Prudential Theory, Visionary Praxis:  
Raymond Aron, Advisor of the Prince and Enlightened Philosopher

When the French philosopher Raymond Aron put forward his theory of International Relations, in the 1930’s, he based it on a fundamental principle. He proposed that an ultimate test of good political science is immediate relevance for the responsible politicians who are always obliged to act in nebulous political conjunctures. Transforming the political scientist into a kind of Machiavellian advisor of the Prince does in Aron’s view not limit science to pure prudential approaches. Rightly, politicians need a faithful description of the chaotic reality as it is, not at it ought to be when they have to take suitable decisions. Aron defines scientific intentions as the desire to understand sociologically how real world politics works. But in his guidance of responsible politicians Aron also refers to norms and values beyond the immediate political situation. Categorising Aron dogmatically from an ethical point of view as consequentialist (Giesen 1992) or more narrowly as a moral scepticist (Braillard 1974), or from an ontological point of view, simply as a realist (Merle 1984) does not do justice to Aron’s work. The originality of Aron's theory of international relation stems from the way he defines the relationship between description and prescription and the conscious epistemological choices he makes. In this paper, I will elucidate these choices by moving between three levels, namely empirical, methodological and epistemological levels. These three levels are, in Aron’s own practice, intrinsically interrelated but can be analytically distinguished1. I propose firstly to show how Aron characterises the empirical subject matter, next, how he chooses the best-suited methodology to follow this reality, and

1 I owe A-M. Ahonen this observation from her thesis on R. Aron. See references
finally, how Aron is aware of the premises of philosophy of history that orient the whole scientific process.

The empirical matter
Aron makes a first definition of the fundamental characteristics of international relations and the kind of actions it implies. In Aron’s view, the specificity of international politics consists of a system of autonomous units whose interaction differs from other social relationships by the fact that recourse to violence is considered legitimate and even legal by the units themselves. This feature is the dramatic dimension of international politics that already the Greek historian, Thucydides identifies. Thucydides shows that even there in highly civilised international systems there are always others who oblige each unit to calculate the risks of war (Aron 1967). Risk calculation, consequently constitutes, in Aron’s theory, the intrinsic behaviour of States. Yet, as Stanley Hoffmann (1985) has noted, Aron avoids the anthropological apriorism from which a good deal of political science suffers, by considering that the motives driving the calculations are of a double origin. One motive is a consequence of the state of war and the permanent competition in which the autonomous decision bodies – the States - find themselves. A description of this situation is provided by the hobbesian interest pole characterised by struggle for power, desire to win (the war), and the necessity for bargaining. It permits a coherent terminology of a science of war developed by French military rationalists in the 17th century and later, in the 18th century, by German strategists (see Azar 1989) ending with Kenneth Waltz’ Grand Theory in the 20th century. This terminology is tempting for political scientists because it allows – at least a priori - hypothetical-deductive model construction and permits a direct step from theory to practice.

But in Aron’s empirical telescope the risk calculation is also driven by another motive pole. Aron underscores that politicians always consider their actions by referring to values that Aron often defines as ‘historic ideas’ (Aron 1962, p. 569). And beside the interest and the value pole, Aron identifies a source of change, which runs more or less independently from mere political processes. This source is the technological revolution encompassing scientific and economic developments and circumscribing interests and ideologies in international politics. Yet, Aron’s originality does not only stem from his detection of the three sources of political conduct - interest, values and technology. In this determination of the empirical subject matter Aron joins most scholars of international relations.

Aron’s originality lies in the methodological and epistemological consequences he draws from his primary depiction of the realities in international politics.

Political science as narrative
In Aron’s view, politicians need precise, contextual knowledge that guides them in their immediate actions. The challenge for a political science, is therefore to understand and explain politics which can not be deduced a priori by reducing motives of conduct to one kind of rationality. Aron considers Max Weber’s historical sociology as a theoretical approach that both provides contextual knowledge and is
conscious about the epistemological specificities of political behaviour. Weber uses the term ‘indeterminacy’ when he describes political behaviour (Weber 1919, p. 166). This is the epistemological term for the multifaceted rationalities which intervenes before agents finally decide and influence on the political scene. Indeterminacy also covers the fact that political actions are unique and singular. They can neither be reduced to monorational or to objective models. The best organisation of the scientific process is therefore, in Weber’s methodology, to establish an ideal typical model of rationality, which only serves as neutral framework for the following understanding and explanation of politics. Aron proposes that a theory of international relations is ideal typical and neutral in Weber’s sense of the word. He therefore depart from his initial depiction of the empirical subject matter and puts it on a theoretical formula. The only thing that the scientist knows a priori is that in international relations there is no such thing as one centre that detains the monopoly of violence. Aron reverses the famous weberian definition of the State, namely its monopoly of violence and transforms it into an ideal typical behaviour. The first advantage of such a primary approach is that the scientist chooses not being cynical, neither obstinately rational from the beginning but depart from a neutral observation of an inner, social logic. The second advantage is that theoretical propositions are not the final purposes of science but only the first step that assures the contextual knowledge, politicians demand. The initial theoretical statement gives no explanations in itself but points to extensive empirical investigations. The variables that the scientist chooses are essentially empirical, i.e. they are suggested by the indeterminate and deeply historical political reality (Aron 1967, 365).

