H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXI-54

Iain Stewart. ***Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century.*** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781108484442 (hardback, $99.99)

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Contents

Introduction by Or Rosenboim, City, University of London 2

Review by Joshua L. Cherniss, Georgetown University 5

Review by Daniel Mahoney, Assumption College 11

Review by Sophie Marcotte-Chénard, Political Science, Carleton University 14

Review by Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, Dartmouth College 19

Response by Iain Stewart, University College London 23

Introduction by Or Rosenboim, City, University of London

Raymond Aron has been long known to English speaking audiences as one of the key French—or even European—political thinkers of the twentieth century. In the discipline of International Relations he is one of the few twentieth-century non-English authors to obtain an entry ticket to the 'canon' (if such a thing exists). In political thought he may be less known than his contemporary Jean-Paul Sartre, but his name still resonates with those who are interested in understanding the development of ideas about modern politics in mid-century France.[1]

As a political thinker and public commentator, Aron's ideas reached French society through his academic scholarship but more effectively through his articles in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, which made him a household name. Thanks to his disciples and to mediators such as Harvard Professor Stanley Hoffmann, Aron's ideas achieved global resonance. Despite the fact that he never produced a coherent and systematic work of political theory, Aron was seen as a perceptive commentator on liberty democracy in modern industrial societies.

It may be surprising, therefore, that historians have dedicated relatively limited attention to Aron's political thought. In the 1990s, analytical and historical assessments of his work were tainted with celebratory colours, often lacking in critical edge. Aron's approach to politics, described as "moderate" or "prudent," was especially praised by American conservative liberals who sought to use his ideas in their own battle against Communism.[2] In consequence, he was described, somewhat limitedly, as a 'Cold War liberal.'[3] In a sense, Aron was a victim of his own battle against ideologies. While his popularity as a liberal anti-Communist was on the rise in the U.S., only a few intellectual historians outside of France engaged critically with his ideas, or questioned the judiciousness of this assessment.[4]

It is in this context that Iain Stewart's compelling and critical book, *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century* emerges as an innovative and insightful analysis, weaving together a historical contextualisation of Aron's ideas with a critical assessment of their merit. Stewart offers his readers a well-researched and knowledgeable interpretation of Aron's political thought, revolving around his position on liberalism. Aron's reputation as a 'Cold War liberal,' reinforced by recent scholarship that locates his work next to that of Judith Shklar, Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin, may explain Stewart's decision to focus his analysis on Aron's contribution to this tradition of thought. As we shall see in the reviews that follow, while this focus has historical and conceptual merits, it also renders the book somewhat vulnerable to criticism, given Stewart's conclusion that Aron's liberalism was, in fact, based on flimsy foundations.

As a scholar of French history, Stewart seeks to reconstruct the rich intellectual context of Aron's liberalism in order to assess his thought as well as the fortunes of France's liberal tradition in general: by challenging Aron's association with

[1] For a concise and influential assessment of Aron in French political thought see Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[2] See, for example, Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: the Recovery of the Political* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997); R.M. Davis, *A Politics of Understanding: The International Thought of Raymond Aron* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). Aron's moderation was more recently discussed in Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in an Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[3] Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[4] A growing interest in Aron is manifested by the recent publication of edited volumes on his thought in English, including, José Colen and Elisabeth Dutartre-Michaut, *The Companion to Raymond Aron* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2015; Olivier Schmitt, *Raymond Aron and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2018). Aron has received a more comprehensive treatment in France, of course, by scholars including Pierre Manent, Pierre Hassner, Gwendal Châton, Nicolas Baverez, Joël Mouric, Serge Audier and others.

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liberalism, he also wishes to cast doubts on the notion of a 'liberal revival' in post-war French political thought more generally. In this sense, Stewart's book aims not only to depict Aron's intellectual portrait as a political thinker, but also to advance an argument about the shape of liberalism in France more generally. Thus, the book succeeds in its double ambition of making an original and critical contribution to the limited scholarship on Aron in English, as well as challenging common narratives about the history of liberalism in twentieth-century France.

The reviewers in this roundtable are clearly convinced that the book makes a significant contribution to existing scholarship on Aron and French liberalism. Sophie Marcotte-Chénard praises the vigorous, detailed, and impartial analysis of the development of the tradition of French liberalism through Aron's thought. She values the originality of Stewart's historicist reading of Aron, an appreciation shared by Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins in his review. For the two reviewers, Stewart's book provides a valuable historical contextualisation that was hitherto only marginal to the scholarship on Aron's thought.

Stewart's book provides a compelling image of Aron's rich and diverse writings, including both academic scholarship and journalistic texts. The book is based on extensive research, which brings to the fore French sources hitherto unavailable to English readers. Thus, Joshua L. Cherniss judges the book as a deeply informed, analytically acute, and revealing account both of Aron's thought and its historical significance. Daniel Mahoney similarly finds the book to be well written and to reveal an impressive command of the principle sources.

The book has generated here a vivid discussion of Aron's historical significance and theoretical importance, as is evident in the following reviews. The reviewers raise a range of questions challenging some of the analytical and methodological scaffoldings of the book, which focus on three main points: context, liberalism and legacy.

First, Marcotte-Chénard, Steinmetz-Jenkins, and Cherniss all reflect on the relevant context for reading Aron's ideas. As Stewart proposes in the book, a contextualist interpretation of Aron's writings, and the selection of the appropriate intellectual, historical, and political context seems particularly significant. For Marcotte-Chénard, Aron's ideas should be understood not only in their intellectual context and in relation to other thinkers, but also against the political events of his time. Aron's ideas were shaped by encounters with the ideas of key thinkers such as Karl Marx or Max Weber, but importantly also by concrete historical developments. Cherniss similarly argues that an alternative reading could put more emphasis on Aron's Jewishness or his relations with Charles de Gaulle as significant for the development of his thought. Aron's discussions of international relations theory, which are left out of the book, have been mentioned in several of the reviews as a relevant and insightful context that remains unexplored in this volume. In terms of intellectual context, Steinmetz-Jenkins and Mahoney both seek to downplay the influence of the German jurist Carl Schmitt on Aron's ideas, and highlight alternative inspirations such as the sociologist Karl Manheim or Aristotle.

The second point raised by the reviewers regards Aron's contribution to liberalism in France. Marcotte-Chénard challenges the usefulness of liberalism as an analytical framework for understanding Aron's thought, particularly in light of Stewart's claims that Aron made a limited contribution to the idea of the "French liberal revival." Focusing on liberalism presupposes a rigid definition of the term, she argues, and excludes from the analysis other important lenses on Aron's writings, such as realism. Cherniss allows for the importance of liberalism to Aron's ideas, yet seeks a clearer definition of his liberal thought and its relations with history.

Finally, the reviewers reflect on the value of Aron's thought today. For Mahoney, the book could have further emphasised Aron's greatness as a political thinker and even as a human being. Whereas Stewart takes a more cautious—and at times severely critical—approach to Aron's liberalism, Mahoney insists on its great historical merits and highly valuable legacy. Marcotte-Chénard advances a more limited argument. She suggests that as a good intellectual historian Stewart did well to abstain from normative arguments about the application of Aron's ideas in today's crisis of liberalism, yet invites him to elaborate more on the merits of Aron's style of political argumentation, which may be the reason why people still read his works today. Stewart leaves this judgement in the readers' hands.

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The fascinating discussion emerging from the four reviews reflects the merits of Iain Stewart's book as a meticulous contextualist historical study of Aron's ideas. Looking at Aron's oeuvre beyond the limiting intellectual framework of the Cold War, Stewart's book invites a wider-ranging and sophisticated engagement with Aron's work and thus may serve as an original and provocative point of departure for a novel assessment of his ideas today.

Participants:

Iain Stewart teaches modern European history at University College London. His research interests lie in the fields of modern intellectual and cultural history with particular focuses on the histories of liberalism and the cultural cold war. In addition to his latest book on Raymond Aron, he is the co-editor with Stephen Sawyer of *In Search of the Liberal Moment: Democracy, Anti-totalitarianism, and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (Palgrave, 2016).

Or Rosenboim is Director of the Centre for Modern History and a Lecturer in Modern History at City, University of London. She is the author of *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton University Press, 2017). Her research on the history of international thought, American geopolitics, federalism and world order has also appeared in *Modern Intellectual History*, *The International History Review* and *International Relations*, and elsewhere. She is currently working on a book on global thinking in the twentieth century.

Joshua L. Cherniss is an Assistant Professor of Government at Georgetown University. He is the author of *A Mind and its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin's Political Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and co-editor (with Steven B. Smith) of *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). His articles and chapters on Berlin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Max Weber, and others have appeared in the *Review of Politics*, the *Journal of Politics*, the *Tocqueville Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently working on a book about liberalism, anti-liberalism, and debates over political ethics in twentieth-century political thought.

Daniel J. Mahoney holds the Augustine Chair in Distinguished Scholarship at Assumption College in Worcester, MA. He has written books on Raymond Aron, Charles de Gaulle, Bertrand de Jouvenel, anti-totalitarian thought, especially Solzhenitsyn, and on the intersection of religion and politics. He is completing a book called *The Statesman as Thinker: Ten Portraits of Courage, Greatness, and Moderation*.

Sophie Marcotte-Chénard is an Assistant Professor in Political Theory at Carleton University in Canada. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy and Social Sciences from the Raymond-Aron Centre at the École des hautes études en sciences sosciales (EHESS) and completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on theory and philosophy of history, twentieth-century German and French political thought, contemporary political philosophy, and interpretive approaches in the history of political ideas. She is the principal investigator of a SSHRC-funded research project on the evolution and uses of the concept of crisis in politics. She is also the author of a forthcoming book entitled *History in Crisis: Political Philosophy and Historicism in the Interwar Period* (Presses de l'Université de Montréal). Her work has also appeared in *The Review of Politics*, *The Journal of the Philosophy of History*, *Politique & Sociétés* and *Methodos*.

Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins is the managing editor of *Modern Intellectual History* and a Post-Doctoral Fellow in the History Department at Dartmouth College.

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Review by Joshua L. Cherniss, Georgetown University[1]

Raymond Aron remains less well-known and widely-read than other post-war political thinkers. This is partly because Aron's analytical sobriety, his careful avoidance of excess, and consequent tendency to offer complicated, nuanced judgments prevented him from producing a straightforward theory or founding a school. It is also because, as the Franco-American scholar of international relations Stanley Hoffmann, wrote, the scope of Aron's work "caused his commentators and his disciples to despair."[2] While Aron never lacked admirers, analysts, or chroniclers,[3] recent years have seen a new wave of works, both in French and English, that raise the bar for the historical reconstruction of Aron's thought.[4] Iain Stewart's fine study is one of the latest fruits of this expanding interest.

Stewart's book is not a comprehensive intellectual biography. His primary interest, signaled by his title, is Aron's relationship to liberalism, and specifically liberalism in France. This reflects the influence of recent scholarly work on the history of French liberalism, and recent work on French political thought and politics since 1968.[5] Not that international

[1] My thanks to Stefan Eich, Laura Hartmann, and Steven Smith for comments on drafts of this review, and to Diane Labrosse for her editorial work on it.

