The 1930s will long be remembered as one of the ugliest decades of modern French history. Diplomatic humiliation abroad
combined with unrestrained partisanship at home to plunge France into an era of almost unparalleled political turmoil. During this unhappy period, H. Stuart Hughes has reported, "the customary warfare among ideological groups mounted to an unprecedented shrillness as rival intellectual clans threatened to devour each other whole." Struggling to moderate these quarrels, "the honest and rigorous social thinkers began to realize that a new kind of discourse was necessary—a discourse which would give a surer grasp of reality and translate more easily into the vocabularies in use outside France." Although the call for a new grammar of politics reverberated through an intensely creative generation of French intellectuals, few responded to the challenge as vigorously or as brilliantly as Raymond Aron.

Recognized on both sides of the Atlantic as one of the leading social theorists produced by France in the latter half of the twentieth century, Aron poured his remarkable talents and energies into two closely related vocations. As a sociologist at the Sorbonne and the College de France, he wrote more than forty books and six hundred articles on a staggering variety of topics in philosophy, sociology, economics, military strategy, and international relations. As a journalist and commentator, first for Le Figaro and later for L'Express, he produced some four thousand columns devoted to French and world politics. Taken together, Aron's scholarly and journalistic writings constitute a body of work that finds few equals in recent history. Indeed, many have declared that France has not seen the like of Raymond Aron since the days of the philosophes, those brilliant and prolific publicists of the eighteenth century.

Coming of age during the interwar years, Aron was deeply shaken by the ideological clamor retarding rational debate. Determined to improve the quality of social and political discourse, Aron tirelessly reminded his audience that the pursuit of values must respect the contingencies of existence. Transforming the ideal into the real requires more than blind, single-minded determination. It requires, above all else, "an understanding of those conditions which are likely to set limits to what men can achieve." In order to articulate
realistic and attainable goals, then, modern men and women needed "faith without illusion." In order to discern the moments when human will is able to intervene most effectively in history, they needed a political science.

As perhaps the last great representative of classical French liberalism, Raymond Aron fashioned a science of human action in the grand style of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, thinkers who tried to take in the entire sweep of whole societies without losing contact with the solid ground of actual experience. Consequently, Aron's political science is distinguished by two overriding features—a proclivity for normative judgment and a commitment to empirical analysis. By referring to Aron's political science as "normative," I mean to suggest that his political science is both interpretive and descriptive, as much a philosophy of history as a science of society. Unlike a great deal of modern day sociology (which the American philosopher Richard Rorty once lampooned as the expenditure of a fifty thousand dollar grant to discover the address of a whorehouse), Aron's political sociology attempted to comprehend the whole of society, not just discrete fragments of it. Empirical research, Aron maintained, must in some way answer the larger questions of human progress and social justice if it is to retain its significance for human affairs. At the same time, however, he vigorously insisted that reflections on the whole must be disciplined by factual knowledge of its parts if these reflections are not to degenerate into speculative or metaphysical flights of fancy.

The purpose of this study is to review the conceptual foundations of Raymond Aron's science of politics. Because Aron advocated "a science for the politician and a politics based on science," I explore not only the logical coherence of his science of politics but its practical significance for statecraft as well. In doing so, I hope to penetrate to the heart and meaning of Aron's scholarship. As Aron himself tells us, "I found my way at about twenty-six when I chose the theme of my philosophic thought: the relations between action and history, and it is out of this query that all my books have emerged."

Axon's science of politics repays close examination for two
reasons. First, it is at this level of conceptual abstraction that we discover the origins of Aron's peculiar method of dialectical reasoning, a method that left its mark on almost everything he wrote. Second, once we lay bare the conceptual mechanics of Aron's dialectic, we will also discover the origins of a troubling ambiguity that runs through his entire corpus. As we will see, in seeking to apply a formalized ethic to the problems of knowledge and statecraft; Aron's method of dialectical reasoning often overshot its mark and threatened to dissolve the sociological or historical necessities he relied on to justify a politics of moderate, prudent reform. This had the unfortunate effect of destabilizing Aron's thought: unwilling to grant priority to either reason or necessity, Aron found himself restlessly shuttling between the two. For this reason, we would say—paraphrasing Tocqueville—that Aron's method of dialectical reasoning made it easier for him to imagine the existence of a middle ground than to call one into being.

In order to take the full measure of Aron's political science, I chart the course of his dialectical logic as it emerges in his epistemology and works its way down the ladder of abstraction from epistemology to methodology and from methodology to theory. These three levels of analysis—epistemology, methodology, and theory—are part and parcel not only of Aron's political sociology but of any well-formed comprehensive science of social action. Our authority on this matter is Talcott Parsons, whose monumental work, *The Structure of Social Action*, Aron so greatly admired. Theory, Parsons explained, "is confined to the formulation and logical interrelation of propositions containing empirical facts in direct relation to the observation of the facts and thus empirical verification of the propositions." Methodological considerations become relevant when we "inquire whether the procedures by which this observation and verification have been carried out...are legitimate." These kinds of inquiries will necessarily spill over into epistemological or philosophical ones because "among the grounds...for believing or disbelieving in the validity of a scientific procedure, there will be some of a philosophical order, which must be philosophically considered." Although these three sets of considerations are closely related,
Parsons added, it is nevertheless important to keep them logically distinct.

Remarkably enough, Raymond Aron's reflections on each of these different levels of analysis correspond not only to certain distinct periods in his life, but to different topical or substantive interests as well. Thus it was that after receiving an appointment to a chair in sociology at the Sorbonne in 1955, Aron turned away from his epistemological studies and turned his attention to elaborating a method for the social sciences and to addressing the economic, political and social problems of modern societies. Next, during the mid-sixties, Aron developed a theory of international relations, one that laid the foundation for his analyses of diplomacy, foreign policy and international order. And finally, near the end of his life, Aron wrote a commentary on the strategic theory of Carl von Clausewitz, the great Prussian military strategist, which in its turn left its mark on many of Aron's more concrete strategic reflections. These distinctions, in both logical form and substance, form the main divisions of this essay.

Although I have chosen to present Aron's political science by proceeding from the general to the particular, this should not be taken to mean that Aron charted his politics according to a fixed star plotted by his philosophy. Quite the contrary: Aron's philosophy of historical knowledge was dedicated to establishing the proposition that there are limits to our knowledge of action and history, a proposition deliberately at odds with Mandan dialectics. In opposition to conventional Marxism, Aron argued that the intentional reality of human behavior sharply limits the utility of causal analysis. Given the fact that action can change the conditions of its existence-and thus its very character-human behavior demands to be "understood" and not simply "explained." Social scientists, in other words, must try to retrieve the intentional determinants of behavior if they are to comprehend the meaning of action. But because two minds never "completely coincide," as Aron put it, knowledge can never be certain. And if knowledge is inherently provisional or ambiguous, then political action must at all times be measured and moderate.
The politics of understanding thus stands in direct opposition to what Aron termed "the politics of Reason," a politics that lays claim to a complete knowledge of the exigencies of human action. For Aron, the politics of Reason was the politics of totalitarianism, a politics he fought his entire life. "In all forms of fanaticism," he wrote, "even those motivated by idealism, I suspect a new transformation of the monster." Aron's reflexive abhorrence of fanaticism is certainly understandable. Born in Paris on March 14, 1905, Aron was of that generation whose intellectuals "were students in the days that followed the First World War and [who] wrote their first books in the years that preceded the Second. After 1945, they wondered how to avoid the third." The 1930s were particularly painful for Aron, propelling him towards what he described as an "active pessimism," an outlook that marked him for the rest of his life. After graduating first in his class in 1928 at the Ecole Normale Superieure and widely considered to be the most promising philosopher of his generation, Aron began his career as a lecturer in Germany, first at the University of Cologne and then at the French Academic House in Berlin. Although he enjoyed his stay in Germany immensely, it was not, as he recalled rather dryly, a very propitious time for a French Jew, "steeped in Kantian philosophy," to be living in Germany. Eventually, it was the rise of National Socialism and the advent of the Great Depression that contributed most directly to Aron's professed pessimism.

Returning to Paris to defend his dissertation (which took place on the eve of the German occupation of Czechoslovakia), Aron was stunned to discover just how oblivious most French scholars were to their impending doom. When one of his examiners asked Aron to explain the "melancholy" overtones of his dissertation, Aron replied that, "imminent catastrophe hardly inspires mirth in a student of history." After the fall of France, Aron escaped to London to continue the struggle for French independence by serving as a journalist for La France Libre, a monthly periodical devoted to reporting the war effort for the French.

Aron never lost his passion for journalism. Upon his return to France in 1945, Aron spent the next ten years as a full-time journalist
Raymond Aron and the Politics of Understanding

for *Le Figaro*, a major Parisian newspaper. When he received an appointment to a chair in sociology at the Sorbonne, Aron continued to write a biweekly column for *Le Figaro*, a practice he continued until 1978, when he joined the editorial staff of *L'Express*, another leading Parisian daily. His journalistic output has been estimated at some four thousand articles.

Aron’s journalistic career served to sharpen his awareness of the tragic constraints that so often limit political leadership and choice. Perhaps the most formative influence on Aron's thinking in this regard was an incident that occurred when he was a young man. Having obtained an audience with an aide to a high-ranking government minister, Aron launched into what he recalled was a rambling and rather abstract discourse on the problems that were then besetting France. After Aron had finished, the aide simply nodded his head and asked, "Yes, but what would you do if you were the minister?" Completely at a loss for an answer, Aron realized that he had just received his first lesson in statecraft. It was a question-and a lesson—he never forgot.

Ironically, Aron’s work is perhaps more popular and of greater significance today than it was when he was alive. It was not until the mid-1970s, a period that marks the beginning of a growing disenchantment with radical thought in France, that Aron’s influence began to extend beyond a small circle of friends and colleagues. Although Aron was well known to his countrymen—his books and columns were widely read in universities and cafes throughout France—he was never particularly well received by them because his defense of liberal democracy was at odds with the radical egalitarianism of the intelligentsia and the Gaullism of the Fifth Republic. For most of his life, in fact, Aron was something of a solitary thinker, an intellectual outsider whose stolid liberalism was eclipsed by the exotic but unstable synthesis of Marxism and existentialism made fashionable by the left and the vision of national *grandeur* in vogue among the right. Now that the ardor for violent revolution by the French intelligentsia has apparently cooled, Aron’s moderate liberalism is being rediscovered and reexamined. As many of Aron’s former detractors now admit, it may have been better to be
"wrong with Sartre than right with Aron" in the 1960s, but one can be wrong only so often before the glamour of romantic rebellion begins to wear a little thin. Sartre, one of his former admirers recalls, "was wrong about Hitler, wrong about the resistance, wrong about postwar Europe, wrong about the East-West struggle, wrong about totalitarianism, wrong about the future of France. [A]nd exactly where Sartre was likely to be wrong, Aron was likely to be right." By the 1980s, history had come full circle: Sartre, one European commentator reported, was passe-the mantle of intellectual leadership had passed to Raymond Aron.

My goal in this essay is to flesh out not the life of a mind but its logic. To do so, I begin at the beginning, with a review of Aron's epistemology, a level of analysis generally described as "the deepest level of overt assumption." There we will discover the categorical framework that bestows unity and coherence on Aron's life's work. Because his epistemology is given its most complete expression in his doctoral dissertation, it is to that work we now turn.

*Introduction to the Philosophy of History*

Unhappy with the narrowness of his philosophical training and finding the sclerosis of French political life difficult to contend with, Aron traveled to Germany as a graduate student in 1930 in search of fresh intellectual inspiration. Scouring early twentieth-century German social theory for an epistemology that could both explain and guide human action, Aron eventually developed a dialectical logic of his own driven by the polar energies of Max Weber's neo-Kantianism and Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.

Aron's theory of knowledge is presented in his doctoral dissertation, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. This book is, to the say the least, a difficult work. Although it was generally well received in French academic circles when it was published (even the great Bergson sent Aron a congratulatory note upon its appearance), virtually every reviewer commented on the difficulty the book poses for those who have no training in philosophy. In an otherwise sympathetic review, the noted French historian Henri Marrou
complained that he had devoted an entire summer to a careful reading of the text but was able to wade through it only twice.

Aligning himself with the broad tradition of historical idealism, Aron stated that the end or purpose of historical knowledge is "to understand the actors." And we "understand," Aron wrote, when "knowledge shows a meaning which, immanent to the reality, could have been thought by those who lived or realized it" (I, 47). But this definition, one scholar has complained, is "both profoundly true and profoundly unhelpful" because it suggests "what every historian worthy of his trade thinks he is doing when he tries to recapture the meaning of past occurrences."

In order to comprehend the reasons for Aron's loose, open-ended interpretation of intelligibility, we must review his account of the source of all understanding and meaning, namely, "experience and reflection." There we will discover the logic that informs not only Aron's theory of knowledge but virtually all of his later writings as well.

In order to understand the relation between experience and meaning, Aron traced the manner in which an individual mind understands its past, for "consciousness of the past is a constituent part of the historical process itself" (Ess., 9). Observing that we can never resurrect even a fragment of our past in all its fullness, Aron underscored the existence of an unbridgeable gap between the memory of a decision and the moment of a decision, a difference which suggested to Aron that the past can never be completely relived. "Even if every nuance of a past episode were somehow conveyed to our present consciousness," Aron observed, "this miracle of resurrection would make knowledge in the proper sense useless, for we would again be the same self we had been" (I, 51).

Because one's past cannot be relived, it must be reconstructed. In Aron's opinion, there are two ways in which one may do this. The first is "to rediscover the goal or goals which motivated the action and later seemed to justify it" (I, 53). Aron termed the representations we fix in our minds before a decision-and which we later invoke to defend our action-"motifs." The second is to retrace "states of consciousness in order to follow the formation of this motif itself..."
(ibid.). These states of consciousness—or "mobiles" in Aron's terminology—are psychological antecedents or determinants that maybe said to "cause" our choice. The contrast between these two choices is clear:

The psychologist, looking back, analyzes not actions, but states of consciousness. Involuntary signs interest him more than deliberate decision. Spontaneously, he explains from below, heroic courage by overcompensation, religious fervor by sublimation. The philosopher on the other hand rejects fatality of character; he invites individuals to look ever ahead and, in sincerity, he sees the mark of liberty. (I, 58)

Both approaches are legitimate but considered individually, each fails to account for a part of reality. The crucial point, however, is that even when taken together, both alternatives are equally parts of a whole, the totality of which exceeds the sum of its parts. Aron argues that self-knowledge

attains neither the whole nor the unity—or at least our self is a constructed unity situated in infinity, like the unity of all objects: We perceive a series of inclinations which are ours: the self would be the fictive source of them. The more we extend our inquiry, the closer we get to the totality without ever reaching it. (I, 56)

Because the essence of all things, including human beings, is located at a point situated in infinity, there is a "gap" or a "break" between the intentional and the psychological dimensions of behavior that guarantees the irreducibility of one to the other. But there is at the same time a marked degree of interaction between the two. All self-knowledge, Aron declared, implies a certain idea of oneself. "And this idea is animated by certain assertions of value. Even those who claim to discover themselves passively, choose themselves" (ibid.). In other words, the "knowledge of self develops according to a dialectic: between an ever-incomplete discovery and a never-trium-
phant decision, the individual defines himself by a double effort at lucidity and creation. Always menaced by Pharisaism or resignation, he can relax neither of the two tensions" (ibid.).

