Raymond Aron and the 'Sense of Compromise' in Democracy

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Compromise in political philosophy has emerged as a compelling and timely subject in the past decade, with political scientists and philosophers, such as Avishai Margalit, Amy Gutmann, Dennis Thompson, Daniel Weinstock, and Fabian Wendt[1] exploring its value for democracy within the tradition of analytical philosophy. So far, the field of continental philosophy has seen very few pioneering investigations on this subject.[2]

This article attempts to establish the meaning of "the sense of compromise" in Raymond Aron's thought and offers a new interpretation of this equivocal wording.[3] Surprisingly, the works of R. Aron, one of the most eminent French political thinkers of the twentieth century, remains rarely studied in English-language scholarship – his extensive corpus of 35 books, 200 academic articles, and numerous editorials, are yet to be fully translated.[4] While the existing literature discussed extensively R. Aron's theory in light of intellectual trends and politics in postwar France[5], it seemed to have gone unnoticed that compromise could be a fundamental concept to characterize further R. Aron's political theory. I argue that the concept of compromise might point to a more nuanced reading of his theory of democracy. The use of "–ism" labels, from "liberalism" to "conservatism," traditionally used to define his political doctrine, tend to downplay the nonconformity of his positioning.[6] Indeed, R. Aron sought to cultivate a non-dogmatic thinking, the mere idea of an ideological system being abhorrent to him.

However, the concept of compromise appears almost surreptitiously in Raymond Aron's essays, turning this inquiry into a notoriously difficult task. Compromise comes out only over a few pages of the volume *Democracy and Totalitarianism* and *Introduction to Political Philosophy.* It unfolds equally, although in a less obvious way, in *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* and in *The Opium of the Intellectuals.*

By analyzing R. Aron's conceptual ambiguity on compromise in a pluralist democracy, I shall make sense of its various meanings and implications. In particular, I shall seek to disentangle the meaning of the "sense of compromise," an expression featured in R. Aron's writings. The "sense of compromise" mentioned by R. Aron seems to hint at a political predisposal to mutual concessions, in the absence of available clear-cut rules or common definition of compromise. As we navigate through these various definitions, it will appear necessary to identify several "figures" of compromise, surfacing in his essays. I will thus propose a typology of compromises, based on the evidence found throughout his books. For each type of compromise, I will outline their moral and political limits, as suggested by the philosopher. The last section of this article will expound upon the former typology and infer certain criteria to distinguish moral from immoral compromises, criteria that are subsequently discussed.

The concept of compromise, laid out by R. Aron, offers key insights into the principles of democratic regimes and political institutions. I argue that compromise can shed light on R. Aron's democratic theory and that, conversely, R. Aron's understanding of compromise can help us sharpen the meaning of the term. For R. Aron, the "sense of compromise" captures the unique essence of a liberal democratic regime in a pluralist society and is exemplified, albeit in different forms, in various social, political, and economic domains.

The Fundamental Ambiguity of Compromise in a Pluralist Regime

In *Democracy and Totalitarianism,* compromise is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter "Concepts and variables." R. Aron grants it a prominent place in his theory of political regimes. Compromise is presented as one of the two primordial principles on which a pluralist and democratic regime rest (both terms can be used interchangeably). From the outset, compromise is held as a foundation for a pluralist regime. Democracy is pictured as the regime of compromise:

> In a pluralist regime, the principle is a combination of two sentiments that I will call *respect for legality or rules* and *a sense of compromise.*[7]

This definition is asserted as an axiom, rather than as a result of a demonstration. In this chapter, R. Aron maintains that each political regime depends on a principle that organizes its existence and the effects of law. He considers that multi-party pluralist regimes, resting on a principle of "respect of legality" and "the sense of compromise," are the opposite of single-party regimes, based on a principle of faith and fear.[8] Therefore, compromise sets the ground for a democratic regime. In this sentence, R. Aron takes up Montesquieu's heritage for whom each political regime has its own governing

principle, sustained by political emotions. However, he also departs from the classical enquiry on forms of governments upon several points.[9]

A few pages earlier, R. Aron had already outlined the absurdity to devise an timeless and anhistorical classification of political systems. The multiplicity of social regimes renders, according to him, obsolete the search of the best regime in the abstract sense.[10] Instead, R. Aron prefers to focus on political regimes in modern industrial societies.[11] For that reason, the "sense of compromise," understood as a basic principle of a pluralist regime, will therefore only be valid within the limits of modern industrial societies under consideration.

