LIBERAL MINDS:

A COMPARISON OF THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF

RAYMOND ARON AND ISAIAH BERLIN

by

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ABSTRACT

The political thought of Isaiah Berlin and Raymond Aron has often been juxtaposed. Yet no systematic comparison of their *oeuvres* has ever been undertaken. As such, the thesis seeks to redress this omission, by constructing a dialogue between the two thinkers, on the basis both of their work and of the relevant secondary literatures. This dialogue is organised around a series of themes which, it is argued, are highly significant to the concerns of liberal political philosophy and, indeed, fundamental to the thought of Berlin and Aron: the philosophy of history, totalitarianism, the concepts of liberty and nationalism.

The aims of the study, accordingly, are threefold. In the first place, it is intended that a deeper appreciation be gained of the thought of Berlin and Aron respectively. Second, it is anticipated that a greater understanding be derived of liberalism as it has developed in twentieth-century political thought. Lastly, it is expected also that the comparative analysis of Berlin and Aron say something substantive regarding the nature of liberal commitments in politics.

The central claim of the thesis resides in the following. On the basis of the comparative analysis of Berlin and Aron's work, an opposition is constructed between what are identified as different liberal 'modes of thinking'. In this sense, it is argued that Berlin's thought is representative of a 'liberalism of uncertainties' while Aron's thought, by contrast, is characteristic of a 'combative liberalism'. In turn, this opposition gives succinct expression to the implications of the thesis with regard to its three aims. First, it

places – at the centre of the proper interpretation of their thought – the 'tragic vision' in Isaiah Berlin and the imperative to 'think politically' in Raymond Aron. Second, Berlin and Aron's engagement with a series of twentieth-century events and problems is used both to remind, and to demonstrate, that the foundations of liberalism are fragile and inherently unstable. Third, the contrast in the differing *temperaments* of Berlin and Aron is used to draw attention to the indeterminate nature of the commitments of liberal theorists; in this regard, the opposition captures the pull toward 'reflection' in the case of Berlin and, more decisively, toward 'action' in Aron.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS ON THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARON AND BERLIN'S LIBERAL THOUGHT

On the occasion of Raymond Aron's death from a heart attack on 17 October 1983, at the age of 78, *The Times*, in its obituary, declared that it was 'in the English-speaking world that comparisons for Aron's achievements as a thinker [were] most easily found.'[1] Alongside Karl Popper, Bertrand Russell and Gilbert Ryle, the similarities of the Frenchman with Isaiah Berlin were emphasised, in particular as a 'great teacher and a master of the expository style.' Equally, when reporting the death of Sir Isaiah Berlin on 5 November 1997, the French newspaper *Le Monde* made the connection between the two men: 'Raymond Aron is the one with whom Isaiah Berlin should be compared. He combined a very British interest for liberalism with a European fascination towards ideas.'[2]

Beyond the many posthumous journalistic references, the resemblance between both thinkers has been perceived by several political theorists.[3] Steven Lukes, in an interview with Berlin, his former professor, regards Aron as the first liberal thinker with whom Berlin can legitimately be compared:

> Steven Lukes: Well let me ask you about liberalism. The liberalism that you espouse invites comparison with that of other contemporary liberals in Europe. I think on the one hand of Raymond Aron who was roughly the same generation as you...and in Italy Norberto Bobbio (1998, p. 96)

Similarly, after both Berlin and Aron were awarded the Erasmus Prize, the director of this award, H.R. Hoetink, explained that these two laureates had been chosen because they were 'outstanding representatives of the unique European intellectual tradition that

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[1] *The Times*, 18 October 1983, p. 14.
[2] *Le Monde*, 8 November 1997, p. 22. All translations are the author's, unless stated.

is characterised by its critical sense and respect for freedom of the individual' (in Manent [ed.], 1983, p. vii). Such a comment appears, on first view, a promising starting point for the comparative study of these thinkers, though in fact the book dedicated to the analysis of these laureates (edited by Pierre Manent in 1983) consists merely of a sequence of independent essays on each writer. The same missed opportunity to generate contrasts and comparison is common to a large number of academic works on Aron and Berlin. Robert Colquhoun, for instance, in his intellectual biography of Aron, concedes the connection between the two thinkers is an apt one, when emphasising their similar views on the philosophy of history and their shared idea that their time was marked by the decline of ideologies (1986a, pp. 153, 483 and 487-8). Yet Colquhoun is ostensibly reluctant to expand on the comparison. Another commentator who evokes the similarity is Brian Anderson. In his book *Raymond Aron: The Recovery of the Political* (1997), Anderson dedicates a final chapter to an analysis of the differences between Aron's thought and that of several liberal thinkers. Of Hayek, Fukuyama and Berlin, the latter is the one who has, according to Anderson, the most in common with Aron:

> Indeed Berlin's liberalism, in its recognition of tragedy, its appreciation of the moral relevance of national belonging, and its attentiveness to the varied and often rivalrous goods that make up the human world, has much in common with the thought of Aron... Aron's sensitivity to the antinomic structure of the political world captures what is correct about Berlin's account: that goods cannot be maximally combined...; that on occasion we are confronted with situations where no choice seems good... that dark angels inhabit the human soul (1997, pp. 186-8)

His two-page analysis also indicates several divergences, although those are not pursued in detail. Overall, the relevance of a comparison between Aron and Berlin has been appreciated by a number of political theorists, but such a task has never been performed with sufficient depth.

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[3] See also *Le Monde*, 19 October 1983, pp. 1, 12-13 ; *Commentaire* n. 28-29, 1985; *Encounter*, January and February 1984.

Given the limitations of the existing research, this thesis intends to take as its initial point of departure the *hypothesis* that there is much to be gained from undertaking a sustained comparison of Aron and Berlin's lives and works. It aims to show that the parallels drawn by the commentators mentioned above are not coincidental, but rather underdeveloped insights that merit further inquiry in themselves. Consequently, the thesis seeks to undertake a more systematic evaluation of their ideas, lives and characters. At this point, several issues of considerable importance must be raised. Firstly, it is crucial to determine the limits of the object of our study: what exactly will be the subject and focus of our comparison? Secondly, and most importantly, it is paramount to establish the precise purposes of this research, concerning, especially, our expectations of what is to be derived from undertaking the comparative analysis of the two theorists. In this way, a problematic for this undertaking will be elaborated. Finally, it is necessary to outline an adequate method of analysis, and clarify a series of issues surrounding the usage of comparative techniques in particular will be raised. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to address each of these issues in turn.

1. THE OBJECT OF THE INQUIRY: ARON AND BERLIN'S 'MODES OF THINKING'

The first level at which to introduce the comparison is biographical. Born four years apart – Aron in 1905, Berlin in 1909 – both lived through the chaotic twentieth century, with the exception that Aron did not live long enough to witness the fall of the communist bloc in Eastern and Central Europe. Both came from Jewish families, although they themselves did not harbour deep religious convictions. They were consequently deeply affected by the Holocaust, and welcomed the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.[4] As for their education, again the similarities are acute. Both studied

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[4] For more details about their Jewish origins and its impact on each of them, see chapter 4, part 1.

humanities in the most prestigious institutions of their respective countries: Aron at the Ecole Normale Supérieure of Ulm, Berlin at Corpus Christi, New College and then All Souls College, Oxford. There they each began to acquire a rich and diverse knowledge of philosophy, history and cognate disciplines. The Second World War had a crucial effect on each of them. Aron had to flee to London, and there started to write on an almost weekly basis in *La France Libre,* which opened up for him the doors of journalism after the war, since he worked for several newspapers, mainly *Le Figaro* and *L'Express.* As for Berlin, he lived in Washington and then New York, where his task was, amongst others, to write reports to the British ambassador about the position of the US in the war, and also with regards to Zionism. This experience convinced him to abandon analytical philosophy and to move toward the history of ideas. Subsequently, they become respected scholars (Aron at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, at the Sorbonne and then the Collège de France, Berlin at Oxford, where he eventually became founding president of Wolfson College) ultimately acquiring a certain fame, that made them familiar to the intellectual circles of the West.[5] Aron and Berlin can therefore be said to belong to a privileged intellectual elite in their respective countries.

At the next level, the connections between Aron and Berlin do not limit themselves to their respective careers and biographies, but are to be found in their writings. Whilst separated by the Channel, each witnessed a succession of events of worldwide resonance, which decisively influenced the positions they adopted. Firstly, and most obviously, both were anti-communist writers who denounced the threat of totalitarianism. Accordingly, they took a liberal stand for which they are most famous.

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[5] Whilst Berlin was acclaimed in his lifetime, Aron's reception was contrasted: better appreciated in the Anglo-Saxon world than in France in his lifetime, he remained an outsider in his own country until a few years before his death. Since then, nevertheless, his reputation has increased continuously.

In practice, this entailed support for the Western camp in the era of the Cold War. That Berlin was deeply attached to liberal democracies such as England and the United States is no surprise. To give only one example, Berlin, it has been observed, 'started to love America' as soon as arriving in New York in 1940, and valued England to the point that he was prepared to label liberalism as 'an English invention' (Ignatieff, 1998, pp. 102, 122). Aron was also a fervent supporter of America, despite France's own ambiguous attitude towards the US. He was proud of his 'Atlanticism' (IPP, p. 198), and in retrospect gave many reasons for this allegiance: 'personally, it seemed to me that the United States were an offspring of Europe, an offspring of a liberal Europe. One can detest the mercantile society of the United States, but the American civilisation is a liberal civilisation' (SE, p. 175). Their liberalism was also manifest in their common rejection of determinism in history, and in their reluctance to offer a *systematic* philosophy. Lukes emphasises this dimension of Berlin's work: 'the challenge his thought presents is not... that of an ambitious, all-embracing *system* of thought. He is not a systematic thinker' (1994, p. 693). Simone Goyard-Fabre provides the same comment on Aron's work, when she notes that 'the liberal defence that Aron's work offers is not organised like a speculative system' (1989, p. 60). Indeed, it is true that neither presents his ideas in the manner of a treatise, as do analytical philosophers. Rather, Aron and Berlin prefer to engage more in a dialogue with the thinkers of the past, which explains their extensive publications in the sphere of history of ideas.

The similarities between Aron and Berlin are, then, extremely numerous. Could it therefore be concluded that Aron and Berlin are the "twins" of Cold War liberalism in Europe? Rather differently, if they are so similar, what possible purpose is to be served in pursuing the comparison? One salient point, here, is that, despite the resemblance,

Aron and Berlin differ in various ways. The first opposition that strikes the reader is of a stylistic order. Aron's dryness, but also his precision, is in marked contrast to Berlin's passionate but sometimes not scrupulous writing. On the one hand, Aron is usually presented as a distant writer, even, on occasions, as arrogant: 'his intellectual style lacked "braggadocio"', writes John Kimball about him (2001, p. 3). His supporters, amongst them the members of the review *Encounter*, readily acknowledge the address of his turn of phrase:

> Cold indifference, melancholy, lack of enthusiasm, icy clarity, dryness, pessimism, scepticism, callousness – these were just the faults for which... Raymond Aron has been reproached... With a few exceptions, particularly in the book *De Gaulle, Israel and the Jews*, Aron stuck mostly to an objectivity in which his own feelings and emotions were expressed as impersonally as possible (Bondy, 1984, p. 21)

At this stage, it should be pointed out that such a style should not necessarily be considered as a shortcoming. Instead, it might be read as a sign of seriousness. As Bondy remarks: 'many who read Aron thought of him as quintessentially lucid and cool. His written prose was dispassionate, almost arid. He dismantled confused propositions with a watch-maker's skill and the nerve of an explosives expert' (1984, p. 29).

Conversely, Isaiah Berlin's way of writing is of a more fervid nature. This seems attributable to a disposition to write as one speaks. Michael Ignatieff, who spent a good deal of time with Berlin in the last ten years of his life, gives a remarkable account of his style:

> Each sentence carries clarity along its spine with qualification entwined around it. The order is melodic, intuitive and associational rather than logical. This darting, leaping style of speaking is a style of thinking... Since he dictates all his written work, the way he writes and the way he talks are identical: ornate, elaborate, old-fashioned, yet incisive and clear (1998, p. 4)

These comments on Aron and Berlin reflect the general impression that is given by their reading. The question which logically follows, however, is whether this difference on a

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purely literary plane is in a way indicative of an opposition on a deeper and more substantial level.

In one sense, a writing style can reveal a lot about a writer. As J. L. Austin, and after him Quentin Skinner, have argued, the *way* thinkers write gives an indication of the meaning of what is said, because they actually *do* something when they say it.[6] The impression of an aesthetic contrast between Aron and Berlin could therefore have more serious implications. It discloses an opposition of character, since, as Alan Ryan has pointed out about Berlin, his 'work is very much harder to separate from *its* author, and for anyone who heard him lecture in person or on the radio it is almost impossible to separate the speaker from the text' (1998). Indeed, as individuals, Aron and Berlin were quite different. As is universally reported, Berlin was extremely jovial in public. On the contrary, Aron – though a confident speaker – was more reserved in social events. The differences in temperaments are partly reflected by differences in interests, even whilst they shared in many activities. In particular, Aron was a journalist for over thirty years, who dealt with daily issues, including diplomatic and economic ones, whereas Berlin freely admitted his disinterest toward most current affairs. Likewise, Berlin had an inclination towards the fine arts, especially music and literature – amongst which Russian literature held special place – interests that were rather remote from Aron.

What, then, do these divergences say about Aron and Berlin respectively, and about our task of comparing them? It appears that, despite their many points in common, a certain opposition between Aron and Berlin can be unearthed. This originates at the level of what Ignatieff calls the 'style of thinking', as just pointed out (1998, p. 4). In the same

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[6] Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard.* Oxford: Clarendon Press; Skinner, Quentin (1969) 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', in *History and Theory*, vol. 8, pp. 3-53.

vein, Lukes talks of Berlin's particular 'way of thinking' (1994, p. 689). What I propose to do is to develop what remain mere remarks in Ignatieff and Lukes' work, and examine Berlin and Aron's writings in terms of their modes of thinking. When introducing this notion of *mode of thinking*, the aim behind this is to capture the level of analysis that is most appropriate to the comparative study of Aron and Berlin. In my view, a mode of thinking is a level of analysis which situates itself beyond the writing style, and deeply rests on the *temperament* of its author. Nevertheless, it stops short of a purely analytical approach to their thought. In other words, it is anticipated that we will observe differences in *perspective* and *approach* to discrete topics. This does not entail that they reach opposing conclusions about specific topics, but simply that they do not treat the same aspects of it. This itself should be borne in mind when defining the aims of the thesis, as it will become clearer that it is at the level of their *modes* of thinking that Aron and Berlin diverge.

2. AIMS OF THE THESIS

2.1 Renew our understanding of each thinker

The first and most obvious intention behind the comparison is to draw attention to the similarities and differences between Aron and Berlin, with regard to a variety of subjects. In doing so, it is anticipated that our understanding of each will be advanced. Specifically, it is expected that the creation of a dialogue between them builds upon and goes beyond the many studies that have to date been published on each thinker. These existing examinations contain interesting points of interpretation – which will be both drawn on and disputed in the course of the thesis – yet they lack the depth of insight that the interactivity of the comparative method potentially calls forth. The creation of a dialogue entails attention not only to each thinker's ideas, but also to the *process of*

reasoning which grounds these ideas. Borrowing from Thibaudet, Aron remarks that 'French thought develops itself through dialogue' (CG, p. 635). Accordingly, generating an exchange of views between Aron and Berlin holds with it the possibility of uncovering the animating sources and concerns of their respective standpoints. Looking at Berlin through the lenses of Aron's thought and vice versa, and confronting their ideas against one another, potentially throws a new light on the thought of each, and brings into focus previously distorted or hidden aspects and dimensions of their work.

A corollary of this method is to establish where, exactly, Aron and Berlin concur and where they differ. This concurrence, in turn, may well be arrived at *via* either a different path or different process of reasoning. To this extent, it will be claimed that there is interest in itself in how equivalent political positions are worked out in dissimilar ways. Conversely, where divergent conclusions are reached on the basis of the same initial starting-point, it is contended that the comparison equally focuses attention on the importance of this. In sum, the comparative analysis of Aron and Berlin's 'modes of thinking' will proceed *via* engagement with both ideas in themselves, as well as the process of reasoning behind these ideas. What is hoped to be gained by this is a re-interpretation of the thought of Aron and Berlin through the clarification of what the 'mode of thinking' of each consists in.

2.2 Renew the study of liberal thinking

The second aim that underlies the comparative analysis of Aron and Berlin's work is to contribute to an increased understanding of the current of thought that both represent, namely *liberalism*. That both Aron and Berlin are liberal thinkers is not in dispute. Commentators invariably situate them within the liberal tradition, with the exception perhaps of the French Left, which has historically been blind to such a tradition,

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preferring instead to label Aron a conservative thinker.[7] Moreover, Aron and Berlin identified themselves as 'liberals.'[8] Our approach to liberalism will however be *indirect*. What is meant by this is as follows. Rather than taking Aron and Berlin's respective relation to liberalism as a single overarching question, the analysis of their writings will be undertaken at the basis of a series of topics their œuvre address in common. In other words, the relevant material will be organised under four discrete headings that shall form the chapters that compose the main body of the thesis. These are thus: the philosophy of history (chap. 1), totalitarianism (chap. 2), liberty (chap. 3) and finally nationhood (chap. 4). In turn, the rationale behind our treatment of these topics will be two-fold. First, we will seek to establish how important and original their contributions are for the understanding of these topics. Second, we will equally seek to assess what bearing their treatment of the topics has upon liberalism and a liberal tradition. Here, one premise implicit at the outset of the thesis is that only after examination of the four levels of analysis will we be able to conclude what it meant to be a liberal thinker in the twentieth century. We can bring to bear our analysis of the two cases to add a particular dimension to this issue.

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[7] The label liberal is used, for Berlin, by Hausheer (1983), Galipeau (1994), Gray (1995), Collini (1999); for Aron, by Bloom (in HP), Brian Anderson (1997), Mahoney (1998), etc.

[8] Berlin, asked by Richard Ingrams whether he should be 'described as a liberal,' replies: 'Can't be helped. Can't be helped. I am what I am. It simply means concern about individual liberty and extreme opposition to the Idea of Final Solution of any kind' (Ingrams, 1990, p.49). Aron, in an interview with Dominique Wolton, adopts a similar stand: Dominique Wolton: 'One always thinks of Aron, the liberal. What characterizes your liberalism?'; Raymond Aron: 'First, I believe that what one must fear most in modern societies is the one-party system, totalitarianism. Today there is a great measure of agreement [on this] between the moderate Left and a "liberal" like myself... By defining myself in the refusal of the single party, I quite naturally come to the idea of pluralism, and from the idea of pluralism to a certain representation of liberalism' (M, pp. 247-8)

2.3 Typology of liberal 'modes of thinking'

Further clarification of the importance of 'liberalism' in this context is necessary. Aron and Berlin are both liberal thinkers but they are not identical thinkers. Their opposition of writing styles and of temperament has already given us an indication of this. Indeed, their divergence extends to their liberalism: one way of putting this is to say that they are each liberal *in they own way*. The term liberalism is not easy to define. As Gunnell remarks, it is often seen as 'an elusive' and a 'protean' concept (2001, p. 127). In the same vein, Alan Ryan wonders whether liberalism is 'one thing or many', and explains that this political concept is 'essentially contested' (in Pettit, 1993, p. 291). Consequently, many strands of liberalism have been highlighted by political theorists: examples are Ryan (in Pettit, 1993), Flathman (in Meadowcroft, 1996), Lucien Jaume in his opposition of three types of liberalism in nineteenth century French thought (1997), and finally Gray in his distinction between two 'faces' of liberalism (2000). While diverse, these interpretations have in common their distinctions of different *strands* of liberal political thought, based on a body of philosophical principles. To give a few examples, Ryan distinguishes between traditional liberals and libertarians, the latter believing that government is 'largely unnecessary' (in Pettit, 1993, p. 296). As for Jaume, he opposes a 'liberalism of the subject' to a 'statist liberalism', the latter asserting that the individual does not prevail over the state (1997, pp. 19-20). Finally, Gray argues that the two 'faces' of liberalism are antagonistic because one is based on a theory of a universal rational consensus, whilst the other takes the form of a *modus vivendi* which seeks the peaceful coexistence of various ways of thinking (2000). The accuracy of these typologies is not going to be challenged in the thesis. Yet, in the particular case of Aron and Berlin, their relevance appears relatively limited. Indeed, when ascribing a strand to Aron and Berlin in each respective typology, both thinkers

fall into the same category: traditional liberals in Ryan's distinction, liberals 'of the subject' in Jaume's, and *'modus vivendi'* liberals in Gray's. In other words, the categorisation of liberal thinkers in terms of their principles of thought does not help discriminate between Aron and Berlin. Both are anti-systematic thinkers, liberal individualists who defend negative liberty, and refuse to adopt a libertarian stand. Thus, their antagonism is not to be found in their *liberalism*, as a system of ideas, but rather in their *attitude or conduct as liberals*. This is why our own approach will attempt to highlight – above all – differences in their *mode of thinking*. Accordingly, my claim is that – used as a heuristic device to frame the main body of the thesis – the differences between Aron and Berlin are better captured through the lenses of a typology of *temperament*, rather than a typology of *thought*. Our ultimate aim will not be to redefine liberalism as a philosophical current, but to understand what it means to *be* a liberal, and to distinguish two *ways of being a liberal* by opposing Aron to Berlin.

2.4 Hypothesis in the opposition of mode of thinking

At this stage, we can only present a hypothesis depicting the division in their mode of thinking, a hypothesis which will be verified in the course of the thesis, and confirmed or invalidated in the conclusion. Nevertheless, such a proposition should be enunciated now, since it will serve as a referential point throughout our research. A preliminary distinction lies in the fact that Aron considers the implications of liberalism in the *political* sphere, whereas Berlin focuses on the *moral* sphere. To follow Brian Anderson, what is peculiar to Aron is to 'think politically' (1997, p. 3). Aron's motto, as described in his memoirs, was to constantly bear in mind the following question: 'what would you do if you were a Cabinet Minister?' (M, p. 632). On the contrary, Berlin is fairly remote from current affairs, and seems more interested in the comprehension of

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the principles of liberalism than in their application. Such comprehension reveals an extremely complex task for Berlin, who is willing to stress the internal dilemmas that liberal theory is confronted by. Berlin recurrently emphasises the conflicts that liberals have to face, as noted by Gray when he talks of Berlin's 'agonistic liberalism' (1995, p. 1). Collini rightly observes that Berlin 'constantly exhorts [us] to forswear much that may at first sight seem intellectually beguiling or satisfying' (1999, p. 203). Though it would be wrong to say that Aron does not share with Berlin some doubts about the veracity and unity of the liberal theory, the Frenchman does not insist on them. Aron is, instead, eager to go beyond the theoretical conundrums of liberal philosophy, and find answers to those at a practical or functional level. Thus, the finality of Aron's liberalism is *action*, whilst Berlin's is *reflection*.

The contrast between Aron's fighting spirit and Berlin's irresolute attitude could lead us to distinguish between two styles of liberalism. On the one hand, Aron's liberalism can be described as a *combative liberalism*. Aron reacts vividly against anti-liberal theories dominant in the intellectual and political life of his time – incarnated in Marxism, existentialism, structuralism or later postmodernism. His struggle against them is situated not only at the level of ideas, but more importantly at a practical level, especially with regards to sociological and political spheres. On the other hand, Berlin's attitude can be portrayed as a *liberalism of uncertainties*. It would be mistaken to argue that Berlin is uncertain about his commitment to liberalism. Berlin favours liberalism, but precisely because it is the only theory that allows flexibility. Berlin insists on the fact that the foundations of liberty, and of liberalism, are shaky. It is what makes liberalism so unique, yet at the same time it causes a certain unsettlement in Berlin which, on my view, characterises his state of mind. It entails that Berlin is not

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frightened to acknowledge the limits of liberal principles, when for instance he draws attention towards Counter-Enlightenment ideas, or stresses the irreducible incompatibility of values. In contradiction to this, Aron is much more confident about the superiority – proven historically – of the liberal stand, and appears to hold a much self-assured – though not entirely fearless – mind.

Before inquiring whether this hypothesis is verified by the comparative analysis of Aron and Berlin's writings, a methodology which is adapted to these specific aims should be elaborated. The particularities of this methodology are two-fold: first, it implies a multidimensional approach; secondly, it will take the form of a comparative method, the many potential pitfalls of which will be indicated.

3. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND PREREQUISITES

3.1 Multidisciplinary approach

The first methodological implication of the specific choice of our object of inquiry is that the research will be situated at the crossroad of several academic disciplines: evidently political theory, but also philosophy, the history of ideas, and finally the history of intellectuals. First of all, our study will not be limited to the analytical examination of ideas – or theoretical frameworks – that Aron and Berlin develop, in the manner normally used in a philosophical inquiry. As neither Aron nor Berlin are pure philosophers, such an approach would produce limited results. Furthermore, theorists who use such a technique tend to assume too often that the connection between the ideas of a thinker on the one hand, and his public commitments on the other, is natural, logical and unproblematic. Therefore, secondly, the introduction of an approach closer to intellectual history should help correct this false premise. Equally, however, the

examination will not become solely historical, insofar as the history of intellectuals may lean towards the opposite default; namely, to neglect the philosophical reasons behind the engagement of intellectuals. In other words, ideas will be evaluated in terms of their context and of the personality of each thinker. It is anticipated that this combination of perspectives will advance the understanding of Aron and Berlin's positions, as the disciplines above – when taken separately – lack of precision.

In order to explain their differences – and also their similarities – special focus will be placed on various elements: for instance, their respective debts to previous thinkers or traditions of thinking; upon national philosophical traditions, and on the intellectual and political context in which their thinking is shaped, and so forth. On first view, what is meant by this in practice is as follows. The most credible explanation of the opposition in their 'modes of thinking' would be to emphasise both the influence of contemporary intellectual debates and the pull of national philosophical traditions. With regard to the first, it is well known that – in contrast to Britain – French intellectual life was defined mainly by the Right-Left division, or, more specifically, by the relation of intellectuals to Marxism. Marxist thinkers, who dominated such debates, were also those who dictated the classification of non-Marxists. Unwilling, or unable, to distinguish between socio-democrats, liberals and conservatives, Aron was accordingly labelled 'conservative.' The artificial dualism of the antagonism of that time is illustrated by the common expressions of that time: 'better wrong with Sartre than right with Aron' was a frequent refrain (cited by Lilla, 1994, p. 12). Similarly, Aron's writings were identified as 'intelligent, but rightist' (Missika and Wolton, in SE, p. 12). In this context, Aron remained intellectually isolated, whereas, in Britain, Berlin belonged to the major

current that rejected Marxism. Aron can therefore be seen as an outsider.[9] Berlin, on the contrary, was fully integrated in a national intelligentsia which welcomed, and was even influenced, by the anti-totalitarian 'White emigration', as observed by Perry Anderson (1992b, p. 61). It will be argued, in the course of the thesis, that the explanatory power of this contrast is real, though should not be exaggerated.

With regard to the influence of national traditions on their work, the extent to which this difference illuminates the contrast and comparison will be disputed.[10] One existing explanation here is that Aron shares the French intellectual tradition, while Berlin belongs to a divergent British one.[11] Yet, this is both restrictive and does not sit comfortably with the facts. Firstly, Berlin is of Latvian origin, and received an early Russian and German education. Secondly, Aron does not fit with the anti-liberal French tradition, especially that of his time. Thirdly, both Aron and Berlin were Jewish, at odds with the dominant Christian culture of their respective countries. Amongst other things, this implies that the question of nationality resolves little, and that a more complex approach to their work should be undertaken.

3.2 The (re)creation of a dialogue

The backbone of the thesis is to be found in its methodological recourse to a comparative study of two liberal thinkers. Comparisons are a common feature in the study of political thought since Aristotle.[12] Aron and Berlin themselves adopt such an

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[9] Aron's isolation should not be exaggerated, and partly originates in Aron's personal pleasure in provoking his rivals, as Tony Judt argues (1998, p.173). Aron also seemed happy in his solitude: 'Je ne dirai pas, comme l'écrivit Tocqueville dans une de ses lettres de vieillesse, que je me sens plus solitaire que dans un désert du nouveau monde. Je me retrouve probablement isolé et opposant, destin normal d'un authentique libéral' (SE, p. 340).

[10] see chapter 4 about their vision of national claims.

[11] See F.A. Hayek (1960) chapter 5, for a defence of the distinction between a French and a British liberal tradition. The French liberal tradition is nevertheless far overshadowed by an anti-liberal tradition.

[12] In the second book of his *Politics*, Aristotle critically examined the views of Plato, Phaleas and Hippodamus. See also his gigantic enterprise to collect constitutions of more than 150 cities.

approach on several occasions: Aron in his study of the origins of sociology (especially *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*); Berlin in his lectures dedicated to the roots of romanticism and in his essays on Russian thinkers.[13] However, the fact that the activity of comparing is ordinary practice does not entail that the methodological issues surrounding such an approach are entirely unproblematic. It can in fact be said that the method has been constantly under-theorised. Indeed, this neglect is easily explicable: the activity of comparison appears so natural that no legitimating process seems required. In other words, most theorists use it, without being especially self-conscious about it. Durkheim said that 'comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself.'[14] The same words could be applied to political theory and, moreover, extended to most disciplines. Comparing is a process, a reflex that one does on daily basis, not only in academic research. It appears natural to place oneself in relation to 'the other'. David Hume already noted this in the eighteenth century, in writing in his *Treatise of Human Nature* that 'all kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but a comparison', thus implying that we constantly elaborate relations amongst the objects we study.[15]

Even if the comparative approach is spontaneous, it does not follow that there is no danger in using it. Many pitfalls need be avoided here if one does not want to run the risk of misrepresenting the ideas and positions of each thinker. First of all, it is crucial that one compares solely what is reasonable to compare. Our choice of two contemporaneous thinkers who faced similar dilemmas simplifies greatly the task at

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[13] See Berlin, RT and RR. Aron also draws a parallel between two thinkers, with regards to a particular question: comparison between Comte's and Tocqueville's view on Britain (EPS), between Tocqueville's and Marx's definitions of freedom (EL), or between Machiavelli's and Pareto's methods and conceptions of human nature (MTM).

hand, which may have been rendered more complicated had they been separated in terms of time and space. Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that – when talking of a specific concept or referring to a particular notion – each means exactly the same thing. It will, in particular, be emphasised later that they do not hold exactly identical definitions of liberty, pluralism, or even nationhood. Thus, it is important to keep to the precept of trying to understand the thinker in *his own terms*.

This leads to a second potential risk of comparing: that of extrapolation. Quentin Skinner describes accurately such an act as 'mistaking some scattered or incidental remarks' by a theorist for his 'doctrine on one of the themes which the historian is to set to expect' (1988, p. 36). In other words, a short passage of the author is over-interpreted to make it sound like an elaborate position, which it evidently is not. To avoid this error, the thesis will concentrate on topics that both Aron and Berlin studied in great depth, but not of those subjects that afforded the interest of one only and not the other. It would indeed be artificial, and ultimately nonsensical, to construct an Aronian view on Russian and Romantic thinkers, or a Berlinian view on nuclear weapons, industrial societies and French politics.

A third problem that arises from a comparison between thinkers is that not only is one author compared to another, but more problematically, is also evaluated according to criteria set beforehand, i.e. prior to the comparative analysis. The danger, here, is to create an *a priori* norm from which the theorist is to be judged, but which would artificially formulate standards of normality, or abnormality. Our intention is to refrain from this, firstly because elaborating 'neutral' norms could be very hazardous: a bias is very likely to be created in favour of one thinker, whose ideas will be the norm and

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[14] Quoted by Smelser, Neil J. (1976) *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
[15] Hume, David (1992) *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 73.

those of others would be seem as deviant. Secondly, these *a priori* norms could prevent

us from grasping the internal logic of each thinker's work, since his work will not be

read with the thinker's objectives in mind. Consequently, our comparison is best

understood as a 'dialogue', which implies no intermediary between the thinkers

studied.[16] A dialogue presupposes that each thinker speaks in his own terms, but has

also a chance to interact with ideas that are not his. The dynamism of this dimension of

interactivity is of great relevance to us, since it is expected that the comparison will

bring a renewed understanding of each thinker's work. Finally, it is essential to find out

whether the dialogue at the heart of the thesis will be fully recreated, or whether it did

occur in reality.

3.3 An Aron/Berlin encounter

Since Aron and Berlin lived at the same time, and frequented the academic or

intellectual circles of the Western world, their encounter was possible, and in fact

occurred. In one of his numerous interviews with Michael Ignatieff, Berlin mentioned

his meeting with Aron in Paris and their subsequent correspondence. Ignatieff sums it

up as follows:

> Raymond Aron became the only French figure whom Isaiah respected. He called
> upon him in Paris in 1950 and they kept in contact thereafter. Aron was liberal,
> anti-communist, Jewish, sceptical – all these things about him appealed to Isaiah –
> but he was too intellectually vain to become a close friend. He seemed piqued that
> the young Oxford don did not appear to regard himself as an Aronian, while Berlin
> thought Aron was a superb political journalist but a weak historian of ideas (1998,
> p. 173)

Aron's biographer, Nicolas Baverez, does not record such a meeting (1993). He does

not even mention Berlin's name, though his work is not as precise and complete as

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[16] The term is for instance used by Beiner (1990, pp. 238-9), when drawing a parallel between Arendt and
Strauss; Todorov (1993, p. xiv) also praises the 'dialogue', which he is willing to elaborate between
himself and thinkers of the past.

Ignatieff's. Yet it is not the case that there is no indication of a relationship from Aron's side. The evidence is to be found in Aron's work itself. In one respect, in his *Memoirs*, he tells us that he 'heard from Isaiah Berlin an ironical remark on the itinerary of Michael Polanyi' (M, p. 240). It can thereby be deduced that at some point he participated in a conference with Berlin, or at least had a private conversation with him. Several allusions at other points in his work confirm this, and even suggest the possibility of friendship between them. On two occasions in his *Leçons sur l'histoire*, Aron mentions Berlin as his 'friend' (LH, pp. 106, 270). He also uses the same expression, 'my friend Isaiah Berlin', in a conference held in Oxford on Tocqueville and Comte (EPS, p. 605).

The term 'friend' that Aron uses should nevertheless not be over-interpreted. On the basis of reading the correspondence between Aron and Berlin, located at Aron's archives at the EHESS[17] in Paris, my firm impression is that their relation was long – the letters date from 1961 to 1983 – but not necessarily very close. Despite the recurrent use of the introductory 'dear friend', and the fact that Aron paid at least two visits to Headington House, Berlin's residence in Oxford, both men largely discuss – in this correspondence – practical matters, but exchange neither personal nor intellectual comments. Another line of inquiry here is the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The CCF was an institution that operated in the early phase of the Cold War (it was founded in 1950), and around which many American and European anti-communist writers and scientists gravitated, such as Arthur Koestler, Robert Oppenheimer, Michael Polanyi and Daniel Bell. Pierre Grémion, in his book on the organisation, mentions Aron and Berlin on many occasions (1995). Nevertheless it seems that they did not show the same interest in the Congress. Aron was involved in it from its start, and quickly acquired

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[17] Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

responsibilities: in November 1950, he became one of the five associate members of the committee; between 1951 and 1953, he was sent, on behalf of the organisation, to the United States and to Asia. By contrast, Berlin's name appears on the registers of the Congress only after 1955. His role remained less direct, mainly intellectual, and consisted in the publication of several articles in the review associated to the Congress, *Encounter*.[18] It is highly likely, thus, that the two men were in contact from time to time, and met on the occasion of conferences. Both also had close contacts with the Ford Foundation that, as an institution, appreciated what they had to offer:

> The head of staff of the Ford Foundation believed in the actions of great men in history, and there were in Europe two men whom he wanted to support in order to increase their political and moral influence: Isaiah Berlin and Raymond Aron. Bundy [head of staff] thus helped Berlin to create a new College in Oxford [Wolfson], and he asked Aron to preside to the redefinition and revival of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Grémion, 1995, p. 462)

Such contacts presumably gave them opportunities to meet and to strike up an acquaintance with one other. Yet, in fact, the term 'friendship' may be an exaggeration. In the last analysis, the reality of their limited encounters and correspondence reveals a relationship of a rather different nature; in short, they did not share the intimacy which a friendship supposes. Indeed, it seems that Berlin at times regarded Aron with condescension. Ignatieff's comment gives a hint of this, and it is confirmed, implicitly, by Berlin's remark to Lukes:

> Lukes: The liberalism that you espouse invites comparison with that of other contemporary liberals in Europe. I think on the one hand of Raymond Aron who was roughly the same generation as you... And in Italy Norberto Bobbio.
> Berlin: I have a very high opinion of Bobbio.
> Lukes: And Aron?
> Berlin: Well I thought that Aron was a very brilliant publicist. His analyses of the French and English situation were always remarkable. His book on Peace and War was interesting, also his book on Clausewitz. I didn't think that his early works on the German philosophy of history or on sociology were interesting (1998, pp. 96)

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[18] In 1955, *Encounter* publishes three articles by Berlin on Russian Thinkers, 'A Marvellous Decade' (June and November 1955). Aron also wrote essays for reviews of the Congress, but, in addition to this, was implicated in the administrative side of the association.

In other words, Berlin's esteem for some of Aron's pieces is levelled by his criticism of other of Aron's books. In fact, I would claim, this mixed attitude is emblematic of the relationships between two figures who, because of their status, respected but were also critical of each other.

Next, it is also helpful to identify their knowledge of each other's work. On this particular subject, an asymmetry appears. On the one hand, Berlin scarcely mentions Aron's ideas apart from those on war (as indicated in the above quote) and those expressed in the *Opium of the Intellectuals* in his article 'Nationalism' (AC). On the other hand, Aron knew Berlin's writings more closely. He indeed mentions 'Historical Inevitability' in his *Leçons sur l'histoire*, and 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in 'La définition libérale de la liberté' (in EP). Indirect references to Berlin can also be found on many occasions: references to positive and negative liberty in his *Essai sur les libertés* (1965) and in other articles, to Berlin's work on Marx in Aron's own engagement with Marx and so forth. This asymmetry is not especially surprising and is easily explicable. The diffusion of Berlin's work far surpasses Aron's, which was not translated until a few years before his death. If one adds to this Aron's curiosity towards English-speaking philosophy – and Berlin's probable reluctance to read, in French, dense books about intellectual controversies in France, or even sociology or international relations – it becomes manifest why they should not have the equivalent appreciation of each other's work. Thus, it can be inferred that an actual dialogue between Aron and Berlin did occur, albeit one that, in all likelihood, was rather curtailed. With this in mind, our attempt to construct a more fruitful dialogue between the two thinkers can now proceed on a firmer basis, and should help capture their respective modes of thinking.

To sum up, the thesis aims to demonstrate that some thinkers can agree on the philosophical foundations of their liberalism, and nevertheless have different states of minds when supporting them. It intends to establish a new distinction that would emphasise the two types of *liberal temperaments* – in opposition to strands of liberal thought – with the examples of Sir Isaiah Berlin and Raymond Aron.

The thesis will be divided in four chapters, each of which will draw on the similarities and oppositions between Aron and Berlin. The theme of the philosophy of history will be first addressed, with special attention to the status of history as a science, and to the possibility of ascribing a sense or logic of history. It will be noted that both Aron and Berlin reject the possibility of determinism in history in the name of individual liberty. Yet, a first distinction between them will be emphasised, and centred on the fact that Berlin understands history as an art, whereas Aron sees this discipline as relatively scientific. In turn, their rejection of historical determinism leads them to fiercely condemn the totalitarian temptation of many of their contemporaries, which will be the central concern of the second chapter. Aron and Berlin's accounts of the origins of this temptation are dissimilar, since Aron holds a short-term approach to the problem, whilst Berlin's approach is situated in the long term. Despite this, they offer a relatively identical solution to the threat of totalitarianism, by fostering pluralism, even though Aron's concerns are much more political than Berlin's. In the third chapter, we will turn to the dilemmas surrounding the definition, and defence, of liberty, especially in its negative form. This concept will also be examined in relation with pluralism and with democracy. Again, an opposition of style between Aron and Berlin will be stressed: whereas Berlin seems tormented by the fact that ends may collide, Aron's reaction to this dilemma is much more positive, since he assumes that value conflicts can be solved in a case by case approach. Finally, the last chapter will question whether Aron and

Berlin afford a similar status to claims for national recognition, and whether such claims are compatible with support for liberty. We will see that both are prepared to admit the legitimacy of such claims, but that their understandings of the problem, largely influenced by their national traditions, lead them to rather dissimilar conclusions.

CHAPTER 1: DIMENSIONS OF THE LIBERAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

INTRODUCTION:

The central concern of this opening chapter will be the treatment, by Aron and Berlin, of the subject of the *philosophy of history*. The 'philosophy of history' is a concept, or discipline, with multiple meanings, principally because 'history' itself has two primary senses.[1] Firstly, it can refer to the succession of events in the past; secondly, to the discipline that seeks out knowledge of this past. Consequently, the philosophy of history embraces two dimensions. On the one hand, the analytical philosophy of history is concerned with the methods that the historian ought to apply in his or her research. It implies, according to Yirmiahu Yovel, that the historian questions 'what his criteria for selection [of facts] are, what causal explanations are open to him'(1978, p. 231). In other words, the issues at stake are those of the *epistemology* of historical knowledge and its resulting *methodological* problems. On the other hand, the substantive philosophy of history attempts to answer questions concerning a possible *logic* or 'sense' that might be ascribed to history, i.e. the possibility of direction and meaning in history, a *telos* in the Aristotelian sense. In this case, the philosopher of history attempts to establish permanent laws (theological, economic, bureaucratic, etc.) and structures which have the capacity both to explain changes from past to present, and to predict the future. The potentiality of a *determinism* in history is, then, the major issue.

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[1] For an overview of the main debates or positions on this matter, see in English: R.G. Collingwood (1939 and 1961); E. H. Carr (1961); and more recently Richard J. Evans (1997). In French, see Henri-Irénée Marrou (1975) *De la connaissance historique*. Paris: Seuil; Paul Veyne (1971) *Comment on écrit*

In the course of this study, both meanings of the philosophy of history will be allocated attention, though the second part of the present chapter will focus on the first meaning.[2] Yet, it is important to explain beforehand why this subject matter should form part of our comparative analysis and why it has been placed at the opening stage of the study. Three main reasons vindicate this decision.

Respect for chronology is the first justification. Aron and Berlin confronted very early on the topic of the philosophy of history. This is especially true of Raymond Aron. His reading of Dilthey, Rickert, but mostly of Weber, alongside the events in Germany at that time (Aron was in Germany when Hitler took power), contributed to Aron's grasp of the significance of history. As he famously writes, Hitler changed his life forever:

> Un jour, sur les bords du Rhin, je décidai de moi-même... En gros, ce que j'avais
> l'illusion ou la naïveté de découvrir, c'était la condition historique du citoyen ou de
> l'homme lui-même. Comment, français, juif, situé à un moment du devenir, puis-je
> connaître l'ensemble dont je suis un atome, entre des centaines de millions ?
> Comment puis-je saisir l'ensemble autrement que d'un point de vue, un entre
> d'autres innombrables ? ... jusqu'à quel point suis-je capable de connaître
> objectivement l'Histoire... et mon temps ? (M, p. 53)

The impact of his findings was considerable. His writings from then until the outbreak of the Second Word War concentrated almost exclusively on the philosophy of history.[3] The situation is not exactly equivalent in the case of Berlin. In contrast to Aron's sudden and transformative discovery of German philosophy, the Oxford scholar came to know the philosophy of history more progressively, and his interest increased with the years, though it was considerable even before the Second World War. He was especially involved in debates about the philosophy of knowledge, amongst the group constituting

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l'histoire : essai d'épistémologie. Paris: Seuil ; and more recently Luc Ferry (1987) *Philosophie politique – 2 : le système des philosophies de l'histoire.* Paris: Gallimard.

[2] Implications of the teleological dimensions of the philosophy of history will be examined in greater depth in chapter 2.

the 'linguistic turn' in Oxford philosophy (Austin, Ayer, Hampshire) that accustomed his mind to those philosophical questions at stake in the analytical philosophy of history. Moreover, his knowledge of the work of R. G. Collingwood – and then of Marx – gave a more historical dimension to his thinking.

Secondly, the philosophy of history deserves close analysis because it remained a centre of interest for the rest of their lives. Aron's first biographer, Robert Colquhoun, emphasises Aron's continuous fascination with the historical condition of man:

> The foundations for his life's work had been laid [by the theses]. Not only is Aron's philosophy of history implicit both in his wartime writings for *La France Libre* and his post-war journalism; it is also, as we shall see, explicitly central to the three major works he was to publish in the decades between the end of the war and his appointment to the Sorbonne in 1955 (1986a, pp. 139-40)

His persistent concern is certainly due to a rise in the attraction of Marxist philosophy. Aron was fiercely opposed to determinist explanations of the past. Aron's persisting interest can be shown, for instance, by his publication of several articles in response to renowned philosophers of history of that time: to Paul Veyne's *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (1971), and to Arnold Toynbee (1975b). Berlin was led by a similar intention · when giving some of his most famous lectures in the 1950s, as noted by Galipeau (1994, p. 16).

Thirdly, the philosophy of history is central because it is always in the background in their work on other topics. Their views on determinism, the concept of science, the value of knowledge, and so forth, lie behind, and frame more general statements on, for example, nationalism, state intervention, liberty or equality. Aron's commentators have observed that his general state of mind and philosophy have their roots in and are

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[3] With the exception of his articles on Nazi Germany.

nourished by his philosophy of history. Shils declares: 'The central theme of Raymond Aron's dissertation – the conditions and limits of valid knowledge of history and society – remained with him throughout his unusually variegated career' (in Draus [ed.], 1985, p. 2).[4] Scholars have emphasised analogous features in Berlin's writings. For Galipeau, 'although he hesitates to point them out, there are obvious ties between Berlin's historiography, his understanding of the role of philosophy, and his moral and political beliefs. The most famous of his books, *Liberty*, contains many of these ties' (1994, pp. 11-2). Bernard Williams is also prepared to admit that Berlin's early interests on the philosophy of knowledge and in the logic of history are evident in most of his writings:

> We can see, then, that in Berlin's central conception of values and, connectedly, of humanity, there is an implicit appeal, once more, to historical understanding. We can perhaps see, too, how the development of his thought from general theory of knowledge to the history of ideas and the philosophy of history was not merely a change of interest; and that his complex sense of history is as deeply involved in his philosophy, even in its more abstract applications, as it is, very evidently, in his other writings, and in his life (in CC, p. xx)

Aims of the Present Chapter

To sum up, the philosophy of history is crucial to the understanding of both Aron and Berlin's political thought. Given its early role in shaping their minds, it will help capture their specific 'modes of thinking', and perhaps uncover some differences between the two thinkers. Yet the subject is so vast that restrictions to its analysis should be demarcated before going into further detail. The discussion will thus concentrate on two perspectives. Firstly, it intends to show that Aron and Berlin's thinking on the philosophy of history has a characteristically *liberal* dimension. History, for them, was a major concern for liberal political thought. As Gray notes, Berlin's 'view of history is of a piece with his pluralism and his rejection of determinism' (1995,

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[4] See also Guy Rocher, 1987, p. 438: 'More than anything else, Aron was fascinated by history ... It is in this conception of the central role of history that is finally to be found the coherence among his sociological, philosophical, and political writings.'

p. 77). The same could be said of Aron. The figure of a individual free to make his history will emerge from this liberal account of history. Secondly, and alongside this emphasis on the two thinkers' similarities, it will be shown that their *liberal temperaments* toward the philosophy of history are not entirely analogous in the sense that their conclusions, although identical, are not directed towards the same purposes. Aron's philosophy of history can be described as a *philosophy of action*, eventually linked to political commitment, and thus a philosophy which seeks the truth, or, more accurately, which aims to find the most probable and the most persuasive answer to issues of his time. In contradistinction to this, Berlin does not find in history a source to guide action, but a source for *philosophical reflection and psychological observation*. Rather than concentrating on the answers that the lessons of the past can give to contemporary problems, Berlin approaches history as a field for more questioning, especially on issues of values and judgements. He is fascinated by the irreducible diversity of ideas in the past and focuses on the distressing obligation, rooted in the human condition, to make choices. Whereas Aron's philosophy of history renders political action possible and even effective, Berlin's is an invitation to theoretical reflection in order to preserve the significance of moral values.

These similarities and differences will be highlighted in three stages. A preliminary part will address the intellectual influences on Aron and Berlin, in order to understand from where their views originate. Secondly, we will consider what they make of the assertion that there is a logic to history. Finally, their respective approaches to history as a discipline – and more generally the humanities – will show a deep contrast between the two thinkers.

1. THE LESSONS OF THE GERMAN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Aron and Berlin's works can be situated at the crossroad of philosophical reflection and historical study. They are neither 'pure' historians nor 'pure' philosophers. Berlin declares that he has 'never been an historian and ha[s] long ceased to be a working philosopher. And therefore [he] ha[s] or ought to have, a neutral attitude to this subject' (in Yovel [ed.], 1978, p. 219). Aron echoes him when acknowledging that

> Je me suis toujours interdit, chaque fois que j'ai écrit sur la connaissance historique, de formuler un conseil : les historiens ne savent pas toujours ce qu'ils font (au sens logique ou épistémologique), le philosophe n'a aucune autorité pour leur dire ce qu'ils doivent faire (1971, p. 1352)

Despite their eagerness to position themselves modestly as non-specialists, it is notable that each had an acquaintance with both philosophical issues, studied at an early age, and historical issues. Furthermore, they were well acquainted with the contributions of previous thinkers, as well as recent commentators of these issues. The section below intends to give an overview of those who influenced Aron and Berlin's thinking. This overview, though not exhaustive, will provide a framework upon which the following sections will rely. Moreover, it aims to give an indication of what distinguishes Aron's stance from Berlin's, even whilst they share a sympathy for anti-deterministic accounts of history. The first section will focus on the analogous and decisive influence of German philosophy on Aron and Berlin's orientations, especially the influence of Max Weber. The second section will consider how – and despite these common viewpoints – their reading of German philosophy leads them to take dissimilar lessons from the philosophy of history: while Berlin stresses its moral and tragic side, in particular the irremediable conflict of values, Aron accentuates the connection between freedom in history and political action in the present.

1.1 A Common Rejection of Positivist and Deterministic views of history

German philosophy inspired Aron and Berlin at many levels, but the present section will concentrate on its influence on the elaboration of their anti-positivist and anti-deterministic perspectives on history. A rather restrictive notion of German philosophy will here be taken into account. Not all German philosophers of history will be taken on board. Our focus will fall upon a group thinkers to whom Aron and/or Berlin refer on many occasions, that is, mainly Max Weber, but also, in the case of Berlin, Herder.

1.1.1 Against the ahistorical Current

It is first of all noteworthy that, in the 1930s and early 1940s, neither French nor British academia was deeply concerned with the relationship between history and philosophy, which is at the heart of German philosophy of history. It seemed that the new 'science' of history had departed from philosophy departments. Aron, at the Ecole Normale Supérieure and in the philosophy department of the Sorbonne, could fairly observe that the approach to philosophy was relatively a-historical, and that the study of history or sociology was too confident about its validity to question its philosophical foundations. As observed by Canguilhem, Hegel was not as well known in most Parisian philosophical circles as Kant, represented for instance by the neo-Kantianism of Léon Brunschvicg, and which was thoroughly ahistorical (in Boyer [ed.], 1998, p. 10).[5] This helps explain why, on Brian Anderson's view, after he had made the discovery of German philosophy, Aron turned to the more historically minded German sociologists Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber as a response to this neglect (1997, p. 22). Aron's isolation can be easily grasped when examining the reactions his two theses prompted in

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[5] As Aron admits (M, pp. 67-8): 'j'avais traduit le kantisme dans le néokantisme de Léon Brunschvicg. Kant s'intégrait aisément dans l'universalisme ahistorique de la pensée française, telle du moins qu'elle

1937-8: his jury was surprised, sometimes disappointed – like his supervisor Brunschvicg – or even hostile (Colquhoun, 1986a, pp. 144-5; M, p. 115).

Isaiah Berlin felt nowhere near so lonely as Aron when choosing to focus on the methodological and philosophical dimensions of the study of history. His commitment coincided with that of Karl Popper or of the school of logical positivism. Nevertheless, Berlin can be considered as different in the sense that, even though he took part in the discussions about verificationism and logical positivism, he never completely agreed with their analytical and a-historical way of reasoning. This is why he felt, as Williams notices, that he had to break from them when he engaged in the history of ideas:

> His conception of the subject had been formed originally by those discussions in Oxford before the war which were shaped by the agenda of positivism; and, very broadly, he stuck with that conception. The most important thing about that conception, though, so far as Isaiah was concerned, was that it saw philosophy as a timeless study, with no interest in history... If what Isaiah wanted to do was really history, then, on his view, it could not be philosophy' (in CC, pp. 121-2)

To satisfy his historical curiosity, he found some support in the lectures of R. G. Collingwood. In his conversation with Steven Lukes, Berlin tells us that Collingwood 'was interested in the nature of history, the influences of cultures...' and that 'he influenced [him] in the direction of philosophy of history, but never as a thinker' (1998, p. 68). Berlin's major debt to Collingwood comes from the fact that 'he introduced [him] to Vico. He had translated Croce's book on Vico into English, and he lectured on the philosophy of history' (1998, p. 68). As we will see, Vico is one of the most frequent references Berlin uses when he explains how the past should be approached.

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s'exprimait à la Sorbonne.' In addition, the thought of Alain, the "Master" of many young students of Aron's generation, was not concerned with the place and lessons of history either (IPP, p. 25).

To sum up, the questions concerning the meaning of history and, in turn, the method appropriate to its study were pursued independently of one another, in contrast with Aron and Berlin's insistence that they could not – and should not – be separated. The major strand in the philosophy of sciences, which they rejected, was positivism. In France, before the outbreak of the Second World War, positivism remained a very influential current through the voice of the many disciples of its founders, Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim.[6] Aron evidently read the work of Durkheim, but, as he admits in his *Mémoires*, 'no spark flashed' (M, p. 68). More than mere indifference, Aron even felt an 'allergy to Durkheimian thought' (1970, p. 65). As for Berlin, his specific target was a group at Oxford who, influenced by the Vienna school, were embracing logical positivism.[7] As will be emphasised in detail later, Berlin and Aron departed from this prominent view according to which the methods of the natural sciences could be applied to the human sciences, yet they also refused to take the opposite stand, which gained influence before the war, with the resurrection of Nietzsche's work in Germany. Despite this isolation, they did not remain indifferent to a growing current in philosophy, which granted a major place to the perceptions and personality of individuals. This current became known as phenomenology,[8] or existentialism, and its main representatives were Husserl in Germany, and Merleau-Ponty, De Beauvoir and Sartre in France. Berlin and Aron took on board some of their reflections on the status of the senses and the nature of individual freedom. Yet they

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[6] Comte, in the first half of the nineteenth century, had encouraged the adoption of a scientific attitude in the observation and organisation of the social and political arenas. He was thus considered as the first sociologist in France. See for instance his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42) and his *Système de politique positive* (1851-4). Influenced by this new approach of social reality, Durkheim developed this positivism in the social sciences, creating the notion of 'social fact', the equivalent in society of what physical facts are in nature. His *Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1985) were followed by generations of students and researchers, even after his death in 1917.

[7] The leading figures of this current were Wittgenstein, Austin, Ayer.

[8] It followed the tradition of Berkeley and Hume in Britain, but also the influence of Kierkegaard and Heidegger and Jaspers.

never became true partisans of phenomenology because it took a form, Marxist or pro-Marxist, of which they disapproved.

1.1.2 The German Influence

Departing from the mainstreams of their respective countries, Aron and Berlin found inspiration outside, in particular in German philosophy. For both, the reading of Karl Marx indubitably played a major role in the development of their ideas and in the choice of their future interests. Their attitude *vis-à-vis* Marx was ambivalent: they both admired the novelty and the scope of his work, yet also rejected his conclusions, in particular regarding his historical materialism. At this stage Marx will be left aside, for his philosophy of history is radically at odds with that of Aron and Berlin.[9] Other German philosophers of history can be seen as a major influence,[10] such as Weber, Simmel, Rickert and Dilthey. For Berlin, another figure is of most importance: Johann Gottfried Herder. With Vico, Herder is regarded as the main source of inspiration for Berlin's vision of history. The place he occupies in Berlin's writings is much more important than Weber's. In his discussion with Steven Lukes, Berlin admits with regret that he 'never read much Weber, one of his great deficiencies, which [he] could remedy but never ha[s]. [He] never ceased to lament not reading enough Max Weber' (1998, p. 96). Yet the conclusions Berlin draws from his reading of Vico or Herder could have resulted from a reading of Weber. He indeed tends to consider Weber, as well as Simmel or Dilthey, as successors to Herder and Vico, as noticed by Galipeau: 'according to Berlin, the whole German historicist tradition, and later the interpretative sociology of Max Weber, reproduced Vico's original insight' (1994, p. 21). For

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[9] For a closer analysis of Marx's influence, see chapter 3, part 1.1.
[10] Immanuel Kant is another important figure for both Aron and Berlin, especially the latter, whose account of the role of Reason in history is very Kantian.

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instance, he emphasises the debts they owe to the nineteenth century thinkers (he means Vico and Herder), when writing that

> Doubts about the possibility of objective knowledge of the past, about changing perspectives on it determined by transient, culture-conditioned attitudes and values, such as are said to have oppressed Mommsen towards the end of his life... problems anxiously discussed principally by *German thinkers – Max Weber, Troeltsch, Rickert, Simmel –* and leading to the radical conclusions of Karl Mannheim and his school – these problems seem to me to have originated in the nineteenth century (CTH, p. 77, emphasis added)

The link between Aron and Weber is more evident. Aron always proclaimed his debt to Weber. In his *Mémoires*, for instance, he recalls his 'passion' and even 'bedazzlement' for Weber (M, p. 70). Indubitably, Aron's discovery of his work was a turning point in his own career. Pierre Manent argues that, after this discovery, Aron 'found his way; he found his interlocutor: Max Weber' (1987, p. 164). Aron's relationship with Weber can be described as a dialogue, which lasted, in Raynaud's words, for the remaining duration of Aron's life (in HP, p. 213).

On the whole, it can thus be said that Weber is a common point of reference for both thinkers. It is evidently not the only influence. It is key, however, for our understanding of the liberal dimension of Berlin and Aron's philosophy of history.

1.1.3   The Liberal Lesson of Max Weber

Weber can be considered as 'liberal' in two senses: in the method required by the researcher in human sciences and in his rejection of determinism in history. On these two levels Aron and Berlin follow his position.

