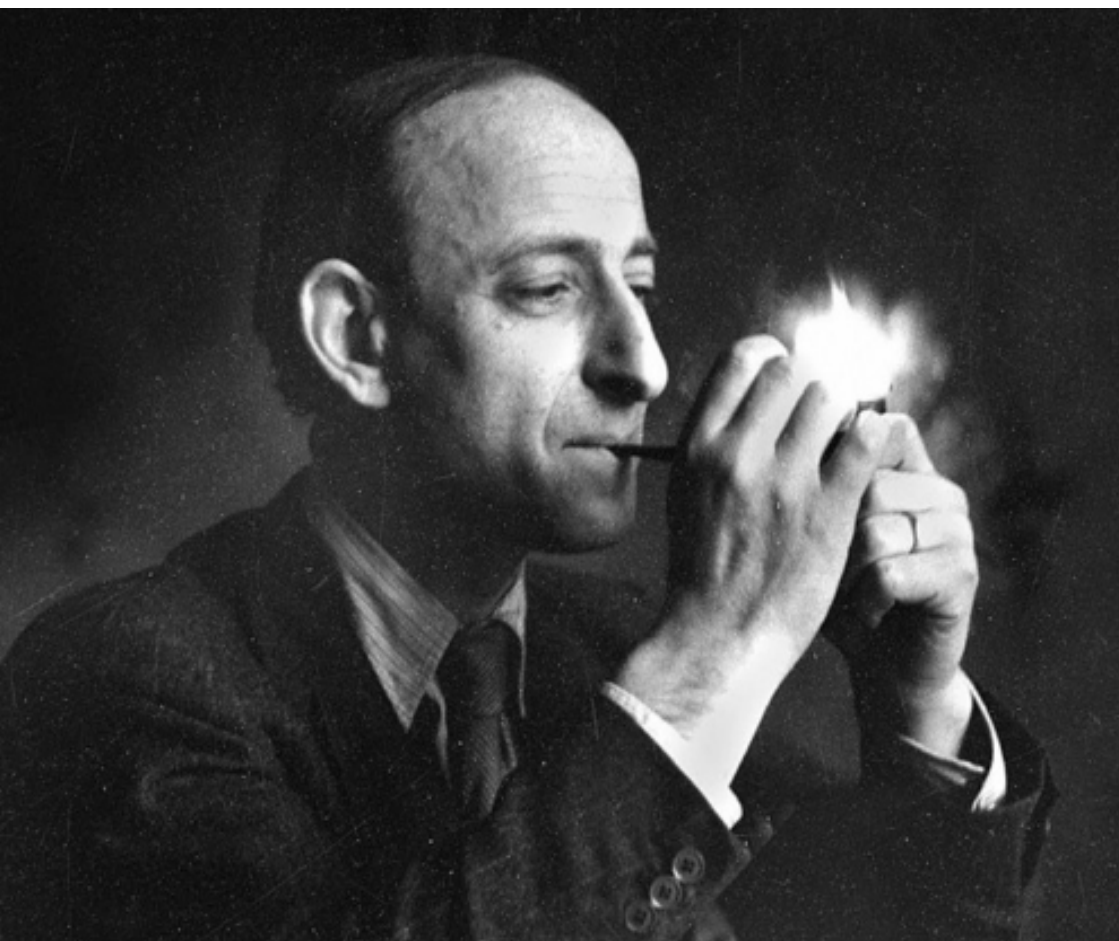


# Raymond Aron and the Renewal of French Democratic Thought

CRASSH



**Saturday 21 May 2016**

At CRASSH, Alison Richard Building

Conveners: **Hugo Drochon** and **Or Rosenboim** (University of Cambridge)



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**Acknowledgements**

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# Raymond Aron and the Renewal of French Democratic Thought

21 May 2016, Alison Richard Building (SG1&2)

## Conveners

**Hugo Drochon** (University of Cambridge)

**Or Rosenboim** (University of Cambridge)

## Summary

The aim of the POLIS-CESPRA exchange is to explore Raymond Aron's democratic theory and its legacy in the second half of the twentieth century. Whilst Aron has widely been recognised in the English speaking world as a leading theorist of international relations, his work on democratic theory *Démocratie et totalitarisme* (1965) is key to understanding not just the twentieth century itself, but the subsequent development of democratic theory both in France and the Western world. Indeed, it is in the Centre founded around Aron by Francois Furet that the leading theorists of democratic theory in France first came together – Marcel Gauchet, Claude Lefort, Pierre Manent, Bernard Manin, Philippe Raynaud, Pierre Rosanvallon, and Dominique Schnapper to name but a few, and their work is starting to have an impact throughout the Western world. Yet to fully understand this renewal, a return to the man who was the source of this renewal seems necessary. By bringing together both younger scholars who are rediscovering these elements of Aron's thought and an older generation who have more personal recollections and perspectives, it is the object of this exchange to do precisely that.

