4 Aron's oxymorus international ethics

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International relations (IR) theory is plagued by paradigmatism, the view that considers the various theories as mutually exclusive paradigms (Barkin 2010: 4). This is how it is taught in textbooks: realism, liberalism, Marxism, constructivism, English school, critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism – the student must pick sides. This leads to several problems, including the caricature of these positions, and the labeling of academics in order to pit them against each other. Having to be *either* a realist *or* a liberal, for instance, leaves little room for nuance, and little hope for understanding Raymond Aron's conceptual framework. He is often presented like a mainstream classical realist, sometimes like a liberal, or a proto-constructivist; the truth is that Raymond Aron is unclassifiable. He can certainly be presented as a realist constructivist, as Olivier Schmitt does in his chapter. I will present him as a realist liberal. This will demonstrate the importance of non-paradigmatism.

In fact, Aron is the archetype – the best possible example of the fecundity of a non-paradigmatic approach. This corresponds with his own project to overcome the mutual-exclusivity mindset. As I will show, Aron was obsessed with finding the middle ground, the third way, between what he called the "antinomies" (a term he took from Kant) 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, as Hedley Bull pointed out, showing dilemmas and always recommending the middle ground does not constitute an ethical doctrine (Bull 1979: 179). 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 – but precious for the one looking for complexity of thought and not reducing it. Moreover, it was never his ambition to establish an ethical doctrine: he did not even believe in the possibility of IR theory ("there is no general theory of international relations"; Aron 2003: 93). There is no normative IR theory in Aron, only unavoidable normative implications of his sociological and theoretical approach to IR, because "normative implications are inherent in every [social sciences] theory" (Aron 2003: 575). The aim of this chapter is to structure

these implications to reveal Aron's international ethics in three oxymorons, i.e., *appearances* of contradiction: a liberal realism, an inspired ethic of responsibility and a post-Kantian Machiavellianism.

A liberal realism

Aron claims to be a realist ("I belong, by temperament rather than conviction, to the realist school"; Aron 1958a: 13). Interestingly, when he also remembers having been a liberal in the 1920s, it is also "by temperament" ("then already, I was a liberal by temperament"; Aron 1983b), which tells us three things: (1) be it realism or liberalism, these classic IR theory schools seem to be nothing more than "temperaments" as far as he is concerned, which confirms his lack of interest for IR theory. (2) Like many progressive realists, he was first a liberal who became realist while observing at close quarters the rise of nationalism, fascism and even totalitarianism, and the corollary demise of the League of Nations and other inter-war dreams (Scheuerman 2011: 9). (3) If realism and liberalism are nothing but temperaments, and if Aron claims he had both, they are not incompatible – which opens the door to the possibility of a liberal realism or a realist liberalism.

With his own specificities, Aron indeed shares the realist axioms – that politics is determined by the struggle for power and international relations are determined by self-interested actors, mostly states, seeking to maximize their national interests in an anarchical context, where there is no global authority able to prevent the recourse to force. However, Aron also claims to be a liberal, and his ferocious fight against communism even made him known as a "passionate" one (Hoffmann 1985: 21). The often forgotten influence of the French philosopher Elie Halévy contributed greatly to Aron's conversion from theoretical to practical philosophy (the position of the "committed observer"), and from socialism to liberalism as early as the end of the 1930s. Halévy is the missing link between Tocqueville and Aron in the filiation of French liberal thought (Baverez 2006: 121).

Liberalism in its broadest sense is based on the ideal of individual freedom and believes in human progress, the possibility of improving the life of citizens. Although Aron does not believe in liberal progress in the Kantian sense – i.e., an ascendant linearity leading to the disappearance of the bellicose nature of man – he certainly believes that man is increasingly aware of the necessity to control this bellicose nature. He is liberal in the sense that such an effort presumes man's free will and autonomy. Aron also sees liberalism as a conception of the limitation of power which, while not equivalent to democracy, leads to it (through the principle of equality before the law) (Aron 1998: 138–139). Aron defends liberal democracy "on the basis of many criteria: effectiveness of institutions, individual liberty, equitable distribution, perhaps above all the kind of person created by the regime" (Aron 2010: 176), and insists that Western diplomacy should defend and even export liberal democratic values (Davis 2009: 173). Aron made a strong defense of liberal society but, contrary to philosophers like John Rawls,

he did so in a historical, contextualized and concrete way. Rawls and others have an abstract and ahistorical approach that is very far from Aron's method. For this reason, some bring Aron closer to neoconservative liberals like Peter Berger or Irving Kristol, who are "mugged by reality", and do not hesitate to call him "the first neoconservative" (Anderson 1995). That is a mistake, as Aron does not satisfy any of the criteria of neoconservatism (supremacy, interventionism, militarism, regime change, unilateralism).

Aron denounces hard realism, which he calls "false realism": the one

> who asserts that man is a beast of prey and urges him to behave as such, ignores a whole side of human nature. Even in the relations between states, respect for ideas, aspiration to higher values and concern for obligations have been manifested.
>
> (Aron 2003: 609)

For him, realism "would be unrealistic if it considered the moral judgments men pass on the conduct of their rulers as negligible" (Aron 1967: 205).

> The sociologist does not appear to me to be doomed either to cynicism or to dogmatism. He does not necessarily become a cynic because the political or moral ideas which he calls upon in judging political regimes are part of reality itself. The great illusion of cynical thought, obsessed by the struggle for power, consists in neglecting another aspect of reality; the search for legitimate power, for recognized authority, for the *best* regime. Men have never thought of politics as exclusively defined by the struggle for power. Anyone who does not see that there is a "struggle for power" element is naïve; anyone who sees nothing but this aspect is a false realist.
>
> (Aron 1968: 24)

It would be unrealistic not to take morality into account, not so much because the actors *are* really ethical but rather because they must *look* so on the international stage, as Niebhur explained in 1954: "They cannot follow their interest without claiming to do so in obedience to some general scheme of values" (Guilhot 2011: 269). Like Niebuhr, Aron shows how states always justify their behavior with norms: diplomatic-strategic behavior "always attempts to justify itself, thereby admitting the authority of values or rules" (Aron 2003: 725). It does not mean that human action is governed by the search for values rather than interests, only that it is in the interests of IR actors to search for values. Therefore, contrary to a widespread prejudice, the two are not incompatible.