First of all, they share Weber's account of the limits of objectivity in the human sciences. Aron, in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (1938), emphasised the

role of Weber in his awareness that the social sciences could never attain the certainty of the 'hard' sciences. Weber's specificity, he argued, was precisely that he underlined the limits of historical objectivity. A similar statement is to be found in Aron's numerous works, in which, Raynaud declares, 'the influence of Weber is notable... in Aron's extreme sensibility to the respective limits of sociology and of historical explanation ' (in HP, p. 218). Berlin also seems to have been conscious of an argument identical to Weber's, since he criticises the concept of scientific history. When questioning the value of purely causal explanation, and in particular the meaning of 'because', he referred to Weber in order to confirm his suspicion that there was no 'science', as such, of human activities:

> Max Weber, whose discussion of this problem is extraordinarily illuminating, asked himself under what conditions I accept an explanation of a given individual action or attitude as adequate, and whether these conditions are the same as those that are required in the natural sciences – that is to say, he tried to analyse what is meant by rational explanation in these contrasted fields (CC, p. 126)

Berlin inferred from Weber that it was impossible to transpose the methods of natural sciences to the observation of human behaviour, whether contemporary or of the past. On the contrary, other criteria ought to be used, such as 'plausibility, likelihood, sense of reality, historical sense, [which] denote typical qualitative categories which distinguish historical studies as opposed to the natural sciences that seek to operate on a quantitative basis' (CC, p. 140). This distinction, he continued, 'originated in Vico and Herder, and was developed by Hegel and (malgré soi) Marx, Dilthey and Weber, [and] is of fundamental importance' (CC, p. 140).

Aron and Berlin's epistemology of the human sciences are both very similar to that of Weber. They can be termed as 'liberal' because of their flexibility and the latitude they give to the historian. A liberal epistemology of history does neither mean that the

historian can conduct his research in whatever manner he decides, nor that all interpretations of the past are equally valid. *Contra* this and following Weber, Aron and Berlin believe that history can teach us a plurality of lessons, allow a diversity of interpretations, which can evolve with time, enabling historians of future generations to issue new approaches to the past.

Another reason for their defence of a liberal methodology in history is related to the nature of the historical object: people and individuals. Because human beings do not react in a mechanical way, the use of causality based on a means/end calculations, gives only a partial view of the past. A more psychological dimension, an awareness of the feelings, expectations and fears of people of the past is also essential. This major claim is one that Berlin and Aron borrow from Weber, who distinguishes between *explanation* – causal mechanisms – and *understanding*, a task that requires, for the historian, the use of the faculties of empathy. The capacity of '*Verstehen*', Weber explains, comes from a similarity in the dispositions of both the historian and his object of study. Berlin, as will be seen later, was a fervent advocate of such a method, which he discovered not through Weber but through Vico and Herder.[11] He nevertheless agreed that Weber's account was not different from that of Vico, who

> uncovered a species of knowing not previously clearly discriminated, the embryo that later grew into the ambitious and luxuriant plant of German historicist Verstehen – empathetic insight, intuitive sympathy, historical *Einfühlung*, and the like. It was, nevertheless, even in its original, simple form, a discovery of the first order... Not until the days of *Dilthey and Max Weber* did the full novelty of the implications for the philosophy of mind and epistemology of Vico's theses about the imaginative resurrection of the past begin to dawn upon some of those who, in their turn, resurrected him (AC, pp. 116 and 119, emphasis added)

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[11] Part 3 of the present chapter.

Aron, for his part, refers to Weber's distinction in many articles about Weber, but also in his own reflection about the methodology in history.[12]

The second main feature of a liberal philosophy of history consists in the claim that individuals are not driven exclusively by causal processes exterior to them, but are capable of determining their own future. This can be found in the writings of Aron, Berlin, and, before them, of Weber. When Weber elaborates his vision of a 'war of gods' – a conflict between antagonistic values, none of which have exclusive access to the truth – it is implied that there is no such thing as a law of history. If values always clash, one cannot foresee which one is going to be prevalent in the future. Moreover, Weber's dismissal of a logic of history can be stressed in his own criticism of Karl Marx, the terms of which are close to those offered by Aron and Berlin. The influence of Weber's critique is particularly evident in Aron's writings on Marx. Aron agreed that some form of rationalisation has appeared in the political as well as the economic sphere, and denies, like him, that this has led necessarily to the realisation of any particular end, especially not in the anticipated collapse of the capitalist system. More generally, as observed by Raynaud, Aron's 'long opposition against Marxism takes the most important elements of the Weberian critique' (in HP, p. 218).

Aron and Berlin draw from German philosophy a vision of history which leads to a defence of the *unpredictability* of the future. This lesson is a crucial dimension of all liberal philosophy, and will be detailed later. At this stage, however, it is important to stress that Aron and Berlin are not mere imitations of their past masters, and that Aron's positions are not exactly identical to Berlin's.

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[12] See for instance DCH, pp. 11-38.

1.2 Contrasting influence

Disparities between Aron and Berlin can be observed. They originate, partly, in their decision to focus on contrasting parts of the work of Weber (or Herder, for Berlin). Essentially, Aron always remained an advocate of Weber's epistemology, but gradually withdrew his support for part of Weber's vision of the world and its future.[13] The distinction between these two levels requires treatment in greater detail, because at each level Aron and Berlin adopt contrasting positions.

1.2.1   Interpretations of the Weberian Notion of 'Verstehen'

To start with the epistemological dimensions, it is noteworthy that those positions of Weber with which Aron had sympathy, are not those that Berlin champions. Berlin holds a very personal interpretation of Weber's concept of *Verstehen* (understanding) and its distinction with *Erklären* (explaining). While Berlin dismisses all attempts at explanation and generalisation, in favour of an insight into the personal character of people of the past, Aron claims that the procedure of explanation should be left some value if one aims at forming more general and objective statements. Moreover, Berlin does not take as seriously as Weber and Aron the imperative of neutrality when observing the past. It results from his misunderstanding of Weber's work, as can be shown through some extracts. An explanation for Berlin's partial understanding of Weber is his obsession with the dimension of *Verstehen*, which he discovered via Vico.[14] Berlin's enthusiasm towards such a method leads him to give a prevalent status to the psychological elements of human behaviour, and to focus on moral dilemmas and conflicts. Consequently, Berlin expresses an aversion to general statements, especially

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[13] For an extended study of what Aron owes to Weber and what he disagrees with, see Mahoney, 1992, chap. 1.
[14] See part 3.2 of the present chapter.

those given by sociology: 'the difference between history, however sociological, and sociology, however historical, lies in the fact that for sociologists facts about individuals cannot be more than a sample or example: for historians they can be of interest as such' (1954, p. 15). From this, it will be inferred that Berlin was never a true historian, or, in the words of Aron, a true 'scientist' (savant).

Aron dislikes the attitude of complete empathy. He believed that Weber did not walk into this trap, but he gives a description of those 'scientists' who did:

> Le savant qui se passionne pour l'objet de sa recherche ne sera ni impartial ni objectif. Mais celui qui estime que la religion n'est faite que de superstitions risque bien de ne jamais comprendre en profondeur la vie religieuse. En distinguant ainsi les questions et les réponses, Weber trouve une issue. Il faut avoir le sens de l'intérêt de ce que les hommes ont vécu pour les comprendre authentiquement, mais *il faut se détacher de son propre intérêt de ce que les hommes ont vécu pour trouver une réponse universellement valable* à une question inspirée par les passions de l'homme historique (EPS, p. 509, emphasis added)

From a reading of Weber, Aron draws conclusions opposed to those of Berlin. As will be emphasised later, Aron does not abandon the ultimate task of the historian, that is, to provide some form of universal validity in one's conclusions. Aron underlines Weber's constant effort to answer the question: 'what are the procedures which help, beyond the subjective choice [of questions], guarantee the universal validity of the results of science ?' (EPS, p. 510). Aron does not go as far as agreeing with his notion of evaluative neutrality or completely *wertfrei Wissenschaft*. Yet, in contrast to Berlin, he does not renounce the possibility of attaining some objectivity. Aron, like Weber, does not discard *Erklären* entirely in favour of *Verstehen*.

To clarify, whereas Berlin concentrates on the task of empathy, Aron does not show equivalent disdain toward constructing objective statements about the past. As a result, while Berlin demonstrates an interest in moral problems, Aron links history with sociology. Furthermore, like Weber, he believes that history should be connected with politics, and with commitment and 'action' in the public sphere:

C'est chez Max Weber que j'ai trouvé ce que je cherchais ; un homme qui avait à la fois l'expérience de l'histoire, la compréhension de la politique, la volonté de la vérité, et, au point d'arrivée, *la décision et l'action*. Or, la volonté de voir, de saisir la vérité, la réalité, d'un côté, et de l'autre côté agir: ce sont, me semble-t-il, les deux impératifs auxquels j'ai essayé d'obéir toute ma vie (SE, p. 40, emphasis added)

1.2.2   The Telos of History

The other point of departure with regard to what Aron and Berlin owe to the German influence concerns the *telos* attributed to history. Like Weber, they reject the position whereby a definite law of history can be said to govern our destiny. Yet Berlin's attitude is closer to Weber's than Aron's. Berlin's 'ends collide' *motto* is comparable to Weber's account of a 'war of gods', that is, of an inexorable conflict between opposite values and morals.[15] It entails, for Weber and Berlin, that there is no clear valuable goal humanity could aim for.[16] It has often been observed that Weber's standpoint can lead to nihilism. Weber and Berlin deny this, whereas Aron concurs with those like Leo Strauss (1953), who criticise Weber's artificial distinction between facts and values, and argue that a historian cannot help but offer an opinion about people of the past, and that, moreover, he commits a sin of nihilism if he does not. Aron has always been uncomfortable with this relativism of values. As Draus notices, he attempts to show that 'Weber was wrong to conclude that, because of the limits of knowledge and the ultimate indecisiveness of actions, various theories under consideration can have equal weight, and all actions are equally ineffective' (1985, p. 32).

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[15] See for instance Weber (1949) '"Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy', or 'The Meaning of "Ethical Neutrality" in Sociology and Economics', translated and edited by Shils, Edward A. and Finch, Henry A., *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*, The Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois; (1989) 'Science as a Vocation' (Wissenschaft als Beruf), translated by Michael John, in ed. Lassman, Peter, Velody, Irving, *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'*, London, Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989; (1994) 'The Profession and Vocation of Politics' (Politik als Beruf), translated by Ronald Speirs, in ed. Lassman, Peter, Speirs, Ronald, *Weber, Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press.
[16] See chapter 3 for Berlin's account of value pluralism.

Aron's demonstration of Weber's mistake is twofold. First, he observes that Weber's conflict of values is incompatible with his affirmation that his own system of values – based on the superiority of Germany – can prevail (EPS, p. 655). Secondly, he affirms that the scholar can, if he bases his interpretation on a few values shared by the whole of humanity, successfully demonstrate that some values make more sense than others (1959, p. 52). Weber completely dismisses the 'power of Reason,' which is why Raynaud discerns that 'what separates [Aron] from Weber was the conviction that, once the temptation of dogmatic rationalism is exorcised, Reason could keep a better status than the status Weber offers' (in HP, p. 214). Berlin's relation to Reason is, on the contrary, very similar to that of Weber, because of his tendency to give priority to irrational elements in his study of man.

To conclude, the influence of German philosophers on Aron and Berlin is significant, though not perfectly identical. It sets the background for a more detailed analysis of Aron and Berlin's epistemological positions in the philosophy of history.

2. THE DISMISSAL OF A SCIENCE OF HISTORY IN THE NAME OF LIBERTY

The present section considers Aron and Berlin's views on epistemological and methodological questions in history, and, more generally, in the human sciences. Such questions are numerous: can the historian find out what happened in the past? Can he reach an objective view of the past? If so, how? To what extent are historical changes the effect of one main cause, and thus are there laws in history? One question, raised by Berlin himself, will hold our attention: 'is history a natural science, as physics or biology or psychology are sciences? And if not, should it seek to be one?' (CC, p. 103).

Our focus on the feasibility of applying the scientific method to the study of history enables us to accentuate the *liberal* dimension that Aron and Berlin give to their epistemology, in the sense that they reject the possibility of discovering laws that would not only explain the past, but also predict the future, and leave no room for human *freedom of choice*. The main challenge is to demonstrate that they dismiss deterministic theories with *liberal arguments*. After having rejected the positivist accounts of history for their lack of coherence (2.1), they intimate the possibility of the freedom of man in history by adding the dimension of the 'individual' to the study of the past (2.2), a dimension which had wrongly been neglected. Hitherto, the result is that the future is open (2.3), a conclusion which offers, for Aron and Berlin, the basis for their liberal philosophy.

2.1 Rejection of scientific determinism

It has already been observed that Aron and Berlin disapprove of positivist accounts in the social sciences. A survey of the arguments of their opponents, and how they dismiss them, assists an understanding of why they prefer a non-deterministic approach to history and the human sciences.

2.1.1   Targets: the Positivist Myth and Marxist Historical Materialism

Aron does not locate the origins of the positivist current at the same point in time as does Berlin, who looks further back in time. In 'Historical Inevitability,' Berlin goes back to the French Enlightenment, and states that the first positivist was Montesquieu and that positivists of the nineteenth and twentieth century are his direct offsprings (L, p. 158). On another occasion, he goes further back still, tracing a line from Descartes to Viennese positivists:

From Descartes and Bacon and the followers of Galileo and Newton, from Voltaire and the Encyclopedists to Saint-Simon and Comte and Buckle, and, in our own century, H. G. Wells and Bernal and Skinner and the Viennese positivists, with their ideal of a unified system of all the sciences, natural and humane, this has been the programme of the modern Enlightenment (AC, p. 82)

Moreover, the ambition of a fusion between natural and human sciences, affirms Berlin, is not even peculiar to the 'modern' world. He sketches its true origins back to the time of ancient Greece, when Ionian physicists affirmed that the natural and the human world could be understood by reducing it to the statement that 'everything is made of water, fire, air, and earth; but that water, or fire, or air, or earth is primary' (cited in Galipeau, 1994, p. 16). Berlin denounces this 'Ionian fallacy'. But his relative imprecision and his amalgam between personalities not normally considered as entirely similar – Bacon has little to do with either Saint-Simon or Wittgenstein – are striking. Yet what Berlin emphasises is simply the fact that positivists have always existed, and that they believe that human actions can be described with 'the language of the mathematical and physical sciences' (AC, p. 83). In contradistinction to Berlin, and as can be easily deduced from his *Etapes de la pensée sociologique*, Aron never puts Montesquieu – whom he considers as the founder of liberal sociology – in the same category as Comte or Durkheim. He does not believe that the Enlightenment as a whole is to be blamed, nor sociology as such, but only certain followers such as Comte.

Marxist theories of history are, for Aron as well as for Berlin, the heirs of Enlightenment positivists, because they affirm that their statements are empirically based and thus scientifically proven.[17] More than Comte and Durkheim, Marx is certainly, for both thinkers, the philosopher in connection with whom they form their own anti-determinism. They were aware that the philosophy of Marx was complex and sometimes remote from that of Marxists, but that historical materialism (essentially, the

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[17] See for instance L, p. 158 ; or 1939, pp. 91-2.

doctrine that economic relationships are what orders society at all times), was shared by most of them. Yet, as with Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment positivists, Berlin focuses on the first generation of Marxists, such as Engels, Plekhanov or Kautsky, and neglects the contemporary generation, with the important exception of E. H. Carr.[18] In contrast, Aron is engaged in the analysis not only of Marx himself but also of the Marxist intellectuals of his day, whether existentialist (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty), structuralist (Althusser), or the ideologists of the Communist Party (Stalinists in particular).

2.1.2   A necessary divorce between the natural and human sciences

Even though Marxists would argue that they are fierce opponents of the 'bourgeois' positivism of Saint-Simon or Comte, like them they assimilate history with the natural sciences. Aron and Berlin do not deny the validity of the attempt to provide history with strict methods of observation or interpretation, but they believe that it is to misconceive history to extend to it the rules of natural sciences and to advocate a 'unified system of all the sciences, natural and humane' (AC, p. 82). Berlin even talks about 'the great divorce between them,' which derives from the impossibility of obtaining complete objectivity (AC, p. 80). Aron underlines the limits of objectivity as well:

> Au point de vue épistémologique, nous cherchons à distinguer les démarches rigoureusement objectives, soumises aux seules règles de la logique et de la probabilité, des démarches subjectives, qui expriment une individualité ou une époque. Distinction décisive contre le positivisme, puisqu'elle permet de tracer les frontières du savoir universellement valable et de réserver, au-delà de la science, les droits non de la croyance mais de la philosophie (IPH, p. 11)

On Aron and Berlin's view, objectivity is not applicable to the human sciences. Firstly, there are no such things as 'bare facts.' As Berlin enunciates, the 'notion of bare facts – facts which are nothing but facts, hard, inescapable, untainted by interpretation or

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[18] See for instance the introduction of *Liberty*, or 1962.

arrangement in man-made patterns – is... mythological' (L, p. 56). Historical objects change over time, evolve, and appear differently depending on the epoch. A second false notion is that of 'causality' in history. The question that guides 'the upholders of the Comtean ideals of social statics and dynamics' is, according to Berlin, 'Resulting from what causes?' (L, p. 109). This preordained structure is well known to natural scientists: it consists of causal or functional correlations, by virtue of which one cause has only one effect, and, *via* the process of causal regression, each event can be explained by one major cause. For Marxists, the main cause is economics, for Enlightenment positivists it is Reason. This schema is too rigid and simplistic for Berlin and Aron, the latter of whom notices:

> Le schéma des moyens-fin s'avère le plus souvent trop simple. Il ne confère à l'action humaine qu'une intelligibilité partielle... Il faut, en effet, considérer : 1° la pluralité des buts, du but prochain au but lointain... 2° la connaissance par l'acteur de la conjoncture ainsi que l'efficacité relative des moyens... 3° le caractère licite ou non licite, louable ou non louable par rapport à des croyances religieuses, mythologiques ou coutumières, des moyens ou de la fin ; 4° les mobiles proprement psychologiques de l'acte (1979, pp. 8-9)

Hence his condemnation: 'mechanical-type causality cannot be applied to men's conduct' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986a, p. 162). Too engaged in their task of building a unified system and finding its "key", scientific determinists forget that they are dealing with people with reflexive capacities and feelings. To those like Merleau-Ponty who affirm that Marxism is *the* philosophy of history, timelessly true and unsurpassable, Aron replies that they show an extraordinary 'dogmatism and naivety' (OI, p. 126). Berlin similarly and sarcastically notes:

> What historiographer, what sociologist, can claim as yet to have produced empirical generalisations comparable to the great uniformities of the natural sciences? It is a commonplace to say that sociology still awaits its Newton, but even this seems much too audacious a claim; it has yet to find its Euclid and its Archimedes, before it can begin to dream of a Copernicus (L, p. 160)

Contra this determinism which implies that men do not master their own history, Berlin and Aron offer a more flexible – which will be called 'liberal' – answer to epistemological questions in history.

2.2 The Individual at the Heart of Historical Research

The emphasis Berlin and Aron put on individuals is not an innovation. The influence of Weber's 'methodological individualism' has already been observed. Yet it contrasts with the dominant view of their time. To them, the individual, as opposed to large impersonal mechanical structures or laws, plays a role on two levels: the historian, as an individual, cannot but allow his personality to speak in his work. Secondly, the object of the historian, i.e. individuals, also holds the capacity to reflect and decide on their own fate.

2.2.1 The Freedom of the Historian

For Aron, the historian does not have the same relationship with his object as the physicist has with his. The researcher has no vantage point, he is not external to his object (DCH, pp. 11-2). He is, in a way, his own object of study. He cannot, therefore, render history free from his own subjectivity. Bernard Williams makes a similar comment about Berlin's conception: 'Berlin affirms that our understanding of reality already includes the conception of it as existing independently of us and our understanding' (in CC, p. xiv). For Berlin, the historian remains a man with feelings and opinions even when performing his task as a scholar. Consequently, the past can be observed and analysed from various perspectives, as expressed by his famous metaphor of the Alps:

> Every past perspective itself differs in the perspective of all successive observers...
> These perspective and perspective of perspective are there, and it is just as idle to

ask which are true and which are false as it is to ask which view of the Alps is the true view and which the false (SR, p. 26)

On both Aron and Berlin's views, there are many interpretations of past events, and they depend partly on the character of the historian. His character is revealed in the choice of event, but also in the manner in which he recounts these events. History, like other humanities, involves a task of writing, which implies the selection of certain words rather than others. Berlin especially is attentive to what he calls the 'historical narrative.' He specifies its content by opposing it to exact sciences: 'we select certain events or persons because we believe them to have had a special degree of "influence" or "power" or "importance". These attributes are not, as a rule, quantitatively measurable, or capable of being symbolised in the terminology of an exact, semi-exact, science' (L, p. 143).

Acknowledging the relative – but not complete – partiality of the historian, can be conceived of as adopting a 'liberal' position. It is liberal in the sense that the historian is not portrayed as a perfect machine capable of recovering true facts, but as an independent being who creates as much as he observes. It also implies that new interpretations of the past are still possible, and that new ideas for the future may result from them. But neither Aron nor Berlin goes so far as to take the opposing view according to which all interpretations of the past are both possible and valid. Firstly, Aron underlines that the scholar, if he cannot put aside all his personal traits, has to remain independent from other external pressures, especially political ones (1959, pp. 22-3). Secondly, there are limits to the interpretations of facts, as noted by Berlin: 'there is a sense in which 'facts', what can be demonstrated by the evidence, as opposed to interpretations, theories, hypotheses, perspectives, must remain the same for all these changing outlooks, otherwise we should have no historical truth at all' (SR, p. 26).

Their refusal of a Nietzschean or postmodernist posture is understandable in light of their belief in a common nature of all human beings (and therefore of all historians).

2.2.2 Freedom of actors in the past

The plurality of interpretations of the past also comes from the indefinite and changing character of the object of study. Historical reality is human, and therefore complex and ambiguous. According to Aron and Berlin, the historian ought to focus not only on the structures of society, but also on individual human actions. Good historians are those, like Thucydides – whom Aron admires – who take into account the actions of individuals as well as groups (DCH, p. 148). This criterion is also of most importance for Berlin, who writes that

> The invocation to historians to suppress even that minimal degree of moral or psychological insight and evaluation which is necessarily involved in viewing human beings as creatures with... motives (and not merely as causal factors in the processions of events) seems to me to spring from a confusion of the aims and methods of the humane studies with those of natural science (L, pp. 140-1)

The obsolescence of the usual methods of 'explanation' result from this. But does this mean that the historian can never uncover what actors in the past did or meant to do? Aron and Berlin use an alternative method, which they borrow from Weber: the famous method of *understanding* or *verstehen*.

As seen previously, the method of 'understanding' that Aron recommends is not completely similar to that of Berlin.[19] However, they have in common the centrality given to the figure of the individual in history. This entails three common features of Aron and Berlin's methods. The first is the 'alterity' of the object studied. Acknowledging the importance of individuals in history implies that all individuals are

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[19] See part 1.2.1.

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different from each other. Consequently, the historian ought to project himself into the head of those he is studying if he is to understand him. For Aron, this should be the 'first step' in the historian's job (1973b, p. 9). Berlin is even more sensitive to this dimension, insisting on many occasions on the need to have an 'inside view' of events, to 'enter into the skin' of people of the past, and to 'transpose ourselves' into their mentality (AC, p. 98; in Yovel [ed.], 1978, p. 221).

Yet recognition of differences does not entail that we are incapable of recovering the state of mind of our ancestors. Alterity has its limits: namely, the values common to all humans. Aron rightly observes that 'this discovery of the other as different presupposes a certain community of values between me and him,' and that there still exists an 'inter-human community' which transcends time (1973b, p. 9). Berlin resorts to a distinction used by Vico – between *verum* (the true) and *factum* (the made) to express a similar view. He explains that 'Vico made use of an ancient scholastic proposition at least as old as St Augustine: that one could know fully only what one had oneself made. A man could understand fully his own intellectual or poetical construction, a work of art or a plan, because he had himself made it, and it was therefore transparent to him' (AC, p. 94). Galipeau adds that for Berlin 'if the principle is correct, then we have an "inside" view of all our creations, including art, morals, institutions, the economy, and so on. Moreover, we understand history in a more direct sense than we do nature' (1994, p. 18). The result is a possibility of 'entering' the minds of people of the past. To describe this process, Berlin uses an interesting parallel between the growth of a species and the growth of the individual:

> Just as we are able to recollect the experiences of childhood (and in our day psychoanalysis has probed further than this), so it must be possible to recapture to some degree the early collective experience of our race, even though this may require terrible effort (AC, p. 98)

A third important element, which insists on individuals considered in their fullest dimension, is the appreciation that they are not only governed by rational (and often egoistic) ends which they plan to achieve by rational means. Systems of values, beliefs, feelings, make up the complexity of man's consciousness. In this multiplicity of aspects, two primary categories can be distinguished. The first concerns the affective part of the individual. Aron talks about 'psychological impulses, categories of reasoning' or 'half-conscious passions' (1973b, p. 9; 1971, p. 1328). Berlin also emphasises 'psychological facts' (CC, pp. 135-6). The second category includes all the values that are influenced by the culture, environment and period in which people lived. Berlin famously calls them the 'concepts and categories' and includes, like his master Vico, symbols, myths, legends, languages, institutions (political, religious or familial), etc. Aron is at one with him when observing that 'one can understand a behaviour in depth only after examination of the system of knowledge, values and symbols which shapes the conscience of the actor' (1973b, p. 9).

The complexity of the object that the historian observes should lead him to adopt a position of modesty, and not to claim that full recovery of the past is an easy task. But it also contributes to the recognition of freedom of men in history.

2.3 A liberal defence of liberty in history

Aron and Berlin assert the liberty of men in history, but do not believe in the pure contingency of events. They refuse the assumption that each epoch has its values and cannot therefore be understood by other generations. Historians like Spengler or Toynbee, whom Aron and Berlin criticise on many occasions, endorsed this

relativism.[20] Aron and Berlin denounce their Nietzschean tendency to consider history as a mere succession of decisions taken by a few powerful men.[21] Against the extremes of relativism and of determinism, Aron and Berlin's writings offer an intermediate position. To them, the past is understandable partly by the analysis of long-term processes, dominant political, economic or social aspects, and partly by the unique intervention of individuals, or groups of individuals, whose actions are independent from more general features. The task of the historian consists in evaluating the impact of each of these elements. Aron explains very clearly how to weight their importance:

> L'historien dès qu'il s'intéresse aux acteurs ou faits parcellaires se demande quel rôle individus et accidents jouent par rapport à ce qu'on appelle forces profondes, les données massives de la structure économique et sociale. Il ne s'agit pas plus ici d'affirmer que de nier l'efficacité des grands hommes ou des accidents. La négation *a priori* de cette efficacité est contradictoire, impensable ; la négation *a posteriori* ne peut être que relative, valable pour telle ou telle période particulière de l'histoire (1973b, p. 11)

His message, shared by Berlin, has a deeply liberal connotation in the sense that it invites the researcher to refrain from making generalisations about the role of individuals in history. Each epoch has its singularities: sometimes individuals play a minor role, sometimes a great one. But there is no possibility that men could be the completely passive subjects of structures. This is not how we conceive of human beings, as remarked by Berlin:

> It is one of the greatest and most fatal fallacies of the great system-builders of the nineteenth-century Hegelian and Comtists and, above all, the many Marxist sects, to suppose that if we call something inevitable we mean to indicate the existence of a law... But as we ordinarily think of ourselves... we see a different spectacle: of men governed by few natural laws (SR, p. 37-9)[22]

Both liberals argue that contingency and necessity are complementary; yet, given the predominance of those who affirm the existence of laws of history in their time, they insist more on the element of contingency. Berlin repeats Herzen's famous expression

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[20] For a complete analysis of Aron's position, see Mesure, 1984, pp. 57-77.
[21] See for instance, for Aron : DCH, pp. 15-16 ; for Berlin : L, p. 113.

'history has no libretto', while Aron concurs with Tocqueville's 'open' philosophy of history (EPS, p. 308).

The final indeterminacy of history implies, for the historian, the limitations of his discoveries. It can therefore lead to a form of pessimism with regards to the efficacy of the discipline. But instead of despairing at the limitations of human power, Aron and Berlin in fact welcome the result, which signifies, for them, a guarantee of freedom on the part of individuals. Authentic freedom does not mean, for Berlin or Aron, a complete knowledge or the mastering of one's future. Freedom means an undetermined future, the absence of barriers, and the capacity for exercising choice. When commenting on Berlin's vision of history, Gray insists on his representation of humans as 'choice-makers', and not as law-governed animals.[23] Berlin gives a related example – one of the few historical examples he uses – with the case of Adolf Eichmann. Examining Eichmann's argument that he had no choice but to kill Jews if he did not want to be killed in turn, Berlin observes that he still had a choice, that of facing death, that there was 'no literal compulsion' that forced him to act as he did (FL, p. 73).

Echoing the Kantian view, Aron and Berlin deduce from this aptitude for choice the autonomy of the individual, which is, as these words of the young Aron show, a reason for hope: 'it is the belief in determinism which is the cause of our servitude. Faith in our will can be the basis of our autonomy. Such a faith is rational not mystical, because it depends on a critique of the determinist mode of thinking but also on an accurate appraisal of historical forces' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986a, p. 132). Autonomy explains the possibility of accidents and of contingency in history. This is why the two liberals restore the role of individuals or groups in history. Berlin stresses the role of

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[22] If one refers to Mesure (1984, pp. 52-3), it seems that Aron has a similar discourse.

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communist leaders such as Lenin to explain the rise of totalitarianism (1962, p. 15). Furthermore, he argues that the rise of Nazism in Germany, and of communism in Eastern Europe, are proof that 'human lives *are* radically alterable, human beings can be re-educated and conditioned and turned topsy-turvy – that is the principal lesson of the violent times in which we live' (SR, p. 13). Aron gave many more examples of the centrality of individual decisions:

> Si les Allemands à la veille de la bataille n'avaient pas envoyé deux corps d'armée vers le front oriental, le miracle de la Marne se serait-il produit ? Si la crise mondiale ne s'était pas prolongée durant des années, ou si les Français ou les Anglais avaient réagi militairement à la rentrée des troupes allemandes en Rhénanie, la dernière guerre mondiale aurait-elle eu lieu ? Sans Churchill l'Angleterre aurait-elle tenu tête toute seule au IIIe Reich ?... L'histoire traditionnelle est action, c'est-à-dire qu'elle est faite de décisions prises par des personnes en un lieu et en un temps précis. Ces décisions auraient pu être autres avec un autre homme dans la même situation, ou avec le même homme dans d'autres dispositions (DCH, pp. 318-9)

In both Aron and Berlin's work, the confirmation of men's freedom in history, of their capacity for choice and for action leads them to a shared final conclusion, of a more moral dimension: the recognition of human responsibility. Berlin's recurrent *motto*, in 'Historical Inevitability', is that determinism renders men irresponsible for their actions, which does not fit with the reality of our societies, where 'we continue to praise and to blame' (L, p. 146). Even though, as will be seen later, Aron especially insists on the necessity of political action – which is not always moral – he also indirectly implies the duty and liability of men with regards to their actions, as observed by Mesure (1984, pp. 52-3).

To conclude, a neglected dimension of the liberalism of Aron and Berlin is revealed in their approach of the philosophy of history. It consists in the affirmation that individuals are never completely governed by laws of history, and that they possess a partial command of their own future. To recall Aron's famous words, 'history is the tragedy of

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[23] See for instance Gray, 1995, p. 78. See also chapter 3 part 1 for the stress on 'radical choice.'

a humanity which makes its history, yet does not know which history it is making'
(1959, pp. 31-2).

3. DIVERGENT VIEWS ON THE STATUS OF HISTORY

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that Raymond Aron shares much in common with
Isaiah Berlin with regards to the philosophy of history. Several divergences are
nevertheless also observable, which do not undermine the general conclusion that they
have a similar *liberal* vision of history, but render more complex the evaluation of what
lessons liberals can learn from history. Oppositions in their 'modes of thinking' will be
emphasised. Firstly, their common denunciation of determinism does not lead them to
similar historical methods and practices (3.1). This leads, secondly, to a somewhat
contrasting account of what history really *is* as a discipline, Berlin thinking of it as an
art, and Aron as a science (3.2). Finally, it will be shown that this difference concerning
the status of history has distinct repercussions for the role it can play in the present.
Berlin uses history as a way of providing original, or of restoring forgotten views to
philosophical and moral reflection, while, for Aron, it is mainly the driving force behind
action, in particular *political* action (3.3).

3.1 Same target, different weapons: science vs. common sense

3.1.1 Some common points in their critiques

The dissimilarities between Aron and Berlin on historical matters are less an opposition
in principle than a divergence of *style*. In fact, both methods start with an analogous
approach, which consists in refuting determinists, especially Marxists. Aron and Berlin
both emphasise the gap between the discourse and the practice of Marxist historians,
and indeed of Marx himself. They observe that, despite their claims, their results do not

rely solely on facts. Berlin notices the persistence, in Marx, of a metaphysical dimension, inherited from Hegel (1939, p. 93). This leads John Gray to write that 'Berlin is clear that Marx's system of thought depends on metaphysical presuppositions that remain indefensible despite Marx's own attempt to give his theory of history systematic empirical corroboration' (1995, p. 91). Similarly, Aron dismisses the unrealistic assumptions of Marx and his followers, as, for instance, when they announce the impending fall of capitalism because of the ineluctable fall of the rate of profit in industry. This assumption, Aron asserts, has not been proven true in practice, because it neglects other important economic elements (OI, p. 183). More generally, both Aron and Berlin emphasise clearly that Marxists, despite their claims, are driven by an ideology.[24]

3.1.2 Differences in their techniques of demonstration

The framework Berlin and Aron adopt to rebut determinist historians seems, so far, relatively similar. It is only when one enters into the details of their demonstration that some degree of contrast appears. Berlin relies on common sense whereas Aron's approach is more scientifically laden. To start with Berlin, it is striking that, despite a recurrent plea for testing and experimentation, he never seems overly interested in doing it himself. In fact, no real scientific demonstration is to be found in Berlin's work. Few examples of historical events are present in his work, not even in the articles famous for his condemnation of historicism, such as in *Liberty*. Berlin relies essentially on references to less historically connoted situations. His favourite examples are almost always extracted from everyday commonplace situations. In his last essay on liberty, for instance he refers to the condition of a kleptomaniac to evaluate to what extent such a

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[24] I will come back to this topic in more details in chapter 2.

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person is responsible for his acts (L, pp. 254-5). And when he refers to historical periods, such as the French or Russian revolutions, or Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan in 'Historical Inevitability,' he never expands a great deal to illustrate the absence of determinism in history.

Unlike Aron, Berlin bases his refutation of those who affirm this existence of laws of history not through statistics or observations of social or economic aspects, but through what he calls 'common sense.' A clue to what this means is observable in the examples cited above, examples of common people in common situations, open for all to understand. To him, something is proven wrong if it does not fit with what ordinary men think. The first quality of a good historian is thus to share the widespread views of the everyday man, unlike a natural scientist: 'a man who lacks common intelligence can be a physicist of genius, but not even a mediocre historian' (CC, p. 141). An extract gives a fair account of how central this argument is to Berlin:

> whether or not determinism is true or even coherent, it seems clear that acceptance of it *does not in fact colour the ordinary thoughts* of the majority of human beings, including historians, nor even those of natural scientists outside the laboratory. For if it did, the language of the believers would reflect this fact, and be different from that of the rest of us... (L, p. 120, emphasis added).

Common sense is Berlin's main defence against the assumption that laws of history can be uncovered. This contrasts deeply with Aron's methods. Even though, albeit rarely, Aron declares that determinism is wrong because it does not *make sense to us*, most of the time he tries to dig out the reasons why this is so. To do so, he uses two techniques in particular. He firstly refers to empirical facts, whether social, political or economic, to show that Marx's or Marxist accounts are based on a one-sided vision of the reality of their time. He condemns Marx for his lack of judgement about the capitalist society of his time: 'why did Marx, from a model of dynamic economy, with a strong accumulation of capital, reach the conclusion of an impoverishment of the masses

despite a growing productivity?' (EL, p. 51). In the same way, he despises Stalin's claim that the class struggle intensifies as the construction of socialism advances. How, Aron sarcastically remarks, can one fight landowners in the Soviet Union, given that they have all disappeared with the nationalisation of land and industries? (DT, p. 246). The social side of Aron's work helps him immensely to lend empirical basis to a plea in support of the non-deterministic study of history.

Secondly, Aron's philosophical background is present alongside his social approach. He attacks determinists by proving that what they argue is illogical and that they contradict themselves. This *could* be seen as a similar argument to the 'common sense' emphasis of Berlin, yet Aron is far more rigorous and systematic than Berlin, as the few examples below illustrate. The first example deals with a very important premise of Marxist thought – the assumption that there is a main cause, or cause in the last instance, which regulates history as well as society.[25] This dominant cause is, for Marxists, economic: the system of production and its repercussion in the alienation of workers. Aron demonstrates, in his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, why 'the economy is neither the primary cause, nor the cause in the last analysis, of historical phenomena' (IPH, p. 37). Firstly, it is not possible to point to a single infrastructure, capable of explaining the functioning of all societies at all times. This would imply, as Mesure observes from Aron's writings, that man has to be defined almost entirely through labour:

> Pour que le marxisme constitue *la* philosophie de l'histoire, il faudrait que ce qui lui sert de principe philosophique de systématisation puisse être reconnu pour une vérité incontestable et, puisqu'il s'agit d'une définition de l'homme, pour la seule

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[25] Another example of the same nature could have be used, that is, that of Durkheimian theory according to which the notion of 'social milieu' is what explains best the particularities in modern societies. Aron dismisses this by showing the impossibility to uncover a final cause to complex entities like societies, and also notices that Durkheimian, and Durkheim himself, never really applied their assumptions. See Aron, 1971, pp. 1343-4.

thèse possible sur l'humanité de l'homme ; bref, il faudrait que la définition de l'homme par le travail épuise la notion d'humanité (1984, p. 39)

To Aron, man's nature is much more complex and cannot be reduced to his relation with labour. Secondly, he opposes the notion of cause 'in the last instance' by showing that causal regress never stops at one cause. In his *Memoirs*, he questions this logic: 'beyond the economic antecedent other, non-economic, antecedents would show up. How can we give a meaning to the expression *"in the last analysis"*? How can it be proven that it is always the situation, which is the *authentic cause* of an event, and that this situation itself is the effect of the method?' (M, p. 167). Because stopping the causal regress is necessarily arbitrary, Aron proves that determinists do not respect their claim to scientificity, but harbour metaphysical presumptions, just as the very doctrines they purport to criticise.

The second example I wish to analyse takes as its target French existentialism, whose most eminent representatives, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, were animated by a fascination with Marxist ideas. In a highly complex and erudite piece, Aron tries to refute their assertion that existentialism is not only compatible with Marxism, but can even be a philosophical foundation for it (MI). Very methodically and with a deep awareness of the philosophical concepts involved, Aron reduces these existentialist hopes to nothing, and shows that 'existentialism can never reach Marxism, unless it ceases to be existentialist' (MI, p. 42). To do so he uses numerous arguments. First, existentialism and Marxism have an antagonistic anthropology: the essence of man is, for Marxists, his labour, and his battle with nature, whereas for existentialists labour plays no role. The essence is, instead, the eternal struggle between individual consciences, with no necessary end, as in Marxist dialectics (MI, p. 43). Moreover, the revolution, which in Marxist doctrine ultimately solves conflicts, will not solve the existentialist problem of the dialogue between the individual and God or the absence of

God (MI, p. 51). Mainly, however, existentialists cannot accept historical materialism because it is contradictory to what Anderson describes as the 'existentialist question par excellence', namely, that of the enigma of history, and the fact that, for existentialists, man is solitary, and 'faced with a meaningless universe (1997, p. 100).

These variations of style between Aron and Berlin are symptomatic of a more general opposition on what exactly the task of the historian consists in.

3.2 History as an art vs. history as a science

Aron and Berlin both agree that the study of history is not a static and uniform undertaking, and recommend a greater level of understanding. Yet a divergence emerges when considering the application of their theory of 'understanding'. Berlin links this task with that of a psychologist, or artist, who tries to reveal the inner feelings of people's minds, on an individual scale. Conversely, Aron refuses to abandon completely the scientific part of the discipline and the possibility of reaching firmer truths about the past.

3.2.1 Berlin or the sense of empathy in history

It has already been noted that Berlin has a penchant for a person-to-person approach to the past, a tendency to transfer his discourse about the past into an ordinary example of daily life, which all can evaluate. What fascinates Berlin is not so much the big events of history, but the struggles of judgements and feelings that surround them. He claims that 'purely descriptive, wholly *depersonalised* history remains, what it has always been, a figment of abstract theory, a violently exaggerated reaction to the cant and vanity of earlier generations' (L, p. 140). In contradistinction to this, he urges a study of 'human' history which focuses on 'human activities'; that is,

Of what men did and thought and suffered, of what they strove for, aimed at, accepted, rejected, conceived, imagined, of what their feelings were directed at. It was concerned, therefore, with motives, purposes, hopes, fears, loves and hatreds, jealousies, ambitions, outlooks and visions of reality; with the ways of seeing, and ways of acting and creating, of individuals and groups (AC, p. 95).

In order to reach the inner feelings of men, Berlin adopts a rather peculiar method. His method is based on the idea that the researcher has to 'share' the preoccupations of his object to be able to grasp his reactions, or, to follow his words, to 'enter into the minds' of men (AC, p. 99). The relation then created between the scholar and his object supposes a sort of interaction between the two, and the resulting knowledge can be compared, as Berlin explains, to the 'knowledge of a friend' in a particular situation (AC, p. 105).

This reference to a 'friend' would be a very curious one for a traditional historian, one who normally strives not to get too 'close' to his subject matter. Aron never considered people of the past – especially not the great men – as 'friends.' Yet the dimension of 'friendship' is no shock to those who know Berlin's work well. He is, indeed, an expert in 'empathy'. Empathy is Berlin's *motto*. He excels not only at explaining its content, but also at putting it into practice, especially when various thinkers of the past, ranging from Machiavelli to Maistre or Sorel. As Bernard Williams remarks, this 'is one thing, besides a courteous nature, that makes Berlin a less than ruthless controversialist – a highly developed sensibility for what is to be the other party, to see the world in that different way' (in CC, p. xiv). Berlin admits, in this matter, his debt to the Italian thinker Giambattista Vico, and especially to his notion of *fantasia*. *Fantasia* is a form of empathy, which rests on a very high capability of insight into the personality of the other. Berlin describes it as

The capacity for conceiving more than one way of categorising reality, like the ability to understand what it is to be an artist, a revolutionary, a traitor, to know

what it is to be poor, to wield authority, to be a child, a prisoner, a barbarian. Without some ability to get into the skin of others, the human condition, history, what characterises one period or culture as against others, cannot be understood (AC, pp. 106-7)

Berlin's sense of empathy can be described as 'liberal,' to the extent that it takes into account the points of view of others, and tries to include them before establishing any conclusion, as underlined by Ignatieff:

> Berlin's ability to understand opposites is more than a personal quality he brings to the history of ideas. Empathy plays an important role in his account of how conflicting views are reconciled in liberal society. Compromises between competing values would be impossible if individuals were unable to enter into the views of those with whom they are in disagreement... In practice, liberal societies cohere because of agreement... Empathy and its twin, self-detachment, are what make liberal compromise possible (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, pp. 135-6)

Empathy requires the mastering of two main skills. Firstly, a very good psychological insight, by which I mean the awareness of all the facets of the individual's mind, of its 'concepts and categories', which Berlin defines as 'such notions as society, freedom, sense of time and change, suffering, happiness, productivity, good and bad, right and wrong, choice, effort, truth, illusion (to take them wholly at random)' (CC, p. 166). Some of these notions refer to an acutely moral and ethical level, others to a more cognitive one, both of which are more usually taken into account in literature than in history. Because reactions are always more or less connected to their context, and thus to the culture of their time, the second skill to be added is what Berlin calls 'a sense of reality', which is very similar to the 'common sense' mentioned previously, and which 'largely consists in semi-conscious integration of a large number of apparently trivial and unnoticeable elements in the situation that between them form some kind of pattern which of itself 'suggests' – 'invites' – the appropriate action' (1954, p. 776). The sense of reality Berlin talks about does not rely so much on detailed investigation into what characterises a past period (as in Aron) but much more on an 'intuition' that things could have been like this. Galipeau describes what this intuition consists of:

Berlin argues that the adequacy of historical writing is determined by two things. One is how well the narrative 'fits' with our sense of what is possible at a particular time: the point here is to avoid anachronism... The second test of adequacy is how well the model of human nature and society used to explain action 'fits' with our sense 'of what human beings... could have felt or thought or done' (1994, p. 27)

This technique of inquiring into what, in our sense, can 'fit', would not have suited Aron's research at all. Though he admits that the feelings of the researcher are always part of his examination, he would not have been prepared to leave the result to a mere 'intuition' not based on facts, and which could, if manipulated, be a pretext for unacceptable interpretations. On the danger of anachronism, he would, for instance, have offered instead a logical demonstration of characteristics that are compatible with each other, and which can therefore cohabit. Berlin, on the contrary, is at ease with the notion of intuition, which suits his temper. He possesses a great imaginative power, which he shares – if not with many historians – with 'artists, and, in particular, novelists' (SR, p. 105).

The allusion to artists brings me to my last main set of observations about Berlin's relation with the discipline of history. Berlin was never a 'pure' historian of politics, but claimed to be a historian of ideas. Nevertheless, most of his pieces do not look like authentic pieces of history of ideas – in the style of those of Skinner or Pocock – as noted by Kenny (2000, p. 1035). On many occasions, Berlin seems more to 'tell a story' than write history, even though the characters are real and the plot is not invented. Beyond this simple impression shared by many readers of Berlin, it is notable that Berlin often admits that the job of the historian is not that far removed from that of an author of literary work. There is an interesting extract in which not only his dismissal of social sciences, but also his admiration, if not envy, for masters in literature, is evident.

It suggests that, by inclination, Berlin was probably more a literary person than a historian:

> Every person and every age may thus be said to have at least two levels: an upper, public, illuminated... clearly describable surface from which similarities are capable of being profitably abstracted and condensed into laws; and below this a path into less and less obvious yet more and more intimate and pervasive characteristics, too closely linked to feelings and activities to be easily distinguishable from them. With great patience, industry, assiduity, we can delve beneath the surface – *novelists do this better than trained 'social scientists'* (SR, p. 20, emphasis added)

Berlin deeply believes that the historian has much in common with the novelist, because 'the concepts involved in the worlds described by novelists (or historians) are not the artificially refined concepts of scientific models... but a great deal richer in content and less logically simple or streamlined in structure' (L, pp. 142-3). Sometimes, he tries to restrain his temptation to make the two disciplines part of the same whole, but ultimately he convinces nobody, not even himself: 'history is not identical with imaginative literature, but it is certainly not free from what, in a natural science; would be rightly condemned as unwarrantably subjective and even, in an empirical sense of the term, intuitive' (L, p. 140). He eventually reaches the conclusion that history, if it is not an 'art' in the strict sense, necessitates possession of an 'artistic gift' (in Yovel [ed.], p. 224). And to prove that the historian always needs an artistic touch, he uses the revealing metaphor of the botanist and the gardener: 'there are regions where gardeners achieve conspicuously more spectacular results than botanists. And to distinguish these areas from one another is one of the first symptoms of the sense of reality' (1954, p. 776).[26]

In conclusion, Berlin appears more an historian of minds, or, better put, a 'searcher' into the maze of feelings, than a historian in the traditional sense. It is not so much the fact

that he focuses on ideas rather than contemporary affairs that makes him unique, since Aron also devotes many pieces to the study of thinkers' views. What remains original is the angle with which he enters into the self-understandings of these people. Here, he resembles in many ways the German Romantics. The 'particular self' was an obsession of men like Schlegel or Fichte, and its 'exfoliation', i. e. the search for authenticity or self-fulfilment through creation and introspection (RR, p. 95). Berlin still remains a liberal in his vision of history (anti-deterministic) and of the study of history (anti-positivist and centred around the capacity for choices of individuals). Yet this liberalism is tinged with an element of romanticism, which makes him more of an expert in minds than Aron.

3.2.2 Aron on History: The Defence Against Irrationalism

Raymond Aron does not conceive of history as an art. Apart from an early period of his career when he did not dismiss irrational elements from his analysis, the Frenchman never really shared Berlin's attraction towards the emotional causes of decisions taken by people in the course of history.[27] Not that he refuses to acknowledge the value of this dimension in the understanding of the past, but he disapproves of an irrational analysis of these elements, which lacks rigour and reliability. He makes this clear when defining 'understanding':

> The theory I set forth at the beginning was *at the opposite pole from the presumably irrationalist conception of understanding*, namely the *affective participation* of the consciousness in the consciousness of others. I designated understanding as the knowledge of meaning that, immanent in reality, was or could have been thought by those who experienced it or brought it into being (quoted in Anderson, 1997, p. 26, emphasis added)

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[26] The reference to the botanist/gardener distinction also appears in SR, p. 33.
[27] Mainly in his writings of the 1938-9 period. See Mahoney, 1998, pp. 17-8.

Aron's search for the rational is not limited to his style of writing, as seen in the introduction to this thesis. It is transposed to his method of study: disciplined, methodical, with no room for disorganised feelings of empathy. Aron adopts the posture of a scientist, albeit aware of the limitations to scientific pretensions. On his view, analyses conducted by people like Simmel – but it could have been Berlin – who resort mainly to the artistic element, 'though suggestive, are incomplete, because... Simmel avoids the difficulties by *resorting to art*' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986a, p. 124, emphasis added).

In contrast to this, Aron displays, in the words of Boyer, 'a taste for reality, a passion for facts, a love for truth and, an almost irritating allergy towards dream, the desire for the impossible and juvenile show-off' (1999, p. 42). This passion for facts is expressed in his recurrent classifications, taxonomies, lists of stages, of components, etc. Aron's thesis provides numerous examples, which are representative of Aron's effort to be inclusive.[28] More so than by his predisposition for classification, Aron's 'passion for facts' is revealed by his famous call for a 'probabilistic determinism' in the study of history and of society. This method consists of the combination of the task of understanding, borrowed from German philosophy, with a necessary, though not sufficient, task of explanation. Berlin would have criticised this second part, because of his assiduous aversion towards the 'scientific' ambition of the discipline (CC, p. 110). For Aron, the rejection of determinism in history does not entail the dismissal of the scientific aspiration of the research: 'the understanding of causality and the understanding of meaning, according to the formulation of Max Weber and the practice

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[28] See IPH, pp. 45-155 : in his attempt to define 'understanding', Aron distinguishes three stages: understanding 1) one's own past, 2) the intentions of another subject, and 3) the spiritual universality of society.' He also separates four stages in his schema of historical explanation (IPH, p. 203)

of all sociologists and historians, strengthen and confirm one another, even though each of the procedures has its own meaning' (cited in Anderson, 1997, p. 42). The two approaches are complementary: the task of understanding starts from the individual and his singularity, but moves towards more general statements, whereas the task of explanation creates inclusive causal relations, which will only be confirmed by its adequacy with particular cases.[29]

The explanatory part of Aron's method brings back the cause/effect schema of the natural sciences. But it is done in such a way that one cannot speak of strict determinism, but rather, in Aron's words, of 'probability', 'probabilism' or 'random determinism' (déterminisme aléatoire) (OI, p. 206; 1959, p. 11). More specifically, Aron talks about a 'retrospective calculation of probability,' which consists in the evaluation of the 'chances' that one event could have happened, or otherwise (IPH, p. 205). Concretely, it entails the question of what would have happened if this event had been different, or had not occurred. Aron uses this with many historical cases, such as the emergence of a golden age for Greek cities after the battle of Marathon, the revolutions of 1789 or 1848, or the outbreak of the First World War (EPS, pp. 513-4; p. 517). What renders highly probable the occurrence of an event depends on the tightness of its link with the situation in which it occurred. In the case of the Great War, it did not depend on one fact only, the assassination of the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand in Sarajevo, but on a web of intermingled components, whether short-term or more structural.

Aron is aware of the potential criticisms to be directed against his retrospective calculation of probability. He knows that it is open to charges concerning its

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[29] See Mesure, 1984, p. 112.

artificiality. It ought to be noted that Berlin has no trust for the practice of 'extrapolation' in history, which nearest resembles Aron's practice. He writes:

> One of the criteria of a natural science is rightly regarded as being its capacity for prediction; or, in the case of a historical study, retrodiction – filling in gaps in the past for which no direct testimony exists with the aid of extrapolation performed according to relevant rules or laws...But this way of filling gaps is commonly regarded as a none too reliable method of discovery of the past, and one to which no one would wish to resort if he could find more concrete kind of evidence (CC, pp. 110-1)

Berlin's reproach here for lack of concreteness is surprising, coming from a man who fosters the artistic side of the discipline. His comment, though, is nonetheless frequent, and Aron, in facing similar criticisms from a range of directions, sets out to take it apart. Firstly, he observes that it ought to be borne in mind that all results remain probabilities. Secondly, he does not think that the use of hypotheses or suppositions is unscientific. On the contrary, in the same vein as Popper, Aron believes that hypotheses are very useful as long as they are compared, in the last instance, to real facts. They are not taken as "true" indefinitely, they are merely an instrument used in the elaboration of a schema of interpretation. Thirdly, the process of trial and error revealed by the 'what if' questions is not completely unreal. For Aron, it corresponds to the 'approximate reconstitution of deliberations that have been or could have been those of actors' (1959, p. 11).

When he follows the schema of Aron's probabilistic determinism, the historian adopts an attitude quite remote from what Berlin recommends. Even if, in any case, he has to focus on the thought and deeds of individuals, he will not, on the first situation, 'enter into the minds' of his object. This would suppose a certain closeness of emotions, which repulses Aron. Instead, he offers a less-committed position for the scholar, which is not

of neutrality – always impossible – but a sort of 'fairness' , 'equity', or 'mediation' described by Mahoney:

> Le sociologue reste scientifique non par une neutralité humainement impossible et théoriquement indésirable mais par une description et évaluation *équitable* des phénomènes sociaux. Il décrit les forces et les faiblesses de chaque ordre social et refuse d'ignorer les faits gênants des régimes qu'il apprécie ou déplore. Le savant ... refuse de se laisser exalter par un rôle, par la dimension unique d'un régime ou d'une question politique. Ce n'est pas un « ascète méthodologique » inhumain mais un homme d'équilibre et d'équanimité. Il n'est pas neutre, mais c'est un médiateur (1998, p. 9)

Another highly important feature of the 'scientific' position of the historian for Aron is his capacity to acquire a knowledge of, to follow Ranke's words, 'wie geschehen ist.' There are, for Aron, limits to the possibilities open to the researcher. The choices the researcher has to make, even though they are always difficult, can remain rational and thus aspire to general and universal truths. To return to the example of the First World War, not all interpretations of the events are true, especially not the communist version:

> Entre la présentation de la guerre de 1914 dans la suite du capitalisme et du partage du monde (style Lénine modifié) et la présentation de cette même guerre dans la suite des querelles nationales à l'Est de l'Europe, le système des alliances excluant la localisation des hostilités (style Elie Halévy), peut-on dire qu'il y a compatibilité, enrichissement du savoir par la pluralité ou que « les liaisons sont ce qu'elles sont » ? Personnellement, je dirais qu'une discussion raisonnable *devrait* conduire à relâcher la liaison entre rivalités économiques et commerciales d'une part, guerre de 1914 d'autre part (1971, p. 1334)

Aron's 'mode of thinking' is characterised by a search for seriousness and professionalism. Eventually, this contributes to the elaboration of truths at a more general level, about the human community and its trans-temporal characters.[30] In a way, Aron reaches, like Berlin, moral outcomes. But whereas, for Berlin, history permits the *discussion* between us and people of the past, and allows contemporary dilemmas to be inferred by new perspectives, for Aron history, and more generally all human sciences, can partly *solve* some these dilemmas and teach us a way to find our own humanity, and eventually our liberty.

It is interesting, at this stage of the argument, to bring back in the topic of the Enlightenment. Berlin and Aron disapprove of the unbounded ambitions of eighteenth-century *philosophes*, and their unlimited faith in the power of Reason.[31] This does not imply that Aron distrusts reason entirely. On the contrary, it ought to be observed that, where Berlin relies on 'common sense' or 'intuition', Aron prefers a moderate use of reason. Berlin's position on the question of reason is rather ambiguous. He does not dismiss it entirely, but values on many occasions the positions of thinkers, such as Herder or Vico, who do so. Yet, in no case is it comparable to Aron's vision, who, according to Anderson

> does not go as far as to completely dismiss the claims of reason and the prospect of objective knowledge of historical tendencies...If we were to surrender completely the principle of reason, would we not then become, to borrow Manent's terminology again, the "plaything of Time?" No knowledge of history would be possible, only aesthetic interpretation: history and the social sciences would be nothing more peculiar than forms of literature, reasonable political action left without foundation (1997, pp. 23-4).

His aversion towards an 'aesthetic interpretation' distances him from Berlin, because it could lead to a form of relativism, which would be as dangerous as a total confidence in Reason. Reason has, for Aron, an intermediary status: it is to be praised in its 'intention to universal truth', not its systematic success in doing so (1997, p. 51).

Whereas a connection between Berlin and the Romantic movement – which reacted against the Enlightenment – has been perceived (and will be developed in the next chapter), for Aron the connection can be made with one of the greatest figures of the Enlightenment: Kant. The German philosopher influenced Aron very early on, largely because his teachers, such as Brunschvicg, were Kantian. Moreover, Kantianism is at

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[30] See Mahoney (1998), pp. 25-6.

[31] For discussions on the different interpretations of the Enlightenment, see chapter 2, part 1.2.

the centre of his thesis of 1938. Mesure draws a meaningful comparison between the two men:

> Reconstituer de façon systématique la réflexion d'Aron sur la connaissance historique ne se peut envisager qu'en prenant comme point de départ et comme fil conducteur le projet... d'une Critique de la Raison historique. Une telle Critique se donnait pour but de prolonger la Critique de la Raison pure sur le terrain des sciences sociales : « on part de l'idée que Kant ne connaissait que les sciences de la nature et on imagine une critique qui serait aux sciences historiques ce que le Critique de la Raison pure est à la physique ». Cette recherche « aurait, comme la critique kantienne, une double fonction : confirmer la vérité de la science et en limiter la portée. » (1984, p. 8)

Aron, in the course of his thesis, but also in other writings, proves to be at one with Kant's thesis according to which 'it is a representation of the end of history as an idea of Reason which guided historical knowledge' (Mesure, 1984, p. 115). Reason is not all powerful in Kant, but it does 'provide us with "regulatory ideas" to orient us within history and in one way to judge history' (1975b, p. 9).

3.3 Liberal lessons of the past: moral dilemmas vs. political action

The variations between Berlin and Aron's accounts of history could be summed up as follows: history as an art versus history as a science. Differences in method entail differences of outcomes. History teaches us a variety of lessons, and Berlin emphasises one type, philosophical and moral, while Aron another, more political.