Political science, in Aron’s view, consists basically of a reconstruction of two dimensions of the political reality. One dimension is an explanation of how the political conjunctures became what they are. Another is an understanding of the motives driving the agents. The scientific challenge in both dimensions consists of maintaining the indeterminacy of human actions in the scientific result. The scientist must be aware of not explaining and understanding human actions as if they were ‘retrospective fatality’ (Aron 1938, sec. III). The difficulties of explaining unique and singular human actions often lead either to ‘sociologism’ or to ‘scepticism’. The first tendency suffers from the illusion that human decisions in themselves are explained once the scientist elucidates the structural causes, which constrain the agent. This tendency is inherent in the kind of political science borrowing epistemology and methods from the natural sciences and considering constrains as general propositions referring to ‘laws’. The other extreme is the scepticism that considers all causes of human decisions as pure accidental. The challenge of explaining also stems from the difficulty of distinguishing between motives and causes. Also in the hermeneutic understanding of motives lies an inherent risk of reducing to one rationality. This risk occurs when the scientist strives to explain the behaviour not according to laws of constraints but asserts having deciphered a single rationality of decision be it universal norms, a psychological dimension or else.
According to Aron, Weber's epistemological solution consists of elucidating the indeterminacy and the subjectivity of human actions (Raynaud 1985). This elucidation demands certain collaboration between understanding and explanation. What characterises human actions is that they are preceded by the agents’ deliberations with a whole set of values, which have historical efficiency for the agent in question. Weber solves the classical problem of hermeneutic circularity with his goal and value rationality schemes (see Weber 1919). He reconstructs the agents’ world visions by the aid of a goal-mean scheme, which only becomes evident through an observance of the agents’ concrete actions. The interpreter is unable to scrutinise the others mind, but he can interpret and explain his actions by the way they have been ‘put into action’ (Aron 1958 and 1974). Aron states - like Weber - that understanding is only elucidated – and confirmed - by an explanation. Moreover, the political science is essentially a narrative, which also elucidates the material constraints of the agents’ decisions. Aron gives a precise account of how Weber proposes the collaboration between understanding and explanation. The probabilistic method or ‘the counterfactual test’ as it is called in the Anglo-Saxon historiographical tradition assures the scientific character of this story telling. Aron presents the probabilism as a systematisation of how the man in the street thinks historical processes (Aron 1938, Sec. III). The probabilistic historian proceeds as follows: he isolates a part of the empirical subject matter, which he wants to interpret. Then he explains and reconstructs the plurality and mutual independent causes having led to the conjuncture of the present. He identifies the causes by asking whether the result would have been different had this incident not happened. Some causes turn out to be adequate. Other causes reveal to be less decisive for the historical output, because they only accelerate already initiated historical processes. In this questioning the historian draws on his general historical and sociological knowledge.

To ask the question if other futures could have been possible if other causes had occurred, permits to establish a hierarchy of causes that constitute a scheme, which has a decisive role for the political science. Aron argues that the political science has to be a probabilistic narrative in order to providing the contextual knowledge, political leaders need. The interest pole and its causal connections are circumscribed in their historical situation and diplomatic conjunctures are identified as meetings between independent causal series, where the exact impact of the technological development is identified. The probabilism also provides knowledge of how the value pole influences on politics. Aron considers pure history of ideas useless - not because he suspends the influence of values, like for example search for justice in international politics but because he wants to identify the exact influence of ideas on the behaviour of political leaders. The efficiency of ideas is measured by their destiny. The destiny of ideas covers the posthumous life they get once they have become part of history (Aron 1938, Sec. IV). And history is produced by meetings between political dramas, technological processes and ideology and consists of allocation of experiences in the mind of political leaders, experiences, which conditions their actions.
According to Aron, the historical sociological arrangement of scientific explorations has not only got the advantage of providing exact knowledge of causal features of diplomatic constellations. It also avoids ideology to intervene directly into theory. Limiting theory to neutral observation – i.e. agents calculating risks in a system characterised by the lack of a monopoly of violence – prevents the political scientist from making \textit{a priori} extrapolations from his research laboratory. Aron denounces 'variable theories' that count on the disappearance of certain stakes and causes in their search for conflict resolution. This is the case of all 'pseudo-theories’ be it Realism, Interdependentism, Moralism, Juridism, etc. The pure realist chooses to limit his attention to the sole interest pole in order to making an explanatory theory. A scientist who analyses international politics only by assuming that States pursuing objective power interests, tends to develop a peace strategy which implies that big powers are satisfied by the possibility of controlling their own zones of influences\textsuperscript{2}. Such theorists are, according to Aron, constantly surprised by the interference of values and irrational forces stemming from ideologies. Passions and ideology also surprise the liberal economist who builds his peace theory on a harmony of interests between States rooted in citizen’s benefits of economic globalisation. The problem with Moralism and Juridism is that they intend progressively to persuade - and hence – evict the egoism and irrationality inherent in Sovereign State behaviour by the sole force of the rightness and rationality of moral principles. Aron prefers not counting already at the theoretical level on lucky (accidental) meetings between the multifaceted motive poles and the independent sources of changes. He warns against speculations on the possibility that one of them eventually absorbs the others (Aron 1962, p. 694).

\textbf{A sociology of war}

In \textit{Peace and War} Aron suggests what kind of causes a theory of international politics chooses to treat in the probabilistic method. One category of causes is the 'interest/gain' pole. It calls for a polemological study covering geopolitics, demographic facts and technological processes. Aron categorises the polemology as sociology of \textit{means}. Yet already here Aron troubles the systemic scientist by letting geopolitical facts depend on the historical sources of change outlined above. The interest pole does not allow pure, objective statements. The effective use of the economy, armies, territories, power and technology depends on historically given political and social conjunctures. Power is only providing the means to propagate ideas, which are also historically situated. Only this empirical narrative is able to produce the exact knowledge (Aron 1962). Moreover, the power configuration identified by the geopolitical and sociological study is a variable circumscribed by other variables. According to Aron’s ideal typical description of interstate relations, every unit obeys a