Moreover, these realist and liberal components are not at the same level of analysis. It is perfectly possible to recognize the realist constraints at the descriptive level (that states are never disinterested is an empirical fact, for instance) while aiming at ways to overcome them to make the world more just at the prescriptive level, i.e., defending some ideals (democratic values, for instance). This is exactly how Aron can be described as a liberal realist. He is not alone in that

category, and nor was he at that time. Arnold Wolfers, who prefaced a book co-written by Aron (Aron 1957), is one of the most liberal of the classical realists, and therefore one of the closest to Aron. But the best representative of this trend is probably John Herz. His book *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (1951) addressed "the problem of how, starting from and not neglecting the power factor, one could yet arrive at 'liberal' objectives" (Herz 1981: 202). It is not certain whether Aron actually knew his work, and that makes their proximity even more spectacular. Herz's idea is to combine a realist base, "built, not on the sands of wishful thinking but on the rock of reality," and a liberal guiding star "that moves man to try to push developments in a different direction" (Herz 1951: 131).

An inspired ethic of responsibility

Aron's ethical reflection was structured by the early reading of Max Weber (Nelson and Colen 2015: 205), a common source for both IR classical realists and realist political philosophers (Scheuerman 2013: 802). To elucidate the relationship between politics and morality, Weber, in a 1919 lecture entitled *Politik als Beruf*, famously distinguished between the ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*), which takes into account the consequences in moral evaluation and gives priority to results over intentions, as opposed to the ethic of conviction or inspiration (*Gesinnungsethik*) that defends a doctrinal belief regardless of consequences, and gives priority to the intentions over the results.

Aron presents the ethic of responsibility as a "means-ends interpretation of action … an ethic defined by the search of effectiveness, and consequently by the selection of means suitable to the goal one wishes to attain" (1999: 252–253). It emphasizes the link between action and consequences, while the ethic of conviction emphasizes the link between action and intention. The choice between the two is the following:

> Either we swear to obey the law, whatever may happen, or we try our best to change the world in the direction we desire, to foresee the consequences of our acts in order to triumph over determinism and avoid bringing about, in the last resort, a situation contrary to that at which we aimed. Does the value of our acts derive from our intentions alone or from the consequences of these acts?
>
> (Aron 1964a: 84)

Against the ethics of conviction

First, Aron criticizes the ethics of conviction, and in particular its indifference to consequences: "No man is moral who acts exclusively according to the morality of conviction. No one has the right to disregard the consequences of his actions" (Aron 1963c: 53). Here, he follows closely Weber. The ethic of conviction is an ethic of ultimate ends, whatever the costs, a political idealism that Aron finds

both unrealistic and dangerous. It is unrealistic in "the game of politics" because "no one, not the citizen, not the president of the student's union, not the journalist, says or writes exactly what he feels, indifferent to the consequences of his words or deeds, concerned solely with obeying his conscience" (Aron 1999: 255–256). A pure ethic of conviction would also be dangerous because it can foster support for the most extreme ideologies – "we repeatedly see the proponent of the 'ethics of conviction' suddenly turning into a chiliastic prophet" (Weber 1994: 361). This is actually what happened with Sartre, who "came to consent to extreme forms of violence in the service of the good cause" (Aron 2010: 951). "For moralism, if it leads to Max Weber's *Gesinnungsethik*, by failing to take account of the probable or possible consequences of the decisions taken, turns out to be immoral" (Aron 1967: 205).

For this reason, his rejection of the ethic of conviction, and more generally of idealism, is "not only pragmatic, it is also moral. Idealistic diplomacy slips too often into fanaticism; it divides states into good and evil, into peace-loving and bellicose" (Aron 2003: 584). He distrusts

> vague slogans such as 'to make the world safe for democracy' or 'to insure collective security' [because they] often tend to make wars bigger and worse. Selfishness is not obnoxious in the case of nations; it is reasonable; indeed only selfishness is moral. So-called idealistic policies always amount to an attempt to impose a certain conception of social or international organization. Political idealism ends by degenerating into imperialism.
>
> (Aron 1960: 80)

His opposition to the ethic of conviction has many manifestations. I will give only three examples. First, pacifism – the belief that war is a supreme evil that should be avoided at all costs – is widespread in the inter-war period (1918–1939). Aron will retrospectively think that such predominance "betrayed perhaps less confidence than anxiety" (Aron 1946: 85). Like most of his young comrades, under the influence of their philosophy teacher Alain, who wrote a persuasive pacifist pamphlet in 1921 (later translated with the title *Mars; Or the Truth about War*), Aron was initially a pacifist. His German years (1930–1931 in Cologne, 1931–1933 in Berlin), where he observed the rise of Nazism (his first mention of a concentration camp is in a September 1933 article in *Europe*), ended his pacifism once and for all (compare Aron 1931 and 1933a). It made him understand that the pacifist belief that war is necessarily worse than all other evils was not only false – "the results of the enemy's victory can be worse than the misfortune of war" (Aron 1983b: 58) – but also dangerous because the fear of war was precisely what totalitarianism needed in order to develop: "Let us have the courage to admit that the fear of war is often the tyrant's opportunity" (Aron 1958a: 73).

He henceforth rejected pacifism – which is "not a doctrine, but a faith" (Aron 1946: 88) – convinced that the policies of appeasement toward Germany had the pernicious effect of strengthening Hitler and making war more likely. When in

March 1936 German troops entered the Rhineland, Leon Blum, the head of the Popular Front, wrote a paper saying that force could have been used against Hitler but was not, and he was proud to have contributed to such a moral progress of humanity. He did not understand that, as Aron comments, "This 'moral progress' meant … the near certainty of war" (Aron 1983b: 31). Four years earlier, Blum already distinguished himself after the defeat of the Nazis at the November 1932 elections by predicting that "Hitler lost all chance of gaining power" … three months before he was appointed chancellor (Baverez 2006: 97–98). Hitler did not only count on his material power, he also counted on the reluctance of democracies to use force. This is how "pacifism, in refusing any risk of war, favored the politics which actually led to war" (Aron 1946: 95). This idea that pacifism is the enemy of peace (and, similarly, nationalism the enemy of the nation) has also been developed by Aron's friend Father Fessard, a Jesuit theologian, in *Pax Nostra* (1936).