# Programme

## Symposium, Saturday 21 May 2016

09.30 - 10.00 Registration and Tea and Coffee

10.00 - 10.15 **Welcome - Hugo Drochon**

10.15 - 12.30 **Session 1**

- **Sophie Marcotte Chénard** (University of Toronto)  
*Aron, Weber and the Crisis of Historicism*
- **Hugo Drochon** (University of Cambridge)  
*Raymond Aron and Machiavellian liberalism*
- **Giulio de Ligio** (EHESS)  
*Thinking about democracy philosophically:  
Tocqueville's alternatives*

Chair: Or Rosenboim

12.30 - 13.30 Lunch

13.30 - 15.00 **Session 2**

- **Benjamin Brice** (EHESS)  
*Change and Continuity: Raymond Aron as a Challenger of  
Democratic Peace Theory*
- **Or Rosenboim** (University of Cambridge)  
*Aron, Mitrany and democratic theory beyond the state*

Chair: Hugo Drochon

15.00 - 15.30 Coffee

15.30 - 17.30 **Session 3**

- **Philippe Raynaud** (Paris II/EHESS)  
*Raymond Aron and Francois Furet: Two critical interpretations of communism*
- **Dominique Schnapper** (EHESS)  
*The democratic spirit of laws*

Chair: Duncan Kelly

17.30 - 18.30 Wine reception - Atrium ARB

From 19.00 Reception and dinner - Queens' College

# Abstracts

## **Aron, Weber and the Crisis of Historicism**

*Sophie Marcotte Chénard (University of Toronto/EHSS)*

This essay tackles the problem of the “crisis of historicism” (1870-1930) in German thought and its relation to Raymond Aron’s conception of political rationality. During his time in Germany in the 1930s, Aron witnessed the growing political and social instability, the rise of Nazism and the collapse of the Weimar Republic. It was in this context that the “crisis of historicism” reached its peak. The radical historicism of the 20th century, which may be defined as a doctrine according to which there is nothing more than relative and competing worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*), culminates in a philosophy of historical and moral relativism. This view leads, on a political level, to decisionism or nihilism. In that sense, the crisis of historicism is synonym with a crisis of reason.

How does Aron understand and respond to this crisis? What are the effects of the historicist view on the elaboration of his political philosophy? Drawing on Aron’s early writings on German philosophy of history as well as later texts on Weber and rationality, this essay seeks to shed light on the specific character of the Aronian conception of political rationality. Through an analysis of Aron’s interpretation of the possibilities – and limits – of the Weberian notions of rationality and value judgments, the aim of this paper is to assess Aron’s effort to go beyond the shortcomings of Weber’s response to the threats of historicism. I will attempt to show that Aron sees the tension between the universality of moral and political norms and the singularity of historical experience as the necessary condition of an adequate understanding of the mechanisms of political reason and as the basis of a “praxeology” or a theory of political action.

## **Raymond Aron and Machiavellian liberalism**

*Hugo Drochon (University of Cambridge)*

The recent interest in Raymond Aron’s political thought in the English speaking world has revolved around Aron’s political liberalism. But how are we to classify such liberalism, when we know of Aron’s rejection of the (neo-)liberalism of Hayek during his time? This paper aims to explore Aron’s ‘Machiavellian’ liberalism, notably through his engagement with Vilfredo Pareto’s work and thought, as mediated through James Burnham’s now forgotten *The Machiavellians*, which Aron helped to have translated and edited in French. If Aron’s engagement with Pareto’s sociological writings are well-known, the impact Pareto, and the ‘neo-’Machiavellians more generally – Mosca and Michels – had on Aron’s democratic thought has been somewhat overlooked, and this paper will explore how Aron utilised t

the 'fact' of oligarchy as a way of defining both democratic and totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century.

### **Thinking about democracy philosophically: Tocqueville's alternatives**

*Giulio de Ligio (EHESS)*

To justify the essential opposition between democracy and totalitarianism, Raymond Aron developed the presuppositions of what he called the «alternative of Tocqueville». Although democracy and totalitarianism share some features as modern societies, they are fundamentally distinct as political regimes. A political way of thinking allows the sociologist to compare societies and to preserve the sense of philosophical questions and practical alternatives.