[2] Stanley Hoffmann, "Raymond Aron and the Theory of International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 29:1 (March 1985): 13-27, at 13.

[3] For comprehensive accounts of Aron's life and writings, see Robert Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: Volume I, The Philosopher in History, 1905-1955* (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1986); *Volume II, The Sociologist in Society, 1955-1983* (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1986); Nicolas Bavarez, *Raymond Aron: un moraliste au temps des ideologies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993). Previous monographs on Aron in English include Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992); Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); Reed M. Davis, *A Politics of Understanding: The International Thought of Raymond Aron* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009). Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in the Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) include excellent considerations of Aron's achievements.

[4] These include, in French: Serge Audier, *Raymond Aron: la démocratie conflictuelle* (Paris: Michalon, 2004); Audier, *Machiavel, conflit et liberté* (Paris: Vrin, 2005); and Gwendal Châton, *Introduction a Raymond Aron* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017); within English-language scholarship, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, "Why Did Raymond Aron Write that Carl Schmitt was Not a Nazi? An Alternative Genealogy of French liberalism," *Modern Intellectual History* 11:4 (2014), 549-574; Or Rosenboim, "Amica America: Raymond Aron's Views on Franco-American Relations in 1945," *The Tocqueville Review/Revue Tocqueville* 39:2 (2019), 35-50; Hugo Drochon, "Raymond Aron's 'Machiavellian' Liberalism,"*Journal of the History of Ideas* 80:3 (2019), 621-42; Isabel Gabel, "From Evolutionary Theory to Philosophy of History: Raymond Aron and the Crisis of French Neo-transformism," *History of the Human Sciences* 31:1 (2018), 3-18; Sophie Marcotte-Chénard, "What Can We Learn from Political History? Leo Strauss and Raymond Aron as Readers of Thucydides," *The Review of Politics* 80:1 (2018), 57-86; Christopher Adair-Toteff, *Raymond Aron's Philosophy of Political Responsibility* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

[5] This includes Andrew Jainchill and Samuel Moyn, "French Democracy Between Totalitarianism and Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and Revisionist Historiography," *The Journal of Modern History* 76:2 (March 2004), 107-54; Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Serge Audier, *La Pensée anti-68: essai sur une restauration intellectuelle* (Paris: La Découverte , 2008); *Néo-libéralisme(s) - Une archéologie intellectuelle* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2012); Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State, and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Kevin Duong, "Does Democracy End in Terror? Transformations of Antitotalitarianism in France," *Modern Intellectual History* 13:3 (June 2016), 1-27; and the essays in Emile Chabal, ed. *France since the 1970s: History, Politics, and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) and Stephen W. Sawyer and Iain Stewart, eds., *In Search of the Liberal Moment: Democracy, Anti-authoritarianism, and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016).

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influences are neglected. Much is made, illuminatingly, of the influence on Aron of the Belgian revisionist socialist Hendrik de Man in the 1930s.There are revealing discussions of Aron's intellectual relationships with German political theorist (and 'crown jurist of the Third Reich') Carl Schmitt (who Stewart shows to have been a crucial influence on Aron's analysis of totalitarianism in the 1930s) and the German-Jewish-American political philosopher Leo Strauss. Stewart also rightly situates Aron's famous formulation of the 'end of ideology' within exchanges among an international community of anti-Communist intellectuals—even as he insists, in a novel and convincing manner, on the interwar, and very French, roots of the idea of an end of ideology. But particularly as the book moves into the 1960s, the rest of the world seems to recede from the picture, as Stewart's attention zeroes-in on France.

In situating Aron in the context of French political thought, and reconstructing his intellectual development from the 1930s to the 1960s, Stewart offers a deeply informed, analytically acute, and revealing account both of Aron's thought and its historical significance. His discussions of Aron's early writings on economic affairs, on pacifism and international relations, and on the philosophy of history, as well as Aron's post-war analyses of democracy and industrial society, integrate a lucid, nuanced reconstruction of Aron's (evolving) arguments with contextualization of the texts within larger debates. Stewart rightly identifies anxiety about French 'decadence' and a willingness to consider more technocratic and authoritarian solutions to the seeming instability, polarization, irrationality, and paralysis bred by democratic politics, as central to Aron's thought. He reveals how these anxieties moved Aron away from both traditional liberalism and democratic socialism, and close to revisionist-socialist and 'non-conformist' circles. Many denizens of these circles (e. g. de Man, the French socialist-turned-fascist politician Marcel Déat, and the French intellectuals Alfred Fabre-Luce, and Bertrand de Jouvenel) came to embrace a version of fascism; Stewart carefully notes that the thread that bound Aron to democratic liberalism, while stretched taut under the stresses of the day, never broke.

Stewart further shows that while Aron retreated from some of the relativist implications of the argument of his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (1938), and became more critical of the German sociologist Max Weber's moral epistemology and politics, there was more continuity, politically and theoretically, between the Aron of the early-to-mid 1930s, and Aron the post-war champion of political "prudence" and "moderation," than is allowed by accounts that posit a break between an "Aron before Aron,"[6] of the 1930s, and the mature Aron. This also complicates the picture of the mature Aron as an exponent of "Aristotelian" political science.[7]

Finally, Stewart effectively argues that Aron's case for liberalism's viability was tied to a hopeful (though not unclouded) diagnosis of liberal societies' capacity for economic growth and peaceful mediation of conflict. Aron thus sought to stake out a position—perhaps nuanced, perhaps strained—which retained a trace of the optimistic faith in science (and expertise) of his Durkheimian and neo-Kantian teachers, but tempered this with the historical pessimism and skepticism that he articulated in the 1930s. While he resisted the hubris of many rivals (and champions) of liberalism, the extent to which Aron was ready to rely on both technocratic management and commitment to projects of economic growth makes his version of liberalism seem less viable in a period of widespread distrust of "expertise"—and one in which the environmental ravages and

[6] Pierre Manent, *Seeing Things Politically: Interviews with Benedicte Delorme-Montini,* trans. Ralph C. Hancock (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2015), 38.

[7] See, for example, Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron;* Daniel J. Mahoney, "A Liberal and a Classic: Pierre Manent's neo-Aristoteian Reading of Raymond Aron," *Perspectives on Political Science* 45:4 (2016), 230-36. Stewart notes in passing Aron's continuing debt to Kant, which has also tended to be minimized in Manent's reading, but does not pursue the importance of the Kantian element of his thought, or the tensions between his affirmation of a Kantian "regulative ideal" and his skeptical, "realist" account of politics.

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economic inequality and misery that have been bred by the avid pursuit of "growth" now pose significant problems (in this connection, it is worth noting Aron's scornful dismissal of the Club of Rome's 1972 report *The Limits of Growth*).[8]

Such reflections on the political salience of Aron's liberalism are not only hard to resist in our troubled times; they seem to me faithful to Aron's own work as a 'committed observer,' moved by a sense of responsibility to engage with political realities. They also reflect the way in which reconstructions of history are often political, and political judgment reflects a sense of history—even as the historian must seek to see beyond the blinders imposed by political partiality, and the political thinker must remain resistant to historical mythologizing. Appropriately, there are two respects in which Stewart's book seems to me to make particularly important contributions, which bear on the intersection of (accounts and philosophies of) history and politics. One concerns the history of liberalism; the other concerns the role played by visions of history in liberal thought. I will return to these in my concluding comments.

While Stewart makes important contributions to our understanding of Aron's thought, he omits discussion of some aspects of Aron's intellectual life that seem to be significant to his analysis. Stewart's focus on Aron's liberalism arguably justifies his neglect of Aron's later work on the theory of international relations and the causes of war (though this may not be so easily separable from Aron's liberalism on a theoretical level, if, as I will suggest, this liberalism is closely enmeshed with questions of historical development or progress).[9] In seeking to correct one-dimensional views of Aron as fundamentally a Cold Warrior, Stewart may also over-compensate slightly in giving Aron's deep and critical engagement with Marx and Marxism—which did much to define his liberalism—less space than it merits. Other omissions are more striking. One is Aron's Jewishness, which gets a brief mention early on and is not discussed further. Yet this part of Aron's background, and experience, may be significant for his liberalism. Aron identified his strong sense of French patriotism, which shaped, and introduced tensions into, his conception of both the liberalism to which he was committed, and the ethic of political responsibility by which he judged political action, as that of a "Lorraine patriot."[10] This invokes the passionate, but insecure, patriotism of the Jews of Alsace-Lorraine: the community from which Aron's family was descended, as was that of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Stewart rightly notes the importance of the Dreyfus affair in defining French liberalism in the generation that preceded Aron's. But he leaves unexplored how the affair might have influenced Aron's thinking about liberalism, nationalism, and French democracy.

It is also curious that Stewart, who pays careful attention to Aron's prewar and immediate postwar writings, does not make more of Aron's wartime articles in the London-based Gaullist journal *France libre*. Stewart ably reconstructs Aron's analysis of totalitarian ideologies as "secular religions,"[11] which was significantly worked out during Aron's London exile. But these articles also contain important material relevant to other topics that Stewart explores. These include Aron's striking efforts to reckon with former intellectual comrades who had embraced the Vichy regime, and his first (so far as I know) appropriations of Enlightenment political philosopher Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, and other figures of the putative 'liberal tradition' (notably, the Franco-Swiss liberal publicist Benjamin Constant) as reference-points and

[8] See Raymond Aron, *In Defense of Decadent Europe,* trans Stephen Cox (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996), 170 (first published, as *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente*, 1977)

[9] Stewart does devote considerable attention to Aron's writings on decolonization; he discusses Aron's later perspective on international relations in Stewart, "From Petain to Pinochet: Raymond Aron, Henry Kissinger and the problem of political realism," *The Tocqueville Review/Revue Tocqueville* 39:1 (2019), 15-33.

[10] Aron, *The Committed Observer: Conversations with Jean-Louis Missika and Dominique Wolton* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983), 265.

[11] See Aron, "L-Avenir des religions séculières," (1944) in Aron, *L'age des empires et l'avenir de la France* (Paris: Defense de la France, 1945), 287-318; translated (by Barbara Bray) as "The Future of the Secular Religions" in Aron, *The Dawn of Universal History: Selected Essays from a Witness of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Yair Reiner (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 177-201.

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inspirations for his own political analysis. Given Stewart's preoccupation with (and revealing analysis of) Aron's later use of Montesquieu, it is strange these wartime writings do not feature more prominently in his account.[12]

Both Aron's Jewishness and his wartime writings are relevant to another topic that receives less attention than it might: his complex relationship with General (later President) Charles de Gaulle. Aron alternately embraced, opposed, and feared de Gaulle's political style of patriotic 'grandeur' and willingness to flirt with authoritarianism. The most dramatic break was provoked by de Gaulle's description (in 1967) of the Jews as "a people sure of itself and domineering."[13] But even when writing for *France libre*, Aron was strikingly silent in singing the General's praises—and issued a pointed warning against Bonapartism.[14] The persistence of Aron's liberalism, as well as the tensions which marked it, are illuminated in his evaluations of de Gaulle. So is his response to the 'events' of May 1968, which was initially emotionally explosive, then became more soberly and ironically hostile, later ambiguous. Stewart questions claims (notably by the French political theorists Serge Audier and Gwendal Châton) that Aron sought an intellectual *rapprochement* with the libertarian Left of '68, because he saw an alliance between reformist liberals and the libertarian left as the most desirable alternative to either Communist resurgence or the renewal of an authoritarian Right.[15] The differences of the interpretations of Stewart and Audier and Châton seem to me undecided, in large part because Aron's views shifted in response to perceived opportunities and threats. But Aron's mix of admiration for de Gaulle's firm response to '68, and his criticism of the authoritarian 'style' of Gaullist rule as having contributed to the crisis, helps to illuminate the extent to which he may have agreed and disagreed with admirers who have more enthusiastically embraced the General and his legacy.

