alliances which have no other common basis than a desire to organise the economy" and an enjoinder to "Be careful of chimeras and universal harmonies".⁶³ This shared reluctance to view economic planning as a social panacea indicates scepticism towards its utopian idealisation rather than a classical liberal rejection on principle. It remains consistent with Hendrik de Man's economic theory insofar as this theory argued for a mixed economy in which the State would have an enhanced regulatory and planning role, but it reveals an appetite for a more flexible, less utopian approach to state interventionism that would become partially satisfied three years later when Marjolin

⁵⁸ Sirinelli, *Génération*, 354-356.

⁵⁹ Robert Marjolin, *Le travail d'une vie: mémoires 1911-1986* (Paris, 1986), 33-39.

⁶⁰ Marjolin, *Le travail*, 56.

⁶¹ Robert Marjolin, 'Les années 30', *Commentaire*, 8 (février, 1985), 19-22, 19.

⁶² Marjolin, 'Les années 30', 19.

⁶³ Marjolin quoted in Julian Jackson, *The Politics of Depression in France, 1932-1936* (Cambridge, 1985), 155.

became the first French economist to study John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.⁶⁴ At this time, he and Aron were seeing each other on a near daily basis while teaching a joint course on political economy at the CDS, making Aron, whose informal economic training occurred primarily at the hands of Marjolin in these years, one of the first Frenchmen to develop an appreciation of Keynesian economics.⁶⁵

Prior to this discovery of Keynesianism, Marjolin and Aron had begun socialising regularly with the economists of the École polytechnique's economic think tank, the Groupe X-Crise.⁶⁶ The principal organ of economic non-conformism, X-Crise counted among its affiliates orthodox liberal economists such as Jacques Rueff and Charles Rist, figures close to the SFIO such as Marjolin, leaders of industry like Auguste Detoef and Ernest Mercier, and moderate trade unionists like Robert Lacoste.⁶⁷ Planning was an ongoing preoccupation for the group, but the mainstream of X-Crise opinion represented a centrist, technocratic strand of non-conformist *planisme*, speaking "a language not of statist command but of initiative, coordination, and productivity".⁶⁸ During the Popular Front, individuals associated with this group, including those who were otherwise sympathetic to the Blum government like Marjolin and the statistician Alfred Sauvy, provided the main source of intellectual resistance to its economic policy, criticising its hesitancy towards currency devaluation and the Malthusian implications of the forty-hour week.⁶⁹ Historian François Denord has recently traced the origin of French neo-liberalism to this critique, which Aron contributed to with an article echoing the assessments of X-Crise affiliates like Marjolin and Sauvy.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Histoire des idées keynésiennes en France', *Revue française d'économie*, 2 (1987), 22-56, 29-30.

⁶⁵ Aron, *Le spectateur engagé: entretiens avec Jean-Louis Missika et Dominique Wolton* (Paris, 1981), 50; Marjolin, *Le travail*, 56. Aron had been writing a book on Keynesian economics on the eve of the war but lost the manuscript. See *Mémoires*, 152.

⁶⁶ *Mémoires*, 143.

⁶⁷ Olivier Dard, 'Voyage à l'intérieur d'X-Crise', *Vingtième siècle*, 47 (juillet-septembre, 1995), 132-146, 134. On *X-Crise* in relation to French neo-liberalism see François Denord, *Néolibéralisme version française: histoire d'une idéologie politique* (Paris, 2007), 78-84.

⁶⁸ Nord, *New Deal*, 42.

⁶⁹ *Mémoires*, 143; *Spectateur*, 47-49.

⁷⁰ François Denord, 'French neo-liberalism and its divisions from the Colloque Walter Lippmann to the Fifth Republic' in Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the*

The significance of Aron's 'Réflexions sur les problèmes économiques français' extends beyond the technical detail of its critique of the Blum government. It also contains a firm rejection of intellectual partisanship at a time when to be neither-right-nor-left was much less fashionable than it had been in the early 1930s, most former non-conformists having succumbed to the traditional polarisation of French political debate following the events of February 1934.⁷¹ This is important because it indicates the authentically liberal, pluralist accent with which Aron articulated this characteristic strand of non-conformist discourse. His insistence on being "*ni de droite ni de gauche*" is reminiscent of Albert Thibaudet's self-description as "*un petit Paris, avec sa rive gauche et sa rive droite, défendant la rive gauche quand je suis sur la rive droite, et vice versa, agent sinon de liaison, du moins de dialogue*".⁷² There is a clear qualitative difference between such pluralism and the monistic, potentially fascistic version of the neither-right-nor-left argument favouring national rebirth through the union of bourgeoisie and proletariat. As with the detail of his assessment of the Popular Front, it is a position that was probably informed in part by Aron's peripheral involvement with the Groupe X-Crise. Like other non-conformist groups, X-Crise possessed its share of affiliates who would go on to develop dubious political records during the war.⁷³ But its pre-war pluralistic inclusivity, bringing together capitalists and trades unionists, orthodox liberals and disillusioned socialists, offers a practical exemplification of the kind of anti-ideological, neither-right-nor-left approach to political and economic questions promoted by Aron from 1933 onwards. The Milan conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, with its carefully selected delegates from the political left and right alongside trades unionists and leaders of industry followed this template,

Neo-Liberal Thought Collective (Cambridge Mass., 2009), 45-67, 46; Aron, 'Réflexions sur les problèmes économiques français', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XLIV (novembre, 1937), 793-822, 801-815.

⁷¹ 'Réflexions', 793-795; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 63-64; Winock, *Le siècle*, 250, 258, Pascal Ory et Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris, 1992), 92.

⁷² Albert Thibaudet, *La république des professeurs* (Paris, 1927), 230; *Spectateur*, 308. Comparison with Thibaudet is doubly appropriate in this context because he was a critic of the *Plan du 9 juillet* along similarly realist lines to Marjolin and Aron. See Albert Thibaudet, 'Réflexions: sur un plan universitaire', *La nouvelle revue française*, 22 (septembre, 1934), 425-430.

⁷³ See Nord, *New Deal*, 48.

which has also been reproduced by more recent, avowedly ‘post-ideological’ think tanks like the Fondation Saint-Simon.⁷⁴

Aron’s ‘Réflexions sur les problèmes économiques français’ not only positioned him at the heart of the debates from which French neo-liberalism emerged, it was also decisive in his invitation to the *Colloque Walter Lippmann*, site of the earliest international attempt at formulating a coherent neo-liberal economic theory, in August 1938.⁷⁵ Recent research on the history of neo-liberalism emphasises its early heterogeneity, highlighting competing variants between and within different countries in the late 1930s to indicate that it has not always been synonymous with the kind of free market radicalism with which it has subsequently come to be associated.⁷⁶ These differences came to the fore in Paris at the *Colloque Walter Lippmann*.⁷⁷ Raymond Aron, Robert Marjolin, Auguste Detoeuf and Jacques Rueff were among the X-Crise affiliates invited to participate in this conference, which failed to reach a neo-liberal consensus because of a split between neo-classical revivalists such as Rueff, Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, and those favouring a critical renewal of liberalism, often Keynesians with a moderate appetite for state economic planning, like Aron and Marjolin.⁷⁸ Despite this lack of consensus, however, the conference was successful in establishing an international network that would form a basis for more durable post-war enterprises such as the Mont Pelerin Society and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which, by the late 1950s, respectively endorsed the contrasting revivalist and renewal-based variants of neo-liberal ideology present at the *Colloque Walter Lippmann*.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ The Fondation Saint-Simon was established in 1982 by, among others, François Furet, Pierre Rosanvallon and Alain Minc. On its position within the post-ideological tradition of French think tanks see Vincent Laurent, ‘Enquête sur la Fondation Saint-Simon: les architectes du social-libéralisme’, *Le Monde diplomatique* (septembre, 1998), text online at: <http://www.mondediplomatique.fr/1998/09/LAURENT/10967.html>. (Accessed April 2011).

⁷⁵ François Denord, ‘Aux origines du néo-libéralisme en France: Louis Rougier et le Colloque Walter Lippmann de 1938’, *Le mouvement social*, 195 (avril-juin, 2001), 9-34; Denord, ‘French neo-liberalism’, 47.

⁷⁶ Dieter Phlewe, ‘Introduction’ in Mirowski and Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin*, 1-42.

⁷⁷ The conference was so named because it was held in honour of the famous American editorialist then visiting France in support of the recent publication of his *La cité libre* there.

⁷⁸ François Denord, ‘Aux origines du néo-libéralisme en France’, 9-34.

⁷⁹ The conference gave rise to a Centre international d’études pour la rénovation du libéralisme, which, although short-lived, formed the model for the Mont Pelerin Society, founded by Friedrich von Hayek in 1947. See Denord, ‘French neo-liberalism’, 45. Twelve out of twenty-six participants at the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* also joined the Mont Pelerin Society. These included Raymond Aron, Louis Baudin, Friedrich von

Although there is no record of Aron's contributions to either the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* or the opening of the Centre international d'études pour la rénovation du libéralisme (CIERL) which was established in Paris in its wake, it is possible to situate him within the debate at the heart of early neo-liberalism by considering a contemporary article, his 'Remarques sur l'objectivité des sciences sociales'.⁸⁰ This piece addressed economics from a theoretical rather than a policy perspective, linking his rejection of classical economic liberalism to the epistemology of the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*.⁸¹ Using economics as an example to demonstrate the limitations of objectivity in the social sciences, he criticised the liberalism of Hayek and Mises for transgressing the boundary between economic theory and doctrine.⁸² What separated these domains was the ability to distinguish between two forms of truth, a "vérité logique" and a "vérité de fait", arising from the unavoidable interval separating schema and reality.⁸³ As Aron explained,

Ces incertitudes ne doivent ni surprendre, ni décourager. Elles ne tiennent pas à l'insuffisance des économistes, mais à la complexité de la réalité économique. Les sujets économiques sont des hommes, leurs décisions ne sont intelligibles que si elles sont rationnelles: or elles ne le sont pas toujours. L'économie n'existe que par l'abstraction de l'économiste, elle se déroule dans un ensemble d'institutions et subit les contre-coups des événements politiques, sociaux etc. Tous les termes du système sont solidaires: d'où la multiplicité des actions et réactions possibles entre ces termes. Enfin, les situations qu'analysent les schémas théoriques sont définies avec précision: les situations concrètes sont toujours imparfaitement connues.⁸⁴

Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Michael Polanyi, Wilhelm Röpke, Louis Rougier, Jacques Rueff and Alexander Rüstow. See R.M. Hartwell, *A History of the Mont Pelerin Society* (Indianapolis, 1995), 70. Aron resigned from the Mont Pelerin Society in 1961 owing to his disagreement with its neo-classicist agenda. See Denord, 'French neo-liberalism', 56.

⁸⁰ No presentations or interventions by Aron are recorded in the proceedings of the *Colloque Walter Lippmann*, which can be accessed in the appendix of Serge Audier, *Le Colloque Lippmann: aux origines du néo-libéralisme* (Paris, 2008), 247-354. His speech at the opening of the CIERL, but not its contents, is noted in Denord, *Néolibéralisme version française*, 156.

⁸¹ For discussions of economic liberalism and planning in the *Introduction* see Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris, [1938] 1986), 141-143, 296-298, 407-408.

⁸² Aron, 'Remarques sur l'objectivité des sciences sociales', *Théoria*, V (1939), 161-194, 166, 176. This charge is repeated in Aron, 'Comment l'historien écrit l'épistémologie: à propos du livre de Paul Veyne' [1971] in *Introduction* (1981), 494-527, 523.

⁸³ 'L'objectivité', 169, 172.

⁸⁴ 'L'objectivité', 179.

This passage anticipates the earlier cited contrast made by Aron in the pages of *L'opium des intellectuels* and from the podium in Milan between both liberal and socialist economic theory and practice. It similarly foreshadows his later, more substantial critiques of Hayek during the early 1960s, which accepted Hayek's radical separation of freedom as non-coercion from freedom-as-capacity on a semantic level, but argued that their confusion in public discourse corresponded to an overriding social logic.⁸⁵ Most importantly, however, it points towards the contrasting status of the individual in the political and economic thought of Aron and Hayek. At first, Aron appears to suggest that 'the economy' is simply a convenient abstraction representing an enormous aggregation of individual transactions, an argument that Hayek, a methodological individualist, would have little difficulty accepting, even including the caveat that individual behaviour is not always rational. But from the fifth line it becomes clear that, for Aron, the reality from which the conceptualised economy abstracts is not simply a mass of atomised individuals but a mass of individuals embedded within an ensemble of mutually conditioning social, economic and political institutions that are separable only at a conceptual level and at the cost of an unavoidable degree of falsification to which the aforementioned distinction between the two forms of economic truth referred.

This position, consistent with the ontology of the *Introduction*, aligns Aron's critique of Hayek with the critique of liberal abstract individualism advanced by non-conformist reviews like *Esprit*, *Plans* and *Ordre Nouveau* in the early 1930s.⁸⁶ As such it suggests that historian Julian Jackson's assertion that "Aron never succumbed to the anti-liberalism of the non-conformists" needs to be qualified significantly: the limited way in which Aron *did* share in this anti-liberalism is precisely what separates his renewal-based neo-liberalism from Hayekian neo-classical revivalism.⁸⁷ Politically, the non-conformist critique of abstract individualism could translate into anti-democratic solutions in practice, as the well-established links between Vichy and non-conformity demonstrate. But, as Aron's wartime writings show, it could equally inform arguments for democratic renewal.

⁸⁵ Aron, *Essai sur les libertés* (Paris, 1965), 231.

⁸⁶ For an account of this critique see Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes*, 207-212.

⁸⁷ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 60. This is not to suggest that Aron derived his critique of abstract individualism from such publications, only that he shared this basic philosophical position with them.

III. *THEORISING DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL IN THE SHADOW OF WAR*

On the eve of the Second World War, Aron outlined a triple economic, ideological, and elite-based reform required for the survival of democratic regimes in the face of their totalitarian enemies, which, formulated in the immediate expectation of war, would also provide the basis for his reflection on post-war democratic recovery.⁸⁸ Comparing democratic and totalitarian regimes, he argued that democracies should learn from the strengths of their enemies, that certain imitative adaptations could be made while still safeguarding the values separating democracy and totalitarianism.⁸⁹ Aron stressed that the militaristic orientation and totalitarian extent of German economic planning reflected the particular political aims of the Nazi ruling elite; it was thus ideologically determined, not a necessary outcome of planning itself.⁹⁰ This implied that democracies could adopt aspects of totalitarian economic organisation without sacrificing individual liberties altogether provided they were led by elites possessing the requisite technical capacity and ideological commitment to democracy. Acknowledging that a minimum of economic liberty was a prerequisite for political liberty, Aron suggested that democratic planning should utilise capitalist industrial expertise, establishing itself on the basis of class co-operation, not conflict.⁹¹ As for the necessary renewal of faith in democratic ideals, this called for reflection on precisely which of these were essential and which secondary. Aron's response to this question was fundamentally liberal. Some form of representative government was essential to democracy, but the ideal of popular sovereignty was not because it was sufficiently equivocal to risk being subverted in support of totalitarian ends.⁹² Instead he argued that:

⁸⁸ Aron, 'États démocratiques et états totalitaires' [1939] in Aron, *Penser la liberté, penser la démocratie* (Paris, 2005), 57-106.

⁸⁹ 'États démocratiques', 69.

⁹⁰ 'États démocratiques', 57-61.

⁹¹ 'États démocratiques', 68-69, 89-90.

⁹² 'États démocratiques', 70.

Ce qui est essentiel dans l'idée d'un régime démocratique, c'est d'abord la légalité: régime où il y a des lois et où le pouvoir n'est pas arbitraire et sans limites. Je pense que les régimes sont ceux qui ont un minimum de respect pour les personnes et ne considèrent pas les individus uniquement comme des moyens de production ou des objets de propagande.⁹³

Aron elaborated upon the inter-related themes of economic organisation, elite renewal, and ideological reinforcement in much of his writing for *La France libre*, the journal he edited alongside André Labarthe during the war. In an article published in May 1942 that had repeated his argument for a limited imitative adaptation of democracies to the virtues of totalitarian organisation, Aron concluded with a reminder of the importance of renewing faith in democratic values since “*si l'on peut gagner la guerre sans croire en la démocratie, on ne gagnera pas la paix si l'on ne croit pas en elle*”.⁹⁴ In September 1942 he emphasised that allied victory would require peacetime economic organisation to be reoriented towards new goals: “*Enfin, libérés des Allemands, libérés de la tyrannie, les hommes doivent être libérés aussi 'du besoin et de la peur', peur que répand la guerre, misère que répand le chômage*”.⁹⁵ Three months later, he reiterated that any such post-war settlement must be based not on a politics of class conflict, but on “*les collaborations élargies qu'exige la technique économique ... de notre époque*”.⁹⁶ Aron repeated this argument in March 1943 in an article that re-emphasised the decisive moral and technical importance of elite renewal for a post-war recovery that must combine enhanced state economic intervention with the safeguarding of democratic values.⁹⁷

During the winter of 1943-44 Aron's writing on these themes became more detailed and specific in its recommendations. In an article dated November-December 1943, he wrote that, “*c'est une fait irrécusable que la prospérité et la grandeur d'une nation dépendent en une large mesure de la minorité qui tient les postes de commande*”, but warned against the technocratic illusion that the administration of things would replace the government of

⁹³ 'États démocratiques', 70.

⁹⁴ Aron, 'La stratégie totalitaire et l'avenir des démocraties' [1942] in Aron, *L'homme contre les tyrans* (New York, 1944), 227-247, 247. See also Aron, 'Démocratie et enthousiasme' [1942] in *L'homme*, 365-382.

⁹⁵ Aron, 'Bataille des propagandes' [1942] in *L'homme*, 248-265, 261-262.

⁹⁶ Aron, 'La menace des Césars', [1942] in *L'homme*, 266-284, 284.

⁹⁷ Aron, 'Du pessimisme historique', [1943] in *L'homme*, 325-342, 334-342.

people in a post-war French democracy.⁹⁸ It would, he argued, be essential to reanimate the faith of the masses in the democratic system, but the organisation of mass democratic enthusiasm must be steered along non-partisan lines.⁹⁹ The only way to avoid a return to the radical polarisation of the 1930s would be to learn the lesson of that decade's failed economic policies:

... il n'y avait pas d'équilibre économique, social, politique possible, aussi longtemps que la stagnation de l'activité obligeait à partager, entre des appétits croissants, un revenu stationnaire. Tant que la richesse collective n'augmentait pas, on ne pouvait satisfaire les aspirations des uns, si légitimes fussent-elles, qu'aux dépens des exigences accoutumées des autres.¹⁰⁰

Returning to this theme in the spring of 1944, Aron attributed the failure of French economic policy in the 1930s to a disconnection of technical expertise and government.¹⁰¹ After the war, this should be addressed by linking public administration and independent think tanks, and by overhauling civil service training to instil a culture that was "*moins livresque, plus internationale*".¹⁰² It was, he argued, "*inadmissible qu'un inspecteur des finances n'ait pas fait un stage suffisamment long dans une banque ou une grande entreprise, qu'il n'ait pas l'expérience directe des grandes places anglaises ou américaines*".¹⁰³ Economic planning would thus be fundamental to stimulating the French economy into the growth upon which post-war social stability depended, but it should be based upon a consultative, cooperative relationship with private enterprise. Favours a targeted, indicative form of planning over more comprehensive socialist approaches, Aron also suggested that the extent of state-led economic planning would reduce once the immediate demands of post-war reconstruction had been met, allowing for a relative expansion of the private sector within the mixed economy.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Aron, 'Du renouvellement des élites', [1943] in Aron, *L'âge des empires et l'avenir de la France* (Paris, 1945), 87-119, 92-93, 103.

⁹⁹ 'Du renouvellement', 99.

¹⁰⁰ 'Du renouvellement', 106.

¹⁰¹ Aron, 'Le renforcement du pouvoir' [1943] in *L'âge des empires*, 125-126.

¹⁰² 'Le renforcement', 148.

¹⁰³ 'Le renforcement', 148.

¹⁰⁴ 'Le renforcement', 149-150.

Written between March and April 1944, this article shows Aron diverging somewhat from the social democratic mainstream of planning debate as represented in the then recently published programme of the Conseil national de la Résistance (CNR). This was also apparent in a later piece in which he discussed the question of nationalisation.

Acknowledging the strength of public opinion on this issue, Aron recognised the political case for nationalisation, even if the economic argument was sometimes unconvincing. He thus accepted in principle the nationalisation of the mining, insurance, transport, chemical and electricity industries, but emphasised that public ownership should not be viewed as a panacea.¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere, his favourable attitude towards comprehensive social insurance was balanced with a similarly pragmatic warning that its long-term feasibility would depend upon tackling France's historically low birth rate.¹⁰⁶ Aron's moderation regarding such issues was not only rooted in an awareness of practical limitations; it was equally motivated by a political concern that any post-war settlement should have a broad-based appeal and refrain from the kind of divisive economic demagoguery that he considered to have marred the experience of the Popular Front.¹⁰⁷ Later that year he suggested that post-war economic planning should be Saint-Simonian in inspiration rather than socialist because "*Autour de l'idée socialiste se livreraient les batailles d'intérêts et de doctrines. Autour de l'idée saint-simonienne s'opérerait la coopération des bonnes volontés*".¹⁰⁸ What this meant in practical terms, he later wrote, was that

Le sens de l'expérience française, ce n'est pas de diriger intégralement la vie économique de la nation ... c'est encore moins de revenir à un libéralisme, momentanément au moins exclu par l'état des esprits et par les circonstances, le sens de l'expérience française c'est de demander à l'intervention étatique de donner l'impulsion nécessaire au renouvellement de notre outillage et de nos pratiques.¹⁰⁹

Where the CNR's planning agenda was oriented towards "*l'instauration d'une véritable démocratie économique et sociale*" with substantial worker control at all levels and generous minimum wage guarantees, the modernising vision promoted by Aron stressed

¹⁰⁵ Aron, 'Révolution et rénovation' [décembre, 1944] in *L'âge des empires*, 209-236, 223.

¹⁰⁶ 'Le renforcement', 142-143. Aron had first addressed this theme in 1937: see 'Réflexions', 821-822.

¹⁰⁷ On the Popular Front's "*démagogie économique*" see 'États démocratiques', 83.

¹⁰⁸ Aron, 'Organisation des partis' [octobre, 1944] in *L'âge des empires*, 167-178, 177.

¹⁰⁹ 'Révolution et rénovation', 227.

the need to subordinate the demands of both wages and profitability to those of productivity: “*Un tel plan*”, he wrote, “*se situerait en marge des querelles partisans, il offrirait aux Français une occasion de labour collectif, aux parties un terrain de conciliation*”.¹¹⁰ For Aron, then, post-war economic planning would perform a socially didactic role in addition to its immediate technical function: a broad-based, collaborative approach, centred on modernisation and efficiency rather than socialisation and redistribution, would ultimately serve to teach a lesson of civic virtue.¹¹¹ Thus conceived, planning offered an opportunity to break the cycle of moral and political crises fuelled by the recurrence of Manichean polarisation in national political debate since the French Revolution.¹¹²

While this vision stood in contrast to the socialist mainstream of wartime planning debate, it would prove to be very closely aligned with the ultimately triumphant planning model established by Jean Monnet, Robert Marjolin and Étienne Hirsch at the Commissariat-général au Plan in 1946.¹¹³ This is not to suggest that men whose combined economic expertise greatly surpassed Aron’s were substantially influenced by his wartime writings. But the close similarities between their respective visions do point to a common historical origin in the neo-liberal strand of technocratic non-conformism embodied by pre-war think tanks such as the Groupe X-Crise.¹¹⁴ This brand of neo-liberalism, which had been fairly marginal in the 1930s, rapidly achieved hegemony after the war when it was embraced by France’s elite administrative training schools the Institut d’études politiques de Paris, which previously had a reputation as a bastion of laissez-faire liberalism, and the newly formed École nationale d’administration (ENA).¹¹⁵ Aron’s employment by these institutions, where he taught Keynesian economics, the history of political thought, and the theory of

¹¹⁰ ‘Organisation des partis’, 176-177. See also ‘Révolution et rénovation’, 221; Aron, ‘Signification des problèmes français’ [décembre, 1944] in *L’âge des empires*, 237-251, 247-248.