And here we reach the heart of the matter. By describing the knowledge of self as dialectical, Aron serves notice that at the center of the scientific knowledge of human action-which, as we will see, is simply a form of self-knowledge writ large—lies the problem of the hermeneutical circle: "[O]ne's idea of his past is dependent on the manner in which that past determines his present...but, in our consciousness, our past depends on our present" (I, 55). Aron's analysis of self-knowledge thus reveals the fundamental indissociability of subject and object. All knowledge of self is "part of its object which it inevitably transforms, for the one who knows himself is already no more what he was before he became conscious of himself" (I, 49). The upshot of this introspective exercise is that all knowledge is in some measure "tied in with the intention of the spectator" (I, 55).

Is this to say that all knowledge is subjective and hence relative? Not exactly. Here Aron interjects a crucial caveat:

This plurality of images, varying with the observer, will no doubt be admitted as evident de facto but paradoxical de lure. How can it be denied that there exists a reality, and consequently a true idea of each person? And yet, we should like to uphold the paradox. We know the essential character of an individual no more than we understand the ultimate intention of an act. (I, 68)

The structure and logic of self-knowledge are now complete. Aron presents the self as a unified whole within which two contrasting elements—the intentional and the psychological—emerge from a common, unknowable source. The relation between these two modes of human experience is ambiguous and complex: the will does not create itself ex nihilo but "emerges gradually from the process of experience which it is capable of influencing because it is the expression of it as well as the judge" (I, 57). Intentionality is thus
at one and the same time conditioned by and independent of psychological or intentional factors, a state of affairs which suggests that self-knowledge culminates in the discovery of a riddle or paradox which reason can recognize but never resolve.

Axon’s emphasis on the limits of reason, then, is altogether different than Weber's. For Weber, choice and interpretation were frankly and unabashedly subjective; the incoherence of reality, together with the irrationality of values, makes it impossible to speak of a "fixed" reality or "true" ideas. Aron, however, attempted to affirm a subjective moment of choice without denying the existence of a priori realities. The issue, then, boils down to the nature of choice-on what grounds is it possible to affirm yet limit the freedom of interpretation? Aron's answer is forthright and unhesitating: "The selection we predicate is based neither on incoherence (Weber) nor on the infinity of the real (Rickert), but on the most incontestable fact: the interval which separates the historian from his object, the realization of consciousness from consciousness itself, and the observer from the party concerned" (I, 144). There is indeed a gap between the rational and the real, Aron maintained, but we have no right to conclude as Weber did that this gap is constitutive of reality. History, in other words, is marked by continuity as well as diversity, a fact that limits, at least in principle, the freedom that Weber granted to choice and interpretation.

We can now understand why Aron was unwilling to define the historian's task with a greater degree of precision. The inaccessibility of meaning, the fact that the unity of all objects is located at a point situated in infinity, implies that an historical object or history as a whole "acquires a unity...only in the mind which re-thinks it, the mind of an historian or historical personality" (0, 139). Historians can bring out "the meanings of actions, institutions and lives," but they "cannot discover the meaning of the whole. History is not absurd, but no living being can grasp its one, final meaning" (0, 136). This statement effectively sanctions not one approach to the study of history but many. History may be investigated at different levels with different techniques for different reasons; historians are free to see not one cause at work in history but several. The elusiveness of
Raymond Aron and the Politics of Understanding

meaning, Aron concluded, suggests that "historical reconstruction never succeeds in unraveling all relationships or exhausting all possible meanings" (0, 142).

What saves historical science from Weber's mad, chaotic scramble for knowledge is Aron's insistence that the indefinite regression of meaning should not be taken to indicate that the objects of history are "formless," as Weber had believed. Because Aron's schema of intelligibility postulates a partial relation between reason and experience, historians do not simply create meaning but, to a certain extent, discover it. We must remember, however, that this order is only partial: Aron may have punched a rather large hole in the barrier Weber erected between facts and values, but he did not tear it down altogether.

Because Aron did not judge reality to be radically incoherent, he did not confine historical truth to the realm of subjective meaning: what is true or historically real now includes those objective or ideal meanings that Weber had originally consigned to the outer darkness of metaphysics. By pulling ideal meanings back into the purview of historical analysis, Aron effectively injected a measure of life and substance into what Weber had treated as "formless matter." In Aron's view, historical objects are not constructed de novo by an act of creative imagination. Instead, different objects have different structural principles that must be respected when we account for that which we investigate. "The relations among persons or among ideas or those among the material factors that give unity to an economic system," Aron explained, "are not the same as the relationship within a political or economic unit. [An]...ideal phenomenon such as religion has an entirely different structure and different principles of permanence than a material phenomenon such as the capitalist system" (Ess., 10).

Historians, then, must take their bearings from the inherent order of the historical world. Even though an historian may sometimes give new names or apply new concepts to the periods, objects, or events, he is studying, "he never creates a complex that has not been adumbrated by the past itself; he is always rethinking the complex that the records themselves reveal" (ibid.). This is the first
step towards correcting Weber's relativism: "When we cease to interpret our knowledge of the past by the criterion of a transcendental ego that gives form to an inert mass of material, when we put the historian back into reality and take the structure of reality as the point of reference, then the whole sense of the relativist formula is transformed" (Ess., 52).

In this context, it is important to note that Aron identified three different categories of historical objects: ideas, institutions and events. To the world of ideas belongs "all natural objects on which the mind has left its stamp: printed books, carved stones, painted canvas." (I, 73) This class of objects forms the nucleus of what is conventionally regarded as "cultural history," that record of human expression as registered by the arts, sciences, philosophy and religion. Here we see the influence of Dilthey. To the world of events (Weber's world) belongs those human actions which are "the result of a choice among several possibilities..." (Ess., 48). An event may be defined most simply as the product of a human decision, as "a response to a given situation" (ibid.). And to institutions—the family, the state, an economic system—belong properties of both ideas and events: "[S]ocial facts of the institutional type retain their privileged status as psychic events: they are comprehensible, they are not comparable with natural phenomena which would have to be classified according to the regularities or reconstructed, but with human actions or words which must be interpreted like a literary or philosophical text." Institutions, Aron added, are both "rational and real" (I, 73).

In order to take the full measure of Aron's historical pluralism, we must recognize that he insisted on the reciprocal solidarity of ideas and events; both classes of objects and meanings exert a significant degree of influence upon one another. But in the final analysis, Aron established a hierarchy that tilts the balance in favor of intentional or ideal realities. This does not necessarily elevate the world of ideal meanings to the status of a first cause or an unmoved mover. "No philosopher," Aron wrote, "has ever been `pure spirit' completely detached from his own time and his own country" (0, 141). It does, however, ascribe a degree of autonomy and indepen-
dence to ideal meanings. Refusing to restrict the scope of historical or sociological interpretation, Aron nevertheless maintained that the study of causal origins cannot, by its very nature, discover "philosophical meaning." Social or historical conditions can explain "the manifold characteristics of different creations" but not "the secret of the masterpiece" (0, 142).

The intelligible structure of history, then, taken as a whole, mirrors the intelligible structure of the self. In the philosophy of history, Aron wrote, "The real distinction is between ideal entities and real entities rather than between categories of behavior" (0, 141). This distinction—which Aron elsewhere presented as a distinction between history conceived as a succession of works and as a series of events-clearly has its origins in the distinction between motifs and mobiles. Moreover, the unity of history, as in the case of the unity of the self, is located at a point situated in infinity: "In spite of the massing of evidence, total understanding...emphasizes the role played by decision. For the unity towards which we strive, the unity of an epoch or a culture, is nothing but the fictive source of works and actions which are all that are directly accessible" (I, 199).

Historical reality, in short, contains a multiplicity of partial orders that do not combine into an overall, self-contained whole. For this reason, history is "ambiguous and inexhaustible but not incoherent," a fact that justifies the plurality of historical interpretations but pulls up short of Weber's relativism.

This ontological description of the historical world, however, constitutes but one dimension of Aron's philosophy of history. The other is defined by its epistemological concern. "Ever since Vico," Aron explained, "all those who have reflected on history have in one way or another upheld a sort of kinship between the nature of reality and the mode in which reality is appropriated by consciousness." This suggests that the various levels of meaning that distinguish the different objects of analysis anticipate and correspond in some fashion to different levels of reasoning that distinguish the various moments of analysis. We will begin by analyzing understanding and explanation, heterogenous forms of cognition which are, in Aron's opinion, the two most basic modalities of knowledge.
Understanding, as we have seen, attaches a course of action to a human intention. Relating actions to intentions as means to ends, however, "usually turns out to be too simple" because an historian is inevitably drawn towards "other considerations that set the framework within which the act is reduced to a choice of means" (Ess., 173). Historical inquiry must therefore place action within the context of a larger totality. In historical matters, then,

The problem of intelligibility is related first of all to the totalities one is seeking to understand, from an individual life to a battle, a civilization, and finally the whole of history. In moving from elementary examples to even vaster ones, intelligibility slips from a practical meaning to a properly metaphysical one, from intrinsic understanding of man's behavior toward the ultimate meaning of the human adventure, accessible only to God or those who take themselves to be His confidants. (Ess., 47-8)

Given that comprehension is drawn by its very nature to seek larger and larger wholes or contexts, a complete knowledge of action would require the historian to view history "from the perspective of the sun," as Kant put it. The possibility of scaling the walls of history in order to view it from the perspective of God or the Infinite, however, is immediately precluded by the fact that historians are historical beings. The limits of the human condition, then, present an insurmountable barrier to understanding. Therefore, as one of Aron's commentators explained, historians are compelled "to discover a substitute for comprehension, which requires in effect a coincidence with an `incomprehensible' totality."

One such possibility immediately suggests itself-namely, causal analysis. Causality intervenes "when comprehension has exhausted its resources." The ultimately inaccessible character of historical wholes compels historians to reconstruct the objects of their analysis by locating those causal determinants responsible for historical change. Because causal analysis attempts to subsume the diversity of historical phenomena under general laws, placing an event in its
Can such an attempt be successful? Is it possible to subsume the plurality of events and institutions under general laws from which historical development can be deduced or reconstructed in its entirety? This, after all, is the Mandan thesis. To such questions or claims, Aron answered with an emphatic "no." In order to demonstrate the limits of causal analysis, Aron resurrected Weber's interpretation of causal reasoning.

Like Weber, Aron distinguished between sociological and historical causality. "Historical research," Aron maintained, "devotes itself to the causal antecedents of a single fact, while sociological research devotes itself to the causes of a fact capable of reproducing itself." This difference in orientation does not mean that history and sociology exist in isolation from one another. Historical and sociological causality were for Aron, as they were for Weber, two sides of the same coin. Because the macroscopic regularities that preoccupy the sociologist are simply abstractions that ignore by methodological fiat the reality of individuals and accidents, the modality of judgment proper to sociological analysis must be one of probability, not necessity. "The relations which unite the abstract and general terms of sociology are...unreal, in a sense...and can for this reason never end in necessity."

It was precisely this indeterminacy that demanded in Weber's eyes a free act of creative interpretation. Because history has no inherent significance or order, meaning must be created by the social scientist. This is perhaps the single most important reason why causal analysis cannot replace comprehension as a mode of explanation: "Causal relations are dispersed, they do not fall into a pattern, they do not explain each other as do the classified laws of a theory in physics. Understanding makes up for this dual deficiency; it makes the regularities intelligible, it brings them together conceptually" (I, 205). Explanation, in short, presupposes comprehension or interpretation. The most critical moment in causal research, Aron emphasized, revolves around the social scientist's choice of concepts and definitions. The relations one discovers in history "depend on
the ideas used [and] on the divisions effected, which, conforming to certain regularities, do not eliminate the possibility of other relations and other interpretations" (I, 269-70).

But Aron did not follow Weber all the way in believing that causality confirms comprehension. To Weber's way of thinking, "understanding puts the subjective questions, causality furnishes the objective answers" (I, 269). Aron, however, stressed the limits of causal verification:

[Un]derstanding, if it sometimes serves to introduce the search for determinism, is nevertheless independent when it is limited to reconstructing the events or narrating the sequence of facts. Since it is singular, it in no way borrows its validity from the verification of cause. So then, either it is of itself objective, or else it depends entirely on this decision which Weber strove to reject at the start. Even more, it would infect causality with its subjectivity, rather than acquire from it a total objectivity. (ibid.)

By granting a measure of autonomy and independence to understanding, Aron transforms what initially appears to be a circular relationship between understanding and explanation-causality completes understanding when understanding has "exhausted its resources," while causality at the same time presupposes understanding-into an hierarchical or architectonic one.

From this perspective, we discover that knowledge is composed not of two terms (understanding and explanation) but three: understanding, sociological causality, and historical causality. Moreover, we immediately notice that the intermediate term of this trinitarian formula, sociological explanation, shares attributes of both understanding and historical explanation. Sociological causality, Aron explained, "is both comprehensive and explicative. It is comprehensive in that it reveals the implicit logic or rationality of individual and collective behavior, and it is explicative in that it establishes regularities, or rather places partial forms of behavior in contexts that give them meaning." Because the abstract relationships fabricated by the
sociologist depend on terms "which are more constructed than given," sociological explanation necessarily presupposes understanding (I, 229). And because these abstract relationships represent only a partial image of the process of historical change, the work of the sociologist anticipates the work of the historian.

We here approach what is perhaps the most important and interesting feature of Aron's philosophy of history. By insisting on the primacy of ideal meanings and, concomitantly, on the autonomy of understanding, Aron has ordered his three classes of meaning according to a sliding scale of indeterminacy. Very much like Montesquieu, Aron envisioned a hierarchy of beings or historical objects that are subject in varying degrees to the laws of necessity. In the case of events, these laws are not of the same logical order as the laws of nature; a method of causal reasoning, however, can be applied to further our understanding of change and development. In the case of institutions, the laws of causality also apply, but not to the same degree as in the case of events. Finally, when we reach the apex, ideal meanings, we have virtually—but not completely—abandoned the categories of necessity and contingency in favor of categories supplied by the understanding. Conversely, if we proceed from ideal meanings to events, we see that the increasing indeterminism narrows but does not eliminate the role of choice and interpretation. A "bare fact" is nonsense, Aron maintained: "[S]election and orientation have their function, even if it be small, in the narration of a single event" (Ess., 13).