I do not mean these caveats to call into question Stewart's larger picture of this complex, manifold figure. On the contrary, Stewart's account strikes me as judicious, convincing, and often revelatory. The significance of this account, furthermore, has larger implications. It points to the need to revise assumptions about mid-twentieth century liberalism that continue to mar even excellent historical work. Stewart begins from the indisputable (but often neglected) point that what we now call 'Cold War liberalism' was shaped by the conditions of interwar politics—and thus by the sense of democracy's fragility, and the power and plausibility of critiques of liberalism.[16] It was thus, in its origins and in its presiding mood or sensibility, a far cry from the "astonishingly complacent" (15) affirmation of liberal-democracy's obvious superiority and inevitable triumph, which has been attributed to Cold War liberalism by its critics, and embraced by admirers who have neglected its anxieties and insights.[17]

[12] See Aron, *L'Homme contre Les tyrans* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 131-70, 261-90, which reprints the most relevant wartime articles from 1942 and 1943.

[13] See Aron, *De Gaulle, Israel, and the Jews,* trans John Sturrock (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1969).

[14] Aron, "L'ombre des Bonaparte," *La France libre*, vi (16 Aug. 1943), 280-288.

[15] As Stewart notes, this interpretation relies heavily on Aron's essay "Liberté, libéral ou libertaire?" (1969)—an essay also significant for its criticism of Hayek. But it is also supported by Aron's evaluations of Gaullism in this period, which Châton characterizes as "a veritable indictment" of Gaullism. Châton, "Taking Antitotalitarianism Seriously" in Sawyer and Stewart, 36 n.33.

[16] Similar cases are made, with respect to other paradigmatic "Cold War liberals," in Malachi Haim Hacohen, *Karl Popper—The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Joshua L. Cherniss, *A Mind and its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin's Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[17] As Stewart notes, there are important precursors in this correction of simplistic views of Cold War liberalism—notably Jan-Werner Müller, "Fear and Freedom: on "Cold War Liberalism," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7:1 (2008), 45-64; and Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

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Stewart does not name (and shame) those guilty of co-opting Cold War liberalism's arguments on behalf of a more complacent, or hubristic, vision. But he does make the case for distinguishing Cold War liberalism from 'neoliberalism,' emphasizing the ways in which Aron diverged from the architects of neoliberal thought. He shows that the idea of the "end of ideology" was a polemical move against not only Marxism, but the "radical free market liberalism" that grew into "neoliberalism" (237). The distance from neoliberalism was not merely a matter of policy, or political positioning. Stewart rightly points out that their "rejection of economic reductionism" set Aron and other "Cold War liberal" theorists apart not only from "positivist forms of Marxism," but also "doctrinaire forms of economic liberalism" (230). He also notes Aron's substantial criticism of the Austrian economist F. A. Hayek's influential defense of a "classical liberal" theory of liberty.[18] Given their vastly different intellectual orientations and political consequences, it is a mistake to see the "neoliberal turn" as "immanent within Cold War liberalism" (244). This assertion is significant indeed: it challenges the tendency to view neoliberalism as a "dubious artifact of the Cold War mentality."[19]

Stewart's account also calls into question the depiction of post-war liberalism as narrow, negative, depoliticized, de-moralized, and demoralizing that appears in recent accounts by the historians Helena Rosenblatt[20] and Samuel Moyn.[21] Stewart argues that Cold War liberalism, as represented by Aron and others, was far less doctrinaire and abstract, far richer and more nuanced, far more politically and morally engaged, than this "caricatural image" (243). This is not to say that Cold War liberalism bears no culpability for the multiple ways in which liberal theory and practice have gone astray in recent decades. Nor is it to vindicate all of Aron's perceptions, intentions, or conclusions. But it does suggest, as Stewart hints in his concluding paragraph, that Aron's "style of political engagement"—his approach to both liberalism and politics—may contain valuable resources for counter-acting the negative consequences of his own ideological innovations and some of those of his allies and admirers (245).

This brings me to a final insight offered by Stewart's analysis, which seems to me significant even if it is not emphasized as prominently as is warranted. Stewart argues that Aron's liberalism is defined, in large part, by his construction or invention of a (French) liberal tradition; and his embrace of a "liberal historical sensibility" or "historical vision" (46-7). Of what does this liberal historical sensibility/vision—or "historical liberalism"—consist? It seems to involve a philosophy of history, an ethical and political as well as intellectual disposition, and a perception or narrative of history, particularly French history. The last involved the adoption of a critical attitude toward the heritage of the Revolution (particularly its Jacobin-dominated phase) and rejection of "neo-Jacobin rhetoric," which was linked to extremism and illiberalism and a polarization that threatened to escalate into civil war (46-7), as well the reconstruction (or invention) of a rival tradition of liberal moderation and civic tolerance. This perception of the past was tied to a perception of the larger dynamics of politics. Liberal democracy was both precious and permanently fragile because politics oscillates between poles of enmity and reconciliation (164-5). The art of politics is to promote reconciliation, without seeking (futilely, and indeed dangerously) to

[18] See Aron, "La définition libérale de la liberté. À propos du livre de F. A. Hayek *The Constitution of Liberty"* (1961), translated as "The Liberal Definition of Liberty: Concerning F. A. Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty"* in Aron, *In Defense of Political Reason*, ed. Daniel J. Mahoney (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 73-91; Aron, *Essai sur les libertés* (1965), translated as *An Essay on Freedom*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: World Publishing, 1970).

[19] Samuel Moyn, "Before—and Beyond—the Liberalism of Fear," in Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess, eds. *Utopianism and Realism: The Political Thought of Judith Shklar* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 24; quoted Stewart 245

[20] Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). For a discussion of Rosenblatt's work, see H-Diplo Roundtable XXI-4, https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-4.

[21] See, for example, Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); "Human Rights and the Crisis of Liberalism," in Stephen Hopgood, Jack Snyder, and Leslie Vinjamuri, eds. *Human Rights Futures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 261-82.

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wholly overcome conflict. To reconcile conflict with peace requires a rejection of self-righteousness, dogmatism, and the partisan fury that they foment; and a "willingness to rethink old principles in new circumstances" (245).

Aron's embrace of this vision of history and politics reflected a philosophy of history which saw human possibilities as constrained, but maintained that human beings possess a margin of freedom and thus unpredictability. There was, he insisted, no more reason to trust that 'collective history' would be ultimately meaningful and complete, than that the life of any individual would be: "Humanity can be carried away by a cosmic catastrophe as can our child by illness."[22] This, for Aron, imposed a responsibility, for those committed to political action to judge and act without the guidance of any infallible philosophy, seduced neither by despair nor by promises of complete victory or future paradise; and supported the "virile and pessimistic humanism" that Aron proposed as the preferable alternative to historical "myths" of progress –or conservative counsels of complacency or despair (243. quoting Aron in 1952).[23]This conception of history differs markedly from that embraced by many earlier and later liberals. It not only defined Aron's liberalism, but distinguished it from others. At the same time, as I have suggested above, Aron's embrace of postwar economic prosperity, and the idea of a future marked by both open-ended economic growth and the gradual improvement of socio-economic conditions (even if these were contingent rather than guaranteed) raises the question of just how far this liberal philosophy of history did—or could—break with more optimistic liberal theories of progress.

Stewart's study allows us to appreciate better the history of Aron's liberal politics; it also points the way for a deeper consideration of the politics of his distinctively liberal history and the challenges and resources that this may provide for later generations who confront their own threats of existential catastrophe and challenges of political judgment.

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[22] "Three Forms of Historical Intelligibility" (1972), in Aron, *Politics and History*, trans. Miriam Bernheim Conant (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1984), 58, 61. This was unusually, if tacitly, self-revealing: Aron's daughter had died of leukemia in 1950.

[23] Aron indicated his sense of the limitations of both radical or "millenarian" and conservative or "Machiavellian" political philosophies of history in "History and Politics" (1949), translated in Aron, *Politics and History*, 237-248. Here he also proposed a "Progressive" politics (shaped by commitment to a Kantian regulative ideal) as the alternative to Machiavellian and Millenarian approaches—while acknowledging that this approach, too, had flaws.

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Review by Daniel Mahoney, Assumption College

Iain Stewart's intellectual history of Raymond Aron's political reflection covers the full range of Aron's life and thought with impressive learning and a command of the principal sources. The book is well written and is generally free from undue polemics. It has several notable strengths: an attentiveness to Aron's earliest writings from the 1920s and early 1930s that is thorough, but is perhaps too convinced of their ultimate importance; a recognition that Aron's much vaunted liberalism often draws on conservative and extra-liberal sources (although this recognition is marred by a barely concealed suspicion of non-liberal wisdom); and the book includes a fine if succinct discussion of Aron's turn from the excessive historical relativism of his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*,[1] a turn partly indebted to the German-American political philosopher Leo Strauss, and that is at the heart of Aron's important recovery of the "classical" dimensions of Montesquieu's and Alexis de Tocqueville's thought (191-200). There are other fine moments, including a lucid account of Aron's indebtedness to and dialogue in the 1930s with Robert Marjolin, a liberal socialist who rejected ideological posturing and who genuinely understood the workings of modern political economy (9 and 125-128).

There is also much of value in Stewart's account of the revival of liberal and anti-totalitarian thought in the France of the 1970s and 1980s. Stewart has some choice words to say about the dialectical character of the new anti-totalitarian political philosophizing of that period; thinkers as diverse as Claude Lefort and Pierre Manent understood both the opposition between democracy and totalitarianism and their complicity in the unfolding of certain pathological modern political possibilities (222-225). Stewart's discussion of the recovery of the 'political,' a recovery indebted to Aron but taking distinctive forms in Lefort, Manent, François Furet, and Marcel Gauchet, is generally on mark.[2] Stewart's discussion is largely commendable but is undermined by the slight suspicion, one that is not ultimately borne out, that there is some unpleasant Schmittian underpinning to Aron's humane and measured recovery of the political perspective against various forms of socio-economic and historicist reductionism.