For a second example, the ethic of conviction is also behind the categorical opposition to nuclear weapons during the Cold War, which Aron opposes because it is "made for motives of conscience and without calculating the risks and advantages" (Aron 2003: 634). Some pacifists, tempted to "save conventional wars to avoid atomic ones" (Aron 1963a: 226), can even, paradoxically, have a bellicose role. However, Aron is fully aware of the moral paradoxes of nuclear deterrence. He admits an "ethical antinomy which none can resolve" (Aron 1983a: 340): on the one hand, nuclear deterrence contributes to preventing major conventional wars; but, on the other hand, it involves threatening to kill large numbers of innocent people, and that is in itself "monstrous" (Aron 1983a: 339) – the main paradox being that, for the first time, forming the intention to do something wrong would be right (Kavka 1978).

A third example is the "peace versus justice" dilemma, which only became acute *after* Aron's death with the development of international criminal justice. After an armed conflict, those with whom we must negotiate a ceasefire and the return of peace are often the same people who have committed crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide). Therefore, we must choose between prosecuting them in the name of justice and including them in the transition process in the name of peace. In this situation, there is usually a confrontation between two schools of thought: on the one hand, most politicians, diplomats, negotiators and realist observers prioritize peace over justice – they fear that such prosecutions against those suspected of committing crimes may create trouble and prevent a ceasefire and the return to peace. Therefore, they offer them official amnesties or secret arrangements to circumvent the sword of justice and persuade them to come to the negotiating table. On the other hand, most human rights activists, international institution representatives and lawyers prioritize justice over peace: they believe that peace obtained by impunity is illusory and temporary and that justice can have a pacifying effect, including discouraging future crimes. Hence the slogan "No peace without justice".

In this debate, a pure ethic of conviction position would prioritize justice over peace whatever the consequences, in conformity with the Holy Roman Emperor

Ferdinand I's motto "*Fiat justitia, et pereat mundus*" (Let justice be done, though the world perish). Against such an idealist stance, and even before the creation of the ad hoc tribunals and the international criminal court in the 1990s, Aron seems to favor an ethic of responsibility which prioritizes peace over justice:

> It is perhaps immoral, but it is most often wise, to spare the leaders of an enemy state, for otherwise these men will sacrifice the lives and wealth and possessions of their fellow citizens or their subjects in the vain hope of saving themselves.
>
> (Aron 2003: 115)

A consequentialist approach

In the language of contemporary normative ethics, the ethics of conviction/responsibility debate – a dated terminology – is instead called the deontologism/consequentalism debate. Aron, like most realists, seems mostly consequentialist: very early, in February 1933, he determined that "a good policy is defined by its effectiveness, not by its virtue" (Aron 1933b: 739–740). "The politician who obeys his heart without concerning himself with the consequences of his acts is failing the duties of his trust and is for this very reason immoral" (Aron 2003: 634).

He is definitely outcome- rather than intention-oriented when, for instance, he writes that "American policy in Vietnam, legitimate in its intention, became apparently immoral because of the destruction it entailed without attaining its objective" (Aron 1980: 8). When Aron expresses his skepticism about the intervention in Indochina, or when Morgenthau opposes the Vietnam War, their position is derived from the assessment of the chances of success, not from an objection to the will to intervene in itself. When the odds of success are too low or zero, even the most just causes should not be pursued. "Logic requires to compare cost and performance, to refuse excessive sacrifices if they are to yield only limited or mediocre profits" writes Aron (1993: 265) – echoing Morgenthau: "It is this impossibility to achieve – even with the best of intentions and the most extensive commitment of resources – what is presumed to be morally required that negates the moral obligation" (Morgenthau 1985: 110). If, in this case, it is impossible to save civilians without killing more of them, the responsibility to protect commands us to not intervene.

In other words, realists are not anti-interventionists, they are simply prudent. Most of the time, this prudence leads them to oppose the proposed intervention. But nothing precludes them, in a particularly favorable environment, to support it. When, the day after North Korea crossed the 38th Parallel on 25 June 1950, for example, the newspaper *Le Monde* thought it was "urgent to wait" before intervening, Aron replied that it was "urgent to act" (Aron 2010: 358).

While criticizing the ethic of conviction and favoring the ethic of responsibility, like Weber, Aron was fully aware that these two ethics are nothing but ideal-types (Breiner 2011: 108). The statesman *tends to* use the ethic of

responsibility, because he needs to justify himself, and the citizen *tends to* use the ethic of conviction, on the basis of which he can criticize the statesman (Aron 1970a: 256). No one really follows the ethic of conviction: it is "an ideal type which no one can approximate too closely and still remain within the bounds of reasonable behavior" (Aron 1999: 256). A pure ethic of conviction would not be an ethic, but fanaticism. In politics, the two are intertwined because we must find "reasonable compromises" between the two demands (Aron 1985: 363–364). Here we find again his politics of compromise.

While criticizing Weber for the "extreme and somewhat radical form given to the antinomy between the two morals, responsibility and conviction" (Aron 1993: 252), Aron recognizes that Weber never meant that adopting the ethic of conviction implies a lack of responsibility for the consequences, and that adopting an ethic of responsibility implies having no conviction. He knew that applications of this abstract dichotomy would be mixed (Aron 1985: 362). Weber himself considered them as ideal-types, heuristic tools, but not irreconcilable realities. Quite the contrary: not only does the ethic of conviction not exclude responsibility and the ethic of responsibility does not exclude conviction (it is "based upon a through-going acceptance of a cultural or human value"; Aron 1964a: 91), but the objective should be to combine them: they "are not absolute opposites. They are complementary to one another, and only in combination do they produce the true human being who is *capable* of having a 'vocation for politics'" (Weber 1994: 368). For Aron as well, "the care for consequences completes, without contradicting them, the motives of action. One acts *by* conviction and *to* obtain certain results" (Aron 1963c: 53).

Does it mean that this is only an artificial opposition? No. Although the reasonable objective should be to combine them, and it is theoretically possible because they are not mutually exclusive per se, it is not feasible to do so in all situations. Aron warns that in extreme situations – and extreme situations are precisely where the "essence of politics" reveals itself – there are sometimes some "real antinomies of action" (Aron 1963c: 54).