We are now in a position to describe more completely the relation between the objects of knowing and the process of knowing. Because each category of meaning contains elements of freedom and necessity, all of the objects of the historical world must be understood and explained. More specifically, Aron's philosophy of history requires the application of all three moments of analysis—understanding, sociological explanation, and historical explanation—to each of the three levels of analysis, namely, ideas, institutions, and events. This pattern of analysis constitutes the logical framework that governs not only Aron's epistemology but his entire life's work as well. It makes no difference whether Aron is analyzing
problems in history, sociology, economics, military strategy or international relations; these categorical distinctions still obtain. All objects display the same three-fold structure and thus require the same three-fold process of analysis.

Before leaving Aron's epistemology, we must address one final issue—the nature and scope of objectivity. Although Aron restored a measure of coherence and rationality to history, he nevertheless maintained that interpretation is still an essential element of knowledge. The postulate of partial coherence may shorten the infinite distance Weber placed between reason and experience, but distance remains nevertheless. What, then, guarantees the objectivity of judgment? How is it possible to bridge the gap between subject and object, particularly after Aron has underscored the logical impossibility of the attempt?

"In order for history to be objective," Aron wrote, "it is necessary for us to believe in the existence of a universal system of values." If all historical judgments bear the mark of a personal system of values, then the possibility of conferring a greater degree of truth on one interpretation over another depends, in the final analysis, on the existence of a transhistorical system of norms against which personal values may be measured and judged.

At this point, Aron's solution to the problem of objectivity reveals its dependence on what Suzanne Mesure recognized as a "fundamental philosophical option," namely, "the Kantian thesis, according to which it is a certain representation of the end of history as the Idea of Reason which orients, in a regulatory fashion, historical knowledge." "There is in Kant," Aron declared during an interview late in life, "a concept to which I still subscribe: it is the idea of reason, an image of a society that would be truly humanized." Despite the senseless turmoil of the twentieth century, Aron never ceased "to think, or dream, or hope—in the light of the idea of Reason—for a humanized society." For Aron, as well as for Kant, a truly humanized society is one which recognizes the freedom of the individual to enhance his or her moral worth under laws hypothetically of his or her making. The universal reign of law and the establishment of perpetual peace thus constitute "two representa-
tions of the Idea as the goal of history as the realization of a rational humanity. From this vantage point, an historical reconstruction can be objective to the degree that it interprets the sequence of events as so many steps leading toward the fulfillment of this Idea. Or, as Mesure put it, "interpretation will be more objective when it is oriented by values capable of being shared by the whole of humanity."

What saved Aron from the revolutionary optimism of the Marxists-and the non-revolutionary optimism of nineteenth-century liberals such as Comte and Spencer, for that matter-was his unshakeable conviction that the idea of the end of history was just that, an idea. As an idea, the end of history is simply an assumption or working hypothesis which is necessary for history and historical science to make any sense at all. Because this eschatological perspective functions only as a regulatory ideal, the end of history must be understood to be inachievable. A purely formal idea of the end of history, Aron wrote, "will carry no conviction (and does not claim to do so) but at least suggests the basic antinomy between the rational mission of man and brute existence. History exists only because of this contradiction. Either pure mind or blind impulse, it would be equally lost in a continuous progress or lawless sequence" (I, 316). History and historical knowledge, therefore, require what one student of Aron has called an "inaccessible paradise" in order to be possible.

By arguing that the meaning of history can never be completely known or realized, Aron effectively removed all possibility of discovering historical truth in history. Beyond science, he explained, "philosophical reflection is possible...but this reflection is itself a function of history." Because we are historical beings, possession of the whole truth can be granted to no one, a fact that lies at the root of Aron's pronounced aversion to totalitarian ideologies. Although we will reserve a more detailed discussion of the manner in which Aron related knowledge and action for the next section, we here note in passing that Aron's preference for what he called the "politics of understanding"-a politics governed by toleration and compromise-has its origins in his epistemological conviction that knowl-
edge is partial, incomplete, and uncertain. Similarly, his condemnation of "the politics of Reason"—a politics based on the conviction that one can know and redirect the whole of history—is justified by the same epistemological modesty.

For some, such philosophical self-restraint was underwhelming, even infuriating. Aron's epistemological reserve was held in contempt not only by Marxists, who claimed to know the laws of history in their entirety, but by existentialists who claimed no such thing. Although existentialists like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were utterly indifferent to the socio-economic theories of Marxism, they were greatly intrigued by Marx's call to revolution. In their view, the problem with a Kantian philosophy like Aron's was its abstractness and uncertainty: the stringent limits that a Kantian ethics placed on theoretical thought made it unforgivably difficult to deduce specific moral choices from general moral maxims. For thinkers like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, a Kantian reign of ends was "only conceivable as the outcome not of morally informed choices but of revolution." Such a revolution, Tony Judt has explained, "would not only release the intellectuals from the discomfort of a contingent existence but would itself change the rules of the existential game."

Although Aron harbored no personal animosity towards Sartre or Merleau-Ponty (they had been close friends at one time), he was plainly angered by talk of this sort. "Revolutionaries tend to exaggerate both the margin of freedom and the power of destiny," he declared. "Uplifted by their faith beyond the humdrum lessons of wisdom, they expect perpetual peace to flower from unlimited violence. They proclaim the inevitability of their triumph, because the cause which embodies so much of their hope cannot possibly fail" (0, 190). Tragically enough, however, "there is no law, either human or inhuman, which can direct the chaos of events to a definite end, be it radiant or horrific" (ibid.).

But if there is no final end in history, what hope can we have for history? In what can we place our confidence? Aron's response is clear: "I believe I have shown the necessity of rediscovering a faith in man and seeking to understand our historical situation." Aron's faith in humanity, however, is a far cry from the robust confidence
that Enlightenment philosophies are made of. "Man is a reasonable being," Aron once declared, quoting his friend Eric Weil, "but it has not been demonstrated that men are reasonable." If we are not to despair, we must assume, or better, hope that men and women will someday become reasonable. For the moment, however, we must recognize that our hold on reason and rationality is a precarious one: 'Human life is dialectic, that is, dramatic, since it is active in an incoherent world, is committed despite duration, and seeks a fleeting truth with no other certainty but a fragmentary science and a formal reflection' (I, 347).

Because his theory of knowledge pulled the rug out from under the feet of those who stood on the conviction that history offers a guarantee of human progress, Aron was rebuked time and again for his "nihilism." Paul Fauconnet, an eminent French sociologist and member of Aron's dissertation committee, for example, declared that *La philosophic critique de l'histoire* and *Introduction a la philosophic de l'histoire* were so epistemologically brooding that they were obviously the work of either "a devil or a madman." Although Fauconnet's rebuff is extreme, even Aron's sympathizers admit that a "dampening quality" characterizes much of his work. For his part, Aron admitted freely that he was something of an historical pessimist: the rising tide of National Socialism, the misery of the Great Depression, and the horror of the Holocaust all combined to cure Aron of what he called his "naive and youthful optimism." After witnessing those tragedies first hand, Aron wrote, "...I ceased to believe that history always obeys the imperatives of reason or the wishes of men of good will. I lost faith [but], not without effort, kept hope."

Indeed, the entire sweep of Aron's scholarship can be interpreted as a lifelong search for evidence that the struggle to realize what he called "the essential values" is not in vain. More specifically, Aron searched for progress in light of what he considered to be the two dominant facts of modern life, namely, industrialization and nuclear weapons. By a sort of "cunning of history," Aron observed, nuclear weapons and industrialization have converged to make war less rational than before. Are we entitled, then, to believe that we
stand on the threshold of a new era? We propose to divide this question into two others. First, what are the consequences of industrialization for social order, and second, what are the consequences of nuclear weapons for the prospects of peace? Our next section takes up the former question, while the third section addresses the latter. Combining an analysis of the substantive problems of history with an analysis of the formal problems of knowledge is very much in keeping with the form and spirit of Aron's work, because to his way of thinking, an answer to the question, What must we do? is inseparable from an answer to the question, What can I know?

As we will see, however, what we must do is not altogether certain because what we can know is not, at least in Aron's account, altogether clear. The chief difficulty lies in Aron's postulate of "partial coherence." At first glance, the notion of partial order seems to be a sensible compromise between Weber's irrationalism and Marx's determinism. Some objects, we will recall, have different "principles of permanence" than others and thus call into being different methods of knowing. The interpretive freedom Aron granted to historians and sociologists, as well as the freedom he ascribed to human action generally, was therefore neither absolute nor non-existent but limited—it changed according to the object or situation under consideration.

What mars this apparently moderate and measured epistemology is the fact that Aron nowhere explained where these principles of permanence come from or, more to the point, how they retain their identity in light of the corrosive effects of interpretation. Understanding, after all, is never a strictly rational operation that simply "grasps" its intentional object in an impartial or mechanical fashion. By virtue of its inherent autonomy, understanding is always a practical or projective exercise that "shapes" the objects of experience in the act of knowing them. Although Aron repeatedly emphasized the independent status of historical objects, his commitment to the Kantian notion of regulatory ideas suggests that these objects do not possess an actual or optic independence but only a believed one. In other words, the real existence of these objects seems to be
reduced to the hope that they do in fact exist. Although Aron was surely correct in maintaining that Marx's impersonal view of knowledge leads to a world without man, his own epistemology runs the risk of leaving man without a world.

This unhappy outcome is particularly regrettable in a philosophy determined to give external necessity its due. Although Aron never wavered in his conviction that reason must respect the constraints of historical necessity, he never squared that conviction with his equally firm commitment to the autonomy of reason, a shortcoming that left him propounding the logically obscure proposition that reason is simultaneously independent of and conditioned by the forces of historical necessity.

It is there, in the double impulse between autonomy and necessity, that we see the source of the restless ambivalence that we take to be the hallmark of Aron's thinking. Declaring that these two points connect "at a point in infinity" only begs the question. How does this abstract proposition bear on practical matters, especially statecraft? What does it mean for concrete political choice?

"The Sorbonne Trilogy"

Dry and highly abstract, Aron's dissertation was nevertheless a necessary first step towards his goal of understanding history-in-the-making. "The mere story of events teaches us nothing," he once remarked, "unless it is given form and meaning by reference to concepts...." If Aron is correct on this point, then we must have recourse not only to a method that generates the concepts we need but, at an even higher level of abstraction, to an epistemology that sanctions the methods that we use. And that was the purpose of the Introduction: "to establish the truth of the most general propositions from which a methodology could be developed...." Another book was necessary, however, "to advance from principles to their application" (I, 10).

Unfortunately, this book was never written. Consumed by his journalistic responsibilities and worried that he would spend the rest of his life writing introductions to the social sciences, Aron lost interest in exploring the more formal dimensions of knowledge. It
was not until 1955, the year he received an appointment to a chair in sociology at the Sorbonne, that Aron resumed his efforts to advance from the first principles of the *Introduction*. However, more anxious to address the problems of modern societies than to resolve the problems of methodology, Aron confined his methodological comments to three short chapters introducing a series of volumes that has since become known as "The Sorbonne Trilogy." The Sorbonne Trilogy is a comparative analysis of Soviet and Western societies which focuses on three dimensions of social order: the economic (*Eighteen Lectures on Industrial Society*), the social properly so called (*La Luttedes Classes*), and the political (*Democracy and Totalitarianism*).

Because Aron chose to explain his method primarily *by way* of illustration, that is, by applying it directly to a specific set of problems, we must cull the elements of this method from several essays on Montesquieu that Aron wrote and from his brief prefatory remarks introducing the Sorbonne Trilogy. In doing so, we will discover that the Trilogy is not a disconnected collection of sociological insights, as some have maintained, but an intelligible whole, the internal order of which not only reflects the logic of the *Introduction*, but anticipates the internal order of *Peace and War* as well.

At the outset of his opening lecture on the nature of sociological inquiry, Aron introduced a distinction between two theoretical attitudes that immediately calls to mind the language and the logic of *the Introduction*. Sociology, Aron maintained, is analytic as well as synthetic in character and may therefore be represented as a discipline that incorporates features peculiar to both economics and philosophy. The analytic quality of economic analysis resides in its commitment to the scientific method in order to understand *one* aspect of social life. Because analytical knowledge is by definition that knowledge which is gained by breaking an object into its component parts, the scope of economic analysis is confined to a comparatively narrow and isolated range of social phenomena, namely, economic behavior.

There is a synthetic dimension to sociological analysis, however,
that compels the sociologist to imitate the philosopher's attempt to understand not one aspect but the whole of existence. Although sociology initially considers limited segments of collective life, social phenomena like the family and class relations reflect to some degree the character or ethos of the particular society in which they are located. It is impossible, Aron argued,

to study social stratification...without considering many different aspects-economic, political and religious. If these phenomena, which are essentially sociological, are examined more carefully they are seen to be characterized by their global nature. They may be regarded as universal social phenomena. (Lee., 21)

Sociology cannot limit itself, however hard it may try, simply to establishing the facts. On this point, Aron noted, Comte was right: one can understand a part of society only by inserting it into a more comprehensive whole. Sociological research on the psychology of factory workers, for example, "means nothing" unless broader factors are taken into account, "such as the role the factory plays in the surrounding area, and in the branch of industry involved; the status of ownership of the means of production; the relations between industrial workers' organization and so forth."

Attempting to join these two doctrines together, Aron argued that sociologists must recognize the existence of "partial" order. Between the absolute unity of an ideal society and the infinite diversity of empirically observable customs and institutions, Aron maintained, lies the plurality of an "intelligible" order. Social life "appears neither incoherent nor completely ordered; it contains innumerable semi-organized parts, but no obvious total order." The whole of society, then, "constitutes an undifferentiated whole over which different conceptualizations give us partial views."

The impossibility of locating a clear, well-defined nucleus of social reality, however, does not reduce sociological inquiry to a methodological free-for-all. By describing social wholes as partially ordered realities, Aron has immediately dispensed with two meth-
ods of analysis: the synthetic method of historical materialism, which attempts to reconstruct the whole of society on the basis of one primary factor, the economic, and the analytic methods of most modern-day sociologists, which dissolve social reality into an almost infinite number of causal relations. However, Aron assured his readers, there is an "intermediate solution": the interpretive method of Montesquieu. "In language that is not really clear and is often ambiguous, [The Spirit of the Laws] gives the essentials of the method of thinking a sociologist would need if he rejected both the completely synthetic claims of Marxist sociology and the type of pure analysis I have just described."