In the end, however, Stewart's book gets things largely right: Aron, as Julian Freund noticed in 1964, has an ample place for the conciliatory *and* agonistic dimensions of political life (see the discussion on 158). But a book that was based upon philosophical analysis, and thus the question of truth, would have involved an engagement with Aron's truly authoritative analysis of the issue, the 1960 essay "Thucydides and the Historical Narrative"[3] where Aron's account of the political owes nothing to Schmitt and everything to Aristotle and Thucydides. With the classics, Aron identified politics at its best with "reason, virtue, and peace" ("achieved only in brief happy periods"). On one level, war is a "negation" of politics, on another level, the true statesman never allows the passions of war to escape, or fully escape, 'political' control.[4] Such are the lessons Aron drew from Aristotle, Thucydides, Montesquieu, and von Clausewitz. Neither a pacifist nor *Machtpolitiker*, Aron embodied the moderation and prudence inherent in the political perspective. Discussions of the German right-wing political philosopher and sometime Nazi apologist Carl Schmitt in this context, as if his "concept of the political" is exhaustive, are largely an unneeded digression (99-100). In and of itself the fact that Aron read Schmitt in 1931 proves nothing.

[1] Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: An Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961). The book was originally published in French in 1938.

[2] A fuller discussion of that issue, more concerned with political philosophy than the history of ideas, can be found in my essay on "The New Liberalism" in *The Cambridge History of French Thought*. See Daniel J. Mahoney, "The New Liberalism," in Michael Moriarity and Jeremy Jennings, *The Cambridge History of French Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 446-455.

[3] Raymond Aron, translated and edited by Miriam Bernheim Conant, "Thucydides and the Historical Narrative," in *Politics and History* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 20-46.

[4] Aron, translated and edited by Miriam Bernheim Conant, "Thucydides and the Historical Narrative," 24-25.

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But there are a series of significant flaws that limit the book's ability to truly do justice to Aron. By approaching Aron through the moderately reductive lens of 'ideas in context' (not a full-fledged historicism, to be sure) Stewart does not raise the question of whether Aron's political thought provides a cogent and truthful account of human nature, modern politics, the totalitarian assault on human liberty or dignity, or the specter of nihilism, of cultural and civilizational repudiation that so concerned Aron after the 'May events' of 1968. Nor is there any recognition of Aron's greatness, or even obvious sympathy for him as a human being or thinker. Totalitarianism is dismissed as a flawed and polemical concept that has "been notoriously fuzzy in practice" (77). Jeanne Hersch, the student of Karl Jaspers and a thoughtful and eloquent Swiss philosopher herself, saw in Aron "the prince of Truth"[5] because of his courage in seeing through the mendacity at the heart of Communist totalitarianism, and speaking out against it with such clarity and eloquence. While Jean-Paul Sartre famously lauded "fraternity-terror," Aron spoke out in defense of the fundamental human and political liberties, and of the sacredness of the human conscience, and this from an (unconventional) unbeliever.

After 1968, Aron opposed libertarian nihilism that not only celebrated limitless individual autonomy but saw in what Roger Scruton has called the "culture of repudiation"[6] an opportunity to reject the entire moral, political, spiritual, and cultural inheritance of the Western world. On this occasion at least, Aron stood with President Charles de Gaulle, an authentic patriot and conservative anti-totalitarian, against the cults of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara. Most of all, Aron practiced what he preached, not a false, unachievable and undesirable neutrality or objectivity that passed over the moral dimensions of political life, but a conception of fairness or equity that belongs to humane and balanced political judgment.

Aron was one of the greatest anti-Communists of the twentieth century but he approached the Marxism of Marx in exactly the same spirit. But Stewart acknowledges no greatness in Aron and, more often or not, suggests that Aron was somewhat soft on fascism (rather than opposing demagogic 'anti-fascist' ideology), or actually drew from intellectual currents outside a decayed and decaying liberalism in the 1930s. It is not clear from this presentation of Aron whether Stewart is arguing that Aron conveys wisdom, and a mode of political analysis and ideological critique that will endure beyond the 'context' of his time. It is hard to answer this question with any surety. The books does not laud Aron, nor does it present something admirable in his 'voice,' his moral-political witness, and his model of political reasoning (which Allan Bloom suggestively labeled "statesmanlike prudence"[7]). One can detect behind this seemingly measured historical account an impugning of Aron for being something less than the pure "liberal" he should have been. In fact, Aron's greatness lies precisely in his capacity and willingness to recover old wisdom, 'conservative' wisdom, at the service of rejuvenating what is best and most enduring in the liberal order. Aron was a liberal admirably bereft of progressivist illusions.

Stewart, like other intellectual historians, argues that the first wave of Aronian scholarship in North America and elsewhere was too admiring, or too Straussian, or insufficiently historical (24). One problem with 'idea in context' method is that few distinctions are made between an author's greatest works and his ephemera and juvenilia. The other is not taking arguments on their own terms. There is always a lingering sense that the original wave of Aronian scholarship was too conservative or conservative liberal, and too uncritical of Aron's fulsome rejection of liberalism decayed into anti-political moral posturing allied to a cheap and facile relativism.

Contra Stewart's argument (24), in my scholarship I fully acknowledge Aron's indispensable debt to Max Weber, the "hero" of his youth, as Pierre Manent has written[8]. Aron's rejection of historical determinism (and his accompanying defense of 'probabilism') and his pessimism regarding the ultimate reconciliation of science and human values owes a great deal to

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[5] See Jeanne Hersch, "Style moral contre 'belle âme'," in *Commentaire* 28 :29 (Février 1985) : 169-173.

[6] Daniel J. Mahoney, "Roger Scruton: Defender of the Soul and Civilization," in *The New Criterion* (March 2020): 14-19.

[7] Allan Bloom, "Raymond Aron: The Last of the Liberals," in *The New Criterion* (September 1985): 34-41.

[8] Pierre Manent, "Aron: Les ateliers de l'histoire," in *L'Express* (30 Octobre 1987), 74.

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Weber. But Stewart himself acknowledges that the mature Aron did not share Weber's extreme pessimism, his radical and nihilistic severing of facts and values, and his pathetic accommodation to Friedrich Nietzsche's 'war of the gods.' Aron was much closer to Aristotle, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, to classic sobriety ancient and modern, in this regard. He believed in the possibility of "reasonable choice" and he practiced and theorized a morality of prudence far from the relativism and expressionism of much German historical thought. I have addressed this issue myself, ignoring neither Aron's permanent debts to Weber or his significant movement away from the Nietzschean undercurrent of his thought, an undercurrent not sufficiently appreciated in mainstream social science or the world of Weber studies, in "Raymond Aron's Model of Democratic Conservatism," chapter nine of my *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order*.[9] In that work I was faithful to Aron's self-understanding, a self-understanding that, in my view, does justice to a truly reasonable and balanced appreciation of reasonable choice as a principled mean between the pathos of decisionism and the allure of absolute certainty in political and moral judgment. In a word, Aron recommends neither relativism nor ideology and other misplaced forms of absolutism.

Let me offer one other illustrative example. Stewart and I (in the work cited above) both pay a good deal of attention to Aron's June 1939 address before the French Philosophical Society on "Democratic States and Totalitarian States." I argue that this is the first time where Aron spoke fully in his recognizably "mature" voice: his defense of beleaguered liberal societies is also a defense of "democratic conservatism" against every form of revolutionary nihilism and dictatorship. Like Hersch, I see the young Aron, who was 34 years old at the time, as "the Prince of Truth," on this occasion and so many others (and I say that with no sentimentality, and in the spirit of true science, not hagiography). He admirably and courageously defends political and economic liberty while criticizing "abstract moralism" and "the ideas of 1789." He rejects both the Machiavellian manipulation of souls, and a pacifist spirit that will surely allow the totalitarians to triumph.[10] The reader can compare our two analyses (for Stewart's see 84-96). Where I see one of the great articulations of conservative liberal wisdom in the twentieth century, Stewart sees a defense of liberal societies that owes precious little to liberalism (87).

In Aron's appeal in the same address to "the supreme values of the western tradition—respect for the person, for the the spirit," (quoted on 95) Stewart sees an illiberal appeal to Catholic and other extra-liberal currents of thought. In Aron's evocation of the human soul, I see a thoughtful, sensible, and wise bringing together of liberal and traditional wisdom. Rejecting Machiavellian or Nietzschean cynicism and humanitarian softness or cowardice, Aron's evocation of the need for decent respect for persons in a regime of law does justice, at one and the same time to the Kantian, biblical, and liberal traditions. His is a conservative-minded liberalism that is much better and truer than the decayed, quasi-relativistic, and anti-political doctrine that too often goes by that name then and now. Stewart's analysis of the 1939 address is thorough and not without merits. But by focusing upon extremist influences on Aron's thought, he significantly underplays the conservative liberalism that can make a whole of all of Aron's political reflection from the end of the 1930s to his death in the fall of 1983 (and including his harsh but accurate judgment of May 1968, also). I would then argue that anti-totalitarianism did not in fact weaken liberalism in the twentieth century, as Stewart claims (243). It allowed liberalism to overcome its drift toward relativism and nihilism in order to defend a civilization, at once liberal and Christian, that was eminently worthy of defense. Anti-totalitarianism, understood in Aron's capacious moral and political framework, in no way constricted or diminished liberalism (243). It elevated it and gave it a much-needed conservative cast. In any case, I welcome Stewart's book for invigorating a debate where I believe political philosophy, and morally serious political history, must play a prominent role. When I reread Aron I am reminded that seeing things as they are sometimes demands the necessity to renew the human capacity for admiration.

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[9] Daniel J. Mahoney, "Raymond Aron's Model of Democratic Conservatism," in *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2010), 161-183. See 164-165 for my discussion of Aron and Weber.

[10] Raymond Aron, "États democratiques et États totalitaires," in Aron, *Penser la liberté, penser la démocratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

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Review by Sophie Marcotte-Chénard, Political Science, Carleton University

Books that diagnose the crisis of contemporary liberal democracies have now become a common trope in our intellectual landscape.[1] Among intellectual historians of various kinds (this is far from a unified discipline), a reassessment of the historical origins, variations, and evolution of the concept of liberalism is one tool among many that can be used in the attempt to make sense of the current situation of crisis. Iain Stewart's most recent work, *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century*, offers such a critical examination of the liberal tradition while avoiding the pitfalls of superficial or easy analogies with the past. Instead, he proposes a rigorous, detailed, and impartial analysis of the development of the tradition of French liberalism through Raymond Aron's intellectual and political engagement from the late 1920s to the postwar period, leading to an investigation into the liberal Aronian heritage among the next generation of French political thinkers.

Aron's lifelong commitment to the principles of political liberalism makes him the ideal candidate for such an inquiry, as he is often considered to be one of the leading figures of "Cold War liberalism" alongside thinkers such as Karl Popper or Isaiah Berlin. It is, however, precisely this immediate association of Aron with the liberal doctrine—defined broadly as an insistence on progress, rationality, liberty, and individualism (5)—that Stewart questions. As he rightly notes: "The importance of Raymond Aron in the history of French liberalism is universally acknowledged, frequently celebrated, but seldom subjected to critical scrutiny" (167). His book thus takes the form of a deconstruction—and eventually, a reconstruction—of the idea of a "French liberal revival." (229). In the process, he dismantles some myths surrounding Aron's intellectual and political positions on the basis of an extensive historical research, drawing on the original sources in French. He thus offers an intellectual history of French liberalism through Aron's confrontation with political events and ideas from the interwar and postwar periods, taking seriously his journalistic work and interest in daily politics. The book fulfills its promise in that regard, as the author suggests a more complex portrait of Aron's commitment to the French liberal tradition—and how he departs from it.

