

## **Democracy and the Political: Raymond Aron Beyond the Hexagon**

Organizers Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins and Stephen Sawyer

AUP Center for Critical Democracy  
6, rue Colonel Combes, Paris, 75007

Raymond Aron – the French sociologist and intellectual – has been overwhelmingly read through liberal eyes. This means that he is almost systematically placed within a French exceptionalist story of a turn against a latent French illiberalism and therefore a critique of the traditional modes and foundations of French democracy.

This approach however is troubled by the fact that Aron was a consistent investigator of the democratic question and that, while his journalistic work tended to focus on France (though not entirely), he was regularly engaged and in many ways structurally influenced by a dialogue with the US and beyond. From this perspective, the French story of an Aronian liberalism triumphing in the French liberal moment is both myopic and misguided.

Perhaps one of Aron's most important contributions was therefore not so much his intransigent liberalism in the face of a French illiberalism as his reconsidering of the relationship between democracy and the political. His perspective of this question of course included an interest in liberalism, but it was hardly limited to it.

This conference seeks to provide a window into Aron's thought beyond that of mere political liberalism.

### **Conference Schedule**

**FRIDAY MAY 5**

**I. 9:00-9:15:** Refreshments Coffee

**II. 9:15-9:45:** Introduction: Stephen Sawyer/Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins

**III. 9:45-11:00:** Reconsidering Aron's thinking on IR Theory

Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer: "Aron's Oxymorus International Ethics"

Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins: "The Intellectual Origins of Stanley Hoffmann's Critique of Hans Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations Realism"

IV. **11-11:15:** Coffee Break

IV. **11:15-12:30:** Aron, Intellectual History and Political Context

Danilo Scholz, “How Kojève's Administrative Writings Informed Aron's Political Journalism”

Grey Anderson, “Revolutionary Warfare, Parliamentary Empire: Raymond Aron on the Republic in Crisis”

V. **12:30-1:45:** Lunch

VI. **1:45-3:30:** Raymond Aron and the United States

Or Rosenboim, “Amica America: Raymond Aron’s view of Franco-American relations in 1945.”

Iain Stewart, “Raymond Aron, Henry Kissinger, and the problem of Political Realism”

VII. **3:30-3:45:** Coffee Break

VII **3:45-5:15:** Aron, Democracy and Post-War Germany

Joël Mouric: “Raymond Aron and the prospect of a German nuclear armament 1958-1963”

Aline-Florence Manent: “Tocquevillian Democracy in Postwar France and Germany.”

VIII. **7:00:** Dinner

## SATURDAY MAY 6

I. **10:00-10:15:** Coffee/Refreshments:

II. **10:15-12:15:** Aron, Liberalism and Democracy

Hugo Drochon: “Raymond Aron and Machiavellian Liberalism”

Gwendal Châton, “Aron et Hayek face à la question démocratique”

Giulio De Ligio, “On political impartiality: Aron between science and action”

II. 12:15-12:45 Concluding Remarks by Stephen Sawyer

**Participant Abstracts**

Aline-Florence Manent: University College London

**Tocquevillian Democracy in Postwar France and Germany.**

My paper will focus on Aron's post-war writings on democracy and the political in order to probe the heuristic value and salience of the "liberal-conservative-democrat" label (or various combinations of these words) that is often pinned on him. I will do so by comparing Aron's thinking with that of some of his German contemporaries who are also seen as exemplifying some form of conservatism (whether liberal, neo-, Schmittian, or any other epithet).

As has been well-documented, Aron has been instrumental in reinserting the thought of Tocqueville in the canon of French political thought in France. An oft-forgotten aspect of this belated revival of Tocqueville, however, is that German intellectuals were also re-reading Tocqueville at the same time, if not a few years earlier, than their colleagues across the Rhine.