The essentials are these: first, the sociologist constructs different types or systems of behavior that reveal what Aron called the "underlying" or "implicit" logic of behavior; second, the sociologist enumerates the general causal determinants that play a role in shaping this underlying logic or rationality; finally, by arranging different social structures in an historical sequence, the "interpretive" sociologist establishes a framework for historical study and understanding. Only when sociology achieves these three objectives, Aron concluded, can sociology "reconcile the two aims, scientific and synthetic, which characterize it" (MC, I, viii).

We immediately see the affinity between Montesquieu's interpretive sociology and Aron's critical philosophy of history: the three steps that constitute Montesquieu's sociological method clearly prefigure the three elements or moments of Aron's philosophy of historical knowledge. Even more striking is the similarity between their methods of reconstructing "social wholes." Montesquieu, Aron explained, compressed the almost infinite variety of customs and social orders into three types of regimes, namely, the republican, the monarchical, and the despotic. The originality of this typology, Aron pointed out, was that these three types of regimes were at the same time three types of societies. And these social orders were themselves the product of an original play of causal forces, such as geography, climate, religion, and soil, among others. In fact, taken together, all of these causes contribute to forming what Montesquieu
Raymond Aron and the Politics of Understanding

Raymond Aron and the Politics of Understanding called "the general spirit of a nation," an obscure and difficult concept that Aron took to be analogous to the notion of "culture" as understood by sociologists and anthropologists. In Montesquieu's sociology, Aron explained, it is important to recognize that the general spirit is inextricably bound up with the notion of the "principle" of government: the principle is the "sentiment" that maintains or upholds a given regime and this sentiment is in turn related to a people's way of life as this ethos comes to be expressed through its institutions.

It is here, in Montesquieu's account of social wholes, that we discover one important reason for Aron's abiding interest in the great French thinker: the relation between the form of government and the spirit of a nation is of the same dialectical order as motifs and mobiles. The behavior of collectivities for Montesquieu, like the behavior of individuals for Aron, is at root governed by the incessant and complex interaction between intentional and causal realities. In the final analysis, however, the way men and women govern themselves was "the essential phenomenon" for Montesquieu. He constructed his social types with politics uppermost in his mind because, like Aristotle, he believed men and women were essentially political creatures.

Turning his attention to the problems of modern society, Aron observed that there is "an antinomy between the fact of differentiation and the ideal of equality." Because industrial societies generate social functions that vary greatly in their complexity and value, industrial societies inevitably generate political, economic, and social inequalities. At the same time, however, "the immanent purpose of politics is to lead men to participate in their community" (Lee., 65). This is the fundamental contradiction of social life "for which all regimes seem to provide an imperfect solution" (ibid.).

However, if all regimes provide imperfect solutions to the problem of reconciling hierarchy and equality, how does one then choose between or among regimes? Do the shortcomings of communist and democratic regimes mean that both forms of governance are flawed but equally legitimate solutions to the problems of governance and order? Aron's reflections on this problem constitute
what some commentators see as his greatest legacy to the social sciences.

As we have seen, Aron accepted Weber's proposition that scientific knowledge promises only limited access to the truth. Aron did not follow Weber all the way, however, in completely divorcing the world of choice from the world of science. Although Aron agreed with Weber that science simply cannot supply us with one "truth of action," he firmly maintained in opposition to Weber that science can "judge those individuals who are arbitrarily fascinated by one aspect of the real, or who are inclined, by fanaticism, to sacrifice everything to one value." Instead of justifying the "legitimacy of commitment," Aron emphasized, "our intention is to lay the foundation of the legitimacy of scientific criticism."

Sociological analysis is thus not only a means of discovering the range of behavioral traits peculiar to different types of social wholes but, as Roy Pierce observed, a guide to political choice as well. According to Aron, reasonable choice begins with an analysis of the probable consequences of action or, in this case, of different regimes. If we are attempting to choose between or among social systems, then we must have recourse to a typology of systems in order to understand the social wholes with which we are confronted. Accordingly, we ask the same question of Aron that he once asked of Montesquieu, namely, by what intellectual tool is chaotic diversity transformed into intelligible order? What, in other words, is the plan of the Sorbonne Trilogy?

Industrial societies, Aron wrote, "like complex societies generally, have three main forms of social differentiation-through the division of labor, through the hierarchy of wealth, power and prestige, and through the plurality of groups which are formed and come into conflict with each other as a whole" (Lee., 232). There are, in other words, three fundamental aspects of social reality: the economic, the social, and the political. Although few would find fault with this rather conventional construction, debate is joined over Aron's next step-describing the relations between and among the different levels-because Aron, like Montesquieu, ascribed a measure of primacy to politics.
In Aron's schema, the different species of industrial society owe their originality to their political systems. "All cooperation," Aron explained, "implies authority; now the method by which authority is exercised is the essence of politics. Politics is the major feature of the entire community because it conditions any cooperation between men" (Dem., 5). Politics, then, exercises a degree of "causal primacy" over the rest of society. More than any other aspect of collective behavior, it is politics that determines a society's way of life.

Aron granted a measure of existential primacy to politics as well: "In relation to man, politics is more important than economics, by definition, because politics is concerned more directly with the very meaning of existence" (Dem., 11). For this reason, politics may be regarded as the "interpretive aspect" of social life. This should not be taken to mean that politics is free from struggle or conflict; Aron was well aware of the violent passions that lurk beneath the surface of even the most orderly political systems. But we delude ourselves, he maintained, if we define politics solely by the struggle for power.

The primacy of politics, however, is only a partial one. Aron repeatedly insisted that he was not exchanging a doctrine of political determinism for a doctrine of economic determinism. Politics is primarily an ideal phenomenon existing "only in and through intentions; it is refracted differently in every consciousness and only attains intelligibility in and through the consciousness of the political scientist." No single theory of politics, then, can identify "a list of variables as causes which we only have to mechanically pass in review: in a concrete case, the causes do not form a system, none is closed in upon itself." The sort of primacy Aron had in mind, therefore, was a very limited one.

In contrast to the essential indeterminacy of politics stands what Aron termed the "quantitative determinacy" of economics. As that aspect of social life concerned with the material production and distribution of goods and services, economics is located closer to the plane of necessity than is politics. Because economic life is governed predominantly by the laws of necessity, economic problems are more amenable to quantitative analysis than political ones.
Occupying the middle rank in Aron's chain of being is the social proper, a dimension of collective existence that exhibits properties of both freedom and necessity, or politics and economics. Like Marx, Aron regarded social life as an arena of conflict and struggle. Industrialization inevitably begets a stratified society in which groups maybe divided in "the maxima and the minima, the haves and the have-nots...." Unlike Marx, however, Aron believed that the socio-economic groups created by industrialization are not the only groups that constitute and affect social reality. In Aron's opinion, "it is the structure of ruling categories, and not class relations, that determines the essence of social regimes." Social behavior, in other words, is decisively affected by the kind of political regime controlling the levers of power. Thus, "A sociology of classes divorced from the sociology of the political regimes has become the absurdity of our time."

After explaining what features or properties all social wholes have in common, Aron then identified the major variable that enabled him to distinguish different regime types. Given his emphasis on the significance of political life, it should be no surprise that Aron attributed supreme importance to one feature of the political order in particular when he constructed his types, namely, the nature of the party system. When one party has a legal monopoly on the exercise of power, there exists what Aron termed a "monopolistic party system," a system that stands in direct contrast to the "constitutional-pluralist system," where two or more parties have the right to compete for the exercise of power. The Soviet Union and China obviously fall into the first category, Western democracies the second. Describing the behavioral possibilities of each type of system consists of analyzing the consequences that the decisive fact of the party system implies for each of the three dimensions of social wholes. How are these consequences determined? By applying each of Aron's three steps to the modality of collective life under consideration: for each system an ideal type is constructed, causal determinants are listed, and historical developments are plotted.

After analyzing the behavioral properties associated with each regime on each level of analysis, Aron then compared the two
systems on the basis of the degree to which they realized the values they proclaimed, a step prohibited in Weber's methodology for the social sciences. On this level of comparison, Aron saw a yawning gap between the two systems. Constitutional-pluralistic regimes are flawed, Aron argued, because "they contain either too great a degree of oligarchy or demagogy and invariably suffer through the difficulty they have in being effective" (Dem., 237). Aron termed these imperfections "imperfections of practice." They are "imperfections in the implementation of the system which are not intrinsic to the system itself." The imperfection of the monopolistic party system, however, is "something different and it is fundamental" (Dem., 237). If we imagine a homogeneous society without conflicts of interest among different social groups, then "the monopoly of the party is no longer indispensable." But, Aron reasoned,

If public opinion is forbidden to express itself freely, if uniformity of thought is maintained, the society is no longer homogeneous. From the moment when society is no longer homogeneous, the group which imposes its will by force can carry out a task, which is in itself admirable, but it can no longer claim that it has established a democracy. In the end it comes down to the question of how to have a perfect society; it contradicts itself when it puts forward the one-party regime as the realization of democracy. (Ibid.)

Monopolistic party systems, then, suffer "inherent imperfections."

Aron never claimed that sociological analysis could tell people what choices to make. He did claim, however, that scientific analysis could enable men and women to make reasonable choices. From Aron's perspective, a reasonable choice is one in which various courses of action are judged not simply by the intentions of the chooser but by their consequences as well. Overlooking or dismissing the consequences of choice means one is acting dogmatically, according to Aron. Now, if a regime's shortcomings have no bearing on the individual's goals or values, then that person is not acting irrationally by choosing a flawed or imperfect regime. "The monopo-
Arion maintained, "may sometimes be necessary, in some circumstances."
(Dem., 246). But, as Pierce noted, an individual acts unreasonably "if he chooses it because of a goal which it proclaims but is intrinsically unable to achieve." The values on the basis of which one chooses, in other words, must be related to the contingencies of existence.

Aron, then, attempted to occupy the middle ground between Weber's notion of free, arbitrary moral choice on the one hand, and the positivist belief in scientifically demonstrable choice on the other. Empirical analysis requires one to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of different regimes while moral reasoning requires one to take the findings of empirical analysis into account. Because a judgment of what is desirable is conditioned by but not confined to a judgment of what is possible, we may compare the nature of a reasonable choice to the nature of self-knowledge: in both cases, there is a dialectical relationship, or what Arion called a "coming-and-going," between intentional and empirical realities that affects the final judgment.

One may wonder, however, if Arion actually hit on the judicious combination of idealism and empiricism that he was aiming for or whether he in fact fell heavily between the stools. A methodology that can mark out the "range and meaning" of the political options available to modern industrial societies, Pierce observed, can "by confirming the claims of an ideology...also justify it." If it is only those institutions implied by constitutional-pluralist regimes that support freedom, Pierce reasoned—parties, parliaments, elections—then democratic liberals seem to be justified in "attributing as much value to those institutions" as they do to freedom itself.

This, however, runs afoul of a cardinal tenet of Arion's critical idealism, namely, the notion that freedom is a purely formal reality that can never be completely incarnated in a specific set of institutions or actions. Readers thus find Arion straining to qualify, even disavow, the normative judgments of his own social science. Declaring, for example, that Western observers were right in prophesying that democratic institutions were "destined for the same triumphal progress across the globe as motor-cars or electricity," Arion never-
theless insisted that Westerners would be wrong to attribute "universal significance to the ideologies which glorify these institutions" (0, 315). But, as Pierce observed, this conclusion is no more satisfying than the first because Aron "believes that the constitutional-pluralist system, with the institutions it implies, is the only system which actually expresses those formal values once traditionalism is overwhelmed by the forces of modernization." Rather than achieving some sort of balance between the empirical and the normative, then, Aron's dialectical logic forces him to hesitate between the equally unpleasant alternatives of dogmatism and relativism.

Aron fares no better when moving from methodological pluralism to political pluralism. To Aron, reasonable choice requires compromise, and compromise is possible only in pluralistic regimes, or in those regimes in which different and conflicting interests struggle peacefully for political power. Although such a politics sought to protect and advance individual freedom, Aron was well aware that pluralism was not without its costs: "it maintains an atmosphere of division and discord in the body politic, it blurs the sense of communal responsibilities and jeopardizes internal peace and friendship" (0, 322). Nevertheless, pluralistic societies must be advanced because pluralism is "a means of limiting arbitrary power and ensuring a legal expression to discontent, and [stands] as a symbol of the lay impartiality of the State and the autonomy of the human mind" (ibid.).

Indeed, in reviewing the prospects for democracy, Aron, for all of his "disabused optimism," was surprisingly sanguine about the future. "World opinion today," he wrote, "understands more clearly than ever before the facts of modern economic life and its potentialities for peace." The possible causes of class conflict, for example, "now seem less important than the things that make for interdependence." At the same time, "ideologies are also becoming discredited and tending to lose their emotional effectiveness." Economists have learned to control economic cycles with greater skill and, by so doing, have drained ideological invective of much of its force.

Given this, what may we now hope for? Those familiar with Aron's broadsides against utopian optimism, or who see in Aron only
a dark, brooding pessimism maybe caught short by his answer. "[I]n tranquil and happy epochs," Aron declared, "millennialism teaches us never to be satisfied with the results so far obtained...." Although "the promise may be all but destroyed" by Axon's insistence on tranquility, Pierce observed, this statement nevertheless "signals a concession to millennialism that even Albert Camus, the philosopher of revolt, was not willing to make."

Indeed, for all of his forceful polemics against those "with a reputation for optimism," Aron gave optimism rather wide berth in his own thinking. In encouraging his fellow citizens to stay the democratic course during the postwar period, for example, Aron promised a rather heady payoff should they succeed in doing so. In the Old Continent, Aron wrote, "the scale of greatness remains that of the national states. Always of the second rank when compared to the colosses [of the United States and the Soviet Union], France will recover a radiance and an influence of the first rank on the condition that, by its interior stability and its prosperity, it creates a political and spiritual center around which will gather the smaller nations."

This stirring, almost breathless description of the future-which immediately calls to mind Victor Duray's declaration that "France is the moral center of the world"-is remarkable not for what it expects of French foreign policy but what it demands of French domestic politics as well. "A great nation," Aron declared, "lives and prospers only by the constant and mysterious inspiration of a great idea," or by what Aron elsewhere termed a "task" (un projet). "Does France still have a task?" Aron asked in the immediate aftermath of World War Two. "This is not only the decisive question," he added, "it is, one could say, the only question." In Aron's opinion, France did indeed still have a task, and a rather lofty one at that: "The French idea," Aron maintained, "is to protect what is human at an hour when all conspire to deliver society to the inhumanity of enslaved masses and the pyramids of steel."