Through the exploration of specific intellectual debates, the political and social crisis in Europe following the collapse of the Weimar republic in the 1930s (Chap. 2); the rise of antitotalitarian theories in the 1940s (Chap. 3); the "end of ideology" debates in the postwar period (Chap. 4); the contentious construction of a tradition of French political sociology and the crisis of legitimacy of political philosophy in the 1960s (Chap. 5); and the fragmented posterity of the Aronian heritage in the French liberal revival of the 1970s (Chap. 6), Stewart interrogates the "liberalizing" interpretation of Aron's work. For instance, he reminds us in the second chapter that the reading of Montesquieu and Alexis de Tocqueville had only a marginal and late impact on the development of his thought (119) and that one should rather consider his philosophy of history exposed in his dissertation published in 1938 under the title *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*,[2] to fully understand the roots of his heterodox liberalism. Stewart even suggests that Aron's epistemological and political pluralism, that is to say his insistence on the plurality, equivocity, and diversity of conceptions of the world, might not be primarily liberal in origins. He brings to light all that Aron owes to Max Weber's writings (24) or to the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (55-56). Moreover, his acquaintance with illiberal thinkers such as Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger might explain in part Aron's critical stance toward democratic values in the late 1930s; and this in turn brings to light other tendencies in the development of his early thought.

[1] See, for instance, Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019); Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018); David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

[2] Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire. Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

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In a similar fashion, Stewart also challenges the conventional narrative according to which Aron acted as the instigator of a French liberal tradition with the publication in 1965 of his Sorbonne lectures, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*.[3] As the author rightly indicates in Chapter 5, although many of Aron's students—Claude Lefort, Pierre Manent— have indeed contributed to a rediscovery of thinkers such as Tocqueville, it has not led to a homogenous liberal revival (209). Lefort is a theorist of democracy more than liberalism; and Manent's work often expresses a conservative rather than liberal sensibility despite his well-known work in the intellectual history of liberalism. In that regard, the author successfully brings to light the fragmented and diverse character of Aron's posterity.

Since the book neither offers undeserved praise nor uses a gratuitous laudatory tone, it is only fitting that the reviewer gives as much consideration to the author and engages in a critical evaluation of the work rather than simply go on to praise its merits (which are many). In the spirit of engaging in an intellectual conversation, I wish to raise three sets of questions pertaining to the approach the author uses in his historical analysis; the implications of examining Aron's contribution through the framework of liberal thought; and finally, the fundamental motivations for the author's investigation, that is to say, the question of *why* we should still read Aron today.

First, while the author never explicitly discusses his approach, his specific practice of intellectual history appears to rely on two main methodological claims: first, that Aron's practical engagement as well as his relationships with his contemporaries take hermeneutical precedence over other types of historical evidence; and second, that the historian should focus on the historical continuity rather than the ruptures in Aron's intellectual development. From this perspective, the analysis focuses on the intellectual figures with whom Aron was in direct or indirect contact—such as Célestin Bouglé, Alain, Léon Brunschvicg or Vilfredo Pareto. This same approach leads the author to insist on the importance of Aron's early socialist positions (25-26, 30-31, 48) in the constitution of his postwar "intellectual ethics" and liberal posture, a fact that, according to him, has been neglected by commentators. One cannot but remark that Aron himself never rejected or denied this continuity. On the contrary, he himself stated several times that his discovery of politics, his philosophical readings, and his early works had a lasting impact on his practice as a journalist and political thinker.[4]

Stewart's type of historical inquiry presupposes that the main sources of influence in the development of Aron's thought come from other French and European intellectuals with whom he was acquainted. However, one could argue that the two main sources from which Aron draws his specific approach to the understanding of the political are the works of thought themselves—the writings of thinkers such as Karl Marx or Weber, who accompanied him since his early years as a scholar—and the historical experience of political events themselves, such as the rise of Nazism and the observation of the rising tensions between European nations in the interwar period. In other words, understanding the roots of Aron's epistemological and political pluralism, his ethics of responsibility, or his posture of practical prudence might not always require going through the mediation of other intellectuals' works, even though Aron might have read them or been aware of them. One could therefore make the case that the specificity and originality of Aron's posture come from his attention to historical reality itself more than from his dialogue with other intellectual figures. As Pierre Manent notes, Aron always recognized the co-dependence of "political events and the adventures of the mind."[5] While the book offers a convincing analysis of Aron's conversations with his contemporaries, it might not fully account for Aron's intellectual development.

[3] Raymond Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

[4] See for instance Raymond Aron, "Ma carrière. Note du 6 janvier 1983," in *Histoire et politique. Textes et témoignages* (Paris: Julliard, 1985), 517-519.

[5] Aron a toujours fait "sentir la dépendance des événements politiques par rapport aux aventures de l'esprit" (Pierre Manent, "Raymond Aron éducateur", in *Enquête sur la démocratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 218 (our translation). In a similar vein, he states that "Aron scruta la vie politique avec une attention infatigable jusqu'à son dernier jour, parce qu'il ne pouvait prendre sa retraite du lieu

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A second reservation has to do with the angle from which the author considers Aron's contribution. The originality of Stewart's inquiry lies in the fact he is the first to propose an in-depth history of the political thinker's intellectual journey through the prism of his liberalism. He argues that this does justice to Aron's work (13-14), insofar as liberal topics were recurrent themes in his books, conferences, and seminars as well as practical stances in political and intellectual debates. There is no doubt that in a French intellectual landscape that has often been dominated by the question of democratic equality, Aron has been a proponent and advocate of what we can call 'liberal values' (as seen in his commitment to individual freedoms, his interest for the question of liberty, his pluralism and his knowledge of the liberal tradition[6]).

However, one might wonder to what extent this interpretive choice also limits the understanding of Aron's work. In fact, this decision involves some sacrifices, including leaving aside the "realist" dimension of Aron's thought—especially in the field of international relations[7]—or the Kantian and neo-Kantian elements of his critical rationalism, or even his classical "Thucydidean" approach to the understanding of political events.[8] Aron himself was always suspicious of predetermined categories of thought and was reluctant to claim any formal allegiance to any liberal "school" or doctrine.[9] His method of understanding history in the making never stemmed from a constituted philosophical system, but was inspired instead by thinkers such as Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Carl von Clausewitz, or Weber, who meditated directly on political things.[10] Moreover, several of the thinkers who had a lasting impact on his own thought belong to a "realist" rather than liberal tradition. This brings us to the question as to whether the author fall prey of the trap he seeks to denounce, that of putting Aron in a Procrustean bed of liberalism. In a 1979 article, Aron claims that the "quest for the true meaning of words in *ism*" ultimately leads to "arbitrary conclusions."[11] There is no doubt that I. Stewart would agree with this conclusion. But while he never claims in his book to offer a definitive account of what liberalism is, his analysis often presupposes a somewhat fixed definition of what a liberal position entails and then proceeds to evaluate whether Aron's posture corresponds to it.

That being said, the author is well aware of the limitations of such a framework and often warns the readers that it does not exhaust the interpretive paths to an understanding of Aron's political and intellectual positions. One is still left wondering if the absence of a systematic treatment of Aron's liberalism until now can in part be explained by the fact that while Aron displays a "liberal sensibility" (47), he does not really propose a liberal theory per se. Aron's liberalism in action was a practical rather than theoretical posture, which makes any attempt to assess the nature of his liberal views even more difficult. One could even add that while the author makes a convincing case for historical continuity in the way Aron

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où l'humanité fait l'épreuve d'elle-même." (Pierre Manent, Préface to Aron, *Liberté et égalité. Cours au Collège de France* (Paris: EHESS, 2013), 5-6).

[6] See Aron, *Liberté et égalité*; *Essais sur les libertés*; *Études politiques*.

[7] See Pierre Hassner, "Raymond Aron: Too Realistic to be a Realist?" *Constellations* 14:4 (2007): 498-505.

[8] See Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris: Julliard, 1983), 826-830.

[9] Aron, *Liberté et égalité,* 48.

[10] Aron makes a distinction between thinkers who arrive at politics through the mediation of a philosophical system (Plato, Hobbes) and those who approach political life directly (Aron, "De la vérité historique des philosophies politiques," in *Études politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 48.

[11] Aron, "Remarques sur l'historisme-herméneutique," in *Culture, science et développement. Mélanges en l'honneur de Charles Morazé* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 185.

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approached political phenomena, the political sociologist's skepticism toward any established doctrine should lead us toward a more complex and ambiguous interpretation of the roots of his philosophical and political positions.

The focus on liberal thought also obscures in part the decisive influence of German thought *after* the Second World War. The tradition of the German critical philosophy of history remained central to Aron's approach as a philosopher, political sociologist and journalist, an element that is surprisingly absent from the last chapters of the book, given that the author argues for continuity between Aron's early and late works. Ideas about the primacy of the particular over the universal, increased attention to contingency in the unfolding of events, the refusal of abstract concepts in favour of lived experience, and the insistence on the changing horizon of socio-historical reality are all inherited from neo-Kantian sources (Heinrich Rickert, Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, Weber) and remained constant preoccupations for him, even in his work in the 1970s and 1980s.[12] I n a similar fashion, although he eventually distanced himself from some of the aspects of Weber's thought, Aron's political sociology still remained indebted to the concepts crafted by the German thinker.[13]

There are, however, some salient liberal features in Aron's thought that Stewart leaves aside and that could have further reinforced his claim. For instance, Aron's lifelong commitment to a form of the Kantian regulatory "idea of Reason" corresponds to the insistence on rationality that Michael Freeden describes as a key element of liberal thought. Aron's claim about the primacy of a form of political rationality in explaining political action also places him among the canon of contemporary liberal thinkers.[14] One could even argue that his defence of an (albeit limited) form of theoretical and practical rationality was already present in his early work on critical philosophy of history.[15] This in turn challenges the author's interpretation of the existentialism and relativism of Aron's interwar writings. While one of Aron's main enemies in his dissertation was in fact determinism, which led him to insist on the relativity of knowledge, he also opposed historical relativism as a doctrine and philosophy.[16]

In sum, although the author proposes a critical reassessment of Aron's relationship with liberal thought and disagrees with the more 'conventional' interpretations regarding the sources of Aron's liberalism, he finds himself in agreement with the majority of commentators in that he ultimately recognizes the central role of the political sociologist in that tradition. In a way, the analysis of Aron's contribution to, or departure from, liberal thought can become a restrictive framework. It would have been interesting to go beyond the liberal/illiberal divide and to examine what Pierre Hassner has called the "plural rationality[17]" of Aron's intellectual and political commitments.

Leaving aside these minor considerations, the strengths of the book are numerous. The author succeeds in painting a nuanced portrait of the continuities, changes of perspective, and variations in Aron's intellectual engagement throughout his career. The book displays an impressive mastery of primary and secondary sources, relies on extensive historical research,

[12] See Aron, *Mémoires*, 158; Aron, "Ma carrière. Note du 6 janvier 1983," 517-519; Aron, *Leçons sur l'histoire*. *Cours du Collège de France* (Paris: de Fallois, 1989).

[13] See Aron, *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*.