> A politician must be both convinced and responsible. But when you have to lie or lose, kill or be defeated, what choice is moral? Truth, answers the moralist of conviction; success, answers the moralist of responsibility. The two choices are moral provided that the success desired by the latter is that of the City, not its own. The antinomy seems to me to be essential, even if, in the majority of cases, prudence suggests a reasonable compromise.
>
> (Aron 1963c: 54–55)

In short, Aron's approach to the conviction/responsibility dichotomy, like Weber's, is dialectical. First, he seems to favor one of the two: he is clearly preferring the ethic of responsibility as "the only [choice] compatible with politics and not condemned to perpetual contradictions" (Aron 1964a: 87). Second, he qualifies this first impression by *sublating* the opposition (this is the Hegelian phase of *Aufhebung*), adding that both are complementary and that a real ethic of

responsibility needs to be inspired and guided by "convictions that transcend the order of utility" (Aron 2003: 634). Aron "believed in the ethics of consequences; but they were rooted in convictions" (Hoffmann 1983). Some calls this synthesis a "responsible ethic of conviction" (Bruun 2007: 272). In order to highlight the ethic of responsibility that both Weber and Aron favor, I would rather speak of an *inspired ethic of responsibility* – taking into account both the consequences of the person's actions (the political calculations) and their non-political values. Third, as is often forgotten, such a balance does not solve all problems. In extreme situations like war the antinomy is inevitable, and for Weber, like Aron, it is even "the mark of what authentically constitutes the human condition" (Aron 1963c: 56). Such an inevitability is another illustration of the tragic character of international relations.

Virtue ethics

Deontology and consequentialism are only two of the three main families of contemporary normative ethics. In his inclusive attitude, Aron did not forget the third one: virtue ethics. Both deontology and consequentialism assess the morality of the action. Virtue ethics assesses the morality of the agent. It emphasizes the virtues, or moral character (the Aristotelian *ethos*). Consequentialism relies on the rationalist assumption that human behavior can be explained by some kind of cost/benefit calculus. However, in international relations it is often difficult to measure gain: "what is the non-Sovietization of South Vietnam worth? … Strategic analysis creates sometimes the illusion of a rigorous comparison between losses and gains … but it is an illusion". Their incommensurability is mainly due to the fact that

> the stakes are never reduced to material realities (acquisition or loss of territory, destruction suffered or inflicted) but involve immaterial elements – prestige, diffusion of ideas or of a way of life, increased or reduced power, and power desired for its own sake.
>
> (Aron 1970b: 60)

Here, Aron the liberal realist is also proto-constructivist (see Olivier Schmitt's chapter).

> The determination of values is essential to the understanding of human conduct, because the latter is never strictly utilitarian. The rational calculations of speculators represent an activity, more or less widespread in different civilizations, which is always limited by a conception of the good life.
>
> (Aron 1962a: 137)

For both Aron and Mannheim, pluralism is a descriptive and a normative category, a fact of political life and a democratic value, which does not imply moral relativism (Mahoney 2001: 246).

Aron does not asses the morality of statesmen's actions *in abstracto*, and from an external viewpoint that would ignore the job's constraints. He limits his own "freedom of criticism" by asking himself "in his stead, what would I do?" (Aron 2010: 813). That is asking a virtue ethics question: not what to do, but what kind of person to be: if I had the statesman's knowledge and responsibilities, which actions would be open to me, regardless of the ethical justification for those actions? Hoffmann notes that this lack of distance can be problematic: it exposes him to the risk – opposite to the idealist "on Sirius" – of being deprived of hindsight (Hoffmann 1985: 21).

Another way to see a virtue ethics approach in Aron is, of course, through prudence, which he is not alone in defending. The fact that all the classical realists are heirs to the Aristotelian *phronesis*, a practical wisdom often translated as "prudence" that inspired an entire tradition of statecraft (Coll 1991; Lang 2007; Shapcott 2013) – including Edmund Burke who described prudence as "the god of this lower world" – definitely puts them in the virtue ethics camp. In 1954, Morgenthau wrote in his fourth "Principle of Political Realism" that realism "considers prudence – the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions, to be the supreme virtue in politics" (Morgenthau 1985: 12). Later, Aron uses the exact same words: "prudence is the statesman's supreme virtue" (Aron 2003: 585). He confirms that he is indeed talking about the Aristotelian concept: "What tradition teaches is not cynicism but Aristotelian prudence – the supreme virtue in this world under the visited moon" (Aron 1974: 329). However, Aron's prudence has little to do with ancient wisdom: contrary to Aristotle, who linked *phronesis* to *sophia*, Aron's prudence is pragmatic and does not seem to be a heuristic quest, a pursuit of truth.

A post-Kantian Machiavellianism

Aron introduces the ethics of responsibility and conviction by stating that they "might be illustrated by referring to Machiavelli on the one hand and Kant on the other" (Aron 1999: 252). Indeed, in the final part of *Peace and War* devoted to "Praxeology", a normative IR theory, he identifies two main ethical problems: the Machiavellian problem and the Kantian problem (Châton 2012, 2017).

The Machiavellian problem

The Machiavellian problem is the problem of legitimate means. What means may the political leaders legitimately use? Can they use particularly immoral ones if it is in order to achieve great good? The Machiavellian problem is posed by the observation that effective means are often immoral. It is an insoluble contradiction because it is absurd to forbid politicians to use the means most likely to make them succeed, nor is it satisfactory to allow them the use of detestable means. One must then choose between "winning by losing the reasons for victory, or giving up victory in the hope of saving his soul" (Aron 1993: 272).

This dilemma is well known: for four centuries the "quarrel of Machiavellianism" reappears each time a political leader is accused of doing terrible things in the name of efficiency (Catherine de' Medici, Cardinal Mazarin, Frederick the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, etc.). Similarly, Aron explains that Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, of his contemporaries, led him to study Machiavelli (Aron 1993: 59). Therefore, the Italian Renaissance philosopher has first an instrumental value in Aron's work: he is used to understand and explain the conceptual framework of tyrannies, and is closely linked to Aron's work on totalitarianism.

Aron takes the aforementioned dilemma seriously: "There is no way out and the politician must accept the tragic of his condition" (Aron 1993: 272). The only thing to do is to avoid the extreme situations in which this dilemma appears. Unlike Machiavellianism in the vulgar and pejorative sense, which would be the choice of efficiency at any moral price, real Machiavellianism consists precisely in reducing the frequency of these situations in which the dilemma is inevitable. Real Machiavellianism is not a doctrine but "a certain way of thinking about politics", gathering the following elements: "a pessimistic conception of human nature … a rationalist and experimental method … and the exaltation of human will and action values" (Aron 1993: 197).