In attempting to infuse French national politics with this rather bracing measure of moral concern, Aron clearly drew not from the precepts of classical French liberalism, a philosophy that accepts the
permanence of the struggle for power, but from the tenets of French republicanism, a philosophy of public virtue and self-sworn enemy of liberalism. In France, Tony Judt observed, it was fin-de-siecle republicanism that "first deployed to the full the idea that France stood for something, proselytizing an idea of civic virtue and implicitly denying any potential or actual differences or divergences in the nation itself." If there was a goal to which republicanism aspired, Judt added, "it was thus the creation of `Frenchness,' an identity whose self-described moral superiority would compensate for the gloomier aspects of recent history."

How this kind of idealism comports with the sort of pluralism Aron hoped would take root in France is far from clear. Even within Aron's own work these two impulses are at odds with one another. Spurring France on to become the "spiritual and political center" of Europe immediately after the war, Aron seemed to sour to the idea in the 1950s, when he wrote that "the longing for a purpose, for communion with the people, for something controlled by an idea and a will" is, quite frankly, "not for us" (0, 323).

Aron's ambivalent idealism manifested itself again when he became engaged in the "end of ideology" debate that gripped intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic at mid-century. As Aron described it, an open or non-ideological society was one where citizens, aided by the findings of policy analysts, would pass judgment on a "multiplicity of partial and ad hoc policy measures" (0, 251). However, even in The Opium of the Intellectuals, which was seen as something of a manifesto for the end-of-ideology movement, Aron was nagged by doubts and anxieties over the pragmatic, non-ideological incrementalism that marks pluralistic regimes. "The substitution of scientific thought for religious truth," Aron observed, "cannot but entail a spiritual crisis: it is difficult to be satisfied with a provisional truth, incontestable but limited, not guaranteed to console" (0, 263). By 1960, Aron's idealism was in full voice once again. Concerned that the anti-ideological attitude could encourage social conformity and passivity in the face of pressing social ills, Aron declared that ideology should be regarded as a "necessary support" for social action and reform.
Despite his concern over the costs that an industrial society can extract, Aron firmly believed not only that the benefits far outweighed the costs, but that those benefits were being globally distributed. Does this mean that the industrial society that Comte foresaw has finally come to pass, that humanity has become "socially uniform" and "diplomatically unified"? Are we, in fact, on the threshold of a new era? Any such judgment must await an assessment of international order, a topic to which we now turn.

*Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*

Although Aron produced several interesting and provocative studies on international relations in the years shortly after the war, these were really nothing more than potshots at the topic, written while Aron was actively engaged as a journalist for *Le Figaro*. As a philosopher writing about international relations, Aron was plagued by a nagging sense of ignorance and inadequacy. What right did he have, Aron asked himself, to pass judgment on international relations when he really knew next to nothing about the problems of global diplomacy, the balance of forces or military strategy? Thus, it was "remorse or at any rate regret," Aron explained, that prompted his decision to take up the problems of war and peace. Once back in the university, however, Aron braced himself for a more systematic study, one that would "unite...the lessons of the recent past, analysis of the present and advice to men of action." "As an observer, although a committed one," Aron explained, "I had to conclude on a theory of action." The result was *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*.

*Peace and War is* a work of heroic proportions. Comparable in scope and profundity to Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* and Quincy Wright's *A Study of War*, it immediately established Aron as a leading figure in the field of international relations. Like many substantial works, however, *Peace and Wards* heavy going. Its difficulty lies not in its prose-one reviewer, in fact, breathing an audible sigh of relief, pointed out that in place of the difficult language of the *Introduction*, Aron had substituted a "prodigiously lucid and limpid style which is so effective in the communication of
his thought"-but in the scope and conceptual complexity of Aron's presentation. Not only is the book long, running to some eight hundred pages in the English translation; but it seems to lack a center of gravity or a fundamental idea that would bestow a systematic coherence upon the work as a whole and enable the reader to keep his bearings while tracldng the lines of what seems at times to be an endless maze of arguments and observations. Stanley Hoffmann, a former student of Aron's, spoke directly to this problem in his lengthy analysis of *Peace and War*. Aron's theory of international relations, Hoffmann wrote, "is not a synthesis centered on a major demonstration or flowing from a major hypothesis—neither the subject matter nor the method lend themselves to such treatment; it *is* a mosaic construction of partial analyses often filled with doubt and negation." But, Hoffmann immediately added, "I *say* mosaic and not motley, for there is a unity provided by Aron's very conception of his purpose: to understand in *all* its aspects the logic of one specific form of behavior...."

Like most mosaics, *Peace and War* is best understood from a distance. In order to grasp the unity and coherence of the book, we will direct our attention largely to its logical form. This does not mean that we will drain *Peace and War* of its political substance. Quite the contrary: one of the purposes of this section is to demonstrate just how inseparable form and substance really are, at least to Aron's way of thinking. To this end; we begin by searching for a definition of "theory." *Peace and War is, after all, a theory of international relations and stands, in fact, as the only claim to theory Aron ever made. How, then, did Aron use this term?*

It is surprisingly difficult to understand exactly what Aron meant by the word "theory." There is, firstly, the problem of his rather confusing terminology. Theory, as Aron used the term, is both a *level* and a *moment* of analysis. As a level of analysis, theory implies a body of knowledge that establishes the logical connections between propositions of empirical fact. As a moment of analysis, however, theory refers to the first act of analysis itself, namely, the act of defining concepts or elucidating an object of analysis. 

An even greater obstacle to understanding lies in the fact that
Aron nowhere systematically distinguished theory from method, model, hypothesis or any other related concept or level of abstraction. Although he began an article entitled "What is a Theory of International Relations?" with the promising complaint that few words in the social sciences are used as carelessly as the word "theory," Aron ended the article by declaring that analyzing the difference between terms such as "general theory" and "model" would entail an excessively long digression "in view of the aims of this short essay" and by wondering if theory is not, after all, simply "the critical or questioning equivalent of a philosophy."

As we have seen, a cardinal tenet of Aron's epistemology is that knowledge cannot be defined by \textit{a priori} criteria. Aron's study of historical understanding, for example, did not measure historical knowledge against "a type of knowledge proclaimed in advance as the only truly scientific one" but followed instead the "natural movement" which proceeds from "knowledge of self to that of the collective development" in order to discover precisely what kind of knowledge history affords. In doing so, Hoffmann pointed out, Aron tacitly suggested that Aristotle's time-worn rule still remained essential: one should allow no greater precision than the subject matter can bear. From this it follows that theory is dependent to some degree upon the meaning of its object. We cannot determine the structure and function of economic \textit{theory}, for example, until we have first determined the nature of economic behavior. Similarly, we cannot establish the nature and purpose of theory until we have first determined the nature of international relations.

The scope and structure of theory, however, is not accounted for by referring solely to material criteria, that is, by referring simply to the object of analysis. There are abstract, logical criteria to consider as well. \textit{Peace and War}, Aron explained, was in fact written "to illustrate a method, applicable to other subjects, which shows both the limits of our knowledge and the conditions of historical choices" (P&W, 24). We immediately see that the structure of theory, like the structure of all intentional objects, is thoroughly dialectical. We can understand what a theory is only by grasping formal methodological principles with one hand and concrete objects with the other. We
thus understand Aron's reluctance to offer a hard-and-fast definition of theory: the specifications for the construction of a theory vary according to the object at hand.

Aron points out that the methodological debates in political science have settled around the two poles of behavioralism and traditionalism. As latter-day descendents of positivism, behavioralists apply the techniques of modern science to the study of human action. Although the quest for vast, overarching laws of behavior has long since gone out of vogue, the taste for empirical analysis has not. Traditionalists, of which Aron offered the work of Hans Morgenthau as a prime example, rely on interpretation as a source of knowledge. The difference between these two approaches to international relations, Aron explained, freely quoting Morgenthau, can be compared to the difference between a snapshot and painted portrait: "The photograph shows everything that can be seen by the naked eye. The painted portrait...shows something that the naked eye cannot see: the human essence of the person who is portrayed" (P&W, 3).

At this point, Aron's methodology emerges to arbitrate the dispute. Taking a page from his study of Montesquieu, Aron declared that Peace and War would "clarify" and "transcend" the debate between political philosophers and political sociologists because these two doctrines of theory are not contradictory but compatible: "[R]ational schematics and sociological propositions constitute successive moments in the conceptual elaboration of a social universe" (ibid.). This line of reasoning is clearly indebted to Aron's earlier epistemological distinctions between understanding and explanation and thus anticipates further refinement. It comes as no surprise, then, when we read that Aron would proceed "from formal theory, to the determination of causes, and then to the analysis of a specific set of circumstances..." (P&W, 3-4). Thus we see a familiar pattern emerge yet again: three moments of analysis (theory, sociological causality and historical causality) are applied to three objects of analysis (statecraft, global political systems, the logic of peace and war). There is also a fourth section in Peace and War, "Praxeology," which is an extended normative meditation on the
moral foundations of statecraft, just as there is a fourth section in the *Introduction*, "Truth and History," where Aron expounds on the moral foundations of historical knowledge.

Beyond this broad, schematic connection, Aron's philosophy of historical knowledge is of decisive consequence for his theory of international relations in at least one other respect, namely, the manner in which the logic of "diplomatic-strategic behavior," the key element in Aron's theory of international relations, is defined. Aron explained that "Interstate actions are expressed in and by specific actions, those of individuals whom I shall call symbolic, the diplomat and the soldier" (P&W, 5). By resolving the object of his analysis into the hyphenated figures of the diplomat and soldier—which again recalls his effort to resolve the objects of historical action and analysis into *motifs* and *mobiles*-Aron meant to suggest that international action does not have an obvious or universal objective. The existence of independent states, however, forces statesmen to engage in a never-ending series of power calculations. Aron's theory of international relations, then, "starts from the plurality of autonomous centers of decision, hence the risk of war, and from this risk it deduces the necessity of the calculation of means" (P&W, 16).

International political action is thus, to use Weber's terminology, *zweckrational* action; it involves a rational calculation of means in order to achieve a given end.

Aron's acceptance of Weber's means-end schema, however, does not mean that his interpretation of international relations is an essentially Weberian one. Although Aron accepted the fact that states pursue a plurality of ends, he refused to concede Weber's fundamental point that these ends are irreconcilable or incompatible. In Weber's view, the incompatibility of values means that states, as the embodiments of different cultural values, inevitably find themselves in permanent conflict with one another. In Aron's view, however, theories of international relations must recognize that there are elements of cooperation as well as conflict that mark relations between and among states. For thousands of years, Aron explained, "Each collectivity had to count chiefly on itself to survive, but it also had-or should have had-to contribute to the task
common even to enemy cities, exposed to the risk of perishing together by dint of constantly fighting each other" (P&W, 17). Aron's recognition that there exists some common good among or between states led him to conclude that "the goal toward which collectivities ought to tend may be determined by rational analysis-a most un-Weberian conclusion-and thus to adopt as a maxim of statecraft Montesquieu's principle that "different nations ought in times of peace to do one another all the good they can, and in time of war as little injury as possible, without prejudicing their real interests" (P&W, 8, 52).

Because there is no universal or self-evident end of action in the international arena, Aron's theory of international relations announces at the outset that it does not purport to predict much. What, then, does it do? The theory that he is here outlining, Aron declared, simply seeks to understand "the meaning of diplomatic behavior, to trace its fundamental notions, to specify the variables that must be reviewed in order to understand any one constellation" of political power (P&W, 93). At best, theory here simply makes political action intelligible. It does not "suggest an `eternal diplomacy,' [and] does not claim to be the construction of a closed system" (ibid.). By moving from formal theory or the construction of "rational schematics" to a consideration of sociological determinants and then to an analysis of concrete historical circumstances, Aron intended to present his readers not with a seamless web of predictable behaviors but with a series of scenarios that, as Aron put it, "shows both the limits of our knowledge and the conditions of historical choices" (P&W, 4). Aron, in other words, seemed bent on illustrating not the predictability but the complexity of human action.

This had two consequences for Aron's approach to statesmanship. First, underscoring the complexity of action served to illustrate the importance of moderation and restraint in statecraft. Because our knowledge is necessarily limited, a politics of moderation, or a politics which seeks to maintain some sort of equilibrium or balance of power in the international arena, is the most prudent. Second, the complexity of action means that action cannot be reduced to the simple calculation of self-interest. Because Aron believed that action
was governed, at least in part, "by the ideas people have of themselves," he refused to treat the Cold War as a traditional great power conflict. To Aron's way of thinking, the United States and its allies were locked in a struggle that was governed as much by ideological factors as by considerations of interest. For that reason, Aron condemned as a double failure any theory of international relations that reified the concept of the national interest: not only did such theories fail to account for the different historical objectives of states, in Aron's opinion, but they also failed to elevate statecraft above the grim, self-defeating imperatives of realpolitik as well.

These propositions immediately differentiate Aron's theory of international relations from Hans Morgenthau's. Beginning from the premise that "politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their root in human nature," Morgenthau argued that political improvement rests on our ability "to understand the laws by which society lives." Because the operation of these laws is "impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure!" Realism, Morgenthau insisted, "believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws." And this theory, Morgenthau concluded, conclusively reveals that statesmen are everywhere and always compelled to "think and act in terms of interest defined as power."

Aron will have none of this. His neo-Kantian insistence that theoretical thought cannot grasp the essence of anything compelled him to reject any talk of a human "nature." Because the power of abstract reasoning does not extend to the discovery of essential unity, conceptualization cannot penetrate to what philosophers have commonly referred to as "the thing itself." So limited, theoretical thought discovers only opposites-in-relation, or pairs of logical antitheses bound together by an unknowable substance. Aron, for example, did not define the self by referring to one fundamental property such as the will-to-power or self-interest but by postulating a dialectical relation between two properties, namely, motifs and mobiles.

From this all else follows. -Jf theoretical thought is incapable of
disclosing a stable, invariant object of analysis, then the concomitant notion of "objective laws" governing the behavior of these objects becomes exceedingly problematic. Although Aron did not dismiss Morgenthau's search for theoretical order (or for what Aron termed "rational schematics") as wrongheaded, he did regard it as insufficient. Given the indeterminacy of human action-given, in other words, the dialectical relation between motifs and mobiles-political behavior can never be rationally determined, even in theory. And if this is true, then foreign policy can never take its bearings from a rational assessment of the national interest, as Morgenthau insisted it should.

From what, then, does foreign policy take its bearings? In Peace and War, Aron argued that statecraft should be guided, above all else, by the virtue of prudence. The prudent statesman, Aron explained, is one who acts

in accordance with the particular situation and the concrete data, and not in accordance with some system or out of obedience to some pseudo norm; it is to prefer the limitation of violence to the punishment of the presumably guilty party to so-called absolute justice; it is to establish concrete accessible objectives conforming to the secular law of international relations and not to limitless and perhaps meaningless objectives, such as `a world safe for democracy' or `a world from which power politics have disappeared.' (P&W, 585)

Although this is strikingly similar to Morgenthau's understanding of prudence, Aron's understanding of prudence contains one element that Morgenthau's does not, namely, a pronounced moral streak. Because international relations "is a mixture [of morality and power] that can be understood only in its ambiguous complexity," prudence must somehow pull self-interest and morality into the same loose orbit (P&W, 607). In fact, Aron argued in a later work, "any judgment about an external action is inseparable from a judgment about the internal system-that is, a state's institutions-and the imperial role appears beneficent or odious depending on
whether armies bring with them freedom or tyranny...." By this criterion, then, American diplomacy in Europe must be reckoned a success "not only because it contained communism, but because it promoted progress and human liberty."