[14] See, for instance, Aron, "La rationalité politique", *Commentaire* 56 (2016) : 725-742.

[15] See the section in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* dedicated to the "overcoming" (dépassement) of historical relativism; see also his secondary thesis, *La philosophie critique de l'histoire*, in which he criticizes the relativistic consequences of Dilthey's position.

[16] On that note, see Sylvie Mesure's interpretation in her introduction to the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*.

[17] See Pierre Hassner, "Raymond Aron et la philosophie des relations internationales," in Audier and Baruch (eds.), *Raymond Aron philosophe dans l'histoire*, 63.

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and offers anglophone readers access to Aron's early works and conferences that are not yet available in English. The book will be of interest not only to readers of Aron or historians interested in that historical period, but to a wider audience that is preoccupied with the meaning and tribulations of contemporary liberalism.

A question nonetheless remains in the background: why should we still read Aron today? The answer the author provides remains ambiguous. As a good intellectual historian, Iain Stewart has some reservations toward any normative or prescriptive argument and does not want to present the Aronian posture as a potential solution to the current crisis of liberalism (242). Yet he cannot but recognize that the latter's way of understanding politics transcends the historical context in which it takes place (242). The judgment of the author, which presents itself as critical at the beginning of the book, seems to converge in a form of admiration that many commentators of the French thinker share. As Stewart suggests in the conclusion, Aron helps us rethink the problematic relationship between liberalism and democracy, which seems to be at the centre of the current political crisis. He adds that "perhaps it is the style of Aron's intellectual engagement more than the contents of his thought that might offer an inspiration at a time when expertise is routinely denigrated and political debate often descends into a dialogue of the deaf" (245).

The reader wishes for a more in-depth analysis of that proposition: what is the nature of this "style" of Aron's intellectual engagement? What are the conditions of possibility of that type of understanding politics in uncertain times? How can one theorize this form of political judgment that seems necessary now more than ever? What lessons can we actually learn from observing this approach in action? The historical inquiry that the author conducts leaves more philosophically inclined readers wanting more: what are the fundamental motivations for writing such a book? It seems as though its primary function is not simply to trace the steps of Aron's intellectual path or to assess his place in the tradition of twentieth-century liberal thought, but also to consider what the proponents of the French liberal tradition can bring to contemporary debates on the status of liberal ideas and their future. This is why, after all, we still read Aron today.

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Review by Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, Dartmouth College

The previous generation of scholarship devoted to Raymond Aron in the English-speaking world was highly moralized and often triumphalist. The cause was the fall of Communism, which led some of its victors to claim that Aron had always been right in his judgements about extreme ideologies, such as Marxism, and therefore offered intellectual guidance for navigating whatever new threats might appear in the post-Cold War era. Daniel Mahoney's *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron*, which was published in 1992,[1] for instance, called for Aronian intellectual moderation to confront what he considered to be the intellectual fanaticism of post-modern thought. Hence, the title of the book's afterword: "The Permanent Contemporaneity of Aron's thought." It was permanent because Aron was a timeless thinker of liberal moderation, whose ideas, as the Cold War demonstrated, were correct, and therefore could be download for a new area.

The culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s in connection to U.S. higher education drove many analyses of Aron's thought. The same kinds of concerns were on display a few year later in Brian C. Anderson's *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political*, which once again viewed Aron's work through the prism of 'political reason' and 'prudence.'[2] In a piece that appeared in *First Things*, a few years after his book was published, Anderson argued that America had become the Left's new messianic hope, which in turn made it all the more important for Aron's work to receive a proper hearing

> A cursory look at the United States—with the most liberal abortion laws in the democratic world, currents of multiculturalism coursing through the "best" universities and destroying what might be left of a classical liberal education, and statist models of economic and environmental regulation forwarded by well-meaning political elites...Such an environment is ill-disposed to the penetrating, dispassionate vision of Raymond Aron.[3]

This scholarship devoted to Raymond Aron during the 1990s was moralistic to the core—something Aron was not—and it was driven by a socially conservative, and at times Catholic, agenda.

It is for this reason, in part, that Iain Stewart's fantastic new book, *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century* is so important. It moves beyond polemics to try to locate the nature of Aron's liberalism over the long course of his scholarly career, which spanned nearly six decades. Stewart's aim is not to use Aron thought's for waging ideological warfare, but to provide a balanced historical and contextualized account of his subject. In this sense Stewart shares much more in common with the caution that marked Aron's own scholarly works compared with that of his admirers from the 1990s.

The book deepens our understanding of Aron in many ways. First, the significant influence that French non-conformism of the interwar period played on Aron's thought has never been given the kind of attention that Stewart demonstrates. In particular, he shows that Aron's invocation of the notion of *ni droite, ni gauche* most likely came by way of the planism of the politically compromised thinker Hendrik de Man, along with the arguments of other non-comformists. Perhaps this would not be that significant if Aron had stopped using the notion, but as Stewart shows, he invoked being neither on the political

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[1] Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

[2] Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

[3] Anderson, "The Aronian Renewal," *First Things* (March 1995), http://www.firstthings.com/article/1995/03/003-the-aronian-renewal.

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left or political right in his most popular book, namely the *Opium of the Intellectuals* (1955).[4] Some of this ground has been covered by Serge Audier, and also by Tommaso Milani,[5] but as of yet no one has unpacked the whole story about non-conformism as it relates to Aron as Stewart has. This is significant because it shows the rather peculiar inspirations behind Aron's idea of the end of ideology, which Stewart argues were illiberal.

Second, Stewart offers some brilliant insights on the role that pluralism played in Aron's political thought. It seems to me that as a philosophical notion, pluralism was a consequence of Aron's historicism, as demonstrated in his dissertation, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*.[6] Stewart shows, however, that Aron's used the idea to appeal to French Catholics in the hope of including them in his post-war anti-totalitarian coalition. This is important, Stewart argues, because Catholics had good reason to be hostile to liberalism under the French Third Republic due to its known anti-clericalism. By focusing instead on political pluralism rather than say, secularism, rationalism, or individualism—things we often associate with a kind of liberalism—Aron was successfully able to craft his own brand of liberalism in a manner that appealed to Catholics. A few questions arise here. Stewart seemingly wants to suggest that Aron's pluralism had some kind of origins in interwar Catholicism, but one could argue that this was in fact the result of Aron's philosophical pluralism, which was based on his interaction with the German historicist tradition.

Second, and this point will be expanded below, Aron made it quite clear that the pluralism of his dissertation took political form in *The Opium of the Intellectuals.* But in the conclusion of *Le Grande Schisme* (1948) he wrote:

> The expression plurality of systems of interpretations that I used ten years ago in the *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, and which at the time was taken to be academic, today reflects a political reality. The conflicts between parties have developed into metaphysical conflicts. The whole of history has been called into question by the alternatives of our tragic age. . . An open philosophy, which humbly confesses the limits of our knowledge, avoids both the rationalist pride and biological determinism, and ends neither in triumphant certainty nor a cry of despair.[7]

This passage occurs in the context of Aron's thinking of the new post-war world order or planetary systems. In other words, pluralism was connected to Aron's understanding of international relations, a subject that Stewart's book struggles to connect to Aron's major writing on international relations, especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

And third, Stewart's book presents Aron's influence on the French liberal revival in a new light. In particular, Stewart shows that the anti-totalitarian coalition that Aron sought after the Second World War involved a different reading of the French Revolutionary tradition, namely a liberal one, compared to the Marxist interpretation, which he traces back to the French anti-fascist movement of the 1930s—an interpretation which Aron at the time criticized. Stewart suggests that Aron wanted to bracket the Revolution's reformist liberal phase from its Jacobin revolutionary phase. In pointing this out, Stewart is able to demonstrate the crucial influence that Aron had on François Furet's understanding of the Revolution, which, to my

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[4] See the afterword titled, "The End of the Ideological Age?" in Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 305-324.

[5] Serge Audier talks about Aron's connection to Hendrik de Man in *Raymond Aron: La Démocratie conflictuelle* (Paris: Éditions Michalon). He also talks about the "X-Mines Group" of the Ecole Polytechniquee, as well as the Centre de documentation sociale vis-à-vis Aron's involvement in early neoliberal circles: *The Walter Lippmann Colloquium: The Birth of Neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 3-54. Tommaso Milani has published numerous articles on de Man's influence in Western Europe; see his book, *Hendrik de Man and Social Democracy: The Idea of Planning in Western Europe, 1914–1940* (London: Palgrave, 2020).

[6] Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire. Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

[7] Raymond Aron, *La grande schisme*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 328.

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mind, has never been discussed in such detail. In other words, a key element of the French liberal revival, namely Furet's groundbreaking work on the French Revolution, was already prefigured in Aron's thinking about the French Revolution, which Stewart is able to trace back to the interwar period.

In the spirit of understanding and constructive dialogue I will raise a few questions. I have worked extensively on the reception of the controversial German jurist Carl Schmitt's thought in France and was impressed by Stewart's discussion of how Schmitt's "Further Development of the Total State in Germany"[8] influenced Aron's thinking of democracy in the late 1930s, as specifically demonstrated in his 1939 article, "Democratic States and Totalitarian States." But I wonder if Stewart overstates Schmitt's influence on Aron, especially in his attempt to give a Schmittian reading to Aron's understanding of the political in *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, when Aron seems to have been drawling on other sources. Unlike so many others, and specifically Hans Morgenthau, Aron was never afraid to openly cite Schmitt, even in his major writings such as *Peace and War*. He criticized Schmitt in various places in *Peace and War* and substantially in *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War*. He also criticized him in their correspondence and quite regularly at that. But reading Stewart's book one gets the impression at times that Aron was basically a Schmittian who was covering over this, along with other illiberal influences, with French liberal thinkers such as Alexis de Tocqueville. As it concerns the so-called French Tocqueville revival, this kind subterranean Schmittian influence on French liberalism has been detected in various places by Tristan Storme, such as in his 2011 article *Carl Schmitt, lecteur de Tocqueville*.[9] My impression is that Stewart's argument pushes the Schmittian influence too far in its stressing of the illiberal inspirations of Aron's thought, and that the real place to look for Schmitt's influence on Aron concerns his thinking on international relations.

This leads to my major question, which concerns why Stewart prioritizes certain context over others, which ultimately seems to always focus on the illiberal influences on Aron's thought, while ignoring or downplaying other contexts which are not reactionary at all, perhaps most notably the lasting influence of [we need a title/label for him }Immanuel Kant on his thought. Take for instance, Aron's involvement with the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in the 1930s, the journal of the Frankfurt School. If I am not mistaken, Aron wrote 30 pieces for the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in the 1930s. He carried on a correspondence with Walter Benjamin. He helped provide housing for Frankfurt School members who fled to France after the rise of Adolf Hitler. The *Centre de documentation sociale*, an institution that Stewart studies at length, was in fact the temporary home for the Frankfurt School at this time. Stewart mentions a few pieces of Aron's which appeared in the journal without mentioning the significance of these essays or what role the institution might have had on his thought. This context is worked out in full detail in Matthias Oppermann's important book, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland*.[10]

The choice of context also arises in terms of Stewart's analysis of the origins of Aron's thinking about secular religion, which he sees as either being influenced by Hendrik de Man or Catholic thinkers who associated Marxism with a political religion. But in this regard he does not discuss Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*,[11] which had a significant influence not only on Aron, but on many members of the Congress for Cultural Freedom who promoted the end of ideology, such as Daniel Bell and Edward Shils. The impression Stewart gives is that the idea of political theology or secular religion is a conservative Catholic notion, at least in terms of its influence on Aron, but it was also a trope that was significantly used by numerous Jewish thinkers of the interwar period and post-war periods, many of whom were anything but illiberal, as explained in detail

[8] Available in Carl Schmitt, Four Essays, 1931–1938, ed. and trans. Simona Draghici (Washington, D.C.: Plutarch Press, 1999).