Before analysing each of these types, a similarity between them ought to be highlighted. Both Aron and Berlin believe that there is much to be gained, in the present or the future, from the interpretation of an event, or series of events or ideas, at a particular moment of history. They do not study history simply for history's sake, but aim to apply their results as contributions to debates of their time. Berlin, even if he focuses on exceptional figures instead of average people, is appreciative that history is not only the

accumulation of particular details, but also the elaboration of a big story. The move

between the two levels creates a tension, which he describes as follows:

> the greater the number of similarities that we are able to collect (and the more
> dissimilarities we are able to ignore) – that is to say the more successfully we
> abstract – the simpler our model will be, the narrower will be the range of
> characteristics to which it will apply, and the more precisely it will apply to it; and,
> conversely, the greater the variety of objects to which we want our model to apply,
> the less we should be able to exclude, and consequently the more complex the
> model will become, and the less precisely it will fit the rich diversity of which it is
> meant to summarise (CC, p. 120)

Berlin affirms that both levels are indispensable, because they correspond to

'complementary human demands: one for unity and homogeneity, the other for diversity

and heterogeneity' (CC, p. 136). Aron gives an identical account of this dilemma, which

he calls the 'hermeneutic circle', a circle that goes from singularities to universals and

vice versa. [32] Despite the difficulties raised, Aron is not led to pessimistic conclusions as

to the possibility of giving some coherence to history: 'one fears that the intervention of

partial facts…prevents the intelligibility of the whole. This fear is unfounded. Whether

facts, in the detail, could have been other than they actually did, does not prevent us

from understanding the whole story' (OI, p. 177). And Aron is persuaded that

regularities can be revealed, which allows us to talk about a 'one and unique history'

(EPS, p. 15). Yet the regularities Aron emphasises are not the same as those Berlin

concentrates on.

3.3.1   Berlin: irreducible antagonisms of values

In his work, Isaiah Berlin shows a particular interest for values and judgements. For

Berlin, history is the story of everlasting clashes between opposing visions of the world.

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[32] Cited by Anderson, 1997, pp. 33-4: 'there are some people who resort that the historian loses himself in
a vicious circle between the age and the work. He construes the age through which he then explains the
work without taking the heed of the fact that he only knows the age through the works… Of course there
is a coming and going between the work and its age, between the works and the vents of the age which
might perhaps be called the hermeneutic circle – a circle which is not vicious.'

As Morgenbesser and Lieberson observe, what is at stake in history for Berlin – who

follows Vico's account – is not the world itself but its representations across time:

> As Berlin puts it, Vico thinks that "to understand history is to understand what men
> made of the world in which they found themselves, what they demanded of it, what
> their felt needs, aims, ideals were: he seeks to discover their vision of it, he asks
> what wants, what questions, what aspirations determined a society's view of
> reality" (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 12)

Different epochs, different contexts create different representations. All of them are, for

Berlin, worthy of study. The confrontation of this variety of opinions gives a more

authentic account of the philosophical issues related to the human condition. His

concern for this diversity is characteristic of Berlin's liberalism. As Gray affirms, what

is striking in Berlin's work is the incessant confrontation of points of views, and how it

is seen as beneficial, like the Greek fight 'agon' (which leads Gray to talk about an

'agonistic liberalism', 1995, p. 1). For Gray, an important benefit is that one can recover

lost perspectives, whose disappearance was due to their dependence on 'doomed social

and political structures, or systems of belief, for their existence and viability' (Gray,

1995, p. 83). Though some losses are irreparable, others can be recovered, as long as the

historian satisfies the requirements described earlier.

The dialogue between the living and the dead about the good and the bad, or the just

and the unjust, occurs inside the minds of those who study the past. Their accession to

other views is realised by the process of empathy described earlier, a process at which

Berlin excels. Berlin's empathy can be criticised when the cost of entering into the mind

of a thinker is to do in such a way that it seems to justify the unjustifiable. Even though

Berlin repeats on many occasions that to understand the position of somebody does not

mean to agree with it and to forgive its odiousness, his method proves its limits in the

case of fascist ideas. Fascist ideas and deeds are considered by many as inhuman. If

they are inhuman, no human can ever grasp them, but Berlin presents an account of

their origin in his piece on Maistre. He is confronted by what Ignatieff sees as an

irresolvable dilemma:

> either you maintain that fascists are human only too human, and you therefore
> absorb into your account of human nature some measure of the Maistrean vision of
> human beings as innately and naturally violent; or you maintain that all human
> beings know what inhumanity consists in, in which case fascists cease to qualify as
> normal human beings. Berlin wants to maintain both that all human beings know
> what it is to be human, and that fascists were human only too human. It is not clear
> how he can. That appears to be the dilemma left unresolved in his account of
> fascism (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 144)

Can one interpret Berlin's reluctance to criticise opinions of others as a simple lack of

discernment, or of confidence in his own liberal ideas? A careful reading of Berlin's

work is sufficient to prove that Berlin is committed to the defence of individual liberties

against fascism. Consequently, a lack of discernment is more to be blamed. It is

provoked, I believe, by a desire to present the conflicts at stake rather than their

solution. As said earlier, what fascinates Berlin is the confrontation of opinions, the

complexity of a dilemma about values, and a desire to encourage reflection on the

veracity of one's own view. He wants to challenge certitudes, not to reinforce them. In

this sense, Berlin seems to resemble Weber, as previously noted. Both men have clear

and strong views on what is good for the world, yet both hide them in their account of a

'war of Gods', or of a clash of opposite values, in order to show the unlimited extent of

the diversity of values and judgements.

3.3.2 Aron's striving for action

Whereas for Berlin history commands us to think twice and meditate before affirming

the accuracy of one's ideas, for Aron history commands us to act. This is why, though

he can be anticipated to be in agreement with Berlin's imperative that views be

challenged, the Frenchman is not burdened with irreducible dilemmas. Many elements

encourage Aron to say that history commands us to take part in the political decisions of our time.

First of all, Aron takes a stand on political debates of his time, since he was a daily commentator on 'history in the making.' Secondly and more importantly, he believes that the study of history and the commitment to public life are intermingled and that their combination define the historical condition of man, as observed by Draus: 'historical understanding, for Aron, is both an act of awareness and a practical act (decision, action)... Man does not exist outside his history; there is no other history than that of man. Man is the subject of history and defines himself through history (1985, p. 23). Aron's aim is to show the pertinence of the past in the present (DCH, p. 7). He applies this when commenting on events of his time. For instance, during the 1968 crisis, when referring to Tocqueville's writings on the 1848 revolution, he highlights the similarities of the two situations, and invokes the reflection on the outcomes of the latter in order to take a fair position on the former (*Rév*, pp. 29-36).

Thirdly, for Aron, a survey of the course of history enables conclusions to be reached about how our political system should be run. There are indeed some permanent elements in the history of humanity; these elements have been highlighted by Aron as well as Berlin. The most important is the liberty of men in history. Men possess a relative capacity for choice. While this leads Berlin to an endless reflection on the opposition between choices, Aron accepts, with no guilty conscience, the ceding of some values which is necessarily incurred in the making of this choice – the justification being that it facilitates the process of decision-making. Aron relies on the freedom of man in history to construct a schema of political participation, to defend commitment in the public sphere. This is fairly summed up by Draus

> L'action politique, action par excellence historique, est une expression de la liberté humaine dans l'histoire. La politique est liberté mais non au sens où l'histoire commanderait la liberté, mais plutôt au sens où *liberté est condition de toute action, de toute politique* (1984, p. 1206, emphasis added)

Aron's approach does not contain the tragic dimension of Berlin's. It does not have its complexity either. In a sense, Berlin strives to keep in mind the ramifications of the lessons of history, which constrain him in a process of continually questioning of the veracity of his own judgements. Aron's attitude, on the contrary, is much more practical, or even Machiavellian in the sense that he deals with opinions only to the extent that they fit the reality of the moment. From this he concludes, unlike Weber and Berlin, that there is no necessary 'war of Gods,' and no separation of the scholar from the politician. The lessons of history can help find temporary solutions to political problems, as Manent highlights:

> Pour le sociologue allemand [Weber], l'homme est double : savant, il dégage la chaîne des causes historiques, il s'abstient de tout « jugement de valeur » ; politique, il choisit librement ses « valeurs », son dieu ou son démon... Aron objecte : séparer ainsi la science et la valeur, c'est se rendre la pensée trop facile, tout en rendant la vie des hommes impossible. La science, en effet, si neutre qu'on la suppose, implique une communauté humaine en marche vers la vérité, une idée de l'humanité et de ce qui vaut pour elle (1987, p. 74)

Yet Aron was never a truc politician. He promoted action in politics and gave grounds for it, but remained a 'committed observer' during his long career. He probably feared losing his sense of detachment and becoming a prejudiced doctrinaire in the style of a great number of politicians of his time.

CONCLUSION

Three main conclusions can be emphasised in light of this analysis of the nature and role of historical studies for Aron and Berlin. First of all, it would be an exaggeration to assert that Aron and Berlin present radically new interpretations of the philosophy of history. In their epistemology as well as their methodology, they owe a significant debt

to previous thinkers, especially from the German school. Yet, and secondly, their accounts are original to the extent that their defence of individual liberty is deeply bound up with their vision of history as free from universal laws. It signifies that their political philosophy is not separable from their critical philosophy of history. Third, their defence of liberty and plurality has its roots in their account of history. Draus notices of Aron that 'the Aronian attachment to freedom comes more from his methodology and from his philosophy of history than from his conscious will to extend a great liberal tradition. The liberalism of Aron was...existential, and not doctrinaire' (Draus, 1984, p. 1207). As for Berlin, Galipeau remarks that 'Berlin's knowledge of history and sense of pluralism militate against claims that there is only one form of best life, one form of liberty, one kind of individuality, one good polity' (1994, p. 174). Such a dimension of a 'liberal' mode of thinking is often neglected, especially in recent liberal theory, which tends to lack historical depth. Yet the example of Aron and Berlin could contribute to a better awareness of its power of explanation.

Nevertheless, as the examples of Aron and Berlin highlight, the status given to the lessons of history is likely to vary. This is why a distinction should be made between the Berlinian effort to use history to expand the terms of theoretical reflection on conflicts of values and Aron's more concrete enterprise to promote political action on the basis of historical experience. This antagonism corroborates with our original hypothesis; namely, that the opposition between Aron and Berlin is not to be found at the level of theoretical principles, but more on a divergence in the *manner* of promoting their liberalism. The opposition between history as an art and history as a science, and furthermore between a moral and a political account of what history has to say,

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illustrates the dissimilarities between Aron and Berlin, and potentially indicates the diversity with which history is treated within the liberal current more broadly.

CHAPTER 2: RESISTING THE TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION

INTRODUCTION:

The hopes invested by millions of people in the accomplishment of the perfect society promised by communism irreversibly collapsed along with the Berlin Wall itself in November 1989. The result is, to follow Russell Jacoby's words, that 'a utopian spirit – a sense that the future could transcend the present – has vanished... Someone who believes in utopias is widely considered out to lunch or out to kill' (1999, p. XI). Yet for the major part of the twentieth century, 'visionary' projects and their implementation attracted the attention of those who hold faith in them or, on the contrary, dedicated every effort to denouncing them as 'totalitarian'.

In addressing France, Brian Anderson correctly observes that 'it is easy to forget, from our post-Marxist standpoint, the extent of Marxism's influence over an earlier generation of intellectuals' (1997, p. 62). This comment, applied to Aron and Berlin's writings on totalitarianism, should help avoid the major pitfall of anachronism. Instead, it is crucial that one immerses oneself in the context of the events that Aron and Berlin faced. A synthetic overview of this context can be found in Abbot Gleason's *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (1995), in which the specificities of reactions in various countries are also stressed. A distinction is highlighted between the reactions in Britain – mainly anticommunist, except for a few Marxist adepts in Cambridge – and France, dominated by an intelligentsia sympathetic to Marxism, but also where 'the intellectual arena... was far closer to the political than anywhere in Europe' (1995, p. 146). Thus, a second element to bear in mind is that Berlin did not have to confront the same hostility as Aron. The intellectual milieu in which Berlin

moved, and British public opinion more generally, broadly mirrored his own positions. By contrast, the appeal of Marxism for French people was significant.[1] It entails that the hostility that Aron endured was undeniable.[2] This difference in the context of writing could provide an explanation of the divergences between what Aron and Berlin have to say about communism.

Yet Aron and Berlin have in common their rejection of totalitarian ideologies. In asking which thinkers are not 'shallow about tyranny', the two examples Mark Lilla immediately thinks of are Raymond Aron and Isaiah Berlin (2001c). This instructs us about the eminence of the two men on this topic. If they cannot be seen as pure experts in the philosophy of history (chap. 1), nor on nationalism (chap. 4), their authority with regard to Nazism and/or communism is indisputable.[3] Their *liberal* stand can be interpreted mainly as a *response* to the totalitarian threat. Indeed, the anti-systematic stand that we have already pointed out in their approach of history, but which can also be found in their defence of a pluralist order, has its roots in their common rejection of the uniformity and determinism that drive totalitarian regimes. The connection with the first chapter is thus evident. We have seen how the confidence in reaching *scientifically* the truth about the past has led some to turn 'political and moral problems' into 'technological ones' (Berlin, L, p. 167). Indeed, totalitarianism, as a current of thought

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[1] The appeal for French intellectuals is described by Tony Judt in *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (1992); whilst the impact on the lives of the common man is shown by Marc Lazar in *Maisons Rouges* (1992).

[2] Aron's isolation should nevertheless not be exaggerated, as shown by Sirinelli (1995, pp. 205-54).

[3] Nevertheless, there were other responses to totalitarianism contemporaneous to those of Aron and Berlin. See Friedrich, Carl and Brzezinski, Zbigniew (1956) *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Arendt, Hannah (1951) The Origins of Totalitarianism. London: Secker & Warburg; Talmon, Jacob (1952) *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy.* London: Secker and Warburg; Hayek, F.A (1944) *The Road to Serfdom.* London: Routledge; Camus, Albert (1951) *L'homme révolté.* Paris: Gallimard.

and as a political experience, invariably has its roots in what Tzvetan Todorov calls a 'hyper-determinism' about the destiny of men (1996, p. 233).

Now that the link with the previous chapter has been established, it is imperative to define the exact scope of the present one. The term 'totalitarianism' is used by both Aron and Berlin – especially the former – when referring to the experience of the Nazi and Soviet regimes, and to their systems of thought based on a possible harmony of all men and all values, and the idea of a perfect society.[4] Yet, it soon appears that Berlin's use of the term 'totalitarian' remains rather vague, and not very frequent. Berlin prefers the words 'monism', or 'utopia', which do not cover the same ground as Aron intends when he speaks of 'secular religions' or 'ideocracies'. Though they have the same major target (mainly communist regimes), Aron and Berlin do not adopt the same approach to the subject. Partly, they are driven by identical questions, such as: What are the origins of totalitarianism? What can one do to prove that they are misleading and dangerous? What alternatives can one offer? Their respective answers to these questions are not, in fact, deeply dissimilar: both show the devastating effects of overconfidence in science and progress; and both see in the defence of liberty and of a pluralist society the main solution to halt these effects. When dealing with their common understanding of totalitarian phenomenon, our aim will be to assess how convincing their arguments to resist the 'totalitarian temptation' are (Revel, 1976).

But this chapter will mainly tackle what *differs* in Berlin and Aron's vision of totalitarianism, in order to be able to distinguish amongst *liberal* responses to this

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[4] Italian Fascism is not central to either of them, especially not Berlin, and will be excluded from the analysis.

phenomenon. A primary distinction between the two thinkers can be found in the perspective they take when questioning the totalitarian phenomenon. Berlin is preoccupied by the following questions: How can one read the canon after totalitarianism? Are any of the great thinkers of the past responsible for the traumatic deeds of the present? What is so fascinating about utopias that they subjugated so many people? These issues are essentially related to two major fields: the *history of ideas* on the one hand, and, on the other, the *psychological* insight into utopian minds. Aron's concerns are, on the contrary, situated at a more *sociological* and *political* level, though he does not abandon the question of the canon. His work is centred on issues that Berlin largely evades: Why did these regimes appear in the twentieth century? What makes totalitarian regimes so different from tyrannies of the past? What is inherently flawed and therefore self-defeating in the totalitarian system? From this methodological distinction (intellectual history *versus* sociology) a number of differences between the work of Aron and that of Berlin will follow: a direct *versus* indirect approach to the totalitarian phenomenon, a short-term *versus* long-term approach to its origins, and the study of political regimes *versus* study of the minds. In each case, Aron holds the first stand of each opposition, Berlin the second.

The thread of our analysis will follow the distinctions just described. In a first part, Berlin's indirect account of totalitarianism, *via* the concepts of 'monism' and 'utopia', will be appraised. They are, for him, by no means a new trend in the history of ideas, but a recurrent feature of human nature. Given his long-term approach, the role of the Enlightenment will be stressed, and then criticised. Eventually, Berlin's positions will be assessed as more moral than political, based on the dilemma caused by the impossibility of a harmony of values.

The second part will be dedicated to Aron's views. Unlike Berlin, Aron analyses totalitarianism as radically novel, a product of the twentieth century, of modern society and of its industrialisation and democratisation. Far from blaming the *philosophes*, he sees the origins of the totalitarian ideology in the instrumentalisation of the 'myth of the Revolution', but also in the Marxist denunciation of capitalism. Aron therefore provides a highly political account of Nazism and Communism: political in the sense that he analyses the regimes as well as the ideologies, and in the sense that he offers a political alternative to the totalitarian threat, with the institutions of constitutional-pluralistic regimes.

1. BERLIN'S REPUDIATION OF MONISM: THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON TRIAL

Isaiah Berlin is rightly considered a major figure of the Western camp opposing totalitarianism, and in particular its communist version. Biographically, his early life even made him the symbol of the liberal stance: he and his parents had fled their Russian homeland soon after the October Revolution. Since that day Berlin was a fierce opponent of revolutionaries of all sorts, which won him a sympathetic comment from an otherwise fierce opponent, Leo Strauss. Strauss wrote that '[i]t would be short-sighted to deny that Berlin's comprehensive formula is very helpful for a political purpose – for the purpose of an anti-Communist manifesto designed to rally all anti-Communists' (in Schoeck [ed.], 1961, p. 138).

If it is undeniable that Berlin's writings are a response to the events of his time, his response is nevertheless very *indirect*. Unlike other anti-communists like Aron, Berlin does not specifically attack the Soviet regime. His criticism is much broader. This is why it is necessary to begin with an analysis of what Berlin's real target is. Berlin did not condemn political regimes as such, but rather *systems of thought*, which he

described as 'utopian' or 'monist'. I will argue that this insight into the totalitarian mind is extremely accurate and useful for our understanding of twentieth-century tyrannies. Yet, it is not without shortcomings: we will then see that, in his assumption that monism derives mainly from the Enlightenment, Berlin probably exaggerates the wickedness of the *philosophes*. Thirdly, we will discuss Berlin's solution to monism, namely the pluralism found in the Counter-Enlightenment. This will lead to the conclusion that Berlin's approach to totalitarian thought lacks a political dimension and is rather to be classified as a study in moral philosophy.

1.1 The Hubris of the Motive: the Belief in a 'Final Solution'

1.1.1   Rarity of concrete political targets

What first strikes the reader of Berlin is the contrast between his reputation as a fierce anti-communist and the relative absence of his explicit attacks against communism. His targets are seldom contemporary. He at times mentions 'Communist and Fascist regimes' (L, p. 285), or 'communism' and 'Nazism', but they are to be taken as a mere illustration of something bigger, and are hardly studied for themselves. It is surprising, though, that names such as Stalin or Hitler, which are normally *over*used by writers and essayists, are not recurrent features of Berlin's discourse. Stalin, to take only one example, is mentioned only twice in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, and seven times in what is supposed to be Berlin's most famous anti-communist piece, *Liberty*. Consequently, Berlin's critique of totalitarianism remains generally abstract.

Another unusual habit of Berlin is his reluctance to use the term 'totalitarianism', and his imprecision when doing so. Berlin does not really make any differentiation between authoritarian (or any type of tyrannical regime or system of ideas) and totalitarianism. In 'Two Concepts of Liberty', he remarks that the 'positivist doctrine of

liberation by reason' is a common feature of 'the nationalist, Communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian creeds of our day' (L, pp. 190-1). In 'Liberty', his lack of rigour is even more apparent, since he opposes 'totalitarian and authoritarian regimes' to liberalism, and concludes that they 'are the two cardinal ideas that have faced one another and dominated the world since, say, the Renaissance' (L, p. 286). Here, he implies that totalitarian regimes are not substantially dissimilar to authoritarian ones, and that they have existed for a long period of time. This constitutes the first contrast between Berlin and Aron's account of totalitarianism, given that the latter makes recourse to many historical and political references, and also adopts a much more meticulous definition of totalitarianism.

1.1.2   Berlin's real target: the utopian and monistic hedgehog

Berlin's approach to totalitarianism is conceptual, centred on the dogmas that drive totalitarian movements. His two favourite words to describe them are 'monism' and 'utopia'. Although they might not strictly cover the same notions, Berlin uses them interchangeably. Berlin defines them as 'the old perennial belief in the possibility of realising ultimate harmony' (CTH, p. 8). A monist accepts as true the "*philosophia perennis*" whereby all the desires of all people can be reconciled in the future, if only one follows the appropriate route. This must lead, to borrow O'Sullivan's words, to 'a single ideal of individual and social perfection' (in Barry [ed.], 1999, p. 67). Berlin elaborates upon this, asserting that monism is driven by three central assumptions, which can be summed up as follows: 1) All genuine questions can only have one correct answer; 2) a method exists for the discovery of these correct answers, which is

knowable; 3) all correct answers must be compatible with one another (CTH, p. 24).[5] The first two points allow us to understand why Berlin calls these types of theories 'monistic': they accept only *one* solution to each problem, and *one* method of unearthing it. Their system is centred on *one* big principle, which governs all other principles and actions.

To make his depiction clearer, Berlin brings into play a metaphor of the 'hedgehog and the fox,' first indicated by the Greek poet Archilocus:

> The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing... taken figuratively, the words... mark one of the deepest differences which divides writers and thinkers, and, it may be, human beings in general. For there exists a great chasm between, on the one side, those who relate everything to a central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel... and on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory... related by no moral or aesthetic principle (RT, p. 22)

This interpretation of Archilocus' fragment has caused two majors controversies. Firstly, Greek specialists have argued that Berlin misinterpreted the Greek poet. I will not enter into the details of the dispute — since Berlin was prepared to admit his error (1980).[6] The second controversy is more relevant to us. Some scholars have maintained that the hedgehog/fox dichotomy is too Manichean, and that no thinker really corresponds to any of these two ideal-types (Lukes, in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 43). Such a criticism is, I think, not legitimate. Firstly, Berlin himself admitted that, if taken beyond its illustrative use, the distinction was 'a bit artificial', or even 'absurd' (RT, p. 23). Secondly, as Lilla correctly observes, the hidden objective behind the metaphor is extremely serious and pertinent, because it is

> meant to help illustrate the puzzle Berlin saw at the heart of modern history. The puzzle is this: how did the optimistic and progressive spirit of eighteenth-century Europe give way to the dark and terrifying world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How did the Europe that produced Goethe and Kant, Voltaire and

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[5] This tripod is recurrent is Berlin's work. See for instance 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' (L, p. 290).
[6] This took the form of an exchange of letters in the *New York Review of Books*: 25 September and 15 October 1980.

Rousseau, Tolstoy and Chekhov, also produced the Lager and the Gulag? (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 33)

And, indeed, it is most useful for the understanding of monist or utopian thought. But what, according to Berlin, is wrong and dangerous about monism? On one occasion, Berlin acknowledges that utopias are not all bad: 'I do not say that the ideal of self-perfection – whether for individuals or nations or Churches or classes – is to be condemned in itself' (L, p. 214). Dreaming of a better future, in other words, is all well and good, but Berlin also asserts that 'equally it seems to me that the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised is demonstrably false' (L, p. 214). And, to make sure that no-one is mistaken about the real significance of utopias, he refers to their hopes with the heavily connoted phrase of 'the belief in a final solution' (CTH, p. 15).

Laurence Davis distinguishes two main reasons for Berlin's dismissal of utopias. The first is that 'a perfect solution is, not merely in practice, but also in principle, impossible in human affairs' (2000, p. 58). Here we touch upon the heart of Berlin's philosophy, which results from his vision of humanity as inherently plural but also flawed. Borrowing from Kant, he affirms that '[o]ut of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' (CTH, p. 19). Berlin objects, in particular, to the 'static' character of utopias. He argues that the history of humanity has shown that men's ideals vary with time and space, and that no such generalisation can be made. It is an 'idle fancy' to pretend that it can be the case (L, p. 167). The second reason for Berlin's rejection of utopias is, according to Davis, 'that any determined attempt to produce it is likely to lead to suffering and loss of individual freedom' (2000, p. 59). Berlin condemns monism not only in theory but also its implementation in practice, though he never really elaborates on its practical outcomes. There is no price too high to

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pay for the realisation of perfection and truth, and the outcome has been a succession of massacres and horrors committed in the name of the greatest good.

1.1.3 Criticism of Berlin's conceptual framework

If we try to evaluate the acuteness and usefulness of Berlin's concepts of monism and utopia, several flaws can be uncovered, which compel a re-examination of some of his positions but do not retract from the force of his main argument.

A first problem lies in the relative vagueness with which Berlin presents monism. Michael Kenny remarks that

> [b]oth the category of monism, and the grounds upon which he offered a critique of it, remain under-determined in his thought... He in fact collected numerous claims under the heading of monism, including: the belief that a single answer to questions of truth and meaning can be discovered; the conviction that human ends are ultimately fixed and possible to rank using critical reason; and the notion that the various principles according to which human society ought to be ordered are compatible or indeed commensurable (2000, p. 1029)

This confusion is indeed undeniable. Berlin made the rejection of 'monism' his favourite precept, and he was inclined to see monists everywhere. The exaggerated frequency of monistic philosophy in the history of humanity and in the character of people tends to minimise its power of explanation. This incites Kenny to conclude that 'it is not clear that the concept of monism provides us with anything other than a rather blunt conceptual instrument with which to make sense of trends and traditions of western thought' (2000, pp. 1029-30). If its utility probably ought to be restricted, I would still argue that such a concept is beneficial if it were to be used in a more limited manner, and with a strict clarification of its meaning(s). Steven Lukes has, for instance, succeeded in specifying four categories under the already mentioned notion of 'hedgehog':

1) *positivist* hedgehogs... 2) *universalist* hedgehogs, or, better perhaps, *uniformitarian* hedgehogs. They hold with Hume that "mankind is much the same in all times and places"... 3) *rationalist* hedgehogs... 4) the *monist* hedgehog... what he variously calls... *"philosophia perennis"* and the "old perennial belief in the possibility of realizing ultimate harmony" (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, pp. 44-51)

A further weakness of Berlin is that he attributes the same meaning to 'utopia' and 'monism'. But do the two notions always correlate? Furthermore, can one conceive of a form of monism that does not hold the same features and therefore would not present the same vulnerability?

On the first issue, we could argue that utopians are not always monists in the first and third sense given by Lukes. One can imagine a utopia whose principle has not been found through scientific enquiry. This is the case of religious and metaphysical utopias such as the 'kallipolis' of Plato or the 'Heavenly Jerusalem' of Christians. The latter example also illustrates that utopias are not necessarily driven by reason, but by faith. But it would be much harder to prove that a utopia can exist without the other two criteria. Laurence Davis' claims that 'while it is true that many utopians writing in the modern world have followed Plato in assuming "the discoverability and harmony of objectively true ends, true for all men, at all times and places" many others have not' (2000, p. 76). I would like to contradict such a statement, as Davis is indeed at pains to give any example of utopias that do not rest on a Platonic search for harmony.

Yet Davis asks a pertinent question: '[i]s utopian political theorising necessarily totalitarian?' (2000, p. 56). His answer is that 'there is no necessary relationship between utopianism and fanaticism' (2000, p. 74). He implies that utopian theories are not systematic, that they offer 'an imaginative picture' of the future that contrasts with usual abstract principles, and that their 'unnuanced boldness' helps 'stir' the imagination of most people. I do not think that Berlin would have denied any of this,

but would have also gone further. As Gil Delannoi stresses, 'a myth is useful only if it is perceived as such, as a story which... indicates one route on which we can rely or not, one route amongst other, a plausible hope, but nothing more. Such a story is useless and dangerous if it indicates a unique, inevitable and predicable route' (2003, p. 123). This limitation is something that Davis wrongly forgets.

Jacoby tries to dismiss the connection Berlin draws between totalitarianism and utopianism. With an openly Leftist tone, he blames 'the liberal consensus' which 'successfully established a rough equivalence of utopianism and totalitarianism, setting both against liberal pluralism' (1999, p. 143). Aiming to salvage the utopias of the left, he affirms that, 'totalitarianism and utopianism are not necessarily related' (1999, p. 143). Yet his statement is not supported by any demonstration.[7] Could there be, though, monists who are neither utopian nor authoritarian? George Crowder gives examples, which belong to the 'great names of liberalism': Locke, J.S. Mill, and Kant (2002, p. 91). Despite the fact that their philosophies are driven by 'one big idea', they do not fully enter Berlin's definition of 'monism' because they advocate neither uniformity nor perfectionism.

In the end, I remain convinced that Berlin was right to assert that, all utopias – according to his definition – are totalitarian, at least potentially. The confusion and lack of rigour of his writings cannot be denied, and at times genuinely frustrates a complete understanding of the risks involved in utopias.[8] But, in fact, even if it is difficult to

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[7] The only argument Jacoby presents is an assertion that Nazism was inherently anti-utopian. The claim is dubious, as Aron shows when describing Nazism as a 'secular religion'. Moreover, stating that one totalitarian regime may not be utopian is no demonstration that utopias are never totalitarian.

[8] Steven Lukes for instance observes that Berlin is not explicit enough about 'why the belief in harmonizing values should be so dangerous. He can of course point to the example to which he always did point, namely Marxism. But there's no explanation really of why this thought structure should have these political consequences' (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 61).

prove, there is, in Crowder's words, 'a good reason to suppose that the historical failures of monism result from a deep conceptual flaw in the monist project itself... the past failures of monism are unlikely to be accidental' (2002, p. 70). Berlin's fear of perfectionism is thus well founded, and Aron would not disagree with him. Though his analytical demonstration is far from perfect, I would like to argue that Berlin's philosophical stand remains valuable: he proves himself as a competent theorist or philosopher, despite his recurrent acknowledgement that he is more of a historian of ideas.

1.2 Guilty: the Enlightenment, the Canon, Everyone or No one?

A significant difference between Aron and Berlin is situated at the level of the *origins* of totalitarianism. Whereas Aron's inquiry does not take him especially far back, Berlin adopts a long-term view of the roots of the problem, making special recourse to the Enlightenment. At this stage our aim will be to evaluate Berlin's reading of the canon, and in particular whether his work as a historian of ideas deserves the repute it has acquired.

1.2.1   The excavation of Western ideas

Berlin differentiates himself from many theorists of totalitarianism in the sense that he does not give a privileged role to Marx in the building of Communist ideology. In his biography of Marx, one of the first judgements he comes to is that '[h]is faith in his own synoptic vision of an orderly, disciplined, self-directing society, destined to arise out of the inevitable self-destruction of the irrational and chaotic world of the present, was of that boundless, absolute kind which puts an end to all questions and dissolves all difficulties' and that his rationalism makes him 'fanatical' (1939, p. 14). Yet Berlin

tempers Marx' originality by saying that this faith goes back to Protestantism, the progress of science and the 'systems of German physicians,' and the rest of the book does not insist on the radical consequences of Marx' theory. Moreover, on another occasion, Berlin minimises Marx' responsibility in the horrors of the twentieth century, saying that '[f]or this the works of Karl Marx are certainly no more responsible than the other tendencies of our time' (L, p. 77). As we will see, this contrasts with Aron's sharp criticism of Marx. For Berlin, the true target is older than Marx; it goes back at least to the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment.

1.2.2 Berlin's vision of the Enlightenment

Like Jacob Talmon in his *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952) Berlin recurrently positions the sources of contemporary evils in the Enlightenment. This move has often been commented upon, since Berlin's liberal stand predispose him to support Enlightenment. Berlin's admirers like to emphasise that Berlin was an heir of the *Lumières*. Ignatieff affirms that 'Isaiah himself was a Voltairian to the core', and that 'his dilemma was how to rescue what was positive in the Enlightenment project from what was tyrannous' (1998, p. 201). A reading of 'Two Concepts of Liberty' renders it indubitable that Berlin shared with the Enlightenment 'the universal need for human dignity and... man's right and capacity to govern himself free from the dictates of tradition and authority' (Lilla, in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 35). But many of his other pieces, especially those collected in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* and *The Roots of Romanticism*, do not present the Enlightenment in a very appealing light. Overall, it is fair to say that Berlin's explicit support for the Enlightenment was very rare, and his censures much more frequent.

Romantic criticisms of the Enlightenment influenced Berlin and often led him to condemn the *philosophes*. His severity is well described by Lilla: 'virtually every imaginable failing is attributed to them... They were enemies of "man's unbroken nature" who exhibited "total blindness to man's inner life"' (1994b, p. 12). Lilla proceeds to say that on social matters they 'have been absolutist, deterministic, inflexible, intolerant, unfeeling, homogenising, arrogant, blind – the ink cannot flow quickly enough when he is describing the vices of the *Lumières*' (1994b, p. 12). If one looks at Berlin's work, Lilla's portrayal is revealed as well founded. Much 'suffering, disillusionment and failure' is attributed to the Enlightenment, which is seen as directly preceding the 'Jacobin and Communist' movements (CTH, p. 47; L, p. 193). In such an arresting style that the whole passage is worth quoting, Berlin makes the *Lumières* – and especially Condorcet, whom he then quotes in a footnote – accountable for the worst evils, alongside religious fanaticism:

> One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals – justice or progress or the happiness of future generations... or even liberty itself... This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in the divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements or history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution (L, p. 212)

Berlin's criticism of the Enlightenment is at one with his more general criticism of monism. In particular, he reproaches the *philosophes* for their excess of rationalism, their extreme faith in reason, a description that he shares with other political theorists or historians, such as Eric Voegelin or Carl Becker.[9] Before gauging the pertinence of Berlin's criticism, it is of interest to clarify what Berlin actually means by 'Enlightenment.' Apart from Condorcet, Berlin cites Descartes, Voltaire, Newton,

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[9] Voegelin, Eric (1968) *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press; Becker, Carl (1932) *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Diderot, Helvétius, Holbach, d'Alembert, Condillac, Rousseau, Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, Kant, Hume, etc.[10] His target, more specifically, is that of the French *philosophes*. Immediately, we notice, with Lilla, that 'we never learn much in detail about particular authors who participated in [the Enlightenment] or about what they wrote' (1994, p. 12). This 'lack of methodological self-consciousness' does not play in favour of Berlin (Kenny, 2000, p. 1035). Several factual errors incite the reader to 'approach the author's more consequential assertions with some caution' (Gay, 1999, p. 3). Ultimately, I concur with Mark Lilla who remarks that '[i]f we let the hedgehogs and foxes speak for themselves, a very different story begins to emerge' (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 34). I want to challenge Berlin at two levels: firstly, by showing that he often contradicts himself when describing the origins of monism; and secondly, by building on the work of specialists who attribute a different face to the Enlightenment.

1.2.3   Berlin's internal contradictions about the origins of monism

The thesis according to which the Enlightenment is mostly responsible for the deviations of the mind in the twentieth century is central in Berlin's work. Nonetheless, Berlin presents, at other times and in a scattered manner, three theories of the origins of monism that contradict the one described above. Firstly, when describing monism, Berlin refers several times to philosophers much older than the Enlightenment. In his 'Intellectual Path', Berlin writes that he has always been preoccupied with monism, 'the central thesis of Western philosophy from Plato to our day' (POI, p. 5). The thinkers involved are 'monists' because they are rationalists and perfectionists (L, p. 213). Monists are also those who hold a belief in a unique and universal solution for the

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[10] There are many references, amongst which L, p. 193; CTH, pp. 71-3; POI, pp. 4-5; RR, pp. 30-1; AC, pp.3, 12, 16, etc. Surprisingly, Rousseau does not hold a very important role in the relationship between

world, such as 'Plato... Zeno... Thomas More, Campanella, Bacon and Harrington and Fénelon... Mably and Morelly... Fourier... Owen and Godwin, Cabot William Morris...' (CTH, pp. 211-12). This passage is striking because the characteristics of the Enlightenment project are applied to thinkers that have little at all to do with the Enlightenment, whether they are anarchists, socialists or communists. It then emerges that the *philosophes* lose their position as 'creators' of the monist idea. Like Popper's famous thesis, Berlin seems here to believe that all utopias are but a version of the Platonic ideal.[11] This compromises Berlin's primary account of the correlation between Enlightenment and monism.

A second problem in Berlin's conception of monism lies in his confused exposition of the period following the Enlightenment. As will be observed later (section 1.3), Berlin considers some of the members of the Counter-Enlightenment current, especially Joseph de Maistre and Hamann, to be precursors of fascism. Such a statement undermines the 'Enlightenment thesis.' Two essays, in which Berlin stresses the clear break constituted by the twentieth century (compared to both the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment), render Berlin's position even less clear. The first piece, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century,' starts with a brief account of the two main movements of the nineteenth century, namely humanitarian individualism and romantic nationalism. They are said to have 'finally ended in exaggerated and indeed distorted forms as Communism and Fascism' (L, pp. 59-60). Does this mean that they should be blamed for the deeds of contemporary totalitarianism? No, Berlin answers:

> [I]t is a fallacy to regard Fascism and Communism as being in the main only more uncompromising and violent manifestations of an earlier crisis, the culmination of

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the Enlightenment and modern totalitarianism for Berlin. He barely mentions him, except in his essay on Rousseau (FIB), in which he does not really stress this connection.

[11] Popper, Karl (1945) *The Open Society and its Enemies*. London: Routledge, vols. 1 and 2.

a struggle fully discernible before. The differences between the political movements of the twentieth century and the nineteenth are very sharp' (L, p. 61)

He then explains that the two opposed movements of the nineteenth century had in common their recognition that 'the problems both of individuals and of societies could be solved if only the forces of intelligence could be made to prevail' L, p. 76). Recent ideologies, on the contrary, resolve the problems by removing them on the ground of superficiality. The second essay, 'European Unity and its Vicissitudes', draws a relatively similar argument. This time, however, the novelty is to be found in the 'denial of common humanity – a premise upon which all previous humanism, religious and secular, had stood' (CTH, p. 177).

The interpretation given here by Berlin is profoundly dissimilar to that offered previously. It implies that totalitarianism is not based on 'big ideas' that gravitate around one principle, but rather on the disappearance of all big ideas as such. This conclusion is at odds with Berlin's 'Enlightenment thesis'. Consequently, it makes us question whether Berlin is always consistent in his analyses of the totalitarian phenomenon, and especially whether his long-term re-reading of the canon is pertinent in the final analysis.

Berlin's third version of the origins of utopian or monistic thinking consists in saying that if one goes so far back in time to find the roots of utopia in Plato, one may as well assume that utopia has always existed, and that utopian desires are integral to human nature. This is what Berlin assumes when he remarks that '[t]here is little need to stress the fact that monism, and faith in a single criterion, has always proved a deep source of satisfaction both to the intellect and to the emotions' (L, p. 216). The human mind likes to put things in order, which is why the faith in utopia cannot 'be dismissed as the

product of sick minds,' but on the contrary recognised as 'a deep and incurable metaphysical need' (quoted by Aileen Kelly, in RT, p. XV). If one follows this interpretation, then 'the great structures built on Hegelian and Marxist foundations are not a terrible aberration' (in RT, p. XV). Would that mean that we are all monists, or at least that we all have monist tendencies? Berlin's personality, if not his work, is a good counter-example. This itself, however, perhaps indicates that Berlin should have been more precise in his account of what defines monism, and therefore twentieth-century totalitarian regimes.

1.2.4   The true face of the Enlightenment

Beyond Berlin's own contradictions, the problems within his account of monism rest also upon the gap between the image of the Enlightenment that Berlin evokes and the historical reality of the Enlightenment. To demonstrate so, I will rely mainly on the work of two commentators, Mark Lilla and Peter Gay.

Both Lilla and Gay condemn Berlin's caricature of the Enlightenment, which they take to be much more pluralistic, and also internally diverse, than Berlin is prepared to admit. Lilla observes that the charges put against the Enlightenment 'can be made to stick to peripheral figures like Holbach, Helvétius, and La Mettrie, who were mad scientists,' but not for most thinkers of that period (2002, p. 36). Lilla rejects Berlin's accusation of monism:

> for the main current of the Enlightenment, in Britain and on the continent, monism was definitely the *problem*, not the solution. What provoked the scorn of Locke, Hume, and Kant, and inspired them to seek new foundations for skeptical empirical science, was the monism of medieval scholasticism and the baroque, rationalist edifices of Leibniz and Malebranche (2002, p. 36)

Far from being utopian, Lilla shows that the *Lumières* were pluralistic in the Berlinian sense. In the same vein, Gay explains that the three famous principles supposed to

describe the Enlightenment project is 'a highly unreliable map of hilly terrain' (1999, p. 3). To be more precise, what Lilla and Gay contest is Berlin's charge of excessive trust in reason. Gay affirms that '[f]ew of them were simple-minded rationalists, and some of them were not rationalists at all' (1999, p. 3). His conclusion is especially harsh: 'the sunny optimism implied in Berlin's three principles ostensibly governing the Enlightenment is largely imaginary' (1999, p. 3). Lilla adopts a slightly different angle of approach, because he agrees that the belief in universal and timeless values was indeed shared by most *philosophes*. But, to Lilla, this does not entail that they are prone to radical solutions: 'did these views really lead the *Lumières* to cultural 'intolerance' and moral 'absolutism'? Were they really rendered 'blind' and unfeeling' to the needs of the human heart?' (1994b, p. 13). Evidently for Lilla the answer is no.[12]

Overall, if one accepts these criticisms, it appears that Berlin certainly went too far in his denigration of the Enlightenment. Not that the Enlightenment does not warrant any censure at all. As Michael Walzer observes, there exists a liberal criticism of the *Lumières* (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 64). Furthermore, there were countless other academics, in Berlin's time, who took the Enlightenment as a target. Subsequently, the Frankfurt School and post-modernist philosophy have been heirs to this critique, and have been subject to similar reproach.[13] As for Berlin, in the company of his Romantic friends, he seems to have gone far beyond their antipathy to the Enlightenment, and lost,

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[12] An interesting case study is that of Kant, an eminent representative of the Enlightenment. Berlin, strangely, does not consider him on the same level as a Voltaire or a Diderot. On the contrary, he locates him as one of the founders of Romanticism, even whilst admitting that Kant 'hated Romanticism' and was 'an admirer of the sciences' (quoted by Gay, 1999, p. 4). Gay is very suspicious of this interpretation, especially given Kant's renowned trust in Reason: '[H]e epitomizes Kant's thought as though it were a pre-existentialist rhapsody: "The only thing worth possessing is the unfettered will - this is the central proposition which Kant put on the map." But does not Kant's *Wille* - as distinct from *Willkur* - stand under the sovereignty of rational law?'.

at least partly, his capacity for fair judgement, which is central to the definition of the historian of ideas. Conversely, Aron follows the liberal path mentioned by Walzer, and in general proves to be more respectful of this intellectual tradition.

1.3 Berlin's Solution to Monism: the Pluralism of the Counter-Enlightenment

Berlin – but also Aron, as will be pointed out later – does not offer a self-enclosed system of thought in order to discredit the model of the Soviet regime. On the contrary, the only way out, he believes, lies in the rejection of a definite structure of thinking centred on one big idea. Thus, his response to monism is pluralism. Jacoby observes that, from the time of the Second World War onwards, 'observers rediscovered pluralism and diversity as the essence of liberalism, which they contrasted to both the monolithic Nazi and Communist regimes' (1999, pp. 41-2). Apart from Berlin, Jacoby cites Arendt, Popper. Yet Berlin's position is exceptional in the sense that he is the only thinker who places the origins of pluralism in the reaction *against* the Enlightenment. It is therefore indispensable to appraise his vision of Counter-Enlightenment.

1.3.1 The Rise of a Pluralist Stance

Berlin derives his conception of pluralism from a number of sources, and does not constantly situate the origins of pluralism in the same historical period. Rather, one can distinguish, as he himself does in 'The Birth of Greek Individualism', three great crises in Western political thought, during which the dominant monist model was challenged by something that resembled, if not coincided with, pluralism. These three phases are

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[13] For a summary of such accounts, see Shklar, Judith (1957) *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith.* Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press.

located in the fourth century BC, the Renaissance in Italy, and finally the latter part of the eighteenth century in Germany (L, p. 290).

With regard to the first phase, in Hellenistic Greece, Berlin draws attention to a group of thinkers, whom he calls 'sceptics', and amongst whom were 'Greek sophists' (CTH, p. 30, 70). The major lesson that these thinkers taught us, according to Berlin, is that they 'did not think it was possible to discover "final solutions"' (CTH, p. 71). Since Berlin was no specialist of this period, it could be that the source of his admiration for their work is that they opposed the Platonic current. The first major thinker in whom Berlin perceives the intimations of pluralism is Machiavelli, the central figure of the second phase.[14] Berlin's perspective upon Machiavelli results, as Lukes remarks, from the fact that it is 'the reading of Machiavelli that planted in his mind "the realisation, which came as something of a shock, that not all the supreme values pursed by mankind now and in the past were necessarily compatible with one another"' (1994, p. 699). In 'The Originality of Machiavelli,' Berlin seeks to demonstrate that Machiavelli was the first to highlight the fundamental antagonism between Christian and pagan virtues, and to reach the conclusion that one must simply give up the former if one wanted to completely fulfil the latter. And Berlin concludes that '[a]fter Machiavelli, doubt is liable to infect all monistic constructions. The sense of certainty that there is somewhere a hidden treasure... and that some path must lead to it... this fundamental belief of Western political thought has been severely shaken' (AC, p. 78).

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[14] Others thinkers of this second phase are Montaigne or Pascal, but Berlin mentions them only very briefly (CTH, pp. 30, 71).

Nevertheless, it is essentially during the third phase that monism was seriously and durably challenged. In fact, for the first time monistic theories ceased to be dominant. The major movement responsible for this radical change was, according to Berlin, Romanticism. The scope of what Berlin calls Romanticism is rather broad, and, as with the Enlightenment, not always sufficiently clear. The major figures recognised as Romantics are mainly of German origin. They include Schiller, Herder, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, to which Berlin adds the less-known writers Hamann and Schlegel. He mentions the Romantics produced by other nations – in England, William Blake and Byron, and, in France, Chateaubriand and Hugo. But, in *The Roots of Romanticism*, he also includes personalities who are normally not seen as reacting to the *Lumières*, such as Kant, Hume and Montesquieu. Berlin's favourite pluralists – Herder aside – were also the Italian Giambattista Vico, and a Russian exile of the end of the nineteenth-century, Alexander Herzen. Beyond their common opposition to monism, these thinkers have little in common. For reasons of space, it is impossible to enter here in the detail of why, for Berlin, each of these thinkers deserved classification as a pluralist. But it ought to be noted that, in this instance, Berlin is quite prolix and positive about them, dedicating entire pieces to each thinker.

Berlin attributes to the Romantics a consciousness of the errors made by the Enlightenment. Romanticism, for Berlin, 'is the beginning of the modern attack on the notion of Utopia, Utopia as such' (CTH, p. 40). Therefore, such thinkers dismiss the faith in perfection (CTH, p. 40), and the belief in a unique solution for each problem: 'the claim that questions of values are genuine questions and capable of solution, at least in principle...was compromised by the German romantics towards the end of the eighteenth century' (L, p. 293). I will not, at this stage, develop what exactly Berlin

reads into the 'pluralistic' stand.[15] What simply needs to be borne in mind is the fierce rejection of all that was connected to the Enlightenment, thus the identification with a 'Counter-Enlightenment' current.

1.3.2   The Trouble with the Counter-Enlightenment

Several issues arise from Berlin's sympathetic presentation of Romanticism. Should the Romantics really be acclaimed in such a way? If so, should they be singled out as the founding fathers of pluralism? Several points indicate to us that Berlin offers a misleading interpretation of the Counter-Enlightenment. As with his account of the Enlightenment, our criticism is two-fold: firstly, Berlin is inconsistent in his description of the roots of pluralism; secondly, his main description is easily disputable, because it does not present the *whole* visage of these individuals.

Supporters of Berlin point out that Berlin was never a true Romantic, because he retained the ability to separate wise ideas from the unwise. For instance, Lieberson and Morgenbesser emphasise that

> Berlin is sharply aware of the excesses of the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers – their haste, their gross errors of detail, their eccentric prescriptions, their wild mythologies – but he sees in their work sound intuitions, expressed perhaps most fully and coherently by Herder, but anticipated, with far greater force and depth, a half-century before him by... Vico' (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 10)

It is true that Berlin is not entirely insensitive to the intemperance of these writers. If we look for evidence of this in Berlin's writings, we must note that Berlin indeed criticises some aspects of Romanticism. He dissents from their admiration for the figure of the hero – who extols his 'creative genius', often with violent means, and adopts an aesthetic stance at odds with any form of morality. He even adds that 'from this to

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[15] See chapter 3.

extreme nationalism and Fascism is but a short step' (CTH, pp. 187-94). In *The Roots of Romanticism*, he writes that 'if [the hero] goes too far, if someone is a Hitler, then we do not think that his sincerity is necessarily a saving quality' (RR, p. 141). Berlin certainly would not want to licence the use of violence in the name of creativity and authenticity, as he thinks Romanticism does.

Further to this, and rather surprisingly, Berlin is, at least on one occasion, disposed to imply that the Counter-Enlightenment can itself be monistic. In dealing with the idea that 'only the truth liberates' (a deeply monistic idea), Berlin notices that this argument was 'employed by Fichte in his latest phase, and after him by other defenders of authority, from Victorian schoolmasters and colonial administrators to the latest nationalist or Communist dictator' (L, p. 198). Some of the targets cited here, especially Fichte and nationalists, are definitely sympathetically disposed to the Romantics, which illustrates that Berlin contradicts himself.

Berlin's writings on Joseph de Maistre also help illustrate his inconsistencies as to whether the Counter-Enlightenment is to be praised or reproached. If he exhibits sympathy, or even admiration, for most Romantics, Berlin makes one notable exception: Joseph de Maistre. In his view, Maistre was the incarnation of extremism and one of the precursors of fascism. But is Maistre really at odds with the rest of the Counter-Enlightenment current? The verve with which he dismisses the power of reason is arguably more eloquent than that of others, but the nature of his claims is not dissimilar. In particular, his famous statement whereby he claims to have 'seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians... But as for Man [he] declare[s] that [he] ha[s] never met him in [his] life,' *could* be interpreted as a sign of pluralism, something that Berlin would normally praise (1994, p. 74). Thus, Berlin's interpretation of Maistre's work is certainly partly misleading. Maistre was a reactionary of a pure kind, who regretted the

loss of the days of absolute monarchy, not an innovator announcing modern forms of authoritarianism.[16]

More generally, despite the few passages invoked above, Berlin is rarely critical of the Romantics. Berlin is much keener in emphasising their contribution to the development of pluralism, which makes the reader wonder whether Berlin is eventually inclined to forgive their excesses. To give one example, no sooner has he deplored the 'monstrous fallacy' of Romanticism, he continues: 'this at least may be said to its credit: that it has permanently shaken the faith in universal, objective truth in matters of conduct, in the possibility of a perfect and harmonious society' (CTH, p. 237). To describe Berlin's prevaricating, Lilla talks of an 'exercise of bowdlerisation' in the attempt to separate the 'kernel' from the 'chaff' (1994b, p. 13). Consequently, Berlin's acknowledgement of the limits of Romantic thinking is insufficient. Another account of Romanticism is necessary if the allocation of blame is to be conducted justly.

1.3.3   The Real Face of Romanticism

Commentators are puzzled by Berlin's presentation of Romanticism. Speaking of Vico, Herder, Hamann and others, Lilla writes: '[t]he more I studied these writers, the less they resembled Berlin's portraits of them... I found myself in the company of thinkers... whose instincts seemed hostile to the liberal ones Berlin himself defended' (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 32-3).[17]

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[16] On this, see Ignatieff, in Margalit (ed.), 1991, pp. 140-42; or Lilla, in Dworkin (ed.), 2002, p. 39-40.
[17] In a similar way, Lukes, after recalling Berlin's account, whereby it is the Enlightenment that 'espoused monism' and Counter-Enlightenment that 'gave birth to value pluralism', he asks a succinct but pertinent question: 'but how convincing is it?' (1994, pp. 705-6). Lukes does not appear convinced, though is not as eager to refute it as are Lilla and Gay.

For these scholars, Romantics are the opposite of what Berlin wants them to be. Above all, they do not adopt the value-pluralism that Berlin wishes them to, but are on the contrary deeply monistic. Proof of the Romantics' monistic tendency lies in the fact that most of them based their philosophies on a faith or theology that undermined their supposedly 'pluralistic' accounts. Lilla remarks that 'whatever their personal beliefs about the divine, Vico, Herder, and Hamann all equated religious life with social life. That is, they believed that society lives primarily through its religion, and cannot be conceived apart from it. This is not a liberal conception of church and state, to say the least' (in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 38). Berlin leaves aside an important dimension of their thought – religious fanaticism – that he would normally condemn.

Another site of Berlin's misreading of the Romantics concerns the nature of the pluralism they fostered. For Berlin, value-pluralism consists in the recognition of the plurality of cultures in the world, but also of diversity *within* each of these cultures. For the German Romantics who stimulated nationalist movements, nations ought to differentiate themselves from others, but within the nation uniformity was required. The best way to ensure so was the *jus sanguinis*, i.e. the attribution of nationality only through filiation (and not residence). Berlin's blindness to this distinction can undermine his entire defence of pluralism.

A third problem is the status accorded to reason. Berlin is right to say that Counter-Enlightenment thinkers denounced the Enlightenment's surfeit of confidence in reason. But these thinkers venture much further than this, to the extent that, for some of them, reason was 'a destructive force threatening the subrational or irrational ties that actually bind societies together' (Lilla, in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 38).

These misinterpretations of Romantic thinking must have a real impact upon our judgement of Berlin's solution to monism. Thinkers who, on his view, are enlisted so as to rescue us from the totalitarian temptation, appear in this light equally dangerous as the 'classical' monists. In an accidental way, Berlin has placed himself in a milieu clearly 'hostile to the basic moral and political values which [he] himself defended' (Lilla, in Dworkin [ed.], 2002, p. 38). Despite Graeme Garrard (1997) or Nancy Rosenblum's (1987) attempts to show the opposite, I am inclined to follow Lilla's view whereby the influence of Romantics cut Berlin off from his own roots. Berlin's excessive sympathy towards the Romantics has several implications. Firstly, if we consider his status as a historian of ideas, it appears that his reading of thinkers of the past can be imprecise, and at times even misguided. This study would tend to prove what commentators and Berlin himself have always denied: that he is a better theorist than historian. Indeed, I have demonstrated earlier that his vision of monism as a concept is deeply relevant, whereas his interpretation of the intellectual origins of monism has been clearly challenged. Secondly, at the level of his general liberal stand, several interpretations can be raised. We will see in the next chapter that Berlin's admiration for Romantics has led several theorists to charge him with relativism, others with 'frustrated monism'. The major criticism is that Berlin's pluralism could be profoundly at odds with his liberal stance. In the remaining part of this section, we will concentrate solely on one question: why did Berlin remain so fascinated by thinkers so hostile to his own views?

1.3.4 Berlin and Totalitarianism: An Unpolitical, Moral Perspective

The claim I want to make in this final section is *not* that Berlin was remote from politics, understood as the public sphere in which people deliberate upon the common

good. His attempt at understanding the totalitarian phenomenon of his own day is proof that he devotes his attention to certain political issues. John Dunn does not dissent when observing that 'Berlin's own interest in politics...[is] centred on two great and desperately important political struggles [i.e. Nazism and Communism], each of which has now ended in the triumph of the side for which he militated. What linked the twin enemies in his thinking was the mildly opaque category of totalitarianism' (1990, p. 1054). But, according to Dunn, this is not sufficient to demonstrate his dedication to political issues. Thus he adds that 'there is little sign of sustained interest in politics on other fronts or at other times,' and concludes that 'Berlin must always in some ways have been a deeply unpolitical man, who found politics thrust peremptorily upon him, thrust with great brutality but very much from the outside' (1990, p. 1054). I think that Dunn is right to highlight the unpolitical character of many of Berlin's writings. Nevertheless, I disagree with Dunn's statement that Berlin imposed a reflection on the political *from the outside*. On the contrary, my assessment is that his first aim was political (i.e. in addressing totalitarianism as a regime and concrete reality), but that the nature of his concerns forced him to *move away* from this, and espouse a more moral perspective. Such a shift occurs in several stages.

First of all, in an effort to understand the roots of totalitarian thinking, Berlin undertook a close reading of the canon. He thereby discovered that the tradition with which he should be the most closely affiliated, given his liberal stand (the Enlightenment), is not without shortcomings. The result is a frustration accurately evoked by Mark Lilla:

> Berlin is an ultra-liberal frustrated by the internal limits of the Enlightenment itself: what he sees as its blind spots and intolerances; its all too quick willingness to see in its critics *l'infâme* rather than dissenters wishing to live differently. What Berlin appears to want is not the contrary of the Enlightenment, but what the Germans call *eine Aufklärung über die Aufklärung*' (1994b, p. 12)

In dialogue with the opponents of the Enlightenment, Berlin realised that no form of regime or political organisation, not even a liberal one, is protected against the danger of monistic impulse. Consequently, rather than considering an ideal political *framework*, Berlin is driven – partly consciously, partly under the influence of Romantics – in the direction of moral reflection. His original object of study remains political, but on his view it leads inevitably to questions of values, and of choosing between values that are absolutely incompatible. Absorbed by these issues, Berlin progressively moves to the level of the individual mind, and of its internal mechanisms at work when evaluating different ways of life. His reflections concentrate on the moral dilemmas that are endemic to the processes of decision-making in each person, but elide the fact that equivalent decisions must be taken at the level of the community. This is how, I believe, he can on occasions err toward the unpolitical. His attitude can be put in parallel with the description he gives of the sceptics, and of Epicurus in particular: for him 'the State hardly exists. The problem is how to avoid being hurt, how to escape misery' (L, p. 303). It is also relatively (and relatively only) analogous to what one generally attributes to a Romantic attitude; an obsession with the feelings and emotions, to the exclusion of how these feelings have 'any bearings on relations with others.'[18]

Finally, Berlin's abandonment of the political is relative, but undeniable. It leads him to an ultimate contradiction, expressed by Kenny, and which Berlin would probably be prepared to accept. According to Kenny, Berlin is at the same time aware of the ultimate anchoring of his investigation into the political, yet still tries to deny it:

> Berlin rejected the vision of the philosopher seeking the truth outside the cave, constructing the perfectly harmonious moral system – a recurrent delusion, he believed, underpinning much philosophical inquiry. Yet in many of his essays he

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[18] As described by Rosenblum (1987, p. 47).

adopted a highly philosophical mode of discourse and a singular conceptual idiom
to articulate his particularist and pluralist convictions (2000, p. 1026)

In other words, Berlin wants to avoid the deeply monistic Platonic position, whilst he

cannot help but act in a Platonic way, in the sense that he brings to bear a moral outlook

upon the political sphere. O'Sullivan draws a similar conclusion, observing that Berlin's

problem 'relates not so much to what he actually says, as to the perspective with which

he says it. To be precise: Berlin fails to distinguish clearly between ethical and political

standpoints' (1999, p. 70). This clearly differentiates Aron from Berlin, but it does not

entail, in the last analysis, that Berlin becomes a pure moralist of the Platonic type, nor a

moral relativist. On my view, Berlin's success in applying Vico's *fantasia* to the study

of the totalitarian mind remains a unique insight into the totalitarian phenomenon,

which Aron, who was more interested in societies than individuals, never reached.