During the Cold War, prudence dictated that the West be committed to anti-communist containment. Much like George Kennan, the director of President Truman's Policy Planning Staff and the architect of containment, Aron believed that the main element of an American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union must be, in Kennan's words, "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." However, unlike Kennan, Aron believed that because the Soviet Union's behavior was driven as much by ideology as by the calculations of interest- "each is alternately a means and an end with respect to one another"-the Soviet Union was as much a moral threat to the West as it was a political one. In other words, the challenge that the Soviet Union presented to Western statesmen was so immense that traditional geostrategic calculations could not apply.

This understanding of the struggle between East and West prompted Aron to make two specific policy proposals. First, given the apocalyptic character of Marxism, it was absolutely imperative for the West to maintain a strict military balance with the Soviets at all levels, from conventional forces to nuclear weaponry. Should the Soviet regime become convinced that it holds an incontestable superiority, Aron argued, "the danger would become fatal; the Kremlin leaders would feel that the time for the final struggle had come or, more probably, they would press their adversary to the point of forcing the West to choose between capitulation and war" (P&W, 691). Second, Aron believed that it was absolutely imperative that the United States protect and strengthen Western Europe. In fact, as long as Europe was secure, Aron maintained, the United States could afford to respond to losses and reversals in the Third World with something approaching a shrug of indifference. Instead of believing that American security was endangered "each time `Ruritania' declares its allegiance to Moscow, it would be better to show detachment...to expose in advance the Communist blackmail
to which incompetent rulers are too frequently prone, wrongly convinced that Americans would be damaged more than themselves by a victory for Moscow" (P&W, 696). Rarely are these losses decisive, Aron added: "[We should, remember on every occasion that the relation of military forces in our age is not seriously affected by the vicissitudes of the Cold War" (ibid.). This does not mean that American statesmen could freely ignore political developments in Asia or Africa; in fact, Aron urged the West to step up its developmental assistance for those regimes threatened by Communist insurgency movements. It does mean, however, that in the event that these efforts should fail—and in some cases, Aron hastened to point out, they most certainly would—that statesmen should never panic.

Although Aron never publicly stated as much, it is difficult to avoid the impression that Peace and War was written primarily for American statesmen as they tried to steer the United States through the turbulent waters of the 1960s and 70s. Some thirty-five years after its appearance, however, it is apparent that Aron's pleas for a moderate and measured political realism fell largely on deaf ears. The two precepts at the heart of his politico-strategic recommendations—a certain sense of detachment or indifference toward communist insurgency movements in the third world and a commitment to maintaining the military balance at all levels—were systematically ignored or violated by American statesmen, the first in the 1960s, the second in the 1970s.

Perhaps the reason that Peace and War found so little support among members of the American foreign policy establishment is that Aron never considered what exercises in prudential judgment would do to the moral foundations of his foreign policy or to public support for it. "After all," one scholar has written in this context, "could Johnson have refused to intervene in Vietnam and still preserved the Cold War consensus that had legitimated containment? And hadn't Eisenhower's `prudent' decision in 1954 merely laid the entire problem in Kennedy's lap?" It was the Kennedy administration, in fact, that felt the full force of this dilemma. John Gaddis has brilliantly described this difficulty. President Kennedy and his advisers, Caddis wrote,
were continually torn between urges to arouse and to educate. There was, on the one hand, the belief that Eisenhower had not made the nation face up to the threats confronting it; that the new administration had a duty, accordingly, to awaken the country—shock it if necessary—out of its complacency. On the other hand, there was a comparable sense of obligation to persuade the public to take a calmer and more rational view of the Cold War, to abandon the passions and oversimplifications characteristic of the early years of that conflict. These conflicting impulses colored Kennedy's public explanation of his strategy throughout his term in office.

The same conflicting impulses color Aron's public explanations as well. Despite his condemnation of strident Cold War rhetoric, especially Kennedy's impassioned promise to defend the "frontiers of freedom" everywhere, Aron could not resist conjuring up images of falling dominos in his efforts to goad the United States into accepting its global responsibilities ("Is it of no consequence to the American republic that the African states are falling one after the other into the Soviet orbit?"). Indeed, given his enthusiasm for a massive, across-the-board increase in military strength, Aron's complaints about Kennedy's rhetoric are a little surprising. How else can an administration convince the public to make the sacrifices necessary to sustain such a buildup save by persuading it that the nation stands in imminent peril? Similarly, his criticism of the American conviction that the United States would jeopardize its role throughout the world if it accepted defeat anywhere rings hollow and for the same reason. If the Communist threat is of such scope and magnitude that the traditional maxims of statecraft no longer apply if, in other words, the communist threat is as much ideological as it is geopolitical—then how can even a tactical withdrawal be construed as anything other than a major defeat? How could the United States appear to retreat from its admittedly overextended positions without triggering a crisis of confidence?

This is the dilemma that haunts any effort to arm power politics with moral purpose. Those who judge politics by the light of abstract
ideals are driven to feel an ever-increasing sense of responsibility for the conditions under which those ideals can be realized. As Kenneth W. Thompson has argued, "humanity has been endlessly prompted by conscience and insight to visions of perpetual peace...[S]uch a vision, [however], can be kept alive only when permitted to over-reach itself." Although Aron repeatedly emphasized that the universal values which guide our actions and policies are purely formal realities that may never be realized, his policy of anti-communist containment generates an almost irresistible tendency toward indiscriminate intervention because it implies that the West, particularly the United States, has a moral obligation to spread—and not just protect—liberal democratic values. Bequeathing the dilemma of an "inaccessible paradise" to philosophers may be harmless enough; bequeathing it to statesmen, however, may prove tragic indeed.

*Clausewitz* and the Art of War

Aron's strategic reflections are by no means confined to the broad, sweeping recommendations that we found in *Peace and War*. Indeed, deeply interested in the phenomenon of modern warfare, Aron wrote several major works on war and strategy that range in scope and complexity from a strangely impressionistic study of war in the twentieth century (a book Hans Morgenthau once described as "having no beginning or end, no center or periphery, no top or bottom") to a critically-acclaimed analysis of the great Prussian military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz.

Of central importance to this section is the book many feel to be Aron's best, namely, *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War*. The significance of this book for our analysis of Aron's strategic thought lies in the fact that, like *Peace and War*, it contains a theory of human action. As works of theory, however, these two books are marked by a fundamental difference: whereas *Peace and War* is an original work of theoretical construction, *Clausewitz* is, in effect, a work of theoretical renovation. *Clausewitz*, in other words, is an interpretive commentary on the strategic thought of the Prussian general; unlike *Peace and War*, it does not elaborate an original theory.
Our purpose in this section is two-fold. First, we intend to demonstrate that the model of self-knowledge continues to be a useful guide for explicating Aron's thought. In *Clausewitz*, for example, we will see that three moments of analysis are once again matched with three modes or objects of analysis. In fact, the manner in which Aron mapped out Clausewitz's theory of action so closely approximates the manner in which Aron presented his theory of action in *Peace and War* that the similarity immediately calls to mind Heidegger's appraisal of his own commentary on Kant: "I don't know if it's good Kant," Heidegger allegedly quipped, "but it's excellent Heidegger."

Second, we will attempt to underscore the connection between strategic theory and practice by searching for the ways in which Aron applied Clausewitzian precepts to military-strategic problems of the twentieth century. Although this exercise requires a rather sustained review of Clausewitz's thought, we will not enter into the abstruse philological and historical issues that Aron brought to bear on his interpretation of Clausewitz; neither will we touch on many of the substantive strategic or tactical matters that Clausewitz and Aron discussed at length. Our primary interest is in the logical form of *Clausewitz*, in the conceptual apparatus that Aron fashioned in order to think clearly about war and military strategy, and in the relevance of this conceptual tool for understanding the strategic predicaments of our own age.

What attracted Aron to Clausewitz was the fact that Clausewitz—like Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Weber—was a thinker who vigorously resisted any form of dogmatism. Clausewitz, Aron explained, thus fought on two fronts: "[O]n the one hand against the pseudo-rationalists who claim to reduce strategy, in theory and practice, to a strictly rational exercise; on the other, against the saber-rattling hussars who, scorning science, distrust any officer immersed in books" (CPW, 133). Between these extremes, Aron hastened to point out, lies the possibility

Of cultivating the capacity to judge by means of a double culture, philosophical and historical: through the first, learning
to think about war; through the second, learning by means of study and criticisms of historical examples (the case study method), to make the appropriate decision in a situation whose exact equivalent can never be found, but in which regularities, brought to light by the study of the past, may be apprehended.

In Clausewitz's mind, then, theory was connected to action only as a bracer for it; theory served not to dictate solutions but to make action more rational by clarifying the range of choices that could be pursued in a given situation.

The fundamental theoretical problem that preoccupied Clausewitz was this: "[U]nder what conditions and in what manner is it possible to subsume the concrete varieties of war under one concept?" This question suggested itself after Clausewitz had witnessed the revolutionary changes in warfare wrought by the "God of War" himself, Napoleon Bonaparte. As an officer in the small, professional army of Frederick the Great, Clausewitz's early military experience had been limited to the relatively small-scale campaigns of maneuver and siege. Napoleon's campaigns were waged with such ferocity and energy, however, and so far outstripped the experience of earlier generations, that it was difficult to see both experiences as different aspects of the same thing. The eighteenth century, Michael Howard explained, "might have reduced warfare to a matter of absurd, rococo formality, but in its essence war was something very different. Napoleon had made this clear for all to see; Clausewitz set himself to explain it."

In explaining how Clausewitz related the concept of war to the historical diversity of wars, Aron noted that Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* had been "something of a model" for Clausewitz. More specifically, Clausewitz's aim, "like Montesquieu's or all sociologists', was to make history intelligible by adapting means to ends. This intelligibility is to emerge from a constant cross-reference from abstraction to history, or from concept to experience, which is typical of the Clausewitzian method" (CPW, 231). In fact, the same three steps that mark Montesquieu's method also mark Clausewitz's: the construction of different types of systems or behavior is followed by
an enumeration of constants and determinants which in turn sets the stage for concrete historical analysis.

These three steps explain Aron's systematic division of Clausewitz's great masterpiece, *On War*, into three main sections or ideas. The first part, "The Means and Ends," defines the implicit rationality of war and constructs the different systems or types of war. The second part, "The Moral and the Physical," sketches the determinants that influence the course and conduct of campaigns. Finally, the third part, "Defense and Attack," examines specific strategic and tactical scenarios. For reasons that will become clear as our analysis unfolds, we will not begin at the beginning, with a discussion of means and ends; rather, we begin at the end, with a discussion of combat and campaigns.

The third antithesis, defense and attack, is located at a lower level of abstraction than the other two. The first two antitheses, Aron explained, relate to the very nature of warfare itself. The distinction between defense and attack, however, is rooted in the historical setting of the conflict. Because this distinction is so fundamental to warfare, it is here that we find the prescriptive elements of Clausewitz's work, or the specific proposals for the conduct of campaigns.

Two great strategic principles are contained in Clausewitz's analysis of defense and attack. The first, Aron pointed out, is that defense is stronger than offense. The second is that military action always involves a small number of what Clausewitz termed "centers of gravity." In war, as in mechanics, Aron explained, quoting Clausewitz, "there are centers of gravity `whose movement and direction govern other parts'' (CPW, 158). From this it follows that "Just as in the world of inert bodies action against the center of gravity is measured and limited by the composition of the parts, so can it be in war: here and there, one blow can easily have more force than is needed to overcome resistance. The result is a waste of force" (ibid.).

This raises a crucial question: how can one be sure that one is striking at a center of gravity? The short answer is, one can't. Regarding the time, place and method of such a maneuver, Aron wrote that "it depends on the many circumstances, material and
moral, which theory may consider in the abstract. Only judgment on
the spot can and should appreciate the relative importance of these
in given circumstances in order to choose the most appropriate
method" (CPW, 157). Clausewitz attached the same caveat to his
observations on the strength and importance of defensive force in
relation to offensive power.

It was in the course of writing the lengthy section on defense and
attack, Aron explained, that Clausewitz came to a clearer under-
standing of his more theoretical propositions, which forced him to
begin revising the entire work. Briefly, the problem Clausewitz
encountered was this: after the initial attack by an aggressor has been
repelled, what must a commander do? Is deflecting a blow suffi-
cient, or is the goal of the defensive war no different than the goal
of the offensive war, namely, to destroy the enemy's forces? The
commander, in other words, must know at some point what kind of
war he is going to have to fight. Would it be a "greater or lesser
approximation to a war of observation," Aron asked, or on the
contrary, would it be one "completely governed and saturated by the
urge for a decision?" (ibid.)

It was this question that led Clausewitz to seek a better under-
standing not only of the relation between military strategy and
political leadership but of the different types of war as well. And it
was in the course of exploring the dependence of strategy on politics
that Clausewitz hit on the distinction between war in the abstract
and wars in reality, a distinction that is of crucial importance, as we
have seen, to Aron's own theory of international relations. Theoreti-
cally, Clausewitz reasoned, all wars should escalate into a total
struggle; if security for one combatant implies insecurity for the
other, then both combatants must outdo one another until violence
escalates to extremes. The intrinsic nature of war, then, is total;
adversaries cannot rest until one has rendered the other helpless. As
soon as real wars are considered, however, "the possibility of descent
determines or should (soll) determine conduct just as much as the
abstract possibility determines a rise" (CPW, 65). Clausewitz of-
fered two reasons why this must be so, one intrinsic to the nature of
war, the other extrinsic.
Unlike war in the abstract, real war is an exercise in suffering, exhaustion and terror. In real wars, fear and uncertainty act as a drag on action and constitute what Clausewitz termed a "moral force of gravity," a force that weighs down decision-making and drains the ardor from military campaigns. Thus, it is the inherent "friction" of war that often acts as a brake on escalation and keeps war from expanding into an all-consuming explosion of violence.

Not only is war subject to the internal limitation of friction, but it is subject to the restraining influence of an external force as well. Here we see the importance of policy. War, Aron wrote, "projects into the activity of interstate relations.... The belligerents know each other, they know approximately what to fear or hope from the other" (CPW, 64). By this route we descend "from the absolute concept to the probabilities of the real world and, accordingly, are obliged to follow a policy giving the reasons for the conflict, defining precisely the role of its desired end" (ibid.). The introduction of policy does not make de-escalation inevitable; it does, however, make it possible.