I choose to name this argument the *humble epistemology*.

According to R. Aron, the increasing complexity of pluralist political regimes has consequently split in two the principle of democracy. Its principle remains the respect of legality but is combined with a "sense of compromise." What does this imply? Mainly, that it has become impossible to define the political problem, and thus democracy, by a single and unique question:

> The political problem does not seem to me, in the present state of reflection, to be defined by a single question. The given fact nowadays is that we are aiming for various objectives, we want values that are not obviously contradictory, not necessarily granted either.[12]

If we elaborate on the aforementioned principle of a pluralist regime, it is as if one had to include both a written core (the rules, the laws) and an unwritten core ("the sense of compromise") within the principle.

The unwritten character of compromise could have two distinct meanings.

Firstly, it would be an unwritten principle *related* to the respect of written laws. As such, compromise would be a kind of "spirit of the laws," a sort of counterweight to strict legality, as laws can never provide for everything in democracy. It could either act as a corrective to existing laws, or it could be mediated by law to reinforce their application.

Secondly, compromise could also refer to an absolute principle, transcending the respect of laws, which would be valid in itself. It would thus refer to a social reality, this time irreducible to legality. If we keep in mind R. Aron's broader political philosophy, "the sense of compromise," taken in that sense, could then hint at a representative system, allowing individual rights, values and liberties to coexist under a strong executive power. Compromise could provide the conceptual openness needed to grasp *in concreto* the diversity of human behaviors in the polity. It would no longer be a matter of restraining oneself to the respect of law, a written code imposed by delegates or legislators. Compromise would be located at a different normative level, allowing space for equitable solutions and resolving tensions between private

individual aspirations and the public good – compromise would hint at a conflictual and messy social reality, in opposition to any ideal view of a perfectly unitary society, featured in monopolistic regimes.

A way to address the dilemma posed by a dual understanding of the "sense of compromise," would be to assume that R. Aron sketches the contours of a legal pluralist regime, and that, within this framework, compromise could be primary or secondary to the law. In these two hypotheses, compromise would take on the meaning of an unorganized political source of law or a political regulation of institutional life.

However, there does not seem to be *strictly speaking* an order of priority between the two "sentiments" at the heart of the principle. There is no rationale in R. Aron's text for stating that it is either the respect of legality, or the sense of compromise, that play a leading role in democracy. This conclusion is congruent once again with R. Aron's approach and his refusal to confine democracy to a single certitude.[13]

Nevertheless, the coordination of legal, formal rules, with practices, customs and particular policies, represents a common challenge for pluralist regimes. The "sense of compromise" appears to put in tune these two conflicting demands. It implies a continuous form of political invention in a democratic regime that is based on mutual concessions between elected public officials and citizens. Indeed, compromise puts legality under tension, while being itself determined by a set of legal rules and procedures in a representative democracy.

If the order of priority between these two sentiments is of little importance to R. Aron, it remains meaningful to note that the relationship between the respect of legality and compromise can be discussed: is one element used to counterbalance the other, to rectify it, or to deal differently with the issue of pluralism? Does compromise apply to the respect of legality or is it located at the level of representative institutions? The uneasiness to define precisely the meaning of "the sense of compromise" can be summarized in a thesis pertaining to the *complexity of the principle*.

Therefore, in R. Aron's study of the pluralist regime, the "sense of compromise" is of crucial importance, while welcoming different possible interpretations. Compromise refers to a plurality of forces, setting aside the search for the best regime. It prevents politics from being locked into a purely legal worldview and gives sufficient room for a critical debate to take place.