power that draws legitimacy from its own midst. In this way, the value pole is decisive for the methodological choices. An important variable is the historical ideas that political leaders refer to in their pursuit of goals. Hence, Aron does not share the early realist school’s conscious ignorance of the influence of intra-state values on international politics. The sharp distinction Aron makes between states’ internal and external goals concerns the epistemological difference between absence and existence of a monopoly of violence, which entails different social behaviour. Aron recommends - like realists and traditionalists - geopolitical investigations and categorises his own theory as prudential preferring the weberian ethics of responsibility from the ethics of conviction. Aron’s practical intentions are to warn liberal democratic States of the persistence of geopolitical logic. This explains partly why he goes as far as considering the war as the constitutive element of international relations (Aron 1962, p. 103). But Aron’s originality lies in the fact that he places geopolitical investigation in the epistemology and methodology of human science. In a short article outlining his future Peace and War, Aron proposes 6 questions, which help the responsible sociologist of war to grasp the whole reality. The three first questions send the researcher out in a geopolitical, material analysis that identifies the diplomatic systems, the power configurations and the influence of arm technologies in the given conflict. The next three questions concern the state of values and ideologies shaping the diplomatic conjuncture. The sociologist of war examines to what extent there is basic mutual recognition among States as to leaving to each unit its own internal, moral order. The recognition is measured sociologically, not by reference to a positive international law to which units have only given formal accept. In case of international consent as to basic moral principles Aron speaks of a homogenous international order and in the opposite case of a heterogeneous order. Whereas the first three questions concern the material dimensions calling for analysis of international phenomenon, the last three demand interpretation. The sociologist of war has to understand in what way the internal regimes of the units in a given context influence on the international system. And he also has to understand the intrinsic goals that the units attach to their foreign policies (Aron 1954)

Limits of weberian methodology

When Aron defines the theoretical approaches necessary for the kind of interpretation that the three last questions demand, he has to go beyond Weber's historical sociology. This is because Weber does not allow any kind of internal coherence in the values that historical agent’s and hence, scholars are referring to. And, as Weber, at the epistemological level denies internal coherence, he also denies scientific interpretation of values beyond the agents’ subjective world visions. Aron explains that Weber’s denial of broad interpretation stems from his rigorous criticism. In his epistemological writings from the 1930’s, Aron examines Weber as part of the German neo-Kantian school, which at the turn of the 20th century had demonstrated how the historical sciences could be universally valid. The neo-Kantian project aims at establishing a positivistic science of history, which buries metaphysics, like Hegelian idealism or uncritical rationalism. But this burial does not just lead, in the
Aron is in particular interested in Weber’s work because it combines the neo-Kantism with the search of relevant knowledge for politicians (Aron 1935). But according to Aron, Weber aims at establishing pure theoretical objectivity and his epistemology is governed by his desire to solve the problem of perspectivism, which he considers as an inextricable part of human sciences. The advisor of the prince is, in Weber’s eyes, a scientific who is unable to make universal judgement because he can not fly over his own historical horizon. The same historicist imprisonment apply to all human beings in their judgement, thus also for the Prince in office, but the politician differs from the scientist by the fact that his normative judgements draws political legitimacy from the fact that he has been elected. 

Consequently, the scientist’s job is only to reconstruct the realities of politics leaving value choices to the politician himself. Aron shows that this is the argument underlying the kind of positivism, Weber praises and which leads to his methodology of historical sociology. Weber therefore tries to neutralise the damaging effect of the scholar’s interpretation. He shows convincingly that the scientist departs from an ‘interest of knowledge’ (Weber 1919). It means that he chooses to examine a part of a subject matter in which he wants to identify the destiny of his personal preferred values. According to Weber, this value orientation stems from the scientist's private world visions and threatens to spoil the production of positive knowledge. Weber’s solution is to neutralise the effects of perspectivism on the scientific result by placing the interest of knowledge in a pre-scientific phase (see Aron 1935, chap. IV). The scientist can chose whatever he wants to study but the final scientific test is the probabilistic narrative which has gets universal validity by showing how things actually happened. Thus Weber only admits interpretation tested by the rationality schemes, which reconstruct the agents’ subjective mind by elucidating it in a mean-goal succession. In this way, the scientist’s understanding does not go beyond the subjective meaning which the agent himself attaches to his action.

Towards a history of philosophy

The solution Weber proposes to the perspectivism is, according to Aron, erroneous both in an epistemological and in a practical sense. Firstly, the scientist's commitment cannot be neutralised by a sole probabilistic, causal test. It continues to mark the interpretative dimension of the whole scientific process. Secondly, neither should the commitment be neutralised if the advisor of the prince is to accomplish the integrity of his tasks. In Aron's view, the scientist’s advise to the politicians is not only the wisdom which Weber's consequence calculations provide for. Reasonable policy recommendation demands broad interpretation and judgement of the ideas, which intervene in politics. Thus Aron establish another kind of critical theory than the weberian ideal typical framework. Now Aron refuses to reintroduce a priori rationalism in the scientific process. Aron’s critique of rationalism stems from his experience of the Fascists movement in the 1930’s, a bad surprise for rationalist science. This is the reason why Aron chooses the weberian kind of sociology that aims at detecting the irrationality and passions inherent in political behaviour (Aron 1938, p. 13). This kind of sociology explains and
understands the empirical matter *a posteriori*, not by universal laws. The philosophical theory Aron looks for can therefore only be a ‘regulatory idea’ in the Kantian sense. Kant points to the possibility of evaluating ideas, not according to dogmatic principles, but in a reflective movement, i.e. observing a part of the empirical record *a posteriori* by moving from the particular to the universal, not the contrary. The weberian narrative already constitutes the *a posteriori* material. The narrative is precisely a part of the empirical record that has captured the scientist’s interest of knowledge. Aron wants to show that this narrative can be taken out of its pure contextuality and be explained and interpreted according to some kind of internal order in the ideas governing human actions. His solution is to reconsider the empirical subject of the human sciences. As Brian-Paul Frost has rightly pointed out, Aron stresses a potentiality in the human science for understanding, which is beneficial for the political science. Unlike the natural Sciences, the empirical facts, which Aron calls ’history-reality’ form an inseparable part of the comprehension of it in such a way that the science of history constitutes the history itself. This solidarity between subject and object is absent in the natural science whose laws are independent of the way that we acknowledge them. And the inseparability between history as an empirical record and historical conscience does not only points to the problem of perspectivism leading to Weber's epistemological scepticism. It also points to the fact that the scientist of history can not avoid reading the empirical record through a philosophy of history. By merely contemplating the facts the scientist is at once informed of human purposes. The fact that human beings are purposeful has got the consequences, at the epistemological level, that agents leave value signs behind them and allow the scientist to detect human actions as final causes (Frost 1997).