Aron dismisses two approaches. First, the idealist "morality of law": legalism, or some kind of legal deontological ethic, applied to international law. He rejects it as being not only naive (international law is often violated) but also immoral – because of the difference between legality and legitimacy which often conflict. Legal actions can be illegitimate and illegal ones can be legitimate. Hence a skepticism toward the Rule of Law, a legitimate ideal which could have a perverse effect if it is supposed to replace politics and prudence. Law itself does not suffice, and could be a cover for exactions (as we saw in 2014 in Ukraine: behind the legalist discourse of Putin lay a good example of *lawfare*, the use of law as a weapon of war). The Aronian is not a legalist, and that is why he can defend what were coined in 2000 as "illegal but legitimate" interventions, in reference to Kosovo.

The second approach he dismisses is the cynical "morality of struggle": a hard-core realism, or, as Aron puts it, an "absolute Machiavellism", saying that the statesman may use all available means. That refers to the "quarrel of Machiavellianism" with the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, whom he never actually met but with whom he had an epistolary dialogue. In a 1941 international conference at the University of Chicago on "The Place of Ethics in Social Science", Maritain gave a talk he published the following year under the title "The End of Machiavellianism" in *The Review of Politics*, in which he distinguished two forms of Machiavellianism: a moderate one which preserves the common good as the end of politics and uses Machiavellianism only as a means of procuring such an end; and an absolute Machiavellianism, which is positivistic (politics is a not an art but a science of power) and amoral ("power and success have become supreme moral criteria") (Maritain 1942: 11–12). Maritain rejects both; he opposes Machiavellianism per se, believing that it "does not succeed" (Maritain 1942: 15). In a 1943 article, Aron finds Maritain's

anti-Machiavellianism too naive, and based on faith more than history (Aron 1993: 384–395). Maritain answers that he tries to criticize Machiavellianism on a realist, not utopian basis (Maritain 1944: ch. 5). Aron appreciates the effort of finding the balance of a policy both moral and realistic between the abstract moralism that has the pernicious effect of leading men to cynicism by offering them an unrealistic ideal, and the nastiness of an absolute Machiavellianism. However, he thinks that Maritain underestimates "the imperfection, the inertia, the materiality of human and social nature" (Aron 1993: 394). In reality, they may not be talking about the same thing: Maritain is describing the Christian Man, while Aron is interested in the liberal one.

Aron distinguishes between domestic politics, where he agrees with Maritain to reject Machiavellianism and defends liberal and democratic values, human rights etc., and foreign policy, which is different because "states are in what Hobbes or Rousseau would have called a state of war" (Aron 1993: 434): international relations are anarchic in the sense that there is no global tribunal or police force capable of rendering justice and curbing violence so "each state remains responsible for its own security" (Aron 1970b: 55). Therefore, conflict is inevitable and the only possible ethic is an "ethics of restrained warfare": "as long as there are sovereign states, armed states, states in conflict with each other, there cannot be anything but a moderate Machiavellianism". Concretely, that means that terrible decisions should sometimes be taken in the name of "raison d'Etat" (Aron 1993: 434).

After Aron, Michael Walzer, the most famous twentieth-century Just War theorist, would defend a similar position on what he calls "the dirty hands problem" (Walzer 1973). Walzer uses it to justify the Allies' strategic bombing of German civilians during World War II, in the name of a "supreme emergency" (Walzer 2004: 46). Aron would have agreed.

For the same reason, Aron repeatedly insisted that foreign policy cannot be *based* on human rights. He is, of course, sympathetic to the defense of human rights, and praises non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for their "useful, respectable task, in which I participate to the extent possible", but states cannot behave like NGOs: even France, which gives in too often to the temptation of calling itself "the country of human rights" (what former Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine calls a "declaratory hypertrophy")

> cannot determine its friendships or make its decisions on the basis of the degree to which human rights are scorned or respected in the various countries. And I do not know of any country in history that founded its foreign policy solely on the virtues of its allies.
>
> (Aron 1983b: 247)

Human rights promotion can and even should be *a part of* foreign policy (Aron is a liberal), but they cannot be the base for it (he is not an idealist).

A morality of wisdom

Having dismissed both morality of law and morality of struggle, he then defends his "*morale de la sagesse*" (morality of wisdom). It is incorrectly translated as the "morality of prudence" in the English edition of *Paix et guerre*, even if Aronian wisdom is certainly prudential (Mahoney 2001: 244). Presented as a third way between idealism (morality of law) and absolute Machiavellianism (morality of struggle), it does not exclude force (unlike idealism) or ethical concern (unlike Machiavellianism). It neither divorces politics from morality, nor reduces it to morality. Politics is irreducible to morality because "the political problem is not a moral problem" (Aron 1933a: 99), but this does not mean that such realism cannot be balanced with ideals and values.

The morality of wisdom is not to be used in a principle or rule-based reasoning but in a case-based reasoning (casuistry). Aron is a contextualist, he stresses the specificities of each unique historical situation. "To be prudent is to act in accordance with the particular situation and the concrete data, and not in accordance with some system or out of passive obedience to a norm or pseudo-norm" (Aron 2003: 585). Therefore, Aron's international ethic is a situational or contextual ethic. Nuclear deterrence, for instance, should not be discussed in the abstract but it should be asked "who deters whom from what, by what threats, in what circumstances" (Aron 1963b: 40) – a formula Herman Kahn used in his book *On Escalation* (1965: 23). For interventionism, it means that the policy makers should decide on a case by case basis where to intervene, and where not. An Aronian can perfectly justify the selectivity of our actions, and easily answer to the "double standards" criticism (why Libya and not Syria? Because "the particular situation and the concrete data" are not the same, and the consequences of an intervention would not be the same).

This morality of wisdom is justified by the famous distinction between rational and reasonable: if the strategic-diplomatic conduct is not rational (Aron insists on the importance of "historical and psychological" dimensions), then IR actors are not calculating machines and they can be reasonable.

Aron's morality of wisdom is a morality of *moderation*, in line with Aristotle (being virtuous is being "skillful in aiming at the middle term"; Aristotle 2011: 35) and Montesquieu ("the spirit of republics is peace and moderation", "moderation governs men, not excesses"; Montesquieu 1989: 132), as explained by Bryan-Paul Frost in his chapter. It means that violence in general, and wars in particular, need to be limited. "Between the absurdity of total war and the impossibility of real peace, the hopes of humanity are confined to the possibility of limiting warfare" (Aron 1958b: 40). "Limited Warfare" is the title of the third part of *Les Guerres en chaîne* (1951), in which Aron explains that "The goal of the West is and must be to win limited war so as not to have to wage the total war" (Aron 1951: 497). Aron's recommendation is always "the control of escalation, the avoidance of an explosion of animosity into passionate and unrestricted brutality" (Aron 2003: 45); to avoid the "all or nothing" (go or not go) logic and defend the flexible response doctrine in the nuclear debate (Aron

1963a: 139; see also Malis' chapter), a doctrine which was elaborated in the 1960 Harvard/MIT seminar in which Aron participated during his sabbatical, the same year France conducted its first nuclear test (Baverez 2006: 399). In short, he sought to propose a "moderate strategy" (Aron 2003: 700).