Several objections can however be raised against this interpretation. On the one hand, it is legitimate to ask whether compromise is a constitutive element of democracy, or whether it is the democratic principle itself - is it an all-encompassing or nested within concept? Besides, is it a "normative concept," by which to assess conducts, or a "descriptive concept," an observation about the characteristics of a given society? To put it differently,

is it an ideal or merely a positive description designed to preserve a state of things?

Its inclusion by R. Aron in the category of principle suggests it could be a normative concept. However, what is the exact nature of this norm? It would seem that compromise is not a "strict" norm, but an "intermediate" norm, which complements the respect for the law. Besides, compromise is not a mere principle but also a "sentiment." Based on a subjective appreciation, it has the merit of being adaptable to different debates, but has the disadvantage of being vague and unfixed in its content.

If the principle of democracy is two-fold, meaning, if the pluralist regime is split into two major foundations or pillars - respect for legality and a sense of compromise - does not compromise bring a worrying normative uncertainty to democracy from the point of view of political theory? Would it not bestow structural instability to a political order?

Figures of Compromise

To answer these concerns, we must try to trace back the multiple meanings of compromise, put forward by R. Aron throughout his work. To do so, one must delineate figures of compromise, *i.e.*, worlds that capture a self-contained view of compromise.

The "sense of compromise" is presented as a fundamental principle of democracy in *Democracy and Totalitarianism* and *Introduction to Political Philosophy*. However, its meaning oscillates between an end and a mere means. On the one hand, compromise is pictured as an instrument to help realizing desirable democratic values, such as respect for peaceful competition: "After all, to accept compromise is to recognize the partial legitimacy of others' arguments, it is to find a solution that is acceptable to all."[14] On the other hand, it is, or should be, a principle, or even a virtue, of modern societies: "the essential virtue of democracy, the principle of democracy in the sense of Montesquieu, is not virtue, it is the spirit of compromise."[15]

This contradiction is only apparent: its aim is to reveal the complex and ductile nature of compromise. In a similar way, R. Aron acknowledges that: "the notion of compromise is difficult, equivocal. Based on language, it is considered either laudatory or pejorative. In other words, this concept is not defined in itself, but in relation to values accepted in society[16]." For this reason, it seems imperative to establish a typology of different historical compromises mentioned by R. Aron, in order to shed further light on this blurry concept.

Three fundamental categories have emerged over the reading of R. Aron's works, which we shall name as follows: *the political-pluralist*

compromise; the economic compromise; the foreign policy compromise. We shall analyze these three models, using the general conceptualization process of ideal-types from Max Weber, an author who was also debated in some of R. Aron's work.[17] Each ideal-type that we highlight, however, is not pure or perfect, in the sense that each presents a value judgment, an assessment of something as good or bad in light of R. Aron's political values. Another difference with the concept laid out by M. Weber is that we have constructed each ideal-type through antinomies. Eventually, unlike M. Weber, R. Aron did not seek to systematize human behaviors but to present a theoretical framework for comparing empirical political systems. It seems that all examples put forward by R. Aron are not just illustrative cases, but are philosophical arguments in their own right, providing relevant intellectual resources for exploring, and perhaps solving, a problem of political philosophy.

A first case of political-pluralist compromise could be the French Fourth Republic. The compromise at the basis of the regime is portrayed in a negative way. A text published in *Combat*, entitled "La stérilité du compromis, politique française" ("The Sterility of Compromise, French Politics") depicts the Fourth Republic as the regime of compromise *par excellence*, in the pejorative sense of the word.

Indeed, for R. Aron, the Fourth Republic is a pluralist regime corrupted by an overblown principle of peaceful competition, leading to a system in which the Parliament holds excessive power. The philosopher judges harshly this political-pluralist compromise, which no longer allows for a sound partisan competition, but is turned into a strategic means of coward abstention. Compromise reflects a spirit of faction and bestows a regime of parties:

> Compromise, whether it is average, leaky or mixed, solves nothing; it has only one justification: the lesser evil. But a policy that is justified exclusively by evils it avoids is doomed to sterility. A country does not find its unity by dint of fearing its divisions.[18]

The condemnation is firm: compromise is politically sterile. A doctrine of "neither-or" is itself neither a synthesis nor a median agreement of opposing doctrines. In this excerpt, compromise comes forward in an unfavorable light: it forces political parties to take incoherent stances and paralyses the action of the state. Far from being presented as a principle of democracy, it perverts and threatens it, by provoking the resurgence of the antidemocratic practice of legislative decrees.