If they are to be properly understood, then, real wars-like regimes-must not be separated from their origins and their ends. In fact, just as different political imperatives arise from the different kinds of regimes (as well as from different historical circumstances), so too do different military imperatives arise from the different kinds of war. Thus, the strategy suitable to fight one type of war could prove to be disastrous if applied to another.

Unlike Montesquieu's typology of regimes, however, Clausewitz's typology of wars recognizes two and only two types of wars, one devoted to political annihilation, the other to military disarmament. "The intermediate stages between one type and the other should remain," Clausewitz wrote, "but the entirely different nature of the two undertakings should penetrate everywhere and separate the irreconcilable" (CPW, 57). More specifically, because the ends of war cannot be separated from a certain type of peace, the manner of the return to peace determines the categorical alternatives. The two types of warfare, then, are related to imposed peace on the one hand, and negotiated peace on the other.
Herein lies Clausewitz's distinctive contribution to a theory of war: despite the pronounced differences between a limited war and an unlimited one, both types of war must be understood as essentially political acts. To Clausewitz's way of thinking, wars have their origins in what are ultimately political intentions. "Whether Marshall Saxe often avoids battle or whether Napoleon always seeks it, war remains war because, in both cases, the states...act politically by violence, whatever the methods might be" (CPW, 81). Despite the diversity of wars and the duality of types, this is the idea that unifies the concept of war. "It is not the initial conception of absolute war which allows the historical diversity of wars to be subsumed under a single concept," Aron explained, "but the intrinsically political nature of war" (ibid.). Thus the origin of what is Clausewitz's most celebrated (and most misunderstood) political dictum: "War is the continuation of politics by other means."

Why is Clausewitz so insistent that political logic govern the "grammar" of warfare? Because in his view, "political logic...always obeys a tendency toward equilibrium." Aron argued that for Clausewitz, international relations tended to maintain a given configuration of power rather than provoke changes. "Something like a common interest prevails in the system; it has not sufficient force to guarantee a given state against the loss of a province or a relative diminution of strength, but, ordinarily favors actions oriented toward equilibrium and discourages action that would jeopardize it." This is the image of Clausewitz that Aron was hoping to refurbish. Far from being an advocate of total war, as some of his interpreters have suggested, Aron's Clausewitz emerges as a thinker of reserve and restraint, a theoretician who, like Aron, "could analyze coolly all the factors that often push war toward the extreme, yet whose own prescription was moderation and the deliberate victory of the rational element."

From this idea of the supremacy of politics, Clausewitz developed the notion that war is composed of three elements: "[O]riginal violence (people), free activity of the spirit (war leaders), supremacy of understanding (government)" (CPW, 85). Taken together, these three elements form what Clausewitz called "the strange trinity" of
war. These three elements are present in every war, and determine by a unique historical mix each war's particular character. Sometimes, for example,

Policy uneasily channels popular passions in order to make them conform to what is at stake. Sometimes it experiences difficulty in inflaming popular passions which the safety of the nation justifies and requires. Sometimes the hostility reaches a point where policy seems to disappear and hostilities resemble a blind clash of unleashed forces; at all times, on the contrary, political considerations—the limitations of the stake, or rivalry between allies—permeate the course of operations. (CPW, 119)

At all times, however, the people play a role, either by participation or indifference, the military leaders make decisions fraught with danger and uncertainty, and, "by gambling, the head of state always bears the higher responsibility, that of appraising the true character of the particular war" (ibid.).

Because this is virtually the same conceptual schema Aron employed in order to account for the intelligibility of diplomatic-strategic behavior, we need not repeat our earlier discussion describing the relations between and among the various components of this "strange trinity." We note only in passing that the structure of warfare as described by Clausewitz conforms to the structure of the self as described by Aron: the intentional reality of political leadership is both conditioned by and independent of military strategy: "The political end governs the war, but it is not a 'despotic' lawgiver, it must adapt itself to the nature of the means, and is often modified" (CPW, 134).

In itself, however, knowledge of the ends of war is insufficient to understand or explain either the development of a specific war or the historical diversity of wars. Real wars are determined not only by the intentions of the combatants but by historical conditions as well. On the one hand, Aron explained, "politics—the brain of the personified state—determines the military objectives in terms of the
end of war; on the other hand, circumstances determine the historical diversity of wars. Politics only adequately determine the end provided that the nature of the war is exactly appreciated in terms of the circumstances which condition it" (CPW, 59). What kinds of circumstances, then, explain the transition from one type of war to the other, or determine a war's specific character?

Clausewitz—again like Montesquieu—clearly divided determinants into two kinds, physical and moral. Indeed, his emphasis on the moral factors of war is precisely what distinguished Clausewitz's work from the work of his contemporaries, most notably von Bulow and de Jomini. Aron observed that in their works on strategy and tactics, von Bulow and de Jomini dealt primarily with the movements of armies, the lines of communication and retreat, and the location of bases. Clausewitz, however, "deals above all with moral forces.... The rest, including the geometry of campaigns or battles, does not disappear but passes to a secondary level and becomes a subordinate method of consideration" (CPW, 121). The three dimensions of moral forces that Clausewitz reckoned with were these: the spirit and moral qualities of the army, military leaders and governments; the emotional state of those in the provinces where a war was fought; and the psychological effects of a victory or defeat.

To what are these moral factors opposed? Primarily to numbers. The size and quantity of troops and materiel were for Clausewitz "the material element par excellence..." (ibid.). Although Clausewitz by no means discounted or disregarded the importance of material factors, he steadfastly refused to assign the sole responsibility for victory or defeat to numbers:

No proposition relating to physical force can be asserted which deliberately disregards what, to simplify matters, we shall call morale. The requirement of totality does not exclude analytical distinctions, but forbids rules or precepts which are based on one element alone and ignores the essential, namely, the activity of the spirit. Clausewitz uses the word Geist in its widest possible meaning, incorporating various faculties or qualities: affection, understanding, courage. What he never ceases to say
Thus, the analyst enumerates and compares various factors but does not award to them, once and forever more, a given weight or "importance. The historical contingency of these factors, Aron added, "is too often forgotten by interpreter, particularly with regard to numbers" (CPW, 123).

Space does not allow a thorough discussion of Aron's reflections on all of the major military engagements since World War Two, including the conflicts in Korea and Viet Nam. We will therefore confine our attention to Aron's reflections on the West's military posture during the Cold War, and will place special emphasis on Aron's contributions to the debate over the place of nuclear weapons in the West's military position. In doing so, we will underscore the ways in which brought his reading of Clausewitz to bear on some of the more current and pressing matters of military strategy and defense.

Far from being made obsolete by the advent of the nuclear age, Clausewitz is in many ways more relevant than ever. Because absolute war is capable of transforming itself from a formal abstraction into an immediate and very real possibility, prudence and moderation are even more imperative today than in Clausewitz's era. "[I]n the nuclear age," Michael Howard has observed, "the political object has to be kept in mind in order to impose limits on an activity whose destructiveness, left to itself, will rapidly escalate to extremes of a kind such as Clausewitz had never conceived." Or, as Aron put it, "the spirit of reasoned intent that informs policy must not be allowed to evaporate the moment the first bombs start exploding; intelligent national policy must to the very end make a determined effort simultaneously to safeguard the national interest and to prevent escalation to the extremes of violence."

It was on the basis of this Clausewitzian principle-preserving the "spirit of reasoned intent"-that Aron judged the doctrine of massive retaliation and found it wanting. Noting the conventional superiority of the Soviet Union and fearful of becoming bogged down in another limited war like the Korean conflict, officials in the
Eisenhower administration declared that the United States would respond to communist aggression against itself or its allies with nuclear weapons. However, as Aron and a host of others were quick to point out, relatively minor or limited acts of aggression would force the United States to risk suffering either overkill or paralysis. Massive retaliation thus violated a cardinal tenet of Clausewitzian doctrine: one must strike a balance between the interests at stake and the effort required to protect them. What kind of military strategy in the nuclear age met this test?

Aron's response is unequivocal: "Precautions against misunderstanding and escalation...require scuttling the doctrine of massive retaliation and replacing it by the doctrine of graduated response" (ibid.). The danger of fighting a war that no one wants to fight can be reduced only if the choice between all-or-nothing is replaced by a much greater range of military possibilities. By allowing for the possibility of calibration, graduated response enables statesmen to apply a wide range of military instruments to the task at hand, thus allowing them to exercise a greater degree of control over escalation than was possible under the doctrine of massive retaliation. "We believe in maintaining effective deterrent strength," President Kennedy declared in explaining his administration's new strategic doctrine, "but we also believe in making it do what we wish, neither more not less."

Aron's enthusiasm for what came to be called the McNamara Doctrine, however, was not widely shared by other Europeans. To most Europeans; the doctrine of flexible response signaled the "disatomization" of Europe; it was widely regarded as a heavy handed attempt to reduce the risk of involving the United States in nuclear destruction while exposing Europe to the risk of a conventional war. In fact, not only were many Europeans worried that they would be forced to bear the brunt of a "conventional" attack but, because the McNamara Doctrine sought to establish a continuity in explosive power between thermonuclear and conventional arms by refusing to rule out the use of tactical nuclear weapons to secure defense of the Continent, many feared that they would have to bear the brunt of a nuclear attack as well. Unconvinced by McNamara's
assertion that limited wars could be kept limited, Europeans believed that escalation was inevitable and that they, not the United States, would pay the price.

It was also believed that graduated or flexible response weakened deterrence. "Europeans," Aron wrote, "discovered that their security was no longer based on an automatic American nuclear response to any Soviet violation of the military line of demarcation but rather on Russia's uncertainty about United States reaction to an aggressive move on their part" (GD, 75). Our allies now feared that the "subtle sophistry" of a graduated response would tempt the Soviets into launching a limited attack below the atomic threshold.

These concerns, Aron admitted, were not altogether groundless. In fact, resurrecting a rather Weberian principle of analysis, Aron noted that "Nuclear strategy...involves intrinsic antinomies. It is impossible, by definition, to ward off one danger without thereby automatically increasing another" (GD, 81). Abstractly considered, graduated response

may seem eminently reasonable, but considered in its proper historical and geographical context it appears to be a sort of insurance policy. As such, it may be understandable and legitimate from the American point of view but it does not necessarily coincide with the national interests of Frenchmen and Germans because the primary purpose of the policy is to minimize the risk of a big war that might involve the continental United States at the price of putting up with little wars...in which only Europeans would be killed. (GD, 78)

Without minimizing the risk of graduated response, Aron nevertheless insisted that from a global perspective, the risks of graduated response are smaller-and thus more rational-than those of massive retaliation.

To those who clamored for national nuclear forces to compensate for the vulnerability of Europe, Aron posed a simple question: "[W]ill the French sacrifice Paris for Hamburg or, for that matter, all
of France for the sake of one city or province?" (GD, 90). "I am convinced," Aron wrote,

that if France or continental Europe were to acquire atomic or thermonuclear arms tomorrow, a school of analysts attacking the theory of massive retaliation would immediately arise. They would stress the dangers of getting trapped in an all-or-nothing situation and point out that, with both sides in possession of invulnerable deterrents, each threat would elicit a comparable counter threat. Would the enemy in such circumstances let himself be deterred from limited aggression by an apocalyptic threat that he has every reason to regard as an empty bluff? (GD, 129)

This, then, is the great virtue of graduated response: by enabling statesmen to tailor a proportionate response to aggression, it enables them "to practice what they preach" (GD, 133). Only then, Aron explained, can there be a strategy that reduces the element of bluff implicit in all thermonuclear deterrence. A nation that has a wide range of possible military-strategic choices at its disposal is far more likely to be believed by potential aggressors, especially those who are considering limited or local acts of aggression. Surely it is the "height of paradox," Aron argued, to assert that "the West would weaken its deterrent capability in relation to local aggression by acquiring the means to repel such aggression without recourse to nuclear weapons" (GD, 92).

We now approach what for many is the touchstone of a reasonable strategic doctrine—the possibility that a specific posture offers for keeping a limited war, especially one fought with tactical nuclear weapons, from escalating into an all-out conflagration. Aron's discussion of this critical issue, however, is rather disappointing. Unlike other strategic analysts like Thomas Schelling, Herman Kahn, or even Henry Kissinger, Aron nowhere analyzes an extended range of concrete scenarios in order to assess the specific risks of escalation. Instead, Aron chose to treat escalation as something of a philosophical problem, by focusing on its peculiar logic.
In discussing the problems of escalation, Aron underscored the dilemma that plagues defense and deterrence in the nuclear age. On the one hand, "reducing the risk of escalation increases the temptation to use conventional weapons as a `sword' under the cover of a nuclear `shield' (or under the protection of reciprocally paralyzed thermonuclear systems)" (GD, 216). On the other hand, Aron immediately added, "If no distinctions are made between initial operations and ultimate weapons, there is a risk of ultimate escalation by accident or misunderstanding" (ibid.). In other words, "escalation is at once a danger that needs to be met and a threat that could not and should not be surrendered" (ibid.).

It was for this reason that Aron refused to speak of deterrence in the abstract. The "eternal question" of deterrence for Aron was, "who can deter whom, from what? In what circumstances? And how?" (GD, 163). Although the determination to raise the level of violence is essential to the efficacy of deterrence, Aron argued, one should never assume that escalation is (or should be) automatic. Clausewitz immediately comes to mind: a specific military decision "depends on the many circumstances, material and moral, which theory may consider in the abstract. Only judgment on the spot can and should appreciate the relative importance of these in given circumstances in order to choose the most appropriate method."

Considering the use of tactical nuclear weapons becomes particularly compelling if parity at the conventional level is unattainable. If NATO troops continue to be overmatched by the conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact, then it becomes pointless to refuse to employ tactical nuclear weapons either for deterrence or attack. Given the West's conventional inferiority, a tactical nuclear threat "does not add substantially to the risk of their actual use...because use of these weapons is in any event, highly probable..." (GD, 174). Moreover, Aron reasoned, such a threat may help to prevent a possible misunderstanding on the part of the aggressor "who might misinterpret all the multitudinous and subtle precautions taken against an almost inevitable course of events as simple lack of fiber and determination" (ibid.).
The contradiction inherent in deterrence, Aron concluded, has led us to the strategy of graduated response which, however, is as much a part of arms control as it is of the theory of stability. Arms control, in its widest sense of the term, refers to the total effort aimed at preventing recourse to force and, failing this, at limiting the scope of the resulting violence. The strategy of graduated response may therefore be interpreted as arms control during a crisis. (GD, 217)

All of this raises a crucial question: exactly whose finger is or should be on the nuclear trigger? "In theory, perhaps," Aron wrote, "it might have been preferable to limit the United States possession and disposition of nuclear weapons within the Alliance" (P&W, 693). Although entrusting the control of nuclear weapons to a single power does not guarantee that these weapons will be rationally deployed, it certainly improves the odds. However, as Aron noted, given the nature of international political behavior and the "age-old aspirations" of states, it would be unreasonable to expect that those who do not possess nuclear weapons would willingly forego the opportunity to acquire them. Thus, the problem today "is less to ascertain what formula would be best in itself than to avoid certain ill-fated consequences of the multiplication of costly national forces, which are of scant effectiveness and quickly outmoded by technological progress" (ibid.).