We should be wary of being too quick to interpret Aron's turn to the French intellectual tradition and his German colleagues' interest in what a Frenchman wrote about American democracy in nationalistic terms. This is not to deny that for many intellectuals of the early post-war era, German intellectual traditions were morally corrupt and, therefore, a turn to so-called Western democratic traditions was required (at least as a moral imperative). But there is perhaps a more fruitful way to look at this renewed interest in Tocqueville from 1950 onwards on both sides of the Rhine. Tocqueville's thought provided a sophisticated articulation of the intellectual and political sensitivities that united intellectuals such as Raymond Aron, Joachim Ritter or some of his students such as Wilhelm Hennis and Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (the list goes on, and is not limited to German or French figures, but an exhaustive account would exceed the scope of this paper) for whom democracy meant first and foremost a toleration for ambivalence and the illusory, if not dangerous, character of "miraculous solutions."

Or Rosenboim: University of Cambridge

**Amica America: Raymond Aron's view of Franco-American relations in 1945**

Less than a month after the United States dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Raymond Aron wrote an article for the popular magazine *Point de vue* titled 'Amica America'. The article aimed to encourage the French public to overcome the sense of enmity towards the US. He called the French to treat the American army with gratitude, as 'old friends', despite the difficulties arising after the Americans liberated France from the Nazi occupation. Aron was keen to persuade his readers that power relations, not ideals, guided international politics: 'rever d'égalité par les mérites en dépit de l'inégalité matérielle, c'est cultiver à l'avance des amertumes vaines'. In this sense, he predicted a post-war order in which the ideal of democracy depended on political power, and sought to persuade his French readers that France's future would have to be defined accordingly. This paper explores Aron's vision of postwar order articulated immediately after the end of the Second World War, arguing that the invocation of the idea of 'Amica America' seeks to redefine not only the relations between France and the United States, but also the very political future of the Hexagon.

Joël Mouric: Lycée de l'Iroise, Brest

### **Raymond Aron and the prospect of a German nuclear armament**

**1958-1963**

Back in 1999, Marc Trachtenberg claimed that the Cold War had much more depended on the issue of a possible German nuclear armament than on ideological disputes. In "A Constructed Peace", Trachtenberg insists that the most sensitive issue was the Soviet fear that the FRG might possess nuclear weapons on her own. The problem of German nukes, and by the same token the peace settlement, were resolved in 1963 when, in the wake of the Cuba missile crisis, the US insisted that the FRG had to sign the nuclear test ban treaty.

Raymond Aron alluded several times to the hypothesis of a West German nuclear armament, possibly under national control. He did not fear it, even though he knew that the Soviets were utterly opposed. This standpoint is puzzling. Yet, there is no doubt that he raised the issue more than once. Why? The answer lies in Aron's special relationship with the Kennedy administration as well as in his distrust of De Gaulle's nuclear policy. Our hypothesis is that Aron used the idea of a West German nuclear armament as a means to show what he considered the inconsistency of De Gaulle's national deterrent while preserving the possibility of a European nuclear force. Aron's subtle but tenacious commitment was aimed at preserving the essential for peace and the freedom of Western Europe: the cohesion of the Atlantic alliance and the permanence of an American army in Western Germany.

Grey Anderson: Sciences Po

### **Revolutionary Warfare, Parliamentary Empire: Raymond Aron on the Republic in Crisis**

In May 1958, an army coup d'état in Algiers precipitated the terminal crisis of the French Fourth Republic. Over the following months, a new regime – presided over by General Charles de Gaulle – would impose a sweeping reform of France's political institutions. This concatenation, marked by fears of military dictatorship and civil war, elicited a whirlwind of conflicting interpretations. Few observers assessed the changing landscape of French politics more lucidly than Raymond Aron. Skeptical of de Gaulle's authoritarianism yet hopeful he might bring an end to the conflict in Algeria, Aron was quick to perceive the dilemmas facing the new Fifth Republic and the enduring imprint of its origins. His response to events illuminates both the extraordinary character of the conjuncture and the subsequent development of his own political thought.