In *The Committed Observer* (*Le spectateur engage*), R. Aron also vilifies Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, another figure of the political-pluralist compromise: he states that, with the French President, "you always have the feeling that everything can be arranged by negotiations, by compromise, by being reasonable[19]." But, according to R. Aron, there are inexpiable conflicts with

the FCP (French Communist Party), as the communist class struggle fosters a worldview prohibiting any possibility of compromise.

In sum, there is an antinomy between compromise and effective decision-making, on the one hand, and between compromise and the stability of executive power, on the other. However, the positive aspect of the political-pluralist compromise lies in the acceptance of plurality. After being presented as a source of a corrupted democracy, compromise is analyzed as its fundamental principle.

The democratic compromise induces, for R. Aron, a non-revolutionary or anti-revolutionary regime. For R. Aron, the ultimate antonym of compromise is therefore revolution. A sound political-pluralist compromise favors peaceful competition for the sharing of power, whereas revolution rejects a distribution of political power amongst separate branches, by conflating power in the "popular sovereign." This viewpoint becomes obvious when R. Aron states the following: "the taking and exercise of power through violence presupposes conflicts that negotiation and compromise do not succeed in resolving, in other words, the failure of democratic procedures[20]."

While democracy is the regime of compromise, showcasing the tension between contradictory personal interests and acceptance of plurality, revolution overthrows the two pillars of democracy: it breaks down the respect of rules, as well as the sense of compromise, to impose a monopoly of thought, justifying violence embodied by a unique party.[21] R. Aron also summons compromise in *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, on the chapter on Vilfredo Pareto, with the portrayal of "pluto-democrat" nineteen-century Italian politicians. R. Aron presents Giovanni Giolitti as a "moderate liberal" in politics and economics and opposed to brutal repression: "his dictatorship is soft, excelling in compromise, in favors that neutralize or rally the adversary and relies on electoral corruption to ensure a majority[22]." This quote shows the ambiguity of compromise when it weakens the civic idea.

But how rational is it for R. Aron to defend the pluralist virtue of compromise, as opposed to the monopolistic regime, and then to point at the threat and lack of effectiveness of compromise in democracy? It would appear to be a complete inconsistency. In fact, R. Aron's understanding of compromise is inseverable from Montesquieu's framing of passions.[23] In this sense, compromise is a principle that self-contains its own possibility of corruption and negation. Compromise remains a site of unsurpassable internal contradiction; precisely because the "sense of compromise" is a "sentiment," in other words, a passion, it provides enough commitment for a foundation of a political regime, but also risks destroying the principled balance and favors its downfall. The democratic regime draws its strength and its weakness from a passion for compromise that dominates it: halfway between the collective political passion and the principle of government,

compromise plays a fundamental and structural role in R. Aron's understanding of democracy.

The second ideal-type is the economic compromise, or the freedom to undertake, to produce wealth and to trade various goods and services to achieve that end:

> Freedom of trade implies competition, and competition is a kind of conflict, but one that is settled by compromise rather than by weapons. These conflicts become a formidable challenge for peace from the moment when states take over the interests of private companies or ensure a monopoly for themselves in colonies or areas of influence. Whoever uses force to exclude other countries from legitimate competition is effectively guilty of aggression.[24]

In the economic field, compromise is, for R. Aron, rational and well-founded. As long as the state authorizes healthy competition and does not establish a monopoly, compromise is justified and desirable. However, there is no guarantee that economic compromises are bearers of peace as such, nor that they promote *per se* equality.[25]

R. Aron cites the example of taxation: the latter makes it possible to reduce the income gap and guarantees a certain efficiency, if the tax is well-distributed and collected. However, it is impossible to conceive a constant and infinite progress towards income equality. The compromise here is the acceptance of a certain degree of inequality. Another historical example of economic compromise is put forward by R. Aron, in opposition to a Marxist theory of class relations. It refers to the alliance established between the Orleans Monarchy and the Legitimist Monarchy, in France, that made it possible and necessary to resort to compromises for the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie.[26]