2. ARON'S STRUGGLE AGAINST THE NEW 'OPIUM'

It is now clearer why Isaiah Berlin's approach to totalitarianism can be described as

'indirect' – he only infrequently makes reference to the events of the twentieth century

themselves, and prefers to concentrate his thoughts upon the intellectual roots of

monism. Raymond Aron's approach is in deep contrast: he confronts the totalitarian

phenomenon in a highly direct manner, analysing in depth the regimes and ideologies of

Nazism and Communism (Stalinism, but also Leninism).[19] The difference of method

can initially be highlighted in their handling of the concept of 'totalitarianism.' Aron is

keener than Berlin to use the term and to clarify its content by enumerating its specific

features. Furthermore, Aron, in the same vein as Arendt, is eager to point out the

uniqueness of totalitarian regimes, especially as compared with more traditional

authoritarian or despotic regimes.[20] This reflects the many other dissimilarities between Aron and Berlin. Before highlighting those, it should be borne in mind that Aron's conclusions, though different, are not radically at odds with Berlin's on the essentials: that totalitarianism, given the centrality of its deterministic vision of history, can only be evaluated meaningfully if one assesses the role of ideologies. Moreover, Aron, like Berlin, but *contra* many intellectuals in France, adopts a *liberal* response to totalitarianism, as emphasised by Judt: 'it is clear in retrospect that Aron was the only prominent French thinker of his generation to take a consistent liberal stand against all the totalitarian temptations of the age, of Right and Left alike' (in *Dawn*, p. viii). Despite all this, Aron differs from Berlin at two levels, which will be discussed in turn.

Firstly, Aron departs company from Berlin in his interpretation of the ideas driving totalitarian movements, and in particular of the role of the canon. To the long-term perspective of Berlin, Aron prefers a short-term one, going back especially to Marx and Lenin, who, for Aron, bear a more important role than the *Lumières*. Aron also introduces the study of ideologies through the original concept of 'secular religions'. Secondly, unlike Berlin, Aron is equally interested in ideologies and in their implementation in practical politics. The legacy of his stay in Germany is his persistent *motto* to confront ideas with reality. This is why his methodology is far more sociological and historical than that of Berlin. Aron's account insists on the specificities of the twentieth century (in economics and society, particularly through the notion of 'industrial society'), which provide the necessary conditions for the emergence of Nazism and Communism. Aron also offers political, institutional, as well as economic,

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[19] Before and during the Second World War, Aron integrated in his writings on Italian fascism, especially when attempting to see the roots of twentieth-century tyrannies (see MTM).
[20] Arendt (1951) applies Montesquieu's typology of regimes to the twentieth century, and shows that Nazism and Stalinism oblige us to set up a new form of classification of regimes.

remarks that should, on Aron's view, facilitate the decision-making process, in order to win the battle against the totalitarian temptation.

2.1 Ideas, Ideologies and Totalitarianism in the Work of Aron

Aron concurs with Berlin in emphasising the central role of ideas in the success of totalitarian movements. When describing the 'revolutionary' regimes of Eastern Europe, the first feature that Aron points out consists in the fact that ideas outweigh institutional features (IPP, p. 141). For him, those who neglect the ideological dimension commit a mistake that precludes a lucid understanding of the totalitarian phenomenon (MTM, p. 224). This explains why Aron dedicates a large part of his study to 'ideologies'. The term itself has caused much controversy, and accordingly a preliminary definition is in order. Aron admits that the concept of ideology has 'numerous meanings' (SE, p. 238). He distinguishes between a weak and a strong, or a narrow and a wide definition of ideology: the weak (or wide) meaning covers all forms of ideas or 'work of the spirit', and is not dangerous as such. What he rejects is the 'ideology' understood in its strong (or narrow) sense, i.e. 'the systematic shaping of an interpretation of the historical or social world', a 'global system of politico-historical interpretation,' or a 'global representation of universal history which, simultaneously, indicates the future and also what needs to be done' (OI, p. 286; EL, p. 242; SE, p. 238). The second definition of ideology that Aron gives is very similar to Berlin's definition of monism: both stress the *all-embracing* dimension of those systems of thought.

Yet, Aron differs from Berlin in his *mode of interpreting* ideologies. Firstly, with regards to the canon of political thought, he does not travel as far as the Enlightenment to uncover the roots of totalitarianism. Secondly, Aron presents ideologies through the

original concept of 'secular religion', which allows him to highlight the *novelty* of totalitarianism.

2.1.1. Raymond Aron and the Canon

Unlike Berlin or Voegelin, Aron's approach to the origins of ideologies in the 'strong' sense does not involve a close study of thinkers of the past. Nevertheless, it is worth concentrating on thinkers that catch Aron's attention. This is the case of Machiavelli, of philosophers of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and finally of Karl Marx. Each case contributes to the demonstration of the deep contrast between Aron's *short-term* approach to totalitarianism – which aims at proving the *unique* character of the catastrophes of the twentieth-century – and Berlin's *long-term* approach, which tends to work at the broader level inclusive of all monists across space and time.

a) Machiavelli

If Berlin credits Machiavelli with the distinction of being the first pluralist, Aron throws a different light on Machiavelli's work. In *Machiavel et les tyrannies modernes*, Aron draws attention to the relation between the practice of Nazism and fascism on the one hand, and Machiavellian theory on the other. He affirms that 'if Machiavellianism consists in governing through terror, no epoch better than ours has been Machiavellian' (MTM, p. 192). Does this entail that, for Aron, latter-day dictators have taken to heart Machiavelli's advice to the early modern princes? Aron's position *vis-à-vis* Machiavelli is more complex. He makes it clear that one should not confuse Machiavelli from the current of thought labelled 'Machiavellian'. For Aron, Machiavelli was a true Republican who aimed at promoting freedom for Italian citizens. In this sense, Machiavelli is completely at odds with the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

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In Aron's eyes, Machiavelli cannot be held to account for the totalitarian nature of the

ideologies of Nazi Germany or fascist Italy. However, Aron is also interested in the

political *practice* recommended in the work of Machiavelli. The central message of *The*

Prince, from which derives the reputation of Machiavelli as a 'teacher of evil', is that all

means are justified in the effort to seize or to hold on to power.[21] It can therefore be

seen as relatively close to the violent methods of governing (propaganda, repression,

secret police) used by totalitarian leaders. Whereas Berlin overlooks this dimension,

Aron tackles the issue by asking whether political leaders should be prepared to

sacrifice their soul for the sake of the survival of the city. As Freymond notes, Aron's

answer is two-fold:

> En savant et historien de la politique comparant des entités lointaines, peut-être
> même au sujet de l'efficacité politique contemporaine, [Aron] accorderait-il un
> crédit partiel à l'appréciation de Machiavel : « Quand l'acte accuse, le résultat
> excuse »... mais en tant que politique, citoyen, il réserve son jugement sur les ruses
> et combinaisons labyrinthiques... de l'homme d'Etat (in MTM, pp. 20-1)

Aron's attitude is therefore ambiguous. On the one hand he denounces the brutal and

vicious methods of government deployed in fascist and communist states, but on the

other he refuses to condemn the use of effective means proper to the political sphere.

This is what Freymond calls the 'moderate Machiavellianism' of Aron (in MTM, p. 30).

For Aron democracies ought to protect themselves in times of crisis in order not to be

condemned to their ruin. From this angle, the doctrine of Machiavellianism helps resist

the totalitarian threat.

Nevertheless, one can raise a serious objection, as did Jacques Maritain in 1939.

Maritain disapproved of Aron's dedication to efficiency in politics, because, for the

former, 'if we borrow totalitarian techniques and totalitarian virtues to resist totalitarian

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[21] The expression 'teacher of evil' is Leo Strauss', and can be found in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958).
Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, p. 9.

regimes, we will eventually become totalitarian ourselves' (in MTM, p. 189). If Maritain's suspicions appear well-founded on the evidence of Aron's early work, it is also clear, as observed by Freymond, that this work evolved with the Cold War, during which 'Aron considers that the best way to destroy Soviet influence is for democratic regimes to solve their own political, economic and social problems, since those are the best arguments of communists against democracy' (in MTM, p. 52). Eventually, it is reasonable to say that, for Aron, neither Machiavelli nor Machiavellianism plays a significant role in the rationale behind or in the opposition to totalitarian states. In contrast with Berlin, Aron declines to journey too far back in time to situate the origins of 'modern tyrannies'.

b) The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment and the reactions it provoked, are, on Berlin's account, the next and most important stage in the development of the 'monistic' way of thinking. Aron, similar to Berlin, does not regard the Enlightenment as a single entity (i.e. deserving of praise or, conversely, reproach); but he departs from Berlin in the sense that he does not develop a special connection between eighteenth-century philosophy and twentieth-century events.

Aron never provides an exhaustive interpretation of the Enlightenment, but he often refers to French eighteenth-century thinkers, especially Montesquieu and Rousseau, on whom Aron has divergent views. Aron shares a good deal with Montesquieu, especially his methodology and his vision of liberty.[22] When discussing the French Revolution,

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[22] Whilst the influence of Montesquieu on Aron's method has seen in the previous chapter, and recalled especially in the part dedicated to Montesquieu in Aron's *Etapes de la pensée sociologique*, the influence on Aron's vision of liberty will be highlighted in chapter 3.

Aron insists that the positive side of the Revolution has much to do with philosophers like Montesquieu, by whom, for Aron, 'the members of the Constituent Assembly were inspired' (2003, p. 376). The principles contained in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and which Aron enumerates, are identical to those advanced by Montesquieu in his *Esprit des Lois*: 'the double point of departure was equality before the law, the fundamental democratic principle, and a political regime that was seen as liberal and based upon the limitation of absolute power' (2003, p. 376). If this constitutes the major feature of the Enlightenment, then there can be little doubt that Aron, as Shils remarks, is a 'direct continuator of the Enlightenment' (in Draus [ed.], 1985, p. 13). Yet Aron is aware that there is another side to the Enlightenment, represented by Rousseau, and by the most fanatical of the French revolutionaries. In the same vein as Berlin, Aron remarks elsewhere that 'an unbroken chain leads from Plato, who... recommended that those who do not believe in the gods should be put to death, to Rousseau, who declares that the sovereign can « banish from the state » whomsoever does not believe in the articles of the profession of a purely civic faith' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986b, p. 275). Aron does not lose sight of this dark side of the Enlightenment, which overshadowed its positive side when put into practice during the French Revolution. Like Berlin, Aron acknowledges the incapacity of Revolutionaries to convert *abstract* principles into practice.

Is the failure of the French Revolution a failure of the Enlightenment itself? For Berlin it may be, but not for Aron. According to the latter, Enlightenment ideas are not, as such, responsible for the Terror; rather, they are instrumentalised by extremist politicians like Robespierre. Aron's criticism of the French Revolution is of a similar kind to those nineteenth-century liberals such as Tocqueville, but not to the Romantic

vision presented by Berlin. Aron insists that many Enlightenment principles ought to be retained, something that twentieth-century dictatorships discard, and he concludes that these regimes have not much in common with the *Lumières*. Even though totalitarianism of the Left claims to be the offspring of the Jacobins, it 'praises the Great-Russian nation, denounces cosmopolitanism', with the consequence that it 'denies the liberal and personal values the Enlightenment movement tried to promote' (OI, p. 26). This constitutes the major tension between Aron and Berlin's respective visions: if the latter makes a connection between Enlightenment and totalitarianism, for the former the rupture is manifest, especially in the case of Hitler, whose leadership was 'radically opposed to Western rationalism' (Kjedahl, 2001, p. 124).[23] The remoteness between the Western tradition and totalitarian rule is emphasised clearly by Aron:

> In our time – by the fact of fascism and National Socialism before 1945 and that of communism especially after 1945 – we have encountered the *other* at our side. It was not necessary to sail to a distant and unknown country to ask oneself: how can one be Persian? It is enough to meet one's colleague, at one's side, to ask: how can he be a Hitlerian? (PH, p. xxiii)

For Aron, the philosophical roots of totalitarianism can only be found, if at all, in more recent political thought, especially in the work of Marx.

c) Marx

Aron was, to follow Tony Judt's words, 'an anti-Communist who took Marxism very seriously' (in *Dawn*, p. xiii). Aron showed an early interest in Marx, an interest that did not fade with the years. His commentaries on the work of Marx are numerous, as the recently published *Le Marxisme de Marx* illustrates (2002). Aron is always very cautious to separate Marx's view from that of his many interpretators, whether they be

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[23] The irrationalism of Nazism is easier to demonstrate than that of Communist regimes. Yet Aron is prepared to argue that, despite their sharing of the Enlightenment motto of the 'faith in reason', Stalinist

Lenin, Stalin or various of a line of French intellectuals. The distinction is essential since it reminds us that Marx himself cannot be held fully responsible for what others have retained of his *œuvre*. A major reason for this is the evolution of the social, political and economic context since the years in which Marx wrote: 'Stalinism still invokes Marxist ideology... The Stalinists speak the language of the nineteenth-century Marxists, but they belong to a different universe' (*Dawn*, p. 206).

There are several elements in Marx's theory with which Aron agrees.[24] Yet Aron rejects Marx's revolutionary dogmatism, the seminal role given to the economic structure and, thus, the denial of the autonomy of the political sphere, as well as his historical materialism. The subversive character of such a doctrine cannot exculpate Marx from some responsibility in the events that have marked Soviet Russia since 1917. Aron explains the extent of the blame as follows:

> [A] doctrine of action such as Marx's is responsible not only for its intentions but also for its implications even if they are contrary to its values and goals... it... remains difficult to conceive the elimination of class antagonisms, the end of the duality between society and state, without an absolute authority, without something like what is called the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat, that is to say millions of workers, cannot itself exercise a dictatorship. Thus, it is not historically surprising that Marxism... should end up with the total enslavement of all to one party, even to one man (PH, p. 160)

Despite his respect for Marx, Aron's liberal stand leads him to conclude, as Mahoney notes, 'that there was an intimate connection between the "Marxism of Marx" and the tragedies of the twentieth century' (2003, p. 415). This condemnation becomes even more evident in Aron's *Memoirs*: 'as an economist, Marx perhaps remains the richest, the most fascinating person of his time. As a prophet-economist, as a putative ancestor

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government was deeply irrational, as will be highlighted when dealing with the concept of secular religion.
[24] See chapter 3, part 1 for more details.

of Marxism-Leninism, he is a damned sophist who holds responsibility for the horrors of the twentieth century' (M, p. 734).[25]

In comparison with Aron, Berlin remains relatively silent about the influence of Marx on the Soviet regime. I do not think that he would have disapproved of Aron's interpretation, but his interest was situated elsewhere, in more remote and less well-known theories. Ultimately, though, Berlin's account of modern dictatorships is deeply linked with Western Enlightenment, which contrasts with Aron's thesis whereby Stalinism is a radical departure from the Western tradition. For the Frenchman, the experience of the Soviet Union constitutes a *radical break* with the theory and practice of European culture:

> Nothing could be less Western than a society of this kind. Western societies are characterized by their rejection of unanimity. Life in the West, with its distinctions between temporal and spiritual power, Pope and emperor, national church and Pope, nobility and monarchy, bourgeoisie and Ancien Regime, proletariat and bourgeoisie, is made up of tensions not so much overcome as managed, a process that calls for effort, struggle, and creativity. Soviet society aims at unanimity (*Dawn*, p. 218)

This explains why Aron chooses to stress the *novelty* of totalitarian ideologies, by employing the concept of 'secular religions'.

2.1.2 Secular Religions: Ancient or Novel?

On a few occasions, Isaiah Berlin compares the utopian faith to a 'religious creed', but never expands on this resemblance.[26] By contrast, Raymond Aron finds that the link between the two phenomena contributes to a greater comprehension of totalitarianism.

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[25] Would Aron have altered his opinion with the death of the Soviet Union? For Casanova, the recent events permit us to remember only the good part of Marx, while for Mahoney, the two faces of Marx are irreducibly interconnected, and Aron would have refused this reinterpretation of Marx (Casanova, in MM, p. 15; Mahoney, 2003, p. 427).
[26] See for instance in his essay on Moses Hess (AC, p. 218), in which he describes historicist approaches such as that of Marx to a 'secular messianism'.

Aron is not the first theorist who thought of applying the structure of monotheist religions (Judeo-Christian in particular) to politics in order to deepen understanding. As he himself admits, 'the theme did not present any originality' (MTM, p. 405). Aron cites the work of Sorel as a precursor, but the major influence on Aron was Vilfredo Pareto.[27] Other contemporary scholars, whom Aron does not refer to, developed a similar perspective, describing the new regimes as 'political religions' or 'political messianism': as is the case of Eric Voegelin, Waldemar Gurian and Jacob Talmon.[28] More recently, a former student of Aron, Alain Besançon, has adopted a slightly different angle to the political religion thesis, describing Leninism as a 'gnosis.'[29]

Aron's preferred term is that of 'secular religions', which he first used in a 1944 article entitled 'The Future of Secular religions'. But, as Freymond observes, Aron had already been applying certain religious terms to committed political behaviours since the 1930s (in MTM, p. 27). Given the circumstances of 1944, the study of Nazism was more central than that of Stalinism, even though both had already begun. In Aron's later work, compensation is made through a focus on communism in Eastern Europe. In general, his definition of secular religion applies to both totalitarianisms of the Left and of the right, and emphasises that both regimes are very much the result of a crisis in traditional forms of faith and religiosity.

a) Defining 'Secular Religions'

Talking about 'secular religions' seems to be a contradiction in terms. How can a political regime based on a secular vision of modern society (Nazism), or, worse, on a clear rejection of all sorts of religious faith and practice, considered as the 'opium of the

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[27] For an analysis of the extent of Pareto's influence on Aron, see Anderson, 1997, pp. 65-6.
[28] For a survey of these theorists, see Shorten (2003) or Burrin (1997).
[29] Alain Besançon (1977) *Les Origines intellectuelles du léninisme*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.

people' (communism), be described as a 'religion'?[30] Aron is well aware of this paradox, especially in the case of socialism, for which the absence of a transcendental point of reference makes it essentially an anti-religion. But he soon adds that 'socialism is a religion inasmuch as it is an antireligion' (HP, p. 369), and that Marxism has become, to play on Marx's words, a new opium (OI, p. 300). A clarification of such a statement is given in Aron's simplest definition of a secular religion: 'I propose to call « secular religions » those doctrines which take, in the souls of our contemporaries, the place of the vanished faith, and situate down here... the salvation of humanity' (HP, p. 370). From this definition six main criteria (three for the doctrine, and three for its implementation) can be elaborated to show the similarities between totalitarianism and Judeo-Christian religions.

With regards to the doctrine, totalitarian regimes mirror the pattern of religious dogmas at three levels. First of all, secular religions such as Marxism are a 'modern form of millenarianism' (Dawn, p. 203) or a new 'eschatology' (OI, p. 78; HP, p. 371). This signifies that they provide a 'global interpretation of the world', establish the ends of humanity, and give meaning to our actions by 'fixing the final goal, almost sacred, vis-à-vis which good and evil are defined' (HP, p. 370). The millenarianism of totalitarian ideologies of the Left is easily identified, since it is based on the historical materialism of Marx. Yet Aron insists that Nazism also presents a similar vision, because 'it predicts a millenarian realm, whose name is the Third Reich' (HP, p. 373).

A second trait that secular religions reproduce from older religions is their salvatory dimension. Both are religions centred on a *soteriology*. They emphasise the

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[30] If the resolute atheism of Marxists is evident, the relationship between state and religion (in particular state and church) is a bit more subtle in the catholic Italy of Mussolini (who found a compromise with the

unjust humiliation suffered by a certain group of people. Comparing Marxist to Christian aspirations, Aron talks of the identical 'resentments of those who are relegated to the bottom of the social scale,' the despair of industrial workers, who are nevertheless the 'true creators of wealth' (quoted in B. Anderson, 1997, p. 116). Moreover, secular religions satisfy the aspirations of the exploited groups by offering them a possibility for revenge, an overthrow of hierarchy, or, to put it simply, for salvation (*Dawn*, p. 204). As to who exactly will be saved, it varies, on Aron's view, according to the form of secular religion. With regards to Marxism-Leninism, the saved class is the proletariat, though the universality of Marx's doctrine leaves room for all to be saved. With regards to Nazism, Aron affirms that it 'does also have a doctrine of salvation' which applies only to one race, the purest race, and thus to the German nation (HP, p. 373).

Third, there is the question of who is to be given the mission of Messiah. At this level, the distinction between communism and Nazism is very sharp. Aron observes that Marxist eschatology attributes to the proletariat the role of collective saviour (OI, p. 78). However Marx's doctrine evolved with Lenin, who introduced the role of the vanguard. The Messiah is, for Marxists, governed by reason, and aims at saving humanity as a whole. This 'rationalist, humanist religion of socialists' contrasts with the 'irrationalist, pessimistic' religion of Hitlerians, which cares only for one particular nation (HP, p. 373). If this account seems less harsh on communism than Nazism, then it can easily be explained by the circumstances of writing, at a time when the Soviet Union was still an ally in the war against Germany. However, in his *Memoirs*, Aron alters his previous judgement:

> L'argument que j'employai plus d'une fois pour différencier le messianisme de la classe de celui de la race ne m'impressionne plus guère. L'apparent universalisme

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Vatican), and even in Nazi Germany, where churches remained relatively independent. For an account of these two cases see Burrin (1997, pp. 332-6).

du premier est devenu, en dernière analyse, un trompe-l'œil. Une fois arrivé au pouvoir, il se mêle au messianisme national ou impérial (M, pp. 737-8).

The two types of secular religions share not only a messianic ideology, but also a *practical* instrumentalisation of the ideology that has much to do with the religious practice of Christianity. Here again, three complementary points can be distinguished. The first one is the many *sacrifices* demanded from the concerned populations, in the name of a more rewarding future (HP, p. 370). If the Church 'consolidates established injustice and helps men endure and forget their pains', instead of curing them, totalitarian leaders operate in a similar way (OI, p. 300). A high level of discipline and obedience is therefore required of those who want to be 'saved '. Berlin too emphasises this gap between the suffering experienced in the present and the happiness promised in an unknown future.

In order to render such obedience less distressing, secular religions attempt to teach new *moral standards*, which aim at helping individuals find their bearings in the new society. Aron notes that such religions are very Manichean, and distinguish clearly between two camps: the good and the evil (HP, p. 373). Those who wish to be 'liberated' ought to follow those instructions *à la lettre*. Aware that it must entail sacrifice, the leaders, communists or Nazis, dream up of various ways to force people to be free, which constitutes the last similarity with traditional religions.

Secular religions are characterised by their *collective practices*, comparable to that of religious institutions. Aron observes that they 'ensure, in the fraternal community of the party, the anticipation of the future community of saved humanity' (HP, p. 370). Citizens are encouraged, through several methods of action, to feel a sense of common destiny. Aron enumerates those methods: 'demonstrations in immense rooms, portraits of leader, simple slogans...' (HP, p. 373). The centre of attention of all these meetings

is, evidently, the leader, presented as a liberator. In discussing Stalin, Aron describes him as 'the great priest of Marxist-Leninist religion' (SE, p. 241). The social life thus created helps members of the community to extricate themselves from the anonymity of mass society.

It appears now in a clearer light why, for Aron, totalitarianisms, despite their rejection of traditional religions, adopt dogmas and practices that are copied, deliberately or not, from the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, Aron does not conclude that they are an ancient phenomenon. On the contrary, he insists that the concept of secular religion represents the most novel element in the two most significant dictatorships of the twentieth century.

b) The Novelty of the Phenomenon

As Philippe Burrin has observed, the expression political religion (analogous to Aron's secular religion) has caused much confusion. Thus his recommendation: '[i]t would be better to start with the metaphorical nature of the term "political religion" and to recognize that the adjective is more important than the noun' (1997, pp. 325-6). Though the concept tends to draw attention to a long term perspective, it is wrong to assume that theories of political religion say little about the modernity of the phenomena it intimates. Aron argues that secular religions are responses to the modern phenomenon of mass society, something that Berlin does not take into account in his study.

Aron undertakes the effort to understand the reasons of common men who were genuinely (and not by force) attracted by the myths decreed by secular religions. Using a comment by Bernanos, Aron remarks that 'the tragedy is not that Hitler acts or sees

himself as a God, it is that there are millions of people desperate enough to believe him' (HP, p. 377). Amongst the social reasons for this despair is one directly connected to the 'secular religion' theme: the feeling of uprootedness that result from the progress of science.[31] Aron's diagnosis is as follows: 'we suffer from an excess of science, which gives to a few men disproportionate powers on matter and on their fellow men' (CG, p. 27). The rapid evolution of the means of production and the increase in the quantities produced may be beneficial in many ways, yet it creates a sense of anguish. Given the permanence of these changes, it becomes a normal reaction to feel constantly behind and deracinated. The rationalisation of the organisation of society and the rise of bureaucracy is a related problem: '[m]en are tired to obey « civil servants », authorities with no face and no name' (HP, p. 378).

Having lost the traditional organisation of his life, whether at work or in the public sphere, modern man calls his values into question. Aron remarks that 'the death of God has left a vacuum in the human soul, but the needs of the hearts remain, which a new Christianity will have to satisfy' (OI, p. 288). The death of God coincide with what Aron calls, following Max Weber, the 'disenchantment of the world.' Brian Anderson summarises accurately the role secular religions play within this context:

> But this disenchantment had not appeased the spiritual hunger of a dissatisfied humanity; in fact, Aron reasoned, nothing would appease the hunger expect "a plenitude comparable to the one that had been promised to them". The secular religions, products of modernity itself, filled a spiritual void with false teachings and empty promises, offering a community, however impoverished, to millions of individuals desperate to believe (1997, p. 68)

In other words, modern man is in need of a supreme principle of authority, and is keen on finding a 'substitute for a unifying system' (HP, p. 377). This desire, Aron argues, is nevertheless more pregnant in Catholic countries than in Protestant, because the former

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[31] This reason as well as other sociological ones will be studied in greater depth in the next section of this chapter (section 2.1)

are more used to the discipline of the Catholic dogmas and institutions than the latter (*Dawn*, p. 234). Aron's angle of approach, unlike Berlin's, permits a better understanding of the *uniqueness* of the totalitarian phenomenon. But how accurate is the use of the 'secular religion' thesis?

c) The Limits of the Religious Analogy

Two major objections to Aron's views can be raised, which could undermine the accuracy of his interpretation of totalitarian rule. The first type of objection is expressed by Launay: 'Does [the expression 'secular religion'] not enclose inaccuracies, since it puts together political doctrines with conceptions of piety, of love and of disinterested devotion? The believer in the bimillenary religion can be hurt by such confusion' (1995, p. 88). Aron's comparison could indeed have the shortcoming of presenting "true" religions in a derogatory light, to the point of discrediting their legitimacy.[32] However, Aron anticipates such criticisms, and provides a two-sided answer to it. Firstly, he claims that traditional religions have not always been peaceful:

> Il serait absurde de reprocher aux religions séculières d'organiser l'intolérance et de répandre la guerre. Après tout, les religions de salut, aux époques où elles exerçaient un empire indiscuté sur les âmes, ne montraient pas moins d'intolérance (HP, p. 383).

As is commonly accepted, many injustices and crimes have been committed in the name of religion, and Churches themselves are not exempt from reproach. Christian faith, Aron observes, 'can be said to be total, because it can inspire our entire existence'. There is nothing wrong with this, so long as it does not become 'totalitarian', which

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[32] John Gray (1993) has made this observation, p. 157: 'totalitarian ideologies are instruments of social transformation and seek to displace traditional systems of belief. That is why the academic *canard*, that Communism is a modern secular or political religion, is true only in the sense in which occultism and theosophy are religions – the sense in which all are modernist projects of supplanting the mysteries and tragedies of inherited faiths with Gnostic techniques of liberation, represented as application of scientific method. There is an inherent paradox in totalitarianism in that it deploys modern ideology in the service of an anti-modernist project.'

Aron says it sometimes has, 'when it ignored the autonomy of profanous activities' (OI, p. 296). Secondly, and despite the tumultuous history of religions, Aron is never prepared to acknowledge their *complete* similarity with secular religions. Unlike Christian faith, communist faith 'becomes totalitarian as soon as it aims to be total, for it creates the illusion of totality only by imposing official truths' (OI, p. 296).

There are many features of totalitarianism that cannot be compared with normal religions. Nazi and communist ideologies, though they appeal to irrational feelings, are also 'overly rational in both the scientific methods of propaganda they deploy and the logicality and internal coherence of its doctrines' (Halberstam, in Shorten, 2003, p. 17). For obvious reasons, revealed religions do not place rationality as the central element in their framework. This leads to another major difference, which lies in the degree of obedience to authority: unlike Stalinism, 'Christianity has never given governments a free rein' (OI, p. 300). Finally, and more importantly, secular religions are weak copies of true religions because they cannot help but engender scepticism towards their own faith. As Aron writes, these 'substitutes of religions are gnawn from the origin by a secret unbelief' (HP, p. 383). The main explanation for this is situated in the deep feeling created by true religions in the hearts of individuals, something that Stalinism cannot imitate: 'communism defines for its believers both the enemy and the future, giving them someone to hate and something to build. It arouses passionate devotions; but it does not offer people anything to love' (*Dawn*, p. 241). Here lies the limit of the religious comparison for Aron, who eventually recognises that we would fall into the trap of the communists if we believed that communism is the true new religion: 'thus, communism is less a religion, whose model is still offered by Christianity to Westerners, than a political attempt to find a substitution to it, in an ideology raised into a state orthodoxy' (OI, p. 294). For Aron the comparison with religions has to remain

functional, as modern tyranny cannot be understood as a full religion in a phenomenological sense.[33]

The second objection to the parallel between religions and totalitarian rule can be addressed as follows: are the ardour, enthusiasm and devotion required of believers of secular religions sufficient criteria of differentiation from other forms of ideology? Could it not be argued that most forms of government expect, to a certain extent, the same form of commitment from their citizens? In this case, where does the originality of totalitarian regimes lie? Once again, Aron provides a convincing answer to this attack. In his definition of secular religions, he remarks that unconditional fervour is not a sufficient criteria to characterise secular religions: 'one could end up calling religion every doctrine which raise burning passions' (HP, p. 370). In the *Opium*, Aron makes a similar statement:

> Democracy or nationalism, have, it is fair to say, provoked ardour that are not less passionate than the classless society... In this sense, all the political movements that have agitated modern Europe have had a religious character (OI, p. 276)

But Aron makes it clear that there is more to Nazism and Stalinism that this ardour: the eschatology, the all-embracing system of values that determines every action of men, in the public as well as the private sphere. Finally, what distinguishes best the communist faith from any other political opinion is its intransigence (OI, p. 279).[34] This inflexibility is unique to totalitarian rule. This is why, in Aron's eyes, if the atheist does not necessarily have to be hostile to religions of salvation, 'those who do not believe in Marxist prophetism ought to denounce secular religions' (OI, pp. 301-2).

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[33] On the distinction between the functional and phenomenological understanding of political religions, see Burrin, 1997, pp. 326-7.
[34] 1 am here going along with Lefort's comment whereby Aron ' juge que le nazisme et le fascisme sont irréductibles au modèle de régimes nationalistes-conservateurs ou à celui de dictatures du genre latino-américain ou bien espagnol ou portugais' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 88).

To conclude with Aron's account of totalitarian ideology, it should be noted that this has little in common with Berlin's account. This is not to say that Berlin would have found room for disagreement, especially on the secular religion thesis, the emphasis of which the fanaticism and uniformity matches indirectly Berlin's description of utopian faith. Furthermore, Aron's presentation has the advantage of bringing out, as Brian Anderson argues, 'what similarities existed between Marxism, fascism, and Nazism, and what separated each from the more prosaic, but far more humane nature of liberal democracy' (1997, p. 71). Beyond the contrasting approach of the short-term versus long-term, Berlin and Aron share, as will be pointed out later, a *liberal* message of rejection of ideologies.

2.2 The Totalitarian Phenomenon: a Specificity of the Twentieth Century

Raymond Aron does not limit his study of the totalitarian phenomenon to its ideological dimension. As he explains in his *Memoirs*, he also assigned himself a different task: 'to confront ideas with the realities that they translate, deform and transfigure' (M, p. 579). In opposition to Berlin, Aron dedicates a great deal of his research to the evaluation of the impact that ideas have on the political decision-making process, at a national and international level. Consequently, his socio-political approach allows political leaders of the West to gain a 'precise knowledge of how fascism and Nazism become important political movements', and therefore to 'respond with an efficient policy' (Kjedahl, 2001, p. 127). Aron does so in three stages: by fleshing out the socio-historical origins of the rise of totalitarianism, by highlighting the gap between the theory and the reality of totalitarian governments, and finally by offering a liberal resolution to the totalitarian challenge.

2.2.1 The Origins of the Rise of Totalitarian Regimes: a Socio-Political Approach

Aron is not as concerned with the *intellectual* origins of totalitarianism as is Berlin, and prefers an historical approach to the events or tendencies that led to it. His *sociological* analysis of the situation preceding the rise of totalitarian regimes is therefore a crucial complement to his examination of totalitarian ideology.

Like other theorists, Aron situates the rise of totalitarianism with that of modernity.[35] However, Aron's vision of modernity is original in the sense that it merges two levels of analysis: political and economic. This is described in *Dix Leçons sur la société industrielle*, in which he emphasises the uniqueness of industrial societies, centred on high production and productivity, and bureaucracy.[36] Aron's account details the models of organisation of the economy, which is not of great relevance here. What is of interest are the implications of those models for society. Aron himself fixes this connection as his major target:

> Given that we observe as a major fact in present-day societies, whether Western or Soviet, that science is being applied to industry and that this involves an increase in production and a growth in the resources of the community... what are the *consequences of this for the social order*? (cited in Colquhoun, 1986b, p. 93, emphasis added).

For Aron, the corollary of industrialism is democracy, or the desire for 'social equality' (DP, p. 154). Aron is not the first sociologist to highlight these two trends of industrial society: in the nineteenth century already, the 'scientific' or technological side was stressed by Saint-Simon and Marx, while the irresistible strive towards equality is at the heart of Tocqueville's work. What Aron adds is a demonstration of their inexorable

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[35] See Arendt (1958).
[36] Bureaucracy as such is not novel as such, but Aron explains what makes it different from traditional bureaucracy in Asia: 'to the usual features of bureaucratic despotisms is added the will to change of the revolutionary party and an ideology, rationalist in inspiration, which in itself constitutes a critique of reality. Lastly, modern industrial society has given to the Soviet regimes means of action such as no past

bond, and of the necessity of studying them in tandem. This does not entail, though, that the social sphere is tied with the economic sphere: it is only their *study* that should not be separated. On this subject, Aron concurs with Tocqueville *contra* Marx: the rise of democracy presupposed a civil society independent from economic (and political) decisions. It is the deliberate attempt to erase the boundary between those two spheres that characterises totalitarian rule: the complex but vital equilibrium on which industrial societies rest vanishes.

Can one conclude that Aron is trying to say that the development of industrial societies is the main cause for the rise of totalitarianism? If it were the case, it would mean that all industrial societies were liable to experience totalitarianism, that it was in their *essence*. Such reasoning would reintroduce a form of determinism against which Aron is fervently opposed. In fact, Aron refuses to discern a unique cause to the emergence of Nazism and communism. The criterion of industrial society constitutes only a general background.[37] Adopting a posture typical of historians, Aron distinguishes other elements that have contributed to the rise of fascism and communism. Following Elie Halévy, Aron emphasises the experience of the First World War in Europe, which triggered off a series of events such as the Russian revolution, the rise of Mussolini in Italy, and the German desire for revenge. Aron nevertheless disagrees with Halévy's thesis whereby modern tyrannies derive the foundation of their rule simply from the

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despotism ever possessed – the monopoly of the means of persuasion and of new techniques of psychological action' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986, vol. 2, p. 152).
[37] Industrialism does not even have to be present in its fully developed form. The best example is Russia of 1917, which was a rural and agricultural country, but was 'imagined' as a huge industrial power by the Bolsheviks.

system of war economy.[38] Another origin is the Great Crisis that reaches Europe, and affects Germany in particular, from 1930 onwards. Yet again, as Kjedahl notices, for Aron, economic causes were more 'accelerating' than 'adequate'. The most important cause of totalitarianism 'amounted to... individuals' (2001, p. 132). In other words, leaders such as Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, Lenin and then Stalin in Russia, played a crucial role. To sum up, on Aron's view, the rise of totalitarianism depended of a wide range of factors, from those on the widest scale (social, economic and geopolitical), to more unique circumstances, especially the role of a few influential men. Ideology is but one element amongst many others, whose role is minor compared to, for instance, that of the Red Army.[39]

Can one consider the elements above as 'causes' that 'explain' the emergence of totalitarian regimes? The question is of importance, since theorists such as Hannah Arendt have denied the possibility to speak in terms of logic, of rationality, and therefore of 'causes'. Aron comments on Arendt's position in 'The Essence of Totalitarianism' (MTM, pp. 203-22). Even though both Aron and Arendt belong to 'the antitotalitarian liberal "school"' (Freymond, MTM, p. 38), Aron departs from Arendt in the sense that he refuses to overemphasise the abnormality of totalitarianism. Luc Ferry points out the difference between the two scholars: if Arendt's interpretation is 'inspired by a phenomenological philosophy' which destroys 'purely and simply the principle of causality', Aron's vision is of 'Weberian inspiration', which implies the limitation of

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[38] Aron remarks that, for most countries, the end of the war has signified the return to an economy run mainly by entrepreneurs, and that it was entirely a decision of Soviet Russia to extend in time of peace the economic regime of wartime (CG, pp. 332-3).

[39] Aron sarcastically highlights the weakness of ideologies if they are not backed by military forces: 'nulle part, le PC n'aurait pu seul s'emparer du pouvoir total. Partout, il avait eu besoin de l'aide de l'Armée rouge' (HP, p. 427); 'La raison du succès remporté par le marxisme-léninisme, entre toutes les tentatives de religion de remplacement, est, en dernière analyse, fort simple : c'est la victoire de la

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the principle of causality, but not its complete removal (in Pisier-Kouchner, 1983, pp. 230-1). The Weberian approach produces a 'rationalist analysis', which is nevertheless neither ideological nor historicist, since it is formulated in terms of probability (in Pisier-Kouchner, 1983, p. 248).[40] In Aron's eyes, the rise of totalitarianism is therefore the result of a range of circumstances, individually seen as 'reasons', but producing an unpredictable and unique outcome. Sociological trends of industrial societies are not a sufficient explanation because, for Aron, 'politics will remain the art of choices with no return in unpredictable circumstances, guided by an incomplete knowledge' (cited by Ferry, in Pisier-Kouchner, 1983, p. 246). This, in turn, means that 'the art of governing men' escapes rationalisation, something that modern tyrannies attempted to deny with no success (MTM, p. 125).

Given his historico-sociological approach, Aron presents totalitarian rule from a more neutral light than Berlin or Arendt's accounts. However, Aron makes use of the sociological angle to eventually discredit the myth whereby communism provides a *legitimate* response to the modern age.

2.2.2 Discrediting the Myth: the Gap Between the Ideal and the Reality of the Soviet Regime

In *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, Aron distinguishes between two types of regime that are to be found among industrial societies : 'constitutional-pluralistic' and 'monopolistic-party' regimes, also called 'ideocracies'. The second type is of much interest to us because it describes the main features of totalitarian regimes, especially

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Révolution qui a permis la diffusion du communisme... Les prophètes désarmés périssent. L'avenir de la religion séculière dépend surtout des rivalités de puissance' (OI, p. 293).

[40] See chapter 1 for Aron's method of probabilism.

Soviet Russia. Aron enumerates five recurrent features to his model of ideocracy: the monopoly of political activity by one party; an ideology on which it bestows absolute authority; the monopoly of means of coercion and persuasion; the subjection of economic activities to the state; and finally the fact that an error in economic activity is an ideological error, which is punished through a process of ideological terror and the reign of the police (Colquhoun, 1986b, pp. 150-1). This definition attests to the power of the revolutionary party, which aims at controlling all parts of social life.

Starting with these observations, Aron gives an assessment of the Soviet Union, which, not surprisingly, highlights the failure of the regime to implement its ideas. This is especially obvious in satellite countries, such as Hungary, where the aborted revolution of 1956 was but a sign of the contradictions of communism (HP, pp. 430-5). But even in the Moscow of the mid-1950s, Aron notices that communism runs out of steam: 'the regime becomes middle-class [s'embourgeoise].' He then adds that if 'the revolution can be permanent', 'the revolutionary spirit fades away' (OI, p. 297). Aron incessantly draws attention to the gap between, on the one hand, Marx's vision of communist society, characterised by the disappearance of the state, the liberation of men and their equality, and on the other hand, the reality of the despotism in the Eastern bloc. One quote in particular is worth citing, because Aron ironically applies a Marxist criticism to Marxist regimes:

> Nul mouvement historique n'offre une cible plus favorable à la critique marxiste des idéologies que le mouvement communiste lui-même. La révolution fut faite par une minorité, elle est présentée comme l'œuvre du grand nombre. Elle se réclame de la liberté et supprime toutes les libertés. Elle invoque la dictature du prolétariat et soumet le prolétariat à la dictature du parti et de la bureaucratie. *Rarement contradiction entre l'action et l'idée que s'en font les acteurs a été aussi éclatante* (MTM, p. 399, emphasis added)

We will not expand much on the formal liberty / real liberty contrast, as a long part of the following chapter will be dedicated to it. As Colquhoun remarks, formal liberties are very much threatened by the supposed 'rationalisation' of society:

> The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century had shown that, if ever an idea was false, it was the idea that the administration of things replaces the government of persons. It had become abundantly clear that, when one sought to administer all things one was also forced to govern all people (198b, pp. 196-7)

According to Aron, people have not only lost their formal liberties, but they have not gained real liberties: economic growth in the Soviet Union is limited to a few sectors (mainly military and heavy industry), but not light industry, nor agriculture, which would genuinely benefit consumers, who instead fail to enjoy an increase in their standard of living. Another failure that Aron stresses is in the promise made to individuals that the sacrifices made in the early days of the revolution would be rewarded once the regime had settled down. The result is the opposite: 'the communist party demands more in 1938 than in 1917, in 1952 than in 1938. The ideological passion does not appease, it is exacerbated. The Marxism of Stalin is more intrusive than that of Lenin' (MTM, p. 213).

Next, having demonstrated the incapacity of communist regimes to materialise the Marxist dream, Aron turns his criticism towards a group of people who, despite the evidence of the shortcomings of the Soviet regime, still affirm the superiority of the socialist system. Aron's target is not so much Soviet leaders – who, as noticed already, show a good deal of scepticism towards the ideology they extol – than French intellectuals of the Left. Unlike Berlin, Aron is not afraid of attacking his contemporaries, which earned him a controversial reputation. Only a minority of these intellectuals were members of the French Communist Party, but most of them

considered themselves as 'fellow travellers' of the communist idea. Aron reproaches them, and the numerous sympathisers (amongst the young, workers, teachers), for having been seduced by the Soviet myth: '[i]t is the Soviet myth that motivates the masses; the Soviet reality lets them down' (*Dawn*, p. 240). *The Opium of the Intellectuals* is an attempt, on Aron's part, to clarify the various myths to which French intellectuals have succumbed.[41] Aron's attack is focused on three types of myths: the myth of the Left, of the Proletariat and of the Revolution. His criticism of the latter is particularly acute, since he considers the revolution as a major cause of blindness: 'The myth of the revolution is a refuge for utopian thought, it becomes the mysterious, unpredictable, intercessor between what is real and what is ideal' (OI, p. 76). The attraction of the myth of the revolution is to be easily explained, according to Aron:

> Pour l'intellectuel qui cherche dans la politique un divertissement, un objet de foi ou un thème de spéculations, la réforme est ennuyeuse et la révolution excitante. L'une est prosaïque, l'autre poétique, l'une passe pour l'œuvre des fonctionnaires et l'autre du peuple dressé contre les exploiteurs. La Révolution suspend l'ordre coutumier et fait croire qu'enfin tout est possible (OI, p. 54)[42]

Aron's criticism of the practice of the Soviet regime, and his demonstration of the strangely unreal character of the discourses of some of his fellow peers, is a typical element in his way of thinking. During his whole career, Aron showed a concern – almost non-existent in Berlin's work – to evaluate how his reflections, and those of others, could be applied to the society of his time. His demonstration of the impossibility of realising the Marxist dream in twentieth-century industrial countries would have certainly earned the agreement of Berlin, who did not know enough of the precise economic and social situation of Eastern Europe to feel able to comment. If

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[41] In *Marxismes Imaginaires* (1970), Aron criticises French intellectuals (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Althusser in particular) from a different angle. He tries to prove that their existentialism or structuralism is not compatible with the Marxist doctrine.
[42] More than a decade later, Aron reiterates his attack, but this time against the fervour of those who took part in the May 1968 events. Aron calls this episode a 'psychodrama', a revolution that 'cannot be found

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Aron and Berlin adopt different angles to censure totalitarian regimes, the alternative they both offer has much more in common.

2.2.3   Aron's Response to Totalitarianism: Disenchanted Politics

In the same way as Berlin argues for the end of monism, one of the recurrent motifs of Aron's work is the celebration of the 'end of ideology'. This orientation, which has caused much controversy, necessitates clarification. In 1955, in a conference organised in Milan by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Aron announces that 'in most Western societies, the ideological controversy is dying down' (cited in Jacoby, 1999, p. 1). The same year, he entitles his conclusion to the *Opium* 'The end of the ideological age?', which was soon a subject of debate, especially from those who chose to ignore the question mark in the title. A recurrent criticism of this conclusion is that Aron argues for the end of *political philosophy* or of reflections about the political. But, if we look at the relevant paragraph as a whole, Aron's statement appears more complex:

> peut-être l'intellectuel se désintéressera-t-il de la politique le jour où il en découvrira les limites. Acceptons avec joie cette promesse incertaine. Nous ne sommes pas menacés par l'indifférence. Les hommes ne sont pas sur le point de manquer d'occasions et de motifs de s'entre-tuer. Si la tolérance naît du doute, qu'on enseigne à douter des modèles et des utopies, à récuser les prophètes de salut, annonciateurs de catastrophes' (OI, p. 334)

An analysis of this quote indicates that Aron does not wish to witness the disappearance of all political debate or ideology. If we recall the two meanings that Aron gives to the term 'ideology', it is clear that his attack 'concerns essentially the narrow sense of ideology, the one that leads to fanaticism and nihilism' (Launay, 1995, p. 117). The target, as he himself explained, was Marxism, which represented the ideology *par excellence*, that is, the definite and final set of truths which could never be substituted.

[introuvable]' because the gap between the desires of these groups and what they could, or indeed did achieve, was extremely wide (RI, p. 21).

Aron was happy to attest to the difficulties of this kind of ideology, yet he did not believe that it equated with the end of all political ideas: 'of course there would remain values for which we would fight, there would be changes in the name of certain ideas, but there would not be a system so complete, so imperative than Marxism-Leninism' (SE, p. 238). Aron's rejection of ideocracies is concomitant with his demystified vision of politics. To follow Brian Anderson's words, Aron's effort consists in making the political 'more mundane, more prosaic, to disenchant what had been falsely enchanted' (1997, p. 71). Far from offering their citizens 'the meaning of life', political leaders ought to, on Aron's view, adopt a very pragmatic attitude to respond to daily issues. This is what Aron calls 'the wisdom of Montesquieu', which Brian Anderson summarises as such:

> That wisdom tells us that the same laws are not good everywhere: one cannot disregard the circumstances of time and place. It is this attentiveness to the *hic et nunc* that Aron is recommending when he asserts that political judgment is essentially historical (1997, p. 108)

The recommendation of pragmatism is taken up in the first model of industrial society presented by Aron, namely, constitutional-pluralistic regimes. There is no doubt that Aron favours this model against ideocracy, yet, as will be emphasised in the next chapter, commentators such as Claude Lefort have argued that Aron does not stress sufficiently the opposition between the two types of industrial society. At this stage, what is important to note is that Aron is prepared to concede that the institutional framework of constitutional-pluralistic regimes cannot be described in too much detail. But to him this is not a shortcoming, on the contrary. Aron accepts the criticism that his thought is not constructive enough, but gives a response that, again, is typical of the anti-systematic liberals:

> Many of the writings that are termed "constructive" are just as futile as plans for a universal state... The term "constructive" is applied even to projects that are unrealizable, and the term "negative" to analyses which tend to delimit what is

possible and to form political judgment – a judgment which is essentially historical in nature and which focus on the real or set itself an attainable objective. One is sometimes tempted to invert the hierarchy of values and to take the term "negative" as a compliment (quoted in Anderson, 1997, p. 108)

In Aron's eyes, but also in Berlin's and in those of many liberals of the Cold War, it is a mistake to think that one can respond to the totalitarian system by building an antagonistic system. The solution is, on the contrary, flexibility. In this sense, Lefort's criticism of Aron, whereby the latter errs too much on the side of caution to legitimately defend his own values, does not stand up to scrutiny: Aron thinks that he would put liberal values *in danger* if he were to adopt a rigid structure of thought.

Aron, like Berlin, is also accused of being sceptical and pessimistic. The attack is usually based on the last sentence of the *Opium*, in which Aron argues that 'one should wish for the coming of sceptics if they are going to put an end to fanaticism' (OI, p. 334). Aiken, for instance, remarks that 'anti-ideologists like Aron were responsible for spreading a philosophy of pessimism which rendered the West "helpless in the world struggle against the ideology of communism"' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986b, p. 270). Once again, Aron seems proud to be described as a sceptic. He replies to Aiken that anyone who has lived in this age of extremes without having experienced 'from time to time some doubts about the temporal destiny of humanity', has a 'very naive and simple faith' (cited in Colquhoun, 1986b, p. 270). Aron calls for some realism in a time of excess of enthusiasm and excitement. He nevertheless observes that the corollary to his pessimism was never indifference or passivity. His commitment was illustrated by his regular publications in defence of the Western liberalism, at a national and international level.

Eventually, his faith in the superiority of a liberal system of government is not called into question. Berlin seems unable to advocate the ultimate truthfulness of his

liberal stand because his reflections, limited to the abstract level, do not provide the concrete answers that would allow him to remove his hesitations. Aron, on the contrary, appears much more confident about his position, as when he affirms that liberalism can be seen as an 'ideology' (understood, in this case, in a positive light, i.e. as a set of ideas) which help guide political leaders, whilst remaining flexible in their content:

> Le libéral cherche patiemment la vérité, il ne bougera jamais de ses convictions ultimes, à savoir de ses maximes morales autant qu'intellectuelles. Je n'avais pas tort d'opposer mon attitude à celle des vrais croyants, des fidèles des religions séculières. J'avais tort d'appeler l'une idéologique et l'autre non idéologique. Mieux vaut reprendre, en le modifiant, un titre de Pascal : *Du bon usage des idéologies*' (M, p. 606)

What gives Aron this feeling of assurance, and thus this desire to be more committed in the public sphere, certainly comes from the specific angle he takes to study the totalitarian phenomenon. His awareness of the failure, in practice, of socialist ideals, comforts him in his conviction that totalitarian ideology is essentially flawed.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, we need to highlight what concurs and differs in Aron and Berlin's interpretations of the rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. Firstly, what distinguishes them is mainly a choice of angle from which to approach the totalitarian phenomenon: an indirect and long-term perspective for Berlin, a direct and short-term perspective for Aron. My assertion, in light of the above, is that Aron's method is more accurate and produces better results on several levels. Concerning the interpretation of the canon in order to find the roots of monistic thought, it is clear that Berlin's vision ought to be partly discredited, whereas Aron's identification of a connection between totalitarianism – in its communist version – and Marx is sounder, though perhaps lacks boldness. More importantly, the evidence strongly supports with Aron that it is crucial to point out the *novelty* of the driving force of Nazism and communism compared to

previous tyrannies. By introducing the conception of 'secular religion', Aron is more at ease than Berlin to stress the originality of the ideology but also the political practices of these regimes.

Secondly, another notable difference between the two scholars is that Berlin is concerned with the *moral* implications of monism (at the level of the *individual*), whereas Aron thinks in more *sociological* terms, and looks at *societies* as wholes. To elaborate, Berlin's approach to totalitarianism can be described as 'devoted to the life of the mind',[43] and concentrates on the many puzzles that the conscience has to face, when challenged by the dream of unity. In contrast, Aron's perspective is deeply political, driven by a desire to find practical solutions. Consequently, Aron is less preoccupied with moral dilemmas, while, like Berlin, he is never prepared to say that there exists a final answer to each question raised by the modern age. Such conclusions are very similar to those drawn at the end of our first chapter dedicated to the philosophy of history, and which also emphasised the differences between a moral and a political 'mode of thinking.' Our second level of analysis therefore reinforces our introductory hypothesis of an opposition of style between Aron and Berlin. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that the difference highlighted is not to be interpreted as an opposition of values. Rather, I wish to make the case that their two approaches are compatible, and in fact even complementary. Each of them provides a necessary weapon in the fight against the totalitarian temptation. Berlin highlights that our minds are often predisposed to look for unity and harmony, and therefore warns us that we could easily be seduced by monistic discourses. On another level, Aron points out that liberal democracies are, in their political but also economic structures, never too far from

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[43] This expression is Mark Lilla's (2001c). In this piece, he tries to describe 'intellectuals' in a general sense, but does not refer to Berlin specifically.

totalitarian regimes. In other words, both hold what Alain Finkielkraut has called 'the anti-totalitarian wisdom', according to which one should never feel too secure that the war against non-liberal ideologies is definitively won.[44]

In the last analysis, the common message that Aron and Berlin want to convey from their analysis of twentieth-century tyrannies is that liberal political systems and liberal ways of thinking have their own deficiencies, and are therefore not infallible. Does this message have only a limited resonance in the post-Cold War age? In a recent article on Oakeshott and Berlin, Paul Franco wonders whether Berlin's critique of totalitarianism – via his dismissal of rationalism and utopianism – 'remains bound up with the ideological wars of the fifties, attacking an enemy that is now no longer recognizable', and therefore whether his target has 'become something of a straw man at the beginning of the twenty-first century' (2003, p. 489) Franco's answer seems to be that Berlin's theory is not of much use for the present. I disagree strongly with Franco, and believe that, in a post-September 11 world, neglecting Berlin, and also Aron's anti-totalitarian wisdom could well prove to be perilous. In our post Cold War era, new threats to liberalism have appeared. The obvious threat is that of new monisms, embodied for instance in renewed religious fundamentalism. The irony here is that utopias have reverted backwards in time, and that the new 'political religions' do not hold any 'secular' elements. But, as noted by Michael Ignatieff, the threat on liberalism could also come from within, for instance with restrictions on our individual liberties in the name of a war against terrorism (2004). This is why, I believe, Aron and Berlin's denunciation of the totalitarian temptation remains highly contemporary. This

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[44] Alain Finkielkraut, *Le Figaro Magazine*, 31 October 2003: 'Je suis frappé par l'évaporation de la sagesse antitotalitaire'.

denunciation also has many implications in their understanding of two major values, namely liberty (chap. 3) and national identity (chap. 4).

CHAPTER 3: ON LIBERTY AND THE DILEMMAS OF ITS DEFENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Liberty is a constant preoccupation of Raymond Aron and Isaiah Berlin: issues directly or indirectly related to liberty can be found everywhere in their work. In the opening chapter, it is pointed out that their rejection of determinism in history derived from a recognition of the freedom of human beings to shape their futures. In the second chapter, Aron and Berlin's fierce denunciation of totalitarianism is made in the name of liberty. Furthermore, the fourth chapter will analyse the problem of liberty from yet another angle, namely that of the autonomy of national communities as singular entities. Given, therefore, the centrality of liberty in the thought of our two thinkers, some clarification of the meaning of the concept and of its implications is necessary, and will be the main focus of this chapter.

Aron and Berlin are uncharacteristically explicit and direct in their approach to this notion. If, on other occasions, they tend to appeal to thinkers of the past for definitions or clarification of debates, with liberty they each undertake original attempt at personal reflection and analysis. This is not to say that they do not refer at all to past theories, but simply that they bring to bear distinct perspectives on the concept. Aron, in his *Essai sur les Libertés*, and Berlin in his 'Two Concepts of Liberty', offer unusually developed definitions and typologies of liberty.[1]

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[1] In each case this is a consequence of their pre-war philosophical training.

It is notable that while many studies have been undertaken on both Berlin's two concepts of liberty and on his pluralism, Aron's vision of liberty has rarely been commented upon, and even then so only in relation to totalitarianism. For reasons of space – but also so as to balance attention to each thinker – debates around Berlin's vision of liberty will not be explicated exhaustively. Instead, the aim of this chapter will be limited to pursuing a closer analysis of the work of Aron and Berlin themselves, in an attempt to establish how coherent are their interpretations of the concept, and how original their contributions as compared with other liberal accounts. It is also essential to evaluate the implications of their conceptions of liberty for the organisation of society, especially that of a liberal society. In doing so, the similarities and differences in their contributions will be highlighted, with a two-fold aim in mind, as in the previous chapters: to find out whether their differences are complementary or irreconcilable.

The argument of this chapter will be divided into two major levels of analysis: the theory surrounding the concept of liberty, and the implications of this theory for the structure of the liberal order. Firstly, when examining liberty, Aron and Berlin adopt fairly dissimilar methods, which reflect an opposition in their 'modes of thinking': Aron's method is based on sociological evidence, whilst Berlin concentrates on the moral, or even psychological, side of the debates. Therefore they do not bring the same dimension to debates about the meaning of liberty. Nevertheless, I will argue that this distinction does not lead them to differ in their conclusions. On the contrary, their approaches are, I believe, complementary, and help produce a clear defence of negative liberty when combined. If one assesses such defences, they cannot be perceived as very original, but rather as following directly from

the nineteenth-century liberal tradition associated with both J.S. Mill and Tocqueville. The main originality, it will be maintained, consists in their *reassertion* of traditional liberal views in a context in which these views are undermined, if not highly threatened, either by socialists or by libertarians.

Secondly, the difference of perspective between Aron and Berlin is noticeable when looking at the implications of their conceptions of liberty for the organisation of liberal societies. A second distinction will therefore be emphasised. On the one hand, Aron, who thinks practically and politically, offers a contribution to the discussion about the best institutional framework through which to preserve liberty. On the other hand, Berlin is not interested in pursuing the ramifications of his reflections about liberty for, say, policy or the design of political arrangements. He prefers to push further the theoretical debate about the internal strengths and weaknesses of the liberal way of thinking, on the question of the status of liberty in a pluralistic order. The result, as will be concluded, is that Berlin and Aron are driven by markedly different purposes. Whilst Berlin remains focused on the potential irresolution of the tensions between liberalism and pluralism at the level of ideas, and endlessly tries to untie the Gordian knot of pluralism, Aron simply cuts it by removing these tensions through an empirical analysis of the conditions of development of liberal societies.

1. DEFENCES OF LIBERTY

What distinguishes Aron from Berlin with regards to liberty is not so much his conclusions – he is as committed as Berlin in defending negative liberty – than the methods through which he reaches these conclusions. As Raynaud emphasises, Aron's position situates itself

'between sociology and philosophy' (in EL, p. 4). By this it is meant that Aron combines a classical approach – centred on perennial political questions such as 'why do we obey the state?' – with an analysis of the condition of the society of his own day, i.e. industrial society. It has already been pointed out that Aron makes the case that 'modernity', understood in the sense of an industrial and democratic world, deeply affects the way in which we understand our system of values.[2] This entails that, for Aron, reflections on the concept of liberty include a sociological dimension. Berlin, on the contrary, adopts a more analytical approach to liberty.