¹¹¹ Aron, ‘Victoire idéologique’ [février, 1945] in *L’âge des empires*, 269-284, 277.

¹¹² Aron, ‘Introduction’ [juillet, 1945] in *L’âge des empires*, 7-27, 12-13.

¹¹³ See Nord, *New Deal*, 101-109, 148-167. See also Étienne Hirsch quoted in Denord, *Néo-libéralisme*, 188: “*Il ne peut [...] pas s’agir de réaliser une économie dirigée ou planifiée à proprement parler, mais de créer l’ambiance générale, le climat, les pentes qui inclineront avec le minimum de contrainte l’économie dans les directions estimées désirables pour l’accomplissement des buts sociaux*”.

¹¹⁴ The experiences and connections of Marjolin and Monnet in the United States were, of course, also influential in shaping their vision of post-war planning.

¹¹⁵ Nord, *New Deal*, 67-87, 130-144, 189-213.

democratic elitism from 1946 to 1955, was symptomatic of this ideological reorientation.¹¹⁶ The positive reception of end of ideology theory among their alumni, for whom Aron became a kind of master thinker in these years, reflects its origin in the same formative neo-liberal debates out of which the orientation of their own training had emerged.¹¹⁷

IV. *POLITICAL THEORY AT THE END OF IDEOLOGY*

The texts considered so far, written between 1933 and 1945, show that Aron's end of ideology theory existed in all but name ten years before it was taken as the theme of the Milan conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. By 1955, its basic propositions remained unchanged, but the context in which they were now articulated had transformed due to the onset of the Cold War and the early successes of the European economic recovery, backed since 1947 by Marshall aid. Although post-ideological political stability was conspicuous by its absence under the Fourth Republic, in economic terms at least, the vision outlined in Aron's wartime writings was beginning to come to fruition. Writing in *Le Figaro* in April 1955, he hailed the success of the West European recovery, stressing its negative implications for traditional ideologies:

Dix ans après la fin de la guerre, l'Europe a atteint un niveau de prospérité qui dépasse les prévisions les plus optimistes formulées au début du plan Marshall. ... La politique semi-dirigiste, semi-libérale, menée en matière commerciale a ... amené les mêmes déplacements qu'auraient, en théorie, provoqués les mécanismes libéraux. Les controverses passionnées entre les doctrinaires de la liberté et les doctrinaires du contrôle administratif prennent, aujourd'hui, un caractère suranné et presque dérisoire.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Nord, *New Deal*, 199-203. One of Aron's ENA courses from 1952 was posthumously published as Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique: démocratie et révolution* (Paris, 1997).

¹¹⁷ On the reception of end of ideology theory and admiration for Aron in these circles see Nord, *New Deal*, 199; Pierre Nora and Michael Taylor, 'America and the French intellectuals', *Daedalus*, 107 (winter, 1978), 325-337, 327; Christian Savès, 'Aron, notre maître', *ENA mensuel*, numéro hors-série: 'Politique et littérature' (décembre, 2003), 67. See also Sima Lieberman, 'The ideological foundations of Western European Planning', *Journal of European Economic History*, 10 (1981), 343-371, 355, 371.

¹¹⁸ Aron, 'La reconstruction de l'Europe', [29/5/55] in Aron, *Les articles de politique internationale dans Le Figaro de 1947-1977*, tome première, *La Guerre froide (Juin 1947 à mai 1955)* (Paris, 1990), 1379-1382, 1379-1380. At the time of writing the French economy was on its way towards comfortably exceeding

As we have already seen, this sense of economic over-achievement manifested itself five months later at the ‘Future of Freedom’ conference in a pervasive air of liberal democratic triumphalism. Yet optimistic expectations of mass prosperity ushering in a post-ideological age of affluence were soon to be disappointed as, ironically, CCF end of ideology discourse helped to provoke new ideological departures in the 1960s.¹¹⁹ The rise of the New Left in this decade was partly fuelled by the perception of a “vacuum of belief at the heart of post-war politics” which end of ideology theory seemed to celebrate.¹²⁰ Both empirically, with the prevalence of technocratic elitism disappointing hopes for more participatory forms of democracy, and normatively, through a failure to adequately define the moral ideals which it uniquely embodied, post-war democracy remained subject to a long-term value crisis.¹²¹ This crisis provided thematic inspiration for influential authors on the left such as Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills who critiqued end of ideology theory as an ideological celebration of mass apathy.¹²² In 1960, in a letter to the recently founded *New Left Review*, Mills railed against “the smug conservatives, tired liberals and disillusioned radicals” that made up “the NATO intellectuals” of the CCF, asserting that “The end-of-ideology is in reality the ideology of an ending; the ending of political reflection itself as a public fact”.¹²³

One can readily appreciate how some of the more optimistic articulations of end of ideology theory might invite such criticism, but this is less apparent in the case of Aron. As we have seen, his version of the theory originated not in post-war liberal triumphalism but

the targets of its second Plan (1952-1957). See Tom Buchanan, *Europe’s Troubled Peace, 1945-2000* (Oxford, 2006), 95.

¹¹⁹ Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1985), 203-218.

¹²⁰ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), 324.

¹²¹ The question of the moral foundations of the revived democracies is presented as the single greatest intellectual challenge to political thought in the immediate post-war period in Noël O’Sullivan, *European Political Thought Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), 2-7. On this problem as expressing a long-term value crisis, Karl Dietrich Bracher identifies a lack of inter-war normative political philosophy reflecting widespread scepticism towards attempts at founding universally valid moral and political values through human reason. See Bracher, *Age of Ideologies*, 152. This scepticism can, in turn, be traced to a late nineteenth-century ‘crisis of reason’, on which see Bracher, *Age of Ideologies*, 9-78 and J.W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (London, 2000). On the disappointment of aspirations towards a more participatory post-war democracy see Martin Conway, ‘Democracy in postwar Western Europe: the triumph of a political model’, *European History Quarterly*, 32 (January, 2002), 59-84, 62-65.

¹²² Mills, ‘Letter to the New Left’, 18; Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London, [1964] 2002), xxxix-xlvi, 3-20, 13.

¹²³ Mills, ‘Letter to the New Left’, 19.

in inter-war crisis, and the question of reanimating faith in democratic ideals had been integral to his wartime argument for democratic renewal. Yet his response to the value crisis of liberal democracy, particularly in its normative dimension, was nevertheless inconsistent. At once deeply sensitive to the need for a renewal of faith in democratic values and appreciative of normative political philosophy's role in this, the scope for such reflection within the philosophy laid out in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* was limited, and this is reflected in the inconsistency of his position on democratic value renewal after the war. Whilst Aron's preoccupation with this issue was a prominent feature of his writings for *La France libre*, such concerns were largely absent from *L'opium des intellectuels*, whose infamous closing sentence - "*Appelons de nos vœux la venue des sceptiques s'ils doivent éteindre le fanatisme*" - appeared to endorse in advance the dismissal of normative philosophical reflection by many CCF delegates in Milan.¹²⁴ Three years earlier, in a course entitled *Introduction à la philosophie politique* at the École nationale d'administration, he had claimed that contemporary political philosophy could only be carried out empirically, and he reiterated this view when delivering an updated version of this course at the Sorbonne in 1957-58.¹²⁵ Elsewhere, however, Aron appeared to be pulling in an opposite direction. Chairing a conference on the question *Y a-t-il une nature humaine?* in 1950, he had acknowledged that atheistic humanism was in crisis, but suggested that the ideal of a universal human vocation upon which to build a normative political philosophy remained salvageable.¹²⁶ During the late 1950s he engaged in a sympathetic reading of Leo Strauss, a prominent critic of the perceived 'death of political philosophy' since the end of the Second World War,¹²⁷ and in 1961 he commissioned Isaiah Berlin's famous defence of normative political theory, 'La théorie politique existe-t-

¹²⁴ *L'opium*, 334.

¹²⁵ *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 14; Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (Paris, 1965), 54.

¹²⁶ 'Y a-t-il une nature humaine?', *Recherches et débats du centre catholique des intellectuels français*, 8 (février - mars 1950), 15-33, 20-22, 29.

¹²⁷ For Strauss' intervention into the 'death of political philosophy' debate see Leo Strauss, 'What is political philosophy?' [1959] in Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago, 1988), 9-55. See also Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), which is discussed in Aron's introduction to Max Weber, *Le savant et le politique* (Paris, 1959), 9-57, 31-52. See too Aron, 'Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi', *Preuves*, 63 (mai, 1956), 8-22, 9-10; Aron, 'Science et conscience de la société' [1960] in Aron, *Études sociologiques* (Paris, 1988), 11-40, 30-31.

elle?’, for a special issue of the *Revue française de science politique*.¹²⁸ Two years earlier, Aron had organised another CCF conference aimed at challenging the equation of the end of ideology with the death of political philosophy, stating that

... je crois qu’en Occident nous sommes entrés dans une phase de réflexion philosophique et religieuse, non pas contre les succès des sciences positives, mais précisément en fonction de leur succès, qui nous ramène à l’essentiel qui est une spéculation sur: quel sens voulons-nous donner à la vie, quelle est la vie bonne, quel est la société bonne ?¹²⁹

To answer such questions requires a conception of human nature against which to determine what would constitute the good life or the good society, and within this the question of whether man is naturally good or evil is fundamental. Aron’s inconsistency regarding the contemporary viability of normative political philosophy stems from his ambivalence regarding this last question – he viewed man as “à la fois animal et esprit” – and from the triple historicity that he placed at the centre of human being in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire*.¹³⁰ In the *Introduction*, the second dimension of human historicity, “*L’homme est historique*”, indicates that values are not universal but historically and socially specific. From this perspective, the classical philosophical problem of universally defining the good society or the best political regime is impossible. The third dimension of human historicity, however, “*L’homme est une histoire*”, posits a universal human history whose end would be the pacific reign of reason conceived as a Kantian ideal of pure reason. This standpoint allows for a more optimistic view of man as “*une espèce animale qui accède progressivement à l’humanité*”, moderating the relativism of the previous dimension of human historicity by advancing the pursuit of truth through reason as a universal human vocation.¹³¹ Liberty necessarily joins truth at the top of the scale of

¹²⁸ Isaiah Berlin, ‘La théorie politique existe-t-elle?’, *Revue française de science politique*, 11 (1961), 309-337. The other contributors to this special issue on the contemporary relevance of political theory, edited by Aron, were Henri Lefebvre, Eric Weil, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Anthony Downs and Stanley Hoffman. See bibliography for full article details.

¹²⁹ These remarks are drawn from the transcribed discussion during the CCF’s conference in Bâle-Rheinfelden in *Colloques de Rheinfelden*, 317. Aron sets out the conference agenda in more detail in his presentation ‘La société industrielle et les dialogues politiques de l’occident’, pages 9-38 of the same collection. On this theme see also *Trois essais*, 125-239.

¹³⁰ *Introduction*, 436. See also *Paix et guerre*, 338-3343. On the triple historicity of human being see pages 70-71 in chapter one of the present thesis.

¹³¹ Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, (Paris, 1967), 395.

values here, effectively rooting intellectual freedom and “*la protection contre l’arbitraire de la police*” in natural law.¹³² But while this grounds Aron’s anti-totalitarianism in a substantive negative morality, it is an insufficient basis from which to address positively and in detail the question of the best regime or the good society. The goal of maximising liberty alone cannot generate a concrete political blueprint or even a coherent abstract ideal because the contents of liberty are historically variable, plural and equivocal.¹³³ Even assuming a minimal universal definition limited to freedom of thought and from arbitrary authority, safeguarding such negative liberty is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for the gradual attainment of humanity by man. To suggest otherwise would require a degree of fundamental optimism about human nature that Aron, who expressly refused to believe that a social order could be based on the natural virtue and disinterestedness of its citizens, did not possess.¹³⁴

It is in the first dimension of human historicity outlined in the *Introduction*, “[*L’homme*] *est dans l’histoire*”, that the tension between Aron’s opposed impulses towards political optimism and pessimism is most readily apparent. This aspect of historicity reveals human existence to be essentially political. Aron later expanded upon this in *Démocratie et totalitarisme*:

Par rapport à l’homme, le politique est plus important que l’économique, pour ainsi dire par définition, parce que le politique concerne plus directement le sens même de l’existence. Les philosophes ont toujours pensé que la vie humaine est pour ainsi dire constituée par les relations entre les personnes. Vivre humainement, c’est vivre avec d’autres hommes. Les relations des hommes entre eux sont le phénomène fondamental de toute collectivité. Or, l’organisation de l’autorité engage plus directement la façon de vivre que tout autre aspect de la société.¹³⁵

This passage begins by affirming the primacy of politics against economics in the sense pertaining to the sociological critique of Marxist and liberal economic determinism:

¹³² For the quotation and reference to natural law see *Essai sur les libertés*, 104. On this point see also Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham, 1992), 82-83. Aron discusses the places of liberty and truth in his scale of values in *Spectateur*, 312-313.

¹³³ *Paix et guerre*, 593. See too *Essai sur les libertés*, 73-235.

¹³⁴ *L’opium*, 100.

¹³⁵ *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 35.

political institutions are not simply the expression of given relations of production and economic liberty is not causally sufficient for securing political liberty.¹³⁶ Such a critique may equally be applied to a vulgarised understanding of end of ideology theory: economic growth is necessary yet insufficient for social and political stability.¹³⁷ This argument for the primacy of the political can be given an optimistic interpretation. Thus in his *Essai sur les libertés* Aron claims that the liberal democratic state, by safeguarding fundamental negative liberties, offers “une chance d’instruire les hommes, de les rendre capables de raison et de moralité”.¹³⁸ He had similarly linked democratic political institutions to the fulfilment of man’s universal vocation in the *Introduction* where he wrote that “Grâce à la participation aux deux œuvres collectives, l’État qui fait de chaque individu un citoyen, la culture qui rend accessible à tous l’acquis commun, il réaliserait sa vocation: conciliation de l’humanité et de la nature, de l’essence et de l’existence”.¹³⁹ But Aron never suggested that these political institutions would *guarantee* such moral progress, only that they offered the least bad guarantee of the personal and intellectual liberties that were its necessary but insufficient prerequisites.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, immediately after the apparently optimistic passage from the *Introduction* cited above, Aron emphasises that social and individual “animalité” must remain a permanent consideration of all political reflection.¹⁴¹

Here we begin to see how Aron’s political theory attempts to balance Kantian optimism with a pessimism partly informed by Carl Schmitt’s writing on the political. The use of “*le politique*” (the political) as opposed to “*la politique*” (politics) in the above passage from *Démocratie et totalitarisme* points to the influence of Schmitt’s existential understanding of the political.¹⁴² Schmitt, who considered that “all genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil” claimed “The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives

¹³⁶ In their original context, these remarks are directed against Marxism, but for the same critique applied to the economic liberalism of Friedrich von Hayek and Jacques Rueff see *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 127.

¹³⁷ For Aron’s refutation of this reading of end of ideology theory see *Trois essais*, 17-122.

¹³⁸ *Essai sur les libertés*, 235.

¹³⁹ *Introduction*, 429.

¹⁴⁰ Aron, ‘Liberté, libérale ou libertaire ?’ [1969] in *Études politiques*, 235-274, 245.

¹⁴¹ *Introduction*, 429.

¹⁴² Prior to Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political* in 1932, use of “*le politique*” in French translated as “the politician”. See David Ames Curtis’ translator’s forward to Claude Lefort’s *Writing: The Political Test* (Durham and London, 2000), xi. I am grateful to Professor Stuart Jones for originally drawing my attention to this issue. For a detailed account of Aron’s relation to Schmitt see note 55 on page 45 above.

can be reduced is that between friend and enemy”.¹⁴³ Aron openly agreed with this latter statement when applied to the field of international relations, but it also retains a background presence in his theory of the internal politics of individual regimes.¹⁴⁴ This is not always immediately apparent because his writings in this area usually assume the established existence of a given regime and explore the various factors contributing to its functioning effectively.¹⁴⁵ It does, however, become clearer on occasions when he discusses extreme situations where the existence of the state is threatened. For Aron, part of the political significance of war, for instance, is that it shows that men are citizens before being private individuals, or rather that they can exist securely as private individuals only by virtue of being citizens of a minimally liberal state.¹⁴⁶ Regarding the birth of new states, his recognition that “*Les unités politiques, les régimes constitutionnels doivent tous leur origine à la violence*” indicates tacit acceptance of Schmitt’s view that “The concept of the state pre-supposes the concept of the political”.¹⁴⁷ So too does his Weberian definition of the state in terms of its monopoly on legitimate violence, but Aron’s particular articulation of this principle simultaneously hints at his Kantian optimism: “*L’État n’est pas seulement, mais est au moins et en tout cas, l’instance qui détient le monopole de la violence légitime*”.¹⁴⁸ This qualification implicitly recalls the positive role attributed to the democratic state in enabling mankind to fulfil its vocation in the *Introduction* and *Essai sur les libertés*.

Aron does not attempt to reconcile these competing impulses towards optimism and pessimism in his political thought; his alternation between idealistic Kantian and agonistic Schmittian visions indicates only that he considered neither individually to exhaust the significance of the political dimension of human existence. Aron’s attempt to draw both into the same orbit was, though, not unproblematic. The survival of the liberal democratic institutions by which animalistic man was to be made capable of reason and morality, for

¹⁴³ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago, 1996), 61, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Aron, ‘La définition libérale de la liberté’ [1961] in *Études politiques*, 195-215, 208; *Paix et guerre*, 294-295.

¹⁴⁵ For instance, both *Introduction à la philosophie politique* and *Démocratie et totalitarisme* adopt this approach.

¹⁴⁶ *Introduction*, 416; ‘Liberté, libérale ou libertaire ?’, 242.

¹⁴⁷ *Paix et guerre*, 61; Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Aron, *Les désillusions du progrès: essai sur la dialectique de la modernité* (Paris, 1969), 197.

instance, depended upon citizens exercising the very qualities that these institutions were themselves supposed to inculcate. This contributed towards Aron's heightened sense of the permanent fragility of liberal democratic regimes, which he contrasted with the more optimistic political liberalism of Friedrich von Hayek:

L'idéal d'une société dans laquelle chacun choisirait ses dieux ou ses valeurs ne peut se répandre avant que les individus ne soient éduqués à la vie collective. La philosophie de Hayek suppose acquis, par définition, les résultats que les philosophes du passé considéraient comme les objets primaires de l'action politique. Pour laisser à chacun une sphère privée de décision et de choix, encore faut-il que tous ou la plupart veuillent vivre ensemble et reconnaissent un même système d'idées pour vrai, une même formule de légitimité pour valable. Avant que la société puisse être libre, il faut qu'elle soit.¹⁴⁹

Aron here touches once more upon the need for cementing a minimum ideological consensus around basic liberal democratic values that had been such a prominent feature of his wartime writings. Yet however much this issue preoccupied him, he was only ever able to confront it in a primarily negative or indirect fashion. From Aron's perspective, the primary political virtues of collective life were those of restraint and moderation. Adopting the terminology of Montesquieu, he identified the dual principle of liberal democratic regimes to be respect for the law and a spirit of compromise, both laudable objectives in themselves and no doubt essential to the effective functioning of such regimes, but hardly sufficient bases for reanimating mass faith in post-war democracy.¹⁵⁰ Despite his constant awareness of the importance of this issue, Aron's fear of mass democratic enthusiasm's tyrannical potential always ultimately won out over his concern that post-war democratic stability be built on more than just economic growth. Where other political thinkers increasingly explored theories of direct democracy as a response to this problem, Aron became France's pre-eminent theorist of democratic elitism.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ 'La définition libérale de la liberté', 211.

¹⁵⁰ *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 36-40, 50-53; *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 76, 85-86.

¹⁵¹ For Aron's theory of democratic elitism see Aron, 'Structure sociale et structure de l'élite' [1950]; 'Classe sociale, classe politique, classe dirigeante' [1960]; 'Catégories dirigeants ou classe dirigeante?' [1965] in *Études sociologiques*, 111-142; 143-166; 187-210 respectively. See too in general Aron, *La lutte de classes: nouvelles leçons sur la société industrielle* (Paris, 1964). Note also the very close similarity with the version of this theory advanced in Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London [1942] 1946), 250-296. For the influence of Aron's theory on the study of political elites in France see William Genieys, 'The sociology of political elites in France: The end of an exception?', *International Political Science Review*, 26 (October, 2005), 413-430, 415-416.

This aspect of his political thought had already been apparent on the eve of the war when, as we have seen, Aron first explicitly relegated the principle of popular sovereignty to a secondary status, reconfiguring the scale of democratic values along liberal lines.¹⁵² While he regarded democracy as the logical conclusion of the liberal philosophy in that equality before the law implied an ideal of equal participation in making the law, Aron's understanding of this participation was limited to the right to vote in periodic general elections.¹⁵³ Democracy amounted to the best available guarantee of negative liberties under modern industrial conditions, but was not an end in itself.¹⁵⁴ This de-emphasising of the ideal of popular sovereignty partly reflected Aron's concern that it was not a value to which democratic states could lay claim exclusively. It also expressed recognition that modern mass societies were politically oligarchic of necessity, especially given the enhanced social and economic responsibilities attached to the post-war state.¹⁵⁵ What mattered for Aron was not the fact of such oligarchy, but the pluralistic or monolithic constitution of elites. Liberal democratic regimes here represented a lesser betrayal of the ideal of popular sovereignty than their totalitarian counterparts in part because of the relative social and institutional plurality of their elites compared to those of totalitarian regimes accessible only via membership of the single ruling party.¹⁵⁶

These kinds of arguments in defence of democratic elitism were increasingly challenged within and outside France over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. Foremost among the critiques of democratic elitism in terms of the adversarial space that it occupied in Aron's writings was that of C. Wright Mills who in 1956 had posited the *de facto* unity of the political, military and economic elites of the United States.¹⁵⁷ Responding to Mills in 1957, Aron dismissed the idea of a unified power elite as a conspiracy theory arising from the fact that the plurality of elites in Western democracies made it difficult to pin down their

¹⁵² 'États démocratiques', 70.

¹⁵³ *Essai sur les libertés*, 86-87.

¹⁵⁴ *Essai sur les libertés*, 71, 87

¹⁵⁵ *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 239-239; *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 131.

¹⁵⁶ This basic argument is expressed in all of the texts cited in note 151 above.