Seen in this light, compromise leans towards a much more ideological meaning, since the supporters of respect of compromise are situated more on the right of the political spectrum. The actors from this political obedience are likely to better understand the "need to establish a wise compromise between contradictory objectives."[27] In this sense, the discussion around compromise was part of R. Aron's political fight against the FCP and the Soviet Union. The economic compromise is thought in conjunction with two major values for R. Aron that can be coined as "progressive liberalism" and "freedom of enterprise."

Compromise in foreign policy is, however, treated differently than compromises in the economic realm.

The repulsive figure that R. Aron convokes is the compromise between France and Nazi Germany, which refers to the Defeat of 1940, to the loss of honor and the humanist vision of the republican world. The Second World war is portrayed as the result of negotiators' failure to listen to the interests of

Russia and Germany during the Paris Peace conference of the First World War (1919).[28] Not without a certain irony, R. Aron states: "as a deep psychologist named Hitler once said, between interests, compromises are always possible, between worldviews, never."[29] To put it another way, R. Aron considers that conflicts rooted in differences of principle or ideology cannot be resolved by compromise. Principles cannot be compromised, while interests are always more amenable to compromise-oriented solutions.

A positive figure of compromise, on the other hand, is the United States' armistice at the end of the Korean War in 1953:

> For the first time, the United States is experiencing the fate that has been the fate of European countries for centuries: they are coexisting with an enemy, whose threat they experience daily. Against the moralists, ready to crusade, against the military proclaiming that there is no substitute for victory, the President and Secretary of State accepted a compromise in Korea, whose moral scope and diplomatic consequences were equally important.[30]

The compromise became, through the armistice, a renunciation to victory, a recognition of a limited power that gave the ability to entertain good relations with the enemy. The compromise solution acknowledged the impossibility of resolving the dispute by other means than force and provided an acceptable alternative to both parties, a positive outcome even for warmongers.

R. Aron mentions the Korean War in several other articles. He locates the source of compromise in the implicit will of South Koreans and North Koreans not to expand the war: "The two sides will not officially agree on the fate of Korea, they will practically agree to maintain the partition, but they will not be able, politically or morally, to proclaim or ratify this agreement."[31]

The value difference between these two examples of compromise in foreign policy rests, for R. Aron, on the disconnection between interests and principles: the United States can make a compromise out of interest, but an armistice cannot be signed, as it would call into question the American conception of the world. In the absence of circumstances conducive to an agreement, compromise will therefore be restrictive and favor the status quo. An agreement with a belligerent power, determined to quarrel, could lead to the escalation of tensions in the region, or the destruction of either one.

Therefore, the antinomy of compromise in foreign policy is war. Without compromise, there shall be war; that is also why compromise is preferable to the absence of conflict resolution. The competing powers give rise to two opposing solutions: "war or compromise. What is false is to add that compromise necessarily takes the form of a negotiated agreement[32]."

This sentence makes it clear that R. Aron distinguishes further between negotiated compromise and compromise without formal agreement. The first is based on two fundamental elements: the same civilization and the same

conception of international relations, that is, the respect of diplomacy, recourse to the same "professional ethics" and "reasonable Machiavellianism":

> When the States coming to grips belong to the same unit of civilization, when they obey the same conception of international relations, when they also use diplomats bound by the same professional ethics and the same reasonable Machiavellianism, compromises are negotiated, confirmed, ratified.[33]

The second type of compromise is grounded on the idea of a limited war and refers to a Cold War compromise. Compromise is rejected in the face of ideologies or incompatible worldviews, in the absence of a shared category. It is dictated by historical circumstances, rather than being the outcome of a voluntary agreement. In both cases, compromise must adapt to the requirements of the present crisis: "to negotiate an agreement, there must be two of us, we must speak the same language, obey the same principles."[34]