This paper reconstructs Aron's contemporary interpretation of the 1958 crisis against the backdrop of his reflections on democracy and military power. Recent research has thrown fresh light on Aron's complicated attitude towards Gaullism. But the significance for his thought of the praetorian revolt that returned de Gaulle to power and the putschism that haunted the new republic has been less noted. From his 1950s lectures at the École de Guerre to *Paix et guerre entre les nations* and his study of Clausewitz, Aron devoted careful attention to the problems posed by revolutionary and subversive warfare, threats to civilian control that his theory of international relations would struggle to accommodate. By focusing attention on the May '58 coup and its aftermath, the paper helps to contextualize part of Aron's oeuvre while uncovering an important perspective on this pivotal but ambiguous episode in the history of postwar Europe.

Gwendal Châton: Université Angers

### **Aron et Hayek face à la question démocratique**

Résumé : « Raymond Aron et Friedrich Hayek appartiennent à une génération de penseurs néo-libéraux directement et précocement confrontée au phénomène totalitaire. Dès les années 1930 et 1940, ils ont ainsi été conduits non seulement à prendre acte du fait démocratique, à la manière de la plupart des libéraux du XIXe siècle, mais aussi à défendre ce régime politique face au défi sans précédent qu'a représenté l'avènement des totalitarismes. Influencés tous les deux par la conception procédurale de la démocratie promue notamment par Joseph Schumpeter et Karl Popper, ils ont ensuite déployé, dans le second XXe siècle, deux théories de la démocratie qui, si elles convergent sur certains points importants, apparaissent néanmoins nettement divergentes quant à leur appréciation respective des vertus et des vices inhérents à cette forme politique. Sur la base d'un examen des causes et des conséquences de cette compréhension différenciée du régime de la multitude, cette intervention cherchera ainsi à clarifier les termes d'un débat dont l'enjeu semble en définitive résider dans le statut conféré à l'ordre politique dans l'institution de la société. »

Iain Stewart: University College London

### **Raymond Aron, Henry Kissinger, and the problem of Political Realism**

In addition to pioneering the discipline of international relations theory in France, Raymond Aron was unusual among French intellectuals for the extent of his personal connections with senior politicians on both sides of the Atlantic. Most notable in this regard is Aron's longstanding relationship with Henry Kissinger, whom Aron met during a stay in the United States prior to Kissinger's appointment as Secretary of State in the Nixon administration and who remained a close friend of Aron's until the latter's death in 1983. In the memorial double issue of *Commentaire* devoted to Aron's life and works that was published in 1984, Kissinger described Aron as "my teacher", a claim he would repeat in the introduction to the first English translation of Aron's memoirs, published in 1990. In light of Niall Ferguson's recent attempt to recast Kissinger as an idealist, this paper will revisit Aron's relationship with Kissinger by drawing on correspondence between the two men. It will show that although Aron was often reluctant publically to criticise U.S. foreign policy, he was privately concerned that American covert operations in support of anti-communist dictatorships, while politically expedient in the short term, risked undermining the strategic aims of U.S. foreign policy in the long term. As such, I will argue, Aron came to view Kissinger as a practitioner of a form of foreign policy realism that, through its very disregard for abstract democratic ideals, was ultimately unrealistic.

Giulio De Ligo: Centre d'Etudes Sociologiques et Politiques Raymond Aron

### **On political impartiality: Aron between science and action**

It is possible and instructive, when discussing Aron's work, to look for the influences on his thought or the contexts of his writings. If however we still find his work worthy of reading and reflection, this is mainly due to the theoretical bearing and practical teaching it still conveys. A thinker manages to articulate a lasting understanding of political things when he is also motivated by, and capable of, a particular kind of *impartiality*. Aron was something of a classical political philosopher in his attempt to be impartial both as professor and as a public commentator. Like Tocqueville, while not refusing to judge between the alternatives of his time, he tried to "see further than the parties". Before discussing his specific contributions and historical analysis, it is important then to recognize this very attempt at impartiality. It is today tempting to deny to every thinker, from the outset or in principle, the very possibility of reaching such an impartial view of things. However, one can argue that no truth, however partial, can be grasped and no city, however conflictual, can live as a city if the