¹⁵⁷ See in general Mills, *The Power Elite*.

political decision-making processes.¹⁵⁸ “[Le] vrai problème des régimes constitutionnels-pluralistes de notre époque”, he added, “n’est pas, ou n’est pas seulement, d’atténuer le caractère oligarchique du gouvernement, mais aussi et surtout d’atténuer le risque de dispersion du pouvoir et d’impuissance des gouvernants”.¹⁵⁹ The diminished credibility of such a claim under the Fifth Republic did not prevent Aron making this argument well into the 1960s when he began to explicitly associate the prospect of a more socially diverse political and bureaucratic elite with the corrosion of the essential principle of respect for legality and the sense of compromise.¹⁶⁰ The prominence of anti-elitist, direct democratic themes within the protests that shook the Fifth Republic in May-June 1968 led him to continue reflecting on this issue into the 1970s. A year after the *événements*, in his *Les désillusions du progrès*, Aron attacked at length a “doctrinal egalitarianism” whose proponents abhorred the inequality of modern societies whilst simultaneously denouncing mass phenomena such as consumerism and the homogenisation of culture. Intellectuals such as Herbert Marcuse were, he suggested, inconsistent in vacillating between attacking the anomie or ‘normlessness’ of capitalist society on the one hand and the alleged phenomenon of mass conformity on the other.¹⁶¹ Aron was especially sceptical of the claims of *autogestion*, the advancing of worker participation in the management of business enterprises, as a feasible or legitimate means of overcoming alienation.¹⁶² After the events of May-June 1968 he increasingly came to regard such ideas, together with other aspects of New Left cultural criticism and anti-elitism, as combining to form a radically egalitarian and libertarian ideology that threatened to extend beyond valid social criticism and tip Western Europe into a full-blown crisis of civilisation.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 139-149.

¹⁵⁹ *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 149.

¹⁶⁰ *Les désillusions*, 37, 56-58, 67; *Essai sur les libertés*, 119-123.

¹⁶¹ *Les désillusions*, 290-293, 325.

¹⁶² *Les désillusions*, 136-145.

¹⁶³ Aron, *Plaidoyer pour l’Europe décadente* (Paris, 1977), 408-447, 445.

V. CONCLUSION

Raymond Aron's justificatory stance towards the elitism of post-war French democracy partly reflected the facts of his having first promoted an elite-led model of democratic renewal since the late 1930s and then taught at both of the main training schools for French politicians and civil servants between 1945 and 1955. Aron's reputation as the master thinker of the latter's alumni is not undeserved, and it would not be unfair to suggest that he had a sense of personal investment in these institutions and the (anti-) ideology they promoted. But as far as his liberalism is concerned this is not a problematic issue; indeed, it enables us to better situate Aron within a tradition of French liberalism noted for its heterogeneity. Fear of the tyrannical potential pregnant within more literal interpretations of the principle of popular sovereignty had been a hallmark of French liberalism since the descent of the liberal Revolution into Jacobin Terror. There was, of course, an important strand of French liberalism, whose greatest representative among Aron's contemporaries was Alain, that emphasised the importance of public opinion as a brake on the over-extension of the authority of representatives of the state.¹⁶⁴ But this was not a priority for Aron, who, during the war, attacked Alain's vision of *Le citoyen contre les pouvoirs* as socially and politically pernicious.¹⁶⁵ Where Alain advised "*Ne croyez jamais ce que dit un homme d'État*", Aron criticised intellectuals for failing to consider politics from the practical viewpoint of the statesman.¹⁶⁶ It is equally significant, however, that, during the 1930s, he admonished politicians for failing to draw upon social scientific expertise.¹⁶⁷ As we have seen, his participation in the critique of the economic policies of the Popular Front linked Aron to the emergence of a distinctive brand of French neo-liberalism.

It is important to acknowledge that use of the term 'neo-liberalism' in this context is open to some legitimate objections. Aron, for instance, did not use this word other than to describe Hayekian neo-classical economics. Applying such a label also risks understating

¹⁶⁴ Alain, *Le citoyen contre les pouvoirs* (Paris, 1926), 154.

¹⁶⁵ Aron, 'Prestige et illusions du citoyen contre les pouvoirs' [1941] in *L'homme*, 128-147.

¹⁶⁶ Alain, *Le citoyen*, 143; 'Réflexions', 793-795.

¹⁶⁷ Aron, 'Réflexions', 796-822.

the extent to which this neo-liberal vision sought to transcend traditional categories like liberalism and socialism, ‘neo’ or otherwise. Furthermore, since neo-liberalism in the more usual sense of the word did become increasingly attractive to some French economists and politicians in the mid-1970s, there is a risk of confusion from applying this term to the position against which they were partly reacting.¹⁶⁸ The term is nevertheless worth retaining to describe what would eventually become Aron’s end of ideology theory. This is because, firstly, this theory emerged at an international level from the same debates within the same intellectual milieu as its neo-classical competitor, as we have seen by examining the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* and its links to the Congress for Cultural Freedom and Mont Pelerin Society. Secondly, and from a specifically French perspective, describing Aron’s end of ideology theory as a form of neo-liberalism acts as a reminder of its roots in the non-conformist political and economic renewal movements of the 1930s. This is important because it shows that it was originally the product of a profound crisis of faith in some of liberal democracy’s basic political and economic postulates. It most certainly did not originate in any sense that democracy represented the achievement of the good society.

We have seen that Aron was at once highly sensitive to the charge that end of ideology theory reduced modern democracy to “a system of technique *sans telos*” and ultimately unable to address this criticism in other than negative or indirect terms.¹⁶⁹ While his anti-totalitarianism expressed a negative political morality effectively rooted in natural law, he typically presented liberal democracies not as the best political regimes for man as man, but as the least bad of the known alternatives available in the twentieth century. This does not mean, however, that Aron’s end of ideology theory announced “the ending of political reflection itself as a public fact”, as C. Wright Mills argued.¹⁷⁰ In fact, and on this point his recent admirers on both the socialist left and neo-conservative right are agreed, Aron’s was a liberalism rooted in an enhanced sensitivity to the irreducibly political character of human

¹⁶⁸ For example, the politician Alain Madelin, whose edited collection, *Aux sources du modèle libérale français* (Paris, 1997), gathers like-minded French economists to promote such a vision of French economic liberalism.

¹⁶⁹ Rousseas and Farganis, ‘American politics and the end of ideology’, 349.

¹⁷⁰ Mills, ‘Letter to the New Left’, 19.

existence.¹⁷¹ The influence of Carl Schmitt on this aspect of Aron's thought has been noted.¹⁷² Without following Schmitt to the extreme conclusion that liberalism and democracy were inherently incompatible, Aron maintained a strong sense of the permanent fragility of liberal democratic regimes.¹⁷³ He recognised Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, but did not consider it to be the sole source of fundamental truths about the political, which he regarded as potentially a terrain of human reconciliation as well as conflict. The significance of end of ideology theory in this respect was that it identified state managed economic growth as a means of containing political divisions within tolerable limits and providing a basis for national reconciliation after the division and humiliation of the war years.

The liberalism of Aron's end of ideology theory was thus not restricted to its economic vision, and it is worth finally noting that it was in the context of some of the writings discussed here that Aron began tentatively to engage with some of the illustrious political liberal predecessors with whom he later came to be closely associated. We have seen that his introduction to his collected wartime writings in *L'âge des empires et l'avenir de la France* framed the challenge of France's post-war recovery in distinctly liberal terms as that of finally overcoming the nation's recurrent post-1789 political and moral crises, and this work is littered with passing references to figures such as Ernest Renan, Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol and Alexis de Tocqueville. It was not, however, until 1955 that Aron began seriously to study Tocqueville on the recommendation of another end of ideology theorist, Daniel Bell.¹⁷⁴ His subsequent interpretation of *De la démocratie en Amérique* was shaped by the end of ideology argument in several respects. Rather than

¹⁷¹ The title of Brian C. Anderson's *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* conveys the book's main argument. On the left, see Serge Audier, *Raymond Aron: la démocratie conflictuelle* (Paris, 2004), 7.

¹⁷² Curiously, given the title of his book, Anderson only discusses Schmitt in passing once: see Anderson, *Raymond Aron*, 156. Aron's relationship with Schmitt is discussed with regard to his theory of international relations in Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven, 2003), 98-102. On this issue see too Philippe Raynaud, 'Raymond Aron et le droit international', *Cahiers de philosophie politique et juridique*, 15 (1989), 117-127. For a discussion of Schmitt and Aron's correspondence see Piet Tommissen, 'Raymond Aron face à Carl Schmitt', *Schmittiana*, 7 (2001), 111-129.

¹⁷³ For Schmitt's view of the fundamentally antagonistic relationship between liberalism and democracy see Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Massachusetts, [1923, 1926] 1988), 1-17.

¹⁷⁴ Serge Audier, *Tocqueville retrouvé: genèse et enjeux du renouveau tocquevillien français* (Paris, 2004), 49.

emphasise the contemporary significance of Tocqueville's theory of tutelary despotism as Hayek had done in *The Road to Serfdom*, Aron contrasted Tocqueville's predictions of the 'equalisation of conditions' with Marx's opposite, catastrophic vision, suggesting that the post-war economic recovery confirmed this basic Tocquevillian view over its Marxist rival.¹⁷⁵ His later critique of doctrinal egalitarianism similarly drew heavily upon Tocqueville, and his attempt at reinforcing the normative basis of his political thought in the late 1950s and 1960s also mined the work of both Tocqueville and Montesquieu for inspiration. These questions will be treated at length in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁵ Friedrich von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago, [1944] 1994), xli, 16, 29; Aron, *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* (Paris, 1962), 33-73; *Essai sur les libertés*, 17-72; *Trois essais*, 108.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTRUMENTALISING THE FRENCH LIBERAL TRADITION

References to tradition are pervasive in the secondary literature on Raymond Aron, but they tend to be made with little apparent awareness of the theoretical controversies surrounding the use of this term and its manifold evaluative and explanatory connotations. To describe a social practice as traditional is often to confer legitimacy upon it and sometimes to denigrate it, while historians commonly locate actions, works and corpuses within the context of tradition to explain or interpret them, but continue to disagree about precisely what may be explained through tradition and how.¹ That the existing specialist literature on Aron is apparently so lacking in theoretical awareness in this regard is partly because references to tradition within it, even when they are presented in seemingly neutral explanatory terms, often perform a laudatory evaluative function. Whether as an intellectual heir to Montesquieu, Constant and Tocqueville,² the talisman for a new wave of French liberal intellectuals,³ or the inspiration for a revival of interest in France's nineteenth-century liberal tradition,⁴ Aron's importance within French liberal tradition has been more celebrated than analysed.

This celebratory tendency is unsatisfactory because it fails to recognise the full implications of two problems concerning Aron's relationship with French liberal tradition. The first is that he repeatedly admitted that his thought owed nothing to the influence of liberals such

¹ Mark Bevir, 'On Tradition', *Humanitas*, 13 (2000), 28-53, 28.

² Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham, 1992), 15, 73, 79; Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron and the Recovery of the Political* (Lanham, 1997), 168, 192, 170; Reed M. Davis, *A Politics of Understanding: The International Thought of Raymond Aron* (Louisiana, 2009), 2.

³ Rémy Rieffel, *La tribu des clercs: les intellectuels sous la Ve République* (Paris, 1993), 225-260; Mark Lilla, 'The other velvet revolution: continental liberalism and its discontents', *Daedalus*, 123 (spring, 1994), 129-157; Nicolas Baverez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des idéologies* (Paris, 1993), 512; Brian C. Anderson, 'The Aronian Renewal', *First Things* (March, 1995), 61-64.

⁴ Serge Audier, *Tocqueville retrouvé: genèse et enjeux du renouveau tocquevillien français* (Paris, 2004), 19-155; Françoise Mélonio, *Tocqueville et les Français* (Paris, 1993), 274-285; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 410; Mark Lilla, 'The legitimacy of the liberal age' in Mark Lilla, (ed.), *New French Thought: Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1994), 3-34, 12.

as Montesquieu and Tocqueville with whom he is often associated.⁵ The second derives from the fact that there is substantial scholarly scepticism about the existence of a domestic liberal tradition when Aron received his education.⁶ These issues should caution against a reflexive approach to Aron's liberal traditionalist affiliation. Neither necessarily implies that we cannot meaningfully situate him within a certain liberal tradition, but they do suggest that the idea of Aron as a direct descendent of such a tradition cannot be taken as self-evident.

Much here will depend on how tradition is defined. If we take the view that "the role of traditions must be to explain why people set out with the beliefs and practices they did, not to explain why they went on to change these initial beliefs and practices", then Aron's relation to French liberal tradition appears compromised by the fact that he set out with beliefs and practices that were socialist.⁷ If we stress the importance of concrete temporal links between members of a tradition defined as a "[body] of thought passed down from one intellectual generation to the next",⁸ then the case for Aron as the embodiment of France's liberal tradition can again appear weakened when we consider, for instance, that he never heard mention of Tocqueville throughout his years as a student at the *École normale supérieure*.⁹ This can be mitigated by considering traditions as chains of influence that do not depend on concrete temporal links between the individuals constituting them, but such an approach does not overcome our other problem: Aron's repeated denial that either Montesquieu or Tocqueville had any substantial influence over his intellectual development. The problem here is that a simplified view of the traditionalist relationship as a unidirectional chain of influence moving from the past to the present is inadequate for the

⁵ "... je ne dois rien à l'influence de Montesquieu et de Tocqueville dont je n'ai sérieusement étudié les œuvres qu'au cours des dix dernières années". Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique: Montesquieu, Comte, Marx, Tocqueville, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber* (Paris, 1967), 21. See also Aron's letter to Jesse R. Pitts dated 25/10/78, *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060 (171); Aron, 'Tocqueville retrouvé', *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*, 1 (fall, 1979), 8-23, 8; and Aron, 'Discours de Raymond Aron lors de la réception du Prix Tocqueville', *The Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville*, 2 (winter, 1980), 117-121, 120.

⁶ See especially Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, (Oxford, 1992), 238; Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (London, 1993), 135-136.

⁷ Bevir, 'On tradition', 49.

⁸ Neil Gross, 'Becoming a pragmatist philosopher: status, self-concept and intellectual choice', *American Sociological Review*, 67 (February, 2002), 52-76, 53.

⁹ Aron, *Le spectateur engagé: entretiens avec Jean-Louis Missika et Dominique Wolton* (Paris, 1981), 27.

purpose of understanding Aron's retrospective relationship with French liberal tradition because the basic features of his political thought were well-established by the time he began engaging with the thought of Montesquieu and Tocqueville. A more flexible understanding of individuals' relationships with the traditions in which they become situated is required if we are to advance beyond the kind of celebratory accounts of Aron's importance in French liberal tradition referred to above.

This is provided in the present chapter by the guiding concept of traditionary action.¹⁰ Developed through a critical engagement with several anti-essentialist approaches to tradition including the hermeneutical theory of Hans Georg Gadamer, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of knowledge, and the methodological writings of historians J.G.A. Pocock, Roger Chartier and Dominick LaCapra, this concept expresses the fundamental assumption that individuals' relationships with tradition are often actively instrumental rather than passively receptive.¹¹ Traditionary action, as it is conceived in the present chapter, operates in two registers and therefore describes the instrumentalising of tradition in two ways. In its strongest sense, it takes the form of *canonisation*.¹² This term refers to individuals aligning themselves with given (or constructed) traditions in order to confer cultural legitimacy upon their own work, the tradition itself, or both simultaneously.¹³ This pursuit of cultural

¹⁰ The term 'traditionary action' is borrowed from Peter L. Janssen, 'Political thought as traditionary action: the critical response to Skinner and Pocock', *History and Theory*, 24 (1985), 115-146.

¹¹ What these authors have in common is their shared attack on the authorial monopoly over textual meaning and their promotion of reader reception of texts as being itself generative of meaning. This anti-essentialist reorientation of the relationship between authors, readers and textual meaning is important from our point of view because it provides a means of accounting for Aron's creative readings of Montesquieu and Tocqueville which does not require him to have been their 'descendent' in the sense of having been influenced by them in a formative way. See e.g. Gadamer: "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author ... understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well". Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London & New York, 2004), 296. See also pages 300-310, 396. Chartier goes further, claiming that a given text "acquires meaning only through the strategies of interpretation that construct its significances". See Roger Chartier, 'Intellectual history or sociocultural history? The French trajectories' in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (London, 1982), 13-46, 37.

¹² The notion of canonisation is adapted from LaCapra: "Canonization is a procedure not only of selection, but of selective interpretation, often in the direction of domestication". See Dominick LaCapra, 'Intellectual history and reading texts', *History and Theory*, 19 (October, 1980), 245-276, 261.

¹³ The term 'cultural legitimacy' is adapted from its use by Pierre Bourdieu in 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project', *Social Science Information*, 8 (1969), 89-119. As with the terms 'traditionary action' and 'canonisation' the use of this term here does not entirely replicate its original authorial use. In particular, greater weight will be afforded to counter-cultural forms of cultural legitimacy than in Bourdieu's application of the term.

legitimacy may often be combative and the canonisation of a particular tradition can serve the twin goals of legitimising one's own position whilst de-legitimising that of another individual, group or tradition. Such was the case, it will be argued, with Aron's construction of what he termed "*l'école française de sociologie politique*" in his famous work on the history of sociological thought, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*.¹⁴ The first section of this chapter is principally concerned with deconstructing Aron's traditionary action in this regard by situating it within the context of a contemporary consensus gap that emerged within French sociology in the wake of the decline of Durkheimianism since the Second World War. This coincided with a period of rising popular and governmental influence for sociologists which encouraged a struggle for influence over French academic sociology in which competing accounts of the discipline's French history played a major role. Aron's canonisation of Montesquieu and Tocqueville as sociologists was, it is argued here, part of this broader competition for influence within the University.

Traditionary action also describes the instrumentalising of tradition in a second, weaker sense defined here as *counter-innovation*.¹⁵ The instrumental connotation of this term is weaker because it reflects the inevitability of individuals reading texts in the light of their contemporary political, social or methodological concerns. Aron himself demonstrated a clear sensitivity to the underlying issues informing this conceptualisation of traditionary action. In his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, he had written that

Toute activité spirituelle s'insère dans une tradition dans et par laquelle l'individu se définit. Pas de savant ou d'artiste qui ne parte d'un acquis, pas de transmission non plus qui ne corresponde à une sorte de recreation. ... Chaque époque se choisit un passé, en puisant dans

¹⁴ *Les étapes*, 295.

¹⁵ The term counter-innovation is borrowed from the intellectual historian J.G.A. Pocock: "... it is easy to see how innovation by the author can be - as we have seen why it must be - met with counter-innovation by the respondent. There is even a sense in which the respondent - let us imagine him a disciple - cannot escape treating the text in this way, since not being the author he cannot use the author's language exactly as the author did; and should the respondent be confronted with a text whose author has been dead for centuries, he inevitably acquires the freedom to interpret it in a historical context that the author did not imagine and a language context that includes idioms he never knew." J.G.A. Pocock, 'The state of the art' in J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 1-36, 20-21.

le trésor collectif, chaque existence nouvelle transfigure l'héritage qu'elle a reçu, en lui donnant un autre avenir et en lui rendant une autre signification.¹⁶

Aron's later expository accounts of Montesquieu and Tocqueville in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* deliberately execute this kind of transfiguration. In the second section of this chapter the concept of traditionary action as counter-innovation is applied in a close reading of *Les étapes* to show how its selective interpretation of these authors answered Aron's specific epistemological and political concerns. There follows an account of how Aron adapted his analyses of modern industrial democracy along Tocquevillian lines and how this affected his controversial interpretation of the events of May-June 1968 in Paris.

Section III describes the evolution of a post-1968 renaissance of political liberalism within the French intelligentsia. This renaissance centred consecutively in two reviews, *Contrepoint* and *Commentaire*, formed under Aron's tutelage in hostile response to the new forms of revolutionary *gauchisme* that developed out of May 1968 and the re-emergence of the PCF as a potential party of government from 1972. Special care is taken here to differentiate this specific liberal revival from a wider anti-totalitarian turn in the later 1970s which witnessed the emergence of competing instrumentalisations of French liberal tradition. The concluding section that follows seeks to critically relate these competing liberal revivals to Aron's traditionary action as described in the first two sections.

¹⁶ Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris, [1938] 1986), 125.

I. *CANONISATION: DECONSTRUCTING THE FRENCH SCHOOL OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY*

The widespread perception of Aron's pivotal importance within French liberal tradition springs in large part from his account of the history of sociological thought in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*. This book, published in 1967 but based upon a series of lectures that he delivered at the Sorbonne in 1959-60, is notable for its tripartite division of the early history of sociological thought. The contributions to sociological theory of two of the schools that Aron identified, the Marxist school and the positivist school of Comte and Durkheim, were undisputed; his addition of a third, "*l'école française de sociologie politique*", was more controversial. Aron acknowledged one obvious objection: neither Montesquieu, whom he identified as the school's founder, nor Tocqueville, its nineteenth-century representative, described themselves as sociologists.¹⁷ The term sociology never existed in Montesquieu's lifetime and, whilst Tocqueville might have been familiar with it, it would be a generation before the beginnings of any identifiable school of academic sociologists would appear in France under the tutelage of Émile Durkheim. Élie Halévy, the third individual that Aron assigned to the French school of political sociology, was a contemporary of Durkheim and the early, precarious rise of sociology within the French University, but at no point did he describe himself as a sociologist of any persuasion. Thus of the four individuals identified by Aron as constituting this sociological tradition, only one, himself, could properly be called a sociologist. A second problem with his account of the French school of political sociology was that the relations of influence between its four members were largely insubstantial. The least problematic join in the traditionary chain was the one connecting Tocqueville to Montesquieu; thereafter the links become rather more tenuous. Aron admitted that neither Montesquieu nor Tocqueville had formatively influenced his own thought and whilst Halévy was important in shaping his theory of totalitarianism, his influence on Aron's reading of Montesquieu and Tocqueville has been

¹⁷ *Les étapes*, 66. Whilst this objection could have equally have been made regarding Marx's categorisation as a sociologist, it was not unusual for Marx to be categorised as such in France. See the indented quotation on page 38 of the present thesis.

exaggerated.¹⁸ Indeed, as will be shown in more detail later, Halévy's own connections with Montesquieu and Tocqueville were somewhat less substantial than his identification as their descendent by Aron suggests.

All of this indicates that the French school of political sociology was, to a large extent, a figment of Aron's creative imagination. This is not to suggest that there were not many significant thematic parallels across the oeuvres of its various members, but as a self-conscious tradition it was clearly nowhere near Marxism or the Comtean-Durkheimian lineage. This raises the question as to what motivated Aron's retrospective construction of this sociological tradition. To answer this it is necessary to situate his action in the context of the post-war disciplinary history of sociology in France, a period when the status of sociology had never been higher, but which was singularly lacking in consensus as to the discipline's aims and its means of achieving them. One of the key battlegrounds in the struggle created by this consensus gap was the history of French sociological thought itself. Aron's construction of the French school of political sociology was part of a wider competition among sociologists to redefine the discipline's past so as to shape its future according to their political and methodological preferences. It was at once an attempt at legitimising his approach to sociology by rooting it in tradition and an undertaking to canonise a partially dormant liberal tradition in French thought. As such it reflects a complex interplay of cultural legitimisation and de-legitimisation because his canonisation of the French school of political sociology was dependent upon the construction of a straw man representation of Durkheimian positivist tradition against which to define it. However, as is shown below, Aron's engagement with the work of Montesquieu and Tocqueville qua sociologists borrowed substantially from some of the alleged Durkheimian epigones against whom he sought to define himself as a sociologist.

It is worth beginning this deconstruction of Aron's traditionary action by reflecting on his definition of the first of the sociological schools considered in *Les étapes*:

¹⁸ Nicolas Baverez, for instance, describes Halévy as the missing link between Aron and Tocqueville. See Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 99.