The Aronian political approach has been extended by philosophers such as Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Manent. Having themselves recourse to Tocqueville in order to deepen the understanding of modern experiences and principles, they aim at fully articulating the human meaning of democracy as well as its internal problems. It is still important to understand why and in which sense the French renewal of a political understanding of democracy implies a philosophical questioning. Such a perspective is not mainly preoccupied with democratic procedures or contexts. It draws attention to what democracy entails for man's relations with other men and with the world as a whole. The very questions raised by the French political philosophers are revealing of what is at stake in the democratic experience and point at other «Tocqueville's alternatives». Is democracy a political regime or an irreversible social revolution, a distinct form of humanity, a religious dogma regulating every human action? Which experience of the human soul and bonds does modern democracy engender?

Those questions are still to be confronted philosophically and politically. It does not suffice to think democracy as the opposite to totalitarianism. Taking the French debate seriously, we may then have to question a last alternative Tocqueville famously elaborated, the opposition between democracy and all the other «distinct humanities». A political philosophy of democracy may still reveal itself to be necessary.

### **Change and Continuity: Raymond Aron as a Challenger of Democratic Peace Theory**

*Benjamin Brice (EHESS)*

One of the most prominent features of Raymond Aron's thought on international relations is his reflection about historical processes. The main question is: what can change in international politics and what cannot? On the one hand, history is on the move and new

contexts lead to new institutions, new practices and new ideas. Thus, according to Aron, it would be misleading to stick to the leading principles of the 19th century's international law in a time when "secular religions" would have prevailed, or to be unable to distinguish between ancient and modern tyrannies. But, on the other hand, he also observed continuities through the centuries. For example, even if Thucydides' history belongs to a completely different world, his descriptions of political regimes and human passions are still relevant to get insights into contemporary politics. To use Aron's own words (in of his articles, "L'aube de l'histoire universelle"), the challenge is to articulate the *procès* ("process") and the *drame* ("drama"), namely what is changing and what is not through history.

This paper assumes that this dialectic can be very helpful to study contemporary international relations, and I would like to apply it to the IR theory known as "Democratic Peace Theory" (or more adequately "Democratic Peace Theories"). Obviously, Raymond Aron died before these theories became prominent in IR controversies. However, the way he thought the *procès* and *drame* dialectic can help us to criticize some of Democratic Peace Theory's assumptions which are little challenged.

### **Aron, Mitrany and democratic theory beyond the state**

*Or Rosenboim (University of Cambridge)*

In the 1940s, Raymond Aron was concerned not only with the recovery of France, but also with the new world order emerging from the war. In particular, Aron paid attention to the future of Europe as a democratic and liberal political entity. In his articles and essays, he reflected on the international conditions that would allow Europe to gain shape as a political unity that could guarantee its peoples political liberty in a democratic structures. Aron was not alone in thinking about the democracy beyond the state in the 1940s. Another key thinker, who was also based in London during the war, was the political scientist David Mitrany. Similarly concerned with overcoming the tensions between order and liberty in domestic and international affairs, Mitrany elaborated the theory of functionalism as the foundation for a new European order. In this paper, I compare the proposals of Aron and Mitrany, to highlight their competing interpretations of democracy in particular, and of politics in general.

### **Raymond Aron and Francois Furet: Two critical interpretations of communism**

*Philippe Raynaud (Paris II/EHESS)*

Raymond Aron and François Furet were two brilliant minds who, if their itineraries were very different, in fact held very similar ideas. At the beginning of World War II, Aron



(1905-1983) was already the author of important works and he was a witness to the rise of the national socialist party in Germany. Even if he had been a socialist when he was a student, he was never a revolutionary. His interpretation of communism is grounded in a philosophical reflection which began in the 1930s and which expressed his double position of "spectateur engagé" and of sociologist. François Furet (1927-1997) was younger: he was a communist just after the war and his comprehension of communism emerged from his research into the French Revolution and its Jacobin Legacy. This paper will offer a comparison between these two approaches: it will (1) provide an analysis of the philosophical foundations of Aron's Critique of Marxism and of "secular religions" and (2) a reconstruction of Furet's approach of modern revolutions, from Jacobin Terror to communism.