Whereas Weber limits epistemology to the search of a solution to scientific explanation of indeterminate behaviour, Aron draws attention to another dimension in the epistemological treatment of the empirical record. He adds a philosophical sense to epistemology. The fact that motives in human behaviour are equivalent to final causes directly sends the scientist from the empirical level into a philosophy of history. The scientific process does not only consist of mere choices of the best-suited methodology after having got a primary impression of the empirical record. The reflections stemming from the empirical record allow a kind of transhistorical dialogue between agents and scientist. In his epistemological writings, Aron demonstrates that the ‘selection’ - another word for Weber’s ‘interest of knowledge’ - is guided, not by the scientist’s private opinions but by a philosophical interest (Aron 1935). Aron admits with Weber that the scientist constantly judges the historical record in a new light because of the posthumous life that historical processes give values. But the fact that values have got a posthumous life does not change another fact, namely that the questions governing the scientist’s choice of interest have got an internal coherence over time. As Aron puts it, scholars’ answers differ over time but the questions they ask are of the same kind. In

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3 Aron refers to I. Kant’s Third Critique (1790) several places, of which « Histoire et politique » (1949), in *Polémiques*, Gallimard, 1955, p. 192
Aron’s epistemological writings from the 1930’s, he explains what he means by the transhistorical dialogue stemming from scientific selection. He refers in particular to the classical questions from political philosophy, starting with Platon and Aristotle. These are questions like ’what are the best and most just political relationship between human beings?’ and ’how do political institutions assure the political participation of the citizens if, at the same time, they have to assure efficient resource allocation’ (Aron 1935, and Aron 1938). Especially in his thesis from 1938, Aron stresses the eternal relevance of these political philosophical questions which ideologies like Marxism suggests to remove from the scientific agenda by showing that Marxist interpretation of history once for all identifies just political institutions. Aron’s point is that the objectivity of selection does not stem from the scholar’s impartiality but precisely from his commitment. By asking the same kind of questions, scholars’ perspectives are different ‘points of view’ (see Mesure 1989), but this is not the same as relativism due to the fact that scholars are questioning the same history, namely world history and deal with the same accumulated experiences. Aron explicitly shows that his point of view is the liberal one, stressing the historical superiority of the constitutional-pluralist system, the neutral term that Aron prefers for the term democratic.

**Dilthey’s hermeneutics**

Aron finds ground for his philosophical theory in the epistemology of another German neo-Kantian, Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey shares Weber's criticism but keeps a leg in the German idealism. This latter tradition has got a heritage that is difficult for the human sciences to ignore, because the phenomenology, especially Hegel’s already proposed an epistemological solution for the science that departs from experience, not from *a priori* constructions. According to Hegel, the science, which aims at understanding human minds, has to interpret the 'objective spirit' governing agents in history. Hegel’s antipositivistic phenomenology not only identifies agents’ purposes but also allows a detection of a historical reason running through the entire history of mankind. This is the line of thoughts behind Hegel's large ontological systems outlined in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and his *Philosophy of Right*. The neo-Kantian project wants to emancipate from Hegel without copying the methods of natural sciences. Dilthey establishes a positivistic epistemology, which keeps Hegel's epistemological discoveries but weeds out all kind of metaphysics. In Dilthey’s approach, the obscure term, 'objective spirit' only becomes a methodological tool. Dilthey departs from the purposes of human agents, generated by this objective spirit. He draws attention to the causal connection between value systems and the actions they engenders and identifies in this way two ontological bricks allowing the hermeneutic circle. The scientist understands gradually more by moving between parts (actions) and wholes (objective spirit). In order not to fall into Hegel’ metaphysical trap, Dilthey’s epistemology insists on a diversity of value systems informing historical actions. He refuses to consider the objective spirits as part of a universal knowledge.
In Aron’s view, Dilthey’s hermeneutic circle is the best description of how scholars – whether conscious about it or not – decipher the agent’s world visions. Aron keeps the ‘objective spirit as ontological brick but shows that Dilthey’s fear of metaphysics conducts him to limit his epistemology to a kind of positivism which in the end becomes relativistic (Aron 1935). Aron argues that Dilthey obliges himself to refuse any links between the objective spirits. Aron’s solution is the transhistorical and objective character of the scientist’s selection. And as he puts it, all historical agent’s, including the scientist himself gives a historically situated answer to the classical political philosophical questions. The answers are diverse but the questions are the same. But Aron’s solution to the problem of relativism includes the weberian probabilistic narrative. What Aron gains as a result beyond Weber’s and Dilthey is a detection of common human experience accumulated over time. This identification can only be obtained through the weberian neutral methodology, which Dilthey is too unsystematic to establish.

Aron’s historical reconstruction is guided by the transhistorical dialogue inherent in the selection and combined with the explanation in the weberian sense, where the exact influence of material and spiritual causes are established. In this way, the historian discovers the internal coherence in the myriad of ideas human beings foster by identifying the accumulated experience allocated by the posthumous life of the ideas. This experience conditions not only politician’s actions but also the scientific understanding of them. The kind of reflective narrative, Aron proposes, makes it possible for the scientist to ‘raise to the level of conscience’ as Hegel puts it, i.e. to understand the movement of ideas in a philosophy of history, without abandoning the critical project. This implies keeping, at the epistemological level, the indeterminacy of human actions and desisting from deducing any knowledge beyond positive facts (Aron 1951).