In order to evaluate how this opposition affects their respective visions, we will, first of all, refer back to the origins of the contrast between the approaches. We will then see that this distinction does not entail that Aron and Berlin's understandings of liberty are greatly at odds, but more that they are complementary. Finally, their defence of liberty will be asserted as being typical of the liberal tradition, though tailored in parts so as to be a sufficient response to the dominant views of their time.

1.1 Origins of the sociological vs. philosophical distinction

Two major reasons explain why Aron and Berlin adopt contrasting methods when addressing issues connected to liberty. Firstly, they are influenced by different thinkers, Aron privileging the founders of political sociology, and Berlin writers from a more philosophical or even literary background. Secondly, they show contrasting interests in terms of the theoretical and practical debates of their time.

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[2] See chapter 2, part 2.1.

1.1.1 Dialogues with thinkers of the past

It has been noted that Aron and Berlin share a debt to German philosophy when commenting on determinism in history.[3] Further to this, it is now important to stress that other thinkers also exercise an influence on each of them.

If we start with Aron, it is evident that his original style of analysis reflects that of writers whom he discusses in detail in his *Main Currents of Sociological Thought*. What is common to most of them, he argues, is the way in which they develop a 'social philosophy of a relatively new type' (EPS, p. 17). I wish to argue that Aron can be seen as a successor to this tradition. In particular, Aron owes a good deal to three theorists: Marx, Tocqueville and Montesquieu. The most recent, Marx, is the one who holds the greatest role in the shaping of Aron's mind. Aron's method is very similar to that of Marx, as he himself acknowledges: it is to work from a combination of observations on the economic, social and political context of Europe, and to pursue this with philosophical rigour. There are several elements in Marx's theory with which Aron agrees: his approach to the study of modern society, his attempt to understand the transformation affected by industrialism, and so forth. Yet, even though Aron acknowledges that his work on industrial societies owes much to Marx, his conclusions are radically opposed.[4] What interests us at this stage is that Aron owes to Marx a *methodological* debt, and as that Melvin Richter remarks, Aron's 'dialogue with Marx' is definitely the 'axis of his thought' (1984, p. 150). Aside from his specific method of study, Aron also retains from Marx the distinction between formal and

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[3] See chapter 1, part 1.1.

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real liberty. Berlin, on the contrary, shows no really interest in replicating Marx's combination of philosophy with economics and sociology. Even though he wrote a biography of Marx in his early career, it is fair to say that it holds little weight in Berlin's thought.

The same can be said about the work of Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Berlin never mentions the latter, and in his piece on Montesquieu, hardly mentions the Frenchman's method of analysis (AC, pp. 130-61).[5] Only Aron stresses the originality of Montesquieu and of Tocqueville's approaches, which he describes as follows:

> Tocqueville, [comme Montesquieu] est à la fois sociologue et philosophe. Sociologue en ce sens qu'il s'efforce de comprendre la diversité des moeurs, des lois, des régimes politiques. Philosophe en ce sens que l'étude de cette diversité ne constitue pas une fin en elle-même, et qu'elle ne s'interdit pas les jugements de valeur. L'un et l'autre regardent et expliquent, mais aussi approuvent et condamnent (EL, p. 19)

This description, I think, can be applied word for word to the work of Raymond Aron. Aron himself is keen on alerting attention to this, though he also adds that neither have much to do with his intellectual training based, originally, on a dialogue with Marx. In any case, the similarity with both Montesquieu and Tocqueville has a major implication for the way Aron looks at liberty, because he considers, in Goyard's words, that Montesquieu and Tocqueville are 'like two beacons which light the way to liberty' (1989, p. 61). Aron indeed shares Tocqueville's problematic, which he explains as follows: 'in a society driven by the dynamism of economic growth and technical progress, what becomes or will become of liberty?' (EL, p. 20). Consequently, he gives over space to the treatment to issues such as

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[4] See chapter 2, part 2.2. For instance, if Marx believed that the superstructure – the mode of production – conditioned the life of human beings, Aron argues that the existence of men cannot be reduced to their 'productive' side.

freedom at the workplace, freedom with regards to the education system, and so on. The sociological dimension of this problematic is completely alien to Berlin, who privileges a more analytical approach.

Berlin is not as interested in the study of societies as wholes, whether modern or pre-modern. Rather, he favours the examination of individuals, and his *œuvre* is a succession of essays on the life and ideas of writers he esteemed, such as Herzen, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Vico, or loathed, such as Joseph de Maistre. It has already been stressed that Berlin particularly enjoys entering the mind of individuals. When applied to the examination of the concept of liberty, Berlin appears to use two levels of analysis. The first one is moral, the second psychological. Berlin, at the start of his 'Two Concepts of Liberty', situates his piece in the scope of '*moral* philosophy', which proceeds, according to him, with the 'discovery, or application, of *moral notions* in the sphere of political relations' (L, p. 168, emphases added). The most important of these moral notions being liberty, Berlin is therefore committed to giving an account of liberty that shows a judgement of value. It would be wrong to say that Aron refuses to do this – like Berlin, he is prepared to 'approve or condemn' – but after a sociological observation that is missing in Berlin's work. The second dimension – psychological – corresponds to the *fantasia* of Vico.[6] Applied to the study of liberty, it implies that Berlin empathises with the slave, or the fool, or the stoic, in order to uncover what freedom means to them. This is something that Berlin recurrently practices, and can be observed in *Liberty*, for instance when he describes the 'retreat to the

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[5] This does not entail that he disapproves of Montesquieu's conclusions about liberty and the organisation of power, as will be stressed later.

[6] See chapter 1, part 3.

inner citadel' of 'ascetics and quietists, of stoics or Buddhist sages' (L, p. 182). Berlin's insight is normally found in literary pieces of work, such as those of the great writers that he praises.

1.1.2 Interest in debates of their time

Apart from the influence of various thinkers on Aron and Berlin's way of understanding liberty, another important aspect to take into account is the context in which they write. In the previous chapters, I have mentioned the variation in the intellectual context only on rare occasions, and argued that it does not have prominent explanatory power when evaluating divergences between Aron and Berlin. At this stage, my conclusions will be fairly similar, though one dimension of the context *is* of huge relevance: the fact that, in France, communist and socialist ideas could not be ignored.[7] In particular, the Marxist claim to have found the way to 'real' freedom, as opposed to the 'formal' liberty of liberalism, was something that Aron was obliged to. This is not to say that Berlin was unaware of Marxist arguments, but their influence was more limited in Britain. Aron, on the contrary, was constantly pushed by his many opponents to respond to their attacks. Further to this, French political life was also highly attentive to events on the other side of the Iron Curtain, especially given the influence of the French Communist Party. Aron was therefore pressed to make a stand on the ideological, but also empirical, situation of socialist countries. This said, it is also evident that Aron's character is very much responsible for the originality of his approach. He was a very candid man, who did not hesitate to tackle questions straightforwardly, and to investigate into archives or dossiers in order to find the details that

could help prove his argument. In opposition to this, Berlin was happy to work at the level

of approximations, something that commentators have reproached him for on several

occasions.[8]

To sum up, Aron is far more driven by reality than Berlin, and therefore keener on

considering practical implications of his theory of liberty. Let us now see whether this

opposition of methodology is reflected in their respective conceptions of freedom.

1.2 <u>Understanding liberty</u>

In his attempt at defining liberty, Aron adopts a scope of study that is much wider, and

perhaps more indefinite, than Berlin, who does not try to encompass all aspects of liberty to

be found in modern society. However, it will be argued that, in constructing a typology of

liberties, the opposition at the outset does not result in an antagonistic vision.

1.2.1   <u>How to define liberty: singular or plural?</u>

The title that Raymond Aron chose for his compilation of articles on liberty is revealing of

his attitude *vis-à-vis* this concept: the *Essai sur les libertés* (emphasis added) is not

concerned with Liberty with a capital 'L', but with the diversity of meanings that can be

given to liberty. The distinction is of great importance to him: 'it is evident that there does

not exist a totality which can be called the liberty of individuals or liberty of people' (EL, p.

195). In a later piece, he reiterates this view: 'the observer that refrains from giving a

philosophical definition of liberty must acknowledge that there exist *liberties*, and not one

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[7] This opposition between the French and the British context will be of great relevance only in the last chapter, when debating the role of national identity.

[8] See Kenny, 2000; Rée, 2002.

liberty' (EP, p. 239). Aron means that we have to be careful to include as many dimensions of the notion as possible, which evidently comprises a political and a sociological level, and not only an analytical one. Aron achieves this in his *Essai sur les libertés* when he places, under the concept of liberty, 'rights written in the law, effective capacities, participation in the public realm and reciprocal limitation of powers, the life of individuals and the organisation of the State' (EL, p. 192). In his *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, he adds to the definition of liberty a notion of 'power', which implies the 'flourishing' of the individual who 'realises himself in social life', and liberty as 'autonomy' (IPP, pp. 64-5). He also describes the role of electoral competition and its limits in the process of citizens' liberating.

If we observe how Berlin examines liberty, we notice that his definition is very close to what Aron calls a 'philosophical definition', which lacks Aron's empirical dimension. It is at this level, I believe, that lies the major difference between Aron and Berlin's understandings of liberty. To simplify, we could say that Aron adopts the view of the sociologist observing twentieth-century industrial societies, whereas Berlin operates analytically, as do most political theorists of the canon. Yet the opposition should not be abridged and become too Manichean. Indeed, Berlin is well aware of the plurality of meanings of liberty, but he declares at the start of 'Two Concepts of Liberty' that he does not 'propose to discuss either the history of this protean word or the more than two hundred senses of it recorded by historian of ideas' (L, p. 168). This signifies that Berlin finds it easier to discriminate amongst liberties *at the start* of his examination, in order to concentrate on two types that, he feels, are at the heart of the philosophical dilemma of

liberty. Conversely, Aron starts from the most complete view, to then narrow it down in terms of what is most relevant for the societies he studies. This does not indicate, as will be stressed later, that Aron gives equal weight to all dimensions of liberty, nor that he refuses to talk about 'liberty' in the singular. He notes precisely that 'some liberties embody the content of *liberty*, at a certain time in history, and according to dominant ideas' (EP, p. 239). Aron is therefore closely akin to Tocqueville, according to whom 'it is the sum of [many] liberties' which 'constitutes liberty' (EL, p. 27). Moreover, he is also prepared to give a *philosophical* definition of liberty. This leads to the conclusion that, rather than being at opposite ends of a spectrum, Aron and Berlin differ only *relatively* in their definition of liberty.

A similar point can be highlighted when examining the limits that they set to liberty. Galipeau notes that, for Berlin, 'in order to analyse the concept "liberty", it must first be separated from its conditions and the ends often sought with it' (1994, p. 86). The same comment can be made about Aron's vision, which is much inspired by a quote from Tocqueville that Aron likes to repeat: 'celui qui cherche dans la liberté autre chose qu'elle-même est fait pour servir'. But because Aron's approach is broadly sociological, the conditions and the ends of liberty are dissimilar to those presented by Berlin. For Aron, the free market – i.e. the organisation of the national economy on the basis of private enterprise – can contribute to the flourishing of liberty in the corresponding society, but is not an *element* of liberty as such. Consequently, he refuses to fully subscribe with Hayek's vision of freedom.[9] In addition, Aron is much concerned that people confuse the sentiment of

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[9] See part 1.3 for more details.

liberty with liberty itself. If he admits that the sentiment of liberty is difficult to grasp (IPP, p. 68), he situates it mainly at two levels: the recognition of social status, and the recognition of a national status for one's community. These are not to be mixed up with liberty itself, because it is possible that people are deceived into feeling free. Berlin is also eager to remove the sentiment of freedom from the definition of freedom itself. Like Aron, he asserts that the feeling of belonging to a nation is an end to liberty, but not a liberty as such.[10]

Once the scope of their study has been demarcated, Aron and Berlin both undertake the construction of a typology of liberties. Despite the dissimilarities noted above, their respective oppositions of two types of liberties emerge as relatively akin.

1.2.2 Typology of liberties

Given that Aron's reappraisal of formal and real liberty, and even more so Berlin's opposition between negative and positive liberty, have been frequently commented upon, it is important to set the specific aims of our analysis of their accounts. Two main questions will guide us. Firstly, could Berlin's famous opposition between negative and positive liberty have been echoed by Aron? Secondly, can we understand this distinction to be a novel and worthwhile contribution to political theory, or a mere repetition of what past thinkers have written? It will be argued that their typology lacks originality, but allows for a renewed understanding of negative liberty.

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[10] See chapter 4, part 3 for a demonstration of this.

In 'Two concepts of liberty' Berlin explains very clearly where the differences between negative and positive liberty lie.[11] As they are well known, they will only be reiterated briefly. If negative liberty is 'principally concerned with the area of control' of one's life, positive liberty, on the contrary describes the source of this control (L, p. 176). To make it clearer, Berlin uses two distinctive questions: 'Who is master?' reflects positive liberty, whilst 'Over what am I master?' helps define negative liberty (L, p. 36). Berlin adds, about the latter, that 'the doctrine is comparatively modern', having been uncovered by Benjamin Constant (L, pp. 176 and 284). Like Constant, he uses terms such as 'liberty from' or 'absence of interference' (L, p. 173). As for positive liberty, Berlin clarifies that 'it derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master' (L, p. 178). Since it entails that the individual fulfils his own self, it is of relevance to grasp what the 'self' is. Berlin distinguishes two forms of 'self': the 'true' and the 'ideal' (L, p. 179). The ambition to realise the 'ideal self' has culminated, historically, in two major perils: 'the first, that of self-abnegation in order to attain independence; the second, that of self-realisation, or total self-identification with a specific principle or ideal in order to attain the selfsame end' (L, p. 179). Berlin's reaction to these two dangers has already been explained: with regards to the first, it corresponds to his disapproval of asceticism, and, with regards to the second, to his fierce condemnation of utopias.

Aron's own typology of liberties is not as clear as Berlin's. Instead of using a recurring set of terms to oppose two types of liberty, Aron refers to various notions. In his wartime piece 'L'homme contre les tyrans', Aron distinguishes 'two ways of tackling the political

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[11] See also the introduction to *Liberty*.

problem', and therefore two ways of understanding liberty: that of Montesquieu and that of Rousseau (CG, p. 636). Whilst Montesquieu attached most importance to 'the enjoyment of the most precious gift: security', which guarantees the limits on the power of the State, Rousseau sees liberty as the fulfilment of the individual through obedience to the laws of the social contract (CG, pp. 640-2). If Montesquieu's definition clearly appears to conform to what Berlin calls 'the absence of interference', the link between positive liberty and Rousseau's vision is not as clear-cut. But it becomes more evident when Aron considers that Rousseau's vision supports the emergence of a new form of absolutism, especially when he formulates his idea of obedience to a civil religion. This can be put in a parallel relation to Berlin's denunciation of the dangers of positive liberty. In his later work, Aron moves on to comment on the work of Marx and Tocqueville, but also of contemporary French intellectuals of the Left. Consequently, he comes across a very frequent opposition: formal versus real liberty. The opposition is, of course, not Aron's invention, yet Aron is eager to examine this distinction in depth, and to interpret it in his own way. A reading of the *Essai sur les libertés* and of 'liberté, libérale, libertaire?' (in EP) reveals that Aron acknowledges the accuracy of Marx's distinction – though he evidently disagrees with its implications. He recognises that men need more than civil liberties in order to be genuinely free. But can one say that the contrast between formal and real liberty is similar to the contrast between positive and negative liberty? If we look in the details of how Aron defines formal liberty, there can be little doubt that it corresponds to what Berlin names negative liberty. To Aron, the formal liberty that Marx denounces is that which Tocqueville defends, and which he describes as follows:

> Every man, assuming he has received from nature the requisite capacity to conduct his own life, brings into the world an equal and inalienable right to live independently of

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his fellows, in everything that concerns only himself, and to regulate his own destiny as he sees fit. This liberty is both *negative* and indeterminate. Negative in the sense that it is expressed by the independence and the choice that each person has over his destiny. Indeterminate in the sense that it remains to be uncovered what, for each of us, is solely up to us' (EL, pp. 25-6, emphasis added)

The above quote, and in particular the allusion to negative liberty, becomes more than just a clue to our argument when linked with other pieces by Aron, in which he also alluded to negative and positive liberty.[12] It emerges, indeed, that Aron was most probably aware of Berlin's famous distinction, and highly sympathetic to it. He simply reformulated it, whether it be under the terminology of Marx, or under his own when he opposes 'personal and political liberties' to 'liberty-capacity'.

To sum up, Aron and Berlin concur that liberty, as the absence of interference is not to be confused with liberty as the autonomy of the individual. Nonetheless, each of them adds a dimension to negative liberty which cannot be found in the work of the other: Aron adds a republican dimension of liberty, whereas Berlin is concerned with the internal freedom of the self. The two notions are not antagonistic, but rather complement each other: they simply tackle liberty from different angles.

Aron questions the issue often raised in his time, whereby 'the death of the citizen' was supposedly a growing phenomenon in individualistic modern societies (EL, p. 163). As Launay remarks, Aron 'differs from Tocqueville to the extent that he is less worried about individualism and about tutelary despotism' (1998, p. 107). This entails that one cannot consider that Aron is fully republican, as is Hannah Arendt for instance. One proof of this is

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[12] See EP, p. 213: 'liberty is essentially negative', and Aron actually refers to Berlin in a subsequent footnote; EP, p. 242: 'one moves form negative liberty...to positive liberty'.

when he remarks that, despite fears of 'depoliticisation' in Europe, there never existed so many think tanks (EL, pp. 182-3). Yet I disagree with Launay when he asserts that 'Aron hardly talks about political liberty' (1998, p. 107). Aron does believe that the inclusion of the citizen's participation in the administering of public affairs, at a national or local level, is essential to the achievement of his liberty. This is why Aron takes the personalisation of power in the French Fifth Republic, the increasing power of the media or the strengthening of bureaucracy seriously. To him, all this could jeopardise the foundations of Western society. Mahoney rightly observes that Aron 'was increasingly critical of the decadence of European society... [and] knew that a free society relies as much on its citizens than on its consumers or on separate institutions such as the army or the church' (1998, p. 154). Consequently, Aron tried to raise awareness that 'political liberty is a formal liberty' of much importance, because it 'guarantees the citizen participation in the political sphere, which gives him the feeling, through his representatives, and possibly his opinions, that he carries influence on the destiny of his collectivity' (EL, p. 138). But he also implies that liberty can begin at the workplace, with the need to 'democratise' the running of businesses (EL, p. 185).

In contradistinction to this, Berlin is not wordy about this dimension of liberty, and is criticised for this by Republican theorists such as Crick, who insists on the need for individuals to become political actors (1967). If he is little concerned with involvement in the public sphere, Berlin enjoys exploring the private sphere of the human mind. He likes to think of negative and positive liberty through what we could call 'medical' cases, i.e. by choosing examples that are matters of psychological scrutiny. As Galipeau remarks, Berlin

invents many illustrations of people 'lacking self-control and burdened by neuroses' (1994, p. 93). One case is that of 'a man who is in the habit of pushing pins into other people' (1964, p. 222). Another instance is when Berlin asks his readers to consider the case of a dipsomaniac, and whether 'to put the bottle beyond the dipsomaniac's reach is not to curtail his liberties' (L, p. 285). By the means of such extreme examples, Berlin can more easily put his message across: in the first case his conclusion is that 'the recognition of some values... enter into the normal definition of what constitutes a sane human being', whilst in the second case it is that 'no matter how well justified, [compulsion] is compulsion and not liberty' (1964, p. 223; L, p. 285). It would be wrong to say that Aron never takes into consideration this level of analysis, but he does so much less often, and does not provide such a powerful insight into immoderate minds.[13] Berlin's special insight appears to complement, rather than depart from, Aron's, and the combination of both would offer a deeper knowledge of liberties.

1.2.3   Evaluation of the dichotomy

Now that the relative proximity of Aron and Berlin's dichotomy of liberties has been stressed, we can turn to an evaluation of their pertinence and originality.

A convincing part of their description of liberty is the *power of decision* that it entails. This has already been pointed out in the first chapter, with the capacity of men to decide their future. It can now be generalised to their overall definition of liberty, though it is perhaps clearer in Berlin's work than Aron's. In the case of Aron, this has been emphasised by

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[13] Aron provides an analysis of this sort when replying to Hayek's vision of liberty, partly because he feels

Nicolas Baverez who says that 'the conquest of liberty is carried out through decision, whether it is directed towards action or knowledge', and concludes that Aron holds 'an existentialist conception of liberty' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 75). Mahoney has a similar line of analysis, even if, for him, the 'absolute of decision' is a specificity of Aron's early work, and a form of decisionism that Aron rejects in his later work (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, pp. 137-42). In the case of Berlin, freedom as choice is made even more central. Berlin stresses, for instance, that 'the freedom I speak of is opportunity for action, rather than action itself. Freedom is the opportunity to act, not action itself', or that 'those who have ever valued liberty for its own sake believed that to be free to choose, and not to be chosen for, is an inalienable ingredient in what makes human beings human' (L, p. xlii; p. lx). Such remarks have led John Gray to conclude that

> The goodness of negative freedom is for Berlin in the fact that it is expressive of choice, and the procedures, and the goodness of choice is in the fact the we are creatures who are part creators of themselves, and part authors of their lives, through the choices they make (1995, p. 31)

Even if choice is indubitably a crucial part of Berlin's – but also Aron's – understanding of liberty, I think that Gray exaggerates a little the centrality of choice in Berlin's work. Gray makes it the driving force of Berlin's liberalism, calling it an 'agonistic liberalism', namely a liberalism guided by the necessity as well as the capacity of choosing (1995, p. 1). I believe, given the above description of negative liberty in particular, that there is more to liberty than choice, and consequently that Gray tends to, as observed by Daniel Weinstock, 'appropriat[e] Berlin for his own anti-Enlightenment philosophical purposes' (1997, p. 483). Nevertheless, the dimension of choice remains original because it is placed within a defence of liberalism (and more specifically of negative liberty). Insistence on choice is

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obliged to reply in the same terms as Hayek (see EP, pp. 195-215).

usually to be found in the work of philosophers that oppose liberalism, typically the existentialism of Sartre or the phenomenology of Husserl or Merleau-Ponty.[14]

Beyond this element, which seems to raise much that is insightful about Aron and Berlin's understanding of liberty, several criticisms can be made of their procedure to draw such a typology. Most of these criticisms have been directed at Berlin, whose work has had more repercussions than Aron's. Yet most of the criticisms directed at Berlin could be extended to Aron. As Ian Harris remarks, '"Two Concepts" excited much comment in the years immediately succeeding publication', and has persisted until the present day (in L, p. 354). Harris gives an exhaustive list of articles dedicated to Berlin's negative and positive liberty, the extent of which explains our inability to recount them all (in L, pp. 354-60). Our analysis will limit itself to highlighting what are the various ways in which the typology has been undermined, and which ways are the most convincing. Firstly, the argument that the two liberties should not be separated appears weak, because Berlin – but also Aron – is prepared to admit that they are two sides of the same coin.[15] Secondly, it has been argued that other divisions of freedom are more pertinent, such as that presented by Gerald MacCallum (1967). Yet, even though his analysis brings a new dimension to the dilemma of liberty, a number of commentators have argued that MacCallum failed to understand Berlin in his own terms.[16] Thirdly, the intellectual background that Berlin offers of the two

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[14] Sartre, Jean-Paul (1968) *L'existentialisme est un humanisme.* Paris : Nagel ; Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1971) Existence *et dialectique / textes choisis par Maurice Dayan.* Paris: P.U.F. ; Barry Smith and David Woodruf (eds.) (1995)*The Cambridge companion to Husserl.* Cambridge: C.U.P.
[15] See for instance Christopher Megone (1987) 'One Concept of Liberty', *Political Studies,* n. 35, pp. 611-22.
[16] See Gray, 1995; Tom Baldwin (1984) 'MacCallum and the two concepts of freedom *Ratio* vol. 26, pp. 125-42.

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concepts has been called into question.[17] It has already been emphasised in the previous chapter that Berlin's reading of the history of ideas is at times approximate, and here again we can say that his views are not always defendable. Finally, the most convincing analyses of 'Two Concepts' are those, I believe, which argue that, if Berlin genuinely values choice, he should be prepared to go beyond a mere defence of liberty as non-interference, and address the question of which form of positive liberty is best for the individual.[18] This is for instance what Charles Taylor maintains when he notes that liberals like Berlin 'have abandoned' the terrain of positive freedom to their enemies for fear of becoming totalitarian themselves (in Ryan [ed.], 1979, p. 179). Similarly, Bellamy, who compares T.H. Green with Berlin, supports the former on the grounds that for him

> the social nature of human life means that an absolute moral individualism, of the sort Berlin espouses, ultimately undermines freedom. It can provide no grounds for going beyond the *bellum omnium contra omnes* except the 'force of the sword' of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Green argues that the exercise of freedom presupposes the existence of certain options, and these can only be provided by a respect for the common good which furnishes the social morality necessary to mediate between conflicting individual plans' (2000, p. 41)

This judgement appears well-founded, and implies that Berlin does not make it clear enough what the best form of society is. He would easily accept the criticism, because, as an anti-systematic thinker, he refuses to build a system of thought that does not allow for margins of manœuvre. This is why, even if he can be compared to liberal philosophers of the past, he may not merit the status in the pantheon of liberal philosophy.

Except the unusual element of self-creation through choice, it is fair to say that neither Aron nor Berlin's dichotomy of liberty is particularly innovative. Both of them are prepared

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[17] See Harris, in L, p. 356, for a detailed bibliography.

to acknowledge their debt to past thinkers. Aron refers to the French school of liberalism, and sees himself as a 'continuator' of their views, as aforementioned. Some commentators locate Aron's view of liberty as directly proceeding from Tocqueville (Hoffmann, in HP, pp. 200-12), others as slightly closer to Constant (Mahoney, 1998, p. 107). As for Berlin, he fits exactly into the description that he gives of the 'liberal tradition', based on two principles: 'first, that no power, but only rights, can be regarded as absolute, so that all men, whatever power governs them, have an absolute right to refuse to behave inhumanly; and, second, that there are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable' (L, p. 211). It is therefore not surprising that Galipeau concludes that '[T]his focus on negative liberty is important because it places Berlin within a specific tradition of liberal thought, the classical one of Locke, Voltaire, and Benjamin Constant' (1994, p. 100).

Such a lack of innovation has led Jonathan Rée to fiercely dismiss the praise that has been given to Berlin's inaugural lecture. To him, 'Two concepts' is

> little more than an inverted theme from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*... Anyone coming across "Two Concepts" today is liable to be puzzled by its canonical status. It has a catchy subject, but key ideas are poorly focused and basic arguments not worked through (2002, p. 35)

Similar judgements on Aron's typology are impossible to find, firstly because, as pointed out, he tries to reinterpret a dichotomy that was used by his opponents; and secondly, because his work, as well as that of Tocqueville or Montesquieu, was unknown or deliberately ignored by his adversaries. However, it cannot be denied that his conclusions

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[18] Criticism of the incompatibility between Berlin's pluralism and his defence of negative liberty will be dealt with in part 2.

are hardly original, at least at the level of analytical philosophy, even if the connection that

he makes with a sociological study of the society of his time renders it more unique.

Despite all this, I consider that Aron and Berlin's desire to distinguish two dimensions of

liberty emerge as extremely pertinent contributions to the political theory of their time for a

simple reason: few insisted, as they did at the time, on the centrality of the *distinction* itself.

Aron stresses this at the end of his *Essai sur les libertés* : 'it would be better not to use the

same word for liberties as non-interference...for liberties-capacities... and for liberty as

collective power of creation' (EL, p. 202). The first is that of liberals, the second of

socialists defending the Welfare State, and the third of planners. He concludes that the latter

liberty is 'radical negation of the liberty of liberals' (EL, p. 202). Similarly, Berlin observes

that 'these are not two different interpretations of a single concept, but two profoundly

divergent and irreconcilable attitudes to the ends of life' (L, p. 212). This message is

restated in his introduction: 'What I am mainly concerned to establish is that... negative

and positive liberty are not the same thing. Both are ends in themselves. These ends may

clash irreconcilably' (L, p. xlix). If this point does not appear particularly innovative, I

would like to argue that it was an idea that urgently required assertion at a time when the

emergence of the Welfare State was producing confusion in the minds of citizens, who

tended to value all forms of liberties equally. This confusion had also partially reached the

intellectual sphere, if we remember that, in the intellectual milieu of the Left, formal liberty

was treated as a mere element of real liberty, if not a mystification invented by liberals.

Whereas on the right, commentators were prepared to affirm that real liberty should not be

part of the definition of liberty, as its scope could not and should not be applied universally,

in contrary with formal liberty. As Berlin rightly emphasises, there is not much distance between an acceptable and a perilous understanding of liberty: 'What can have led to so strange a reversal – the transformation of Kant's severe individualism into something close to a pure totalitarian doctrine on the part of thinkers some of whom claimed to be his disciples?' (L, p. 198). In any case, negative liberty was, I believe, undermined or misunderstood. This is why it is important to now turn to an analysis of Aron and Berlin's *defence* of negative liberty, which remains the principal element of novelty of their work.

1.3 Defence of negative liberty

If Aron and Berlin remain celebrated for their respective typologies of liberties, they are even better known for their defence of one liberty, namely negative (or formal) liberty. Before pointing out why this common point of view constitutes the most unique element of their liberal message, it is essential to reflect on the nature of their support for negative liberty. It will be emphasised that neither of them fully dismisses the value of positive liberty, nor goes as far as the libertarian defence of negative liberty. Eventually, their attachment to negative liberty will be judged as their recognition of the fragility of liberty.

1.3.1   The limits of positive liberty

In contradiction to a common view which asserts that Aron and Berlin neglect positive liberty, I would like to make clear that they never attempt to deny the value of positive liberty as such. Berlin acknowledges this when replying to his critics in the introduction to *Liberty*: '"Positive" liberty... is a valid universal goal. I do not know why I should have been held to doubt this' (L, p. 39). Indeed, if we look at the core of 'Two concepts', we

realise that, when defining positive liberty, Berlin uses relatively neutral terminology, if not affirmative elements, notably when he links it with the Kantian notion of autonomy.[19] It will also be stressed in the next chapter that Berlin is convinced of the need to support one dimension of positive liberty in particular, namely the 'search for status' of communities which are denied national sovereignty. C.B. MacPherson separates three different kinds of positive liberty in Berlin's work: 'The first kind is the liberty of self-direction or self-mastery (PL1). The second is the idealist and rationalist versions of self-realization (PL2). The third is a collective form of self-realization, such as the status one enjoys as a democratic agent, as a participant in sovereign decision-making (PL3)' (in Galipeau, 1994, p. 98). As Galipeau notes, 'Berlin does not dispute the worth of self-realization (PL1) or that of participation in collective decision-making (PL3)' (1994, p. 101). The only liberty which Berlin fears is the one that leads to an excess of rationalism, and therefore to unbridled monism (PL2). The way in which Berlin stresses the potential perils of positive liberty should therefore be put in parallel relation to his acknowledgement that negative liberty is not without defects either. But Berlin affirms that the manipulation of positive liberty has a much more obvious resonance in the Cold War years, since 'recent history has made it only too clear that the issue [the positive conception of freedom as self-mastery] is not merely academic' (L, p. 181).

Aron's appraisal of the dangers which threaten the society of his time are broadly similar. Like Berlin, he is prepared to concede that real liberty ought to be as protected as its formal counterpart, which entails the inevitability of the State's intervention:

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[19] See for instance L, pp. 184 and 198.

It is not sufficient, if the citizen is to be seen as effectively free, that the law prevents others and the State to exclude him from it...it is also necessary that he possesses the material means for it... More generally, the freedom that law guarantees commands, in certain circumstances, the intervention of the State, if most individuals want to be able to exercise it' (EP, p. 242).

This shows that Aron recognises a certain 'legitimacy to the social criticism of classical liberalism', to follow Raynaud's words (in EL, p. 10). For instance, he raises the issue of inequalities and poverty in developed countries, which is partly the result of a lack of – or at least of a misconceived – intervention by the State, and of the concentration of political and economic power (EL, pp. 104-15). In the case of the US for instance, Aron declares that poverty could be reduced partly by social legislation, and partly by removal of racial discrimination. Furthermore, his sociological analyses of the French and Anglo-Saxon societies prepare him, in a manner unknown to Berlin, to compose a synthesis of formal and real liberty. He remarks on one occasion that 'liberty-capacity... does not prove contradictory with personal and political liberties' (EL, pp. 200-1). He even goes further to assert that the link between liberties and restrictions helps us discover 'the extent with which so-called *formal liberties are in fact real*, in the sense that they provide to all guarantees and effective possibilities' (EP, p. 240, emphasis added). More generally, his willingness to show that both kinds of freedom are inseparable leads him to establish what Goyard calls 'the synthesis of the liberal thesis and the socialist antithesis', which results from the 'dialectics of formal and real liberties' (1989, p. 90).[20]

Despite this, Aron's work is not a manifesto in support of the defence of real freedoms. Like Berlin, Aron refuses to countenance that the dangers caused by a misuse of negative liberty are as high as those resulting from a misuse of positive liberty. *Contra* the

traditional Marxist Left and then the new Left, Aron endorses the view that the organisation

of Western societies – notwithstanding some failures noted above – ought to be

championed at several levels. On the economic front, he challenges the Marxist idea of the

paralysis of capitalism, and adds that, despite the danger of the concentration of power in

the hands of a few, 'the danger would inevitably be aggravated with an evolution towards

Marxist-Leninist conceptions of socialism' (EL, p. 114-5). On the educational front, he

argues that democratisation of the university should not lead to a pure equality between

students and teachers. Rather, responding to ideas commonly fostered by the May 1968

events, he affirms that to give students full participation in the running of the university,

and in particular in the making of assessments or the choice of members of staff, would

inevitably result into anarchy.[21] On the level of offering individuals a fulfilling life, Aron

remarks that the liberty-capacity to be found in the West never concurs with the possibility,

described by the young Marx, of 'being, the same day, hunter, fisherman and writer'; but he

sarcastically adds that 'authoritarian planning' of the economy hardly attains it either (EL,

p. 201).

Most importantly, Aron, in the same vein as Berlin, is willing to stress the limits of real

freedom. Unlike Berlin, though, his approach is frequently based on analyses of the Soviet

state, which he calls a 'Minotaur' because it transcends its proper role of provider of

welfare and in fact 'deports millions of Kulaks in order to accelerate the collectivisation of

the soil' (EP, p. 243). Such an abuse of positive liberty deserves, on Aron's words, 'fear', if

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[20] Aron never expressed openly that he held such an ambitious project, except in one of his wartime pieces, in which he writes that we should defeat tyrannies, and then 'seek the synthesis of the autonomy of Rousseau and of the liberty of Montesquieu' (CG, p. 648).

not 'detestation' (EP, p. 243). The final message of Aron is that formal liberties ought to be preserved at any rate. For him, the events of 1956 in Hungary are, amongst others, proof that formal liberties should not be jettisoned: 'by an irony of history, the demand for formal freedom regained its freshness and sometimes its former virulence' (EL, p. 60). Moreover, on several occasions, Aron adds to this sociological emphasis a more philosophical analysis of theories centred on positive liberty. To take one example, Aron rejects Sartre's particular definition of positive liberty which includes a Hegelian dimension that encourages, in Aron's words, 'revolt' and 'negation' (M, p. 589). With regard to Sartre's call for violence, even though it is not individual violence but that of the mob, of the public, Aron asserts that this view 'creates a community [of conscience] against one enemy, which means that the pacification amongst rebels leads to war against others' (M, p. 590). Such a 'philosophy of violence', as he describes it, is at odds with Aron's own understanding of liberty.

To sum up, both Isaiah Berlin and Raymond Aron find some appeal to positive liberty. However, neither of them countenances the excessive use of positive liberty in government. Thus, in the last analysis, they give more weight to negative than positive liberty.

1.3.2   The status of negative liberty: basic or highest value?

In order to be able to judge what status Berlin and Aron respectively give to negative liberty compared to positive liberty and to other values, it is essential to establish whether, on their view, a classification of values is necessary and possible. Indeed, if all values are compatible, then the question of which value has priority becomes irrelevant. Furthermore,

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[21] See 'Liberté, libérale, libertaire ?' in EP, pp. 256-63, but mainly *La révolution introuvable* (RI).

if a ranking of values is required, it is important to assess whether Aron and Berlin's rankings are equivalent.

For Berlin as well as Aron, accommodating many values is not a simple task. It has already been briefly pointed out in the previous chapters that, in opposition to a monistic way of thinking, Aron and Berlin assert that the world is pluralistic and that not all values can be reconciled. Yet if more details of their positions are gathered, it appears that they do not adopt exactly the same standpoint. Firstly, if we consider Berlin's view, there is little doubt for him that, as Galipeau remarks, the two different conceptions of liberty 'pull in opposite directions' (1994, p. 96).[22] Further to this, Berlin affirms that freedom is not compatible with other important values, such as equality. For instance, he observes that, in the fight against inequality, 'an absolute loss of liberty occurs. This may be compensated for by a gain in justice or in happiness or in peace, but the loss remains' (L, p. 172). Given this, it is surprising to note that, for John Gray, Berlin's position is not clear. In 1989, Gray was willing to argue that 'contrary to the imputations of several of his critics, Berlin nowhere claims that negative and positive conceptions of liberty are mutually exclusive' and that 'Berlin's thesis is not that negative and positive liberty are antinomies or contraries, but that, while their subject matters may overlap, they need not do so, and as a rule do not' (1989, p. 51). On this occasion, I am tempted to dispute Gray's assertion, since one of Berlin's most recurrent motifs, in the course of his whole *oeuvre*, is that 'ends collide'. Incidentally, in his later work, Gray himself seems to have realised his mistake, when he

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[22] Berlin is never ambiguous about this, and repeats his position in many articles. To simply give an example extracted from *Liberty*, Berlin writes that 'one freedom may abort another; one freedom may obstruct or fail

points out that 'Berlin's view of liberty, even negative liberty, contains *rivalrous and incommensurable liberties*: examples may be the liberties of information and of privacy' (1995, p. 44, emphasis added).

If, in the case of Berlin, vital values can be incompatible – though not *always* incompatible – Aron's position is not as radical. Like Tocqueville, he is worried that the irresistible movement towards equality, which started with the French Revolution, threatens the preservation of civil and political liberties (IPP, p. 36). In the same spirit, he emphasises, in his *Désillusions du progrès*, the many tensions amongst values that most people aspire to: equality, individuality and the development of our own personality, hierarchy at the work place to foster efficiency, and finally the universality of certain rights. Given this, Aron can be labelled a pluralist. However, he is much more silent about the *gravity* of the clash of values. If Berlin talks about the 'agony of choice', Aron is less dramatic in his presentation of value conflicts. It will be emphasised later that a reason for this difference is that Aron presents, in a clearer way than Berlin, what the basic universal values are. And when these do not help decide which value should outweigh another in case of conflict, Aron's morality of prudence solves the problem.[23]

This difference entails another, of relevance for our present point of discussion: if for Aron formal freedom unquestionably prevails, for Berlin it is a matter of interpretation. Raynaud observes that, despite his criticism of Hayek, 'Aron evidently remains closer to the liberal

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to create conditions which make other freedoms, or a larger degree of freedom, or freedom for more persons, possible; positive and negative freedom may collide' (L, p. lvi).
[23] See part 2.2.2

tradition than to the socialist critique' (in EL, p. 10). One proof of this can be found when

Aron asserts that 'Hayek is not wrong to say that *liberty is essentially negative,*

preservation of a private sphere; and that the more depersonalised orders are, the more

likely liberty will be preserved' (EP, p. 213, emphasis added). Incidentally, Aron's

reputation as a fierce supporter of liberty as non-interference has never been challenged by

commentators, perhaps because most of his critics were especially keen on denouncing this

dimension of his work. But this interpretation is also the result of a consistent reading of

Aron's considerable work, in which the general gist that repeatedly emerges is the desire

for security and guarantees of a private sphere for the individual. Yet, as Pierce correctly

remarks, it does not result that formal liberty, for Aron, is 'an absolute power' (1963, p.

26). Aron is always cautious to avoid grandiloquent theories that apply to everyone at all

times. Looking back at the rise and fall of empires of the past, he remarks:

> It may be that liberty is in the first rank of political values but, for whoever thinks
> historically, it cannot be an absolute. If, in decadent Athens, it safeguarded the
> comforts of life, it did not arrest, in certain respects it facilitated the corruption of the
> city (cited in Pierce, 1963, p. 26)

To clarify, Aron considers that liberty does not systematically solve all problems, therefore

it should not be put on a pedestal. However, when compared to other values, Aron's

ultimate view is that the preservation of liberty, especially in its negative form, is a more

reliable guarantee of achievement of any wishes than any other value.

An almost identical interpretation of Berlin's defence of negative liberty can be made, and

is supported by the analysis of several scholars. Galipeau regards Berlin's negative liberty

as 'basic to positive liberty', and emphasises the primacy of negative liberty by adding that

'the converse is not true' (1994, pp. 90-1). Galipeau also remarks that 'Berlin considers the

concept of negative liberty to be "basic" to all kinds of liberties, to all free acts, even those seeking "self-realization", whether individual or collective... Hence a polity without negative or civil liberties is unfree in a basic and fundamental sense' (1994, p. 105). In the same vein, Kocis finds in Berlin's work 'a claim that some values, like negative liberty, have a more basic validity than other values, in that they protect the human capacity of choice' (1980, p. 39). But, in contrast to Galipeau, he also highlights a dilemma in Berlin's thinking: 'either the rationalists are right that we can discover some order to our values which best guarantees our humanity, or [Berlin] cannot insist that negative liberty is "a truer and more humane ideal" than any other' (1980, p. 39). This is a crucial point when analysing the internal consistency of Berlin's *œuvre*. Indeed, as will be reasserted later, Berlin's pluralism can be viewed as a refusal to classify incommensurable values.[24] This is not the position that Kocis takes, since he infers that 'Berlin's liberalism might be rendered internally consistent if we were to treat liberty, not as the highest of values, but rather as a basal or foundation value' (1980, p. 39). This interpretation places Berlin in similar position to Aron. Another contribution – that of John Gray – can also help illustrate that the visions of Aron and Berlin merge together. Like Pierce in the case of Aron, Gray observes that Berlin 'does not consider negative liberty to be an "absolute" value which is not to be put in the balance with others' (1995, p. 27). He also insists that Berlin thinks 'that it is reasonable... to trade off liberty for other values' (1995, p. 62).

But the comparison stops here, because Gray also insists that Berlin considers many high values as incommensurable, and is therefore at pains to defend liberty against other claims.

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[24] See in particular the work of George Crowder, 2002.

I agree with Gray's second interpretation, because I am not convinced that Berlin's *motto*, 'ends collide', can offer a full defence of liberty in the absolute or even in particular circumstances, as is the case for Aron. Gray has an admirable sentence, which to me reflects perfectly Berlin's state of mind: 'he is insistent that the task of philosophy is to illuminate such conflicts, not to prescribe the trade-offs that we make' (1995, p. 62). Despite his willingness to clarify the dilemmas surrounding the concept of liberty, Berlin remains, lastly, irresolute as to how to promote negative liberty in particular cases.

This, in my view, is the most revealing opposition between Aron and Berlin, and we will encounter an identical antagonism when dealing with the liberal order.[25] Whereas Berlin emphasises in great depth the ramification of the problems raised by philosophical reflection on the problem of freedom, but shows a final indecision as to its implementation, Aron prefers to curtail theoretical conflicts and let the circumstances decide reasonably what the best trade-off consists in.

1.3.3   Rejection of libertarianism

Aron and Berlin's support for negative liberty should not be extended so far as to say that they adopt a libertarian stance similar to that, for instance, of F.A. Hayek.[26] Aron and Berlin are at one in emphasising the limits of the compatibility between their understanding of freedom and Hayek's, even if Aron expresses it more distinctly than Berlin.

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[25] See part 2 of the present chapter.
[26] See F. A. Hayek (1960).

In an article dedicated to commenting upon *The Constitution of Liberty*, Aron recounts that

Hayek's definition of liberty limits itself to the absence of constraint or coercion. The first

difficulty of this definition consists, on Aron's view, in the fact that it neglects many other

definitions of liberty of equivalent importance (EP, p. 196). But if we put this problem to

one side, and try to understand Hayek's in his own terms, Aron remarks that there is still a

major default to his theory: namely, that it is not as simple to define constraint as Hayek

wants us to believe (EP, p. 198). Aron rightly demonstrates that obedience to general laws

does not always guarantee the absence of the oppression of a particular group of society, or

even its members as a whole. He takes the example of the ban to travel abroad: even if it

affects every citizen of a country, it does not entail that freedom is respected in this country

(EP, p. 202). Aron also rejects Hayek's attempt at assimilating general laws with natural

laws. For Aron, laws are artificial, i.e. the product of political decisions taken at a certain

time; therefore it is wrong to suppose that liberty as non-constraint is an 'eternal' element

(EP, p. 206). Aron enlarges his criticism of Hayek to that of the 'Whigs' in his *Essai sur les*

libertés. He reproaches them for focusing their understanding of liberty on the exclusive

cases of the consumer and the producer. For Aron, freedom covers other dimensions

neglected by the Whigs, notably participation in the political sphere or access to minimal

wealth (EL, p. 125). Two main reasons behind the disagreement between Aron and Hayek

can be pointed to, both of which show that Aron is not willing to abandon the *political*

implications of liberty, unlike Hayek. The first reason is stressed by Colquhoun:

> Hayek's ideal of the reign of law, as opposed to the domination of man by man, was
> the essential condition of freedom... Aron had no wish to reject it. But the ideal was
> neither fully accessible to all nor coextensive with the whole life of society. Whether
> one liked it or not, the government of society would always involve the power of man
> over man (1986, p. 251)

Contra Hayek, Aron insists that domination remains a permanent feature of the political order. Consequently, it is best to try to define rules and set limits for such domination. The second reason is described by Mahoney, who firstly notices that Aron approved of Hayek's formulation of a link between economic and political liberty, to then conclude that, despite this, 'it does not mean that a liberal society is incompatible with a Welfare State or certain forms of economic planning. It is wisdom who determines the share of regulation compatible with a liberal society' (1998, p. 155). By this Mahoney means that Aron is not as fearful of state intervention as is Hayek, and of the existence of a public sphere more generally.

Similar to Hayek, Berlin, as will be observed later, shows signs, at times, of suspicion towards any form of power.[27] But it never leads him to adopt an identical view of liberty. Berlin hardly ever mentions Hayek, though seems aware of his work (L, p. 101).[28] Yet, it is not difficult to guess that, when he condemns the excess of negative liberty, he has in mind a libertarian view of the type of Hayek's. The 'vices of indiscriminate negative liberty', as Dworkin observes, took the form, for Berlin, of 'savage economic inequality', something that Hayek does not take into account (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 101). Berlin also departs from Hayek on other level. When comparing both thinkers, John Gray emphasises, for instance, that 'Hayek's view appears to be that a liberal social order may be, and perhaps must be, a society in which a dominant moral and intellectual tradition drastically curtails the options open to its members' (1989, p. 63). Berlin's defence of a plurality of ways of life is evidently at odds with such a view, which fails to leave room for such diversity. In

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[27] See below, part 2.2.1.

light of this, it becomes clear that Berlin is willing to give more importance to other values apart from negative liberty than Hayek, which brings him closer to Aron's vision.

1.3.4   Fragile liberty

After this examination of the similarities and differences between Aron and Berlin's conceptions of freedom, it is essential to conclude by stressing the final message that both of them ultimately want to communicate. Beyond their dissimilarities, Aron and Berlin's conclusions are at one, and, I believe, very much the product of their reactions to the threat of totalitarianism.

Firstly, both Aron and Berlin sound out the concern that their passionate defence of freedom may not be perceived as a priority of their time, and that therefore they may struggle to find an audience receptive to their warnings. Aron observes, on several occasions, that freedom as security and absence of interference does not interest people equally. By this he implies that individuals can be happy to hand over some of their liberties to a state or to intermediary groups, as long as they contribute to the enhancement of a purpose they believe in. This can be either the realisation of a perfect communist society, or the building of a nation-state (IPP, pp. 64-5; HP, p. 211). Echoing Aron, Berlin remarks that 'individual freedom is not everyone's primary need', thinking mainly of nations that are denied any recognition (L, p. 171). In the next chapter, it will be emphasised that both Aron and Berlin treat the latter claim very seriously, and are fully aware that it often leads to a negligence of individual liberties. But, at this stage, it is

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[28] As a general rule, Berlin tends to not mention names of thinkers whom he criticises.

interesting to notice that Aron and Berlin were conscious of the limits of conveying their plea, which to many sounded anachronistic. This, nevertheless, did not discourage them to from communicating the message of the classical liberal tradition to their times.

Secondly, and more importantly, it transpires from Aron and Berlin's work that liberty – because it is not always recognised as a prior need – is in constant danger. The danger of monism has been emphasised at length, and to this we can logically add the danger of extreme nationalism or of a lack of stable democratic foundations in developing countries. Yet it seems that, for both thinkers, liberty is also at risk in liberal democracies. Stanley Hoffmann observes that Aron, and before him Tocqueville, had 'an acute sense of the fragility of political liberalism and of the artificiality of institutions' (in HP, p. 204). More recently, Baverez links Aron's claim that freedom is inscribed in history with the fact that liberty is always frail. He concludes that freedom 'is not strong but fragile. It is never secured but remains to conquer' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 86). These assertions are corroborated by many passages of Aron's work. To take only one example, Aron distinguishes himself from Sartre by a 'reasonable choice' which contrasts with Sartre's 'unconditional engagement' (M, p. 591). Aron disapproves of Sartre's belief in 'absolute liberty', which, on his view, is 'contradictory with our experience': we are tied to our past, and therefore is it crucial to think of liberty in terms of 'progressive liberating' (M, p. 592). This distinction between liberty itself and the 'possibility of liberty' is, according to Mahoney, characteristic of Aron's liberalism (1998, p. 153). It entails that individuals should be moderate, realistic, as well as assertive in their defence of liberty. David Riesman's opposition between the 'well ordered liberty' of Aron and the 'unbridled liberty'

of other thinkers also reflects the state of mind in which Aron is when trying to defend liberty (in HP, p. 132).

A similar tone emerges from the reading of Berlin's work. Commentators have insufficiently insisted on this aspect of Berlin's character. Yet it is clear, from his diagnosis of the many criticisms directed variously at negative liberty, from his recognition that the plurality of values can lead to an 'agony of choice', and from his insistence on the essential imperfection of man, that Berlin shares in Aron's conclusion on the frailty of liberty. This sense of the endless battle that ought to be fought in order to preserve liberty has been identified by Judith Shklar as the 'liberalism of fear.' She defines it as 'a response to horrors and cruelties that are still actual,' a response which 'concentrates on damage control' (in Rosenblum, 1989, p. 27). On her view, Berlin's position 'resembles' this type of liberalism, which can nevertheless be based on more than a mere defence of negative liberty. I think that Shklar's term best describes the specificity of Aron and Berlin's views, which insist both on the necessity of attaining liberty and the impossibility of guaranteeing it perpetually.

2. ORGANISING THE LIBERAL ORDER

Despite variations in their approaches, both Aron and Berlin concur that defining liberty is a complex matter, since the concept covers several dimensions of analysis, and has also been instrumentalised by those who, in the name of freedom, have instigated tyrannical regimes. The complexity of the task becomes even more evident if we consider the implications of conceptions of liberty for the organisation of the liberal order. Indeed, now

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that it has been pointed out *why* liberty is so essential for the two thinkers, we need to uncover *how* they envisage guaranteeing its preservation. This entails finding a framework that aims at solving tensions amongst liberties but also between these and other important values. Both agree that pluralism is a preferable answer.[29] But they have a very different understanding of the term 'pluralism'. Aron, who does not use the term so frequently as Berlin, gives a highly political definition to pluralism, namely the plurality of political parties and free elections (1980, p. 25). He adds that pluralism is often associated with democracy and opposed to totalitarianism, even if the two notions are not identical. His approach is therefore based on the study of political regimes, and of *societies as wholes*. It focuses on tensions between individuals or groups, and on the possibility of combining the various values to be found in a society. Berlin, on the contrary, centres his attention on value-conflicts *within the self*, which Bernard Williams calls 'one-person conflicts' (in Ryan [ed.], 1979, p. 222).[30]

Aron and Berlin examine the notion of pluralism it in different terms: Aron does so in practical and political terms, while Berlin does so in theoretical terms. A second distinction will therefore be introduced at this stage, which is in direct continuation from the sociological vs. moral distinction already established. Aron is interested in the *political implementations* of a defence of liberty. To him, dealing with pluralism entails, as Draus observes, the 'institutionalisation of conflicts' (1989, p. 54). Aron is concerned with the establishment of a institutional framework that would contribute to the recognition of the

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[29] See chapter 2, part 1.3 and 2.3.

[30] This is not to say that Berlin never deals with value-conflicts at the scale of society, nor that Aron is not aware of tensions within one person. Both are, I think, deeply conscious that the world is plural at all levels.

plurality of value, but that could also help solve conflicts when necessary. Nevertheless, our attention will firstly focus on Berlin's understanding of pluralism, which is much more based on *moral dilemmas* than on political ones. It will be emphasised that Berlin, *contra* Aron, does not truly intend to find answers to the applications of value-pluralism in the liberal order. On the contrary, given the many ramifications in his work, Berlin seems to be willing to add to the complexity of tensions amongst moral values. Finally, the conclusion will stress the opposition of temper, between an irresolute – and 'problem-making' – Berlin and a determinate – and 'problem-solving' – Aron.

2.1 Liberty and pluralism: the dilemma of their compatibility

Berlin's assertion that pluralism is a fact of life, has given rise to numerous comments. An issue recurrently raised will guide our analysis: the question as to whether Berlin favours liberty over other values, and therefore of whether his liberalism may be at odds with his defence of pluralism. From this follow other disputes: does Berlin fail to avoid relativism, and does his position become dangerously close to irrationalism? Judgements on Berlin's work are deeply contrasting: they go from approving of Berlin's position, to a fierce denunciation of his incongruity. The nature of Berlin's work – in so far as it is lacking precision – explains why it is very much open to interpretation. His imprecision, I will argue, turns into severe ambiguity. This will be explained, ultimately, by Berlin's unwillingness to solve the many dilemmas that he himself uncovers. In other words, if Berlin shows a genuine talent for exposing moral puzzles, he, equally, fails to find adequate solutions to them.

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2.1.1 From Pluralism to Relativism

a) Liberty and Pluralism

The first dilemma that Berlin faces is that of the possible – or impossible – compatibility of

a defence of liberty, in particular negative liberty, with support for what he calls value-

pluralism.[31] This issue has been a recurrent subject of controversy in political theory. Many

thinkers have argued either for or against the compatibility. On the one hand, those who

defend the compatibility, and even the complementarity, of liberty and pluralism, refer to

the origins of liberalism: at a time of deep religious conflicts, thinkers such as Locke tried

to promote toleration and respect for values of opponents. John Gray gives us a relatively

clear account of three major arguments in favour of a logical link between liberalism and

pluralism: first, 'value-pluralism supports liberty here in that it is by the choices protected

by negative freedom that we negotiate our way among incommensurable values'; second,

'if there are goods (and evils) that are rationally incommensurable, then no political

authority can have good reason to impose any particular combination of them on any of its

citizens'; third, it is maintained 'that the authoritarian denial of freedom presupposes the

denial of the truth of value-pluralism [because]...liberal societies are ones in which the

truth of value-pluralism is accepted and celebrated' (1995, pp. 142-3-5). On the other hand,

and despite the apparent validity of these arguments, Gray shows that arguments can

counter-claim these views. He gives examples of authoritarian regimes that respect value-

pluralism but do not necessarily result in liberal societies. He also affirms that if liberal

societies defend pluralism, then it follows that 'the human world will be richer in value if it

contains not only liberal societies but also illiberal regimes' (1995, pp. 151-2). This brief

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[31] See Lassman, in Pierson (ed.), 2000.

opposition of views highlights just how complicated is the argument from pluralism to liberalism. Another sign of the difficulty is that a political theorist such as George Crowder, who for a while argued for the incompatibility of pluralism and liberalism, has recently altered his position, and found a specific route that leads from one value to the other (1994, 2002).

These introductory remarks on the link between liberalism and pluralism should help us assess Berlin's own answer to the following question: which comes first, liberty or pluralism? If, first of all, we look at Berlin's work, a certain ambiguity appears. On the one hand, he seems prepared to limit liberty in the name of pluralism: 'the extent of a man's, or people's, liberty to choose to live as he or they desire must be weighed against the claims of many other values, of which equality, or justice, or happiness, or security, or public order are perhaps the most obvious examples. For this reason, it cannot be unlimited' (L, p. 215). This message is common in many of his articles. This seems to imply an incompatibility between pluralism and liberalism, as he states in his interview with Jahanbegloo: 'pluralism and liberalism are not the same or even overlapping concepts... I believe in both liberalism and pluralism, but they are not logically connected' (1993, p. 44). On the other hand, he concludes his famous article on the two concepts of liberty by asserting that

> Pluralism, with the *measure of 'negative' liberty that it entails*, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind (L, p. 216, emphasis added)

Here, he seems to imply that negative liberty is the basis for pluralism, and that both are therefore not only compatible but even interdependent. Overall, the *imprecision* in Berlin's position cannot be denied, and his final stand is consequently a matter of interpretation.