### **The democratic spirit of laws**

*Dominique Schnapper (EHESS)*

The victory of democracies over their external enemies has marginalized the debate on the opposition between democracies and totalitarian countries. We are now aware that under the impact of their own dynamics, they could be threatened by their tensions and possibilities of perversions and "corruptions" (in Montesquieu's sense). The risk exists that democracies might be corrupted by the exaggeration of their own "principles". They could go from autonomy to independence, from freedom to abuse of freedom, i.e. license, from search for equality to search for identity and general indistinction.

# Biographies

## **Benjamin Brice** (EHESS)

Benjamin Brice recently completed his PhD in Political Science at the Centre d'études Sociologiques et Politiques Raymond Aron de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (CESPRA-EHESS). His doctoral dissertation was entitled "The End of War? The Ambiguities of 'Democratic Peace': interests, passions and ideas". He published in 2012 an article on Raymond Aron's international thought entitled "L'avenir de la guerre dans le monde du commerce : Raymond Aron face aux philosophies pessimiste et optimiste de l'histoire" in *Études internationales*.

## **Giulio de Ligio** (EHESS)

Giulio De Ligio is associate researcher at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales of Paris, where he teaches a class of introduction to political philosophy. Among his publications: *La tristezza del pensatore politico. Raymond Aron e il primato del politico* (Bononia University Press, 2007); *La politique et l'âme. Autour de Pierre Manent* (eds., with J.V. Holeindre e D. Mahoney, Paris 2014); *Le problème Machiavel. Science de l'homme, conscience de l'Europe* (eds., Paris 2014) and several essays on 20th century political philosophy. He is also co-founder and member of the editorial board of the Italian journal « Rivista di Politica » (Rome). He was awarded in 2007 the Prix Raymond Aron.

## **Hugo Drochon** (University of Cambridge)

Hugo Drochon is an historian of late 19th and 20th century political thought. His book, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, is out this summer with Princeton University Press (2016). His current research is on elite theories of democracy – Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Ostrogorski – and the impact their ideas had on the development of democratic theory in American and Europe after WWII.

## **Sophie Marcotte Chénard** (University of Toronto/EHSS)

Sophie Marcotte Chenard is a Postdoctoral Fellow in political theory at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on the relationship between contemporary political philosophy and history and the normative aspects of interpretive methods in the history of political ideas. She also specializes in 19th and 20th-century philosophy and theory of

history. She previously studied at the EHESS, where she did her Ph.D. in philosophy on the theme of the problem of historicism in the thought of Leo Strauss and Raymond Aron. She received a SSHRC Fellowship for a doctoral studies and was a visiting doctoral student at the University of Chicago in 2013.

### **Philippe Raynaud** (Paris II/EHESS)

Philippe Raynaud (1952) was educated at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint Cloud (1972-1976). He has been a Professor of Political Science at the University of Panthéon-Assas since 1997 and has previously been a Professor of Political Science at the University of Lille (1991-1997) and a research fellow in political science at the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) (1988-1991). In 2004, he was appointed to the Institut Universitaire de France, of which he is honorary member. In 2012-2013 he was senior fellow at the Strauss Institute for the Advanced Study of Law and Justice (NYU). In 2014, he received the Prix Alexis de Tocqueville. He is the honorary president of the French Society for legal and political philosophy (SFPJ) and vice-president of the Fondation des Treilles. His writings include notably : *Max Weber et les dilemmes de la raison moderne* (Paris, 1987), *L'extrême gauche plurielle. Entre démocratie radicale et révolution* (Paris, 2006), *Le juge et le philosophe* (Paris, 2008), *Trois Révolutions de la liberté. Angleterre, Amérique, France* (Paris, 2009), *La politesse des Lumières*. He directed with Pr Stéphane Rials the *Dictionnaire de philosophie politique*, (Paris, PUF, 1996).

### **Or Rosenboim** (University of Cambridge)

Or Rosenboim is a Research Fellow in Queens' College, Cambridge. Her research focuses on the history of international thought in the twentieth century, exploring ideas about international order, universalism and empire in Europe and the United States. In 2014, her doctoral dissertation was the co-winner of the Prix Raymond Aron. Her book, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* will be published by Princeton University Press in 2017.

### **Dominique Schnapper** (EHESS)

Dominique Schnapper is Professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and honorary member of the French constitutional Council, president of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Paris and of the Museum of Jewish art and history (MAHJ).

# Participants

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## Notes

## Notes



## Notes

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Do not use the lift during an evacuation. If you are in the lift when the alarm sounds the lift will automatically return to the ground floor where you must exit via the evacuation points.