**Historical examples**

Aron’s epistemological solution of the problem of relativism (transhistorical dialogue, detection of accumulated experience, reflective historiography) will remain too abstract if it is not exemplified by the way Aron practised it in his writings on international politics. Aron ‘positivistically’ reconstructs the political record by the aid of stirring, philosophical concepts in a weltgeschichtlich narrative, which is not lacking moral dimensions. The moral judgements are only developed indirectly from the a posteriori description. It is hence impossible to deduce general moral concepts from Aron’s theory of international relations. His normative evaluations can only be identified by examining what kind of concrete moral advice he suggests when analysing real world politics in his own historical horizon. I propose therefore to follow Pierre Hassner’s advice when we try to understand the scope of Aron’s theoretical work. Hassner suggests to reconstruct Aron’s thinking through his concrete analysis (Hassner 1985).

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During the 1930’s when Aron establishes his epistemology, he observes a historical phenomenon, which directly interests a theory of international relations. He states that there is a growing convergence of ideas in the regimes of the units in the international system. These ideas are *national self-determination, democracy* and *growth*. Anti-imperialism, political participation and rational exploitation of resources in order to assuring more equality, are ideas, which have shown a high degree of historical efficiency. In Aron’s view these ideas have in the 20th century become a part of a common western experience and, as Aron argues, are about to pave the way for a globalisation of western values because the ideas prevailing inside the western regimes prolong themselves in the interstate system. Aron writes in his thesis from 1938 that from now on, historians of contemporary history will for the first time be able to history of mankind, not only history of civilisations (Aron 1938, Sect. IV).

However, Aron’s history of ideas is not announcing the end of interstate conflict as a deducible effect of global, ideological convergence. He writes his thesis when the Nazis are in power in Germany and reacts by suggesting his prudential sociology of war, which takes the whole empirical record into consideration. The neutral, probabilistic narrative shows that the interwar events have let to a deviation in experience. Germanys’ political performance causes heterogeneity in the international system. From 1933, Aron starts speaking of a ‘state of war’. Germany has become imperialist and challenges the ideas of self-determination and democracy by a totalitarian, anti-western ideology, which only satisfies the third idea, growth, and only for the benefit of Germans. Aron localise the main cause of the sudden heterogeneity in Hitler’s world vision and personality. The cause of the state of war is Hitler’s capacity to exploit the German people’s feeling of humiliation after the politically unwise Versailles Treaty and bad geopolitical analysis prevailing during the interwar period. Aron’s policy recommendations to western (French) politicians are to behave according to the heterogeneity of the system. Pure procedural attempts to convict Germans not to violate international law are inefficient because it is precisely the ideas underpinning the Society of Nations that Germany challenges. Instead, Aron characterised the crisis as a classical hegemonic menace and proposes ’objective’ war waging (Aron 1933).

This illustrates how Aron’s interpretation follows an ethics of responsibility and geopolitical approaches. Aron’s observation of conformity of ideas and their efficiency have got Alexis de Tocqueville’s warning character. From an epistemological point of view the indeterminacy of human actions must generate a ‘fear of the future’ in the liberal scientist judgements⁵. Even though a set of values prevails historically, one value can get more historical efficiency and evict another. Same indirect relationship between description and prescription prevails in Aron’s interpretation of the East-West confrontation. In 1945, Aron shows that one heterogeneous system is about to replace

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another (Aron 1945). He also argues that the scientist has to be subtler than in 1933, because this time the ideas governing the revisionist unit in the system are able to gather universal claim. Self-determination, democracy and growth are exactly the Soviet Unions goals. Stalin couches his rhetoric in antifascist terms and the Marxist-Leninist doctrine suggests a more just and efficient solution of the classical challenge in political philosophy. Already in 1942, Aron judges Nazism too weak ideologically to respond to the historical, global ethos. In Aron’s interpretation, Nazism lacks the first two components of the universal values and he foresees a speedy agony of the Nazi regime and hence, a quick German conversion to western values (Aron 1942).

In the Soviet case, Aron creates, in 1945, the concept of a ‘competition between two kind of industrial societies’, one stressing authentic pluralism, another considering that ‘democracy’ be best guaranteed by a single party system with ideological monopoly. Aron’s policy recommendations stem from his interpretation of a deviation in experience. He encourages Western powers by his philosophy of history that points to the incapacity of the soviet model, in the long run, to favour self-determination, democracy and growth. Like the German totalitarianism he detects a ‘future loss of prestige’ (Aron 1951). But he also stresses the necessity of an active western diplomacy. It consists of strengthening the western regimes economically and political. Aron is therefore in favour of Atlanticism and encourages French politicians not only to accept the Marshall Aid but also to allow an immediate rearming of Western Europe - Germany included - in order to resisting Soviet attack. Aron shows that Soviet’s imperialist project is caused by United States unwise war waging from 1942. According to Aron, the Americans did not think geopolitically. During World War II, they had too ideologically focused on the defeat of Germany and unintentionally left an ‘emptiness’ in Europe which in turn stirred up the hegemonic policy of the Soviet Union (see Aron 1945).

Aron also stresses the moral obligations that the new heterogeneity places on the Western powers. In order to reintroduce homogeneity, which leads to the principle of self-determination and democracy, the Western powers have to wage a war. Aron admits that the Western powers are reluctant to wage a warm war and gives two reasons for this reluctance. Firstly, the existence of atomic weapons has led to a fear of global suicide. Secondly, the experience of two total wars has created a public pressure on western governments never ever to wage wars. A law ban of war is therefore the ethos governing the Society of Nations, and later the UN treaty. Aron shows however, that the moral obligation of the Western alliance to liberate Central and Eastern Europe, demands an ‘adjustment’ of the lesson that the western public opinion draws from the immediate past, and a unsentimental judgement of the change that atomic weapons had introduced in international relations (Aron 1951). This is why Aron resurrects the German strategist, Karl Von Clausewitz, from which he borrows the concept of ‘limited war’. According to Aron, the only ethically tenable war, after the experience of total war, is limited war, which exactly presupposes Aron’s sociology of war. It demands an all-round geopolitical diagnosis of the diplomatic constellation. It identifies the possibility of classical diplomatic skill freed
of the kind of liberal dogmatism which, in Aron’s views, characterises the democratic war waging and which the most often leads to exactly the opposite of the initial intentions⁶.