Moderation is precisely the idea behind war ethics and international humanitarian law, to limit the consequences of war on people and goods. It opposes the direct approach of strategy famously embodied in Clausewitz's dictum: "To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to logical absurdity" (Clausewitz 1976: 76). Direct strategy justifies total war, the hard-line approach of General MacArthur, requiring victory at all costs, the price being precisely that of ethics. The Russian bombings of Aleppo in 2016 are a more recent illustration of a direct approach that would have repulsed Aron. He is not alone: there is an entire tradition defending the "indirect approach" of strategy, aiming at precisely the opposite: the avoidance of frontal collision, and even of battle. The object of war is not to annihilate the adversary but to dominate them, that is, to impose one's will on them – "the effort of each state to impose its will on the other" is the first of the two elements in Clausewitz's definition of war that Aron adopts (Aron 1970b: 56). The best way to achieve this goal is to do so by spending the least energy and causing as little damage as possible. Like ethics, but for the sake of efficiency and economy of forces instead (Marshal Ferdinand Foch's first principle of war; Foch 1920: 48), the indirect strategy limits the effect of war on populations. This long tradition includes Sun Zu as much as the British strategist Liddell Hart, whom Aron considered "the most intelligent, and also the most typical, opponent of Clausewitz writing in the English language" (Aron 1983a: 234). Against Clausewitz, Liddell Hart argues that a perfect strategy would "produce a decision without any serious fighting" (Liddell Hart 1941: 190).

It is important to understand that Aron does not present his morality of wisdom as a solution and the Machiavelli problem remains unresolved: "the eternal problem of justifying the means by the end has no theoretical solution" (Aron 1994: 45). The morality of wisdom is not a solution, rather a guide for action: it "does not resolve the antinomies of strategic-diplomatic conduct, but it does attempt to find in each case the most acceptable compromise" (Aron 2003: 609). The notion of compromise is important because Aron used it before: in his 1938 dissertation, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, he prefers the "politics of compromise" over the "politics of reason". The politician of compromise (he refers to Max Weber as an example) tries to preserve certain values (peace, liberty) in a changing environment, without being handicapped by an unchanging conception of human nature. The politician of reason thinks he is a "confidant of Providence" (Aron 1961: 328).

The fact that the Machiavelli problem remains unresolved, and that all we can reach is a compromise, means that even in liberal democracies there will always be a certain amount of Machiavellianism – counterbalanced by other forces but still present. That is why Aron defends a "moderate Machiavellism" as opposed to an "absolute" one (Aurélio 2015: 240) – another instance of the centrality of moderation in his thought. A moderate Machiavelli is willing to dirty their hands if

necessary. Convinced of the impossibility of a pacified world, they recognize that violence can be a legitimate means to defend liberal values – and, for example, fight against totalitarianism. However, contrary to absolute Machiavellianism which excludes nothing, moderate Machiavellianism excludes certain means like nuclear war or genocide. By defending the use of force when necessary and under certain conditions, Aron assumes there can be just wars, and even anticipatory action. Aron "was not against the notion of preemption or prevention, which could, in certain circumstances, be indispensable" (Hassner 2005: 1–2).

The Kantian problem

The Kantian problem is the cosmopolitan one, i.e., the problem of universal peace. The twentieth century of Raymond Aron in ambivalent in that respect: on one hand, there is more talk about human rights and more institutions than ever; on the other, it is the bloodiest century in the history of humanity, with two world wars and several genocides. As a matter of fact, the successive attempts to outlaw war and guarantee collective security failed. Therefore, Aron, like other realists, is skeptical about the efficiency of international law and institutions (Lefort 2007). He criticizes the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN), a "pseudo-parliament" which does not prevent "world society [from remaining] anarchic" (Aron 1983a: 411). "The United Nations does not have the capacity to ensure collective security, a concept for which we vainly seek a meaning in the present world situation" (Aron 1954: 22). He points out the contradiction between two missions of the UN: stating the law and limiting hostilities. When, for instance, North Korea, which was not recognized by the UN, invaded South Korea, the UN proclaimed the North to be an aggressor, but quickly opened negotiations with it and eventually recognized it. Aron understands and shares the consequentialist logic of it – "Standing by a formalistic position, refusing negotiations with the aggressor, would have meant the risk of prolonging and expanding the war" (in other words, the UN prioritized the ethic of responsibility over the ethic of conviction) – but the fact remains that there was a "contradiction between legal and expedient action" (Aron 1954: 24). He does not underestimate the importance of the UN either. As usual, he tries to be realist, meaning some kind of middle ground between the excesses of cynicism, on the one hand, and idealism, on the other: Aron believes it is a fact, not a value judgment, "that the establishment of the U.N. has not essentially changed international relations", i.e., "the essential characteristics of relations between states as we have known them for the past six thousand years" (Aron 1954: 26). It means that the essential factor is not the UN but

> the great powers' will to act. It would be a mistake through false realism not to recognize the necessity of this framework. It would be an equal mistake, through false idealism, to seek in the Charter the secret of salvation and a substitute for force.
>
> (Aron 1954: 25–26)

The cosmopolitan goal of building some kind of "world state" is utopian for a number of reasons: because hostility is natural to man, it cannot be eradicated, only moderated; because to bind a community you need an external enemy (Aron is influenced by Schmitt's friend–enemy distinction); because states will not give up their sovereignty and it would pose governance issues ("Which men would hold the supreme authority which would force the submission of states?" Aron 1951: 208); and because the world is too diverse, "There is no such thing as world opinion on the political level" (Aron 1962b: 722). Against the nineteenth-century idea of a "world conscience", Aron invites us to

> recognize the facts: in international relations, there is no world conscience – first, because the world is divided into two camps, each adhering to its own system of values; second, because even in those countries that subscribe to our system of values statesmen speak and act according to expediency. So much is this the case that if one of them, against his interest, were to proclaim a policy based upon pure morality, all observers would look for cynical motives behind such a noble and surprising conduct.
>
> (Aron 1954: 21)