In short, compromise comes along in different ideal forms, but almost inevitably becomes perverted when it is implemented in the non-ideal world. As R. Aron reminds us on several occasions: "The West is a victim of this: the idea of government by discussion, consent or compromise is perhaps an ideal, but the practice of elections or assemblies is a practice, among others[35]" or, alternatively: "in a given regime, it is a matter of reaching a reasonable compromise between incompatible demands."[36]

At the end of this journey, the easiest compromise to achieve appears to be, for R. Aron, the economic one: he reiterates this view in *Democracy and Totalitarianism*: "the good compromise is often easy to obtain for economic matters; it is widely used."[37] The political-pluralist compromise tends to be corrupted by human passions. Additionally, foreign policy compromise is necessary for peace but requires that parties share a certain set of ideologies and worldviews, which makes it harder to obtain.

Raymond Aron's Criteria for a Fair Compromise?

If compromise seems inevitable to R. Aron, it cannot be inferred from this premise that it would also be desirable. This rests upon a simple idea: we cannot deduce a norm from a fact, *i.e.,* we cannot conclude that compromise is a normative ideal by acknowledging its necessity. Even if R. Aron remains allusive on this topic, from his ideas can we establish a typology of fair and unfair compromises, also named by R. Aron as "good and bad use of compromise"?

Certain criteria surface from the analysis. Firstly, R. Aron seems to be adamant on the distinction between what we can view as a compromise on interests and a compromise on principles. The latter is more questionable, as

it would contradict political and moral ideals, whereas compromise on interests (economic compromise, in particular) would only involve purely strategic aspects and would be less akin to moral and personal integrity loss. A possible rebuttal to this implicit dichotomy would be that is often difficult to draw a demarcation line between these two types of compromises. This is especially the case for the field of foreign policy, since certain strategic compromises can lead to the realization of certain values. Moreover, it is not excluded that interests can be transformed into moral principles, or *vice versa*.

On the other hand, R. Aron seem to make a distinction between compromise in foreign policy and compromise in domestic policy. According to him, internal compromise within the state has the potential to lead to lasting agreements that are favorable to pluralism. It can be a positive force capable of preserving the balance of power in a country, when it does not paralyze the state, as was the case in the Fourth Republic. On the other hand, compromise in foreign policy, in the absence of agreement with states that do not share the same national interests, is more delicate. Compromise is then simply synonymous with deterrence: it features a moderate strategy to avoid the risk of military conflict, or is the only tool available to guarantee the survival and integrity of a state's territory and its values.

However, one might ask if there are sufficient grounds for this distinction. Can we not consider that domestic policy is increasingly dependent on foreign policy, with the growing interconnection of trade? Besides, European and international law have imposed various adaptations on domestic law, multiplying sources of legality. These legal adjustments are not negligible, as they have had an impact on the French Constitution itself - for example, the French Constitution is no longer the exclusive source of protection for fundamental rights. Thus, criteria that should help to distinguish domestic from foreign policy are less obvious. The spheres' boundaries in international and domestic matters become increasingly difficult to draw; internal affairs no longer refer to a delimited and homogeneous space, cut off from an external space of foreign relations.

Finally, R. Aron implies that there should be two conceptual levels of compromise. The first level reflects upon compromise as a democratic principle, the second upon its use, good or bad. What are the consequences of dissociating a philosophical principle from its practical use and handling by citizens or vested powers? In fact, R. Aron seems to consider compromise not only through its use, but as a way to highlight some constitutive difficulties of choice. In this sense, the "sense of compromise" does not mean to substitute ideal theory to ordinary uses. "The sense of compromise" is thus a principle; it stands at equal distance from idealism (an abstraction without application) and realism (which would lead to sacrificing lasting interests to cunning strategies) - its use does not send it back to a lower level of value, but allows to make intelligible the functioning of its principle.

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In conclusion, to uphold an Aronian "sense of compromise" as a democratic principle, it would be necessary to comply with a certain number of rules, both at the national and international level, written and unwritten, which would guarantee that a regime can be sanctioned by a moral judgment.