Aron’s East-West analysis are both more prudential and radical compared to other contemporary analysis. Aron’s prudence differs from pure realist analysis. The inaccuracy of categorising Aron as Gaullist (Merle 1984), becomes clear once Aron’s analysis is seen in the light of de Gaulle’s famous maxim, according to which ‘ideologies pass away, nations remain’. Aron shows that, in order not to becoming naive, by believing in the inefficiency of ideas in international politics, de Gaulle becomes naive. He only pays attention to narrow geopolitical analysis and becomes blind for the transnational power of the soviet ideology. De Gaulle’s mistake is, according to Aron, not to detect the fundamental heterogeneity of the system from 1945 and to believe that discussions with Stalin or Brejnev do not differ from discussions with the tsar of the ‘Saint Russia’ from the 19th century⁷. In the same way, Aron’s intellectual kinship with Henry Kissinger has got the internal limit that Kissinger chooses only to follow the interest pole in international politics. His policy recommendation becomes cynical, in Aron’s eyes, because they stress a parallel legitimacy of Soviet and American ‘zones of influence’. This is a to be too large to the Soviet Union and it removes from the agenda, the Western alliance’s moral obligation of liberating Central and Eastern Europe⁸.

Immanent historical ethics

Aron himself describes his philosophy of history as ‘positivistic’ because it only understands and interprets what has - or is - actually happening. It does neither deduce the future, nor does it suppose an inner logic or Reason governing the historical processes. Yet, even though Aron shares the neo-Kantian critical project, he has also got an antipositivistic approach to international relations, especially when he deals with the difficult relationship between international law and international politics. Aron has been called an international law scepticist (Pellet 1992). Indeed, in his Peace and War, Aron opts in favour of the German lawyer Jellinek’s theory of self-limitation. Jellinek does not admit the existence of any objective international law. He only identifies States’ implicit consent (Aron 1962, p. 707). Aron’s critical attitude towards positivists like Kelsen is not surprising. It matches his description of the state system as a ‘system of war’, and hence his sociological attitude to the question of international law. Aron, however, refutes that he is a scepticist but has never systematically proven the opposite. In this last section, I will show that it is in particular in the question related to law that Aron escapes from what Koskenniemi (1989) calls the dichotomy between

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‘descriptive apology’ and ‘normative utopia’. The first category covers the realist’s refusal to operate with any *a priori* system of norms that could improve international relations. They only describe, or apologise, the impossibility of positive law and recommend that best functioning models be established according to satisfaction of States objective interest. The second category covers the Jusnaturalists’, the Kantians’ or others’ attempts to ground, *a priori*, a normative interstate system.

Aron’s approach to the two interrelated questions, namely ‘what is the foundation of interstate law?’ and ‘who are subjects to the interstate law’, lies in an antipositivist decipherment of a *historically* developed law. This historical vision builds on a substantial theory of the State. In Aron’s view, the States as collective identities have become the final subjects of the law. Moreover, the States are the only agents capable of limiting war and improving intra-humane relations in general. Through this vision, Aron’s ideal typical description, namely the plurality of States not only stems from his detection of a historical and sociological fact. The existence of rebellious wills has also got Aron’s approval, but only in the light that a philosophy of history casts on these relations (see Hassner 1996).

In Aron’s theoretical writings, there are not many references to Hegel’s philosophy of right but it has nevertheless Aron’s favour as to its fundamental presuppositions. According to Hegel, rights are neither grounded in nature, nor in a positivistic codex but are produced through history in a dialectical process (Hegel 1807). Hegel uses especially two pedagogical figures. One is the ‘dialectics of recognition’. It shows that the first man’s political behaviour is an existential fight for recognition, which only ends once he has become part of a State, because the objective of his fight is belongingness, a situation in which he feels free, recognised and committed. Commitment is the only reason Hegel accepts for individuals obeying positive laws.

Hegel’s other pedagogical figure is the ‘causality of destiny’. It suggests that every individual is not only a body but also a unique, spiritual principle, which is called to unfold over time. In Hegel’s and Aron’s line of thoughts, States are analogous to individuals and attend their ‘moments’ in world history. This must not be understood pathologically. Hegel’s moral dialectic is spiritual and this is the reason why Aron finds it interesting.

Aron asserts in his primary empirical scenario that political actions are partly motivated by values, norms or historical ideas. Thus he wants to identify the efficiency of these values in order to judging to what extent given values explain State behaviour. Aron does not assume the political consequences Hegel draws from his philosophy of right. Neither does Aron assume his metaphysical system. He only uses Hegel’s moral dialectic to make a scheme for the history of international relations. In this scheme, the State, as idea, is the end of history. This does not mean that the State stop changing.

Following this logic the interstate war which historically constitutes the State, has also got a history. In Aron’s vision, the war, understood in Clausewitz’ terms as the prolongation of politics, is a key to the understanding of the morality prevailing among the States. In the following I will summarise Aron’s account of the European dialectics of war.
Dialectics of war