That is why Aron does not speak of an "international community" – an expression widely used today despite the fact that no one knows exactly what it refers to: certainly a wish, but is it a reality? Aron prefers to talk of an international "society", a less homogeneous term (there are tensions between communities inside any given society), which is also favored by the English school. "The international society" is the title of the first chapter of his last book, *Les dernières années du siècle* (1984a), where he acknowledges that *Paix et Guerre* dealt only with "the interstate system" and took war in its traditional meaning of "the armed confrontation between states", while the interstate system is only "a particular aspect" of such a society (Aron 1984a: 19). It is the most important one, and should be given priority in the study of international relations – like all realists, Aron is state-centric – but it is not the only one. There are three types of phenomenon – transnational, international and supranational – that are not part of the interstate system but influence it and are influenced by it. The international society, or "world society", is the whole entity, "all these relations between states and private persons allowing us to dream of the unity of human species" (Aron 1984a: 25). However, Aron continues, it is not "a real concept", because it has "almost none of the characteristics of a society" (Aron 1984a: 26).

He prefers the Kantian expression of "asocial society" (Aron 1967: 204), which well reflects the permanent tension between conflict and cooperation – in both external and internal orders (in the latter, Aron defends the Machiavellian idea of a conflictual pluralism). "The society of states is by essence a-social, since it does not outlaw the recourse to force among the 'collective persons' that are its members" (Aron 1966: 480). "As long as international society preserves this mixed and, in a sense, contradictory character, the morality of international action will also be equivocal" (Aron 2003: 608). However, and because it is a

tension, not a victory of conflict over cooperation, Aron does not totally exclude "the idea of a unifying, universal project for humanity" (Cozette 2008: 24). He insists that starting from a Hobbesian state of nature – a state of war in an anarchic world in the absence of a global tribunal and police – does not "deny the possibility of a more or less radical transformation of interstate relations" (Aron 1970b: 58). He leaves the door open to a better future.

Ideas of reason

Aron believes there are signs that humanity is heading in a cosmopolitan direction: compared to the Age of Metternich (the Concert of Europe), the interstate system is now spread over five continents and allows the exchange of everything (goods, ideas, currencies, etc.) (Aron 1984a: 151). Diplomacy is global too, even "total" because "*everything* is related and actors employ *all* means" (Aron 1959: 94), and "the unity of the diplomatic field is, firstly and above all, the expression of unity, on the road to fulfillment, of the human species" (Aron 1959: 88). However, such a common diplomacy, which gives the impression that a "world concert" has replaced the Concert of Europe, is nothing more than "the superficial uniformity of certain techniques": that diplomatic practices which were originally European have become widespread does not make the world uniform. Western technology is widespread too, but ways of life remain very diverse. Similarly, in IR there is an "infinite diversity of customs". Therefore, "The idea of world unity is the expression of a desire or of an illusion" (Aron 1954: 23). However, although there is no world unity *yet*, it does not mean that we are not heading in that direction.

Aron still believes in "The spread of the industrial society, the unification of mankind" and wonders whether there is some kind of "predestined fate, as foreseen by Auguste Comte: an industrial society that would set an example for all human communities and unite mankind for the first time ever" (Aron 2002: 477). In other words, he believed we have entered what Kant called "the cosmopolitan situation" (Hassner 2015b: 199), while being more prudent and skeptical than Kant (for whom universal peace was "the hidden plan of nature for mankind") as "we have no proof that … from now on the rational process will reign in peace … It is just a hope, supported by faith" (Aron 2002: 485). Therefore, he is not a Kantian, but a realist with Kantian aspirations. At first sight, that seems at odds with the conservatism of realism, but not with Scheuerman's interpretation of the classical realists being more open than we think to a global reform (Scheuerman 2011). Here it should recalled that Morgenthau eventually supported a Kantian cosmopolitan world state (Speer 1968; Craig 2007) that even the most liberal realists like Herz and Aron considered utopian.

Understanding the compatibility of realism and idealism, in the literal sense of having ideals rather than the vulgar one of being naive, depends on the Kantian notion of "idea of reason", "an idea that can never be entirely realized, but which animates action and indicates a goal" (Aron 2003: 735). World community and perpetual peace, the former being the means of the latter, are ideas of

Reason: impossible to accomplish, but still useful to guide action. Contrary to many other realists, Aron cares enough about the horizon of a perpetual peace to wonder about its conditions of possibility, and finds three of them. In a 1957 lecture at the London School of Economics, they were: the reduction of the gap between the rich (the Western minority) and the poor (the African and Asian masses); the end of the Cold War; and the constitution of a world community of nations accepting each other – each condition implying the previous one(s) (Aron 1958b: 41). Five years later in *Peace and War*, these conditions were different: the adoption by all important states of a democratic regime; the existence of a real international community; and the abandonment of external sovereignty, i.e., of the possibility to take the law into one's own hands. Aron is fully aware that this is only an optimistic mental experience, and that in reality these objectives are counterbalanced by "the desire for power and pride in surpassing other men" (Aron 1958b: 53) – the "revenge of passions" to which his disciple Hassner devoted his last book (Hassner 2015a). This ambivalence is rooted in the "double nature of man, both passionate and reasonable" (Aron 1959: 158). Therefore, perpetual peace and world community are a horizon, of which Aron sees "improbability in the short run, and yet, in spite of everything, the remote possibility of achieving it", and he urges the reader not to forget "the duty of hope" (Aron 1958b: 60). "The end of myths should not be the end of hope" (Aron 1946: 260). At the end of his *Memoirs*, he confirms: "I continue to think a happy end possible, far beyond the political horizon, an Idea of Reason" (Aron 2010: 986).

Such optimism can seem surprising from someone who is usually considered a pessimist. There are actually two kinds of pessimist: the resigned ones, like most of the "hard" realists, and those liberal realists like Aron: "The pessimists of my kind want incessantly improve society, fragment by fragment. The only thing is that they do not have a global solution (those believing in an impossible regime are usually considered optimists)" (Aron 2005: 1019). Aron described himself as an "active pessimist" who lost faith (in the 1930s), but kept hope (Aron 1971: 21). In line with his usual habit of sublating all antinomies, he could be better described as an "optimistic pessimist". Not all realists are entirely pessimistic: Machiavelli and Weber were, but Marx and Aron have an optimistic component because both are philosophies of progress, for very different reasons obviously (Marx believes in the end of capitalism, while Aron is a liberal). Weber is a major inspiration but Aron also criticizes his "Darwinian-Nietzschean vision of the world", excessively brutal and pessimistic, which is the conceptual framework of his *Machtpolitik* (Aron uses the German word for power politics on purpose, as it has a nationalist connotation and a pessimistic inspiration; see Aron 1964b: 45). Being a realist is certainly seeing the world as it is rather than as one would like it to be, but also rather than as one fears it to be – "The pessimistic deformation, inspired by the desire to demonstrate as inevitable and indispensable a policy of power, being no less dangerous than the idealistic deformation" (Aron 1993: 236).