Interpretations have tended towards several directions. One current of thinking seeks to defend Berlin's arguing that both values are compatible, but that one has priority over the other. Galipeau, for instance, considers that Berlin is *mainly* a pluralist, and that this pluralism conduces him logically to defend liberty:

> Pluralism is a fact of our moral condition. As such, it implies a fundamental place for liberty in moral life. For without liberty, one cannot choose between goods... It is for this reason that Berlin considers negative liberty to be basic to moral life... In fact, *Berlin argues for negative liberty because he believes that pluralism is true*, and not because he has a dogmatic adherence to personal liberty' (1994, p. 111, emphasis added)

Weinstock is even clearer on this matter. He argues that 'there is no need to argue *from* pluralism *to* a liberal defence of individual freedom, for the most plausible form of objective value pluralism... will *already* include a commitment to freedom' (1997, p. 494). On the contrary, others argue that Berlin's pluralism is not the cause, but the effect of his support for liberty. Gray implies this when insisting that freedom as 'the capacity for choice' is the 'basic freedom' that underpins all 'options' that human beings are allowed to choose (1995, p. 14-5). Similarly, as already noticed, Kocis maintains that liberty is to be treated, in Berlin's work, as 'a basal or foundation value', which helps promote others, and pluralism itself (1980, p. 39). It is difficult to determine which of these interpretations is the most accurate. A close reading of Berlin's work does not elucidate the issue: his work on Romantic thinkers insists more on the centrality of pluralism, whereas his articles on writers named 'enemies of liberty' are a plea for a respect for individual freedom. Gray explains this 'uncertainty' of Berlin's position by relating it to thinkers who have an influence on Berlin: 'his thought shows at some times the face of a deeper and subtler

liberalism whose lineage is nonetheless in the tradition of JS Mill and at other times a

Vichian and Herderian face' (1995, p. 156).[32]

Hence, Berlin can be described as 'irresolute' on the matter of the priority between

pluralism and liberty. As Kenny rightly emphasises, the 'marked ambiguity about Berlin's

capacity to demonstrate rationally the superiority of liberal over non-liberal societies'

logically leads him, as a liberal pluralist, to 'accept the validity of anti-pluralist and anti-

liberal conceptions of the good' (2000, p. 1034). This incapacity to discriminate amongst

values can result in the accusation of relativism, a label that Berlin is very reluctant to

accept.

b) Accusation of Relativism

Many commentators have denounced Berlin's tendency towards relativism. The earliest,

and fiercest denunciation was formulated by Leo Strauss, who highlights two flaws in

Berlin's thinking. Firstly, it is *self-contradictory*:

> the demand for the sacredness of a private sphere needs a basis, an "absolute" basis,
> but it has no basis; any old basis, any such "absolute stand" as reference to my own
> subjective will or the will of my society will do... Liberalism, as Berlin understands it,
> cannot live without an absolute basis and cannot live with an absolute basis (in
> Schoeck [ed.], 1961, p. 138)

Strauss evidently shares the view whereby a defence of individual liberty cannot logically

be combined with equal respect for other values. Without a solid and absolute moral basis,

liberalism cannot be protected against relativist blows. Secondly then, for Strauss true

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[32] A further problem results from the fact that Berlin's position on pluralism is borrowed from Romantic
thinkers. This direct influence is one reason why commentators have argued that Berlin's pluralism was not
compatible with his liberalism: Romantics have always made their opposition to liberal thinking very clear.
This is the criticism made, for instance, by Momigliano (1976), or, more recently by Mark Lilla (1994). To
them, Berlin places himself at odds with his desire to protect liberty when sharing Vico or Herder's

liberalism is in crisis precisely because of its *lack of certainties*. To him, Berlin's view 'has

abandoned its absolutist basis and is trying to become entirely relativistic' (in Schoeck

[ed.], 1961, p. 139). Strauss rests his attack on a quote subject to several comments: 'to

realize the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly, is

what distinguished a civilized man from a barbarian' (L, p. 217). This, on Strauss's view, is

a sign that Berlin considers that 'our primary ends' are relative. More recently, Sandel has

adopted a similar interpretation of the above quote. He asks: 'If one's convictions are only

relatively valid, why stand for them unflinchingly?', and asserts that objective pluralism in

ethics is an impossibility (1984, p. 8). The severity of both Strauss and Sandel's criticisms

result from their belief that Berlin *wilfully* endorses relativism.

Other commentators, such as John Dunn, have been slightly less harsh in their attacks

on Berlin's value-pluralism. Dunn, following Momigliano, remarks that only a fine line

separates pluralism from relativism understood as nihilism – if one asserts that all values

are equal, then one defends no value in particular. Dunn questions:

> Is pluralism just nihilism liked: nihilism allied to a human agreeable disposition? And
> nihilism, conversely, simply pluralism carried to a radical and consistent extreme – and
> hence, very understandably, cordially misliked by those at the receiving end? What
> Berlin has to say about relativism is too slight to answer this question (1990, p. 1053)

Here, Dunn seems to imply two things. Firstly, that Berlin really does make a significant

attempt at answering the question of the proximity between pluralism and relativism. I

would agree with Dunn, and *contra* Sandel and Strauss, that Berlin is indeed fully aware of

the danger of turning pluralism into relativism. Secondly, Dunn implies that Berlin fails to

answer the question, and falls *reluctantly* into nihilism, even though his original aim was to

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understanding of cultural pluralism. This view has been challenged by Graeme Garrard, who finds in
Romanticism a route to modern liberalism (1997).

distance himself from it. Again, I would be inclined to accept this: it is Berlin's lack of clarity, his imprecision, and inconsistency across his work that have led to such interpretations.[33] However, many other theorists have read Berlin in a different light, and have offered interpretations of his value-pluralism radically at odds with those just described.

2.1.2   Berlin's common moral horizon

Berlin tried, on several occasions, to dismiss accusations of relativism. His most famous piece on the subject is 'Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought'.[34] Replying to Momigliano (1976), Berlin admits that he partially overlooked Vico and Herder's enunciation of pluralism (CTH, p. 77). Nevertheless, he persists that both thinkers have an important message to deliver: 'we are urged to look upon life as affording a plurality of values, equally genuine, equally ultimate, above all equally objective; incapable therefore, of being ordered in a timeless hierarchy, or judged in terms of some one absolute standard' (CTH, p. 79). In Berlin's eyes, this 'doctrine' is nothing but 'pluralism', and should not be confused with relativism, defined as the 'doctrine according to which the judgement of a man or a group, since it is the expression or statement of a taste, or emotional attitude or outlook, is simply what it is, with no objective correlate which determines its truth or falsehood' (CTH, pp. 79-80). Berlin also wishes to distance himself from relativism by asserting that the variety of ends that men seek 'cannot be unlimited, for

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[33] If we compare this interpretation of Berlin's work with Aron's, it can be noticed, as Mahoney does, that Aron is incapable, in his early work, to ' force himself out of a philosophy of relativism because he accepts too easily as « indisputable » the relativistic speech on the diversity of societies' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 136). However, soon enough Aron realises the dangers of such a position, and moves towards a position of 'prudence' which 'removes the remains of decisionism' in his work (p. 140).
[34] But see also his joint piece with Bernard Williams, 1994.

the nature of men, however various and subject to change, must possess some generic character if it is to be called human at all' (CTH, p. 80).

If this passage remains insufficiently significant for those commentators who see Berlin as a relativist, others have found here grounds to defend Berlin. They are of two types, depending on whether they judge Berlin's pluralism to be moderate or radical. Some theorists have argued that the piece cited above reveals the moderate character of Berlin's support for value-pluralism. To them, Berlin's pluralism does not fall into relativism because Berlin sets limits to our acceptance of values that clash with negative liberty. Steven Lukes remarks that Berlin's pluralism 'intended to be compatible with the absolute, overriding, and universal value of liberty, the *existence of a common human nature*' (1994, p. 714, emphasis added). Accordingly, there would, after all, be a basis available for Berlin to ground his theory. Riley asserts that this basis is a 'moral horizon', which implies that 'some minimum set of basic human rights must not be violated for any social purposes' (2002, pp. 86-7). The recognition of a common horizon by Berlin is a reason repeatedly given in support of Berlin's value-pluralism. It is not always clear what is meant by 'common horizon', mainly because Berlin himself does not seem to define it. Ignatieff grounds it on the fact that 'we can understand antithetical points of view because we share an understanding of how human beings ought to be treated. Because we do share these attachments, we can call each other to account when what we do or say fails to accord with these understandings' (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 137). Rather than a theory of basic rights – as, for instance, Riley thinks in terms of – Ignatieff prefers to rely on common sense. As for Weinstock, the basis for Berlin's moderate pluralism is his ultimate defence of liberty.

Contra Gray, he affirms that, according to Berlin, 'liberty must remain, at least to some minimal degree, in whatever complex of values a society chooses to pursue' (1997, p. 488). Given this, Weinstock continues, Berlin was logically willing to accept that 'tradeoffs among values were permissible and in some cases inevitable, but that negative freedom had to be an element of any admissible set' (1997, p. 488).

There exists, however, a more radical interpretation of Berlin's pluralism. In order to rebut Strauss's accusation whereby Berlin neglects *absolute* claims, several commentators have pointed out that Berlin claims that the fact of pluralism is an *absolute* in itself. Following Berlin, Lukes emphasises that major values, as well as their potential conflicts, are *objective*, i.e. not a matter of interpretation (1998, p. 9). In a similar vein, Michael Walzer detects two reasons to dismiss the accusation of relativism: 'first, because the discovery of a pluralist universe is a real discovery; there really are many visions and many ways, self-validating and uncombinable; and second, because the freedom that gives rise to these visions and ways is genuinely valuable' (1986, p. vi). But it is John Gray who offers the boldest interpretation of Berlin's value-pluralism. Gray has strong words for Strauss, who he accuses of missing the distinctiveness of Berlin. For Berlin stresses that 'ultimate values are objective and universal', which makes his 'variety of pluralism... a species of value realism, not of scepticism, subjectivism or relativism' (1993, p. 66). Two years later, he reiterates and specifies his view, when asserting that 'Berlin's ethical theory is a species, not of relativism or scepticism, but of objective pluralism' (1995, p. 46). Unlike commentators who see in Berlin a moderate pluralist, Gray believes that only a clear belief in the incommensurability of values can allow for a clear understanding of the real world.

Consequently, conflicts of values cannot 'be smoothed away by the application of some theory, or tamed by some talismanic formula (1993, p. 67). This leads him to conclude that Berlin provides a 'variant of realism' (1995, p. 49). This radical interpretation of Berlin's work has been criticised by commentators such as Weinstock, who, as seen above, presume that tradeoffs are ultimately possible if our decisions are grounded on a common human horizon. Once again, Gray does not seem entirely clear on the subject of the common horizon. In a more recent piece, he indeed seems to concur with Weinstock when observing that 'there is nevertheless a common human horizon of values that is, for all practical purposes, universal. This horizon may be more easily expressible in terms of universal evils than of goods – the evils of torture, slavery and the myriad varieties of cruelty, for example' (1997, p. 92). But he soon adds that 'Berlin does not suppose that we are in a position to draw up a definitive list of the items that frame this common moral horizon, or universal moral minimum, of the species' (1997, p. 93). This throws doubt upon Gray's overall stand with regards to Berlin's pluralism. Even though Gray is renowned for his changes in position, his confusion here could be partly explained by Berlin's own lack of clarity on these matters. A shortcoming in Berlin's writings is that he clearly, and originally, sets out the problem of value-pluralism, but does not fully ensure that coherent responses are provided. Despite the fact that it is underdeveloped, the idea of a common horizon has raised another type of controversy that, once again, Berlin fails to solve: are the grounds for this common horizon to be found *rationally* or not?

2.1.3   Rationalism vs. irrationalism in Berlin's work

The issue as to whether Berlin endorses a rational or irrational stance when defending value-pluralism is, like the issue of relativism, open to debate. Yet again, it is mainly the result of Berlin's own imprecision on the subject. As pointed out by George Crowder, Berlin's position is ambivalent. At times he seems to believe that we 'choose only in some non-rational way', when asserting that we are 'faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute', and in talking also of our 'irrational and disordered lives' (Crowder, 2002, p. 57; L, 214). On other occasions, though, 'he repudiates that view, insisting that we do in fact make rational choices among plural values at all time, at any rate in particular cases' (2002, p. 57).[35] Such change of attitude is described in relatively similar terms by Nieuwenburg:

> On the one hand, there is the demand to practically reason as if there were a rationally unique solution. As we have seen, we cannot diagnose the rational underdetermination of a choice between two values if we have not exhausted the possibilities (supposing this to be possible). On the other hand, if our deliberations are, at the same time, controlled by the awareness of rational underdetermination, we are under a pressure not to do this (2004, p. 696)

Nieuwenburg is deeply puzzled by the presence, in Berlin's work, of such self-contradictory statements. This brings us, he concludes, to a dead-end: 'how can we ever confidently arrive at the diagnosis in the first place?' (2004, p. 696). I agree with Nieuwenburg and Crowder that Berlin's standpoint is fairly inconsistent, due to a lack of rigour in his demonstrations. However, in the same vein as in the previous two issues raised above, several commentators have denied this inconsistency. Instead, they have argued either that Berlin has an irrational stand, or that he endorses a *rational* liberalism.

George Kateb is amongst the theorists who argue that Berlin is not a liberal rationalist. In a recent article, Kateb argues that Berlin offers two defences of cultural pluralism: the first one he calls 'aesthetic', the second 'anti-universalist' (1999, p. 1009). According to the first interpretation, Berlin promotes aestheticism, which Kateb defines as 'the disposition to look or hunt for beauty (and sublimity), in matters present to the senses or the mind' (1999, p. 1010). It entails that aesthetes 'regard some inherently non-aesthetic phenomena as more or less aesthetic phenomena' (1999, p. 1010). Berlin is seen as praising, indifferently, all manifestations of human creativity when apprehending cultures, instead of coming to an appraisal, in utilitarian, moral or rationalistic terms. Kateb's portrayal of Berlin is that of a man eager to acclaim but averse to condemn. Kateb's view is challenged by Jonathan Riley, according to whom Berlin 'is better seen as a liberal rationalist, though a rationalist who emphasizes the inability of reason to resolve all conflicts of values. His pluralism is grounded in his peculiar rationalism, not in some non-rational religious or romantic nostalgia for creativity and diversity' (2002, p. 69). Riley is convinced that Berlin never abandons the standards of practical reason, from which he can judge, and condemn, cultures which do not respect the common human horizon mentioned above. For Riley, Berlin's pluralism is not at odds with his recognition of inalienable rights: 'Berlin, despite his advocacy of cultural pluralism, is aware of the pre-eminent importance of "the status of each individual person, a status that only the recognition of individual rights can fully protect"' (2002, p. 77).

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[35] See for instance Berlin (with Williams, 1994).

Aside from his 'aesthetic' interpretation of Berlin's pluralism, Kateb also offers an antiuniversalist reading of Berlin, which is, according to Riley, also favoured by John Gray (2002, p. 76). Gray makes it clear that, on his view, Berlin's liberalism departs drastically from that of Mill or Rawls, who adopt 'rational strategies' for promoting 'general well-being' in the case of the former, and a 'comprehensive conception of the good in common' in the case of the latter (1995, p. 8). For Gray, Berlin's originality lies in his belief that reason cannot help us select amongst valuable goods, which are incommensurable. This is why Gray talks of the 'limits of rational choice' (1995, p. 8). Because no universal standard can be uncovered to rank values, the only alternative is what Gray calls 'radical choice' (1995, p. 8). Gray does not expand on the nature of these choices, but implies that they are not guided by reason. As already noted, this capacity to take pure decisions is, according to Gray, the cornerstone on which Berlin's theory relies. In direct response to Gray, Riley argues that 'a belief in reason – rational choice as opposed to radical choice in Gray's sense – is at the foundation of Berlin's liberalism' (2001, p. 285). *Contra* Gray, Riley describes Berlin's work as a piece of 'liberal rationalism with "cracks" or imperfections built into the power of practical reason to resolve ethical and political conflicts' (2001, p. 284). Two elements of Riley's view deserve more attention. Firstly, for Riley, Berlin believes in the existence of a common horizon 'that can be discovered by rational methods' (2001, p. 285). In other words, when thinking of what makes humanity 'human', Berlin thinks in rational terms. Secondly, Berlin is no rationalist in the manner of the Enlightenment philosophers he criticises. Indeed, his rationalism 'accepts limited zones of indeterminacy' (2001, p. 288). To the 'agonistic pluralism' of Gray, Riley therefore responds with a 'moderate' interpretation of Berlin's work. It is very difficult to guess which one would have the

favour of Berlin himself, though, perhaps, his reluctance to adopt extreme positions might have led him to agree with Riley over a bolder Gray or Kateb.

To conclude our analysis of Berlin's pluralism, we can only emphasise the evident *ambiguity* of his position. To be fair to him, the issues he raises are numerous, and not simple to answer, as the recent literature on the subject has displayed. In fact, Berlin can be praised for the fact that he puts his fingers on many dilemmas which liberal thinkers of his time – but also more recent ones – confront, especially the desire to combine a defence of negative liberty with a recognition of the plurality of values and cultures. He can also, indirectly, be thanked for the numerous debates that his work has aroused in moral and political philosophy. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Berlin remains rather irresolute when approaching many central issues of political theory. He does not seem fully willing to offer elaborate or definite responses to the questions he himself raises. This explains the frustration of some commentators who, like Nieuwenburg, expect more from Berlin's work:

> What, then, does Berlin's heroic pluralism have to tell us by way of practical advice for the conduct of life? There appears to be a quite straightforward answer to this question: Not much… On this reading, pluralism is a diagnosis rather than a guideline for action (2004, p. 692)

By using the medical metaphor of the 'diagnosis', Nieuwenburg emphasises clearly Berlin's omission: he can find the origins of a disease but is incapable, or perhaps unwilling, to prescribe the adequate cure. Kenny reaches a fairly similar conclusion about Berlin's achievement: 'this was a public intellectual who offered counsel and guidance on few issues of his day and displayed a remarkable capacity for disengagement on questions eliciting strong moral responses in others' (2000, p. 1027). So far, we have insisted on the absence of pronounced *theoretical* solutions to conundrums surrounding pluralism. But it

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should also be highlighted that he offers even less *practical* advice, in clear contrast to Aron.

2.2 The institutional defence of liberty

The preservation of negative liberty, and its potential clashes with other values in a pluralistic society, have, so far, been conceived of in relatively abstract and theoretical terms. A more empirical dimension can nevertheless be added when questioning whether pluralism subverts liberalism in Aron and Berlin's thought. This level of analysis has Aron's preference, which is not surprising given his concern to offer a politico-sociological analysis of societies. We will see that Aron engages in discussions on the nature of the democratic regime, and how it can be combined with liberalism. But firstly it is important to examine Berlin's silence on the matter.

2.2.1 Berlin's reluctance to address institutional apparatuses

Berlin seldom talks about the application of his defence of negative liberty to political practice, and in particular how it can be enforced under a democratic regime. He limits himself to basic remarks, such as that whereby negative liberty 'is not incompatible with some kind of autocracy, or at any rate the absence of self-government' (L, p. 176). Aron, on the contrary, is much more prolix on the topic of democracy. This antagonism between the two thinkers originates partly, as previously stated, in the angle from which they study modern liberty. But it is essential, at this stage, to uncover other reasons for Berlin's disinterest in practical politics. One quote, I believe, is especially revealing of Berlin's state of mind, even though the quote describes not his but Herzen's attitude: 'at the heart of

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Alexander Herzen's outlook (and of Turgenev's too) is the notion of the complexity and insolubility of the central problems, and, therefore, of the *absurdity of trying to solve them by means of political or sociological instruments*' (RT, p. 202, emphasis added). This statement, when applied to Berlin, can be interpreted in two ways.

Firstly, it can mean that, for Herzen – and, by extension, for Berlin – politicians cannot pretend to solve problems which are not, by nature, institutional. Berlin seems to show some distrust *vis-à-vis* the political class and politics generally speaking. This has been highlighted by Noel O'Sullivan, who talks of a 'hard core of romantic anarchism at the very heart of Berlin's political thought' (1999, p. 69). On O'Sullivan's view, Berlin seems suspicious of all forms of authority, and consequently never satisfactorily provides a theory of how to put his model of pluralism into institutional practice. O'Sullivan explains Berlin's incapacity to think in terms of institutions as an apprehension toward any form of regulation: For Berlin, law is an intrinsic restriction upon the area of free choice required by negative liberty, rather than a defence of that area... "Every law", he writes, "seems to me to curtail *some* liberty, although it may be a means to increase another" (1999, p. 70). Berlin's reaction stems from a common confusion, which conflates laws with curtailment of liberty. But laws contribute to the definition of the status of the government and of its relations to its citizens and therefore make the activity of citizens possible, just as the rules of chess, or tennis, are essential to the running of these games. Yet O'Sullivan also points out that Berlin's reluctance to support any type of contractual law is due to his 'confusion about the nature of sovereignty' (1999, p. 70). This confusion derives from his definition of sovereignty as 'unlimited authority, in a sense which treats this as synonymous with

unlimited power' (1999, p. 71). In addition to his misinterpretation of the role of sovereignty, Berlin's attitude can also be explained, I think, by the fact that institutional frameworks tend to degenerate quickly into monistic ones.

A second, and more radical, explanation of Berlin's denunciation of the 'absurdity' of attempts to find political answers to philosophical problems is simply to say that these answers not only cannot be unveiled by politicians, but that they cannot be unveiled by anyone at all. Rather than being antagonistic to O'Sullivan's position, this view is, I suspect, an extension of Berlin's 'anarchic impulse'. Despite his allusions to possible tradeoffs amongst values, it seems to me that Berlin's final point is a pessimistic one. I concur with Gray when he asserts that, *contra* the dominant liberalism of his time, Berlin's liberalism 'is a stoical and tragic liberalism of unavoidable conflict and irreparable loss among inherently rivalrous values' (1995, p. 1). Berlin's reluctance to enter into institutional debates is but the result of his refusal to reduce the complexity of human life and thought. Aron adopts a very different attitude *vis-à-vis* the necessity of making tragic choice in politics. Whilst he acknowledges that tragedy cannot be abolished, its impact and its frequency, on his view, are to be limited by the establishment of appropriate political rules.

2.2.2 Aron's assessment of the best political regime

Aron is deeply at odds with Berlin in the sense that he analyses the implications of both liberty and pluralism in terms of the possible *political organisation* of societies. Aron's problematic can be expressed as follows: which government defends liberty best? Which

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government recognises plurality best? Before we enter into the details of Aron's judgement of political regimes, it is important to stress that, even if the defence of liberty is a priority, that of pluralism is also essential. It would be a mistake to oppose Berlin and Aron on this matter. Indeed, even if Aron is not as wordy as Berlin about pluralism, he is eager to recognise the reality and the inescapable character of pluralism. Aron talks of the 'incontestable fact' of the 'existence of multiple and complex oppositions within modern societies', which is characterised by 'the rivalry of classes and parties, of interests and ideas' (CG, p. 654). Moreover, he confers a beneficial dimension to pluralism. This 'positive value' of pluralism consists in fostering 'toleration of opposition, the right to be different, the flourishing of a society by the multiplicity of schools of thought or art' (1980, p. 26). Consequently, when evaluating which regime is the most adequate for modern societies, Aron takes into account the preservation of pluralism as well as that of formal liberty.

One political system that seems to respect these criteria, commonly labelled 'democracy', catches Aron's attention. Yet, from Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, Aron harbours the conviction that in any regime, including democracy, one can find 'the seeds of corruption' (EL, p. 94). From his liberal ancestors, Aron is also immune from an unconditional trust towards democratic regimes. From his comparative studies of Montesquieu and Rousseau, there can be no doubt that Aron has more affinities with the former. Aron is no supporter of Rousseau's understanding of democracy, that is, as unqualified popular sovereignty. In a classic interpretation of the *Social Contract*, Aron stresses that liberty can be threatened: 'the political freedom accorded to the individual

through participation in collective sovereignty does not necessarily entail the fundamental liberties of thought, speech and action. Democratic principles do not imply respect for liberal values' (CG, p. 644). On the contrary, he adds elsewhere, popular sovereignty can 'lead as easily to despotism as to liberty' (*Dawn*, p. 175). Further to this, pluralism can also be jeopardised by Rousseau's conception of a unifying civil religion, 'a form of religious and moral orthodoxy in the interests of the State' (CG, p. 644). As Pierce observes, for Aron the 'achievement of the democratic idea' should be disconnected from 'universal suffrage' (1963. p. 30). Pierce concludes that Aron 'places a higher value on liberty than he does on popular participation in the selection and control of governors' (1933, p. 30). Does this entail that Aron distrusts democracy, and prefers another form of government?

For Aron, as for many theorists, it is difficult to praise or condemn democracy unless one has a clear vision of what is meant by the term. Most contemporary governments describe themselves as 'democratic', yet few respect the rights of their citizens. The result is that, for Aron, it is important to qualify what type of democracy we talk about. As an alternative to this dilemma, Aron offers, in *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, a new typology of regimes, one which distinguishes 'constitutional-pluralistic' regimes from 'one-party' regimes, which he calls 'ideocracies'.[36] The first type corresponds to what political scientists usually describe as liberal democracies, and appears to have Aron's favour. Yet commentators such as Claude Lefort have argued that Aron does not stress sufficiently the opposition between the two types of industrial society. According to Lefort, Aron asserts that constitutional-pluralistic democracy and ideocracy do not differ in their conception of liberty, and that

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[36] See chapter 2, part 2 for more details on the definition of each of these regimes

even communist leaders are prepared to recognise that freedom of thought and of participation are valuable. This leads Aron to conclude, on Lefort's view, that the opposition between the two regimes is not an opposition between two fundamental ideas. This, for Lefort, is a sign that Aron relativises the difference between a regime that is essentially flawed (ideocracy), and one whose imperfection is only due to circumstances (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 90). Lefort also observes that Aron, on occasions, tends to minimise the novelty of the Nazi phenomenon by showing how easily intelligible it can be (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 91). He concludes that the main weakness of Aron derives from his reluctance to imagine the possibility of an ultimate sense to history and to our lives, and his 'affiliated mistrust of philosophy' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 92).

It is true that Aron's 'scientific' style of writing – aimed at being as descriptive and neutral as possible - can irritate the reader. For instance, Aron is prepared to acknowledge that some policies implemented by totalitarian regimes can be beneficial to the economy, and perhaps worth imitating.[37] He even writes on one occasion that 'it is possible, under certain circumstances, that people are better off with the essentially imperfect regime than with democracy' (cited by Lefort, in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 90). Nevertheless, is this sufficient to deduce that Aron is not harsh enough on totalitarian governments, and not keen enough to show his support for liberal democracies? Our answer will enquire at two levels: first, what Aron really means when he says that the two models of industrial society are close;

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[37] See for instance *Dawn*, p. 174: 'On the technological plane, some of the measures adopted by the totalitarian regimes are excellent, and we would do well to imitate them: for example, steps to encourage the birth rate, and some other aspects of social policy. On a more delicate subject, unemployment policy, I would not say everything is perfect about the methods adopted by the totalitarian regimes, but I think it would be interesting for us to examine them more closely to see whether the democracies might borrow from them. There is nothing, for instance, to stop us making use of major public works'.

second, how Aron replies to the criticism according to which he is incapable stating clearly what the best regime consists of.

I think that Lefort misinterprets Aron's comment whereby communist and liberal societies are two species of the same kind. From an economic angle, the similarity cannot be denied, especially compared to non-industrial societies. But Aron goes beyond this common point, and stresses many differences, as Pierre Hassner accurately remarks:

> all of Aron's intellectual thrust consists precisely in departing from the simplest and most general elements, namely in this case technical progress and its consequence, industrial growth, and in insisting (in opposition at the same time to Marxism and to positivism) on the autonomy of the social, political, and spiritual dimensions and on the decisive role that they play in the meaning of the concrete totalities that make up those regimes which exist in history (1985, p.30).

In other words, Aron is keen on showing the similarities of communist and capitalist societies at the level of industrial production, in order to prove their *opposition* in the way they organise the economy, and, relatedly, the whole society. On the one hand, the common 'industrial' feature has to be born in mind. Indeed, the margin between the two regimes can be 'so thin that it is relatively easy to slide from democratic regimes to totalitarian regimes' (Dékany-Szénasi, in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 101). But on the other hand, political leaders should also be aware that the totalitarian threat is less likely if they ensure that changes in the sphere of production do not affect the running of politics and the organisation of society. Consequently, Aron's main recommendation is to guarantee the primacy of politics: 'politics is the major feature of the society as a whole, because it is the condition of all co-operation between men' (1965, pp. 24-5).[38] Overall, the crucial element that will secure the differentiation between democracies and ideocracies is what Dékany-Szénasi

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[38] However, it implies neither that human life is *essentially* political, nor that there is no boundary between public and private.

calls the 'antinomy between the singular and the plural' or between 'unity and plurality' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 95).

Secondly, then, it is essential to stress why, for Aron, constitutional-pluralistic regimes, as a form of democracy, are the best available regime in industrial societies. According to Draus, 'Aron defends liberal democracy as the regime that adapts best to the conditions of modernity' (1989, p. 52). To put it differently, Aron believes that *only* constitutional-pluralistic regimes can contribute to the flourishing of individual *liberty* as well as guarantee the *plurality* of their members. Liberty is best preserved by these regimes because, on Aron's view, the power of governments is limited by both the separation and the balance of powers. Aron is evidently aware of Montesquieu's precepts, and concurs with his conclusion whereby 'the separation of powers is... more than a means to defend oneself against abuse and illegality: it is constitutive of liberty itself (CG, p. 638). There is nothing novel in this support of limited government, which follows the classical liberal tradition. Aron observes that even a libertarian like Hayek is prepared to recognise this advantage to democracies. He concurs with him on the fact that 'democracy is more a means than an end: it is the form of government which, especially in our time, provides the *best opportunity for safeguarding liberty*' (EL, p. 121, emphasis added). But he goes further that Hayek, and asserts that democracy is not just a stopgap solution, when he states that 'democracy is the logical conclusion of liberal philosophy', because it promotes the limitation of government, but also the respect for legality (EL, p. 121).[39]

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[39] See Colquhoun, 1986b, p. 197: the final question Aron asks himself is 'how to put new life into the idea of democracy? It was necessary, first of all, to distinguish what was essential from what was of secondary importance. ... What was essential in the idea of a democratic regime was *legality* – "a regime in which there are laws and in which power is not arbitrary and without limits".' (emphasis added)

Liberal democracies preserve not only liberty but also the plurality of ways of life of their members. As already noted, Aron is a fervent defender of multipartism as a way of promoting a variety of ideas. Yet, as he himself admits, 'multipartism is a necessary, not a sufficient condition' (1980, p. 25). He therefore advocates for a 'democratico-liberal synthesis', which defines itself, as seen above, by the rule of law and the respect for individual members (1980, p. 25). This combination of rules and procedures can, for Aron guarantee the openness of society and the diversity of styles of life for one crucial reason: all these procedures do 'not determine the objective that those who are elected will set themselves' (EL, p. 121). In other words, the institutional framework that Aron defends does not presuppose that citizens share a unique conception of what is best for themselves and for their country. In addition to this *political* defence of democracy, Aron adds a more *historical* perspective, observing that, as Pierce has highlighted, 'even in this century the voters have never given majority support to a revolutionary party in a free election' (1963, p. 32).

All the statements made by Aron in order to defend a democratic institutional framework can be judged, so far, as fairly unoriginal. We can conjecture that Berlin, had he been interested in this dimension of the problem, would have been in agreement. Yet a dimension of Aron's theory radically differentiates him from Berlin, but also from the mainstream of liberal theory. It is the belief that politicians, when confronted to a clash of values and interests, should adopt a *morality of prudence* in order to solve these conflicts.

In a very unusual manner – which is not unlike Machiavelli's style of writing – Aron dedicates much attention to the articulation between political theory and political practice,

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which is exemplified in the figure of the statesman. Unlike Berlin, Aron is eager to put himself on the place of the statesman, and to 'think *politically*', to follow Brian Anderson's words (1997, p. 10). The first and main advice that Aron gives to princes is that 'what it is true in all epochs is that the necessary reference to the calculation of forces and the endless diversity of circumstances requires statesmen to be *prudent*' (PGN, p. 600). What does Aron exactly mean by 'prudence'? Prudence is a combination of several levels of analysis, as Mahoney observes: 'common sense, or ordinary experience necessarily constitute a point of departure, as well as human action and theoretical reflection' (in Bachelier [ed.], 2002, p. 143). In his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire*, Aron distinguishes two extreme views of politics: on the one hand a 'politics of understanding', characterised by pragmatism, and which can be compared, as Anderson does, to Oakeshott's 'idea of navigating the sea of the particular' (1997, p. 54). On the other hand, the 'politics of Reason' is driven by the inflexible belief that Reason can resolve all issues. Aron concedes that 'any politics is both one and the other. There is no immediate action that is not responsive to distant concerns; no confident in Providence who is not seeking out unique opportunities' (IPH, p. 327). In other words, for Aron, political activity is the art of combining short-term and long-term plans. Applied to democratic regimes, it entails, in practice, a preference 'for negotiation and compromise over despotism and war' (CG, p. 658). Further, if 'the political class continues to respect the principles of the regime, electoral procedures and individual rights, liberal democracy... can survive in apparently unfavourable conditions' (1980, p. 36).

Anderson rightly remarks that 'Aron departed from Berlin in his refusal to abandon a reasonable foundation for political moderation – "prudence, the God of this world below"'

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(1997, p. 8). Aron's 'political prudence' standpoint helps, I believe, to refute the nihilism and relativism that Berlin has been accused of. Indeed, aside from his short-lived temptation towards decisionism, Aron does not surrender reason when confronting antagonistic values. Aron's prudence comprises a notion of 'equity' as a way of overcoming relativism. Anderson describes it as 'a push to reduce *bias* in the exploration of historical and social reality rather than pursuing an illusory ideal of neutrality' (1997, p. 48). These biases are various: 'the arbitrary selection of facts', 'the confusion between conventional definition and definitions that express the results of research', etc. (1985, pp. 212-7). Aron's prudence is, overall, very close to Aristotelian wisdom. Indeed, Aristotle's famous quest for balance, moderation, and the 'happy medium' was familiar to Aron, who appears to base his recommendations to politicians on similar grounds. Aron remains optimistic that prudential judgement can overcome most value-conflicts, or at least help determine the least tragic solution to political problems. In the end, the antagonism between Aron and Berlin is best – though indirectly – described by Anderson, who observes that 'Aron's political reflection took as its inspiration the Aristotelian duty of moderating the agonistically contending commitments of the various parties in society – to *tame* pluralism rather than exacerbate it' (1997, p. 44). If Aron is prepared to tame pluralism for the sake of the running of everyday politics, Berlin exacerbates it in his quest for purity. In other words, ultimately, Aron situates himself in Plato's cave, and does not avoid the 'dirty hands' dilemma, whereas Berlin prefers to remain outside the cave, though the world of ideas he contemplates, far from being perfect, is on the contrary essentially tragic. This opposition characterises what I mean when I opposed Aron's 'problem-solving' attitude to Berlin's 'problem-making.'

CONCLUSION:

In the final analysis, as in the previous two chapters, the distinction between Aron and Berlin's theory is on first view difficult to discern. Both thinkers adopt a relatively classic defence of liberty as non-interference, and both claim that a society in which a plurality of values is encouraged is the most appropriate for the preservation of liberty. In this sense, Aron and Berlin not only resemble each other, but also many liberal philosophers of the nineteenth century, and equally of the turn of the twenty-first century. However, they depart from them in the sense that their understanding of both liberty and of pluralism is embedded in an 'antitotalitarian wisdom' which conduces them to reaffirm the centrality of the freedom to choose as part of the essence of the human condition. They also both differ from recent liberal theories in their way of moderating assertions that values and interests can easily be combined in the liberal order.

However, our close analysis has also uncovered two fundamental points of departure between Aron and Berlin. The first one is to be found in their understandings of liberty: Aron is prone to highlight the sociological aspects of formal and real liberties, whilst Berlin concentrates on a more theoretical opposition between negative and positive liberty.[40] Yet, it has been concluded that these two visions are more complementary than antagonistic. The same cannot be said of the second difference, which concerns not so much *why* liberty – and pluralism – should be preserved, but *how* this should be done. Berlin's ultimate irresolution on the pluralism vs. liberalism dilemma is a clear sign of his torn mind. Aron, on the contrary, is always eager to solve those problems that statesmen face daily, in his

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[40] The opposition of style is very similar to that already observed when dealing with totalitarianism.

attempt at bringing together theory and practice. The two visions are, at this level, unmistakably irreconcilable.

CHAPTER 4: LIBERAL RESPONSES TO NATIONAL CLAIMS

INTRODUCTION:

National identity was marginalized in intellectual debates during the Cold War. In the confrontation of two great ideological systems, national or group rights were, for many political theorists, and in particular liberal thinkers, a secondary matter. This position was for instance taken by two eminent liberal thinkers, Karl Popper and F. A. Hayek, and for the latter nationalism was based on 'the instincts appropriate to the small hunting band' (quoted by Miller, 1995, p. 5). John Gray, in the same way as Miller, argues that for these two thinkers, nationalism is not to be praised because it 'is only tribalism revived and written large' (1995, p. 99).

Unlike some of their contemporary liberal fellows, Raymond Aron and Isaiah Berlin took the demands for national recognition seriously. This final chapter proposes to tackle this rather neglected dimension of their work. It will complement the first three chapters for several reasons. Firstly, it will illustrate how the issues developed previously, in relation to the logic of history, monism, liberty and pluralism, are all interconnected when dealing with demands of national recognition. These demands also provide a more *practical* illustration to the rather theoretical matters above, as historical examples will recurrently highlight. Secondly, Aron and Berlin's treatment of national claims can be evaluated as characteristic of their liberalism. How do they cope with demands that may endanger values that they, as liberals, regard as crucial? Thirdly, as in the previous chapters, the comparison between the two men will contribute to the assessment of what they have in common and of what distinguishes them. It is in this chapter that the differences drawn out between Aron and Berlin are the most striking:

Berlin seems more enthusiastic about the promotion of minority rights – amongst which is the right to self-determination – than Aron, even though, in practice, the latter publicly stated in favour of the right to self-determination of colonised nations. It will be argued that these differences result from the angle from which they tackle national claims. The distinction is to be found on the level at which Aron and Berlin comprehend national claims: a moral level for Berlin, a more rational and practical level for Aron.

Nations and national claims

A complete definition of the topic at the heart of the chapter is not to be presented at this stage. Yet it is important to delimit the boundaries of the research, in order to consider the relevant parts of Aron and Berlin's writings. The terms that have been used so far, i.e. 'national claims' or 'demands', have an imprecision that is appropriate given the scope of the study. It is not to be limited to demands for independent statehood, but includes the recognition of minorities within a state, such as the Jewish minority. This imprecision is also at one with Aron and Berlin's own lack of clarity on the matter. More generally, neither Aron nor Berlin offers a definite meaning of the words 'nation', 'national', 'people' or 'ethnic groups'. Like most scholars working on the issue, they acknowledge the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of objectively defining the features of a nation or people. They agree that what constitutes a nation rests on a fundamentally subjective basis. Even though they do not elaborate on the subject, their reluctance to see any 'objective' criteria to define nations render them close to Hobsbawm's formulation of nations as 'invented traditions', or to Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities'.[1] To simplify, on this view, a nation is very much based on the

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[1] See Eric Hobsbawm (1990) *Nation and Nationalism Since 1870: Programme, Myth and Reality*. Cambridge: CUP; Benedict Anderson (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

consciousness of community of its members, which implies that national claims, in most cases, generate nations, and not the other way around. This does not mean, as will be seen in the case of Berlin, that the process of awareness comes from the individuals themselves: it can be imposed from the outside by the decisions of a dominant group.

Aron and Berlin do not expand much on the origins of national claims and nationalist movements. But they both recognise that the end of the eighteenth century has been a turning point for the rise of nationalism, at least in Europe, and therefore follow renowned scholars of nationalism, such as Kedourie, who affirm that nationalism is a product of the Enlightenment, and more generally of modernity.[2] As will be noted later, Aron and Berlin differ in what they retain of this period, Aron insisting on the influence of the French Revolution, while Berlin shows a deeper interest for German Romanticism.

Points of departure

As in the previous chapters, the method used in the present chapter situates itself at the crossroad of several disciplines: evidently political theory, but also the history of nationalist movements, and finally the history of intellectuals. Nevertheless, unlike the other chapters, what will be of most relevance is the special focus given on a sociology of intellectuals.[3] In the case examined in this chapter, it is essential to question Aron and Berlin's relations with their 'nations' or *'patries'*. It is evident that the Jewish origins that both share have an impact – though not an identical one – on their writings, in particular when dealing with Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel. A preliminary examination of the influence of the above element is therefore necessary. It

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[2] Elie Kedourie (1960) *Nationalism*. London: Hutchinson. London: Arnold. For Berlin's view, see for instance, 'The Bent Twig' (CTH), in which he sees the roots of nationalism in East Prussia at the turn of the nineteenth century.

will then be followed by Berlin's account of national claims as being part of a person's identity, with particular focus on whether his claims are compatible with his defence of negative liberty. A comparison with Aron's views will next shed light on what makes the distinctiveness of the latter: his refusal to admit the centrality of national claims in his liberal framework.

1. BEING A JEWISH THINKER: TWO CONTRASTING MODELS

Before analysing what Aron and Berlin make of demands by nations, cultural groups or peoples, it seems natural to wonder which group the two authors acknowledged membership of, and whether their membership to one or several groups had an impact on their vision of nationalism. The 'groups' at stake are, for both men, Judaism (considered not only as a religious group but also a culture in itself), and for Aron, the French nation, whereas for Berlin the national allegiance is double: Russian and British. Their common Jewishness will be the starting point of the study: did they see themselves as Jews? What did it mean to them? When answering these questions, it will become increasingly clearer that their common non-observance to the religion of Judaism does not make them identical, on the contrary. The opposition in their interpretations of their Jewishness, and also of the Jewish question, is then to be explained by another dimension of their being: the deep and secure *enracinement* of Aron into French Enlightenment tradition, as opposed to the voluntarily uprooted and wandering mood of a Berlin *sans-patrie*.

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[3] See Prochasson in Jennings (ed.), 1993, pp. 59-81.

1.1 Common features

The Jewish component of Aron and Berlin's characters has many common features. Both men are Jewish in a 'talmudic sense', that is, because they were 'born from a Jewish mother' (Benain, 1990, p. 162). Aron's roots are situated in a Jewish family implanted in Lorraine, whereas Berlin's are to be found in the Jewish community of Russia. Born as Jews, they also both died Jews: Berlin is buried in the Jewish section of Oxford Wolvercote Cemetery, while Aron rests in the Jewish section of the Montparnasse's cemetery in Paris. Furthermore, they both accepted to be described, and describe themselves, as Jewish, or, in the case of Aron, 'Israelite'. Nevertheless, these few facts should not be over-interpreted, since the label 'Jewish' does not necessarily render the person accustomed to Jewish traditions or religious beliefs. In fact, neither of them was religious. The move towards secularism was made, in their respective family, at least a generation before they were born. Berlin explains to Lukes that, if his grandparents were 'pious Hasidim', as was his mother, his father 'drifted away from it' (Lukes, 1998, p. 54). As for Aron, the shift away from Judaism occurred even earlier on. As Benain remarks, 'assimilation in the case of his family had reached an extremely high level' (1990, p. 162). Aron expresses it in a deliberately provocative manner: 'I feel less remote from a French anti-Semite than from a Jew from South Morocco, who only speaks Arabic and is struggling to leave what appear to be the Middle-Ages or impenetrable darkness of radically foreign cultures' (ECJ, p. 64). Berlin never went that far in his statements, but did not seem to accentuate his Jewishness either. To highlight this, Ignatieff cites Berlin, who, during his first visit in Palestine in 1934, felt a sense of unease amongst Jews: 'As for the Jews they are most odd and fascinating, and I felt equally uneasy with them and away from them, like relations one hasn't seen for thirty years or something, to whom one knows one is, even feels, related, but whom one

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doesn't really know and is afraid of' (1998, p. 78). Further to this, neither Aron nor Berlin was observant: neither of them practiced their religion, and both espoused atheism.[4]

Another element helps demonstrate that their Jewishness was not *the* central feature of their existence: their clear assimilation to the environment they lived in. Aron and Berlin could be considered as the perfect examples of the assimilated Western-European Jews, Berlin belonging to what Perry Anderson calls the 'White emigration' which was absorbed by the English intelligentsia (1992b). They both belonged to the bourgeoisie of their respective countries, and showed a real keenness in following the standard route to social and intellectual recognition: the khâgne and ENS for Aron, public school and Oxford for Berlin, who was even the first Jewish scholar elected at All Souls College. Judaism was therefore completely absent from their intellectual formation. Their studies in institutions of a national prestige also put them in a good position to develop and retain contacts within the intellectual milieu of their country of residence. Berlin in particular became famous for his enjoyment of British 'salons.'

The elements above seem to reveal the weak attachment of Berlin and Aron to Jewish tradition understood in its religious but also cultural and intellectual dimension. However, it does not entail that they showed no respect for their origins. They were more Disraeli than Marx, to follow Berlin's comparison: if the latter denied his Jewish origins and even showed disdain for the Jews, the former proudly affirmed his Jewishness (AC, pp. 252-86). Because he was a Russian émigré, Berlin remained very close to his family and to a circle of Jewish friends. Some of these people, notably his

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[4] Berlin explains to Lukes (1998, p. 54): 'I happen not to believe in God'.

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mother, were not as 'secularised' as him, and he consequently never lost complete touch with the Jewish culture. If it appears evident as to why Berlin easily recognised his Jewish identity, things are different with Aron. Indeed, Aron had no sense of being Jewish until, to follow his own words, Hitler revealed to him his Judaism in 1933. From then own, he accepted his condition:

> Je me suis efforcé, vaille que vaille, de l'assumer, ce qui a voulu dire simplement ne jamais le dissimuler. Etre juif, à mes yeux, n'est ni infâmant, ni glorieux, je n'en tire ni honte, ni fierté, je n'ai même pas le droit de mettre en accusation l'humanité ou, du moins, pas plus que n'importe quel homme de cœur, puisque j'ai survécu au grand massacre (ECJ, p. 101)

In a sense, his Jewishness was partly imposed by the outside.[5] Aron could have refused this identity, yet he chose not to, and consequently constructed a definition of his Jewishness. In other words, his acceptance of his status is the result of a deliberate decision, and not simply, like Berlin, a product of habit. It does not mean, though, that Berlin was not as much affected as Aron by the Nazi persecutions of the Jews and then by the Holocaust. For both – as probably for all Jews – the revelation of the organised genocide of the Jewish people left them wordless: none of them could write about the genocide in an extensive way, as noted by Ignatieff (1998, p. 123) for Berlin, and by Perrine Simon-Nahum for Aron (1989, p. 8). They also felt a sense of unease for having been spared. Aron even speaks of a feeling of 'guilt' for the luck he had to manage to flee France on time, and Berlin also uses the same term when telling Jahanbegloo that he 'still felt some guilt about [not having realised what was happening], even though it was not really any fault of mine' (1992, p. 20). This reinforced their will not to cut the links with the Jewish 'community' – though Aron did not like the term – as such. But it did not change radically their relations to Judaism, which they had shaped before the Second World War.

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[5] Missika talks of being 'Juif par le regard de l'autre' (in HP, p. 187).

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Despite the many similarities between Aron and Berlin in their attitude towards their status as Jews, a closer look shows that the Jewish element of their personality does not hold the same weight, especially when compared to the 'national' element. In the rest of this section, it will be argued that the French element overweighs the Jewish one in Aron, and thus illustrates the capacity of assimilation of the French conception of nation. On the other hand, Britishness, whose influence is by nature more evasive and subtle, left more room for Berlin to construct his own identity, composed of Jewishness but also of the attitudes of a Russian émigré.

1.2 Aron and the defence of the French vision of citizenship

1.2.1 Aron and the Republican model

As curious as it can sound, the efficiency of the French Republican tradition to breed dedicated citizens finds one of its best illustrations in the person of Raymond Aron. This 'French' dimension of Aron's mode of thinking ought to be specified first, and then will be comparatively evaluated with the Jewish aspects of his identity, in an attempt to prove that the latter is far less influential than the former. To start with, a core element of the uniquely French vision of the nation is the Republican vision of education. One of its aims is to promote meritocracy, that is, the democratic aspiration whereby those who work hard, whatever their class or rank in society, can achieve their ambitions. An illustration of the meritocratic system is the competitive and anonymous exam, the 'concours', a necessary stage for those who wish to join the best schools or positions in the civil service. Though he did not come from a poor background, Aron exemplifies the accomplishment of the Republican dream because, unlike his father, he was successful at entering the renowned Ecole Normale Supérieure, and a few years later

obtained the first rank at the agrégation of philosophy. In this sense, Aron fits with the model of the Republican dream.[6]

In addition to its specific organisation, another important component of Republican education is the *content* and efficiency of the instruction given, a task performed, at the time of Aron's youth, by the new heroes of the Third Republic: the 'instituteurs'. Evidently, they put emphasis on the heyday of the French Enlightenment and Revolution, whether it be through their major events, actors, or ideas. Aron recalls that very early in his childhood, he felt this sense of pride for the great past of the French *patrie*, but nothing for his Jewish roots: 'as a child, I cried before France's misfortunes in Waterloo or Sedan, not while listening to the story of the destruction of the Temple. No other flag than the tricolour, no other anthem than the Marseillaise will ever wet my eyes' (ECJ, p. 101). Quotes like this illustrate how, to follow Shils' words, Aron 'was the heir of the best elements in the outlook of the Third Republic' (in Draus [ed.], 1985, p. 15). Aron's spontaneous sense of attachment to France seems to have been reinforced by two other factors. Firstly, his family transmitted to him a deep sense of patriotism: 'born of a Jewish community from Lorraine, I received from my parents a touchy patriotism that, I wish, is devoid from vanity or xenophobia, a demanding and severe patriotism' (ECJ, p. 188). The patriotism of people from Lorraine was probably more exacerbated than anywhere else in France, having been deprived, from 1871 to 1918, of part of their land, annexed by the newly formed German empire. Maurice Barrès, a nationalist from Lorraine and author of the famous *Les Déracinés*, is a famous example. To sum up, for Aron's family, and Aron himself, the duty of defending the French nation was more important than the preservation of Jewish traditions. They belonged to the 'fools of the Republic', as Pierre Birnbaum calls, them, that is, the Jews who

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[6] For a more detailed analysis of the Republican model, see Rudelle, Odille, and Berstein, Serge (1992)

assimilated completely – as individuals, but not as a community – in the Republican

system and served the State with devotion.[7]

Further to the family influence, and perhaps more importantly, Aron's sense of

patriotism towards France is the result of a conviction, forged with the years, that the

French Enlightenment and Revolution bestowed a definition of nation and nationalism

that fitted with his aspirations. With the *philosophes*, he shared the view that men and

women can choose their nation, and are not chosen by it. What Aron respects in the

French vision of nation is its voluntarism, the 'daily plebiscite' expressed famously by

Ernest Renan, but which originates in the French Revolution, in the idea that anyone

can be a French citizen if he or she adheres with its ideals. These ideals are shared by

Aron, despite his awareness of the potentially dangerous deviation: the universal rights

of men, the power of reason, and, more importantly for us, the ideal of citizenship.

Citizenship involves that individuals have a political dimension close to the Aristotelian

notion: Aron declares himself 'as a political being', by which he means a person

prepared to take part in the public debates (ECJ, p. 272). To sum up, the influence of the

French tradition on Aron is not so much to be found in a defence of his national

particularities, than of a more general and abstract idea of *patrie*.

1.2.2 No double allegiance

How Aron applies this conception of nation to practical cases will be analysed in depth

later on in this chapter. What interests us now is to assess the impact that his attachment

to the French revolutionary ideals can have on his Jewish condition. On the one hand, as

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Le modèle républicain. Paris: PUF.

seen above, the French character of his thought is not contestable. Tony Judt (2002) and Edward Shils (in Draus [ed.], 1985, p. 9) underline the centrality of Aron's patriotism, and Aron himself is not afraid of confessing it, even if it may offend those Jews who never forgave France for letting them down in 1940:

> Or je suis français, je le suis depuis le premier jour, je le serai jusqu'au dernier. En juin 1940, quand le malheur s'abattit sur la France, je connus le suprême déchirement. Je pus croire que ma patrie me chassait et, du même coup, m'obligeait à me dépouiller de mon être même tel que l'avait fait la langue que je parle, la culture que j'ai absorbée ; d'une France qui serait devenue hitlérienne, je n'aurais ni pu ni voulu demeurer citoyen. Mais la France, elle aussi, n'aurait plus été, en ce cas, ce qu'elle a été, et ce qu'elle demeure (ECJ, pp. 187-8)

French culture is deeply embedded in him by education, but he also accepts it *freely* and deliberately. On the other hand, Aron acknowledges that he does not belong to 'those who have rejected their belonging to France and have put first their attachment to Judaism' (ECJ, p. 272). Furthermore, he feels incapable of describing what is, in him, specifically Jewish; and when asked why he does not want to tear the links with other Jews, he replies in rather vague terms that he 'do[es] not know [him]self... perhaps because [he] care[s] not to cut [his] roots. But it is very abstract: it is more an intellectual justification than an existential choice' (ECJ, p. 272). It thus becomes more evident that the Jewish element in Aron does not play a significant role. Yet at times, as it is the case of Berlin, the loss of the religion and tradition of one's ancestors can provoke a mysterious reaction, a feeling of not being entirely true to oneself. This was not the case of Aron, whose rationality and realism safeguarded against a crisis of personality. As Pierre Manent remarks, 'his writings do not betray this religious uncertainty or this nostalgia of the ages that can be seen in so many atheist modern writers' (in HP, p. 167).

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[7] See Birnbaum, Pierre (1992) *Les fous de la République : histoire politique des Juifs d'Etat, de Gambetta à Vichy*. Paris: Fayard ; and from the same author (1990) *Histoire politique des juifs de France : entre universalisme et particularisme*. Paris: Presses de la FNSP.

To go even further, it seems that Aron is the perfect example of the effectiveness of an assimilation *à la française*. Before the War, Aron would have probably admitted this with no shame, but after the Holocaust, he could not be so explicit. I suspect, though, and *contra* Benain (1990), that 1945 was not such a considerable rupture in Aron's relation with Judaism, it simply brought a deeper sense of respect for the Jewish people. Publicly, he may have been careful enough to dismiss the possibility of assimilation, yet he never really doubted that, in his own case, assimilation was complete. This is made even more evident if one remembers two cases when Aron favoured French interests instead of Jewish ones. During his exile in London from 1940 to 1944, Aron remained silent about the anti-Jewish laws of Vichy. He later explained that he felt that the unity of France had to prevail, and that denouncing these laws would have not only been useless, but could also have created tensions within the French resistance, as well as cut off the French who remained in France – some of them approving of the laws – from the resistance itself. The second example is more anecdotic. Having criticised the Israeli Prime Minister Begin in *L'Express*, Aron had the surprise to receive an official letter of complaint from Begin's office. Aron's reply was instant and unequivocal: as a free individual, he had a right to express his disagreement with policies he did not judge appropriate, and no one was entitled to tell him not to (ECJ, p. 253).

The portrait of Aron drawn here should not be misinterpreted. Aron certainly shows an attachment to the French *patrie*, whereas his Jewish origins do not seem to have a significant impact on him. Yet it does not entail that he is a nationalist in the sense that he would believe in the superiority of the French nation, or in the Barresian sense that national sentiments ought to be promoted because they are the truest. The purpose of the section was simply to assess whether Aron's Judaism could have any influence on his

conceptualisation of nations and national claims. Our findings are as follows: firstly, the Jewish element in Aron is probably negligible. He never felt, as Berlin did, a sense of belonging to a threatened minority. Secondly, Aron's attachment to the typically French vision of the *patrie* is evident: Aron is more *rationally* than sentimentally attached to France, a crucial point of departure with the more sentimental Isaiah Berlin.

1.3 Isaiah Berlin in Search of his Identity

The case of Isaiah Berlin is even more complicated than that of Aron. In addition to his Jewish background and his British nationality, it should not be forgotten that Berlin was a Russian émigré. Berlin evokes this three-fold influence in an autobiographical essay entitled 'The Three Strands in my Life'. Each of these 'strands' has, I will argue, an influence upon the way Berlin thinks about nations and nationalism. The three strands will be examined in contrast with Aron's position. The differences here are indeed to be found at three levels. Firstly, following the British tradition, Berlin rejects the model of French assimilationism. Secondly, the flexibility of the British liberal model permits Berlin to acknowledge his roots, both Jewish and Russian, and to show an interest in Counter-Enlightenment thinkers. Finally, this leads Berlin to support Zionism, a step never reached by Aron.

1.3.1   Berlin and Britain

Berlin's relationship with Britain is of a different nature to that of Aron with France, for two major reasons. First of all, whereas Aron's family had settled in France for at least two centuries, Berlin only came to England at the age of twelve. Thus, the process of assimilation did not start, in Berlin's family, before Berlin himself. Moreover, Berlin had to endure the experience of exile, when he was obliged to leave for England in

1921. Even though his family fled in relatively comfortable conditions and did not encounter any problems of settlement once they arrived in London, Berlin was certainly deeply affected by these events. Another difference with Aron is to be found in the connections that Berlin kept with the Jewish milieu (and to a lesser extent with Russians) once settled in Britain, whereas Aron never seems to have developed close links with the Jewish circles in Paris. Berlin's parents soon moved to a Jewish area of London, and Ignatieff observes that Berlin's mother soon found a kosher butcher and Jewish friends (1998, p. 32). Berlin befriended upper-class Jewish families, as for instance the Rothschilds (Ignatieff, 1998, p. 63). Through connections such as these, Berlin remained in touch with his Jewish roots and Jewish culture.

The second reason for Berlin's 'soft' British identity – as opposed to Aron's 'deep' French identity – is to be explained by the very nature of the British nation.[8] Berlin's father chose to take his family to Britain not only because he had contacts there, but also because was an admirer of the liberalism of British institutions and habits. He knew, as his son would later on learn, that belonging to the British nation does not require as much dedication as to the French nation. Whereas the French mode of citizenship and 'laïcité' requires full and enthusiastic commitment in a Rousseauist spirit, to the extent that the citizen should disregard his communitarian links, the British nation has been historically built in a rather different way. Not as centralist and holistic, it shows a Lockean tendency to mistrust any type of government, and to promote counter-powers to that of the political leaders. It explains why groups and factions, especially religious or ethnic, are not looked at in Britain with the same suspicion as in France. These rather simplistic ideas of the difference between France and Britain may not entirely be true in practice, but they played a role in the imaginary representations that both Aron and

Berlin drew of their respective countries. I believe that this opposition between France and Britain helps clarify why Aron was not afraid of being assimilated, while Berlin was more sensitive to specific demands by cultural minorities.

The absence of any 'British patriotism' in Berlin's writings does not entail that Berlin showed no attachment for the country where he spent almost all his life. The most evident sign of Berlin's Britishness is precisely his liberalism. Nevertheless, when he examines nations and nationalism, the two other 'strands' of his life are more influential. Berlin is willing to emphasise the importance of the Jewish strand. He writes that his Jewish origins led him to have 'never been tempted, despite [his] long devotion to individual liberty, to march with those who, in its name, reject adherence to a particular nation, community, culture, tradition, language – the myriad unanalysable strands that bind men into identifiable groups' (PI, p. 258). As Roger Hausheer points out, this statement shows that 'from his Jewish roots stems his immediate awareness of the deep need of men to belong to a continuous community with its own national identity and geographical home' (1983, p. 51). It is important to specify the nature of the Jewish influence, in order to clarify the source of his deep interest in national claims. Berlin himself remains vague about the Jewish element of his identity.[9] But I will argue that it is not so much the religious dimension of Judaism, nor its traditions and customs, which have an impact on Berlin. What fascinates Berlin, and what he can empathise with – given than he is himself an émigré – is the myth and reality of the Jewish Diaspora. What other cultural and religious minority could best symbolise oppression, persecutions and the absence of recognition than the Jewish community?