La première est celle que l'on pourrait appeler l'école française de sociologie politique, dont les fondateurs sont Montesquieu et Tocqueville. Élie Halévy, à notre époque, appartient à cette tradition. C'est une école de sociologues peu dogmatiques, intéressées avant tout par la politique, qui, sans méconnaître l'infrastructure sociale, dégagent l'autonomie de l'ordre politique et pensent en libéraux. Probablement suis-je un descendant attardé de cette école.¹⁹

Given that the other two schools are named according to their underlying doctrines, Marxism and positivism, it is significant that Aron should have named this a French rather than a liberal school. Indeed, this was not a neutral choice: it reflected an underlying concern with legitimising this particular tradition. Aron was writing at a time when liberalism tended to be associated with 'Anglo-Saxon' capitalism and therefore widely perceived as un-French.²⁰ Furthermore, all of the authors he placed within this tradition were known Anglophiles. The choice of 'French' over 'liberal' may, then, be viewed as a compensatory measure; however, it should also be recognised that this was compensation at the expense of positivism, especially in its Durkheimian guise, which from the late nineteenth century up to the Second World War had effectively monopolised French academic sociology.²¹

Throughout *Les étapes*, Aron's descriptions of Marxist and positivist sociological thought seem engineered to valorise the French school of political sociology by comparison. This works in two ways. First, the particular faults that he chooses to emphasise when discussing these traditions are conspicuously those of which his own liberal tradition of sociological thought is defined as avoiding. For instance, whereas positivism is repeatedly described as dogmatic with a tendency to exaggerate social determinism and dismiss claims for the autonomy of the political domain, the French school of political sociology, as may be seen from the quotation above, is defined by its superiority to positivism on precisely these points.²² It is similarly defined in terms of its overcoming the dogmatic economic determinism of the Marxist school. But the second way in which Aron's treatments of rival

¹⁹ *Les étapes*, 295.

²⁰ Christian Stoffaës et Henri Lepage, 'Présentation: les dynamiques libérales de l'histoire économique de la France' in Alain Madelin (dir.), *Aux sources du modèle libérale français* (Paris, 1997), ix-xxxiv.

²¹ On Durkheim's dominance over French sociology see Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1987), 135. See also in general Terry Nichols Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).

²² *Les étapes*, 66, 262, 295-296, 345, 360-361, 391.

schools of sociological thought were intended to valorise liberal political sociology was specific to his account of the positivist tradition whose academic hegemony he repeatedly exaggerated and contrasted with the relative outsider status of his own school. Aron's description of Durkheimian positivism as the officially licensed sociology of the French academic establishment was arguably intended to de-legitimise it in the minds of his (initially) student audience.²³ At the same time his emphasis on the 'official' character of this school implicitly addressed the preconceptions of this audience which on the whole would likely have regarded him as an archetypal 'establishment' figure. To contrast his own school of sociological thought with Durkheimian positivism in this way was effectively to create a mild sense of counter-cultural legitimacy around the school of political sociology in which Aron had situated himself. By defining it specifically as French, he further emphasised its credentials as a replacement-in-waiting for a dogmatic and outdated positivism.

The foregoing analysis may be supported by submitting the situation of French academic sociology during the mid-twentieth century, and particularly Aron's claims about Durkheimian hegemony, to closer examination. This would suggest that to a large extent Aron's representation of Durkheimian positivism was somewhat overdrawn. Rather than a dominant hegemonic force within the University, the Durkheimian school had been on the wane for several decades prior to Aron's election to the Sorbonne in 1955. After the First World War and the death of Émile Durkheim in 1917, it experienced a crisis of recruitment that was temporarily masked by the continuation of figures such as Maurice Halbwachs, Marcel Mauss, Célestin Bouglé and Paul Fauconnet in senior academic positions, but which became obvious in the immediate aftermath of World War Two when they were replaced by a new generation of sociologists.²⁴ This succeeding generation, whose most prominent figures included men like Aron, Georges Gurvitch, Jean Stoetzel and Georges

²³ *Les étapes*, 295. This point comes out especially strongly in the earlier, English version of the text, published in 1965 and itself based upon the version of the lectures published by the Centre de documentation universitaire in 1962. See Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought I* (Harmondsworth, 1965), 258-259.

²⁴ Clark, *Prophets*, 199-241; John E. Craig, 'Sociology and related disciplines between the wars: Maurice Halbwachs and the imperialism of the Durkheimians' in Philippe Besnard (ed.), *The Sociological Domain: The Durkheimians and the Founding of French Sociology* (Cambridge, 1983), 263-289, 263; Victor Karady, 'The Durkheimians in academe: a reconsideration' in Besnard (ed.), *The Sociological Domain*, 71-89.

Friedmann, consisted of “scholars who paid little more than lip service to their Durkheimian forbears” and who were “mostly alien and sometimes hostile to Durkheimianism”.²⁵ United by their more or less critical attitudes towards Durkheim, these individuals also shared a common background of having cut their sociological teeth during the 1930s, not at the Sorbonne, but at the École normale supérieure’s Centre de documentation sociale under the tutelage of Célestin Bouglé, a man belonging to the older generation but who was himself an “ambivalent Durkheimian” at best.²⁶ However, whilst they had similar institutional backgrounds and a commonly critical view of Durkheim’s sociology, this new generation otherwise shared only a minimal core of beliefs regarding the practice of academic sociology.²⁷ Therefore, whilst the transition between the inter- and post-war periods was characterised by “intellectual discontinuity”²⁸ and “the end of Durkheimian dominance”,²⁹ it also culminated in a manifest lack of intellectual consensus among the new bearers of France’s sociological tradition.³⁰

This consensus gap emerged at a key moment in the history of the social sciences in France, when sociology was becoming popularised and institutionalised to an unprecedented extent.³¹ There were several reasons for this. First, sociology was becoming embedded within the French University on an ever-surer institutional footing, a process formalised with the initiation of the first *licence* in sociology in 1958. Aron played an important role in establishing this qualification and fought successfully against Georges Gurvitch, who had beaten Aron to a Sorbonne professorship in sociology in 1948 and organised the unsuccessful opposition to his appointment in 1955, to ensure the compulsory study of a unit on political economy within this new degree course.³² Sociology itself subsequently became increasingly popular with the rapidly growing numbers of students

²⁵ Karady, ‘The Durkheimians’, 88.

²⁶ W. Paul Vogt, ‘Un durkheimien ambivalent: Célestin Bouglé, 1870-1940’, *Revue française de sociologie*, 20 (janvier - mars, 1979), 123-139.

²⁷ Clark, *Prophets*, 201.

²⁸ Karady, ‘The Durkheimians’, 88.

²⁹ Clark, *Prophets*, 234.

³⁰ Clark, *Prophets*, 201.

³¹ Alain Drouard, ‘Réflexions sur une chronologie: le développement des sciences sociales en France de 1945 à la fin des années soixante’, *Revue française de sociologie*, 23 (janvier – mars, 1982), 55-85; Michel Lallement, *Histoire des idées sociologiques de Parsons aux contemporains* (Paris, 2007), 34-37, 40-43.

³² Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris, 1983), 343.

entering the University, such that within ten years the number of sociology students equalled those studying philosophy.³³ This coincided with the popularisation of the social sciences among the French reading public in the 1960s when paperback editions of works by sociologists became widely and affordably available for the first time.³⁴ Finally, during the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists including Aron were increasingly entering into professional relationships with policy-makers as part of the state-led modernisation drive of this period.³⁵ Thus at the same time that sociology was being bequeathed with an arguably unprecedented level of cultural and political legitimacy its leading academic representatives could not agree either about its methodological parameters or basic goals. The struggle over the contents of the new sociology *licence* was one of the major battlefields in this fight over the means and ends of French sociology; another was the history of French sociological thought itself. Here too the principal antagonists were Aron and Gurvitch.

Of Russian origin, but a French citizen since being naturalised in 1928, Georges Gurvitch (1894-1965) had a career that paralleled Aron's in many respects. As the author of one of the earliest French accounts of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology and ontology with his *Les tendances actuelles de la philosophie allemande* (1930), his contribution to publicising new trends in German philosophy predated Aron's *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* by four years. Gurvitch also entered into the orbit of Célestin Bouglé at the Centre de documentation sociale and Aron wrote a positive review of one of his books in 1936.³⁶ However, their relationship soured after Gurvitch was successfully elected to a Sorbonne professorship in sociology at Aron's expense in 1948. By this time their political priorities had already begun to diverge, although they continued to share common thematic interests. In the same year, Gurvitch strongly criticised the American sociologist James

³³ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, 'Sociology and philosophy in France since 1945: death and resurrection of a philosophy without subject', *Social Research*, 34 (spring, 1967), 162-212, 193.

³⁴ The success of Aron's Sorbonne trilogy offers a good early example of this popularisation trend. See Drouard, 'Réflexions sur une chronologie', 77-78. The term 'Sorbonne trilogy' refers to Aron, *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* (Paris, 1962); Aron, *La lutte de classes: nouvelles leçons sur les sociétés industrielles* (Paris, 1964); and Aron, *Démocratie et Totalitarisme* (Paris, 1965). These books were adapted from lectures delivered at the Sorbonne between 1955 and 1958. On the popularisation of the social sciences in France see also Michel Winock, *Le siècle des intellectuels* (Paris, 1999), 679-681; Pierre Nora and Michael Taylor, 'America and the French intellectuals', *Daedalus*, 107 (winter, 1978) 325-337, 331.

³⁵ Drouard, 'Réflexions sur une chronologie', 58, 64, 70.

³⁶ Aron, 'Gurvitch, G. *L'Expérience juridique et la philosophie pluraliste du droit*', review, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 5 (1936), 118-119.

Burnham during a conference in Paris.³⁷ At the time Burnham was famous for promoting and drawing upon a tradition of modern Machiavellianism populated by figures such as Max Weber and Vilfredo Pareto in order to theorise enthusiastically about the potential of technocratic governance and the coming of a ‘managerial revolution’.³⁸ He was also a prominent hardliner in the emergent Cold War, championing military intervention to ‘roll back’ communism in Eastern Europe.³⁹ Whilst he did not subscribe entirely to Burnham’s positions on technocracy and Cold War military strategy, Aron had drawn sympathetically on his book, *The Managerial Revolution*, in his wartime articles for *La France libre* and would continue to reference him in his subsequent discussions of technocratic elitism, which tended to emphasise its inevitability and the unrealistic character of proposed efforts to do away with it.⁴⁰ By contrast, following his election to the Sorbonne in 1948, Gurvitch had positioned himself as one of the academic establishment’s most fervent critics of technocracy, which he regarded as the thin edge of an alleged fascist wedge.⁴¹ He also possessed an expertise on the early philosophical writings of Karl Marx to rival that of Aron, whom he later criticised for exaggerating the extent of the economic determinism at work in Marxism and understating its Hegelian, dialectical side.⁴² Finally, Gurvitch was more radically opposed to Max Weber’s nominalist sociological epistemology than was his new colleague.⁴³ Aron explicitly criticised Gurvitch during his Weberian critique of the monolithic Marxist understanding of social class in *La lutte de classe*, and Gurvitch responded in the second edition of his book, *La vocation actuelle de la sociologie*.⁴⁴

³⁷ Georges Balandier, *Gurvitch* (Oxford, 1975), 33-35

³⁸ James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (New York, 1941); James Burnham, *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom* (New York, 1943).

³⁹ Aron and Burnham met regularly through the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris during the early 1950s. Burnham was an influential hardliner in the Congress during its early years. See Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 2000), 87-90.

⁴⁰ Aron, ‘Bureaucratie et fanatisme’ [1942] in *L’homme contre les tyrans* (New York, 1944), 68-88, esp. 68-77, 82-88; Aron, ‘Destin des nationalités’ [1943] in *L’homme*, 302-321, 315-319; *La lutte*, 278-282. For Aron’s critique of Burnham’s Cold War military strategy see his ‘James Burnham et la politique de libération’, *Preuves*, 27 (mai, 1953), 3-17.

⁴¹ Georges Gurvitch, *La vocation actuelle de la sociologie. Tome II: antécédents et perspectives* (Paris, [1950] 1963), 431-451, esp. 448-451.

⁴² Gurvitch, *La vocation*, 321.

⁴³ Georges Gurvitch, ‘Objet et méthode de la sociologie’ in Georges Gurvitch (dir.), *Traité de sociologie. Tome I*, (Paris, 1967), 3-27, 15.

⁴⁴ Gurvitch, *La vocation*, 321. For Aron’s critique of Gurvitch see *La lutte*, 58-60.

Where Gurvitch and Aron most consistently opposed one another, however, was in their representations of the history of French sociological thought. Georges Balandier, one of Gurvitch's protégés, has written of him that "His passion for socialism could not be separated from his passion for sociology" and it has been claimed that the greater part of his work in the period from 1953 up to his death from a heart attack in December 1965 sought a revival of French sociology by reconnecting it to its socialist roots.⁴⁵ This is confirmed by examining Gurvitch's teaching and publishing interests during this period. From 1955, the year of Aron's election to the Sorbonne, to 1959, he taught five courses on the history of sociological thought: *Le concept de classe sociale de Marx à nos jours* (1954); *Saint-Simon, sociologue* (1955); *Proudhon, sociologue* (1955); *Pour le centenaire d'Auguste Comte* (1957) and *Le sociologie de Karl Marx* (1959).⁴⁶ The second volume of Gurvitch's *La vocation actuelle de la sociologie*, first published in 1950, dealt primarily with the history of sociological thought, treating in turn the discipline's Durkheimian and Marxist roots and arguing that "*Marx reste le plus important des fondateurs de la sociologie contemporaine*".⁴⁷ Finally, Gurvitch's chapters in the large two volume collection that he edited (and from whose thirty-one contributors Aron was conspicuously absent), *Traité de sociologie*, also sought to root French sociological thought in a socialist tradition stemming from Saint-Simon and Proudhon.⁴⁸ It is partly against the background of these sustained efforts by Gurvitch that Aron's own attempt to redraw the history of sociological thought should be read.⁴⁹

This context is one of the important factors that help to explain Aron's choice of Élie Halévy as the French school of political sociology's main twentieth-century representative

⁴⁵ Richard Swedberg, *Sociology as Disenchantment: The Evolution of the Work of Georges Gurvitch* (New Jersey, 1982), 134.

⁴⁶ These courses were published in limited amounts for students by the Centre de documentation universitaire in the years given. They are listed on the inside sleeve of the second volume of Gurvitch, *La vocation*.

⁴⁷ See Gurvitch, *La vocation*, 1-202, 220-324 for his treatments of Durkheim and Marx respectively.

⁴⁸ Gurvitch, 'Objet et méthode de la sociologie', 3-27 and 'Brève esquisse de l'histoire de la sociologie' in Gurvitch (dir.), *Traité de sociologie. Tome I*, 28-64, esp. 32-45.

⁴⁹ These efforts were not confined to the course that would go on to form the basis of *Les étapes*: Aron taught a year-long course on Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* in 1956 and the comparison of Marx with Tocqueville and Montesquieu was prominent within his lectures on industrial society as well. See *Dix-huit leçons*, 33-73; *La lutte*, 348-349, 361-362. See also Aron, *Essai sur les libertés* (Paris, 1965), 17-72; Aron, *Trois essais sur l'âge industriel* (Paris, 1966), 108. On Aron's difficult relationship with Gurvitch see Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 314; *Mémoires*, 351.

other than himself. The strangeness of this choice has never been adequately acknowledged, yet Aron himself admitted that Halévy was a far from obvious candidate for inclusion in the tradition that he had outlined in *Les étapes*. In a speech at a meeting of the Société française de philosophie held in November 1970 on the occasion of Halévy's centenary, he revisited his identification of a French school of political sociology and qualified Halévy's inclusion. Acknowledging that Halévy had never demonstrated any substantial interest in sociology, Aron also suggested that his work's explicit debts to Montesquieu and Tocqueville were minimal. First, he admitted that, whilst Halévy did refer to Montesquieu in his work on utilitarianism, he did so indirectly by referring only to his English reception. As for Tocqueville, Halévy had no doubt read him, but Aron acknowledged that there was little evidence of him having had a direct influence on Halévy's work because it did not refer explicitly to him, even when approaching apparently Tocquevillian themes. Aron effectively admitted here that the twentieth-century continuation of the French school of political sociology was a product of his imagination rather than part of the lived experience of one of its major representatives, stating that "*Rien ne prouve ... qu'Élie Halévy lui-même ait eu conscience de la filiation ou qu'il ait subi l'influence de Montesquieu ou de Tocqueville*".⁵⁰ He repeated this claim ten years later in a speech during the presentation of the second *Prix Tocqueville* to the American sociologist David Riesman.⁵¹

Not only, then, did Montesquieu and Tocqueville have no formative influence on Aron's thought, but the man that Nicolas Baverez describes as the missing link between Aron and Tocqueville was also at best an equivocal descendent of the French school of political sociology.⁵² In fact, the idea that Élie Halévy served as a bridge between Aron and the liberals whose thought he would later come to promote is most probably inaccurate. Whilst it is true that Aron's anti-totalitarianism evolved from a socialist towards an implicitly liberal position through a dialogue with Halévy, the older historian is unlikely to have

⁵⁰ Aron, 'L'itinéraire intellectuel d'Élie Halévy', *Commentaire*, 8 (février, 1985), 341-346, 341- 343 (quotation on page 341).

⁵¹ "Entre les deux guerres le seul de nos grands esprits, d'inspiration tocquevillienne, Élie Halévy, ne se réclamait jamais de lui". The manuscript of this speech is available in a box dedicated to the *Prix Tocqueville* at the Aron archive: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 28060 (171). Aron was the inaugural recipient of the prize in 1979.

⁵² Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 99.

introduced him to Tocqueville. Recent literature on the post-war reception of Tocqueville in France has denied Halévy's role in introducing his work to Aron and suggested that it was rather the American sociologists Daniel Bell and Robert Dahl who first encouraged him to study the author of *De la démocratie en Amérique*.⁵³ However, whilst it may be that Aron was prompted to study Tocqueville in detail by these American associates, much of his earlier indirect knowledge of Tocqueville was probably derived from Célestin Bouglé. Bouglé's importance as an early twentieth-century interpreter of Tocqueville has been acknowledged before, but it has always been denied that he had anything to do with Aron's later attempts at reclaiming Tocqueville for French sociology.⁵⁴ However, if we frame Aron's discussion of the French school of political sociology within the context of the competing account of sociology's socialist roots in France provided by Georges Gurvitch, then the likelihood that Aron deliberately omitted Bouglé from any of his discussions of this issue appears substantial.

Previous failures to adequately explore the relationship between Bouglé and Aron are the product of Aron's own omission of Bouglé from his self-acknowledged predecessors coupled with a tendency to consider the maturation of his thought from the mid-1930s as the product of a clean break with the philosophical and sociological traditions of the older Dreyfusard generation of which Bouglé was a prominent member.⁵⁵ There are, however, significant parallels between the sociology of Bouglé and Aron. Like Aron, Bouglé's first book, also the product of an extended stay in Germany, was an introduction to contemporary trends in sociology there.⁵⁶ Both of these books conclude with comparisons of French and German sociological methodologies and both use approaches prevalent in Germany to criticise the methodological basis of Durkheimian sociology.⁵⁷ The nature of the criticisms and the corrective prescriptions issuing from German sociological method are

⁵³ Audier, *Tocqueville retrouvé*, 49; Mélonio, *Tocqueville*, 279.

⁵⁴ Mélonio, *Tocqueville*, 265-266; Audier, *Tocqueville retrouvé*, 48-59.

⁵⁵ For a critique of the effects of an over-reliance on inter-generational clash on the interpretation of Aron's work see Iain Stewart, 'Existentialist manifesto or conservative political science? Problems in interpreting Raymond Aron's *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*', *European Review of History - Revue européenne d'histoire*, 16 (April, 2009), 217-233.

⁵⁶ Célestin Bouglé, *Les sciences sociales en Allemagne: les méthodes actuelles* (Paris, 1896).

⁵⁷ Aron, *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* (Paris, [1935] 2007), 154-170; Bouglé, *Les sciences sociales en Allemagne*, 142-172. For Bouglé's critique of Durkheim see especially pages 148-162.

also strikingly similar in Aron and Bouglé's work. Bouglé criticises Durkheim's famous contention in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* that the sociologist must treat social facts as things, arguing that such an approach leads to an over-reliance on mechanistic causal explanation which cannot account for the specifically human dimension to social phenomena.⁵⁸ The phrasing of Bouglé's critique anticipates Aron's own anti-Durkheimianism in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, where he insisted that mechanistic causal determination presupposes interpretative understanding:

Les faits sociaux sont, pour M. Durkheim, irréductibles aux faits psychologiques. Ils ont une réalité indépendante des consciences individuelles dans lesquelles ils retentissent. Ils ne sortent pas d'elles, puisqu'ils les dominent et s'imposent à elles. Le caractère essentiel du fait social, qui est d'être une contrainte, empêche qu'on ne le réduise aux faits de conscience individuels. La société est autre chose qu'un certain état d'âmes. Mais alors où existe, dira-t-on, cette société ? ... s'il n'y avait pas des consciences pour connaître, pour interpréter, pour aimer les choses sociales, celles-ci seraient pour la société comme si elles n'existaient pas ... *Sans vie psychologique, pas de vie sociale.*⁵⁹

The methodological implication that both Aron and Bouglé drew from this critique was that French sociology would benefit from integrating intuitive teleological forms of explanation into its methodological arsenal alongside strictly mechanistic forms of causal determination borrowed from the natural sciences. The main difference between Bouglé and Aron was one of degree rather than essence: where Bouglé, whose early career coincided with the peak of Durkheim's dominance of the social sciences in France, made a greater effort to reconcile German interpretative and French explanatory methods, Aron, writing in what were effectively the dying days of Durkheimian hegemony, adopted a more aggressively anti-positivist approach.⁶⁰

Bouglé's late nineteenth and early twentieth-century work did not just anticipate Aron's subsequent borrowing of German methodological insight to criticise positivist sociology; it also foreshadowed Aron's later attempt to integrate Alexis de Tocqueville into French

⁵⁸ For Durkheim's famous argument about treating social facts as things, see Émile Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris, [1895] 1947), 15-46.

⁵⁹ Bouglé, *Les sciences sociales en Allemagne*, 150-151. Emphasis added. Compare Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris [1938] 1986), 114.

⁶⁰ See here the final, more conciliatory pages of Bouglé's *Les sciences sociales en Allemagne*, 162-172.

sociological tradition. Before turning specifically to Bouglé's uses of Tocqueville, it is worth pausing to note that, although he was politically active on the left of the Radical party for three decades, he has been described as one of France's rare early twentieth-century liberals.⁶¹ Such claims should be approached with caution and can be judged by considering an article that Bouglé published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in 1902 entitled 'La crise du libéralisme'.⁶² The crisis to which Bouglé referred did not relate to classical economic liberalism, which he claimed that virtually everybody now recognised had had its day, but to intellectual liberalism, which he defined in the following terms: "*Laisser parler, laisser penser, laisser les hommes s'éclairer les uns les autres par l'universelle discussion*".⁶³ His liberalism here was, then, of a rather generic, democratic republican variety that could also be easily attributed to socialists like Jean Jaurès, for example. Nowhere in this article does Bouglé place any emphasis on the importance of constitutionalism as a means of safeguarding the intellectual liberalism he hopes to protect, nor does he evince any scepticism towards monolithic republican understandings of the French revolutionary heritage, two tropes that might align him with a more specific kind of French liberalism. However, in this article Bouglé does show an appreciation of early to mid-nineteenth-century liberal political thought:

Nos plus grands théoriciens de la politique, de Benjamin Constant à Tocqueville, nous l'ont rappelé: là où il ne se rencontre plus, en face du pouvoir central, qu'une poussière d'individus, la voie est libre pour le despotisme. Un état hypertrophie devant une masse inorganisée d'individus, c'est, disait plus récemment M. Durkheim, une véritable monstruosité sociologique.⁶⁴

As far as Bouglé's utility for Aron's purposes of defining a French school of political sociology in opposition to Durkheimian positivism is concerned, his association of the thought of Constant, Tocqueville and Durkheim is obviously problematic. However, Bouglé made numerous references to Tocqueville and other nineteenth-century liberals

⁶¹ William Logue, 'Sociologie et politique: le libéralisme de Célestin Bouglé', *Revue française de sociologie*, 20 (1979), 141-161. Bouglé stood unsuccessfully for election to the Chamber of Deputies as a Radical in 1901, 1906, 1914 and 1924. See W. Paul Vogt, 'Durkheimian sociology versus philosophical rationalism: the case of Célestin Bouglé' in Besnard (ed.), *The Sociological Domain*, 231-247, 232.