To what extent is Aron Kantian?

When he arrived in Germany in 1930, the young Aron was definitely a neo-Kantian pacifist influenced by his Sorbonne master Leon Brunschwig, and destined to work like him on the philosophy of biology. At that time, he was "a pure product of … neo-Kantian rationalism" (Aron 2010: 150). Referring to that period in his *Memoirs*, he writes: "I *was* a disciple of Kant" (Aron 1983b: 267) – I "was" and not I "am", because he changed. When he returned to Paris three years later, after having observed the rise of Nazism, read Marx and Weber and discovered phenomenology ("In studying phenomenology, I too experienced a kind of liberation from my neo-Kantian training"; Aron 2010: 103), he was no longer Kantian nor pacifist, and reoriented his work toward social sciences, convinced that the century's destiny was built up around two main ideologies, Nazism and communism (Baverez 2006: 94). "National Socialism had taught me the power of irrational forces; Max Weber had taught me the responsibility of each individual, not so much with respect to intentions as to the consequences of his choices" (Aron 2010: 118). World War II, which Baverez considers as "the most determining factor", prompted a reorientation of his works toward strategy and sociology (Baverez 2006: 184) and disabused him of his early "Kantian optimism" (Davis 2009: 36; Hoffmann 1985: 21). At exactly the same time he consolidated his realist attitude.

Indeed, Aron later equated Kantian ethics with the ethic of conviction, idealism and moralism and vigorously opposed them all: when he criticizes Sartre, who "was often lost in political affairs, precisely because he was essentially a moralist" (Aron 1983b: 146), he means that Sartre "never understood the duality of politics … he was into *Gesinnungsethik*" (Aron 1981: 1054); he was "spontaneously Kantian, he was concerned with the intention of the other, much more than with the act itself" (Aron 2010: 268). Aron's ethics, mostly consequentialist with maybe some virtue ethics aspects, is definitely not Kantian: his morality of wisdom is not a principled or rule-based reasoning. His realism and criticism of idealism and liberalism, i.e., Kantian institutions (international law and organizations), are even anti-Kantian. Pierre Manent, who was close to him at the end of his life and pleads for an Aristotelian interpretation of Aron,[2] even writes that Aron "made perfectly attentive readers who were not much interested in politics believe he was a Kantian. But Aron was the least Kantian thinker there is; he sought no horizon beyond politics, no 'kingdom of ends,' no 'pure morality'" (Manent 2015: 27) – an interpretation that Mahoney finds "quite right" (Mahoney 2016: 232).

However, this is probably too strong: while Aron's ethics and political theory is not Kantian it does not mean there is no trace of Kant *at all* in his philosophy. When, at the end of his life, he reminds the reader that he *was* a disciple of Kant, it implies he is not anymore. However, he immediately adds:

> there is in Kant a concept to which I still subscribe: it is the idea of Reason, an image of a society that would be truly humanized. We can continue to think, or dream or hope – in the light of the idea of Reason – for a humanized society.
>
> (Aron 1983b: 267)

Aron still believes in a number of Kantian ideals, but only as ideas of Reason: as unreachable guides for action. From that perspective, he is certainly more Kantian, that is to say liberal, than many other realists. Raynaud concedes that Aron is not a pure Kantian but sees him as a "post-Hegelian Kantian" (Raynaud 2002: 130), to borrow an expression from Eric Weil, whom Aron met in Berlin in 1932. However, because the Hegelian dimension does not capture the realism counterbalancing his Kantian liberalism, and because Aron was at least as much a "liberal disciple of Machiavelli" (Aron 1984b: 96) as a realist disciple of Kant, it seems more adequate to capture his hybrid position by using these two references: a post-Kantian Machiavellianism.

Notes

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2 There are two main interpretations of the Aronian practical philosophy, the Kantian and the Aristotelian – Raynaud thinks that "both are true" (Raynaud 2002: 124).

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5 Raymond Aron, war and nuclear weapons

The primacy of politics paradox

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The analysis of war played a central role in Raymond Aron's overall thought, as exemplified by the Herodotus quotation he chose to have engraved on the ceremonial sword he carried as an elected member of the *Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*: "No man should prefer war to peace, since in peace sons bury their fathers, but at war fathers bury their sons."

But is it not a bit of a paradox, since he had not directly participated in nor held any real military role during World War II? After 1945, he devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to strategy, more specifically to nuclear strategy, primarily insisting on the primacy of *politics* in the understanding of war. And this may be the supreme paradox of his life as a committed observer. I would like to show that he was probably *a personal victim of the primacy of politics*: through his unconscious desire to play a role in French politics, he "overplayed" his opposition to de Gaulle's *force de frappe*, becoming marginalized in the French political landscape. In 1976 he then authored his masterpiece *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*. Like his "role models" Clausewitz but also Thucydides, Machiavelli and Tocqueville, he succeeded as a theoretician inasmuch as he failed as a practitioner.

Nuclear weapons played a triple role in the edification of Raymond Aron's intellectual work: obviously in the comments he made and positions he adopted inside the nuclear strategic debate from 1945 to 1983, but also in the genesis of his theory of international relations and of war (culminating in *Paix et guerre* and in *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*), and lastly in his personal biography as a "committed observer" of the French and transatlantic strategic debates.

Theory, debate and personal involvement were dynamically interwoven in his original "modus operandi" as a thinker. The thought and work of Aron, at least with regard to the areas of international analysis and strategy, have been built by the continual cross-fertilizing of three levels of thinking:

- news comments in the press (mainly *Combat* (1945–1946), then *Le Figaro* (1947–1977), finally *L'Express* (1977–1983) (Aron 2005)) or topical (and often polemical) books dedicated to contemporary hot issues (*Le Grand Débat* (Aron 1963), *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* (Aron 1977));[1]