[9] Anaïs Camus et Tristan Storme, "Carl Schmitt, lecteur de Tocqueville" *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 49:1 (2001): 7-35.

[10] Matthias Oppermann, *Raymond Aron und Deutschland: Die Verteidigung Der Freiheit und Das Problem Des Totalitarismus* (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag), 2008.

[11] Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1929).

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by the historian Benjamin Lazier in his book, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars.*[12]

As mentioned, in terms of context, Aron connected not only his dissertation to the main claims of the end of ideology, but also his thinking on international relations. Stewart offers some interesting arguments for why political realism accounted for Aron's defense of Algerian independence. He also has written elsewhere on Aron's thinking during the 1970s about then U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's views of international relations. And yet it may be that by focusing primarily on illiberal sources of the interwar period, the book may overlook the origins of Aron's work on IR theory, which might be the crucial aspect of what makes Aron a Cold War liberal, specifically his views of world order and containing Communism. Aron was a founding father of IR theory, a discipline that he played a major role in inventing specifically for the Cold War. Outside of Schmitt, with whom Aron dealt explicitly, Stewart's book does not give us much by way of understanding how Aron's liberalism related to global politics, which he spent so much time discussing. This is in all likelihood due to Stewart's tracing of Aron's essential thought back to the 1920s and 1930s. At one point Stewart states, "Toward the end of his life Raymond Aron was usually dismissive of his political views as an undergraduate," and I have to imagine that this is a very common sentiment among scholars and is hardly surprising. What is perhaps more surprising is the claim that Aron arrived at many of his key ideas at the age of nineteen or twenty, and that despite the world being turned upside down by the Second World War, he remained faithful to certain ideas of his youth for the rest of his life.

One place to look would be at Aron's relationship with the Marxist philosopher Alexandre Kojeve, whom Aron thought to be the smartest human being he had ever met. Aron was, of course, a participant in Kojeve's famous seminars on Hegel, carried on a regular dialogue with him until Kojeve died shortly after the 1968 Student Protest Movement in France. There are good reasons for believing that Aron's thinking about global politics in the 1930s was fundamentally shaped by his debate with Kojeve, a Marxist, who was himself in discussions with Carl Schmitt, as Jan Werner-Mueller points out in his discussion of Kojeve, Aron, and Schmitt, in his book, *Dangerous Minds.*[13]

I am thus interested to know why Stewart focuses on certain contexts rather than others, especially contexts that prove to be significant for understanding Aron's Cold War liberalism.

For decades Aron wrote columns in *Le Figaro*, published the lectures from his courses in numerous books, and wrote a number of academic tomes. One cannot reasonably focus on all of these sources, which is to say that Stewart is more than justified in focusing on the contexts and sources that he chose. His book is the finest contextualized study of Aron to appear, and offers a much-needed intervention in the scholarship devoted to the subject of French liberalism.

[12] Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[13] Jan-Werner Mueller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven: Yale, 2003).

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Response by Iain Stewart, University College London

I am grateful to Diane Labrosse at H-Diplo for organising this forum, to Or Rosenboim for introducing it, and to Joshua L. Cherniss, Daniel J Mahoney, Sophie Marcotte-Chénard, and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins for their thoughtful responses to my book. The reviewers have been generous with their praise, but of course there is also some criticism and it is this that will occupy my attention in this essay. Instead of responding to each of the reviews individually, I have identified what appear to me the most significant themes, emphasising general methodological questions and the implications of these for what is and is not covered in the book.

Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century makes no claim to being a comprehensive intellectual biography; instead, as the title indicates, the book is concerned specifically with Aron's place in the intellectual history of liberalism during the twentieth century. I recognise that this is "a restrictive framework," as Sophie Marcotte-Chénard puts it, but what interpretative framework is not? Important aspects of Aron's work, such as his international relations theory, are de-centred when approaching Aron from this angle. So it is true that one does not get a full sense of Aron's stature as a political thinker from the book. But most of the topics that I omit are already insightfully covered in the existing scholarship, and this is not the case when it comes to the important historical question of Aron's relationship with liberalism.

What makes this question worth asking is that Aron played a significant role in two defining moments in liberalism's intellectual history during the twentieth century. First, as one of Europe's leading theorists of totalitarianism and the 'end of ideology,' he contributed to a transatlantic reinvention of liberalism whose consequences are the subject of considerable debate within the emerging scholarship on what has come to be known as "Cold War liberalism."[1] Second, Aron's work was an important source of inspiration behind the so-called "French liberal revival" that emerged from the collapse of revolutionary politics among French intellectuals in the mid-to-late 1970s.[2] Although Aron's contribution to these important developments has long been recognised, the question has never previously been subjected to close historical scrutiny. This is the gap that my book attempts to fill.

One of the things that makes the book methodologically distinctive compared to the majority of existing scholarship on Aron is that it is a work of contextualist intellectual history. This inevitably raises questions about why some forms of context are prioritised over others. Joshua Cherniss questions my relatively brief covereage of Aron's Jewishness, while Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins remarks on Aron's relations with the sociologist Karl Mannheim, the philosopher Alexandre Kojève, and the Frankfurt School, all of which I deal with only in passing. Most of this criticism is fair enough, but on the question of Aron's ties to the Frankfurt School I would caution against reading too much into his work for the *Zeitschrift für*

[1] Compare, for example, Jan-Werner Müller, "What Cold War Liberalism Can Teach us Today," *The New York Review of Books*, 26 November 2018, www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/11/26/what-cold-war-liberalism-can-teach-us-today [accessed 3 December 2018]; Samuel Moyn, "Before—and beyond—the liberalism of fear," in Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess, eds., *Between Utopianism and Realism: The Political Thought of Judith Shklar* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2019); Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism from Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 265-277.

[2] See e.g. Mark Lilla, "The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and Its Discontents," *Daedalus* 123 (Spring 1994):129-157; Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 135-57. For a critique of the notion of a 'French liberal revival' see Stephen W. Sawyer and Iain Stewart (eds.), *In Search of the Liberal Moment: Democracy, Anti-Totalitarianism and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

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Sozialforschung. Nearly all of the articles Aron published there in the 1930s were short book reviews and the Frankfurt School intellectuals who knew Aron in Paris appear not to have viewed him as an ideological ally at the time.[3]

In his review Steinmetz-Jenkings provides a helpful survey of the secondary literature on Aron that has developed since the 1990s. The general tendency that he observes is that the wave of scholarship that appeared in the 1990s was often written by conservative political scientists and was promotional and occassionally celebratory in tone, whereas since the turn of the century intellectual historians writing from the left have shown increasing interest in Aron and produced an emergent body of work that is somewhat more critical, without wishing to deny the importance of Raymond Aron's place in the history of twentieth century political thought. I think this is broadly correct, and that my own work on Aron, like that of Steinmetz-Jenkins, fits into the more recent tendency in the secondary literature. However, I would add that for all the differences in method and tone between the first wave of Aron scholarship and my own work, the neo-conservative reading of Aron that emerged in the early 1990s was well-founded. From a historical standpoint, the notion of Aron as 'the first neo-conservative' is closer to the mark than more recent attempts to reclaim Aron for the left.[4] And although I approach this subject from a different political and methodological perspective than Aron's conservative admirers, my understanding of how his engagement with French liberalism related to his early epistemological writings builds on the work of political scientists like Daniel J. Mahoney and Brian C. Anderson.[5]

It is therefore gratifying to read Mahoney's praise for the book in the first half of his review, even if he also has some significant criticism of its methodology and epistemological presuppositions. On the latter theme he writes that:

> Stewart does not raise the question of whether Aron's political thought provides a cogent and truthful account of human nature, modern politics, the totalitarian assault on human liberty or dignity, or the specter of nihilism, of cultural and civilizational repudiation that so concerned Aron after the 'May events' of 1968. Nor is there any recognition of Aron's greatness, or even obvious sympathy for him as a human being or thinker.

Although I disagree that the book is uninterested in the cogency of Aron's thought (chapters two, three and four are all substantially concerned with this), the rest of this passage is accurate. As an intellectual historian I am not interested in questions of essential truth, and in writing the book I was careful to avoid the hagiographical tone of some of the existing literature. This was not because of any lack of admiration for Aron but because more celebratory approaches to this subject can obscure as much as they reveal, especially where Aron's relationship with liberalism is concerned.

The opening words of Nicolas Baverez's introduction to a recent edited volume on Aron provide a good example of this:

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[3] See for instance the correspondence between Aron, Horkheimer and Benjamin over the French translation of the latter's 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' in Walter Benjamin, *Écrits français, ed. Jean-Maurice Monnoyer* (Paris: Gallimard 2003), 162-169. I am grateful to Grey Anderson for bringing this source to my attention.

[4] "It is not an exaggeration to call Aron the first neoconservative." Brian C. Anderson, 'The Aronian renewal', First Things 6 (March 1995), https://www.firstthings.com/article/1995/03/003-the-aronian-renewal [accessed 10 June 2020]. Recent attempts to recover Aron's thought from the left include Gwendal Châton, *Introduction à Raymond Aron* (Paris: Découverte, 2017) and Serge Audier, *Raymond Aron: La démocratie conflictuelle* (Paris: Michalon, 2004).

[5] Brian C. Anderson, *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

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> Raymond Aron is *the* greatest figure in French liberalism of the twentieth century. In the tradition of Montesquieu, Constant, Tocqueville, and Élie Halévy, he is part of the French school of political sociology [...][6]

Obviously, I agree that Raymond Aron is an important figure in twentieth-century French liberalism, but proclamations of this kind have no explanatory value. Baverez seems to take it as given that Aron is the descendant of a venerable French liberal tradition because that is how Aron presented himself in a well-known passage of *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, where he defined a "French school of political sociology" whose main representatives were Montesquieu, Tocqueville, Halévy and himself.[7] Baverez's judgement of Aron's importance in the French liberal tradition is thus just a laudatory rephrasing of Aron's own self-presentation. But what might be good hagiography makes for bad history.

Baverez, Mahoney and other political scientists writing on Aron have made important contributions to scholarship from which I have learnt a great deal. But their work begs the historical question of how and why Aron came to define and align himself with a particular vision of French liberal tradition. For as Aron himself repeatedly acknowledged, the French liberal authors with whom he came to be associated had a negligible influence on the development of his political thought prior to the mid-1950s. Insofar as French liberalism did inform Aron's early political development, this was mainly because he associated his arrival at political maturity with a rejection of the kind of progressive liberalism to which his elders in the interwar academic establishment largely subscribed. Furhermore, the intellectual influences that Aron drew upon to critique the politics of this older generation were mostly non- or explicitly anti-liberal thinkers. This obviously calls into question the idea that Aron was the direct linear descendant of a continuous tradition of French liberal thought.