⁶² Célestin Bouglé, 'La crise du libéralisme', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, X (1902), 635-652.

⁶³ Bouglé, 'La crise du libéralisme', 635-636.

⁶⁴ Bouglé, 'La crise du libéralisme', 649.

across several of his works and sometimes presented Tocqueville as a corrective supplement to Durkheim.⁶⁵ His doctoral thesis, *Les idées égalitaires* (1899), provides a good example of this which also shows his socio-political analysis anticipating Aron's later work quite closely. In the second chapter of this book, Bouglé considers the effects of social heterogeneity and homogeneity on the rise of egalitarianism.⁶⁶ He defines heterogeneity and homogeneity not, in economic terms, as referring to wealth, but, politically as the presence or absence respectively of "*dissidence*". The purpose of this chapter is to argue that both absolute heterogeneity (total dissidence) and absolute homogeneity (total consensus) are detrimental to the spreading of egalitarianism, which requires the maintenance of a somewhat precarious balance between the two. Aron also made this argument, both in *Introduction à la philosophie politique* and *Démocratie et totalitarisme*.⁶⁷ But in Bouglé's case what is more interesting is that he here used Tocqueville to correct what he perceived to be Durkheim's limited consideration of this question only in terms of embryonic societies and his relative neglect of the continuous need for a political culture conducive to the maintenance of democratic egalitarianism.⁶⁸ This clearly serves to draw Bouglé towards not only Tocqueville, but also Aron's position on this issue.⁶⁹

Given Tocqueville's view of democracy as the 'equalisation of conditions', *Les idées égalitaires* obviously chimes with Tocquevillian concerns, but – and here the connection is much more tangible than in Halévy's case – it also references him repeatedly as well.⁷⁰ Bouglé's secondary thesis on the caste system in India is also imbued with the spirit of Tocqueville. In this book he takes India as an exemplary case from which to draw general conclusions about the nature of the caste system, citing *De la démocratie en Amérique* as the basic model informing his approach. By doing this, Bouglé effectively presented his

⁶⁵ Bouglé's doctoral thesis, *Les idées égalitaires: étude sociologique* (Paris, 1899), contains, for example, references to the works of Benjamin Constant (pages 49, 113-114), François Guizot (pages 44, 97, 193), Paul Leroy Beaulieu (pages 98, 213, 217, 220, 242), and Tocqueville (pages 36, 42, 84, 147, 165, 213-218, 222, 225, 230, 232).

⁶⁶ Bouglé, *Les idées égalitaires*, 126-167.

⁶⁷ Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique: démocratie et révolution* (Paris, 1997), 77-97; *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 151-186.

⁶⁸ Bouglé, *Les idées égalitaires*, 147-148.

⁶⁹ Compare *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 169-186.

⁷⁰ See note 65 above.

book as a kind of negative image of Tocqueville's, using India as a case study of the institutionalised inequality of the caste system where *De la démocratie en Amérique* drew general conclusions on the 'equalisation of conditions' from an American example.⁷¹ Where his relationship with Aron is concerned, however, what is especially significant about his secondary thesis is that we know from Aron's *Mémoires* both that he read it and that he held it in high esteem.⁷² On this basis, and given both Bouglé's status as "one of the most important members of the Durkheimian team and one of its most famous" and his close working relationship with Aron at the Centre de documentation sociale in the mid-to-late-1930s, it is reasonable to suggest that Aron drew his early, indirect knowledge of Tocqueville at least in part from Bouglé. Certainly the connection appears much more robust than the Halévian one advanced by Nicolas Baverez. The question that remains, then, is to know why Aron might have chosen to obscure both his intellectual debt to Bouglé and the latter's importance as a French sociologist who had drawn quite extensively on Tocqueville.

It should first be acknowledged that Aron's sociological thought did differ in important respects from that of Bouglé, not least in terms of the importance he attributed to economics within sociology. For Aron, Bouglé's wilful ignorance in this regard typified what he considered one of the major flaws of Durkheimian sociology, one that he eventually sought to address through his input into the first sociology *licence* instituted in 1958.⁷³ Bouglé was also considerably more optimistic about both the objectivity of sociological knowledge and its potential moral applications than was Aron.⁷⁴ But the elision of Bouglé in Aron's construction of the French school of political sociology was largely due to the fact that his acknowledgement would have been counter-productive with regard to the aims of Aron's traditionary action. It should be remembered that Aron's account of the history of sociological thought was in direct competition with the one being promoted around the same time by Georges Gurvitch, which, as we saw earlier, sought to

⁷¹ Célestin Bouglé, *Essais sur le régime des castes* (Paris, 1908), 32-34.

⁷² "Son livre sur les castes dans l'Inde, que les spécialistes apprécient encore aujourd'hui, témoigne d'une capacité d'analyse dont il ne tira pas toujours le meilleur parti". *Mémoires*, 83.

⁷³ *Mémoires*, 83.

⁷⁴ See Célestin Bouglé, *Qu'est-ce que la sociologie?* (Paris, 1932), vii-xxiii; Célestin Bouglé, *Bilan de la sociologie française contemporaine* (Paris, 1935), 159-169. Compare *Dix-huit leçons*, 13-31, esp. 20.

emphasise the socialist rather than liberal origins of the discipline in France. Bouglé's inclusion within the French school of political sociology would have been problematic because of the prominent role that he had played in promoting the study of French sociology's socialist roots during the inter-war period. Here he served as the main precursor for Georges Gurvitch's later efforts in this direction, publishing on Proudhon as a sociologist as well as overseeing the republication of Saint-Simon in the 1920s.⁷⁵ His work on socialist sociological thought was more substantial and more recent than were his interactions with Tocqueville which were confined mainly to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It should also be kept in mind that Aron sought to define the French school of political sociology in opposition to Durkheimian positivism. However ambivalent Célestin Bouglé's adherence to this tradition may have been, he was nevertheless perceived to be a prominent and powerful member of the late Durkheimian school. Furthermore, whilst he did treat Tocqueville as a sociologist and sometimes used his work to make criticisms of Durkheim, he equally sought to present him as a sociologist more or less within the Durkheimian tradition, as his article 'La crise du libéralisme' shows. This meant that, even though he has been described as being "dedicated to political sociology ... in the service of liberal ideals",⁷⁶ he could not effectively serve as part of a liberal French school of political sociology that Aron deliberately sought to define through its opposition to and surpassing of Durkheimian positivism. Élie Halévy, although his inclusion within this tradition was arguably questionable, served the needs of Aron's traditionary action much more effectively because he was known to be one of a group of senior French academics sceptical towards Durkheimian sociology.⁷⁷ It ought finally to be noted that Bouglé's substantial engagement with Tocqueville challenges the notion that the latter's descent into relative obscurity in the twentieth century resulted primarily from the hegemony of

⁷⁵ Célestin Bouglé, *La sociologie de Proudhon* (Paris, 1911); Célestin Bouglé, *Proudhon* (Paris, 1930). See also Célestin Bouglé *Socialismes français: du socialisme utopique à la démocratie industrielle* (Paris, 1932) and C. Bouglé et É. Halévy (dir.) *Doctrine de Saint-Simon: exposition, première année, 1829*, nouvelle édition (Paris, 1924).

⁷⁶ This quotation comes from D.F. Pocock's introduction to the English translation of Bouglé's secondary thesis: *Essays on the Caste System* (Cambridge, 1971), vii-viii.

⁷⁷ That is, the editorial board of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. See Garry Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2001), 7.

Durkheimianism. This influential explanation derives in large part from the politically motivated argument put forward by Aron in *Les étapes*.⁷⁸

Aron's presentation of the history of sociological thought in *Les étapes* is illustrative of traditionary action in the form of canonisation because it contrasts an idealised and schematic account of one tradition (the French school of political sociology) with a schematic and de-idealised representation of another (sociological positivism) in order to valorise the preferred former tradition by comparison. One could speak here in terms of the canonisation of the French school of political sociology being dependent upon the denigration of Durkheimian positivism. An important part of this process, as has been touched upon above, was the setting up of this latter school as a straw man against which to define the benefits of the tradition that Aron sought to legitimise. One way in which Aron did this was to understate the links between the positivist school of Comte and Durkheim and the French school of political sociology. We have seen how this was manifested in the selection of Halévy as an immediate predecessor in the tradition rather than Bouglé. Further evidence may be found by considering treatments of Montesquieu qua sociologist from within the positivist tradition against which Aron sought in part to define the French school of political sociology. This shows that not only were 'positivists' more sympathetic towards Montesquieu than Aron's account in *Les étapes* would suggest, but his own engagement with *De l'esprit des lois* was probably triggered in part by the earlier interpretations put forward by rival sociologists including Georges Gurvitch.

Auguste Comte, the founder of positivism, discussed Montesquieu briefly in his *Cours de philosophie positive*:

La première et la plus importante série de travaux qui se présente comme directement destinée à constituer enfin la science sociale, est alors celle du grand Montesquieu, d'abord dans son *Traité sur la politique romaine*, et surtout ensuite dans son *Esprit des Lois*. Ce qui caractérise, à mes yeux, la principale force de ce mémorable ouvrage ... c'est la tendance prépondérante qui s'y fait partout sentir à concevoir désormais les phénomènes politiques

⁷⁸ See e.g. Mélonio, *Tocqueville*, 265-266.

comme aussi nécessairement assujettis à d'invariables lois naturelles que tous les autres phénomènes quelconques ...⁷⁹

The positive side of Comte's appraisal of Montesquieu is here tied to the latter's application of the concept of 'law' (in an explanatory rather than juridical sense) to the study of society and particularly the political domain; however, he goes on to criticise Montesquieu for his 'metaphysical', rather than 'scientific' application of this concept which

paraît directement repousser toute idée d'un véritable enchaînement scientifique, pour ne laisser ordinairement subsister qu'une liaison purement illusoire, fondée sur d'arbitraires rapprochements métaphysiques.⁸⁰

Here Comte anticipates Durkheim's later argument that the sociologist must treat social facts as things, explaining them through a mechanistic, non-teleological form of causal explanation lifted from the natural sciences: Comte's criticism of Montesquieu relates to his failure to do just that. It was because of this perceived failure that Comte concluded that Montesquieu could be categorised only as a precursor of sociological thought, rather than as its founder, a tag he reserved for himself.⁸¹

Émile Durkheim wrote about Montesquieu at greater length than Comte did, most notably in his Latin thesis, a comparative study of Montesquieu and Rousseau's contributions to the early development of sociological thought.⁸² His analysis of Montesquieu follows Comte's very closely. It was, Durkheim argues, Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* which established the principles of the new social science, preparing the basis upon which it would develop by furnishing it with the sociological concepts of 'law' and 'type'.⁸³ However, according to Durkheim, Montesquieu was mistaken in believing that different social forms resulted from different forms of sovereignty.⁸⁴ For Durkheim, this priority

⁷⁹ Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, tome IV (Paris, 1839), 243.

⁸⁰ Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 246-247.

⁸¹ Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 252.

⁸² Émile Durkheim, *Montesquieu et Rousseau: précurseurs de la sociologie* (Paris, [1892] 1953). The additional thesis in Latin was, at the time, a mandatory requirement for all French doctoral students.

⁸³ Durkheim, *Montesquieu et Rousseau*, 25-27, 110.

⁸⁴ Durkheim, *Montesquieu et Rousseau*, 111.

attributed to the political domain in shaping social relations revealed Montesquieu's erroneous understanding of how sociological laws functioned:

Montesquieu ... affirme qu'il existe dans les choses sociales un ordre fixe et nécessaire ... il tient pour assuré qu'il existe des lois gouvernant ce domaine de l'univers. Mais il les conçoit de façon confuse. Elles n'expriment pas, selon lui, comment la nature de la société engendre les institutions sociales, mais ce que sont les institutions qu'exige cette nature de la société, comme si leur cause efficiente devait être cherchée dans la seule volonté du législateur.⁸⁵

The reference to the will of the legislator at the end of this passage foreshadows the argument that Durkheim would make three years later in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* when he enjoined sociologists to treat social facts as things. To attribute any influence over fundamental social relations to individual will was to adopt a form of explanation whose sociological validity he would categorically deny in this book. This view also indicates Durkheim's intellectual debt to Auguste Comte, whose conclusions about Montesquieu's status as a precursor rather than founder of sociological thought he replicated in claiming that the new science

ne pouvait en effet progresser davantage tant qu'on n'avait pas établi que les lois des sociétés ne sont pas différentes de celles qui régissent le reste de la nature et que la méthode qui sert à les découvrir n'est pas autre que celle des autres sciences. Ce sera la contribution d'Auguste Comte à cette science.⁸⁶

These early interpretations of Montesquieu as a precursor rather than founder of sociological thought show that Aron's later definition of the French school of political sociology in opposition to the social determinism of the positivist school was neither entirely arbitrary nor unfounded. Nevertheless, both Comte and Durkheim did acknowledge Montesquieu's importance to the development of sociology in France, even if they were not prepared to grant him a status other than that of a precursor. The reception of Montesquieu qua sociologist by 'positivist' sociologists after Durkheim suggests that Aron's extension of this already equivocal bifurcation in French sociological thought was indicative of a desire to establish a rather caricatural vision of rival French sociologists as dull Durkheimian

⁸⁵ Durkheim, *Montesquieu et Rousseau*, 112.

⁸⁶ Durkheim, *Montesquieu et Rousseau*, 113.

epigones in order to present his own approach to sociology as a ‘counter-cultural’ alternative. Indeed, not only did some of his ‘positivist’ contemporaries proffer analyses of Montesquieu that were oriented against those of Comte and Durkheim, but Aron’s own studies of Montesquieu were almost certainly informed and perhaps even triggered by these earlier accounts.

In his *Mémoires*, Aron describes Georges Davy (1883-1976) as a Durkheimian epigone,⁸⁷ but, in a series of works published between 1939 and 1953, this specialist in juridical sociology presented an account of Montesquieu’s place in the history of sociological thought that questioned the interpretations of Comte and Durkheim, suggesting that *De l’esprit des lois* amounted to more than mere pre-sociology and that its author was a genuinely sociological thinker in his own right.⁸⁸ The first of these works appeared in a special issue of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* published under the shadow of war in November 1939 to mark two hundred and fifty years since the birth of Montesquieu. Alongside it appeared two other articles presenting different accounts of *De l’esprit des lois* from those of Comte and Durkheim. One of these criticised Comte’s view that Montesquieu’s sociological method was deficient because it was not based, as was his own, upon an underlying awareness of the causal laws determining the historical progression between different forms of society. The author, René Hubert, suggested that this was rather in Montesquieu’s favour, noting that *De l’esprit des lois* did in fact contain a theory of historical development, yet that it did not amount to a theory of continuous progress, but rather to a pluralist philosophy of history, more pessimistic in nature than Comte’s.⁸⁹ The final article in this special issue was by another sociologist repeatedly described as a dyed-

⁸⁷ *Mémoires*, 351. Davy had been decisive in determining the success of Georges Gurvitch’s candidature to the Sorbonne over Aron’s in 1948. See Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 236.

⁸⁸ Georges Davy, ‘Sur la méthode de Montesquieu’, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, LI (novembre, 1939), 571-586; Georges Davy, ‘Note introductive’ in Durkheim, *Montesquieu et Rousseau*, 9-23. This introductory note was derived from a paper titled ‘Montesquieu et le science politique’ delivered by Davy in 1948 at a conference in Bordeaux marking the bicentenary of *De l’esprit des lois*.

⁸⁹ René Hubert, ‘Le notion du devenir historique dans la philosophie de Montesquieu’, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, LI (novembre, 1939), 587-610, esp. 609-610. Hubert is described as a “para-durkheimien” in Johan Heilbron, ‘Les métamorphoses du durkheimisme’, *Revue française de sociologie*, 26 (avril – juin, 1985), 203-237, 212-213.

in-the-wool Durkheimian: Georges Gurvitch.⁹⁰ Here Gurvitch agrees with Comte and Durkheim about the sociological status of Montesquieu's thought, but also repeats Bouglé's critique of Durkheim with regard to the supplementary value of interpretative understanding in relation to positivist causal explanation. However, in doing so he references Montesquieu as having effectively initiated this methodological innovation which reached its apex in the interpretative sociology of Max Weber. This is significant not only because it somewhat undermines his earlier downplaying of the sociological importance of *De l'esprit des lois*, but above all because Gurvitch explicitly links Weber and Montesquieu, not only in terms of their general contributions to sociology, but specifically in relation to their status as corrective supplements to Durkheimian positivism:

Toute son œuvre montre que l'observation empirique de la réalité sociale du Droit exige l'étude des 'ressorts', des 'principes', c'est-à-dire des significations internes inspirant les conduites effectives. Il a le premier conçu la sociologie juridique à la fois comme une science positive prononçant exclusivement des jugements de réalité, et comme une espèce de Sociologie de l'Esprit fondée sur une compréhension interprétative (*verstehen*) et n'admettant que l'établissement des types qualitatifs...

Les vues de Montesquieu sur la sociologie juridique sont plus proches des conceptions récentes, qui n'admettent pas d'évolution unilinéaire et tiennent compte de la diversité des types ... Les sociologies juridiques de Durkheim, d'Hauriou et de Max Weber, en faisant ressortir, de différentes manières, les caractères de cette discipline comme espèce de la Sociologie de l'Esprit, fondée sur les méthodes de la compréhension interprétative et de la recherche des types qualitatifs, sont toutes redevables ... aux vues profondes de Montesquieu.⁹¹

These contemporaries of Aron writing on Montesquieu either distanced themselves from or added significantly to the views expressed by Comte and Durkheim. In doing so, all of them anticipated Aron's later presentation of Montesquieu in different ways. In the case of Georges Davy, this was to suggest that the label of 'precursor' did not do full justice to his contribution to early sociological thought, the argument upon which a large part of the distinctiveness of *Les étapes* was based.⁹² René Hubert's article presented Montesquieu in

⁹⁰ Georges Gurvitch, 'La sociologie juridique de Montesquieu', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, LI (novembre, 1939), 611-626. On Gurvitch as a Durkheimian see Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 236, 289-290, 300, 327. For Aron's often acidic descriptions of Gurvitch see *Mémoires*, 336-337, 342-344.

⁹¹ Gurvitch, 'La sociologie juridique de Montesquieu', 614, 625-626.

⁹² Aron never claimed that his interpretation of Montesquieu was original in this respect and referred to Léon Brunschvicg having made such an argument before him. The choice of Brunschvicg here is, however,

terms that both criticised Comte and Durkheim's interpretations and, by emphasising his pluralist philosophy of history, aligned him with the philosophical concerns preoccupying Aron in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*. His positive appraisal of Montesquieu's rejection of simplistic notions of progress was also repeated by Aron in both *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* and in *Les étapes*.⁹³ Finally, Georges Gurvitch, even more than Hubert, gave an account that effectively demonstrated Montesquieu's thematic significance to Aron's work by showing how his method anticipated the development of German sociology in general and Max Weber in particular. Such thematic and interpretative similarities obviously raise the question of whether Aron had been influenced by these readings of Montesquieu in his own later accounts. Given that he listed this special issue of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* in his bibliography for *Les étapes*, it is safe to assume that Aron had read the contributions of Gurvitch, Davy and Hubert and reasonable to suggest that their various anticipations of Aron's later accounts of Montesquieu qua sociologist were not entirely coincidental.⁹⁴ Of course, Aron read other works on Montesquieu in preparation for his various treatments of his thought in the 1950s and 1960s, but the special significance of these, and especially of Gurvitch's account, was that they presented the author of *De l'esprit des lois* in terms that made him appear to be of clear and immediate relevance for Aron's major philosophical preoccupations. As shall be argued below, when Aron eventually did begin to engage substantially with *De l'esprit des lois*, he did so in such a way as to highlight substantial similarities between Weber and

arguably significant since he was renowned for his scepticism with regard to Durkheimian sociology whereas Davy was, rightly or wrongly, closely associated with it. Acknowledging Brunschvicg was therefore clearly not damaging to Aron's overall project of presenting the French school of political sociology as an alternative to Durkheimian positivism in the same way that direct reference to Davy could have been. For Aron's references to Brunschvicg on this point see *Dix-huit leçons*, 62 and *Les étapes*, 64. For Brunschvicg's account of Montesquieu qua sociologist see Léon Brunschvicg, *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale* (Paris, 1927), 489-510, esp. 496: "... on peut dire *De l'esprit des lois* qu'il est le chef-d'œuvre de la sociologie pure".

⁹³ *Dix-huit leçons*, 58; *Les étapes*, 66. See also the English version, which appeared two years prior to the final French text of *Les étapes*. Here Aron's attack on the "ideology of progress" as the *sine qua non* of other French sociologists is more overtly polemical: *Main Currents*, 62.

⁹⁴ *Les étapes*, 76. This assumption is reinforced by both the status of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* as arguably the Third Republic's most prestigious philosophy journal and Aron's own personal and professional connections to it as an author and friend of one of its founding editors: Élie Halévy. Taking all this into account, we can be almost certain that Aron had read this special issue. The question of exactly when he did so is less clear cut: this issue did not appear until November 1939 by which point war had broken out in Europe and Aron had been mobilised into the French army. He may therefore not have been able to access these texts until after the war.

Montesquieu. In fact, Aron's reading of Montesquieu was directly oriented by the increasing dissatisfaction that he felt with parts of his doctoral thesis by the mid-1950s. He used Montesquieu to address these issues, drawing on the links that Gurvitch had identified between him and Weber in order to rein in some of the nihilistic and relativist tendencies present in parts of the *Introduction*.⁹⁵

II. COUNTER-INNOVATION: ARON'S SELECTIVE INTERPRETATION OF MONTESQUIEU AND TOCQUEVILLE

The overriding concern of Aron's reading of Montesquieu in *Les étapes* is to demonstrate that the various parts of *De l'esprit des lois* form a cohesive whole. This interpretation was not radically original; its significance lies in how it shows Aron to have woven the epistemological concerns of his doctoral thesis into his reading of *De l'esprit des lois*. This works in two ways: his reading of Montesquieu first supports the anti-positivism of the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, then contains it by providing a means of overcoming the radical epistemological relativism into which the *Introduction*'s anti-positivism had sometimes lapsed. This had become an especially pressing concern following the critical reaction to *L'opium des intellectuels*.⁹⁶ Much of the opprobrium heaped upon this work had focussed on Aron's closing invocation of "*la venue des sceptiques*", prompting him to intensify his efforts towards reinforcing the moral epistemological basis of his commitment to Western democracy.⁹⁷ Partly informed by his reading of the conservative political philosopher Leo Strauss, this project entailed the adoption of a more critical attitude towards Max Weber whose radical value pluralism

⁹⁵ Aron explicitly likens Montesquieu's project to that of Weber on two occasions. See *Les étapes*, 28, 38.