In *Peace and War*, Aron shows that wars are caused by logic of power. Once a State has got sufficient material basis, it uses it to obtain hegemonic control over other States. But shortly after, Aron makes a distinction between *causes* and *motives* of war. A cause is what leads to a war and a motive what drives it. Moreover, Aron stresses that power is only a mean to impose ideas on other. It is, accordingly, by following the value pole that we understand the *real* causes of war. Values cover in Aron’s political philosophy especially the ideas that regulate the internal life of the States in a given diplomatic constellation. Thus Aron proposes a periodization of wars according to the ideas governing the regimes in given periods. Aron speaks of *feudal, dynastic, national, colonial wars*, etc. and he shows that these wars have produced a morality among the units. The morality is a result of confrontations triggered off by a fight for recognition of value systems prevailing internally in the units. Aron reintroduces his two guiding concepts, namely *heterogeneity* and *homogeneity* as ideal typical descriptions of shifting international systems. The feudal wars were triggered off in a heterogeneous system. The religious wars were political wars because they were fought in the name of incompatible authoritative systems. In 1648, the system became homogenous thanks to a peace concluded among States and based on the principle of *cujus regio, hujus religio*. After the Westphalian peace followed a period of wars, which Aron characterises as dialogues between equal States, not as existential fights. Aron shows furthermore, that the ideas that led to the French revolution introduced a new kind of heterogeneity in the system. It was the national idea that spoiled the old system. The national idea pointed to a principle of popular sovereignty. The revolutionary wars were once again waged because of incompatible suggestions of just political institutions governing States and hence interstate relations. The dynastic regimes were challenged by new collective identities, peoples, who proposed completely new political relationships. Aron shows, in his narrative, that Napoleon accompanied the national idea with an imperial one. His defeat in 1815 has got, in Aron’s eyes, the historical function of having definitively eliminated imperialism from the national idea. The European Concert of the 19th Century was again possible because of the reintroduction of homogeneity in the international system. Once again there was mutual recognition among equals, but this time it differed from the system of 1648 by its national dimension. Aron stresses the fact that Bismarck ’s Reich is compatible with the European diplomatic system. Germany is a Nation-State, not an empire. But the homogeneity and the internal morality of this diplomatic system only prevailed among European States. The United States were not recognised as diplomatically equal, but were looked upon by Europeans as a cultural prolongation of Europe. Other civilisations had to wait for other wars before they became part of the diplomatic system based on mutual recognition. In Aron’s schemes, this was precisely the historical function of the colonial wars waged in the 20th Century (Aron 1962, pp. 157-162)
With this narrative, Aron explains an immanent progress in the international relations, initially defined as a system of warfare. At a certain, historical moment, the States became collective consciences, a fact which initiated a change of the legitimacy underpinning internal and, in the end, external sovereignty. Aron talks about a double legitimacy in the Western style nation-state. He makes a distinction between autorité de droit and autorité de fait (Aron 1962, p. 726). The first kind of legitimacy is the neutral, law dimension which was introduced by the American and French revolutions. This legitimacy is based on Montesquieu’s division of power and popular sovereignty. From this moment, the European State is obliged to admit an external point of view on the regime. This external point is the idea from the Enlightenment that every citizen has got fundamental rights guaranteed by the States governed by law. Aron’s point is that even though fundamental rights are not fully assured in the century following the liberal revolutions, the European States have, from the end of the 18th century, initiated a process of reforms. This process will sooner or later accomplish the liberal goals but the accomplishment depends on historical, and hence accidental conditions.

The other kind of legitimacy, Aron talks about, is a historical, substantial idea which assures that citizens are committed to the State and obey its laws. This factual legitimacy is the spiritual principle that Hegel depicts in his dialectic of recognition. It is the spiritual principle, the ‘causality of destiny’, he identifies in each individual, and hence, in each State. If the State has not well succeeded in defining an idea that gathers broad popular consent, it is not recognised by the people and is therefore unable to govern. Aron shows that democratic, popular sovereignty depends, rightly, upon elections and hence shifting representative governments. But the people does not obey a neutral administration but allow only shifting elites to govern if they promise to protect and further develop given norms. In Aron’s narrative on the European State of laws, he asserts that this substantial, historical dimension of the States’ internal legitimacy is protected against authoritarianism or totalitarianism because the movement of nationalities was accompanied by the Enlightenment ideas. In this way, governance also has got a history. The public opinion is, as Kant notes, the final test of possible government in Europe, but this does not, remove the permanent necessity of a substantial idea which makes liberal governing possible.

With his narrative on the modern, European State system, Aron’s explains the convergence of ideas he observes in the 1930’s. The two sides of the legitimacy underpinning the internal sovereignty, that of right and that of a substantial idea, has prolonged themselves in an interstate, diplomatic order. The State as idea, assures the self-determination and democracy, two ideas which confirm the ‘negative imperialism’ and entail a homogenous international system (Aron 1962, p. 297). Aron explains at the same time the European law of nations. The possibility of war is maintained, as the sovereignties are maintained. But possibility of war has been transformed into an idea of subjective rights prevailing among equals. Equality is no longer based on material facts but on spiritual facts. Even though the
States have means to impose ideas on others they definitively refrain from using it. The balance of power in Europe has become an ‘inclusive diplomacy’. Aron talks about an extremely valuable ‘maxim of communication’ which was introduced in Europe in the 16th century and steadily confirmed during the following centuries (Aron 1976). The European States were obliged to calculate the risk of war but this obligation was transformed into a moral idea of not waging war with the aim of annihilating other States. It is exactly this normative acquisition Aron detects in Clausewitz’ writings. As Hoffman has put it, Aron shows that Clausewitz’ famous formulation according to which war is a prolongation of politics is the contrary of a bellicose statement (see Hoffmann 1985). Aron transplants Clausewitz’ concept of ‘limited war’ – which covers a politically controlled war, governed by the ‘maxim of communication’ – from the 19th century to the 20th century. With the experience of total war, in the first half of the 20th century, ‘limited war’ is the only ethically acceptable war in the western world (Aron 1976). When democratic States wage wars the goal can only be to favour mutual recognition between States. Democratic warfare can neither aim at annihilating in order to overtake responsibility of a State, nor can it be a crusade. The Western war only liberates States and their civil societies from unjust imperialism. It does not try to convert the liberated state to special political institutions, which in Aron’s view are always results of particular experiences and thus different people’s historical solutions (Aron 1976). When Aron in the end of the 1930’s recommends ‘objective war’ with Germany the aim of the war could not be to destroy the spiritual principle of Germany – only to liberate it from Hitler’s anti-western demonic regime (see Aron 1962, p 42). After the war, Aron appeals to immediate normalisation of Germany and suggests that the Western powers resist from the temptation to democratise Germany. Thanks to their experience, Germany is already part of the Western normative movement, and Aron believes that Germany will convert their imperialist mission into a moderate idea of European integration. Aron’s reformism calls for patience to let the people themselves adjust their institutions to the pluralist, moderate ideas in which they belonged already. In the same line of thought Aron stresses, during the 1950’s the western alliance’s duty to wage a ‘limited war’ against the Soviet Union. The aim of the war can not be to impose western ideas on the Central and East European countries but only to liberate the states, and hence the civil societies from the Soviet empire (Aron 1976).