The fire evacuation points are situated towards the ends of the wings on all floors, with further evacuation routes through the ground floor lobby and Arc cafe. Internal fire evacuation doors will default to open but the final evacuation door from the building will need to be opened by pressing the green release button. During an evacuation, do not use the main stairwell as this route will be closed off by the fire curtain. If you are on the stairs when the alarm sounds make your way to the next floor landing and use the fire escape route on that floor.

### First Aid

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### The Arc

The Café is operated by The Brookwood Paternership and is open five days a week between 8:30am and 5pm.

There is a coffee vending machine in the Law Faculty, which is open on Saturdays from 9am.

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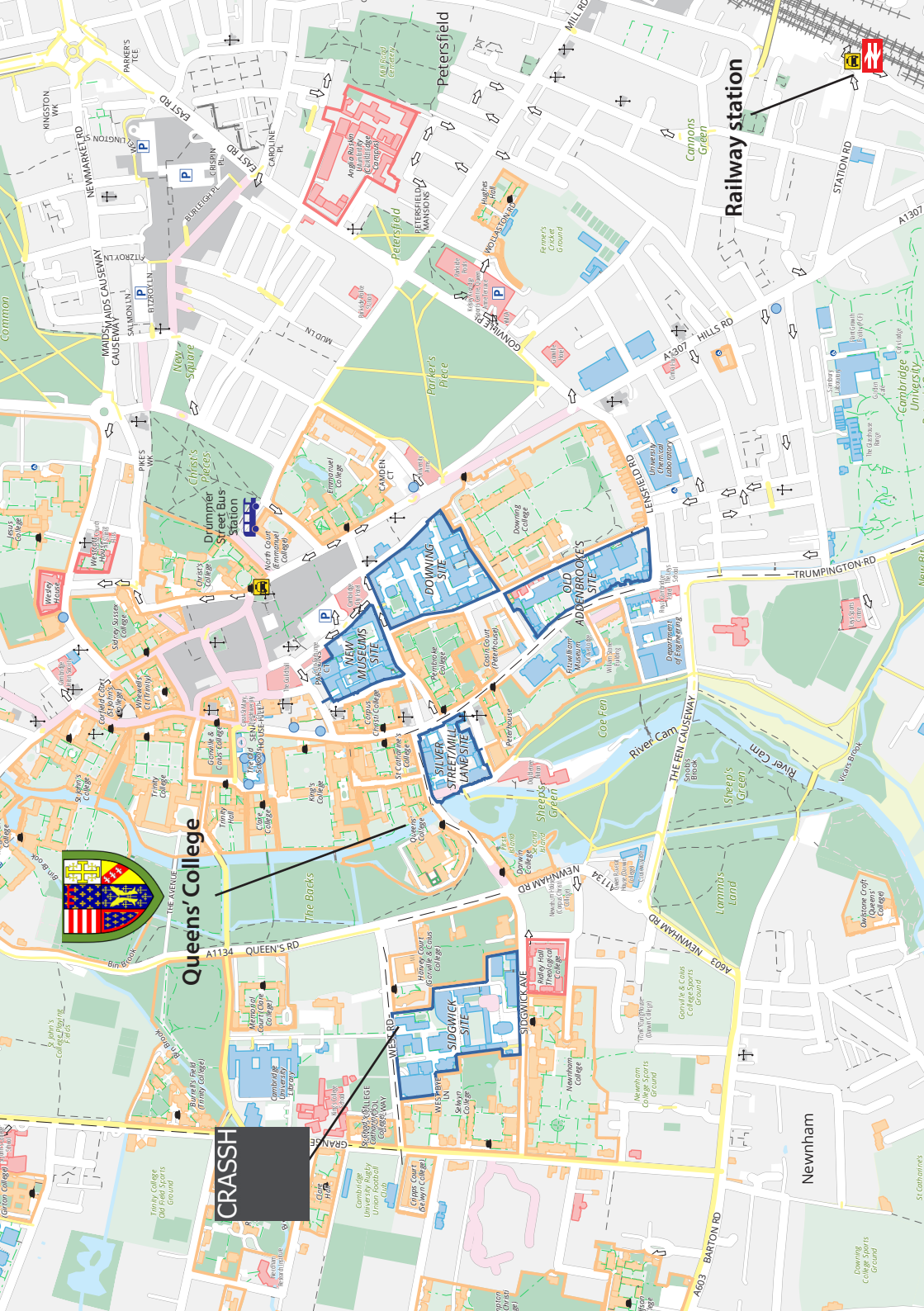
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