⁹⁶ For the reaction to *L'opium* see Robert Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: The Philosopher in History* (Beverly Hills, 1986), 479-488.

⁹⁷ *L'opium des intellectuels* famously closes: "*Appelons de nos vœux la venue des sceptiques s'ils doivent éteindre le fanatisme*". Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris, [1955] 2002), 334. For a discussion of Aron's project of moral and epistemological consolidation, but which does not relate this to his reading of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, see Daniel J. Mahoney, 'Raymond Aron and the morality of prudence', *Modern Age*, 43 (summer, 2001), 243-252.

could not provide a solid moral basis for his defence of liberal democracy.⁹⁸ Aron did not, however, follow Strauss' return to the political philosophy of ancient Greece, but rather turned to Montesquieu, whose combination of a prototypical form of social science with classical political philosophy in the style of Aristotle he used as a corrective to Weber's occasional nihilistic and relativistic tendencies. As will be demonstrated below, for this to be effective required Aron to show that the 'scientific' and 'philosophical' parts of *De l'esprit des lois* formed a unified whole, something that Comte and Durkheim had both denied.

The purpose of Aron's firming up of the normative basis of his political thought was not only to reinforce his defence of liberal democracy, but also to strengthen his moral critique of its opponents. This is indicated by a shift in the language that he began using in his polemics after the publication of *L'opium*, at once denying his own alleged radical scepticism and attacking as nihilists Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, whose rejection of any reference to human nature highlighted, for Aron, the moral bankruptcy of their revolutionary politics.⁹⁹ However, whereas it was at first primarily through an engagement with Montesquieu that Aron undertook the revision of the epistemological basis of his thought, he came increasingly in the 1960s to rely on Tocqueville to inform his critiques of the new kinds of left-wing political radicalism that emerged in that decade. The second part of this section will consider his various adaptations of Tocqueville with an emphasis on their application in Aron's interpretation of the disputatious satisfaction of modern democracies, especially through his analysis of the events of May 1968.

⁹⁸ Aron had met Strauss, for whom he expresses his profound admiration in his *Mémoires*, in Berlin in 1933 and again during one of his visits to the USA in the 1950s. In 1963 he sent Strauss copies of *Paix et Guerre* and *Dimensions de la conscience historique*, the latter a collection of his post-war writings on historical epistemology. Strauss wrote enthusiastically to Aron of his treatise on international relations that it was the best book on the subject that he had ever read, but neglected to mention *Dimensions de la conscience historique* other than by allusion: "In a word, I am somewhat more doubtful than you are regarding 'the historical consciousness' as a whole." This letter, dated 11 June 1963 is in the Aron archive: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(208). See also *Mémoires*, 457. Aron referred to Strauss' *Natural Right and History* in his introduction to Max Weber, *Le savant et le politique* (Paris, 1959), 9-57, 31-52. Another important text for Aron's post-war critique of Weber is Aron, 'Science et conscience de la société' [1960] in Aron *Études politiques* (Paris, 1972), 9-37. For Strauss' famous critique of Max Weber see *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), 35-80.

⁹⁹ For his moral and humanist rejection of the existentialisms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sartre see especially Aron, 'Le fanatisme, la prudence et la foi', *Preuves*, 63 (mai, 1956), 8-22, 9.

Aron's discussion of Montesquieu in *Les étapes* begins by justifying the claim that he “n'est pas ... un précurseur, mais un des doctrinaires de la sociologie”.¹⁰⁰ He does this in the first instance by arguing that Montesquieu's aim of imposing a conceptual order upon the apparently limitless diversity of morals, customs, ideas, laws and institutions constituting human social reality was exactly the goal characteristic of sociology. Aron aligns Montesquieu qua sociologist with Max Weber whose own sociological orientation repeats that of Montesquieu in that both are concerned with moving from meaningless diversity to an intelligible order via the interpretative elaboration of concepts, or ‘ideal types’.¹⁰¹ The emphasis placed on conceptual elaboration here is important because it signposts the implicit anti-positivism of the remainder of the analysis: the significance of the Weberian ideal type is in large part the nominalist epistemological pessimism that it expresses, which contrasts strongly with the optimistic positivist view that the various aspects of social reality present themselves to the sociologist in an unmediated form for direct empirical observation.¹⁰² However, as his exposition of Montesquieu's thought progresses, it becomes clear that Aron sees in it a means of overcoming the potentially nihilistic excesses of Weber's relativism.

Having justified his position in the sociological canon, Aron moves to identify the two approaches through which Montesquieu seeks to achieve his goal of imposing intelligible order upon an apparently incoherent social diversity. The first of these, which Aron, echoing Comte and Durkheim, says represents Montesquieu's first truly sociological idea, is causal explanation, the idea that “il faut, derrière la suite apparemment accidentelle des événements, saisir les causes profondes qui en rendent compte”.¹⁰³ The second method, which Aron tellingly introduces as being fundamentally more interesting and perceptive than the first, is the conceptual elaboration of social types.¹⁰⁴ This methodology is founded in interpretative understanding rather than causal explanation, but Aron is keen to emphasise that the two methodologies at work in *De l'esprit des lois* “ne sont pas

¹⁰⁰ *Les étapes*, 27.

¹⁰¹ *Les étapes*, 28, 38.

¹⁰² See e.g. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (Sussex, 1979), 278-335, esp. 312-314.

¹⁰³ *Les étapes*, 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Les étapes*, 29.

contradictoires” but rather “*deux étapes d’une démarche*”.¹⁰⁵ Here Aron is reading into Montesquieu his own presentation of the relationship between explanation and understanding in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire* where, against Durkheimian orthodoxy, he had argued that causal explanation presupposes interpretative understanding.¹⁰⁶

It is partly in order to demonstrate the interdependence of explanation and understanding through his reading of Montesquieu that Aron next turns to discuss the structure of *De l’esprit des lois*. Claiming that previous interpretations - Aron has in mind here those of Comte and Durkheim - had tended to emphasise the apparent discontinuity between its initial description of the different types of government and the causal analysis in the latter half of *De l’esprit des lois*, he aims instead to present it as a cohesive whole. He does this by first identifying an apparent dividing line in the work’s structure between the classically oriented political philosophy of Books I to XIII and the causally oriented sociology of Books XIV to XXVI. Aron then makes his first move to expose this as a false division by highlighting how Montesquieu’s typology of regimes differed from classical tradition through his use of the concept of a regime’s principle as one of its defining characteristics. In Montesquieu, principle - the sentiment indispensable to the functioning of a certain form of regime - supplements the classical criterion of ‘nature’, defined by the number of people in whom sovereign power is invested, in the process of establishing a typology of regimes.¹⁰⁷ The particular significance of this for Aron is that principle is a sociologically conditioned concept at the heart of Montesquieu’s political philosophy. In order to make this argument he presents principle as a manifestation within this first part of *De l’esprit des lois* of the concept of the general spirit of nations found in Book XIX.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Les étapes*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Introduction*, 114.

¹⁰⁷ Aron applied the notion of principle to his own comparative study of modern political regimes where he identified constitutional-pluralistic regimes resting on a principle of respect for legality and the spirit of compromise and single party regimes based on a principle of fear and faith. See *Démocratie et totalitarisme*, 170-178. It has recently been suggested that Montesquieu inspired Aron’s methodology across the whole of his Sorbonne trilogy - see Davis, *Politics of Understanding*, 63.

¹⁰⁸ *Les étapes*, 50-53.

Aron describes the notion of the general spirit as “*l’aboutissement véritable de la sociologie de Montesquieu*”.¹⁰⁹ His discussion of this concept takes place during a creative summary of the main sociological causes identified by Montesquieu in which Aron changes the order from how these causes originally appear in *De l’esprit des lois* so as to emphasise the central importance of the general spirit. In the original work the causes identified by Montesquieu are divided into what Aron terms physical and moral categories. Books XIV to XVIII are concerned with physical causes such as soil and climate; Books XX to XXVI deal with moral causes including trade, currency, population and religion; Book IXX, containing Montesquieu’s discussion of the general spirit of nations, is situated between the first series of Books on physical causes and the second series on moral causes. Thus the order of causes as they appear in the original text is: 1. geographical milieu (comprising soil and climate); 2. the general spirit of nations; 3. trade and currency; 4. population; 5. religion. Aron rearranges these in order to emphasise the status of the general spirit as the product of the other moral and physical causes. The order of sociological causes in *De l’esprit des lois* as he presents it is: 1. geographical milieu; 2. population; 3. religion; 4. trade and currency; 5. the general spirit of nations.¹¹⁰ Aron’s definition of the general spirit reflects its re-situating by him as the culmination of other physical and moral causes. He calls it “*un certain style de vie et des relations en commun, qui est moins une cause qu’un résultat – résultat de l’ensemble des influences physiques et morales qui, à travers la durée, ont modelé la collectivité*”.¹¹¹

This concept is central to Aron’s reading of Montesquieu for several reasons. First, it serves to bridge the apparent gap between the classically oriented political philosophy of the earlier Books and the causally oriented sociology of the later ones because Aron links it directly to the notion of principle which he sees as a manifestation of general spirit. As such, principle becomes the means by which political regimes are defined by Montesquieu not simply in political terms by reference to the organisation of sovereignty, but also in sociological terms such that “*La distinction des types de gouvernement ... est en même*

¹⁰⁹ *Les étapes*, 46.

¹¹⁰ *Les étapes*, 45-46.

¹¹¹ *Les étapes*, 51.

temps, une distinction des organisations et des structures sociales”.¹¹² Aron’s interpretation of *De l’esprit des lois* here reflects his anti-positivism not only because it directly contradicted the readings of both Comte and Durkheim, but because in doing so it supported his rejection of Durkheim’s injunction to treat social facts as things and his promotion of an interpretative pluralism based in the combination of interpretative and explanatory methods.

One of the drawbacks of interpretative pluralism as Aron had described it in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire* was that it at times appeared to over-extend into a radical relativism encapsulated by the notion of the ‘dissolution of the object’.¹¹³ Montesquieu’s concept of the general spirit, as interpreted by Aron, offered an escape route at a time when he was seeking to reinforce the epistemological foundations of his political thought. In fact Aron’s efforts in this regard predated the accusations of radical scepticism that followed the publication of *L’opium des intellectuels* but intensified subsequently. This is supported by comparing a shift in emphasis in his treatment of the relativism inherent to interpretative pluralism between his doctoral thesis and *L’opium*. In the former work the plurality of interpretations acts as a solvent on the object under consideration; in the latter Aron claimed instead that the plurality of meanings was “*inscrite dans l’objet*”.¹¹⁴ His reading of the general spirit reinforces this change of emphasis: in it the general spirit is seen to regroup the plurality of partial causes into an overall interpretation, but “*L’esprit général n’est pas une cause dominante, toute-puissante qui effacerait le reste*”.¹¹⁵ In other words, the general spirit contains the plurality of interpretations without negating it.

One of the conclusions that Aron had drawn from the epistemological pluralism identified in his thesis was the rejection of mono-conceptual forms of explanation such as Marxist economic determinism and their substitution with the notion of probabilistic determinism, the idea that the sociologist could only identify relations of probability between social

¹¹² *Les étapes*, 33.

¹¹³ See page 66 above for a discussion of this passage.

¹¹⁴ “... *la richesse de significations est inscrite dans l’objet*”. *L’opium*, 167.

¹¹⁵ *Les étapes*, 51, 52-53.

causes and effects.¹¹⁶ This was another theme from the *Introduction* that Aron would identify in *De l'esprit des lois*, particularly in its consideration of the influence of climate on social relations where he argued that Montesquieu had been much less an advocate of climatic determinism than had previously been supposed.¹¹⁷ This argument rested on his interpretation of the following passage from *De l'esprit des lois*:

Il y a des pays où la chaleur énerve le corps et affaiblit si fort le courage que les hommes ne sont portés à un devoir pénible que par la crainte du châtement. L'esclavage y choque donc moins la raison. Et le maître y étant aussi lâche à l'égard de son prince que son esclave l'est à son égard, l'esclavage civil est encore accompagné de l'esclavage politique.¹¹⁸

The key phrase here for Aron is “*choque ... moins la raison*” because it implies that slavery *is* offensive to reason even while the rest of the passage seems to promote a deterministic explanation based on the influence of climate. This indicates to Aron that Montesquieu's explanation is probabilistic since if it were characterised by the strict scientific determinism attributed to him by Comte then the implicit moral judgement in this passage would be logically inadmissible because slavery would be conceived as an inevitable product of climate and hence free of human control. Aron further emphasises the moral significance of Montesquieu's probabilism as he develops his interpretation. Pointing to the argument in the fifth chapter of Book XIV that good legislators work to counteract the negative social and political effects of climate, he highlights the margin of opportunity for free human action maintained within the account of the various social causes treated in *De l'esprit des lois*.¹¹⁹ Later, in comparing the different significances attributed to the notion of law by Montesquieu, Aron returns again to the fundamental moral significance of his probabilism, arguing that it implies the existence of a universal natural law prior to both positive and causal-scientific law. Opposing Comte's dismissive interpretation of this as a metaphysical residue, he argues that Montesquieu's sociology represents instead an original attempt at marrying sociology to a classical philosophy of natural law.¹²⁰ This interpretation is significant given Aron's wider concern with strengthening the moral epistemological basis

¹¹⁶ *Introduction*, 258-261. For a discussion of this issue see page 64 above.

¹¹⁷ *Les étapes*, 46-49.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in *Les étapes*, 47.

¹¹⁹ *Les étapes*, 48, 71 (note 13).

¹²⁰ *Les étapes*, 61.

of his political thought because it suggests that he saw Montesquieu as occupying the kind of position mid-way between Straussian neo-classicism and the value-free political science of Max Weber that he was then seeking to carve out for himself.

The accounts of interpretative pluralism and probabilistic determinism in the *Introduction* were written largely under the influence of Max Weber. In the first case, we have seen how Aron's Weberian pluralism extended into an open ended relativism wherein any object was liable to 'dissolve'. A large part of the attraction of Montesquieu's thought for Aron was probably that he provided a means of containing epistemological relativism without negating it altogether. A similar argument can be made in relation to the moral relativism inherent to Weber's radical separation of facts and values by comparing his probabilism with that which Aron found in Montesquieu. Weber's probabilism is deeply rooted in his relativist epistemology; Montesquieu's, as described by Aron, is also partially rooted in a recognition of the plurality of interpretations, but one whose relativist implications are contained by the notion of the general spirit. Where his probabilism really differs from that of Weber, however, is in the fundamental normative significance that it bears because of the place of universal moral law within it. What this provides is a means of making rationally grounded value judgements which Weber's radical separation of facts and values lacked. This is important because it again suggests that Aron's reading of Montesquieu was informed by his efforts elsewhere towards strengthening the normative content of his own political thought, efforts which were contemporaneous with and tied to his preoccupation with reinforcing its epistemological basis. Central to this process of revision was a moving away from the Weberian decisionism that had characterised parts of the *Introduction*. In his thesis Aron had articulated a distinction between a politics of reason and a politics of understanding derived from Weber's own separation of the ethics of conviction and responsibility. Here Aron, following Weber, had grounded his preference for a politics of understanding in existential choice rather than by reference to a permanent moral principle rooted in human nature.¹²¹ In articles in 1959 and 1960, however, he distanced himself from Weber on this point, seeking an understanding of the historical character of political

¹²¹

On this issue see Mahoney, 'Raymond Aron and the morality of prudence', 243-252.

judgement that was not dependent upon a radically historicist philosophy.¹²² This relative distancing of his political thought from its Weberian roots involved a move towards Montesquieu who Aron saw as exemplifying the kind of balance between historicism and rationalism that he sought to arrive at in his own post-war work.¹²³

Similar concerns also informed Aron's reading of Tocqueville, but they did not directly orient his interpretation to the same extent because they provided but one of several uses that he found for the author of *De la démocratie en Amérique*. Whilst Tocqueville's work arguably had more thematic parallels with Weber's than did Montesquieu's, its use by Aron as a corrective to Weber's relativist and nihilist tendencies is identifiable initially only insofar as he is presented as a sociologist who repeats the qualities of Montesquieu as discussed above. Thus Tocqueville is presented as a "*sociologue dans le style de Montesquieu*" in that his methodology displays a similarly tempered form of interpretative pluralism, allowing for a diversity of sociological causes but regrouping these to form a synthetic portrait of a given type of society.¹²⁴ As with Montesquieu, his interpretative pluralism leads into a probabilistic form of sociological explanation, both because no individual cause operates a unilateral determinism and because the action of individuals is seen to be conditioned but not determined by these underlying causes. Tocqueville's philosophy of history is therefore also pluralist and probabilist and thus differentiated from Marxist and Comtean determinism. His probabilism similarly points to a moral core at the heart of his sociology, again aligning him with Montesquieu as "*un sociologue qui ne cesse de juger en même temps qu'il décrit*".¹²⁵ Here Aron alluded to the partial Straussian inspiration for his turn towards the French liberal tradition: because he is a sociologist that does not refrain from making moral judgements, Tocqueville remains "*très proche de la philosophie classique telle que Léo Strauss l'interprète*".¹²⁶

¹²² See note 98 above.

¹²³ See here Aron's critique of Friedrich Meinecke's view of *De l'esprit des lois* as an unsatisfactory compromise between rationalism and historicism. Against Meinecke, Aron presented this as "*une tentative, légitime et imparfaite, pour combiner deux sortes de considérations dont aucune ne saurait être entièrement éliminée*". *Les étapes*, 61-62.

¹²⁴ *Les étapes*, 237-238, 249.

¹²⁵ *Les étapes*, 239.

¹²⁶ *Les étapes*, 240.

Aron's treatment of Tocqueville in *Les étapes* further aligns him with Montesquieu by identifying the similarity between the hierarchies of social causes described in *De l'esprit des lois* and *De la démocratie en Amérique*, emphasising the prevailing importance attributed in both works to customs, manners and religion in shaping political culture.¹²⁷ This, however, was also an area where Tocqueville appeared to go beyond Montesquieu in anticipating some of Aron's specific contributions to twentieth-century political thought. Four of these areas are commented on in *Les étapes*: the notions of political religion and the end of ideology, the critique of the sometimes pernicious influence of intellectuals on political culture, and the idea that 'disputatious satisfaction' was a primary characteristic of democratic societies.¹²⁸ This latter dimension to the commonality between Tocqueville and Aron is especially important because here Aron not only referred to Tocqueville to confirm a theory that he had earlier arrived at independently, but he would also subsequently adapt his work on this theme along explicitly Tocquevillian lines. This initially becomes apparent in his analysis of the rising discontent with the authoritarian and hierarchical characteristics of industrial civilisation in *Les désillusions du progrès*.¹²⁹ Against the influential neo-Marxism of Herbert Marcuse, whose *One Dimensional Man* had become a standard text of the New Left, Aron argued that the alienation and anomie that had accompanied the post-war rise in prosperity was less a product of capitalism than inherent within the insatiable egalitarian appetite of modern democracy. This impulse was at once stimulated and frustrated by an industrial civilisation that provided rising material prosperity but whose inevitably hierarchical character obstructed the same egalitarian desires that its growing productivity helped to create. This was what Aron termed the dialectic of equality.¹³⁰ Although rising post-war prosperity served in part to lessen the appeal of revolutionary political ideologies, it could not provide reasons for living; thus whilst it in one sense

¹²⁷ *Les étapes*, 230.

¹²⁸ *Les étapes*, 228-229, 241, 246-247, 249. For a discussion of Aron's interpretation of Tocqueville in the light of his thesis about the end of ideology see pages 151-152 in chapter three above.

¹²⁹ This work was published in French in 1969, but was based upon a piece first published in English in the 1964 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It contains a preface written after and touching upon the events of May 1968, which also explains the origins of the main text. See Aron, *Les désillusions du progrès* (Paris, 1969), vii-xxiii. Aron's most famous treatment of May 1968 and its immediate aftermath remains *La révolution introuvable: réflexions sur les événements de mai* (Paris, 1968), but see also Aron, 'Student Rebellion: Vision of the Future of Echo from the Past?', *Political Science Quarterly*, 84 (June, 1969), 289-310. On the legacy of 1968 see Aron, 'Remarques sur le nouvel âge idéologique', *Contrepoint*, 9 (1973), 13-26 and Aron, *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* (Paris, 1977), 408-447.

¹³⁰ See *Les désillusions*, 19-90.

engendered social conservatism, at the same time it fed a spiritual revolt whose privileged expression during the 1960s was a rise in demands for enhanced participation and self-management in the workplace and a critique of hierarchical bureaucracies that was especially keenly felt in the Gaullist Fifth Republic. Tocqueville resonated with these concerns in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, as a theorist of the benefits of decentralisation and association, he could be mobilised in support of rising claims for direct democracy and self-management; on the other hand, Tocqueville could be cited in support of the view that agitation in this direction simply expressed a fundamentally insatiable egalitarian impulse that must be tamed through the exercise of social discipline.¹³¹ Aron's interpretation fell firmly into the latter camp.

The following expository passages from *Les étapes* contains the main Tocquevillian themes that Aron would subsequently adapt in *Les désillusions du progrès* and then develop polemically in his controversial account of the 'elusive revolution' of May 1968:

Dans une société démocratique régnera une passion de l'égalité qui l'emportera en force sur le goût de la liberté. La société sera plus soucieuse d'effacer les inégalités entre les individus et les groupes que de maintenir le respect de la légalité et de l'indépendance personnelle. Elle sera animée par le souci du bien-être matériel, et travaillée par une sorte de permanente inquiétude en raison même de cette obsession du bien-être matériel. Bien-être matériel et égalité ne peuvent en effet créer de société tranquille et satisfaite, puisque chacun se compare aux autres et que la prospérité n'est jamais assurée...

Mais ... en contrepartie au matérialisme ambiant, surgissent de temps à autre des explosions de spiritualisme exalté, des éruptions d'exaltation religieuse. Ce spiritualisme éruptif est contemporain d'un matérialisme normalisé et habituel. Les deux phénomènes opposés font l'un et l'autre partie de l'essence d'une société démocratique.¹³²

The first passage describes the overwhelming power of the egalitarian impulse within democracy specifically in relation to the secondary appetite for political liberty. As suggested above, this basic presupposition informed Aron's abstract analysis of the disputatious satisfaction of modern democracies in *Les désillusions du progrès*. With the events of May 1968, however, he saw it taking on a more immediate concrete significance

¹³¹ See Serge Audier, *La pensée anti-68: essai sur une restauration intellectuelle* (Paris, 2009), 169-185.

¹³² *Les étapes*, 255, 257.

with the collapse of established authority within the University and the emergence of various revolutionary student-teacher committees seeking to institute radically new and, for Aron, fundamentally illegitimate forms of authority determined by introducing direct democracy into the organisation of French higher education. Aron considered this explosion of demands for radical participatory democracy within the University to express the insatiable egalitarian appetite that Tocqueville had identified in *De la démocratie en Amérique*, but rather than simply representing an extreme case of the clash between the hierarchical and egalitarian impulses of industrial democracy, it also pointed to a profound moral crisis.¹³³ Here too Aron's analysis was informed by Tocqueville, who saw America having successfully combined political liberty and social equality because of the strong influence of religion acting as a moral restraint upon the egalitarian impulse.¹³⁴ On Aron's view, by 1968 the moral bases of a necessary minimum respect for authority in France had been undermined not only by a long term decline in the influence of religion over social mores, but especially by the more recent erosion of atheistic humanism as an alternative source of fundamental moral principles that might restrain the excesses of radical egalitarianism. In this latter regard he singled out anti-humanist intellectuals such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser for criticism because of the corrosive moral effect of their aggressive relativism, which he considered not only as undermining respect for authority among their students, but feeding a wider cultural malaise that risked creating in future a ruling class that would be uncertain of itself and, as such, condemned to death in advance.¹³⁵

The second passage summarises Tocqueville's views concerning the strange mixture of social conservatism and perpetual restlessness characteristic of democracy. Here too Aron's expository reading of Tocqueville anticipates his subsequent use of this idea in *Les désillusions du progrès*, but again the events of May 1968 seemed to concretise the previously abstract analysis.¹³⁶ Aron interpreted them as an instantiation of the eruptive

¹³³ *La révolution introuvable*, 15-17.