[8] For a comparison of the French and British ideas of citizenship, see Favell, Adrian (1998) *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Thus, his concern for the desire to acquire a real 'status' originates at least partly in his sensibility to the fate of the Jewish people. To challenge this, one could argue that Berlin, as a Jew, never really had to suffer the worst of persecution. In Riga and Saint Petersburg, the Berlins were treated better than most Jewish families. As Ignatieff remarks, 'the ghetto was *terra incognita*' for Berlin (1998, p. 12). The threats that forced the Berlin family to leave Russia were not mainly due to their Jewish belonging, even whilst it could not conceivably have helped their cause, but derived rather from their relative wealth and their sympathy for the Whites in the civil war. Moreover, once in England, Berlin did not experience much discrimination. On the contrary, as seen earlier, he fully integrated into the British system. Despite his fortune that derived therefrom, the major aspect that Berlin retained from his Jewishness was the sense of having no 'home', which he himself may have felt when leaving Russia. It is not specifically a 'Jewish' specificity, even though Berlin creates a correlation. I believe that, in fact, it has probably as much to do with his condition of *Russian* émigré. Ignatieff further stresses this sentiment of uprooting in Berlin:

> The marks of exile remained faint but visible throughout his life: abstractly, in his respect for the need to belong... morally, in his fascination with the marginal, excluded or enraged figures of nineteenth-century history. But personally? In a slight touchiness, a hyper-sensitivity to small slights, to any gesture that treated him as an outsider (1998, p. 34)

Berlin's Jewish and Russian origins generate a 'melancholic tone', which he found expressed in the work of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers (Galipeau, 1994, p. 158).

1.3.2   Berlin and the Romantics

The second major opposition between Aron and Berlin is located, as already highlighted in chapter, in the influence, on the latter, of Romanticism, whereas for the Frenchman,

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[9] Berlin explains: 'As for my Jewish roots, they are so deep, so native to me, that it is idle for me to try to

the French Enlightenment remains the point of reference. Following German Romantics such as Herder, Berlin dismisses the French vision because it does not take into account the cultural bonds within nations. Whether Berlin is entirely right about the Enlightenment is subject to debates, as emphasised earlier.[10] Yet, at this stage, what is important is that, in contrast with Aron, Berlin is willing to emphasise, in his description of nations and cultures, the irrational dimension of such bonds, and the importance of traditions, languages, shared historical memories, etc. He finds supports for this view in the work and life of one of the first Zionists, Moses Hess, who, according to Berlin, asserted that 'nationality is real. Nations are a natural historical growth, like families, like physical types' (AC, p. 232).

Alongside the influence of Jewish writers, Berlin borrows a good deal from Herder, who regarded nations likewise as organic communities. This influence, especially, has been a source of concern amongst Berlin's commentators, because it seems to be in contradiction with Berlin's liberalism. As Cocks notices, 'there are all sorts of logical conundrums in Berlin's claim that a Herderian answer to the Jewish question in Palestine creates a Millian freedom for Jews everywhere else' (2002, p. 83). The link between his defence of national identity and that of negative liberty will be studied in greater depth in the next section, and it will be argued that Berlin is aware of the potential collision of the two demands. What needs to be stressed at this stage, however, is that Aron and Berlin do not approach the problem of national minorities from the same angle: Aron remains highly rational, whereas Berlin is keen to express his feelings of sympathy and empathy towards national demands.

identify them' (PI, p. 258).

1.3.3 Berlin and Israel

The third and final difference in the influence of the 'national' aspects of Aron and Berlin's personality follows logically from the first two points. Berlin manifests a deeper interest and attachment to his Jewish roots than Aron. Consequently, the fact that Berlin supported Zionism is not very surprising, as it would be with Aron. Berlin declares that '[his] sympathies had been pro-Zionist since [his] schooldays' (1972, pp. 12). He agreed with Zionism in principles as he explains to Jahanbegloo: 'it seemed to [him] that there was no Jew in the world who was not, in some degree, socially uneasy' (1992, p. 85). Unlike Aron, Berlin regards the assimilation of Jews as neither possible nor desirable, and borrows an image invented by Namier to symbolise this:

> [Namier] compares the effect of enlightenment upon the Jewish masses in the last century with that of the sun upon a glacier. The outer crust disappeared by evaporation; the heat of the glacier remained stiff and frozen... Evaporation, in Namier's senses, occurs, indeed, but on too negligible a scale; consequently the question of whether or not total assimilation is permissible or dignified or justifiable, or in any respect desirable, is, for good or ill, irrelevant to the Jewish problem (POI, p. 162-3)

Berlin's Zionism is the result of his desire to find a home for the Jews, but also of his connections with leaders of the Zionist movement. He developed relations with the active Jewish Diaspora during his years in the United States. He had contacts with David Ben Gurion, but more importantly was a close friend of Chaim Weizmann, who was to become the first Israeli President. As Galipeau remarks, Berlin always 'remains a committed Weizmannite', which means that he shared 'Weizmann's political goals...: the creation of a nation state, of a political homeland, for the Jewish people' (1994, pp. 154-5). Berlin visited Israel and Weizmann several times after the war, the first time in 1947 (much earlier than Aron, who waited until 1956). This demonstrates that Berlin, at least in the early 1940s, was clearly committed to the creation of the State of Israel.

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[10] See chapter 2, part 1.

Berlin's departure from a total support to the British government is indicative of the pull of his Jewish 'strand'. Nonetheless, Berlin is respectful to the British state and nation. Furthermore, his attachment to Britain can be illustrated by his refusal to live in Israel: he even turned down a position in the Israeli foreign office. Margalit explains that he 'recognized the need for home, and the need for a national home for the Jews, but [he] believed that immigrating to a matter of personal choice' (in Dworkin [ed.], 2001, p. 148). Nor can it be claimed that Berlin did not show any concern for the fate of the Palestinians, as Cocks seems to believe (2002, pp. 84-8). Despite his friendship with Weizmann, Berlin's deep sense of empathy towards people with no 'home' always remained wide enough to include the Arabs, as his rare public interventions show.[11] Brian Barry presents an even less convincing interpretation of Berlin's Zionism. Examining Berlin's writings on nation and nationalisms, Barry concludes that '[i]t should be borne in mind... that while he was vehemently opposed to revolution, Berlin was quite keen on war' (2001, p. 8). To illustrate his argument, Barry refers, amongst other things, to his admiration for the Israeli terrorist Yitzak Sadeh. In subsequent letters to the Editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, several scholars have expressed their disapproval towards Barry's comment. Joshua Cherniss, for instance, reveals, through references to Berlin's work or biography, that 'it is absurd to suggest that Berlin was "quite keen on war" or that he admired terrorism.' (2001) Barry seems, for instance, to completely misinterpret Berlin's writings on Yitzak Sadeh: Sadeh was his uncle, whose extravagant life probably impressed a young Berlin. Yet it does not entail that Berlin 'admired' him *because* he was fighting against British authorities in Israel. A

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[11] Galipeau (1994, p. 162) explains that Berlin prefers, in general, to express his views privately, but that, at the end of his life, he became a member of the Israeli organisation Peace Now, which supports the dialogue with Palestinians. See also Berlin's last letter before his death, in section 2 of this chapter.

conversation that Berlin had with Jahanbegloo shows that Berlin's position with regards to violence is far more complex than Barry seems to admit:

> I hate [violence] deeply whatever its necessity... ever since I saw a policeman being dragged to his death in the first Russian revolution, I acquired an instinctive dislike of physical violence which has been with me all my life. But still, one has to fight wars. I was not against the war against Hitler. The Italians were right to fight the Austrians (1992, p. 203)

To conclude this first section, Isaiah Berlin can be considered far more sensitive to his Jewish and Russian background than Aron. If the Frenchman is prepared to recognise the legitimacy of demands for recognition as minorities or nations, he does not include himself in any of the disadvantaged groups. Thus, when dealing with crisis involving national claims, Aron analyses them from a relatively neutral position, and takes into account not only the demand to exist as a nation, but also other aspects, whether economic, diplomatic or political. On the contrary, Berlin is more receptive to national claims because he himself experiences nostalgia for his roots. These aspects of both Aron and Berlin's characters have to remain in the background when studying what positions they take when considering demands for self-determination.

2. BETWEEN THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY AND NEGATIVE LIBERTY: BERLIN'S DILEMMA

Isaiah Berlin showed an early and deep interest in the meaning of a sense of belonging to a nation. His commitment was principally theoretical: he rarely took a public position with regards to the various events that, from the 1940s to the 1990s, were connected to national consciousness. He tackled the issue in a more abstract and theoretical way than Aron, making rare historical references, mainly to the period of the rise of nations in the nineteenth century, and in particular to Romantic writers who influenced these movements. There is nevertheless one notable exception – already mentioned – to

Berlin's refusal to engage with this debate, namely the case for Zionism, the creation of the state of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Yet Berlin is not principally famous for his recognition of the centrality of the 'need to belong', but instead for his defence of negative liberty, of the rights of the individual against the State or against other potentially oppressive groups.[12] As such, his positions on national identity have long been neglected. Recently, however, the publication of several compilations of Berlin's essays on this topic, juxtaposed with the revival of debates about the compatibility of liberalism and nationalism, have entailed that, in the words of Brian Barry, 'attitudes to Berlin's life and work have recently become a way in which academics and journalists have orientated themselves to such topics as the Cold War, Zionism and the position of Jews in the Diaspora' (2001, p. 7).

An interesting angle of approach to Berlin's work is to consider whether his defence of national identity proves consistent with his support for individual liberty. If, as many thinkers of his generation argued, the two are ultimately irreconcilable, then the 'nationalist' part of Berlin's work is in fundamental tension with his 'liberal' part. This argument is partly endorsed by Joan Cocks, who dedicates two chapters of her book *Passions and Paradox* to Berlin's views on Zionism and nationalism. According to Cocks, even if Berlin never attempted to 'wash out the incongruities between nationalism and liberalism' – and thus we should be grateful to him for 'his refusal to harmonize these unharmonizables' – his admiration towards thinkers such as Herder leads him to embrace illiberal principles, such as the affirmation of the basic need to belong to a group (2002, p. 100).[13] The result is, for her, that 'a commitment to liberalism and a fascination with illiberalism are internal, irreconcilable aspects of

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[12] As seen in chapter 3, part 1.

[13] Joan Cocks (2002, p. 75) argues that illiberal principles are 'respect for the power of irrationalism; an affirmation of the basic human need to belong to a group; a hostility to the idea of cosmopolitanism.'

Berlin's personality – fissures in the self that show up as fissures in the self's work' (2002, p. 75). Can this, as Cocks seems to think, be considered a failure on Berlin's part?

After detailing Berlin's pledge for the recognition of national sentiment, Cocks' argument will be refuted at two levels. Firstly, it will be argued that national sentiment is not, on Berlin's eyes, an 'illiberal' principle. Indeed, the 'search for status' can be interpreted as a form of liberty, because it is included in Berlin's notion of positive liberty. Secondly, Cocks' idea of the 'fissure' in Berlin work will be challenged, by showing that, even whilst Berlin may have never confronted the opposition between liberalism and nationalism *in a direct way*, it is very clear from his many writings that he did not want to make a case for their compatibility, and was *fully aware* of their potential opposition. Berlin did not oppose negative liberty *explicitly* with the need to belong to a nation, but with positive liberty, and recognised that the latter can be in tension with negative liberty. Berlin acknowledged the difficulty of combining liberalism and nationalism, and in this sense would have agreed with Cocks' claim that the two can be incompatible. Yet, *contra* Cocks, it cannot be considered as an unwanted 'fissure', or an inconsistency in his thought because – far from being unaware of it – Berlin places the irreducible conflict of human values at the heart of his reflection.

2.1 National Identity, an 'essential' Human Need

2.1.1 Defining the 'need to belong'

Isaiah Berlin is known to be an apostle of negative liberty, yet this image is partly distorted, since he also recognised the centrality of the *need* to belong to a group, in particular to a national community. Berlin's position on national claims is inseparable

from that of Counter-Enlightenment writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, such as the Romantics, and in particular of Johann Gottfried Herder, whose influence on Berlin was immense. This influence is observable in the rather uncommon approach Berlin uses to deal with nationality, whose originality is praised by Mark Lilla when he writes that Berlin's essays on nationalism 'are more valuable than shelves of recent scholarship on this problem because they go to the psychological heart of the matter' (2002, p. 43). The Herderian interest in psychology manifests itself, in Berlin's writings, in his concern with emotions and feelings that go on in the inner mind of each individual.[14] This contrasts, as noted by Margalit, with an analysis of national claims based on ideologies:

> For Berlin the emotional underpinnings of nationalism are the most important element in nationalism, more important than the set of beliefs that nourishes it. Altogether, Berlin's interest was the emotions, feelings, and moods which motivate social movements, even more than in their ideas. His concern was not the pure philosophical concern with sense, but with sensibility, a concern with the systematic ties between ideas and feelings (in Lilla [ed.], 2001, p. 150)

A feeling tantamount to national 'sentiment' or 'consciousness' is, for Berlin, the *need to belong*.[15] Borrowing from Herder, he argues that all men have a 'sense of belonging', that they desire to be part of a group that accepts them as members not for what they do, but for who they are (namely, English, German, Greek, and so on). Amongst this group they feel at ease, 'at home', because they are part of a community that shares in their particularities. They do not feel left alone, but on the contrary 'understood'. Berlin explains that 'to be understood is to share a common past, common feelings and language... in short, to share common forms of life. This is an essential need: to deny this is a dangerous fallacy' (PI, p. 258). He shares Herder's conviction that 'among the basic needs of men, as elemental as that for food or procreation or communication, is

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[14] This should be connected to Berlin's endorsement of Vico's *fantasia*, as seen in chapter 1.
[15] Simone Weil develops a similar idea in her book (1949) *L'Enracinement*. Paris: Gallimard.

the need to belong to a group' (CTH, p. 244). In other words, Berlin places the search for recognition of one's own national identity as a primary requirement if one wants to be respected as a human being, with his full dignity and self-esteem. It implies that the imperative to belong is common to *all*. But it is particularly visible in the minds of people who are completely denied this recognition. Denial of rights, the failure for some people to be anything but a minority – this all too often sharpens national consciousness. Or, as Cocks accurately remarks, Berlin 'reveals that the philosophical elements of nationalism derive their practical force not from their intellectual persuasiveness to rational individuals but from the psychological experience of group discrimination, humiliation, and subordination' (2002, p. 97).

Berlin provides several examples of this situation of 'wounded' people, which he finds particularly in the history of nineteenth century Europe (CTH, p. 245). The case of the Germans is a recurrent one, as Berlin sees this at the origin of nationalist movements (CTH, p. 244). On Berlin's view, the major reason behind the upheavals of East Prussians resides in their refusal to countenance French domination (CTH, p. 246). Not only did the Germans abhor the territorial and political control of France, but also the philosophy of the French Revolution, based on universal principles that were remote from them. Another illustration of this humiliation is Berlin's use of the powerful image of 'hunchbacks' to describe the feelings of nineteenth-century European Jews deprived of recognition of their distinctive identities. Berlin distinguishes between three types of 'hunchbacks': those who denied having a hump at all (those Jews who wanted to be assimilated); those who were happy to have a hump, and desired to remain different (Jews who wanted to remain segregated), and finally those who acknowledged that they had a hump but were not inclined to give to it much consideration (POI, pp. 174-5). In any case, Berlin adds, these hunchbacks could never feel at ease, not even those of the

third type, because their condition was dependent on how non-hunchbacks interpreted the meaning of having a hump. In other words, the Gentiles' refusal to recognise them as different, and while so not inferior, undermined the status of Jewish people in Europe, especially in its Eastern part.

2.1.2   Two types of nationalism

Berlin's vision of national identity, based on internal feelings and emotions, is a plea to his contemporaries, especially liberals, to make stronger concessions to this part of the self. It stands at odds with more familiar and conventional representations of nationalism. Berlin does not depict nationalism in terms of an ideology, a set of ideas that might guide and order reality for specific groups. The ideological zeal of nationalism he disapproves of, and makes clear that one ought to distinguish between national consciousness, which is respectable and even should be promoted, and aggressive nationalism which ought to be condemned because it contains the germs of war within it: 'nationalism' as such, he writes, 'is not consciousness of the reality of national character, nor pride of it. It is a belief in the unique mission of a nation, as being intrinsically superior to the goals or attributes of whatever is outside it' (CTH, pp. 176-7). In his interview with Nathan Gardels, he emphasises the fundamental tensions between these two levels of nationalism (1991, p. 19). It is not clear, though, where the boundary between the two needs to be drawn, or whether it is possible to draw one at all. As Perry Anderson remarks, Berlin

> often sought to distinguish between legitimate national sentiment, to be cherished, and nationalism as an ideology, to be condemned. To separate the two, however, would be difficult enough over much of the world in the twentieth century, and certainly impossible in the case of Israel (1992, p. 248)

If Berlin really considers that having a national identity is a 'basic need', rooted in human nature, he has to make provision for the possible consequences of this, namely

that its corollary would seem to be that national claims should be recognised *by all means*, ideological propaganda and violence included. In this case, there is no such distinction between good (culture-based) and bad (race-based) nationalism, or, as Hampshire says, between 'sympathy with the nationalism of Verdi and Clemenceau', and sympathy with 'the nationalism of Treitschke and Barrès' (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 132). Cocks is therefore justified in arguing that these two conceptions are 'at any rate hardly any distinct species' (2002, p. 100). Yet Berlin's view is more complex than this. On the one hand, he seems to acknowledge the natural character of the need to belong:

> The need to belong to an easily identifiable group had been regarded, at any rate since Aristotle, as a *natural requirement* on the part of human beings: families, clans, tribes, estates, social orders, classes, religious organisations, political parties, and finally nations and states, were historical forms of the fulfilment of this basic human need. (AC, p. 338, emphasis added)

Such a remark has led some commentators to assume that Berlin makes a case for the naturalness of the need to belong. According to Hampshire, this is a sign of an influence of Hume's assertion that 'we ought to follow Nature's guidance, and we make a serious mistake if we try to act against the natural and normal sentiments implanted in us' (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 129). As for Duncan Kelly, he emphasises, in a more general way, the importance of Berlin's reading of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, who 'occupy such a place in his oeuvre – namely, a passionate belief in the naturalness of human association, particularly through the forum of the nation, as opposed to the rational plans of system-builders, alongside a focus on cultural "style"' (2002, p. 41).

But Berlin's excerpt above also intimates that for Berlin all the different types of human associations fulfil the search for status. Is membership of one type of association sufficient to satisfy the 'need to belong'? If so, then this leaves no basis for national extremism, and Berlin would presumably agree that in the Western World, people

satisfy their desire to belong through family or other associations. But Berlin also seems to say that national allegiances have replaced, historically, family or class allegiances. The domination of this new allegiance renders the move from an inoffensive to a more resolute nationalism more likely. This is what Cocks rightly implies, when arguing that Berlin's admiration towards Herderian nationalism could lead him, even though he would deny it, to a 'difference-persecuting' form of nationalism (2002, p. 101). However, as will be seen later, Berlin's sympathy for national claims does not mean that he was not aware of their inherent dangers.

For now, the main implication of Berlin's innovative appreciation of national consciousness is his rejection of cosmopolitanism, as he explains to Gardels: 'Like Herder, I regard cosmopolitanism as empty. People can't develop unless they belong to a culture... If there is anything I'm certain about, after living so long, it is that people must sooner or later rebel against uniformity and attempts at global solutions of any sort' (1991, p. 22). This does not mean that Berlin is an anti-universalist on all matters, but simply that he does not believe in the Enlightenment's conception of a world freed from any particularisms. His position is quite close to that of Julia Kristeva, who, according to Yack, tries to find a just middle between 'an exclusory, murderous racism' and 'an all-encompassing feeling of "S.O.S.-absolute brotherhood"' (1995, p. 169). Once again Berlin concurs with Herder, who, in Berlin's eyes, asserted that

> Every nation has its own centre of moral gravity, which differs from that of every other: there and only there its happiness lies – in the development of its own national needs, its own unique character. There is no compelling reason for seeking to imitate foreign models, or returning to some remote past. Every age, every society, differs in its goals and habits and values from every other (CTH, p. 37)

To sum up, for Berlin national identity matters, and to ignore this would condemn us to denying the essential diversity of 'experiments of living,' as he borrows from J. S. Mill.

Berlin, as well as Mill and other liberal thinkers, would thus certainly have disagreed with Cocks' claim that the need to belong was an 'illiberal' principle. On the contrary, it seems that Berlin may consider it part of the armoury of positive liberty. The aim of the following section will be to clarify how the search for national identity can be identified as a sub-category of positive liberty.

2.2 The Need to Belong to a Nation: a Positive Liberty

A preliminary remark is called for at this juncture: Berlin is rather indecisive as to whether the search for national identity ought to be considered as a liberty. A cursory overview of his main writings on the matter reveals some discrepancy. In *Liberty*, Berlin argues that the striving toward recognition of one's national identity is not equivalent to any type of freedom, whether positive or negative:

> *Yet it is not with individual liberty, in either the 'negative' or the 'positive' sense of the word, that this desire for status and recognition can easily be identified.* It is something no less profoundly needed and passionately fought for by human beings – it is something akin, but not itself, freedom; although it entails negative freedom for the entire group, it is more closely related to solidarity, fraternity, mutual understanding, need for association on equal terms, all of which are sometimes – but misleadingly – called social freedom (L, p. 204, emphasis added)

At other times, nevertheless, he seems to imply that men are not 'free' if they are deprived of their national identity. He writes, in the pages preceding the above passage, that 'the lack of freedom about which men or groups complain amounts, as often as not, to the lack of proper recognition,' and suggests that 'I may feel unfree in the sense of not being recognised as a self-recognised or sufficiently respected group: then I wish for the emancipation of my entire class, or community, or nation, or race, or profession' (L, pp. 201 and 203). Furthermore, having distinguished the desire for status from that of liberty, he asserts that it is only the combination of both that truly 'liberates' men (L, p. 204). What is to be made of these apparent contradictions? A closer analysis of his

writing and, in particular, of his usage of the terms liberty and identity, enables us to see that Berlin is not opposing national consciousness with *any* liberty, but merely *negative* liberty, which leaves some room for the claim that the former can be regarded as a *positive* liberty.

Negative liberty, as previously observed, is the liberty privileged by most liberal thinkers since the Enlightenment, i.e. the absence of oppression, especially from the State, and the existence of a private sphere distinct from the public one.[16] Negative freedom is concerned with that 'area' where government is silent, and not so much with 'the source' of this authority (L, p. 176). I believe that it is mainly the negative form of freedom which Berlin wants to distinguish from, or even oppose to, the 'need to belong' to a group. He expresses this more clearly in 'Two Concepts of Liberty': 'Although I may not get *"negative" liberty* at the hands of the members of my own society, yet they are members of my own group; they understand me, as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me the sense of being somebody in the world' (L, p. 201, emphasis added). He is even more explicit in 'The Search for Status', when he targets the 'classical Western notion of liberty', which leads those liberals to think that 'status is one thing, liberty another; recognition is not the same as non-interference' (POI, pp. 198-9). National claims, is not, for Berlin, absence of domination by a master, but merely absence of domination by a master *who is foreign*.

Berlin's apparent inconsistency on the subject of liberty is now partly solved: if he does not believe in the coincidence of the desire for status and *negative* liberty, he still speaks, at times, of the satisfaction of the need to belong as one means of human emancipation. It was anticipated that this form of liberty could be what Berlin calls

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[16] See chapter 3 part 1 for more details.

positive liberty; and even though Berlin himself is not always straightforward about it, several indications point in this direction. Firstly, in his attempt to differentiate positive from negative liberty, Berlin refers to a series of questions that cover the essence of each type of liberty. Since positive liberty is concerned with the *origin* and *basis* of the government of individuals, it is guided by questions such as 'Who governs me?'. Several interrogations of the same nature follow: 'For the "positive" sense of liberty comes to light if we try to answer the question, not "What am I free to do or be?", but "By whom am I ruled?" or "Who is to say what I am and what I am not, to be or do?"' (L, pp. 177-8). These questions have to be compared with 'nationalist' questions, as Berlin refers to when explaining to Gardels, in 'Two concepts of nationalism', the reasons behind the oppression of nations: 'people tire of being spat upon, ordered about by a superior nation, a superior class, or a superior anyone. Sooner or later, they ask the nationalist questions: *"Why do we have to obey them?" "What right have they...?" "What about us?" "Why can't we...?"'* (1991, p. 20, emphasis added). These questions are very similar to the previous ones, because they deal with the *source* of power and its legitimacy. The proximity appears even more clearly when Berlin argues that

> This wish to assert the 'personality' of my class, or group, or nation, is connected both with the answer to the question 'What is to be the area of authority?' (for the group must not be interfered with by outside masters), and, *even more closely, with the answer to the question 'Who is to govern us?'* – govern well or badly, liberally or oppressively, but above all 'Who?' (L, p. 206, emphasis added)

Thus, the craving for a recognised national identity and positive liberty are first of all connected in the sense that they are driven by the same demands.

Secondly, they appear very close to one another to the extent that both are constitutive of each person's *identity*. It has already been noted that, for Berlin, the need to belong is essential for the satisfaction of human beings on the ground that it helps them fulfil their

'desire to be 'somebody in the world' (POI, p. 196). Such recognition is an important stage, on Berlin's view, in the process that makes an individual an autonomous being, in the Kantian sense of the term. When he talks about the inner *self* and its elaboration, Berlin implies that self-government is a condition towards its fulfilment: 'the craving for status is, in certain respects, very close to the *desire to be an independent agent'* (L, p. 205). Berlin applies this dimension of being one's own master in almost exactly similar terms to positive liberty:

> The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to *be his own master*. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind... I wish, above all, to *be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being,* bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by reference to my own ideas and purposes (L, p. 178, emphasis added)

It can, then, be deduced that positive liberty, which accommodates issues related to the making of an independent agent, almost certainly includes, for Berlin, the satisfaction of one's national consciousness. Peter Watson has observed this: 'positive freedom', he writes, 'concerns all those issues that centre around the desire of the individual "to be his own master". This concept therefore involves issues of government, of reason, of social identity (*race, tribe,* church) of genuine autonomy' (2002, p. 27, emphasis added).

The third and last instance of coincidence between positive liberty and the search for national status is to be found in the *implications of the non-recognition* of both of these rights. Their absence, in short, cannot sustain human identity, properly conceived. The consequences of the absence of national recognition are, on Berlin's view, as follows:

> For if I am not so recognised, then I may fail to recognise, I may doubt, my own claim to be a fully independent being. For what I am is, in a large part, determined by what I feel and think; and what I feel and think is determined by the feeling and thought prevailing in the society to which I belong (L, p. 203)

This dimension in Berlin's thinking has not always been given the place it deserves, but it is a fundamental element if one aims to understand what constitutes a *full* human being for Berlin. National consciousness is not only a complementary element contributing to the well being of individuals, it is as crucial as other elements, such as negative liberty. Berlin insists, further, as noted by Gray, that the 'individual well-being is impoverished to the extent that [his cultural forms] are in disrepair' (1995, p. 101). Berlin illustrates this with the case of Jewish identity: 'to be cut off from one's familiar environment is to be condemned to wither', he writes about the situation of Jews prior the creation of the state of Israel (PI, p. 258). The symptoms described above are very much similar to those encountered when men suffer from a lack of positive liberty, since they are prevented from showing *who* they are through personal actions and choices. Positive liberty is concerned with setting a *goal* to an individual once he is given an area of action. It therefore contributes to the full realisation of his identity. The coincidence of positive liberty and the craving for national identity has become clearer, even whilst Berlin almost inevitably fails to state it explicitly. The exception is a singular occurrence, which lends final substance to our claim:

> Provided the answer to 'Who shall govern me?' is somebody or something which I can represent as *'my own'*, as something which belongs to me, or to whom I belong, I can, by using words which convey fraternity and solidarity, as well as some part of the connotation of the *'positive' sense of the word 'freedom'*... describe it as an hybrid form of freedom (L, p. 206, emphasis added)

The only remaining issue is to unearth whether, on Berlin's view, positive liberty is as fundamental for one's personal identity as the sense of belonging. The challenge is all the more interesting, as many critics have argued that Berlin was, by and large, a defender of *negative* liberty, who did not give adequate importance to *positive* liberty. As noted in the previous chapter, Berlin never denies that positive liberty is as important, as noble and fundamental as negative liberty. We can reinforce this

statement, at this stage, by arguing, like Perry Anderson, that through his defence of national identity, he champions once again positive liberty:

> National sentiment, indeed, is the point of turbulence in which the clear-cut oppositions of negative and positive freedom buckle and dissolve... At one moment not to be confused with either kind of liberty, at another representing a hybrid form of freedom with elements of both, national self-determination visibly undermines the stability of their meanings. If anything, *it tends to rehabilitate the positive sense put under suspicion* (1992, pp. 248-9, emphasis added)

Galipeau reaches the same conclusion when observing that Berlin does not consider individual liberty to be the sole end of good government. He is concerned that other admirable ends be satisfied, especially a sense of belonging to a culture, speaking a particular language, being tied to a people by common bond, etc. According to Galipeau, this places Berlin halfway between the communitarian and the liberal stand, given that he is 'advocating a mixture of negative and positive liberty, individualism and communal affiliation, individual liberty and collective self-determination' (1994, pp. 150-2).

2.3 Limits of Liberal Nationalism: Incompatibility of Values

So far, it has been shown that Berlin's particular evaluation of national identity is compatible with one form of liberty (positive liberty), which ought to be respected as much as negative liberty. If Berlin's respect for both types of liberty is representative of a form of liberal philosophy, it appears that liberalism can be considered not only as a set of principles orientated towards a defence of the integrity of individuals (against community claims), but also as a set of principles insistent upon the rights of individuals to be members of recognised groups. Thus, Joan Cocks' argument whereby Berlin endorses *illiberal* positions (the need to belong, the refusal of cosmopolitanism, etc.) is clearly open to contest. As Holmes emphasises, many liberals have always been prepared to recognise that individuals are situated beings, and that therefore the

community they belong to matters as much as their rights as individuals (1994, pp. 601-2). Yet this does not entail that Berlin was a 'liberal nationalist', who naively believed in the harmonious compatibility between liberal individualism and national groups rights. Things are more complex and subtle. In the following section, it will be argued that Berlin, when he accentuates the inevitable collision of values, implicitly articulates the perspective that national feelings and personal desires can be irreconcilable and that the choice of one will entail the sacrifice of the other.

2.3.1   The conflicts facing national claims

Berlin always renders it unambiguous that there is no such thing as a perfect philosophical system in which all principles are compatible and unified towards an all-inclusive goal. As seen in the previous chapters, his *œuvre* is dedicated to an acute denunciation of supporters of this type of system, whether they do so in the name of God, science, or History. It is now well known that on his view, some values do not necessarily dovetail with others, in particular elements that constitute liberty: claims for positive and negative liberty, although both just and acceptable, cannot always be combined. This entails that human beings have to make choices between these absolute claims. This unavoidable conflict between acceptable values should be applied to nationalist claims. Two implications logically follow. Firstly, and as observed by Gray, demands from one national group may be incompatible with those of another group (1995, p. 101). Secondly, and more importantly for us, the conflict between positive and negative liberty implies a conflict between negative liberty and the search for national status. My desire to belong to a group of people who understand me may, for instance, prevail over my desire to be self-governed: I thereby submit to the structures of authority of this group, although they may be very constraining. The sense of fulfilment

of my identity that I thenceforth gain, may be, for other members of my group, a small achievement compared to the sacrifice of other principles. Galipeau concludes that 'such conflict is not surprising, for only simplistic and doctrinaire political thought avoids altogether intricacy and entanglements' (1994, pp. 152-3).

Given that Berlin stresses these unavoidable tensions, it cannot be said that he was a liberal nationalist. Consequently, Cocks is right to think that the liberal principle supported by Berlin cannot always be combined to the national principle. Yet she is wrong to argue that it emphasises an internal tension in Berlin's thinking: not only is Berlin aware of the tensions, but these tensions are also at the heart of his work, through his affirmation of value-pluralism.

2.3.2 Antagonistic interpretations of Berlin's position on nationalism

A remaining issue is to establish whether Berlin believes that the search for status, conflicts at *all* times and on *all* occasions with other values, or whether there is a chance that their opposition does not always result in a tragic choice, but instead in a low and thus affordable cost. The boundary between the two lies in the *absoluteness* of the claims that are made. Mark Lilla explains it very clearly, taking different national claims as the example of conflicting values:

> There are at least two ways of thinking about nationalism that I think he held. One is to treat it as a fact of life. It's a fact that people have these attachments, either because we're built that way or because of accidents of history... this view is consistent with a certain liberalism. But there's another argument for nationalism which Berlin also makes... and that is the argument that the good life is a life with those attachments. And it's something not only that we have to cope with but that we need to cultivate and perpetuate, because liberalism, or modernity perhaps, threatens it. Now if Berlin's position really is that national attachment is just a fact of life that we have to cope with, then it seems to me that it doesn't need strong views about the perpetuation of that fact... On the other hand, if to live a good live is to have these attachments, then it seems to me he has to make a stronger case for perpetuating these ties, in which case he might ultimately have to sacrifice his liberalism (2001, pp. 182-3)

Which of these types of nationalism is Berlin thinking of? Lilla exhibits some uncertainty, because Berlin's position is not always clear. In fact, two divergent interpretations can be distinguished, one leaning towards Lilla's definition of nationalism as a 'fact of life', largely compatible with liberalism, the other leaning towards the second interpretation.

Firstly, and as seen previously, Berlin distinguishes between national consciousness – a perfectly acceptable claim – and nationalism, which he condemns. On this view, Berlin seems to endorse Lilla's first type of nationalism. It is true that Berlin's personal contact with national claims is not as radical as that posited by contemporary communitarian thinkers, because he rejects, as noted by Gray, their idea of the 'radically situated self' and offers instead a 'modern culture' where 'plural allegiances' and the conflicts they may raise are part of human identity (1995, p. 102). The life of Berlin is itself acutely representative of this possibility to appease or even avoid crisis of identity, even when one is Jewish, as described in the previous section. Berlin, following Koestler, believes that all Jews from 1948 onwards, had the opportunity to choose to be either 'nothing but Jews' – in which case they would emigrate to Israel – or to remain citizens of the country in which they resided if they did not 'wish to be Jews in the full sense' (POI, p. 177). In any case, Berlin affirms, the decision, as such, has become a personal one, not dependent upon the wishes of others: 'it is now a purely individual problem which each Jew is free to solve as he chooses, and for which he bears responsibility not as member of a nation but as an individual human being' (POI, p. 179).

Such aspects seem to demonstrate that Berlin finds, in his own life but also in most practical cases, a solution to the collisions between the desire to belong to a nation and the preservation of negative liberty. Galipeau presents Berlin's position as very close to

this 'mild' nationalism. Galipeau observes that Berlin's 'nationalism thus is tempered by a liberal sense of the just limits of authority. Inasmuch as he is a communitarian, he is so only up to the point that communal sentiments begin to justify the repression of individuals, minorities, or worse, pogroms and holocausts' (1994, p. 159). The dilemma presented by Berlin under the motto 'ends collide' could thus be solved, not in theory, but in practice, in a case-by-case study. Yet, Galipeau himself admits that 'the tragedy of many nations is that their political constitutions and political cultures may be insufficiently flexible to easily accommodate the values of both liberty and belonging' (1994, p. 164). This is a sign of irresolution of Berlin himself, who cannot bring himself to say that, if one fully agrees with the striving for the recognition of national claims, then one is forced to acknowledge that negative liberty is endangered.

In this last paragraph, I would like to present a more pessimistic, or even tragic interpretation of Berlin's theory whereby values, amongst which the 'need to belong', are irreconcilable. I wish to argue that this interpretation has my favour, because it fits very much with the conclusions drawn in the previous three chapters. Berlin's melancholic and dispirited character is most visible in his writings on nationhood, but also in his own life, since he admitted that he felt like an uprooted Russian Jew in Britain, as shown in the previous section.[17] Furthermore, Berlin himself insists, at times, that the price to pay for trade-offs between opposite claims is very high indeed, and that painful choices are an inevitable result (CTH, p. 191). Thus, what makes Berlin's liberalism so original is the insistence on the tragic dimension of loss:

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[17] On this point, Tamir (in Margalit [ed.], 1991, p. 146) explains that Berlin said to her once: 'I know that I am still a Russian Jew from Riga, and all my years in England cannot change this. I love England, it has become my home, I have been very well treated here and I cherish many features of English life, but I am a Russian Jew; that is how I was born and that is who I will be to the end of my life.'

> The universe is not a jigsaw puzzle, of which we try to piece together the fragments, in the knowledge that one pattern exists, and one alone, in which they must all fit. We are faced with conflicting values; the dogma that they must somehow, somewhere be reconcilable is a mere pious hope; experience shows that it is false. We must choose, and in choosing one thing lose another, irretrievably perhaps (CTH, p. 201)

This deep pessimism contrasts with the spirit of hope of most liberal nationalists, especially Yael Tamir, according to whom true nationalists will accept to disregard some of their nationalist claims (in particular that of self-determination and independence) for the sake of the respect of individual rights (1993). Berlin's vision of the world is a sombre one, insofar as he thinks that 'the notion of the perfect civilization in which the ideal human being realizes his full potentialities is patently absurd: not merely difficult to formulate, or impossible to realize in practice, but incoherent and unintelligible' (quoted by Gray, 1995, pp. 98-9). His pessimism should not be perceived as intentionally gloomy: it stops us to naively believing in the high expectations of the system-builders who are prepared to sacrifice lives in the present for the sake of a supposedly perfect future. When we apply Berlin's 'mode of thinking' to national concerns, it implies that whatever the degree of commitment to national claims, some loss will occur. Conflicts internal to an individual's mind will appear, because the guarantee of a full national identity can threaten other important sides of a person's identity, or the other way around.

The example of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict helps finally illustrate Berlin's scepticism about the possibility of compromises when national claims clash. Berlin, who was a Zionist, affirmed also the legitimacy of Palestinians claims and was a fervent supporter of the Oslo process. In the last letter he wrote before his death, he nevertheless saw the reconciliation of these two peoples as deeply problematic, as he stated:

> Since neither claims [Israeli or Palestinian] can be accepted within the realms of realism or without grave injustice, it is plain that compromise, i.e. partition, is the only correct solution, along Oslo lines... Ideally, what we are looking for is a relationship of good neighbours, but given the number of bigoted, terrorist chauvinists on both sides, this is impracticable (1997)

If we come back to our previous statement about the two types of nationalisms, it emerges that Berlin refuses extreme violence – which is an abuse of the defence of positive liberty – but does not provide an alternative, since these 'bigots' and 'chauvinists' have obviously decided to promote one absolute and objective value (national sentiment) over all others. Conflicts are inherently part of the world; only their degree of sharpness and resulting sacrifice can vary. He therefore provides us with a 'view of the world... very far from cuddly – more Dostoevsky than Dickens' (Barry, 2001, p. 8). This view states the probability of the opposition between liberty and nationalism in the case of a profound attachment to *both* values, which supposes an impossibility to rank our values and give priority to one or the other. Therefore, for Berlin, the only way to avoid conflicts is try to not have too high expectations about our possibility to fulfil completely elements constitutive of our identity.

In conclusion, the interest Berlin shows in the sense of belonging to a group and the resulting national sentiment does not make him an anti-liberal, nor a nationalist. Yet he cannot be regarded as liberal nationalist, in the sense that, to him, even if both the liberal and the nationalist claims are respectable, they are also not always (or even not often) compatible. His consciousness of the irreducibility of conflicts is particularly evident in his analysis of the issues surrounding national identity, and therefore it provides a perfect illustration of what Berlin means by value pluralism. In the end, it is possible to sketch out a hypothesis, already noted by Perry Anderson, whereby Berlin's sense of conflict derives from his awareness of the conflicts between national claims:

The attractive force of national identity, the tug of belonging about which Berlin has written so acutely... may also provide another clue to the specific character of his pluralism, its liveliness and its limits. For the universe of nationalism is by nature always a dialectic of the other and the same... The structure of Berlin's pluralism has an affinity with this formal scheme. Values, like nations, are diverse; conflicts between them are inevitable; but in the end nations, like values, share a common discursive universe (1992, p. 249)

3. ARON AND NATIONAL CLAIMS IN THE POLITICAL REALM

Raymond Aron's work on the nationhood has elicited less attention than that of Berlin. The origins of such neglect are, I think, three-fold. Firstly, Aron's writings on the topic do not constitute the central part of his reflections. As Simon-Nahum observes of Aron's publications on the Jewish 'nation' (a fragment that could be extended to all his writings on claims of group recognition), they 'occupy a relatively limited place in a considerable œuvre' (in ECJ, p. 7). Secondly, his positions on these matters are not presented in a systematic way, but are to be found dispersed throughout his work. As a journalist, he commented on foreign affairs, such as the wars of decolonisation (Algeria, Indochina), the creation of Israel and the conflicts that followed; as an academic, he offered more conceptual and general, but still disseminated reflections. Finally, it indicates that Aron, in common with many other liberals of his time, thought that the primary concerns lay elsewhere; for instance, in the necessity of dealing with the totalitarian threat and of defending liberty understood in its negative sense.

Does this entail that Aron's views do not warrant consideration when examining national claims? Although Aron's writings on nationalism may not be of intrinsic use for scholars of nationalism, their close examination remains valuable, to us, for three main reasons. First of all, because no systematic study of this part of his work has previously been undertaken: commentators have either concentrated on his theoretical views, or on his analysis of foreign affairs, but have declined to combine them. By embarking on this task, I hope to provide an original and methodical account of Aron's

positions. Secondly, the study will contribute to the achievement of a central objective of the thesis. This is to evaluate the core aspects of liberal political thought, of which – as seen already with Berlin – the relationship between national identity and liberty can be included. And precisely the last point is that it helps highlight the differences between Aron and Berlin's reactions towards nationalism, and therefore recreate a dialogue between the two thinkers. It can be imagined that Aron would have disapproved of Berlin's position, and one aim of this section will be to try to 'reconstruct' grounds for Aron's criticism of Berlin. There are to be found at two levels. At the theoretical level, Aron is far more reluctant than Berlin to justify *philosophically* minority and national rights (3.1). At a more practical level, Aron refuses the exclusive recourse to moral stances to defend or oppose claims issuing from nationalist movements (3.2). On the contrary, he insists that other dimensions be taken into account. This leads Aron to proceed on a much broader level than that of the individual's mind (favoured by Berlin); namely, that of the national and international contexts. Aron thus shows his concern for political responsibility, whilst Berlin remains at the abstract level of ideas.

3.1 Aron's moderate support for national claims: a deliberate lack of theorisation

Unlike Isaiah Berlin, Raymond Aron does not offer an extensive and comprehensive theory of national and minority rights. This is not a sign of his disinterest, but rather of his reluctance to countenance ready-made and clear-cut answers to these issues.

3.1.1   National claims as claims for self-government

When dealing with cases of demands for national independence or at least recognition, Aron, most of the time, is inclined to recognise the legitimacy of such demands. Despite

his deliberate silence as to what justifies them, the theoretical framework behind his position can be identified as the classically liberal defence of the rights to self-determination. Such theory was elaborated at the turn of the nineteenth century with thinkers such as J.S. Mill and Michelet, and given shape in the twentieth century by the Wilsonian theory. Such an affinity is rarely explicitly stated, but the reading of Aron's work leaves this general impression, which several clues reinforce. For instance, Missika interprets Aron's solidarity towards the Jewish population in Germany in the 1930s not as a sign of his support for fellow Jews, but as an 'attachment to the values of liberty and justice of a man who felt closed to other men who suffer from arbitrary decisions and barbarism' (in HP, p. 189). The notion of arbitrariness and barbarism belong to the vocabulary of the Enlightenment tradition, which fought against oppression of all sorts, and in the name of equal and just treatment of all members of the community. His support for the Jewish state of Israel was partly based on similar terms, as his comments following the Seven-Day War of 1967 exemplifies. Targeted for his support for Israel, which was seen as the aggressor by the press and a number of prominent politicians, among whom was De Gaulle, Aron demonstrates that the aim of the Arab countries surrounding Israel is to obliterate it from the map. This he calls an 'Etatcide'; literally, the killing of a state. This neologism is extremely powerful, especially when placed next to the highly connoted term with the same root: genocide.

> Depuis New Delhi jusqu'à la Havane, tous se déclarent pro-égyptiens et anti-israéliens. Que le Président Nasser veuille ouvertement détruire un Etat membre des Nations Unies ne trouble pas la conscience délicate de Mme Nehru. « Etatcide », bien sûr, n'est pas génocide. Et les Juifs français qui ont donné leur âme à tous les révolutionnaires noirs, bruns ou jaunes, hurlent maintenant de douleur pendant que leurs amis hurlent à la mort. Je souffre comme eux, avec eux, quoi qu'ils aient fait, non parce que nous sommes devenus sionistes ou israéliens, mais parce que monte en nous un sentiment irrésistible de solidarité (ECJ, p. 106)

Aron's argument here is based on two characteristically Wilsonian principles. Firstly, the principle of legality: a state officially recognised by the international institution of

the United Nations has a right to exist, and therefore to defend itself. Secondly, solidarity with oppressed people is a duty, arising out of the Rights of Man, in the same vein as those 'revolutionaries' who fought against authoritarian regimes. Aron's reference to the 'all the revolutionaries, whether black, brown or yellow' is rather sibylline, but is to be understood in the same way as the reference to his absence of Zionist commitment. Aron deliberately wants to go beyond particular cases and appeal to universal grounds, such as the right to self-determination, and the duty of other nations to come to the aid of those whose right is put at risk.[18]

The examples above provide mere 'hints' of Aron's espousal of the typically 'liberal' stand (in the Wilsonian sense) with regards to national claims. Clearer accounts of his views are extremely rare, but one can be found in his critical assessment of Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty*. In this essay, Aron suggests that Hayek's definition of liberty as 'non-interference' neglects 'other meanings of liberty', amongst which he cites the 'independence of a population governed by men of the same race or nationality' (EP, p. 196). By this he evidently means the right to self-determination. Aron elaborates a little further, explaining for instance that 'it is normal and reasonable that people do not feel free, even if, in times of peace, laws leave them a sphere of personal decision, because they do not belong to the political unit of their choice, of their race or language' (EP, p. 196). Aron here departs from a current of Cold War liberal philosophy (which includes Hayek), which refuses to consider the communitarian dimension of the individual as fundamentally constitutive of his or her identity. Aron is here closer to Berlin's positions than Hayek's. Nevertheless, Aron remains unclear about how this is connected to the concept of liberty, and about whether

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[18] Similar clues can also be detected in his writings about the Algerian war. Aron insists, as Granjon remarks, that the France would be hypocrite if she 'was to deny to Algerians the liberal and democratic principles that she had taught them, starting with the right of people to self-determination' (1991, p. 125).

the struggle for self-determination is a central and indispensable feature of liberty. Consequently, there is a danger here of over-interpreting these few comments and turning them into an elaborate defence of the 'need to belong' that is similar to that of Berlin. In fact, Aron sympathises with demands for minority rights, but does not attribute to them the same power as Berlin does.

A major point of departure between Aron and Berlin is situated in the definition each attributes to national bonds and national attachment. It has already been observed that Berlin emphasises the *unique* essence of national bonds, which has no equivalent in human experience. He also asserts, following the Romantic movement, the *naturalness* of these bonds, thus implying that they are irreplaceable. It explains why, for instance, Berlin affirms that the Jewish people never achieved full assimilation, especially in Eastern Europe, because other associational links – political or economic – cannot compensate for the absence of recognition of national bonds. Aron does not go this far in his defence of 'national liberty'. He is not prepared, unlike Berlin, to acknowledge the *specific* nature of national bonds, and is instead happy to compare them to other types of group relationships. Claims of a national dimension are not, on Aron's mind, of an *entirely* different nature from many other claims, whether political, social or cultural. This conclusion can be drawn from an analysis of two remarks Aron makes. Firstly, he considers, in *Les Désillusions du progrès* – in which he presents the most important values that govern individuals in modern societies – that demands for recognition of one's national group do not constitute an independent value of their own, but are to be included within the more general demand for equality of status, alongside the suppression of differences of class or gender. He remarks: '[t]he same claim for equality that opposes the socio-professional stratification calls into question the

hierarchy of ethnic groups, a hierarchy the ethnic group at the bottom of which calls discrimination' (DP, p. 73). It results that, for Aron, demands for minority rights are to be treated with the same respect as demands for the equalisation of status, and do not necessitate specific measures.[19] The second relevant excerpt comes from Aron's comment on Hayek, already mentioned, and reinforces the idea that Aron does not regard national claims as being of a *specific* kind. This time, he connects them not with claims for equality, but with claims for political participation:

> Puisqu'en fait de paix et de guerre, les hommes sont toujours gouvernés par d'autres hommes, il est normal et raisonnable que les gouvernés n'aient pas le sentiment d'être libres... dès lors qu'ils n'appartiennent pas à l'unité politique de leur choix, de leur race ou de leur langue. Le même argument vaut pour la liberté définie comme la participation aux procédures par lesquelles sont choisis les gouvernants (EP, p. 208)

In other words, he regards these demands as a mere derivation of the claim to be self-governed, i.e. to choose one's leaders. The 'national' dimension turns out to be negligible since it is only one criterion, amongst many others, that individuals take into account when taking part in the political process.

3.1.2   Aron's specific approach to national claims

From this, two implications follow. Firstly, because Berlin thinks in terms of the identity of the 'self', he is led to stress what renders each individual *unique*. This, in turn, explains his recourse to a psychological insight into national sentiments. Aron's approach seeks a different target; namely, to ensure fair treatment, before the laws, of all citizens of a country, whatever their particularities. It is typical of the French approach to the idea of nationhood: individuals are to be seen mainly as 'citizens',

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[19] On another occasion, Aron writes, in the same perspective, that 'men sacrifice part of their private sphere in order to be governed by brothers of race, of language or religion, in order to *be treated as equals*, and to give themselves a country [patrie]' (EP, p. 215, emphasis added)

bearers of political, rather than cultural, identities.[20] This explains why Aron offers an

account of French Jews that contrasts with Berlin's. Aron states, of the Jewish

community in France, that it 'does not exist as such, has not organisation, cannot and

should not have one' (ECJ, p. 64). He thus highlights that what interests the Jews is not

to be singled *qua* Jews, but on the contrary *qua* citizens. To sum up, the line that

separates Aron from Berlin is more or less the line that, in more recent years, has

opposed liberals to communitarians: Aron thinks in terms of *rights*, whereas Berlin is

more eager to search the authenticity of *feelings*.

Secondly, we can now clarify Aron's comment on Hayek, who is said to 'put on one

side three other ideas frequently linked, in our epoch, to the concept of liberty' (EP, p.

196). It appears now more clearly that for Aron these three ideas (including the right to

form nation-states) are not a component of liberty itself, but are merely linked to them.

In other words, Aron is not prepared, as Berlin is, to identify minority or national rights

as *constitutive* of liberty, but merely as *derivative* of it. A passage from the same piece

on Hayek illustrates this distinction:

> Hayek insiste... sur la nécessité d'une discrimination rigoureuse entre la liberté
> (non-coercition) et d'autres notions comme autogouvernement, démocratie,
> puissance, statut. Tâchons, en effet, de ne pas confondre les concepts... Si les
> membres d'une minorité revendiquent l'égalité contre une majorité qui les traitent
> en inférieurs – l'égalité individuelle dans le cadre de la communauté existante,
> comme les nègres des Etats-Unis, ou l'égalité collective par la constitution d'une
> communauté indépendante - *cette revendication, à coup sûr légitime n'équivaut
> pas à la revendication de liberté* (EP, p. 196, emphasis added)

It is unfortunate that Aron does not expand on the reasons why the claims for self-

determination are not 'equivalent' to liberty. But we can reasonably argue that, to him,

'true' liberty is only the absence of interference, as seen in the previous chapter. This

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[20] On this see the work of Aron's daughter, Dominique Schnapper, in particular (1994) *La communauté
des citoyens, Sur l'idée moderne de nation*. Paris: Gallimard.

entails that, in the last analysis, he remains highly sympathetic to Hayek's vision of liberty (EP, p. 213).

In the end, both Berlin and Aron share the view that absence of constraint does not always cohabit in good terms with claims of national recognition. To follow Aron's words:

> In Europe, the right to self-determination may be seen as an application of the idea of liberalism. The unity of Germany and Italy called for by the liberal bourgeoisie could or might have facilitated the progress of liberal institutions. But even in Europe, the national and liberal ideas did not chime together for long. Absolutist nationalism ravaged Central and Eastern Europe... The deportations and transfers of population that the European policy of nationalities produced in the twentieth century were a shattering disavowal of the values that had inspired the liberals (*Dawn*, p. 425)

Beyond this similarity, the main distinction between the two men can be summed up as follows. On the one hand, Berlin affirms the *equal* centrality of both negative liberty and the need to belong to a nation, and does not solve the problem of the clash between them (even though, in practice, he refuses to support fanatic nationalists). On the other hand, Aron declines, *in theory*, to argue that national rights are as important as negative liberty (whilst in practice he will defend nationalist movements which are manifestly illiberal). His liberalism can therefore be classified as the more classic liberal in orientation, centred primarily on the notion of non-interference.

3.2 The 'burden of responsibility': evaluating nationalism in political terms

3.2.1 Thinking responsibly

The relative under-theorisation of the right to national self-determination and of minority rights, in the work of Aron, is deliberate. Aron is not convinced that the best demonstration, in the abstract, of the legitimacy of such claims, holds a prior importance when dealing with concrete cases. Thus, Aron would have probably

harboured disapproval with the manner with which Berlin defends national claims. While Berlin can be praised for his deep reflection on the subject – something that Aron does not engage with – the limits of his position appear when decisions have to be taken. Aron would have certainly reproached him the irresolution that results from his abstract stance. Conversely, if it leads Berlin to adopt a particular stand, Aron would have doubtlessly disliked it on the grounds that it is exclusively based on moral reflections and judgements. Aron never criticised Berlin for doing so, because he was not aware of his work. But he did so with many other French intellectuals whose stance, in common with Berlin's, focuses on the moral necessity of permitting a nation or people be 'at home' in their own territory. Aron disapproves of such attitudes, which he denounces as that of 'belles âmes', the 'beautiful souls'. He uses the term when describing his attitude during the Algerian war: 'As for moral protestations, I left that mission to the "belles âmes" since, once and for all, it is clear that I am not a "belle âme", what Hegel calls "die schöne Seelen"' (SE, p. 218). As Jeanne Hersch notices, by "belle âme" Aron means an 'attitude which consists in procuring cheap morally satisfactory solutions and the conviction that one is kind-hearted, even though one dissimulates to oneself the painful constraints of reality' (in HP, p. 170). Aron's target was mainly those Marxists or Communist 'fellow travellers', such as Sartre and Jeanson, who condemned France's brutal and imperialist behaviour. Given his anti-communism, Berlin can hardly be said to have positions identical to these thinkers, yet what I wish to emphasise here is merely their common resort to moral arguments, to the detriment of a clear analysis of the specificity of each case.

In contradistinction to this, Aron prides himself on not being a moralist. On his view, moral arguments are – with rare exceptions such as the Dreyfus Affair – disputed by opposite sides in a conflict because it is never very clear where the 'moral' voice

stands (or whether it is possible to adopt a moral stand at all). In the case of Algeria, for instance, independence has moral costs which Aron wants his readers to bear in mind. He reminds them of the potentially shattering fate of the 'pieds-noirs' (the French of Algeria), of Algerian economy after the break with France, and questions the possibility of the democratisation of institutions within the new state. Winock also remarks that 'Aron dismisses sentimental arguments and ideological presuppositions. The atrocity of the Algerian conflict does not escape him, but it is equally shared' (in HP, p. 270). In other words, what Aron distrusts in moral arguments is their lack of efficiency when it is imperative that a solution be found. It does not entail that he is amoral, or that he aims to promote the partial interests of capitalists, as some of his opponents have reproached him (in HP, p. 271). As he ironically remarks to a journalist about his position during the events in Algeria: 'to sum up, you reproach me, despite my support for Algerian independence, not to have written literary texts about the horrors of torture… But I would not have taught anyone anything if I had asserted that I dislike torture. I have never met anyone who was in favour of torture' (SE, p. 217). To Aron, denouncing torture was not of much help in defending the cause of Algerians, and this is why he chose to adopt a completely different angle of approach, based on realistic and not purely theoretical grounds.

If Berlin was entranced by the difficulty of resolving conflicts of value, Aron is driven by a completely different ambition; namely, to follow Tony Judt's words, 'the burden of responsibility' (1998). Aron was possessed by the desire to avail himself of use to those who had to take political decisions influencing the destiny of his country, or even more widely. This can seem a little surprising, given Aron's refusal to enter politics, and his dual status as academic and as journalist (two realms where questioning is normally

seen as more central than finding practical solutions). Aron recalls that his conception of his role and mission changed after his stay in Germany in 1932-33, when he was asked by an officer of the Quai d'Orsay who had called him to give his impressions about Germany: 'What would you do if you were the Cabinet minister?'[21] This became Aron's motto for the rest of his career. For him, an intellectual, whatever his position (scholar, journalist, writer, etc.) has a duty, when he comments on the political issues of his time, to think responsibly. To put it differently, even whilst an intellectual may not hold any political office, he should be of help for those who do, by presenting solutions appropriate to the obligations of statesmen. The purpose of Aron's public stand is similar to the purpose of his piece 'La tragédie algérienne': 'My essay was not a philosophical treatise destined to posterity. It was a political act' (SE, p. 200). As seen in the previous chapters, Aron finds that thinking in terms of political action is more suitable than in exclusively philosophical terms. It is one of the reasons why he cannot, in contrast to Berlin, be considered as a pure philosopher. As André Maurois remarks, 'he could be our Montesquieu if only he consented to pull away from reality' (quoted by Elster, 1983, p. 16).

But Aron was not interested in doing so; on the contrary, he found that it was his duty to place himself in the situation of the decision-makers for whom abstract ideas provided no realistic guidance to conduct. He was therefore prepared to condemn the many intellectuals of the Left who were blind to this, or even, on occasions, to political leaders who gave declarations that Aron judged to be irresponsible. The most famous example can be found in Aron's short essay 'De Gaulle, Israël et les Juifs', in which Aron vehemently criticises De Gaulle's 1967 speech when he called the Jewish people 'an elite people, self-assured and domineering.' Aron, for once, lost his detached style

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[21] Edward Shils (in Draus [ed.], 1985, p. 2) recalls the visit of Aron at the Quai d'Orsay.

to denounce an attitude which he found irresponsible not only because the speech could sound anti-Semitic, but also because De Gaulle gave the speech in his official capacity of President, thus encouraging the real Anti-Semites – Aron did not think that De Gaulle was one of them – in their positions. De Gaulle made the mistake, unforgivable for a statesman, of not foreseeing the consequences of his acts (ECJ, pp. 35-180).

In order to act responsibly, the analyst of issues of the day – especially, in our case, claims by national groups or minority – should examine them *in their entirety*. The first danger that ought to be avoided is to take sides at too early a stage in the evaluation of a conflict. Aron admits that it is impossible to be entirely neutral and above all sensibilities, as in his case when he has to deal with Israel. He writes: 'I confessed that a Jew would never be perfectly objective in the case of Israel' (ECJ, p. 67). Despite this warning, Aron himself showed an aptitude for implementing the methodological device of 'axiological neutrality', even when reflecting on Israel.[22] Firstly, because nature gifted him with what his critiques have called a 'cold heart': he always showed an aversion for sentimentality and fervour. For instance, when he was once invited to talk about the Kippur war before a Jewish audience, Aron announced that in these circumstances it was difficult not to be passionate, but that he would still try to provide a 'cold analysis' of the issues at stake, which involved addressing the 'dirty business' of diplomacy (ECJ, p. 193). He then proceeded to give a detailed analysis of the Middle East crisis in terms of strategies and political influences, in which no sign of Aron's sympathy for Israel are visible. The Algerian war is another good example. Aron asserts that his 'superiority in the case of Algeria was that [he] did not know it concretely. [He]

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[22] See chapter 1, influence of Max Weber.

had never been in Algeria', and that it was difficult for those who know Algeria too well – Camus was one of them – to even imagine an independent Algeria (SE, pp. 194-5).