According to R. Aron, "the sense of compromise" is a powerful force of democracy: it ascribes pluralism within democracy, while it can be akin to corruption and instability, especially when political parties adversely affect its efficiency. As long as "the sense of compromise" works smoothly, compromise strengthens the sound working of a multiparty system, that is the safeguard of the individual liberty. Nevertheless, compromise appears to be more consensual in economic endeavors, since only private interests are at play. In the field of international relations, R. Aron is more ambivalent: he considers that compromise is crucial, as long as it helps to avoid war and does not undermine certain worldviews that rest on the idea of personal liberties protected from arbitrary state power. In the absence of shared worldviews, the "sense of compromise" will be limited to maintain a status quo. Certain distinctions could surely be reframed, namely the overly rigid opposition between compromise of principles and compromise of interests. However, R. Aron's offers valuable insights on the role of "the sense of compromise" in democratic values and institutions.

By avoiding using "anti-liberal" or "liberal" qualifications, we have sought to demonstrate that R. Aron's political philosophy can be explained by alternative terms that are less Manichean. The status of democracy and its critique in R. Aron's thought are not grounded in liberal or anti-liberal sources, but in the ambivalence of compromise itself. This is why R. Aron defends democracy not as the best regime in the classical sense, but as the least bad of the known alternatives. For that reason, it seems more cumbersome than enlightening to qualify his philosophy under prefabricated labels. It becomes clear that R. Aron is not comparing side by side democracy and totalitarianism according to certain metaphysical values. On the contrary, it is the concept of compromise that helps to conceptualize the difference in nature between democracy and totalitarianism, on the basis of pluralism, while accounting for the "end of the ideological age."[38]

Compromise thus flourishes on the soil of ideologically fragmented democracies. Compromise is also a sign of transition from R. Aron's search for the best system in classical political philosophy, to modern sociological thought. Through this concept, R. Aron acknowledges that the most desirable regime cannot possibly be determined in a purely abstract way. It remains a subject of inquiry whether R. Aron intends to imply that "the sense of compromise" in democracy serves as the sole safeguard against all forms of totalitarian rationality.

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[1] Amy Gutmann, Dennis F. Thompson. *The Spirit of Compromise: Why Governing Demands It and Campaigning Undermines It* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Avishai Margalit. *On Compromise and Rotten Compromises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Daniel Weinstock. "On the possibility of principled moral compromise," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 16, no. 4 (2013), p. 537–556; Fabian Wendt (ed.). *Compromising on Justice* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[2] See, Laure Assayag-Gillot, "Le compromis selon Paul Ricœur," *Négociations*, 1, no. 29 (2018), p. 103-120.

[3] Footnotes will refer to the original French publications – all translations of excerpts are my own. The scope of my research on "compromise" in R. Aron's thought is limited to several key works, namely the articles "Stérilité du compromis" (1946), ("Sterility of Compromise") published in French in *Combat,* "En quête d'une philosophie de la politique étrangère" (1953), ("In Search for a Philosophy of Foreign Relations"), available in French in the *Revue française de science politique*, as well as the following essays: *Introduction à la philosophie politique* (1952) *(Introduction to Political Philosophy)*, *L'opium des intellectuels* (1955) (*The Opium of the Intellectuals*), *La société industrielle et la guerre* (1959) (*War and Industrial Society*), *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (1967) (*Main Currents in Sociological Thought*), *Paix et guerre entre les nations* (1962) (*Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*), *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (1965) (*Democracy and Totalitarianism*), *Liberté et égalité (cours au collège de France)* (2013). These writings develop, to my knowledge, the most salient arguments and examples on the concept of compromise.

[4] Elisabeth Dutartre-Michaut, José Colen, "Introduction," in *The Companion to Raymond Aron,* Elisabeth Dutartre-Michaut, José Colen eds., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 2.

[5] Many edited volumes on R. Aron deal with his liberalism and antitotalitarianism. I shall limit this bibliographical list to English titles. One should mention the remarkable essay of I. Stewart that seeks to situate R. Aron's legacy in the French liberal tradition and debates over totalitarianism. See Iain Stewart, *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For an analysis of his Aron's political concepts and reasoning, see Bryan-Paul Frost, Daniel J. Mahoney (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Raymond Aron, Political Science in the Age of ideology* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), and Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Liberal Political Science of Raymond Aron: A Critical Introduction* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991).