¹³⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America* (London, [1835/1840] 2003), 55-56, 512.

¹³⁵ *La révolution introuvable*, 134-137. See too pages 122-123, 147. See also similar attacks in *Plaidoyer* 408-447.

¹³⁶ *Les désillusions*, xix-xxii, 126-128.

spiritualism referred to in this passage.¹³⁷ As such they amounted to an outbreak of mass delirium or collective madness reflecting a profound moral crisis both in terms of the breakdown of established authority and in a wider sense related to the failure of Western democracies to convincingly articulate the values that they stood for other than the pursuit of economic growth and material prosperity.¹³⁸ At the same time, however, Aron refused to take the actions of students and intellectuals during the crisis seriously; he was convinced that they were indulging in pseudo-revolutionary agitation against a consumer society of whose material benefits they were among the principal beneficiaries.¹³⁹ His infamous description of the student unrest as a psychodrama thus represented in part a polemical extension of Tocqueville's analysis of the democratic tendency towards superficial, eruptive spiritualism. But not only did Aron draw on this analysis of democracy to inform his critique indirectly, he also positioned himself explicitly as a modern day Tocqueville, reacting to the revolutionary upheaval of 1968 as Tocqueville had to that of 1848:

Psychodrame. Je ne maintiens pas sans nuances cette expression. Mais, tout de même, nous avons tous, au cours de cette période, joué un rôle. Je commence par moi-même, je vous l'ai dit, moi j'ai joué Tocqueville, ce qui ne va pas sans quelque ridicule, mais d'autres ont joué Saint-Just, Robespierre ou Lénine, ce qui, tout compte fait, était encore plus ridicule.¹⁴⁰

Aron's role-playing reached its fullest extent in an article that he published in *Le Figaro* on the 29th of May 1968 which consisted almost entirely of quotations from Tocqueville's *Souvenirs*.¹⁴¹ These included a critique of Louis-Philippe's complacency in the years prior to 1848, which Aron presented as an implicit indictment of Charles de Gaulle along the

¹³⁷ See in particular the following, especially Tocquevillian passage: "...l'individu est apparemment réduit à la condition de personne privée, sans appartenance à une communauté de foi religieuse ou de croyance politique, puis soudain, ces isolés, épris de confort et de prospérité, sont saisis de passion. Accès de fièvre avec des objectifs définis qui aboutissent à des bouleversements politiques ou sociaux, accès de fièvre sans objectifs définis et tel est le cas présent. Faute d'un modèle qui satisfasse nos aspirations, les accès de fièvre ont un caractère essentiellement négatif, nihiliste ou destructeur". *La révolution introuvable*, 47.

¹³⁸ See especially Aron's preface to the English translation: *The Elusive Revolution: Anatomy of a Student Revolt* (London, 1969), xvii.

¹³⁹ *La révolution introuvable*, 117-121.

¹⁴⁰ *La révolution introuvable*, 33. Aron's characterisation of the unrest of May 1968 as a psychodrama was a conscious repetition of Tocqueville's own analysis of the upheaval one-hundred-and-twenty years earlier: "On faisait donc parler dans la langue enflammée de 93 les passions tièdes du temps et l'on citait à tout moment l'exemple et le nom d'illustres scélérats auxquels on n'avait ni l'énergie ni même le désir sincère de ressembler". Tocqueville, quoted in *La révolution introuvable*, 35-36.

¹⁴¹ Aron, 'Immuable et changeante' [29/5/68] in *La révolution introuvable*, 161-162.

same lines, as well as other passages which served to attack the political naivety of French intellectuals and their propensity towards an abstract or literary approach to politics.¹⁴² Speaking through Tocqueville, Aron also denounced the opportunism of politicians and academics that sought to “*apprivoiser le nouvel maître*” and capitalise on the unrest to further their own interests.¹⁴³

The readings of Montesquieu and Tocqueville that Aron presented in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, *Les désillusions de progrès*, and *La révolution introuvable* were inevitably selective and oriented by his contemporary political and methodological concerns. What unifies all the various interpretations and applications presented across these works is a concern with reinforcing the moral basis of liberal democracy through a critique of radical relativism. In the first instance this entails an element of implicit self-criticism as he uses Montesquieu to elaborate a pluralist and probabilistic form of sociological explanation that avoided the relativistic excesses of his thesis. In *Les étapes*, Aron’s intellectual portraits offer Montesquieu and Tocqueville as proponents of a tempered, humanist relativism, overcoming the dogmatic tendencies of positivism and Marxism without lapsing into nihilism. He later came to lean primarily on Tocqueville as a support for his moral critique of the excesses of contemporary egalitarian demands, first in *Les désillusions de progrès* and later in his response to the events of May 1968. Aron’s reading of Tocqueville as a proponent of social discipline against a morally corrosive, nihilistic anti-humanism became highly influential, representing the first instance of what has since become a major trope of liberal and conservative criticisms of the May events and the pernicious influence of an amoral, relativist ‘*pensée 68*’.¹⁴⁴ Two of the most important

¹⁴² For Aron’s criticism of De Gaulle and Gaullism in relation to the events of May 1968 see *La révolution introuvable*, 95-98.

¹⁴³ ‘Immuable et changeante’, 162. It is likely that Aron had in mind here Pierre Mendès-France. See *Mémoires*, 474-475.

¹⁴⁴ Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, *La pensée 68* (Paris, 1985). See especially the admiring account of Aron’s view of the May events on pages 93-98. There is also a broad thematic parallel here with Allan Bloom, the American conservative philosopher and student of Leo Strauss whose bestselling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, is an attack on the influence of relativism within American higher education which also references Tocqueville repeatedly. See in general Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York, 1987). See also Allan Bloom, ‘Raymond Aron: The Last of the Liberals’ in Allan Bloom, *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays, 1960-1990* (New York, 1990), 256-267, esp. 265-267. For the influence of Tocqueville

sites for the subsequent development of this critique of the legacy of May 1968 were the journals *Contrepoint* and *Commentaire*. These publications were founded in the 1970s by individuals who had gravitated towards Aron after his call to arms to form an intellectual resistance to the movements that had almost brought down the Fifth Republic in 1968.¹⁴⁵ Both built on Aron's writings in the period 1955-68 by combining the critique of May 1968 with the promotion of France's liberal tradition.

III. ARON AND THE POST-1968 LIBERAL RENAISSANCE

Before making an attempt at relating the wider liberal revival of the 1970s in France to Aron's earlier traditionary action it is necessary to try and describe in some detail the renaissance with which we are concerned. In particular, it is important to try and keep a distinction in mind between this and the more general anti-totalitarian rejection of Marxism that gained pace in the second half of the decade. The two phenomena are often conflated, but it should be remembered that the liberal renaissance predated the wider anti-totalitarian turn. It was a post-1968 renaissance, initiated in hostile response to the fashionable leftist radicalism that it saw emerging from the May upheavals and, latterly, to the re-emergence of the PCF as a potential party of government after the signing of the *Programme commun* with the Parti Socialiste in 1972.¹⁴⁶

within *The Closing of the American Mind* see S.J.D. Green, 'The Closing of the American Mind Revisited', *The Antioch Review*, 59 (spring, 2001), 371-382, esp. 376-382.

¹⁴⁵ Gwendal Châton, 'Désaccord parfait: le *Contrepoint* libéral dans les configurations intellectuels des années soixante-dix' in Jean Baudouin et François Hournant (dir.), *Les Revues et la dynamique des ruptures* (Rennes, 2007), 131-164, esp. 139-141. For a first hand account see Alain Besançon, 'Souvenirs et réflexions sur mai 68', *Commentaire*, 118 (été, 2007), 507-519.

¹⁴⁶ See here the anonymous introduction to the inaugural issue of *Contrepoint*, which presents the review as a liberal antidote to post-1968 intellectual conformism: "[Depuis 1968] l'exercice de la pensée libre se trouve de plus en plus limité par la soumission aux caprices de la mode ... Des écrivains, des universitaires, des hommes de science et de recherche, que le 'surprenant nouveau' n'hallucine pas, partagent sans pouvoir vraiment l'exprimer le même et douloureux sentiment de se sentir menacés par ce système de conditionnement intellectuel de plus en plus contraignant. Il semble, depuis 1968 notamment, que rien ni personne, ne puisse ou ne veuille s'opposer à une marée qui se donne pour irrésistible. La sérénité et le fatalisme ne s'accommodent que du silence. Une entreprise d'insubordination à l'air du temps, et une réflexion libre, est nécessaire. *Contrepoint* ambitionne d'en être le foyer". Anon, 'Éditorial', *Contrepoint*, 1 (mai, 1970), 3-5, 4.

The events of 1968 acted as a powerful centripetal force drawing together a nucleus of individuals that coalesced around Aron after his public appeal for the formation of a Comité de défense et de rénovation de l'université française in *Le Figaro*.¹⁴⁷ Whilst the committee itself was short-lived, this group continued to associate informally through his weekly seminar at the École pratique des hautes études, and it was through the network established there that the review *Contrepoint* was formed in 1970.¹⁴⁸ The first intellectual review in post-war France to explicitly aim towards the rehabilitation of political liberalism, *Contrepoint*'s pursuit of this objective was based on Aron's example.¹⁴⁹ Consequently its liberalism was presented as open, pluralist, and based in the rejection of Manichean political debate in terms of a supposedly permanent Left/Right divide. It gathered contributors from a political spectrum ranging between the moderate left and nationalist right, united in opposition to mainstream communism and post-1968 revolutionary leftism of all varieties.¹⁵⁰

Contrepoint continued Aron's association of liberalism, especially that of Tocqueville, with the critique of radical relativism in all its forms as morally corrosive.¹⁵¹ Its launch was timed to coincide with the second anniversary of May 1968 and the first issue was themed on the state of French youth two years on from the events. Nine out of its first ten issues were devoted to specific themes, and of these five were oriented towards aspects of the moral crisis that Aron's Tocquevillian analysis of the 'elusive revolution' had identified.¹⁵² Given the extraordinary durability of anti-'68 sentiment as a means of mobilising French

¹⁴⁷ Aron, 'La crise de l'université: une mise en garde et un appel de Raymond Aron' [11/6/68], in *La révolution introuvable*, 169-170.

¹⁴⁸ *Contrepoint* has been described by one of its regular contributors as a direct response to Aron's appeal for a committee in defence of the University in *Le Figaro* two years earlier. See Châton, 145. On the links between Aron's seminar and *Contrepoint* see Châton, 'Désaccord parfait', 138-159 and Rieffel, *La tribu*, 245-246.

¹⁴⁹ "Nous sommes des héritiers qui ne refusons pas l'héritage: quelles seront les modalités de la liberté qui est la valeur suprême?" *Contrepoint* aimed to "faire vivre ... l'esprit d'un libéralisme véritable". Anon, 'Éditorial', 4-5.

¹⁵⁰ On the influence of Aron on *Contrepoint* see Châton, 'Désaccord parfait', 134-145; Rieffel, *La tribu*, 242-247.

¹⁵¹ *Contrepoint* was committed to combating "le terrorisme et l'anarchie nihiliste du parti intellectuel dominant". Anon, 'Éditorial', 4. From its third issue *Contrepoint* carried a quotation from Tocqueville on the front of every edition.

¹⁵² In addition to the inaugural edition, issue four was titled 'Aux sources du 'malaise''; issue five 'Liberté et autorité'; issue six 'La crise des églises'; and issue ten 'Situation des intellectuels'.

conservatives, it has been suggested that *Contrepoint* acted as the cradle of a new reactionary conservatism currently embodied by President Nicolas Sarkozy and his controversial views concerning the need to liquidate the legacy of May 1968.¹⁵³ There is truth in such claims, but it ought to be remembered that the review also published work by intellectuals of the centre left who had adopted a more positive view of the student and worker unrest of 1968, including François Furet.¹⁵⁴ In fact, if *Contrepoint* were to be associated with any French political party it would probably have been the centre right Union pour la démocratie française whose leader, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, tried unsuccessfully to have it operate as a kind of think tank for the advanced liberalism that he sought to represent.¹⁵⁵

Although it sought to maintain formal independence *vis-à-vis* individual political parties, the election of Giscard d'Estaing to the presidency in 1974 marks the beginning of a revival of liberalism in the political sphere that complemented the one that *Contrepoint*, under Aron's tutelage, had sought to engineer in the intellectual sphere since 1970. The new president and, from 1976, his prime minister, Raymond Barre, had both been students of Aron in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and the influence of Aron and Tocqueville is apparent in the Giscard's book, published in 1976, *Démocratie française*.¹⁵⁶ Aron publicly supported Giscard's election in 1974 and thereafter maintained personal relations with him that were much closer than those he had held with either Georges Pompidou or Charles de Gaulle, acting as an informal advisor during the election campaigns of 1978 and 1981.¹⁵⁷ Jean-Claude Casanova was another important link between Giscard's administration and

¹⁵³ Serge Audier notes the fact that Aron's biographer, Nicholas Baverez, was an advisor to Nicolas Sarkozy during the presidential election campaign of 2007. Baverez is a regular contributor to *Commentaire* and has written extensively from a conservative angle on May 1968. See Audier, *La pensée anti-68*, 54-55. See also Daniel Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l'ordre: enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires* (Paris, 2002), 28.

¹⁵⁴ See Châton, 'Désaccord parfait', 154.

¹⁵⁵ See Châton, 'Désaccord parfait', 161-162. The editorial board declined Giscard's invitations for collaboration with the UDF.

¹⁵⁶ Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Démocratie française* (Paris, 1976). See page 40 for an example his presentation of Marxism as a surrogate religion. For his claims regarding the need for individuals and groups in democracies to practice self-discipline and moderate their political demands see pages 143-144. See also pages 153-154 for his criticism of France's radically adversarial political culture encouraged by an outdated ideological divorce expressed by the Manichean division between a largely mythical Left and Right. In the preface to the English translation of this text, the author explicitly states his Tocquevillian inspiration: "I dedicate my idea to Alexis de Tocqueville, my brother in intention if not in talent ...". Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *French Democracy* (New York, 1977), xii.

¹⁵⁷ See *Mémoires*, 566-574; Baverez, *Raymond Aron*, 436-440, 474-474.

the emergent liberal group affiliated with *Contrepoint* and, later, *Commentaire*, serving as an advisor to Barre throughout his tenure as Prime Minister whilst playing a leading role within both of these publications, the latter as director.¹⁵⁸

While *Contrepoint* never achieved a circulation that would enable it to compete with more established publications like *Esprit* or *Les temps modernes*, the connections between its somewhat limited readership and the upper echelons of the French government between 1974 and 1976 were such that its contribution to the liberal renaissance ought to be taken seriously. The wider credibility of the review was enhanced by the publication in 1974 of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, an enormous first hand and eyewitness account of the system of forced labour camps operating in the USSR. However, *Contrepoint* was unable to fully exploit the increasing appetite for all things anti-communist among French intellectuals that followed in the wake of Solzhenitsyn's book because personal differences between the review's directors, Georges Liébert and Patrick Devedjian, led to the former's resignation, triggering Aron's withdrawal from the project and shortly thereafter the review's collapse at the end of 1976.¹⁵⁹

Soon after the demise of *Contrepoint* most of the core group of individuals that had initiated it in 1970 began planning for its replacement.¹⁶⁰ This would be *Commentaire*. Work towards the founding of this new review began in the early summer of 1977 with the intention of launching in the December before the legislative elections of March 1978; however, financial constraints led to a delay of three months, with the first issue appearing on the 1st of March.¹⁶¹ The immediate political imperative driving the creation of

¹⁵⁸ Rieffel implies that *Commentaire* was “*un club barriste*”, see his *La tribu des clercs*, 252-257.

¹⁵⁹ In 1977, Liébert went on to develop the collection ‘*Pluriel*’ at the French publishing house Hachette, producing new paperback editions of classic texts from the liberal tradition as well as numerous works by contemporary liberals that had been affiliated with *Contrepoint*, including Pierre Manent's anthology of extracts from noted liberals past and present, *Les libéraux* (Paris, 1986). Liébert also maintained a place on the editorial board of *Commentaire*. See Rieffel, *La tribu*, 260.

¹⁶⁰ Jean-Claude Casanova acted as the director of *Commentaire* and was deputised by Pierre Manent. Both had also been involved in the running of *Contrepoint*. Other members of the inner circle at Aron's seminar that participated in both *Contrepoint* and *Commentaire* included Annie Kriegel, Alain Besançon, Pierre Hassner, Georges Liébert, Jean Baechler, Julien Freund and Kostas Papaioannou.

¹⁶¹ See the collection of documents relating to *Commentaire* in the Aron archive: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(130), especially the meeting minutes from 28th June 1977 and

Commentaire had been the perception that the combined left, united behind the *Programme commun*, was in line to win a majority at these legislative elections.¹⁶² The feared victory for the Left never materialised, but with *Contrepoint* finished and Aron having left *Le Figaro* in April 1977, the need for a new platform to push the liberal agenda that Aron and his followers had been promoting since 1970 remained.

Whilst the teams behind *Contrepoint* and *Commentaire* were both similarly composed of individuals that had coalesced under Aron's tutelage in the wake of May 1968, Aron himself became the public face of the latter in a way that he had not done with its predecessor. The day-to-day running of *Commentaire* was handled by Jean-Claude Casanova, Pierre Manent and Marc Fumaroli, but it was deliberately presented as an enterprise initiated by Aron to contribute towards the intellectual and political reform of France through advancing the cause of liberal pluralism.¹⁶³ The anonymous introduction to the first issue situated *Commentaire* explicitly within a liberal tradition, but emphasised that this tradition, characterised by its transcendence of the binary opposition of Left and Right, was open to dialogue with the anti-totalitarian left. A conditional olive branch was specifically proffered towards the *autogestionnaire* current within the Parti Socialiste:

Ce courant a redécouvert la société civile et veut briser l'équation mortelle socialisme-étatisme. Il lui reste à faire la preuve qu'il peut être autre chose que le contrepoint, libertaire et impuissant, de la gauche étatique, qu'il n'est pas condamné à « espérer éternellement des choses vagues ».¹⁶⁴

Aron's letter to Louis de Villefosse dated 3rd February 1978, which refers to the financial issues leading to the delay in launching.

¹⁶² Aron's concern was such that he wrote a book on the potentially dire implications of success for the combined left, *Les élections de mars et la Ve République* (Paris, 1978). A split between the PCF and PS in September 1977 (Aron had started writing the book in June, see page 7) contributed to the left's failure to win a majority in the elections the following March.

¹⁶³ An advanced promotional flyer was distributed prior to the publication of the first issue in which Aron personally appealed for subscriptions, stating that: "*Par la revue Commentaire, avec le groupe d'amis rassemblés autour de moi, je voudrais contribuer à la réforme intellectuelle et politique de la France. Écrite par des hommes unis dans le goût de la liberté, notre revue sera pluraliste, sans dogme et sans conformisme*". This flyer is held in the Aron archive: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(130).

¹⁶⁴ Anon, 'Commentaire', *Commentaire*, 1 (1978), 3-6, 5.

Although *Commentaire* sought to draw strength from and, to some extent, offer leadership to the wider anti-totalitarian movement of the late 1970s, it was also concerned to maintain an identity apart from latecomers to the anti-communist cause, particularly among ex-*soixante-huitards*. This helps explain the above exhortation to *auto-gestionnaire* tendencies within the Parti Socialiste to abandon irresponsible libertarianism; it also underpinned *Commentaire*'s distancing of itself from *nouveaux philosophes* like Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann.¹⁶⁵ It is significant in this regard that *Commentaire* did not position itself as a merely anti-totalitarian review; it opposed itself to what it identified as the *two* major threats to liberal democracy: “*le cri inarticulé, la révolte pure d’un côté; le savoir absolu, l’idéologie totale de l’autre*”.¹⁶⁶ In railing against the first of these enemies of liberty it picked up from where *Contrepoint*'s condemnation of “*l’anarchie nihiliste du parti intellectuel dominant*” had left off.¹⁶⁷ Implicit to this rejection of nihilistic libertarianism was an assertion of fundamental moral truth based in natural law:

Nous récusons l’idiome inarticulé de l’invective, de la mise en accusation indifférenciée de la « société » en tant que telle, parce que ceux qui assurent qu’« on a toujours raison de se révolter » ne fournissent jamais les raisons de leur révolte, parce qu’ils s’exemptent eux-mêmes de la condamnation, parce qu’enfin toute accusation présuppose une loi et ils ne reconnaissent aucune loi.¹⁶⁸

It also entailed the rejection of radical epistemological relativism:

Le registre du commentaire est celui du sens et de la liberté. Au contraire, le cri de la révolte nue, au nom de la pure liberté sans responsabilité ni raison, est destructeur de la liberté même, car la liberté est prise de position dans un monde qui, s’il a ses opacités et ses contraintes, a aussi ses clartés et ses raisons, tissé qu’il est par les activités sensées des hommes.¹⁶⁹

Central to *Commentaire*'s project of intellectual and political reform, then, was the same concern with reinforcing the normative foundations of liberal democracy by reinstating

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, the introduction to the first issue which is dismissive of such “lightweight” and “telegenic” former-leftists-turned-humanitarians. Anon, ‘Commentaire’, 5. See also Aron, ‘Pour le progrès: après la chute des idoles’, *Commentaire*, 1 (1978), 233-243.

¹⁶⁶ Anon, ‘Commentaire’, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Anon, ‘Éditorial’, 4.

¹⁶⁸ Anon, ‘Commentaire’, 3. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁹ Anon, ‘Commentaire’, 4.

faith in the moral and epistemological capacity of human reason that had motivated much of Aron's writing since the late 1940s. As with his work during the Sorbonne period, this entailed the promotion of France's liberal tradition as a source of humanist pluralism, capable of replacing the totalising ideology of Marxism without over-extending into radical relativism. *Commentaire* here adopted a more systematic approach than its predecessor by initiating a regular section titled "*Les classiques de la liberté*" which reprinted extracts from French liberals such as Montesquieu, Tocqueville, Hippolyte Taine, Théodore Jouffroy, Edgar Quinet, and Benjamin Constant. Whilst it would publish articles by individuals on the centre left that participated in the wider revival of French liberal tradition, such as François Furet, Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Rosanvallon, *Commentaire*'s liberal revivalism mainly continued in a direction that emphasised its significance as a corrective to the relativistic nihilism that it perceived to have contaminated French thought since the late 1960s. As such, it linked with aspects of American neo-conservatism that had developed out of the culture wars of the 1960s. Allan Bloom, whose reading of Tocqueville supported his own militant anti-relativism, was a member of *Commentaire*'s editorial board, and Aron arranged for a valedictory article by Bloom on Leo Strauss to appear in translation in the review's first issue.¹⁷⁰ Through this article and the translation of various works by Strauss himself, *Commentaire* became an important vehicle for the introduction of the philosophical godfather of American neo-conservatism to France. Pierre Manent, the individual who, aside from Aron, was most engaged in reviving French liberal tradition at *Commentaire*, promoted an interpretation of Tocqueville in the 1980s that was informed by his own admiration for Strauss and Bloom and their anti-relativist crusade.¹⁷¹ Prior to the commemorative wave that greeted the fortieth anniversary of the events of May 1968, *Commentaire* published a predictably

¹⁷⁰ Allan Bloom, 'Un vrai philosophe: Léo Strauss', *Commentaire*, 1 (mars, 1978), 91-106. The article had originally appeared in *Political Theory* in 1974. Aron personally requested permission to republish it. See his letter to Benjamin Barber dated 24 November, 1977, *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(130). This was the first of fifteen articles that Bloom would publish in *Commentaire*.