Beyond the avoidance of bias and prejudice, another major dimension at work when Aron examines national claims is the combination of levels of analysis. Once again, Aron is not explicit about his method, but a *multidisciplinary approach* is a recurrent feature of both his writing and perhaps his way of thinking. Aron always had a natural curiosity for everything that was connected to the realm of politics, as illustrated by the variety of topics he studied. As a 'Normalien', he studied the humanities. In addition to this, he showed a deep interest in new disciplines such as sociology and psychology. With the Cold War his scope of study also extended to economics and international relations, understood as traditional diplomacy and warfare but also as reflections on new issues brought with the nuclear age or the European construction. This scope of interests and skills thus developed, as well as the open-mindedness that seems naturally to follow in Aron's case, are all the more important when dealing with claims of national self-determination than the latter are situated at the crossroad between all these disciplines. Moral arguments occupy only a minor place in the middle of so many other issues raised by these different levels of analysis. It constitutes a major contrast with Berlin's own approach, which neglects the other dimensions, not because Berlin did not find them relevant, but rather, as he himself acknowledges, because he remained indifferent to these disciplines, either out of laziness, lack of competence or, in the case of sociology, from a dislike of those who practiced it.

3.2.2 The cases of the Algeria and Israel

The results of Aron's commitment to responsibility can be evaluated with regards to two major crises involving nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. The first one is the

Algerian war, which lasted from 1954 to 1962, and the second the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with special reference to the Six-Day War.

Concerning the former, Aron decided early in the conflict to support the independence of the Algerians, and the termination of the French military intervention. But he never went as far as backing the violent actions of the FLN (the Front de Libération Nationale), in contrast to other French intellectuals, because he thought that this was irresponsible on their part. Intellectuals had other means, provided by a liberal-democrat system, to express their disagreement, such as protesting (ECJ, p. 264). His positions on the conflict can be found mainly in two pamphlets, the first written in 1957, 'La tragédie algérienne', and the second after the return of De Gaulle to power, entitled 'L'Algérie et la République.'[23] The arguments Aron presented to defend the Algerian revolt are rather surprising in the sense that he hardly mentions their rights as a nation, oppressed by France. As has just been explained, Aron preferred to insist on reasons that are less subject to disputes about morality. His demonstration was based on practical matters, the most important of which are economic and financial.

Aron affirmed that Algeria represents, for France, a 'financial burden'. It could have sounded surprising to some readers, insofar as colonies like Algeria were seen as a simple way to obtain raw material and to provide outlets for French products. In contrast to this, Aron argued that it cost more money to France to subsidise Algeria with modern logistics and substantial administrative resources than it gained from the exploitation of raw material. Aron also insisted on military and police costs, which, he thought, would not cease if the war were temporarily won, because the causes for rebellion would not have disappeared. It is not our purpose here to enter into too much

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[23] It is notable that Aron was not allowed to articulate his positions in his regular columns in *Le Figaro*. Pierre Brisson, its director, was aware that the readership of *Le Figaro*, in majority opposed to the independence, would not appreciate Aron's views.

detail about these arguments, but it ought to be noted that Aron did enter into such details, and provided data and statistics in support for his claims. He did so too when demonstrating that the demographic attitudes of France and Algeria were too different to be part of the same state. The high natality rate in Algeria would have institutional consequences that the 'métropole' was probably not ready to accept: if Algerians were awarded the right to take part in the political debates of France, then they would have to be given a proportional number of representative seats in Parliament and other institutions, implying an ever increasing ratio in the years to come. Aron is not condemning this, but fears that this could destabilise the French political system. The destabilisation would also be caused, in Aron's view, by many other problems, which he summarises as follows: 'whether it is a question of industry, education, or social legislation, Algeria *must* have a different regime from that of France' (*Dawn*, p. 440).

What is striking, in Aron's presentation, is that he cares at least as much for the fate of his own nation as for that of Algerians when highlighting the inadequacy of their union. It becomes even more obvious when he says that the Algerian war should be abandoned because it jeopardises the status and influence (he uses the French word 'rayonnement') of France in the world. Aron's patriotism can provide part of the explanation for such a choice of arguments; but a more important one can be situated in Aron's desire to address a certain public – to convince the most patriotic, or even nationalist, supporters of a French Algeria, anxious about the 'grandeur' of France if she is to lose her colonies. Aron affirms that he adapted his argument deliberately for these people:

> Or, la raison pour laquelle j'ai présenté le problème de cette manière, c'est que, à mon sens, il s'agissait de convaincre ceux qui étaient de droite, et qui, eux, n'étaient pas sensibles à la condamnation morale de la colonisation. Il fallait leur démontrer que ni pour l'économie ni pour la prospérité, l'Algérie n'était nécessaire à la France (SE, p. 197)

This is the mark of Aron's intuition that the whole French nation needs to be convinced by the benefits of the independence of Algeria, and should not become divided over this issue. This attitude is typical of that of a statesman, obliged to think beyond particular interests and visions, and legislate 'responsibly' on the best route to take. Thus the necessity to have in mind economic, demographic, institutional or other types of issues connected to the major problem analysed.

In the case of Israel, its creation as a State and its conflict with its Arab neighbours, the major issues at stake are of a different nature: more strategic and diplomatic. Before examining them, a preliminary remark is essential: Aron was not as committed to the defence of Israel as he was with Algeria. In contrast to Berlin, Aron was never a Zionist, and refrained from anything approaching unrestrained enthusiasm following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. To him, it meant mainly 'a new source of conflict and instability in the Middle-East' (Missika, in HP, p. 190). The Berlinian line whereby Jews need a home in Israel to be themselves is therefore absent from Aron's discourse. Despite this moderation, Aron took the Israeli side in the conflicts against its Arab neighbours. The geo-strategic dimension of the conflict constitutes Aron's first argument in defence of Israeli's preventive attack of 1967. It is its only way to survive when surrounded by enemies bigger than itself:

> Les Arabes peuvent perdre des batailles et des batailles pour finalement gagner la guerre (ils disposent du temps, de l'espace et du nombre), Israël perdrait la guerre et la vie s'il perdait une seule bataille. David, une troisième fois, abattit Goliath mais demeure David, momentanément supérieur par ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui intelligence (ECJ, p. 62)

Aron departs from the commentators who saw Israel as the aggressor in this conflict. For him it was mere self-defence. Berlin probably approved of the position presented by Aron, because it implies that the core objective is the survival of the newly created state.

Thus far, Aron's views are not so different from Berlin's. Yet they become so when Aron resorts to a larger scale than the Middle East, namely, the division of the world provoked by the Cold War. In Aron's eyes, the crucial issue has not much to do with the right to national self-determination of the Jews and the Palestinians, but rather with the necessity of containing the influence of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Aron should be considered more as a warrior of the free world against Communism than a defender of Jewish interests. Aron emphasises that, while Israel has been given the support of the United States, and more generally of the Western camp, the USSR had subsidised Egypt with arms and new technologies, in an attempt to extend its power. To him, it is clear that the American-Israeli coalition should be supported, and not destabilised, as De Gaulle did when condemning the Israeli attack of June 1967. And Aron sharply criticises De Gaulle's behaviour, which, 'does not help maintain an equilibrium of powers' in the Mediterranean, nor promote a "progressive appeasement" of the conflict' (ECJ, p. 72). This level of analysis is not present in Berlin's work, despite his anti-Communism. Not that the Englishman would not agree with it, but he was not interested in the balance of power of the international system.

CONCLUSION:

To conclude this chapter, the differences and similarities of Aron and Berlin's approaches should be summarised and reflected upon. Despite a common Jewish background which made them both aware of the reality of national sentiments, the two thinkers were influenced in a radically opposite manner by their 'national' characters. Following, perhaps unconsciously, the French 'a-cultural' model of citizenship, Aron remains unconvinced by the priority of nationalists' claims, especially if they endanger the individual liberty of the members of the nation in question. He thus adopts a rational

vision of national claims, based on choice. On the contrary, Berlin's sense of empathy towards the uprooted leads him to affirm the centrality of the need to have a 'home', a nation, even if, at times, it may be to the detriment of negative liberty.

Aron is as aware as Berlin of the frequent collision between national values and negative liberty, and both believe that it can only be resolved with a case-by-case analysis. They nevertheless adopt dissimilar methods of study. Berlin focuses mainly on the psychological drama encountered by individuals when they are denied recognition of their nationality, a method at odds with Aron's approach, which deliberately avoids the moral dimension of the problem. It is not that he would not share Berlin's moral arguments, but he declares that they do not foster a peaceful resolution of conflicts, insofar as people hardly agree on the definition of morality. Aron offers analyses that bear the advantage of presenting solutions applicable in practice by decision-makers, whereas Berlin's reflection misses the level of practical politics. Yet, Aron's position also neglects an important element, because he tends to never give priority to the right to self-determination, compared to other economic or diplomatic issues. This raises an important question, which shows the limits of Aron's 'responsible' stand: what would Aron have done if he could not have proven that France was better off without Algeria, for economic, diplomatic or demographic reasons? What if Israel happened to have opposed the United States? In these cases, Aron would probably be more timid that Berlin, because it would imply to take a purely moral posture that the latter enjoys more than the former. All these differences between Aron and Berlin are at one with those highlighted in the previous chapters, since Aron's 'mode of thinking' appears, once again, as deeply political, turned towards practice and rather self-assured, whilst Berlin's reflects his tormented mind *vis-à-vis* the impossibility to resolve conflicts between or amongst national claims.

But in the final analysis, the two would probably agree in denouncing nationalist movements if they are too extremist or ideological, on similar liberal grounds. Both remain in the line of the classical Wilsonian liberalism. They simply diverge in their tendency to incline, for Aron, towards the Republican side that prefers the universal criteria of choice to that of cultural particularity, and for Berlin, towards the Romantic side which places the community and its customs higher than the personal will of its members.

CONCLUSION

At the final stage of our comparative analysis of the work of Raymond Aron and Isaiah Berlin, it is important to revisit the central tasks set out for this study. Our objectives were three-fold: firstly, to throw new light on the work of both thinkers, through the recreation of a dialogue between them on four major topics; secondly, to make a new contribution to the understanding of liberal thinking; and finally, to clarify the meaning, and to draw a distinction, of liberal 'modes of thinking' through the cases of Aron and Berlin, by verifying an hypothesis stated in the introduction. If these tasks have been accomplished in the course of the thesis, a synthesis of our major conclusions is now necessary, in order to highlight the most original elements of our findings, and in particular our construction of an opposition of two liberal *temperaments*. We will proceed as follows. To begin with, a summary of what Aron and Berlin have in common will be undertaken, which will result in an emphasis on what makes their liberal stand so special when compared to other forms of liberalism. We will then turn to an examination of the major differences, if not oppositions, between the two thinkers. Lastly, elucidation of their respective 'modes of thinking' will lead us to confirm our initial hypothesis, and to expand on what renders them so unique, despite their agreement on a core minimum of liberal principles.

1. A COMMON SUPPORT FOR A 'LIBERALISM OF HUMILITY'

Our attempt, in this conclusion, to elucidate a major point of departure between Aron and Berlin – by drawing an opposition in their modes of thinking – should not deceive us: the two men resemble each other much more than they diverge from one another.

Far from being antagonistic to one another, they belong to the same strand of thinking, and more generally to the group of Cold War intellectuals who opposed the communist temptation. Furthermore, one can even say that their liberalisms are two of a kind if compared to those of other liberal theorists of their time, or even to the currently dominant form of liberalism. A quick reminder of what unites them in their understanding of the four subjects treated will help us capture this common specificity of their positions, which will be described – following Kenny – as a 'liberalism of humility' (2000, p. 1034).

1.1 Agreement on core principles

To start with, the opening chapter demonstrated that the thought of Aron and Berlin, and consequently their liberalism, is grounded in detailed reflection upon the role and the meaning of history. Both realised early in their careers how central were epistemological and methodological questions to the examination of the past, and more generally to all human sciences. Concerning the most appropriate method of historical inquiry, Aron and Berlin concur in their rejection of the positivist approach to history. On their views, the human sciences cannot adopt similar tools of analysis as the 'hard' sciences, a position derived from German philosophy of history. They therefore emphasise the limits of objectivity in history, a conclusion that, far from dissatisfying them, satisfies their ambitions to prove that the historian is partly free *vis-à-vis* his object of study. The specificity of the 'object' of historical inquiry, namely men and societies, also leads them to reject the possibility of uncovering irrevocable and unchanging laws in history. Drawing on Weber's notion of 'understanding', they argue that individuals are not driven exclusively by causal processes exterior to them and, consequently, that determinism in history is an illusion. Aron and Berlin's insistence on

the *unpredictability* of the future can be seen as liberal in the sense that they allow individuals to at least partly determine their destiny. Nevertheless, neither Aron nor Berlin goes as far as to endorse a Nietzschean or Spenglerian decisionism. Aron's famous quote that 'history is the tragedy of a humanity which makes its history, yet does not know which history it is making' echoes Berlin's, borrowed from Herzen, that 'history has no libretto' (1959, pp. 31-2). To put it simply, the main lesson to be inferred from Aron and Berlin's philosophy of history is that men are free to choose their history. This conclusion remains at the heart of their understanding of liberty, and of liberal society. Such a position is rather unique for their time, and is a way of grounding liberalism which is not evident in the main current of recent political philosophy.

With regard to our second chapter, it has been emphasised that Aron and Berlin are two dominant figures who denounced the threats of the totalitarian temptation at the time of the Second World War and then of the Cold War. Aron and Berlin share, in particular, a condemnation of the insidious *ideology* that drives totalitarian regimes, whether it is through the concept of 'monism' and 'utopia' for Berlin, or of 'secular religions' for Aron. They oppose the excessive confidence in the power of Reason, which conduces monists to affirm the possibility of an ultimate harmony amongst values and amongst individuals. Aron and Berlin alert us to the appeal exercised by these theories, yet point to their internal inconsistency and to the impossibility of implementing them in practice. To respond to totalitarian theories, they offer a more disenchanted vision of the world, based on the fact of pluralism, which emphasises the inevitability of the collision of desires and values. Rather than building an unattainable all-embracing system, Aron and Berlin seek to lower their contemporaries' expectations, in an attempt to render them

more responsible. Though deeply embedded in their times, the analyses offered by Aron and Berlin remains of relevance today, insofar as many contemporary liberals adopt a confident style of thinking that seems, too often, to forget the necessarily shaky foundations of their philosophy.

Aron and Berlin's insistence on the freedom of men to determine their future, and their common message that would-be 'liberators' of humankind offer a utopian vision of the world which, in fact, bridles rather than fosters peoples' liberties, led us next to undertake a deeper examination of their interpretations of the concept of liberty. Despite an antagonism in the way they respectively approach the concept of liberty, both agree that liberty is a protean concept that covers several levels of understandings. In particular, they distinguish between two concepts of liberty, which Berlin calls negative and positive, and Aron formal and real. On their views, not only are negative liberties (security or non-interference) threatened by totalitarian regimes, but so too are the more 'creative' liberties that these regimes purport to defend. Yet Aron and Berlin concur that negative liberty is primarily worthy of defence, as it is a more central value than others, albeit one which they refuse to describe as an 'absolute'. Aron and Berlin not only clarify that there was a *real* difference between the two levels of liberty, but also that it is not always possible to reconcile them. Their ultimate message is that liberty, whatever the time or place, remains fragile and constantly subject to being undermined. Though this claim is deeply rooted in its time, it can be transposed to the present post Cold War era, in which the victory of liberalism is threatened not only by the revival of religious fundamentalism but also, from within, by those who would suppress some liberties in order to defend others.[1]

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[1] See Ignatieff (2004).

Our comparative study of Aron and Berlin reached its final stage in consideration of a topic for which they are less well known, namely nationhood and national claims. In this respect, it has been observed that differences between the two thinkers overweigh their similarities. Nevertheless, several common points have also been emphasised, since they help situate them within a certain current of liberalism. This current is, to put it simply, the current of those liberals who take claims for national recognition or independence seriously, yet do not embrace what Yael Tamir calls 'liberal nationalism' (1993). If such a position seems fairly usual today, it was not so in the second half of the twentieth century: many liberals such as Hayek or Popper considered national claims as futile, or even dangerous. Aron and Berlin had a more moderate approach. They were aware of the potential extremism of such demands, yet recognised also their legitimacy (even though justifying them on different grounds). National claims belong to the *framework* of principles that liberals ought to defend, but like others they may enter into collision with important values. Once again, Aron and Berlin emphasise, the fulfilment of our desires as individuals and also as members of communities is no easy task, which the simplistic discourses of most nationalist movements do not grasp, and therefore cannot overcome.

1.2 A responsible scepticism

These four topics, treated separately, serve to generate a sense of a more general commonality of values between Aron and Berlin. Not only are they linked by a common defence of liberal principles, but it can even be argued that it is a distinct *type* of liberalism that unites them. This is a type of liberalism which differs both from liberalism of more recent date – which derives from a more juridical or analytical

perspective, in the style of Rawls – and from the liberalism of their nineteenth-century predecessors such as J.S Mill.[2] What is missing in those accounts – the first, because liberalism is to some extent informed by the triumphalism that attended the end of the Cold War; the second, because they preceded the totalitarian experience – is a sense of the frailty of the foundations of liberalism. Aron and Berlin extend their misgivings toward the monistic system-builders, whether Nazi or communist, to their own family of thought. Brian Anderson rightly points to this common feature when observing that Aron's 'acknowledgement of the condition of political scarcity might be compared fruitfully with the notion of the incommensurability of values associated with the philosopher Isaiah Berlin' (1997, p. 8). Their awareness of the internal tensions within the liberal creed, and of the impossibility of arriving at a harmonious liberal philosophy, is a fact that is rarely stated in most liberal writings. This comes, I believe, at least partly from the circumstances in which Aron and Berlin wrote. The twentieth century was the century in which utopias took the shape of its worst evils, but also the time in which millions of people were attracted by these utopias. Aron and Berlin chose to tackle the challenge of totalitarianism directly, by studying the 'enemy' at its source: Berlin through the close reading of anti-liberal currents in political thought, Aron by adding a sociological study of Soviet Society. Their attention to the 'enemy' explains why we can call their liberalism a 'liberalism of defence' or 'of reaction', which differentiates them from the liberal currents stated above, but not from liberals such as Arendt, Popper, and perhaps Camus. But it is also a 'liberalism of fear', in Judith Shklar's words, since it asserts that the goals of liberal institutions are primarily negative, and consists in avoiding the worst outcomes, rather than seeking perfection (1989). Aron and Berlin's limited ambitions make them sceptics, a term to which, as

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[2] Though this is perhaps not true of Tocqueville, who was deeply affected by the experience of the French

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already noted, they do not object. Indeed, on their view it signals their desire to carry what Tony Judt calls the 'burden of responsibility' (1998). In seeking to lower the expectations of their contemporaries, Aron and Berlin showed a special aptitude at not closing their eyes to the realities of modern societies, in contrast with the many 'reckless minds' recently described by Lilla (2001). The attitude of the two thinkers has been articulated by Michael Kenny as a 'liberalism of humility which teaches its citizens that the achievement of any moral order necessarily involves the loss and defeat of some fundamental values' (2000, p. 1034). This element constitutes, in my view, the most important contribution that Aron and Berlin have *together* given to liberal political theory. It transcends the respective national traditions that could have influenced each of them, which reinforces our point, stated in the introduction, that the 'national explanation' has a limited impact in our study.

Beyond this shared input to their tradition of thought, the study of Aron and Berlin's work also reveals oppositions which potentially assist in uncovering differences amongst liberals, at least at the level of what we have called liberal 'minds' or 'modes of thinking'.

2. DIFFERENCES OF PERSPECTIVE BETWEEN ARON AND BERLIN

The differences between Aron and Berlin's styles of writing, was initially drawn attention to in the introduction to this thesis, and was the starting point for a more substantial examination of what separates the two thinkers. A quick reminder of the divergences specific to each subject of inquiry will firstly be offered, and prior to an attempt to draw more general conclusions concerning what separates them.

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revolution, which made him aware of the frailty of liberal ideals.

2.1 The philosophy of action vs. the logic of reflection

In the course of our four chapters, the opposition between Aron and Berlin has become increasingly evident. If the similarities outweigh the differences in the subject of the first chapter, the converse is true in the final chapter. Yet some disparities are already noticeable from the outset.

In our examination of Aron and Berlin's accounts of the philosophy of history, a two-fold opposition has been highlighted, which corresponds with the two meanings to be inferred from the term 'philosophy of history' itself; namely, as the questioning of the methods most suitable to the analysis of the past, and as the project of disclosing laws governing the destiny of humanity. Their reading of German philosophy takes them in two separate directions. Aron, following Weber's plea for a more neutral study of the human sciences (independent – especially – from political pressures) is eager to combine the method of understanding with a dimension of causal explanation closer to the 'hard sciences'. He does so when elaborating his notion of 'probabilism', which helps form more general and objective statements. On the contrary, Berlin dismisses all attempts at explanation and generalisation, in favour of an insight into the personal character of people of the past, an insight borrowed from Vico. Berlin treats history more like an art than a science. Albeit a common deduction that there is no determinism in history, Berlin insists that historical inquiry is a source for philosophical reflection and psychological observation on the irreducible conflicts between moral values. On the contrary, Aron stresses the connection between freedom in history and the possibility of an effective commitment to political action in the present. Aron's temperament can therefore be described as more action-orientated than Berlin's.

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With regards to their treatment of totalitarianism, other differences have been highlighted, which lead to conclusions which complement those of the first chapter. Berlin, concerned with the origins of the 'monistic' way of thinking, elaborates a reading of the canon that situates the roots of utopia far back in the past (though Berlin is not always consistent about its exact period of emergence). In contrast to this, Aron's interpretation of the great texts in the history of ideas insists almost exclusively on the role of scientific socialism – and of Marx – in the rise of totalitarianisms of the Left. His short-term approach also contains a sociological analysis of industrial societies which is entirely absent in Berlin's work. The uniqueness of the phenomenon appears much more acutely in a reading of Aron rather than of Berlin. As a result, Aron's approach to totalitarianism described as being more direct than Berlin's, in the sense that Aron is concerned with the totalitarian *practices* as well as ideologies driving the main tyrannical regimes of his time, whilst Berlin centres his attention on the precepts at work in the totalitarian *mind*. If Berlin's concerns for the psychological effects of utopias prompt him to move away from the political sphere, and toward the moral sphere, Aron's perspective remains constantly political, in the sense that he strives to offer advice to decision-makers obliged to confront the threat of totalitarianism. Their opposition of attitudes has been partly explained in the fact that Aron felt duty-bound to respond to the many blows struck by the intellectuals of the Left, whose influence was considerable in France. The comparatively liberal consensus in British public life explained that Berlin, *contra* Aron, could afford to insist further on the conundrums facing anti-totalitarian as well as totalitarian ideas.

A similar distinction between Aron's sociological and Berlin's more analytical – or reflective – approach has also been noted in our third chapter, which concentrates on

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liberty and the liberal order. Whilst Aron analyses the concept of liberty with particular reference to modern societies, in the manner of Tocqueville, and gives attention to issues such as those of the Welfare State or the Marxist denunciation of 'formal' liberty, Berlin prefers a method closer to moral philosophy (with the aim in mind to answer perennial questions about freedom). This explains why, despite their relatively similar understanding of liberty, Aron is more eager than Berlin to emphasise the centrality of political liberty, i.e. participation in the public sphere, whereas Berlin adds a more psychological element. This opposition has major implications for the organisation of the liberal order. Berlin's main problem is to assess the possibility of combining negative liberty with other essential values – positive liberty included – in a world which he describes as plural. His vision of value pluralism – aside from the opposition of interpretations that it has given rise to – is revealing of his state of mind, which is fascinated (as well as distraught), by the potential irresolution of the tensions between liberalism and pluralism. In radical contrast to this, Aron is driven by a desire to find compromises, at the level of political practice, to collisions of values. Consequently, he pays attention to institutional frameworks, as well as the organisation of the economy of developed countries, with special focus on the benefits, and shortcomings, of the liberal democracies of his time.

The chapter dedicated to Aron and Berlin's views on nationhood is the one in which the antagonism between the two thinkers is the most revealing. In this regard, Berlin places great weight on demonstrating the naturalness of the feeling to 'be at home', and the necessity of realising this feeling in order to fulfil one's identity. Following Romantics such as Herder, Berlin attributes to national claims a place of importance in his theoretical framework of valuable principles. On the contrary, and despite his support

for many independence movements, Aron never offers a theoretical defence of national claims. He makes it clear that, on his view, the recognition of individual liberty deserves more emphasis than that of national communities. Berlin's position is, on the contrary, more irresolute: he is aware of the clash between these values, but refuses to come out in favour of one or the other. This major opposition, I argued, finds its main origin in Aron and Berlin's divergent ways of identifying themselves *vis-à-vis* nationhood. Even while they are both of Jewish origin, Aron's identity makes this secondary to French citizenship, whereas Berlin finds precisely in his Jewishness – and in his condition as Russian émigré, a deep sense of uprootedness. This is at one with our previous conclusion whereby Berlin was a deeply tormented mind. In opposition to this, Aron shows more assurance in the possibility of resolving conflicts concerning nations and nation-states. Following the French national tradition, Reason is his guide, and discourages him from trusting irrational feelings of national belonging.

2.2 The distinction between two liberal modes of thinking

The many differences captured in the course of the four chapters are not so much differences at the level of philosophical principles – which Aron and Berlin mostly agreed upon except perhaps with regard to their responses to nationalism. Rather, what distinguishes them is what they *do* with these principles. This can be described, as it has been in the introduction, as a distinction between Aron and Berlin's liberal 'modes of thinking'. The term 'liberal minds' can also be used, as did Collini in a piece dedicated to Berlin (1999). The above survey of the oppositions between Aron and Berlin gives an indication of the ground covered by the 'modes of thinking' with regards to four specific topics of analysis. Nevertheless, a more systematic description of the

divergences between the two thinkers will allow for a better understanding of what a mode of thinking really consists in.

A primary and recurrent opposition between Aron and Berlin is located in the angle from which they approach each subject. On the one hand, Berlin tends to situate himself at the level of the individual's mind and of the issues to which it is confronted. Michael Walzer rightly emphasises that 'the subjects of Berlin's liberalism are individual men and women engaged in the business of choosing the way they live and the things they do' (1995, p. 29). Berlin therefore privileges the knowledge of moral life. This fascination for the individual mind is central even when he examines communities such as national groups. As seen in our fourth chapter, what interests him when dealing with national claims is the possibility for the individual to experience the acutely personal feeling of 'being at home' amongst others. On the other hand, Aron is much more interested in the 'big picture'; that is, the running of entire societies and nations. This is not to say that Aron does not recognise the individual as worthy of study. On the contrary, he adopts, when studying societies, Weberian methodological individualism, as opposed to the more holistic vision of sociologists like Durkheim. Furthermore, by temperament a true liberal as himself cannot but care for the fate of individuals, especially in addressing the threat posed to the liberties of individuals, in the name of a deterministic or nationalist ideology. Yet Aron believes that, in order to guarantee individual values, a detailed study of the world in which they live is presupposed, since it assists in establishing the margin of manœuvre of human beings in their society. This explains Aron's concern to understand the specificities of modern and industrial societies, and his empirical analyses of the political and sociological spheres.

This difference entails another, to be found at the level of their writing style. Fascinated by the mechanisms at work in the human mind, Berlin seeks to enter the mind of the monist, of the Stoic or of whomever he studies. This particularity, highlighted on several occasions, places him closer to a novelist than to a scholar. In the same vein as the novelist, Berlin's work is constructed in a literary and narrative style, which gives the impression that he is telling a story to his readers. We might say that he speaks with his heart, being disposed at times to make sentimental – even poignant – comments based more on intuition than observation. For Collini, if Berlin possesses the 'manner which is the scholarly equivalent of the novelist's free indirect speech', then conversely he lacks the 'kind of close critical engagement with the details of the verbal texture of the works that one associates with a certain style of literary-critical essay' (1999, p. 197). For Collini, this explains why Berlin's work is not immediately recognised as 'scholarship'. In opposition to this, Aron's writings are highly representative of a more conventional scholarly style. Aron, in the manner of the sociologist, supplements his arguments variously with empirical illustrations, historical examples and relevant statistics. In light of this, Aron develops what Manent calls his unique 'impartiality of judgement' (2003). According to Kenny, Galipeau and Gray apply to Berlin the following description: a 'rather sober, cerebral figure' (2000, p. 1027). I wish to argue that, in fact, the two adjectives apply much more to Aron than Berlin, whose image, in the work of Galipeau and Gray, has been partly reinvented. A much more accurate description of Berlin is Barry's when he calls him a new 'Dostoyevsky' (2001). Berlin would have enjoyed the comparison with the Russian novelist, whose insights into the moral dilemmas of his characters Berlin would have been flattered to share. All this leads us to confirm a hypothesis stated in our introduction, and whereby Berlin focuses on the moral sphere, something that Aron refrains from. If Berlin can rightly be called

an 'ethical liberal', Aron's stand is not so evident (Kenny, 2000, p. 1038). Aron is no

amoral thinker, as his œuvre makes clear. But he believes that what is lacking, at his

time, is not the ability of intellectuals to defend a moral standpoint. On the contrary,

there are, on Aron's view, a plethora of them. The task he assigns himself, therefore, is

of another nature: namely, that of presenting contemporary issues in a more down-to-

earth, or even Machiavellian way. Such a position, despite its many benefits, has

already been criticised in the fourth chapter, for its excessive a-moralism with regards to

the Algerian war. The criticism can be extended to the entirety of his work, which fails

to detach itself from *Realpolitik*. This is what Mahoney means when he reproaches

Aron for remaining entrapped in his self-consciously adopted particular political

perspective which entails the command of acting as if one were the minister (1998).

The opposition of modes of thinking between Aron and Berlin can therefore be

understood as an opposition in the method with which they approach their study of

modernity (small vs. large scale), and in the angle from which they address the issues

that modern man has to face (moral vs. socio-political). Further to this, their antagonism

is also evident in the conclusions they reach about these very issues. Once again the

antagonism is not radical, given that both favour the moderation of liberalism over more

radical solutions to contemporary problems. Differences appear when comparing the

states of mind in which they adopt such stands. It is notable that a sense of irrevocable

tragedy haunts Berlin, whilst Aron is more confident. This is not to say that Aron is

unrealistically optimistic. He concludes his *Memoirs* in a manner that reveals how

deeply aware he is of the tragic character of his time:

> J'écrivis, il y a près d'un demi-siècle, que notre condition historique est
> dramatique. Faut-il dire dramatique ou tragique ? A certains égards, oui, tragique
> vaut mieux que dramatique. Tragique la nécessité de fonder la sécurité sur la
> menace de bombardements nucléaires ; tragique le choix entre l'accumulation

d'armes classiques et la menace nucléaire ; tragique la destruction de vieilles cultures par la civilisation industrielle, mais la tragédie ne serait le dernier mot que si un aboutissement heureux, par-delà les tragédies, n'était pas concevable. Je continue de juger concevable la fin heureuse, très au-delà de l'horizon politique Idée de la Raison (1983, p. 741)

For Aron, the twentieth century has proved devastating. However, as the last part of the quote illustrates, he refuses to give up hope. Despite its limits, the power of Reason is real for Aron, and provides a basis to rely on. His defence of what Brian Anderson calls 'political reason' allows him to formulate clear judgements about ideologies such as Nazism and communism, and about their corresponding regimes. Manent says of Aron that he was 'a tranquil, yet resolute and tireless "anticommunist"' (2003). His calm serenity and his determination contrast deeply with Berlin's insecurity. The literary style of the latter's writings distinctively reveals the profound melancholy and disillusion of its author. As Collini observes, Berlin's reaction to the horrors he witnessed was a 'pathos of stoicism', which presupposes that 'we are constantly exhorted to forswear much that may at first sight seem intellectually beguiling or satisfying, and instead to endure the frustrations and disappointments of finding only partial answers' (1999, p. 203). The origins of Berlin's irresolution are to be found in his assertion that values are not only plural but also incommensurable. As noted by Gray, this does not correspond to 'the Augustinian thesis that human life is imperfect, and imperfectible: it is the thesis that the very idea of perfection is incoherent' (1993, p. 65). Because we are confronted with moral ambiguity that cannot be smoothed away, we cannot but remain distressed about our future. The torment that Berlin seems personally to endure is admirably described by Gray: 'the voice we hear is one that cleaves to mortal men and women in all their unconsoled sorrow, and which refuses with a passion the mocking harmonies of any theodicy. It is Job's' (1993, p. 69).

The opposition of temperament between Aron and Berlin can also be clarified by referring to Tony Judt's expression of the 'burden of responsibility' (1998). Their common opposition to utopias makes Aron and Berlin deeply aware of this burden. Nevertheless, they have opposing attitudes as to what to do with this burden. From what has been said above, the burden of responsibility proves too much to carry for Berlin. The more he scrutinises it, the heavier the burden becomes. Our lives are therefore comparable, from a Berlinian standpoint, to that of Atlas, carrying the world upon his shoulders. The burden of responsibility appears, for Aron, somehow lighter. The task of taking the right decisions is not easy either for Aron, yet he finds ways to facilitate it, and thus to lighten the burden of the statesman. He does not elaborate grand solutions applicable to all situations, but a morality of prudence that encourages a case-by-case solution to specific problems. Consequently, the act of taking decisions does not instil him with fear, as it does for Berlin: for the latter, an irreparable loss will occur, whereas, for the former, an end will be put to uncertainties. The significance of the sense of loss in Berlin's work has been stressed by John Gray, who terms it an 'agonistic liberalism', which corresponds to a 'stoical and tragic liberalism of unavoidable conflict and irreparable loss among inherently rivalrous values' (1995, p. 1). Gray explains that he constructed the term agonistic by using the Greek word 'agon', which means, according to him, 'competition or rivalry and the conflicts of characters in tragic drama' (1995, p. 1). Though such a definition is correct, I would like to argue that it is incomplete. Gray chooses to stress the *tragic* sense of the word (which is evident in the word agony), but, for the Greeks, it also held a much more positive meaning. Indeed, 'agon' also covers a dimension of competition, which, for the Greeks, was the occasion to display one's best features, whether bravery, strength, technical abilities, or a sense of honour. Festivities such as the Isthmian and Olympic games were described as an 'agon'; courtship, the

attempt to win the heart of another, was an 'agon', as too was the spirited discussion in which each person tries her best to prove the veracity of her viewpoint.[3] It seems to me that this more positive dimension of 'agon' corresponds best to Aron's own understanding of liberal thinking. For Aron, regulating industrial societies is no simple task, yet it also proves both challenging and rewarding, because some balance amongst competing values is to be found, even if only temporary.

Finally, it becomes more evident that Berlin's liberalism is turned towards reflection, whereas Aron's is directed towards action. The moral complexity inhabiting individuals and groups of individuals seems to torment a Berlin who, naturally, feels a sense of uprooting, as discussed in the fourth chapter. He consequently finds that political commitment is impossible, because it cannot be based on any certainty. If such behaviour is remote from Aron, it can nevertheless be compared to another Frenchman, namely Camus, who, according to Bronner, 'was basically uninterested in the nuts and bolts of practical politics' (1999, p. 151). Berlin was, like Camus, a moralist, whose anxiety *vis-à-vis* the numerous moral conundrums of our lives was combined with a certain pleasure in uncovering more and more of these dilemmas. As for Aron, I do not think that the term 'moralist' best suits him, even if Baverez entitles his biography of Aron 'a moralist at the time of ideologies' (1993). Aron is mostly committed to understanding the political world, or, to follow Allan Bloom's words, the attempt to 'understand the political beast' (1990, p. 260). Thus, Aron adopts at least partly the a-moralism of Machiavelli, necessary if one adopts the imagined standpoint of the statesman. Aron's main difference with Berlin, and with many other liberal thinkers, is that, in Mahoney's words, 'his thinking was deeply political' (1998, p. 12). It implies,

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[3] See http//:www.freedictionary.com/agon and Feyerabend, Karl (1988) *Greek Classical Dictionary*.

for Judt, that for Aron 'matters of high theory spoke directly to real, and in his view urgent, political worries' (1998, p. 124). Aron is eager to restore the mutuality between political theory and political practice. By recreating such links, Aron offers solutions to what Gray denounces as the 'emptying of political life' (1992, p. 13). He does so by examining the political sphere from many angles, in the manner of what Mahoney calls 'the old image of the political scientist', which implies being an 'analyst, assessor and guide of human and political guide' (1998, p. 13). His will to prove that a complete analysis of political life can alter it for the better is a sign of what we have called his 'combative liberalism'. It is combative in the sense that Aron puts himself in the role of the political actor who constantly has to take decisions. But such a commitment should not be confused with that of intellectuals of the Left: it is a *responsible* commitment. This is best described by Manent, who remarks that 'the secret of his simple reasoning is a very rare mixing of civic passion and of impartiality of judgement... Aron embodies this very rare balance between passion and a constant desire of impartiality' (2003). Ultimately, the practical implications of liberalism for government are more an issue for Aron than for Berlin, whose liberalism remains rather a-political. This opposition, combined with those described above, constitute the core of the antagonism between Aron and Berlin's modes of thinking. On my view, both modes can be classified as 'liberal' because they rely on many principles that most liberals share. It would be difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to apply the two modes to non-liberal thinkers. Yet these thinkers would have to share Aron and Berlin's sense of the 'burden of responsibility', the everlasting fragility of our societies, which proved to be rare at the time of the Cold War.

Berlin: Langenscheit.

3. ATTEMPT AT A RELIGIOUS ANALOGY

What unites and what separates the two liberal thinkers at the core of this thesis has now become much more evident. Nevertheless, it is possible to clarify the contrast between these two 'liberal minds' through the *detour* of a religious analogy. At first sight, this idea is curious. Neither Aron nor Berlin was religious and, moreover the analogy that I propose is borrowed from Christian practices, not Jewish. Despite this, the religious comparison remains worthwhile, and follows certain precedents. Historians of intellectuals have used the metaphor in a recurrent manner since the days of Julien Benda, who talked of the 'trahison des clercs' (1923), 'clercs' (clerics) describing intellectuals themselves. On this view, intellectuals are 'clerics' to the extent that they are driven by a mission which can be compared to that of religious conviction. The 'commitment' that Sartre talks about in his first issue of *Les Temps Modernes* requires a dedication and a perseverance that is not unlike that of Christian missionaries. The religious analogy has in particular been used to describe post-war intellectuals of the Left, especially in France. But can it be extended to intellectuals like Aron and Berlin who did not build a system of thought comparable to a 'dogma', in the way that Marxist or pseudo-Marxist theories are open to the charge. In other words, is it not problematic to apply a religious analogy to those who precisely denounced the new secular religions? Since it shows that the 'dogma' is not of much relevance when comparing Aron and Berlin, our metaphor does in fact avoid this pitfall. Indeed, what matters in the distinction is not so much what doctrine they hold (neither of them has a definite one), but what they do with the doctrine. The image of two *types of clergymen* will therefore enable a more incisive understanding of their opposition of temperaments.

The Christian Clergy, since the Middle Age, has been divided between secular and regular Clergy (or canon)[4]. Both types share the same dogmas, which rest on the Bible and other texts by the Fathers of Church. They also recognise – in the case of the Catholic Church – the supremacy of the Pope and the hierarchy of the Church. Despite so many common points, they have been given different titles, to the extent that they do not share the same *vocation* within the Church. Even though they have the same "material" – the Christian creed and precepts – they do not *practise the same activities*. The members of the regular clergy (monks or nuns) devote their lives to obedience to a rule that, mainly, enjoins them to spend most of their time in praying and studying holy texts. They are usually confined to a monastery and see laymen only if their rule requires them to look after the poor or invalids. On the contrary, the job of the secular clergy – priests, bishops, etc. – consists in preaching the Christian faith to the people of God. Like the Apostles, proselytism is their major occupation. In other words, whereas they lead a *vita apostolica*, the regular clergy leads a *vita contemplativa*. This is not the only dissimilarity. Indeed, they also have different *aspirations* and *objectives*. Some – those who contemplate – are engaged in the discovery of the real meaning of the word of God, and of that of life. Others – the clerics – use Revelation to appease, comfort those afflicted by woes, and give them reasons to believe that their faith is a source of salvation.

This description is not entirely historically correct, and has been simplified for the purpose of our parallel. Yet, it can be asserted that what distinguishes Aron from Berlin is, roughly speaking, what distinguishes a priest from a monk, with Aron in the role of the cleric and Berlin in that of the monk. Again, this should not be misinterpreted: Aron's mission is not purely evangelical, nor Berlin's interpretative. The general claim

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[4] See KIBLER, William W., and ZINN, Grover A. (eds.) (1995) *Medieval France. An Encyclopaedia.*

is that Berlin is more interested in the comprehension of the principles of liberalism than in their application, whereas what is characteristic of Aron is to seek to promote liberalism across various domains. This corresponds almost exactly to the oppositions stressed in the course of the thesis: Aron is characterised by a sense of action in the public sphere, whereas Berlin prefers to reflect on the "real" meaning of the liberal stand. This leads Aron to show confidence in the liberal solutions he is advocating, whilst Berlin despairs of the imperfection of liberalism.

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CG   *Chroniques de guerre. La France libre, 1940-45* (1990). Foreword by Jean-Marie Soutou, edited by Christian Bachelier. Gallimard, 1990.

DCH   *Dimensions de la conscience historique* (1961). Paris: Plon.

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IPH   *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (1938, 1983). Paris: Gallimard.

IPP   *Introduction à la philosophie politique. Démocratie et révolution* (1997). Paris: Fallois.

M   *Mémoires. 50 ans de réflexion politique* (1983). Paris: Julliard.

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APPENDICES

Correspondence between Aron and Berlin

Stored at the 'Archives privées Raymond Aron',
under the direction of Mrs. Elisabeth Dutartre
Boxes n. 66, 101 and 119.

EHESS, 54 Boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris
(to be relocated at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Sir Isaiah Berlin

OXFORD

Mon Cher Ami,

     Monsieur Sipos, qui était professeur de littérature hongroise à Budapest et qui a quitté la Hongrie à la suite des événements de 1956, a fait des études de sociologie à la Sorbonne. Il m'a fait à l'époque une excellente impression. C'est un homme manifestement intelligent que je crois capable d'études sérieuses et poussées. Il souhaite beaucoup être admis à l'Université d'Oxford et me demande une introduction auprès de vous. Peut-être pourrez-vous d'une façon ou d'une autre appuyer sa demande?

     Voulez-vous présenter mes hommages à Lady Berlin, et croire pour vous-même à l'assurance de mes sentiments fidèlement sympathiques.

Raymond ARON

HEADINGTON HOUSE,

OLD HIGH STREET, HEADINGTON,

OXFORD.

TEL. OXFORD 61005.

16th November, 1961

Dear Monsieur Aron,

Thank you for your letter of 7th November
to Sir Isaiah about Monsieur Sipos. I am afraid
that Sir Isaiah is away in India at the moment,
but I will show him your letter as soon as he
returns at the beginning of December.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Bonser

Secretary to Sir Isaiah Berlin

→ Sipos

6th December, 1961

Cher Ami,

Thank you for your letter - I am just back
from India - a journey which has upset my
preconceptions to a very violent degree.

I should like to do my best for Mr. Sipos,
although, as I think he could find out from other
Hungarians who came here after 1956, Oxford is not
the ideal place for a sociologist (at any rate as
yet). If he writes to me I shall certainly be
glad to see him and do anything that I can to help
him.

I hope you are well despite a political
situation which cannot give you much pleasure.
My wife, too, sends her greetings - when shall we
see you again at Oxford in our house? The young
men of St. Antony's, as indeed the young men of
all Colleges and Societies, would be extremely glad

and delighted if you promised to come and talk
to them - if you could do this, we would be
delighted if you would stay with us.

                    Yours sincerely,

                    Isaiah Berlin

14th March   [1965]

Dher Ami,

    Vague rumours have reached me that you
are about to honour this university with a
visit; if this is indeed true and I am not
mistaken in supposing that you are coming
either in the beginning of May or the
beginning of June, may I warmly invite you
to stay with us at Headington in the house
that you know already, where, if nothing
else, I can promise you greater material
comfort than a college bedroom is likely
to provide.

    I should dearly love to see you again,
and so would my wife, after that over-hasty
visit to Stanford; I still feel regret at
not having heard your address, and have — God
be praised — forgotten my own.

                Yours,

                                Isaiah B.

Sir I. BERLIN
Headington House
Old High Street, Headington

OXFORD

Cher Monsieur,

          Merci de votre lettre du 14 Mars. Oui, il est vrai que
je dois faire une conférence à Oxford au Taylor Institute le 3 Juin
prochain sur le sujet qui peut-être vous intéressera: Auguste
Comte et Alexis de Tocqueville juges de l'Angleterre.

          Votre invitation est trop cordiale de votre part et trop
agréable pour moi pour que j'ai la discrétion de la refuser. J'ac-
cepte donc avec joie votre hospitalité en espérant ne pas être une
"nuisance".

          Mes hommages à Lady Berlin. Bien amicalement vôtre.

                                        Raymond ARON

le 24 avril 1965

Mon cher Aron,

L'annonce de ta conférence
paru dans l'"Oxford University
Gazette" et nous nous réjouissons
très à l'idée de t'accueillir,
et de t'entendre, le 3 juin.

Pourrais-tu me dire dès à présent
combien de temps tu comptes rester
ici ? J'espère que tu pourras arriver
au plus tard, le matin de ta conférence
(qui a lieu, à 5 heures), à temps
pour un déjeuner que ma femme et
moi voudrions donner à All Souls
en ton honneur. D'autre part, il
est d'usage qu'il y ait à la Taylorienne,
avant la Zaharoff Lecture, une
brève réception (tea !). Enfin, je
compte que tu voudras bien dîner ici
avec les Fellows ; et je serai heureux
de t'offrir l'hospitalité à All Souls si

SEZEC

SEIZEC

SEZNEC

Monsieur SEZNEC
All Souls College
OXFORD (Angleterre)

Mon Cher Ami,

        Merci de ta lettre du 24 avril. Ma réponse a quelques
jours de retard à cause d'un voyage éclair que je viens de faire
aux Etats-Unis.

        Je compte arriver à Oxford le 2 juin dans l'après-
midi, mais j'ai déjà accepté l'hospitalité de Sir Isaah Berlin.
En revanche, j'aurai grand plaisir à déjeuner avec ta femme et
toi vendredi à All Souls. En ce qui concerne le dîner avec les
Fellows, il me semble que tu pourrais demander à Sir Isaah ce
qu'il en pense ; je ne voudrais pas, après avoir accepté d'habiter
chez lui, manquer aux règles de la courtoisie. Je repartirai le
4 au matin puisque je dois donner une autre conférence à Londres
dans l'après-midi. Ma femme me charge de te remercier de ta lettre ;
malheureusement, des raisons de famille ne lui permettront pas de
m'accompagner.

        Présente, je te prie, mes hommages à Madame Seznec
et crois à l'assurance de mes sentiments bien amicaux.

                                        Raymond ARON

Sir Isaah Berlin
Headington House
Old High Street, Headington

<u>OXFORD</u>

Mon Cher Ami,

Seznec vous a, je crois, mis au courant de mon
voyage oxfordien. J'arriverai à l'aérodrome de Londres le
2 juin à 15 h 30, ce qui, sauf accident, me permettra de
prendre le train à Paddington à 17 h 15. Je pense que je
n'aurai pas de difficulté à trouver un taxi à la gare de
Oxford, car je ne voudrai pas vous causer de dérangement.

Voulez-vous présenter mes hommages à Lady Berlin et,
en attendant le plaisir de vous revoir, croire à l'assurance
de mes sentiments bien amicaux.

HEADINGTON HOUSE,
OLD HIGH STREET, HEADINGTON,
OXFORD.
TEL. OXFORD 61005.

16th February.

Cher ami,

I am giving this letter to my friend Steven Lukes, of
Nuffield College, Oxford, who is making a study of Durkheim.
If you have a moment to spare from your exceedingly busy life
(even busier than mine, I expect, and yet I regard mine as
near the limits of the endurable), I should be grateful if
you could see him for a while - the profit to him would be
immense, and you would, I am sure, enjoy it - I shall not
sing his praises, since I propose to send this letter to him
unsealed, but his admiration for your work is (for me)
sufficient evidence of his intellectual taste.   At any rate,
he is a very serious person, and will not take up a great
deal of your time.

I still lament the fact that I was not able to hear your
lecture at Stanford - I was very disappointed with my own.
And I am most grateful to you for putting me in touch with
the student of Vico, who has sent me a most interesting and
informative letter.   I hope to keep in touch with him.

When are you coming to England?   I shall be in Washington
between mid-March and the end of April, obliged to deliver
lectures somewhat outside my field.   But will you be here in
May and June?   And if so, would you not come and deliver a
lecture here too: I should be very happy to arrange this if
you have the time.

With my warmest regards,
Yours ever,

Isaiah Berlin

From the President   31 March 1980

Professor Raymond C.F. Aron,
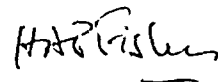87 Boulevard Saint-Michel,
75005 Paris,
France.

Dear Professor Aron,

Wolfson College, Oxford, of which I am President, has in
each of these last eleven years held a series of public
lectures in Hilary Term which have attracted wide attention
and large audiences. We have been fortunate in being able to
persuade very distinguished speakers to take part. The most
recent series have been on The Molecular Basis of Life (1977),
The Origins of Civilization (1978), The State of the Universe
(1979) and The Nature of Matter (1980). The speakers this
year included two Nobel Prize winners (Abdus Salam and Murray
Gell-Mann) as well as Sir Denys Wilkinson, Vice Chancellor of
Sussex University, John Adams from CERN and Sir Rudolf Peierls.

Next year we are planning to hold a series on "Social Theory
and Political Practice" and I am writing to ask if you would
be willing to deliver a lecture on International Relations on
Tuesday, 10 March. Apart from yourself we hope the following
professors will take part: Tom Bottomore, Charles Taylor,
Michael Dummett, Stuart Hall, Ralf Dahrendorf and Eric Hobsbawm.
Professors Bottomore and Hall have already accepted invitations.
In addition Dr. Wlodzimierz Brus of this College will also take
part. We hope that Professor Bottomore will speak on the history
of social theory, Professor Taylor on philosophical issues,
Professor Dummett on morality, Professor Hall on modern Britain,
Dr. Brus on Eastern Europe and Professor Hobsbawm on Western
Europe, with Professor Dahrendorf giving the introductory lecture.

I very much hope that you will be able to accept this invitation,
and that you will be able to stay on for supper after the lecture.
It would give my wife and myself great pleasure if you were able
to stay the night with us.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Fisher

HEADINGTON HOUSE
OLD HIGH STREET. HEADINGTON
OXFORD. OX3 9HU
TEL: OXFORD 61005

8 April 1980

Cher ami et collègue,

I was asked by Sir Henry Fisher, my successor as President
of Wolfson College, to write you a letter in support of his in-
vitation. Of course I am glad to do this: any lecture or talk
by you is a unique source of intellectual pleasure and illumina-
tion; and it would be an opportunity for seeing you again after
all these months, which Aline and I would love. Whether you
have the time or the inclination to do this is, of course,
another matter. All I can say is that you would be assured of
the usual warm welcome here, and would lift the level of the
series very considerably.

With warmest regards,
Yours sincerely,

Isaiah Berlin

22 AVRIL 1980

Sir Isaiah Berlin
Headington House
Old High Street, Headington
Oxford OX3 9HU

Cher Ami,

Merci de votre lettre. Je souhaiterais accepter
l'invitation de Sir Henry Fischer d'autant plus qué l'invi-
tation vient du Wolfson College que vous avez présidé pen-
dant plusieurs années.

Malheureusement, je ne rajeunis pas et bien que
la biologie ait été jusqu'à présent tolérablement indulgente,
elle me rappelle à l'ordre de temps en temps; les conférences
me cóûtent davantage, je me crois obligé de les rédiger à
l'avance, ce qui me prend du temps. Il me faut donc, en der-
nière analyse, ne pas accepter un nombre déraisonnable d'obli-
gations de cette sorte.

J'ai déjà promis de donner une conférence à Oxford
le 15 novembre prochain. Ne me tenez pas rigueur si je
n'accède pas à la demande de Sir Henry Fischer.et croyez,
je vous prie, à l'assurance de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

Raymond ARON

22 AVRIL 1980

Mr.Henry FISCHER
President
WOLFSON COLLEGE
OXFORD OX2 6UD

Monsieur le Président,

Je vous remercie de votre lettre du 31 mars et je suis
très sensible à votre invitation.

La lettre jointe de Isaiah Berlin était une raison sup-
plémentaire d'accepter votre invitation, malheureusement, elle
arrive pour ainsi dire après que j'aie rempli mon emploi du
temps pour l'année qui vient.

Je dois donner une conférence, à la McCallum Memorial
Lecture, à Oxford le 15 novembre prochain. Le mois demaars
beaucoup d'obligations d'attendent et je dois tenir compte
de mon âge et économiser mas forces.

Ne doutez pas de la sincérité de mes regrets et croyez
je vous prie à l'assurance de mes sentiments très distingués
et de haute considération.

Raymond ARON

5 May 1981

Cherissime ami,

    I cannot tell you how pleased I am that you will be coming
to give a Herbert Spencer Lecture in October next year.   I dis-
miss from my thoughts, as you must from yours, the notion that
at our age such engagements can only be accepted <u>sub specie
temporalitatis</u> - I am sure that one must behave as if one will
live forever; otherwise,like an old American friend of mine, you may
decide prematurely that you will not be alive after the age of 90,
arrange your financial affairs on that assumption, and then sur-
vive that age (as we both will, of course) only to find yourself
without means of subsistence.   The principal purpose of this
letter is simply to say thank you, and say that you must stay
with us on 22 October 1982 - the prospect is distant but
delightful.   Unless you tell me otherwise, Aline and I will
proceed on that assumption.

                        Yours ever,

                        Isaiah Berlin

11 mai 1981

Sir Isaiah Berlin
Headington House
Old High Street, Headington, Oxford OX3 9H8

Cher Ami,

Merci de votre lettre charmante.

Avant 1977, mon état d'esprit n'était pas différent du vôtre; depuis lors, après avoir regardé de plus près la fin inévitable de notre aventure ou les paralysies pires que la mott, j'ai fini malgré moi à prendre conscience de mon âge administratif, Bien que je m'obstine de temps à autre à l'oublier.

Cela dit, à demain, c'est-à-dire au mois d'octobre 1982. D'ici là, notre gauche réussira à mettre la France sens dessus dessous de manière à éliminer un des derniers pays européens qui donnait encore l'impression d'exister.

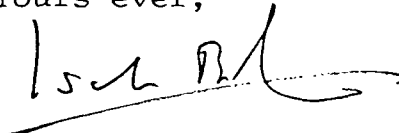Mes hommages à Lady Berlin et bien amicalement à vous,

Raymond ARON

15 October 1982

Cher ami,

This is only to confirm that on the occasion of your visit
to Oxford, when I have the very genuine honour of presiding over
your lecture at 5 p.m., you will be coming to dinner with us and
staying the night.   After the lecture there is a question period
of 20-30 min tes, then a short sherry party somewhere in the
building, then to our house in Headington.   There will be coming
to dinner the Kolakowskis, Monsieur Neveu (the Director of the
Maison Francaise, who in effect demanded it, though I should not
say so), Prof. Margaret Gowing, who knows about the politics of
atomic energy, Stuart Hampshire, Herbert and Mrs. Hart, and the
very bright Regius Professor of Medicine, Henry Harris, and his
wife.   Aline and I are greatly looking forward to your visit.

There is a political theorist (in early middle age) called
Larry Siedentop (American, Harvard, then a graduate student here,
now for some years a Fellow of Keble College), who years ago
wrote an excellent thesis on de Maistre and Maine de Biran and
is now writing on Guizot and Tocqueville - he finds all kinds of
unexpected treasures in Guizot.   He is charming, intelligent,
and has long and passionately wished to meet you: he tells me
about this about twice a year (he was a student of mine).   He
will be in Paris in early November, staying (he is slightly em-
barrassed to admit) at the Jockey Club.   If you could see him
even for a short while he would be extremely grateful - a
telephone call to Le Jockey should be enough - he is not a horse-
owner, and this is a relic of early social ambition, which has
now somewhat declined.

Yours ever,

Isaiah Berlin

December 16, 1982

Professor Raymond Aron
Centre Européen de Sociologie Historique
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
54 Boulevard Raspail
75270 Paris   CEDEX 06
France

Dear Professor Aron,

The Committee on Social Thought would like to propose Sir Isaiah Berlin as a candidate for an honorary degree in this university. One requirement for a successful proposal is an evaluation of the candidate's contribution to intellectual life, and it is my hope that you will be willing to furnish us with such a statement.

I am reluctant to trespass on your time in this way, but I know that your evaluation would carry great weight with the University authorities, especially as you were yourself the recipient of just such a degree a couple of years ago. I am therefore formally asking for your confidential help in this matter. The Honorary Degree Committee will begin its deliberations at the beginning of February 1983, so I would appreciate having your response as soon as is conveniently practicable.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Wheatley
Chairman

COLLÈGE

DE

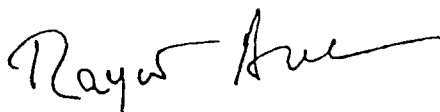FRANCE

———

Professeur honoraire

Paris, le 11 janvier 1983

Monsieur Paul Wheatley
Chairman
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Committee on Social Thought·
1126 East - 59th Street
CHICAGO. Illinois 60637
U.S.A.

Monsieur le Directeur,

Je vous remercie de votre lettre du 16 décembre et je vous prie d'excuser le retard de ma réponse, j'étais en dehors de Paris quand votre lettre y est parvenue.

Vous trouverez ci-inclus le témoignage que vous souhaitez sur mon ami Sir Isaiah Berlin. Celui-ci, me semble-t-il, n'a pas besoin de mon témoignage pour convaincre les autorités de l'université de Chicago. Si cependant j'y contribuais, je m'en réjouirais.

Veuillez agréer, je vous prie, Monsieur le Directeur, l'assurance de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

Raymond Aron.

Le 11/1/83

Sir Isaiah Berlin est certainement une des personnalités les plus remarquables du monde intellectuel de Grande-Bretagne. Sa culture littéraire, philosophique et historique est très étendue. Il a écrit sur des sujets extrêmement différents, sur la pensée russe au 19ème siècle aussi bien que sur Auguste Comte ou le mouvement sioniste. Il a publié, il y a de longues années, une bonne biographie de Karl Marx, mais l'essentiel de son oeuvre consiste dans des articles et des essais réunis récemment dans trois volumes qui ont été loués presque unanimement aussi bien en Grande-Bretagne qu'aux Etats-Unis. Bien que Sir Isaiah Berlin appartienne au monde universitaire, il ressemble davantage aux grands humanistes du passé, amateur et professionnel tout à la fois, écrivant pour le grand public et aussi pour les scholars.

Si l'Université de Chicago lui accordait un doctorat honoris causa, elle reconnaîtrait un homme dont la conversation brillante est réputée et dont la largeur et la profondeur du savoir le désignent pour cette distinction.

Raymond Aron