With his decipherment of an immanent, historical ethics, Aron also explains the unique European experience after 1950. The European Community is, in Aron’s view, the maturest project of negative imperialism. It is a ‘whole’ but does not need to fuse into one Sovereign as some proposed it in the 50’ies. In Aron’s ethical scheme, the different Member States have all attained each at their manner, their internal coexistence and their guarantee of fundamental rights. A European Constitution can not add anything to these historical acquisitions. Thus Aron recommends that the European project, which

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he depicts as a ‘Community of destiny’ consist of pragmatic co-operation on liberal ideas (Aron 1983, p. 675).

Reformative prescriptions
The examples of the links Aron makes between description and prescription with his antipositivist interpretation show that though Aron’s scientific approach to international relations seems conservative at the theoretical level, it becomes reformative by its practical implications. I will argue that a good deal of the critiques that Aron has received for his scepticism, narrow realism and conservatism during the years can be refuted. Aron has been criticised for his statement of a permanence of interwar war and in particular of his demonstration of how wars produce norms (Raynaud 1989). Aron meets this kind of critique by stressing that he distinguishes between neutral observation of how morality is produced and the policy recommendations he makes (Aron 1938, sec. III). He states that he does not approve that wars produce rights but points to the fact that the history of the European State has shown the possibility of an immanent historical ethic. It is this possibility that serves as regularly idea in the Kantian sense. Another critique points to a theoretical limit in the dialectic of ethics. This interpretation of history localises normative results of dialectic in given regional areas (Europe). These norms can therefore not be exported, as the others have to make their own experiences. Aron did not systematically refute this critique. Only his empirically distribution of moral tasks to France and Western powers shows that Aron believes in the possibility of an extension of Western values.

Yet another critique of Aron points to the conservatism of the state-centric approach (Merle 1984). In Aron’s scheme, he shows, rightly, that the State in its Modern European form has been the European civil societies historical solutions for coexistence and democratic participation. Moreover, the State is the only agent capable of moderating war because the principle of legitimacy underpinning internal and external sovereignty has been historically transformed. This process ends, rightly, in the idea of the State. But whereas Aron stresses that the State has become the permanent agent of international relations he does not at the same time show that it is immune to change. In fact, this is exactly his point. Aron’s dialectic reading of the historical record does not exclude even more changes of the State, which respond to the demands of global reforms. Until now the State has been transformed into a multiple reality. It is no longer only a physical reality (a territory). It has also become a collective conscience, an historical idea conditioned by the Enlightenment, a civil society and a framework for democratic institutions.

It is precisely in this ‘empirical’ interpretation that Aron’s normative dimension lies. It is therefore unfair to classify Aron’s theory, as Allen B. Brooks does, in a category of non-normative theories. Brooks compares Aron with the English School and demonstrates that Bull and Aron are ontologically
close but that Bull’s larger normative dimension stems from his identification of already existing patterns of co-operation. This makes room for larger normative judgements because Bull prescribes a set of rules, voluntary and reciprocal which turn the state of war into a kind of society (Brooks 1997). But the theoretical largesse does not assure the practical implications, that Aron’s theory does. The English School tries to deduce, at a theoretical level a possibility of convicting all the parts in the system of the pragmatically superiority of Western style diplomacy. This line of thoughts meets accordingly the same problems as the Rationalist a priori theories with which they do not share the theoretical presuppositions. The more radical Rationalists directly attack the sovereignty by declaring themselves Kantian and determine a theory of international relations as one which identifies the conditions of possibilities in the rationality of human nature (see Giesen 1992). By this identification, they establish the most ambitious principle of justice, which the construction permits. But according to Aron, the ultimate test of these theories is the one to which the advisor of the prince is exposed.

Whether the construction is ‘international society’ or ‘global community’ the challenge remains how to convict those who refuse to co-operate or do not favour the principles of justice (Hassner 1996). Aron’s reformatory dimension is provided for by his analysis of concrete possibilities. He invents the concept of ‘uncertain struggle’ (Aron 1951). It is a concept that covers the multifaceted, geopolitical feature of international politics. It also points to the scientist’s prescriptive challenge to suggest concrete solution that is reasoned on the grounds of causal knowledge about the consequences of alternative choices.

Conclusion

I have shown that Aron’s originality stems from a conscious move between three levels in the scientific process. A first level is a primary detection of the empirical matter. A second level is the choice of the best-suited methodology. And a third level is that of a philosophy of history. The criterion of relevance is decisive for Aron, and the reason why he opts for Weber’s historical sociology. But as the political science also has to ground responsible policy recommendations on broad interpretation, Aron scans and extents the possibility of critical judgement. He shows that beyond Weber’s ideal type a philosophical approach to the understanding of international relation is possible if the scientist is aware of the reflective character of the empirical matter. Aron thus admits scientific judgement inside a philosophy of history. He also allows for an immanent ethics in international politics. This last decipherment demands a dialectic approach to international relations.

No commentator of Aron’s work will ever be able to remove the label of realism from his theory. This has neither been my intention. Instead I wanted to show that Aron’s theory of international relations gives an idea of what a continental, liberal, realist and idealist approach can consist of. The relevance of Aron’s theory in the post-communist era is the research agenda it suggests. The detection of meetings between autonomous causes is still relevant if the complexity of diplomatic constellations is
to be understood. Likewise, Aron’s ideal typical and weltgeschichtlich concepts as homogeneity and heterogeneity remain pertinent. Aron’s theory still does not provide a priori judgements. It only places the moral obligation on scholars to reiterate scrupulous empirical investigations every time diplomatic constellations undergo dramatic shifts.

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