effort at impartiality is held to be impossible or vain. Both by his theoretical works and public speeches Aron showed the virtues and effective strengths of this now discredited virtue. The effort at impartiality, not neutrality, is particularly on display in his ongoing attempt to understand the whole of political situations, to articulate the different political goods in given circumstances or to recognize the part of truth included in the arguments of his opponents. I will try to illustrate this point by discussing what is for us the most difficult object of impartiality, that is our own regime and principles of justice. I will highlight some of the main features of Aron's approach to democracy and of his discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of liberalism. A liberal-democratic thinker, Aron was in a way capable of seeing "beyond" liberal democracy to vindicate and preserve the full range of human goods. A political educator, Aron encourages and guides the desire for impartiality when facing the trials of historical judgements and political actions.

Hugo Drochon: University of Cambridge

### **Raymond Aron and Machiavellian liberalism**

The recent interest in Raymond Aron's political thought in the English-speaking world has revolved around Aron's political liberalism. But how are we to classify such liberalism, when we know of Aron's rejection of the (neo-)liberalism of Hayek during his time? This paper aims to explore Aron's 'Machiavellian' liberalism, notably though his engagement with Vilfredo Pareto's work and thought, as mediated through James Burnham's now forgotten *The Machiavellians*, which Aron helped to have translated and edited in French. If Aron's engagement with Pareto's sociological writings are well-known, the impact Pareto, and the 'neo-'Machiavellians more generally – Mosca and Michels – had on Aron's democratic thought has been somewhat overlooked, and this paper will explore how Aron utilised the 'fact of oligarchy' as a way of defining both democratic and totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century.

Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer: Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire

### **Aron's Oxymorus International Ethics**

Aron is the archetype- the best possible example of the fecundity of a non-paradigmatic approach in international relations (IR) theory. This corresponds with his own project to overcome the mutual-exclusivity mindset. He was obsessed with finding the middle ground, the third way, between what he called the "antinomies" of political life: between realism and liberalism, cynicism and moralism, "morality of struggle" and "morality of law", ethic of responsibility and ethic of conviction, Machiavelli and Kant, conservatism and millenarism, despair and faith, etc. However, showing dilemmas and always recommending the middle ground does not constitute an ethical doctrine. Aron's ability to always simultaneously consider the merits of a proposal and its counter-proposal, to always balance the two and find

the wisest position to be the middle ground, can even be frustrating for the reader looking for easy answers. However, it was never his ambition to establish an ethical doctrine: he did not even believe in the possibility of IR theory. There is no normative IR theory in Aron, only unavoidable normative implications of his sociological and theoretical approach of IR, because “normative implications are inherent in every [social sciences] theory”. The aim of this paper is to structure these implications to reveal Aron’s international ethics in three oxymorons: a liberal realism, an inspired ethics of responsibility, and a post-Kantian Machiavellianism.

Danilo Scholz: École des hautes études en sciences sociales

### **Intellectual Supply Chains: How Kojève's Administrative Writings Informed Aron's Political Journalism**

Kojève supplied Aron with administrative documents throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Through Kojève, Aron gained a privileged insight into French foreign policy and European economic relations. Aron, it is argued, regularly drew on these documents for his Figaro columns.

Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins: University of California Berkeley

### **The Intellectual Origins of Stanley Hoffman’s Critique of Hans Morgenthau’s Theory of International Relations Realism**

Argues that Hoffmann’s early writing on IR can be considered as an attempt to promote Aron’s thinking on the subject, which had been generally ignored by Hans Morgenthau and his students. In turn the paper suggests that Hoffmann picked up on the same Teutonic influencing Morgenthau’s thought that Aron had embarrassingly pointed out in *Paix et Guerre*.