[6] An overview of some titles may provide sufficient information about the nature of their enquiry: Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order* (Wilmington: ISI Books,

2011); Gwendal Châton, "Libéralisme ou démocratie? Raymond Aron lecteur de Friedrich Hayek," *Revue de philosophie économique*, 17 (2016): 103-134; Nicolas Baverez, "17. Raymond Aron, libéral et patriote," in Jean-Christophe Buisson (ed.), *Les grandes figures de la droite. De la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris: Perrin, 2020), p. 313-332.

[7] R. Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (Paris, Folio, 1965), 85. (*Democracy and Totalitarianism*).

[8] "Looking for what could have been the answer from a disciple of Montesquieu to the question of the principle of a monopolitistic party regime, I found, without being quite certain, two sentiments. The first is faith and the second is fear," Aron, *ibid.*, 87.

[9] On the extent to which R. Aron is indebted to *The Spirit of Law* and his transposition of a Weberian understanding onto *The Spirit of Law*, see Iain Stewart, "Aron's interpretation of Montesquieu," in *Raymond Aron and Liberal Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 190-199.

[10] "In more general terms, since a political regime is linked to a social organization, to a diversity of possible and real social organizations, it seems to discourage in advance the search for the best regime in the abstract sense." (*Ibid.*, 45)

[11] "In fact, I will follow here a cautious method. I will limit myself to sketch a classification of the political regimes whose validity I will restrict to the modern industrial societies," *ibid.*, 44-45.

[12] *Ibid.*, 52.

[13] *Ibid.*, 33: "In other words the formula: ultimately, everything is explained either by economy or by technique, or by politics, is, as such, meaningless."

[14] *Ibid.*, 86.

[15] R. Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique* (Paris: Livre de Poche, [1952] 1997), 52.

[16] R. Aron, *Démocratie et totalitarisme, op. cit.*, 86.

[17] I will not dwell on R. Aron's criticism of Max Weber's ideal-types, whose main drawback seems to reside, for R. Aron, in an implicit selection principle that could not guarantee pure objectivity. On R. Aron's political reading of M. Weber, and his possible blind spots in understanding M. Weber's sociology, see Peter Breiner (2011), "Raymond Aron's engagement with Weber: Recovery or retreat?," *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11 (2011): 99-121.

[18] R. Aron, "Stérilité du compromis," *Combat*, 5 September 1946.

[19] R. Aron, *Le spectateur engagé* (Paris: Livre de poche, [1981] 2005), 375.

[20] R. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010), 45.

[21] "A revolutionary power is by definition a tyrannical power," *Ibidem*.

[22] R. Aron, "Vilfredo Pareto," in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 494.

[23] Although Montesquieu did not, strictly speaking, elaborate a theory of passions, it is nevertheless obvious, according to Jean Goldzink, that the principles of *The Spirit of Laws* depend on collective and political passions. See Jean Goldzink, "Passions," Dictionnaire Montesquieu [online], edited by Catherine Volpilhac-Auger, ENS de Lyon, September 2013.

[24] R. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010), 165.

[25] "No economic regime by itself eliminates the risks of war because none puts an end to the state of nature that reigns between rival sovereignties. None guarantees that States will cease to impute

sinister designs to each other and that they will not prefer cooperation to rivalry and compromise to fighting." R. Aron, *La société industrielle et la guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 39.

[26] R. Aron, "Les sociologues et la révolution de 1848," in *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 290.

[27] R. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels,* 95.

[28] R. Aron, "En quête d'une philosophie de la politique étrangère," *Revue française de science politique*, 3 (1953): 74.

[29] R. Aron, *La société industrielle et la guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 594

[30] R. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels,* 224.

[31] R. Aron, "En quête d'une philosophie de la politique étrangère," *Ibid.*, 81.

[32] *Ibid,* 80.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid,* 91.

[35] R. Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, 287.

[36] *Ibid*, 30.

[37] *Ibid*, 87.

[38] *Ibid.*, 315-314.