¹⁷¹ This connection with American neo-conservatism has made Manent a prominent target for critics of the conservative turn in French thought since the 1980s. See especially Audier, *La pensée anti-68*, 148-168 and Lindenberg, *Le rappel*, 18, 33, 38-39, 57, 74-78. Manent was originally introduced to the work of Leo Strauss by Aron. See Pierre Manent, *Modern Liberty and its Discontents* (Lanham, 1998), 36.

critical memoir by Alain Besançon attacking its alleged nihilism, and the review continues to target cultural and moral relativism as a matter of priority.¹⁷²

IV. CONCLUSION

This chapter began by problematising Aron's relationship with the French liberal tradition. Given that he only started to engage substantially with the predecessors that he selected for his liberal political sociology, Montesquieu and Tocqueville, after the main features of that sociology were already in place, it has suggested that his relationship with them was predominantly instrumental, taking the form of a traditionary action that functioned in two registers: canonisation and counter-innovation. This conclusion attempts to briefly relate the wider liberal revival initiated in the 1970s to Aron's traditionary action across these two registers.

Canonisation deals in cultural legitimacy, taking recognised traditions and drawing legitimacy from them to validate contemporary political or methodological positions or constructing traditions and conferring legitimacy upon them by describing them as such. Aron's traditionary action served both of these aims at once. It legitimised an approach to sociology that, because of its emphasis on the autonomy of the political and the importance of economics, some of his senior colleagues at the Sorbonne did not recognise. At the same time his canonisation of the French school of political sociology relied upon Aron's partially renewed kudos on the left after 1956 to present this sociological tradition as a credible alternative to Marxism. To further enhance the credibility of this invented tradition, Aron defined it against a representation of positivist tradition as dogmatic, complacent and outdated. By indicating how his readings of Montesquieu and Tocqueville built upon interpretations from within the positivist tradition, it has been shown how the

¹⁷² See e.g. Nicolas Weill's review of the December 2009 issue of *Commentaire*: 'Le relativisme, voilà l'ennemi !', *Le Monde*, 7/2/2010. For a critical anticipation of the fortieth anniversary of May 1968 see Alain Besançon, 'Souvenirs et réflexions sur mai 68', *Commentaire*, 118 (été, 2007), 507-519.

construction of the French school of political sociology depended in part upon a selective and somewhat caricatural vision of Durkheimian positivism.

Within the fairly narrow coterie of associates that he built up around his seminar, admiration for Aron derived from his longstanding anti-communism and especially from his leadership of the intellectual reaction against the revolutionary politics of May 1968; it was not the result of his having cloaked himself in the prestige of a half-forgotten French liberal tradition. Amidst the wider anti-totalitarian turn of the mid-to-late 1970s, Aron's rising public prestige resulted from his consistent opposition to communist totalitarianism rather than his association with the thought of Montesquieu or Tocqueville. After being awarded the inaugural *Prix Tocqueville* from President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1979, he received a letter from the son of one of his old *lycée* teachers. The letter was humorously addressed to "Cher Tocqueville" whom it went on to congratulate for winning the *Prix Aron*.¹⁷³ This note cheerily expressed a certain truth, which was that the *Prix Tocqueville* was as much about raising the domestic profile of the author of *De la démocratie en Amérique* as it was concerned with recognising the achievements of the author of *L'opium des intellectuels*. Aron acknowledged as much when, whilst participating in the deliberations over whom to award the second *Prix Tocqueville* in 1980, he argued unsuccessfully in favour of Isaiah Berlin over the eventual winner, the American sociologist David Riesman, because of Berlin's international renown and its potential for further raising the profile of the award and hence of Tocqueville himself.¹⁷⁴

In describing the liberal revival of the 1970s a distinction has been made between the post-1968 liberal renaissance centred in the reviews *Contrepoint* and *Commentaire* and the wider anti-totalitarian turn that followed the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1974. These two phenomena partially merged, however, with the foundation in January 1978 of the Comité des intellectuels pour l'Europe des libertés (CIEL). That its politically heterogeneous membership, which included Gaullists, former Maoists and PCF

¹⁷³ This letter is available in Aron's correspondence concerning the *Prix Tocqueville*: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(171).

¹⁷⁴ See Aron's letter to Alain Peyrefitte [8/9/80] in *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(171).

supporters, prominent representatives of the Catholic left as well as liberals affiliated to *Commentaire*, could unite around the principle of ‘aronisme’ was as strongly symbolic of the distance that public perception of Aron had travelled in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the universal acclaim that greeted his *Mémoires*.¹⁷⁵ The case of CIEL also partly supports historian Mark Lilla’s view that the anti-totalitarian turn in France was differentiated from contemporary Italian anti-totalitarianism by its explicitly liberal tone.¹⁷⁶ However, it is important to recognise that references to liberal tradition within this wider ideological shift were themselves instrumental, supporting a variety of sometimes opposing political agendas.

If Aron’s rising status in the 1970s was more a product of his longstanding anti-communism than the effect of his having legitimised himself by aligning with French liberal tradition, his canonisation of that tradition did have long-term significance in suggesting to a generation of intellectuals disillusioned with Marxism the existence of a domestic intellectual heritage offering an escape route from the cul-de-sac into which they felt it had led them. It is important to acknowledge, however, that Aron did not single-handedly resurrect interest in this tradition and particularly in Tocqueville whose complete works were in the process of being published under subsidy from the French State prior to his initial engagement with some of them in the late 1950s.¹⁷⁷ Nor did subsequent French treatments of Tocqueville universally take their cues from Aron, particularly where his relevance to the analysis of May 1968 and its aftermath were concerned.

¹⁷⁵ “*Nous ne sommes toujours pas rattachés à une formation ou à une ambition politique. Le CIEL n’est pas chiraquien, rocardien, giscardien. Il est vraisemblablement ‘aronien’, mais il s’agit d’une pensée si ouverte, attentive et généreuse qu’elle n’exclut rien, sauf ce qui exclut*”. Alain Ravennes, quoted in a report on CIEL’s 1982 national congress, ‘Le CIEL se déclare « aronien »’, in *Le Monde*, 17 juin, 1982. Aron was a member of CIEL where his role was mainly that of an informal figurehead. He was an occasional participant at its organisational meetings and used his connection with Henry Kissinger to solicit funding for CIEL in America. See Aron’s letter to Kissinger dated 11 December 1981 along with other documentation relating to his CIEL membership in the Aron archive: *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060(176). For the reception of Aron’s *Mémoires* see Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: The Sociologist in Society* (Beverly Hills, 1986), 582-590.

¹⁷⁶ Lilla, ‘The other velvet revolution’, 151.

¹⁷⁷ On the twentieth-century French reception of Tocqueville prior to Aron see Mélonio, *Tocqueville*, 236-269; Audier, *Tocqueville retrouvé*, 19-59.

This leads into the question of the relation between Aron's traditional action in its second register, as counter-innovation, and the liberal renaissance of the 1970s. The term counter-innovation refers to a weaker form of instrumentalisation wherein individuals inevitably read texts in the light of their own contemporary political, social or methodological concerns. This concept has been applied in a close reading, first of Aron's expository accounts of Montesquieu and Tocqueville in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, then in his use of Tocqueville in *Les désillusions du progrès* and *La révolution introuvable*. After demonstrating how Aron read Montesquieu in the light of his concern with reinforcing the moral and epistemological bases of his thought, it was then shown how this extended and developed into his reading of Tocqueville, especially once the events of May 1968 imbued his anti-relativism with a new militant urgency. In the second part of this chapter, two ways in which Tocqueville's thought resonated with key post-1968 intellectual and political concerns in France were identified: his championing of decentralisation and association could be mobilised in support of claims for direct democracy and self-management, but his work could also be used to support the view that such claims merely expressed an insatiable egalitarian impulse that must be tamed through the exercise of social discipline. Aron's interpretation, and the one promoted in the pages of *Commentaire*, leaned predominantly towards the latter, more conservative reading. This interpretation has had a lasting impact in determining the conservative tinge of the liberalism promoted by prominent intellectuals associated with the review such as Pierre Manent through whom its links to aspects of American neo-conservatism are apparent.

The liberal-conservative slant that characterises much of the *Commentaire* group's presentation of French liberal tradition is far from the only account that has emerged since the 1970s. But because of its association with Aron, its joining with neo-conservative American interpretations, and its influence upon France's conservative political elite, it has achieved a level of pre-eminence that competing accounts have struggled to match. It is worth noting, however, that in terms of the long-term development of France's post-1968 political culture, there is substantial empirical evidence in support of the less conservative reading of Tocqueville alluded to earlier. Between 1970 and 2000, for instance, the number of new associations in France increased by three hundred percent such that by the start of

the new millennium one in four French adults belonged to one or more associations.¹⁷⁸

Here is not the place to begin an in-depth account of the reception of Tocqueville in late twentieth-century France, but the heterogeneity of this reception is noteworthy for being representative of the under-acknowledged heterogeneity of the French liberal renaissance more broadly.

¹⁷⁸ Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton, 2010), 362.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a critical review of the evidence for the main arguments made in this thesis is necessary, both to establish its findings on as firm a basis as possible and to ensure they are sufficiently nuanced. The first of its two main claims has been that Raymond Aron's liberalism was not so much a product of the Cold War as of the inter-war crisis of European liberalism. His involvement in the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* and the Centre international d'études pour la rénovation du libéralisme on the eve of the Second World War offers substantial empirical evidence for this claim, but do not constitute definitive proof; Aron's hopes for a strong Parti socialiste in the immediate post-war years might still be legitimately advanced to support a Cold War liberal reading, for instance. Yet one can equally find evidence of Aron's continuing, if distant, attachment to the socialism of his student years well into the Cold War itself. "*S'il existait un grand parti socialiste en France*", he wrote in 1955, "*l'auteur des Aventures de la dialectique y rejoindrait peut-être l'auteur de L'opium des intellectuels*".¹ What these apparently conflicting pieces of evidence show is that Aron's liberalism should not be understood in doctrinaire or detailed programmatic terms; rather it constitutes a more fundamental worldview and temperament that is compatible with a range of moderate political positions. Of course, political moderation does not in itself constitute a coherent political *Weltanschauung*. What made Aron's worldview liberal was its reproduction of major tropes from that tradition of French political reflection, including its ambivalence towards France's revolutionary heritage, concern with promoting a pluralist political culture, and advocacy of the separation of powers as a safeguard against the tyrannical potential of modern democracy. Aron's clear articulation of all these themes in his presentation to the Société française de philosophie in June 1939 offers very strong evidence that his political worldview was basically liberal by the eve of the Second World War.

¹ Aron, 'Aventures et mésaventures de la dialectique', *Preuves*, 59 (janvier, 1956), 3-20, 7. Published in 1956, these remarks were written in late 1955. Aron is referring here to Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

One of the arguments advanced to support Cold War liberal readings of Aron's political thought is that his early reluctance to categorise the USSR as a totalitarian regime alongside National Socialist Germany betrays the kind of moral bi-focalism of which he became such a persistent and vocal critic from 1947. There is some truth in this, but its significance should not be exaggerated; Aron's reticence here primarily expressed political realism, not idealistic illusions about the totalitarian ambitions of Soviet communism. Indeed, there is a much greater weight of evidence showing that between 1933 and 1937 Aron was already formulating the kinds of arguments against the progressive intellectual mindset that he would synthesise to great effect in *L'opium des intellectuels* twenty years later. One such argument was his rejection of the basic Left/Right dichotomy in terms of which much of the political engagement of French intellectuals, particularly from 1934, was articulated. As we have seen, Aron was a critic of the Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes and the Popular Front. His criticisms of both were fundamentally liberal in that they related to the exacerbated polarisation of political culture that he saw as resulting from the actions pursued by the united Left in its intellectual and formal political guises. In this respect Aron's thought again exhibited strong thematic continuity with traditional French political liberalism, but on the question of economic policy he also aligned himself with nascent French neo-liberalism.

Considering how Aron's end of ideology theory began as a form of neo-liberal non-conformism in the 1930s provides further evidence of his pre-war liberalism and also supports the subsidiary claim that his thought emerged from a reflection on the crisis of liberalism that entailed an assimilation of elements of anti-liberal crisis thought. On this basis his renewal-based neo-liberalism contrasts with the neo-classical revivalist model advanced by Friedrich von Hayek in several respects. The partially Heideggerian ontology outlined in his doctoral thesis informed Aron's rejection of Hayek's ontological and methodological individualism, enabling his own liberalism to absorb Marxist and nationalist critiques of formal liberty as meaningless when conceived independently from the concrete lived experience of national independence or economic autonomy. Aron's attitude towards the State and its relationship with the citizens of liberal societies differs fundamentally from that of Hayek or, indeed, Alain in that he conceives the continuous

establishment of its sovereign authority as the basic prerequisite for all subsequent claims towards specific rights and liberties. In this respect, as with aspects of Aron's theory of secular religion, Carl Schmitt was a probable source of influence that he was reluctant to openly acknowledge because of Schmitt's dubious political record after the rise of Hitler. We have seen, however, that this pessimistic element of Aron's political thought co-existed in a mutually limiting relationship with an optimistic Kantian streak. Within individual societies, the political, for Aron, was equally a terrain of potential reconciliation and moral education as it was of conflict; to discount either of these aspects would be to radically falsify its significance.

This attempt to draw fundamentally opposed political positions into the same orbit reflects a broader commitment to interpretative pluralism for which Aron set out the theoretical justification in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*. We have seen that the *Introduction* represented a flawed attempt at reattaching rational humanism to concrete existence and history, and that it attempted to do so on the basis of a partially Heideggerian ontology that fed into a 'transcendental relativism'. Most of Aron's commentators have flagged the generally problematic nature of this relativism for his attempts at justifying a 'politics of understanding', but equally most have not adequately explored its complexities. This has prevented previous accounts of Aron's thought from recognising the relationship between his pre-war political epistemology and post-war reading of Montesquieu, a connection explored at length in the final chapter of this thesis and which supports its second principal argument: that Aron's relationship with the French liberal tradition was primarily active and instrumental instead of passive and receptive.

In one sense establishing this argument has been straightforward, since Aron, as we have seen, admitted on numerous occasions that the development of his own thought owed virtually nothing to the influence of Montesquieu or Tocqueville. This does, however, pose the problem of from where Aron developed the characteristically French brand of political liberalism that has been attributed to him in this thesis. It would indeed appear that it is easier to identify Aron's antagonisms with individual representatives of the French liberal tradition, most notably Alain, during the 1930s than it is to find positive relations of

influence. One thing that is worth noting here is that while Aron's claims of relative ignorance regarding Tocqueville in the 1930s are credible, he must surely have studied Montesquieu during his formal education. As far as personal relations are concerned the impact of Célestin Bouglé in shaping Aron's approach to Tocqueville has been noted, but this seems too narrow and specialised an influence to have shaped the much broader liberal outlook evinced by Aron in the second half of this decade. His relationship with Élie Halévy had a more wide-ranging effect in terms of Aron making the transition towards an explicitly liberal form of anti-totalitarianism in these years and is the most frequently cited personal influence in shaping Aron's transition from socialism to liberalism. But another likely personal influence in these years that is much less often cited is that of Albert Thibaudet, the literary critic of the *Nouvelle revue française* who in the 1930s turned his hand increasingly towards political commentary. This connection makes sense for several reasons. Thibaudet was a liberal who, like Aron, was critical of the 'liberal' intelligentsia in the Dreyfusard mould. This was especially true of his critical relationship with Alain, whose columns in each issue of the *Nouvelle revue française* typically sat next to his own. Thibaudet's commitment to liberal pluralism, political and intellectual, has already been noted, as has his penchant for criticising the failure of intellectuals to reflect on politics from the statesman's point of view. Richard Gowan has already written of Thibaudet's influence over some of Aron's wartime articles, and we have noted how Aron's teaching at the École nationale d'administration drew upon Thibaudet's history of French political thought. But given that it is virtually inconceivable that Aron, a young, highly cultured member of France's literary elite, would not have regularly read his columns during the 1930s, Thibaudet also stands as a highly plausible French liberal role model for Aron during these earlier years.

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The primary aim of this thesis has been to provide an historical account of Aron's liberal political thought; its secondary objective to establish Aron's position in the liberal renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s so as to provide a basis for a better historical

understanding of that broader development. The conclusions in this latter respect are thus preliminary in nature and intended as a spur to further research. Responding to a tendency to treat Aron's role in the liberal renaissance in primarily laudatory terms, an effort has been made to specify how, when and why he began to accumulate acolytes and engage in collective efforts at promoting a revival of liberal political thought in France. The main argument here has been that the liberal revival with which Aron was most closely involved was prosecuted primarily in hostile response to the events of May-June 1968 and their radical ideological outgrowths, but latterly also in reaction against the re-emergence of a united Left via the *Programme commun*. While it benefited in terms of its wider prestige and legitimacy from the Solzhenitsyn effect after 1974, it did not originate in this period. In this latter respect, the development of the liberal renaissance mirrors that of the wider anti-totalitarian turn of the mid-to-late 1970s. However, the strong anti-*soixante-huitard* dimension to the liberal revival promoted by Aron's acolytes at *Contrepoint* and *Commentaire* indicates that it should not be viewed as simply a product of the anti-totalitarian movement. This does not mean, as Michael Scott Christofferson has suggested, that this French liberal renaissance should be regarded as largely separate from the anti-totalitarian turn.² It stands instead as a reminder of the heterogeneity and complex inter-relation of both phenomena. Participants in the anti-totalitarian movement ranged politically from Straussian neo-conservatives such as Pierre Manent to ex-Maoists turned champions of the cause of human rights like André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy. The revival of interest in France's liberal tradition since the 1970s has occurred across a similarly broad range of political positions, with participants including the ex-Trotskyist Claude Lefort and the leader of the intellectual New Right, Alain de Benoist.³ Of course, the heterogeneous participation across both these phenomena was motivated by widely varying political concerns. But there were nevertheless substantial areas of convergence, most notably regarding opposition to communist influence in French government.

² Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Anti-totalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (Oxford, 2004), 268.

³ See e.g. Claude Lefort, *Writing: The Political Test* (Durham, 2000), 35-66, 85-108; Alain de Benoist, *Vu de droite: anthologie critique des idées contemporaines* (Paris, 1977), 259-261, 264-272.

The Comité des intellectuels pour une Europe des libertés was a broad-based coalition of anti-totalitarian intellectuals that, as we have seen, declared itself ‘*Aronien*’ in the early 1980s. Yet, in characteristically contrarian fashion, Aron criticised the Manichean excesses of this organisation’s anti-totalitarian enthusiasm. As has been remarked in chapter two, he was similarly critical of the *Nouveaux philosophes*. We should, then, perhaps be wary of claims that the late 1970s and 1980s were marked by the adoption, *en masse*, of Aron’s intellectual ethic of responsibility by France’s public intellectuals.⁴ A reasonable case could, for example, be made for an enterprise such as the Fondation Saint-Simon as continuing the model of intellectual engagement pursued by Aron since the mid-1930s. But it should be remembered that for an individual or group to declare their allegiance to ‘*Aronisme*’ was often a means of siphoning some of the formidable moral authority bestowed upon Aron late in his life more than any substantial philosophical or political statement. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Aron was thus himself subjected to the kind of canonisation discussed in chapter four. The emergent New Right, for instance, frequently resorted to such tactics in these years. Aron threatened legal action against Yvan Bloch, president of the radical conservative Club de l’Horloge, after promotional materials for the new *Contrepoint*, re-launched under Bloch’s stewardship, insinuated Aron’s endorsement of the review.⁵ Alain de Benoist, to take another example, courted Aron via correspondence and regularly cited his influence in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶

Aron’s thought lends itself particularly well to such forms of canonisation because of its pluralism, which, while emphatic in its rejection of political extremism, makes its positive political content difficult to pin down. “*En politique*”, he once remarked, “*il n’y a jamais de proposition vraie qui n’appelle immédiatement un correctif*”.⁷ An outlook such as this offers a valuable lesson in tolerance and moderation, but it cannot provide the basis for a

⁴ François Dosse, *History of Structuralism, Volume II: The Sign Sets, 1967-Present* (London, 1997), 203; Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (London, 1998), 137.

⁵ See Aron’s letter to Bloch dated 13/1/81 in *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060 (131).

⁶ See in general Benoist’s correspondence with Aron in *Fonds Raymond Aron*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF28060 (132). See also on this point See Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford, 1996), 156.

⁷ Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique: démocratie et révolution*, (Paris, [1952] 1997), 208.

systematic doctrine; Aron's denial that there existed any such thing as '*Aronisme*' thus did not betray false modesty.⁸ This pluralism helps explain some of the divergences in the interpretation of his liberalism within the secondary literature devoted to him, but it does not make it impossible to critically discriminate between the readings that have been offered. Whatever other merits they possess, Cold War liberal readings suffer from a basic historical inaccuracy. Recent attempts at mining Aron's oeuvre in support of a kind of moderate, liberal socialism do not radically distort his liberalism, but the extreme revisionism of Serge Audier excessively downplays the significance of his leadership of the intellectual reaction against May '68. Where the otherwise conflicting accounts of Audier, Mahoney and Anderson are right to agree, however, is in acknowledging Aron's importance in contributing towards a 'recovery of the political' within French philosophy and social science. Here it is possible to identify concrete links between Aron and the wider liberal renaissance beyond its specific post-1968 strand. Liberal revivalists that were more sympathetic to elements of *soixante-huitard* political and social thought such as François Furet and Pierre Rosanvallon drew directly and indirectly on Aron's influence in this regard, and their cautiously optimistic account of the arrival of a liberal *République du centre* in 1988 indicates a change in French political culture of which Aron would have no doubt approved.⁹

⁸ Aron, *Le spectateur engagé: entretiens avec Jean-Louis Missika et Dominique Wolton* (Paris, 1981), 303.

⁹ François Furet, Jacques Julliard et Pierre Rosanvallon, *La république du centre: la fin de l'exception française* (Paris, 1988). The Fondation Saint-Simon commissioned this book. As we have already seen, Furet openly expressed his partial debt to Aron. Rosanvallon, who is committed to the project of creating a philosophical history of the political, has primarily been influenced by Claude Lefort in this respect, but Lefort's own concern with recovering the political was partially indebted to Aron, who supervised his doctoral thesis on Machiavelli. See here Andrew Jainchill and Samuel Moyn, 'French democracy between totalitarianism and solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and revisionist historiography', *The Journal of Modern History*, 76 (March, 2004), 107-154, 115; Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Towards a philosophical history of the political' in Dan Castiglione and Iain Hampsher Monk, (eds.), *The History of Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge, 2001), 189-203. See too Jeremy Jennings, 'Le retour des émigrés'? The study of the history of political ideas in contemporary France' in Castiglione and Hampsher Monk, *History of Political Thought*, 204-227.

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An exhaustive bibliography of Aron's work and the secondary literature devoted to his thought may be found at:

<http://raymond-aron.ehess.fr/sommaire.php?id=159> (Accessed February 2011).