Marcotte-Chénard is thus right to draw attention to my pre-occupation with Aron's earliest intellectual and political influences, but this is a function of the specific question I am asking in this book; it is not, as she suggests, indicative of any pressupposition about orders of causal priority in intellectual history generally. Marcotte-Chénard also rightly highlights my emphasis on continuity over rupture in Aron's political thought, though she suggests that I oversell the book's originality on this front. I think that she is mistaken on this last point. It is quite true that Aron and his many commentators have consistently emphasised the foundational importance of his experience living in Germany between 1930 and 1933 for his intellectual and poiltical development. I also recognise the importance of this but I do not make any claims to originality on that front; instead it is the book's coverage of Aron's earliest political engagements in the normalien student socialist movement of the late 1920s that is new and, to some readers at least, controversial.

As Steinmetz-Jenkins suggests, what makes this part of the book potentially controversial is that the revisionist socialist and neo-radical milieux in which Aron was politicised as a student were seedbeds for the emergence of a French brand of fascism in the 1930s. It is possible that Aron's retrospective dismissiveness towards his student political engagements served to gloss over something that, viewed in an uncharitable light, could be seen as politically compromising. But however sensitive this topic might potentially be, to draw attention to Aron's early involvement in political revisionism of various kinds is not to cast aspersions. After all, non-conformism's political sequels were heterogeneous: for every Marcel Déat there was an André Philip; for every Bertrand de Jouvenel a Pierre Mendès-France.[8] Aron's interwar ties to different strands of non-conformist

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[6] Nicolas Baverez, "Life and Works: Raymond Aron, Philosopher and Freedom Fighter," in José Colen and Élisabeth Dutartre-Michaut, eds., *The Companion to Raymond Aron* (New York: Palgrave, 2015); 3-14, here 3. Italics in original.

[7] Raymond Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 295.

[8] The classic account of 'non-conformism' is Jean-Louis, *Loubet del Bayle, Les non-conformistes des années 30: une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969). A more recent account can be found in Philip Nord, *France's New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton: Princeto, 2010). Marcel Déat was the figurehead of interwar French neo-socialism and embraced fascist ultra-collaborationism in the 1940s. André Philip was a socialist politician and theorist whose work was influential on the development of French neo-socialism. He played a prominent role in the resistance during the war. Among the

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political revisionism are significant not because they point to a spurious crypto-fascist tendency but because they remind us that he was politicised during a radical breakdown in consensus over what it meant to be a 'socialist,' a 'radical' or, indeed, a 'liberal.'

Mahoney understands my emphasis on Aron's illiberal influences as "impugning […] Aron for being something less than the pure 'liberal' he should have been." Yet the entire book is based on the assumption that there is no "pure" liberalism, that what it means to be "liberal" changes across time and space, and that Aron was influential in effecting such change during the mid-twentieth century, especially, though not exclusively, in France. The influence of the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt on aspects of Aron's political thought is significant in this regard. But contrary to Mahoney's reading, in discussing this issue my intention was not to insinuate that there was "some unpleasant Schmittian underpinning" to Aron's thought. Nor do I understand Aron's eventual turn towards a French liberal tradition as a means of "covering over" the dark secret of his Schmittian inspiration, as Steinmetz-Jenkins suggests.

While I agree that Schmitt's influence on Aron should not be exaggerated (this is something that I repeatedly stress in the book), it is particularly significant for the problem that the book addresses. First, it exemplifies the anti-liberal tendency among Aron's formative influences, thereby casting doubt on the idea of Aron as the direct descendant of a French liberal tradition. Second, Schmitt's influence on Aron illustrates how the anti-totalitarian reinvention of liberalism was undertaken partly in response to some of liberalism's most penetrating critics and resulted in a partial absorption of those critics' ideas. An example of this from the left would be the broad acceptance of Karl Marx's critique of 'formal' liberty by most 'Cold War liberals,' including Aron (I acknowledge here the validity of Cherniss's criticism that I could have said more about Aron and Marxism). Similarly, Schmitt's radical distinction between liberalism and democracy, and his view of totalitarianism as a fulfilment rather than a betrayal of the democratic project, were heretical among progressive liberals in the 1930s but absorbed into the Cold War liberalism of thinkers like Aron. I do not think that this new liberalism was somehow "tainted" in the process, nor that Aron's eventual turn towards an earlier French liberal tradition was a way of sanitizing the Schmittian element of his democratic thought. Finally, Schmitt matters because from the mid-1970s onwards French intellectuals' increasing interest in the relationship between liberalism, democracy, and totalitarianism was articulated as a turn towards "the political" (*le politique*), a concept that was understood differently than "politics" (*la politique*).[9] Because Schmitt was this concept's original theorist, it was necessary to consider the relationship between his use of the concept and its application during France's "liberal moment."[10] If in the end I show that the French turn towards the political was only minimally Schmittian in inspiration, that does not mean that the question was not worth asking.[11]

Steinmetz-Jenkins contends that "the real place to look for Schmitt's influence on Aron concerns his thinking on international relations,"[12] and most of the reviewers remark on the absence of a sustained discussion of Aron's international

interwar neo-radicals Bertrand de Jouvenel joined the fascist Parti Populaire Français in 1936, whereas Pierre Mendès-France stayed in the Radical Party and joined the resistance during the war.

[9] On this see Samuel Moyn, "Concepts of the Political in Twentieth-Century European Thought," in Jens Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 291-231.

[10] See Stephen W. Sawyer and Iain Stewart, eds., *In Search of the Liberal Moment: Democracy, Anti-totalitarianism and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

[11] For a similar take on this see Moyn, "Concepts of the political."

[12] This is debatable as a general statement, but where Aron's view of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction is concerned I think it is correct. When asked his opinion on this in 1964 Aron replied that "The purpose of politics is friendship. But in the state of nature, that is to say in external politics, the risk of enmity is the first consideration." See Letter to Julien Freund, 5 February 1964, as quoted in my *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century* (158). See also *Raymond Aron, Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Transaction, 2003): "Within one unit, politics does not involve the opposition of friend and enemy; rather, it is the order of command, legitimized by custom or beliefs. Philosophical reflection cannot and must not posit the death-struggle as the basis of

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relations theory from the book. This is clearly a significant omission. International politics was probably the subject which most preoccupied Aron in his writings from 1945 until his death in 1983, and he made a major contribution to understanding of the new international order that emerged after the Second World War. This was true not only in France, but also in the United States, where the American Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, to take only the most famous example, regarded Aron as "my teacher."[13] Yet as far as I know Aron never presented his international thought as "liberal," nor has it ever been widely understood as such.[14] This is unsurprising because Aron's theory of international relations rejected the basic tenets of what was conventionally understood as "liberalism" in this field at the time he was writing.

There are certainly some meaningful conceptual parallels between Aron's writing on domestic and international politics. For example, noting the significance of "pluralism" in my account of Aron's liberalism, Steinmetz-Jenkins asks why I did not pursue this line of inquiry into Aron's international thought, where "pluralism" also figures prominently. But had I done so this would only have confirmed that Aron was not a proponent of liberalism in the field of international relations theory. This is because whereas he considered "pluralism" (freedom of expression and a multi-party system) to be one of liberalism's conditions of possibility at the level of individual states, Aron thought that "pluralism" at the international level (a plurality of states recognising different principles of political legitimacy) was what made liberalism (the rule of international law) impossible, at least in the context of the Cold War.[15]

Of course, this is not to say that there is no relationship between Aron's international thought and his liberalism. One could certainly argue – and I concede that this is something the book ought to have made clearer – that Aron understood the rejection of liberalism at the level of international politics as a pre-requisite for the long-term survival of liberal democracy at the level of individual regimes. I approach this sort of argument in my account of Aron's writings on decolonization. There is a fairly widespread misconception that Aron's endorsement of Algerian independence in 1957 amounted to a "liberal" argument for decolonization,[16] yet in making this argument Aron actually broke with "liberalism" as it was understood in relation to the Algerian conflict at the time. Before 1957 he, like most of his contemporaries, associated liberalism with a progressive reform of the French Empire culminating in some form of federal arrangement. Aron's eventual endorsement of Algerian independence therefore amounted to an abandonment of liberalism as he understood it in relation to empire, but he saw this abandonment as necessary for the preservation of liberal democracy in metropolitan France.

Marcotte-Chénard suggests that although I adopt a nominalist view of liberalism's history in the book's introduction, elsewhere my "analysis often presupposes a somewhat fixed definition of what a liberal position entails and then proceeds to

order even if, in the so-called phase of civilizations, the collectivities do in fact often separate themselves into parties each of which, in order to create an order in conformity with its preferences, is ready to treat its adversary as if it were the enemy and is sometimes, perhaps, obliged to do so. [...] It frequently happens that hatred and, consequently, cruelty are worse between adversaries who are members of the same society than between foreigners. Nonetheless, the adversaries regard themselves, even in the heat of combat, as destined to live in one and the same community" (293, n.11).

[13] Henry Kissinger, "My teacher," *Commentaire* 28 (1984), 129.

[14] A recent exception to this trend is Thomas Meszaros and Anthony Dabila, "Raymond Aron's heritage for the International Relations discipline: the French School of Sociological Liberalism' in Olivier Schmitt, ed., *Raymond Aron and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[15] On this point compare part two of Raymond Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1968) with Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Transaction, 2003), 99-124, 561-567.

[16] See, for example, James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 147-157; Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2006), 68-70.

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evaluate whether Aron's posture corresponds to it." My justification for the book's omission of international realtions theory might seem open to this objection, since to say that there is nothing "liberal" about Aron's IR theory is to presume certain criteria according to which a theory might be considered as "liberal." Yet as the examples discussed above show, the criteria on which I base such judgements are not a set of abstract propositions about the essential, transhistorical characteristics of liberalism. My judgements about the liberal or un-liberal quality of various phenomena discussed in the book are based on what counted as "liberal" for individual authors and in wider political discourse at particular moments in time.

To adopt such an approach is not to suggest that liberalism's intellectual history has no bearing on its current moment of crisis, but it does suggest certain limits on how we might use that history in the present. In the book's conclusion I discuss this problem with specific reference to Cold War liberalism's contested contemporary legacy. While some historians regard the contemporary crisis of liberalism as resulting from its reformulation in the mid-twentieth century, others are more inclined to see Cold War liberalism as a source of ideological inspiration from which a post-neoliberal renewal of liberalism might draw.[17] Although I am sceptical of both these claims, I do think that an historical understanding of liberalism's mid-twentieth-century reinvention is relevant to the present. But this is not because Cold War liberalism's conceptual innovations have retained their analytic utility in a world that bears little resemblance to the one in which they were first articulated. It is because liberalism's reinvention in the mid-twentieth century stands as a reminder that a different reinvention is possible in the present.

[17] For the former view see, for example, Rosenblatt, The Lost History of Liberalism; for the latter see, for example, Müller, "What Cold War Liberalism Can Teach us Today."

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