What, then, should be done?

Aron's answer is not altogether clear. In Peace and War, he apparently envisioned the formation of a European deterrent force "which, without officially depending on the American deterrent, would act only in cooperation with it" (P&W, 694). In a later work, however, Aron hedged on his call for a European deterrent, uncertain about the institutional forms that "cooperation" would entail. The problem of control, he observed, plagues the European deterrent just as it does the American one. Nevertheless, convinced that "the time of the American (or Anglo-American) directorate is past," Aron very much hoped that the West, especially the
United States, would do more to change NATO from a strictly military alliance into an "authentic Atlantic community" (P&W, 693).

Broadly speaking, the solution to the problem of command and community rests on the United States' willingness to understand the minds and motivations of the Europeans, and on the Europeans' willingness to trust the intentions behind America's strategic doctrine. More concretely, Americans must give Europeans a greater sense of participation in formulating Atlantic strategy. There is no good reason, Aron insisted, for excluding Europeans from the conception, formulation or elaboration of military strategy. Relying freely on arguments developed by Alastair Buchan, Aron argued that once Europeans "had made a genuine contribution to the strategic concepts and operational plans, they would be willing to leave operational responsibility to the American leaders" (GD, 184). In this plan, then, the United States would retain control of the nuclear trigger, but the elaboration of an overall military posture and division of labor would be the joint responsibility of the Americans and Europeans.

If the French government accepted this proposal, Aron mused, then the United States and Great Britain would probably do the same. There was, of course, a rather large obstacle blocking the way of an agreement of this sort, namely, Charles De Gaulle. De Gaulle's demand for military independence, so essential to his vision of national grandeur, could be satisfied only by an exclusively national force. For his part, however, Aron had no patience for the idea of an independent French deterrent: the "force de frappe" was too small, too vulnerable, and too expensive to be of much strategic significance. In Peace and War, Aron argued that a country could exert some degree of deterrent power once it acquired a nuclear retaliatory capability. What he did doubt was that "in a test of nerves the leaders of a country risking total annihilation are the equals of those whose country would merely sustain some losses" (GD, 138).

In Aron's opinion, France would be better served if it submitted to a common discipline and integrated its military forces into the command structure of NATO. "To value the power of independent choice between war and peace above national security may once
have been a sign of national greatness," Aron wrote, "[b]ut I do not believe that in the thermonuclear age this should be considered an appropriate goal for the national ambition of a country such as France" (GD, 265). Given the terrible possibilities of a nuclear war, everything, including the eternal political desire for independence, must be subordinated to the contemporary needs of security. This does not mean that the desire for independence should be disregarded, but it does mean that the urge for autonomy must be kept in very tight rein.

Aron took up the problem of escalation once again when George Kennan, Gerard Smith, McGeorge Bundy, and Robert McNamara publicly urged the United States to adopt the policy of "no first use" in 1982. Unlike some members of the "band of four," however, Aron had not changed his mind regarding the possible use of tactical and strategic weapons to defend Europe against military aggression. The case for "no first use," Aron observed, rests on "an essential idea that [Kennan, Smith, Bundy, and McNamara] do not demonstrate but affirm, here and there, as self-evident: any use of nuclear arms, tactical or strategic, provokes uncontrolled escalation" (DA, 68). To Aron, a vastly different scenario was every bit as imaginable as the one postulated by Kerman and his colleagues. The overwhelming fear and dread that would inevitably grip the leaders of those states contemplating a nuclear strike makes it reasonable to assume that those leaders would make contact with the enemy, resume the dialogue, and stop the escalation. Aron also refused to subscribe to the notion that all escalation necessarily ends in mutual destruction. A nuclear exchange would certainly leave untold death and destruction in its wake, Aron wrote, but it would not necessarily reduce both the United States and the Soviet Union to radioactive rubble; neither would it "condemn millions of children to genetic destruction" (DA, 70).

The plea for a "no first use" policy, prompted by the decision to station mid-range missiles on European soil, also led Aron to review his own call, delivered some twenty years earlier, for a strategy of graduated response. More specifically, Aron sought to understand the effect that the growth of Soviet nuclear power had on the
American military posture. Did the loss of American nuclear superiority in recent years make the policy of flexible response an anachronism? "In a sense," Aron answered, "yes" (DA, 79). "The original idea of escalation—or in Clausewitzian language, of the ascension to extremes—was sustained, if not created, by the implicit hypothesis of American superiority at the highest levels" (ibid.). However, Aron immediately pointed out, given the growth of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, there is no longer any reason "to conserve this illusion." The decisive question, then, is this: "[D]oes the intervention of the `engine de la balance centrale' [Pershing Two missiles] restore the credibility of the Western deterrent?" (ibid.).

The fundamental significance of the Euromissiles, Aron argued, does not lie in the fact that they contribute to the reestablishment of a numerical equilibrium that had been upset by the Soviet introduction of the SS 20. "The notion of equilibrium hardly has any meaning in matters of nuclear arms. That the medium-range missiles are as numerous on one side as on the other matters little" (DA, 83). What does matter is that the Euromissiles can strike at targets deep in Soviet territory, a fact that immediately dispels the notion that a limited war will be confined to European soil, thus sparing the superpowers. In the event that a Pershing Two is launched in self-defense, does this mean that the Soviet Union will then respond by launching its missiles against the United States? If they should do so, then the Soviet Union "[r]isks enlarging the range of battle and entering into direct conflict with the power of the outer Atlantic" (DA, 81). An attack against Western Europe would thus "in all probability" lead to American participation. "In strategic jargon, the Pershing Twos have for their mission the task of keeping a limited war from being confined to the boundaries of the Old Continent," thereby preventing the decoupling of the United States from Europe (ibid.).

But does this not set in motion the possibility of an ascension to extremes against which Kennan, Bundy, Smith and McNamara protested so vigorously? It does indeed. Aron, however, was willing to take his chances:
If the menace [of a nuclear threat] is taken seriously, non-war becomes more probable; but if it is not taken seriously, if we proceed to applying the threat, catastrophe engulfs us all. This is a valid objection, but one which responds to an antinomy that has been recognized and commented upon indefinitely for the past forty years: the greater the horror the threat banished, the greater the horror of its execution. (DA, 85)

The decision to station Pershing Two missiles on European soil was one of the very few strategic developments near the end of his life that Aron had warmly applauded. Alarmed by the growth of Soviet military power, Aron repeatedly voiced his concern that detente and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks had lulled the West into a false sense of security. By any standard of judgment, Aron argued, all attempts at bilateral arms control (most notably the SALT agreements) have been abject failures. In fact, Aron maintained; "Arms control has assisted in the decline of American power and helped to conceal it." Although the Soviet Union spared neither money nor brainpower in its quest for "military absolutes," it was equally true that the United States' "obsession with arms control caused the American leaders to forget the balance of power and remain passive in the face of the Soviet threat." Unmoved by the assertion that dialogue between the superpowers was desirable in itself, Aron flatly declared that no meaningful agreement about the relationship of military forces could ever result from a dialogue between two states so implacably opposed towards one another.

Given this situation, there is simply no alternative to safeguarding deterrence and defense by stockpiling American-controlled nuclear weapons in Europe. Dismissing George Kennan's proposal for a mutual withdrawal of military forces from the European theater as naive and far-fetched, Aron maintained that Moscow and Washington prefer a situation that is deplorable but stable to the unpredictable consequences that military disengagement would trigger. "However unfortunate the division of Europe may be, the dividing line is at least known and respected."

Implicit in this approach is the notion that diplomacy can do
little to alter the conventions of the Cold War. In light of the Soviet Union's sworn hostility to the West, Aron reasoned, diplomatic negotiations, which by definition "suppose that we give as much as we receive," would only be an act of craven appeasement. Aron was particularly disturbed by Morgenthau's claim that the Cold War would inevitably become a hot one if the superpowers failed to negotiate a settlement dividing the world into spheres of influence. Although it was to Morgenthau's credit that his political realism "invites us to keep out heads cool, to be suspicious of abstractions, [and] to look at the world as it is instead of imagining it to be what we would like it to be," Morgenthau nevertheless tended "to mistake traditional diplomacy...for eternal diplomacy."

Aron was also profoundly unhappy with George Kennan's willingness to embrace diplomatic negotiations as a means of relieving some of the pressure generated by the mistrust between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although he had greatly admired Kennan's public service and scholarship, Aron was bitterly disappointed by what he perceived to be a change of heart on Kennan's part during the late 1960s. After thirteen years of diplomatic service, Aron wrote, "Mr. X" had rightfully denounced the illusions of the American left, incapable as it was of comprehending the method and manner of Soviet thinking. Unfortunately, some thirty years later, Kennan "had lost his learning and his convictions" (DA, 184). What Aron found to be utterly incomprehensible was Kennan's conviction that the death of Stalin had altered the nature of the Soviet regime. Even though Brezhnev exhibited none of Stalin's paranoia, and even though the Soviet leadership was in all probability not plotting to launch a surprise attack against Europe, it simply did not follow that the Soviet Union had become more politically agreeable.

Particularly regrettable, in Aron's opinion, was Kennan's failure to see any significance in the changing balance of military power between the United States and the Soviet Union. How, Aron wondered, could Kennan argue that at the very moment when Soviet military power and activity had increased, Soviet political ambitions had abated? Thus a rare outburst from Aron: "I say to Kennan: what
Aron's reading of Kennan and the sources of Soviet conduct aside, it must be admitted that his attitude toward negotiating with the Soviet Union appears to be more logically satisfying than Kennan's in one fundamental respect: given the goal of containing the Soviet Union, the United States would do considerable damage to its credibility at home and abroad if it initiated negotiations with the Russians. "[H]ow could the American commitment to resist aggression be believed," John Gaddis has asked in this context, "if at the same time the United States was engaged in negotiations with the most likely aggressor? It [is] simply easier not to negotiate." Perhaps, but as Gaddis also recognized, the price of consistency can be "strategic shortsightedness." If one's immediate goal is to maintain economic and military strength to counter the Soviet threat, then one must be very careful not to lose sight of the objective that this power is supposed to serve, namely, ending the Cold War.

Properly approached, with an eye to the discovery of convergent interests as well as irreconcilable differences, negotiations can contribute to the creation of a stable world order. Otherwise, if one negotiates only with those whom one trusts, diplomacy becomes redundant, a luxury to be indulged in only after peace and order have been achieved. Moreover, as Henry Kissinger has so often pointed out, discovering what the Soviets would have agreed to and abided by could not have been determined in the abstract; if the Soviets had wanted an agreement, negotiations would have revealed this. Surely it is no contradiction to assert, as Kennan has, that the United States and the Soviet Union could have reached short-term agreements without committing themselves to a friendly, long-term partnership.

Aron's concluding paragraph to a small volume of essays on war in the twentieth century provides a fitting conclusion to this section. In bringing his study to a close, Aron asked whether it was fruitful to peer into the future in order to divine the course of political events. True to form, Aron refused to speculate. "What would be the
point," he asked, "unless to ward off the temptation to despair?"
Instead of conjecture, Aron offered only consolation: "The power of
false ideas condemns all hope of world unity in the immediate
future, but not the hope of a gradual, ultimate reconciliation of the
human race."

All of France mourned Raymond Aron's death in 1983. Although
Aron was buried quietly-in marked contrast to the huge crowds
and emotional outbursts that accompanied Sartre's burial in 1980-
his memory was honored by scholars and commentators around the
world. All paid homage to Aron's courage, his integrity and, of
course, his great learning. Even the Left paid a tribute, although
somewhat grudgingly, in the pages of Liberation.

That Aron was a genius cannot be doubted. His genius, how-
ever, was of a peculiar order. Unlike Sartre, whose effortless
creativity Aron deeply admired (and even envied), Aron by his own
admission wrote very little that was original. In judging the
significance of Aron's scholarship, Stanley Hoffmann wrote that
Aron

always put `creators' above `critics': Sartre, for all his political
divagations, was a creator; Aron, for all his lucidity, was only a
critic. His conception of man and of history made him impa-
tient with what he called half-truths, prophecies based on a
powerful but partial central intuition, such as Marx's or Freud's.
But he admired most those who had changed man's way of
thinking in this fashion, and he knew that he was not one of
those.

Aron's emphasis on reason and general moral ideas makes his
philosophy more ethically appealing than the views of realists like
Weber, but it also contributes to the confusion and ambiguity in his
analyses. In order to escape from the morally discouraging implica-
tions of political realism, Aron insisted on the existence of a realm of
perfect freedom, a world devoid of the contaminating or limiting
effects of historical necessity and hence knowable only by pure
reason. At the same time, Aron tried to procure an accord between historical necessity and moral freedom so that morality can operate within history and so history can be receptive to moral action, even changed by it. Having separated the two realms of intentionality and necessity, in other words, Aron is then compelled to unite them, and this he does by producing "intermediaries" and "correspondences" between them. Therein lies the origin and logic of his many pluralisms: conceptual opposites are always held together by the force of a middling term that keeps the other two within range of one another.

As I have tried to show, however, the connecting points that Aron attempted to reestablish are insecure, attached as they are by a rather unwieldy logic that sees intentionality as both independent of and limited by historical necessity. This is the reason for the restless two-sidedness of so much of Aron's thinking. Beneath the surface clarity of so much of Aron's writings, as we have seen, lies an unsettling inability to reach many clear or firm conclusions, Despite Aron's erudition and his elaborate, sophisticated schemas, many commentators have been driven to ask, Exactly what has Aron said anyway? "Often and in a quasi-ritualistic way," Pierre Hassner has written of Aron, "the idea of reason intervenes, that of a reconciled humanity, an idea that must never be abandoned but never knows its full incarnation." However, Hassner added, "this makes one think a little bit of the `meager black and gold' of Valery; its content is vague and its philosophical status...seems vulnerable to the criticisms to which the idea of indefinite progress has been submitted from Hegel to Strauss." Nevertheless, Aron's efforts to, "grasp both ends and fill the space between," in Pascal's memorable phrase, were indeed heroic. It is in that light that Raymond Aron's work is perhaps best understood; it is for that effort that Aron's work surely deserves to be remembered.

Reed Davis
Seattle Pacific University