

H-Diplo Roundtable Review of Raymond Aron, *Liberty and Equality*. Translated by Samuel Garrett Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023.

Response by Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (translator), University College London.

The translator is thankful to Michael Behrent for kindly organizing this symposium on Raymond Aron's *Liberty and Equality* and for the rich intellectual generosity and friendly engagement of both the first and second readers, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins and Sophie Marcotte Chénard. Their reviews themselves (as well as the readers' writings beyond these reviews¹) offer a fine introduction to the lines of intellectual contestation in contemporary academic writing on Aron.

Steinmetz-Jenkins reads Aron as a critic of liberalism, whilst Marcotte Chénard reads Aron as a contributor to liberal thought. If political ambiguity is an attribute of classic works, it would seem that Aron's writings have the potential to attain classic status on the basis of their ability to speak widely and variously to various readers and writers. Both reviewers agree that Aron is worth reading and that Aron's writings are inescapable for understanding political thought and political philosophy both within twentieth century France and beyond it.

Both also agree on the value of translating and publishing Aron's work in the present. On *Liberty and Equality* specifically, Marcotte Chénard notes that "making the lecture available to the English public allows for a more complete portrait of Aron's *oeuvre* and contribution to political philosophy." Moreover, she continues, "This newly available work testifies once again to Aron's sense of reality, and captures his fundamental view of the tension between the *exception heureuse* of contemporary liberal democracies and their inner fragility and vulnerability."

Where Steinmetz-Jenkins does not offer criticisms or critique of the translation itself, Marcotte Chénard questions some of the interpretive choices, in answer to which questions the remainder of this response is addressed.

One question concerns "*sûreté*." One may have safety without surety and one may have surety without safety. To purchase an insurance policy is to purchase a surety—it does not guarantee one's safety. To build a missile defence system may augment one's safety without assuring it. In some of the passages where Aron speaks of "*sûreté*," he speaks of "protection" or "*insécurité*" in close proximity to it,² and the translation here respects Aron's choices rather than mix his vocabulary to indistinction. Aron is, moreover, keen to assert that whilst the state offers surety to property (and this, for Aron, may be the most that one can hope for), property rights in a bicycle do not insure securely that nobody steals the bicycle (surety does not guarantee security) or that the bicycle emerges safely unscathed from a crash (surety does not guarantee safety).

A second question concerns "still" and "all the same." "Still" carries a potential implicature of temporal continuity which "all the same" (*tout de même*) lacks: had Aron

¹ Sophie Marcotte Chénard, "What Can We Learn From Political History? Leo Strauss and Raymond Aron, Readers of Thucydides," *Review of Politics* 80:1 (2018): 57-86; Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, "Why Did Raymond Aron Write that Carl Schmitt was not a Nazi? An Alternative Genealogy of French Liberalism," *Modern Intellectual History*, 11:3 (2014): 549-577.

² Raymond Aron, *Liberté et égalité, Cours au Collège de France* (Paris : Éditions EHESS, 2013), 31; 40.

wished to say *encore* or *toujours*, he could have. In a similar vein, one may hate something without detesting it and one may detest something (say, the taste of brussels sprouts) without hating it. Had Aron wished to say “*haine*” in place of “*détestation*,” he could have, and the translation respects that choice. Moreover, if Aron wished to say “we” (*nous*) in place of “we others” (*nous autres*), his rhetorical finesse was such that he could have spoken otherwise.

Scholars of Max Weber as well as sociologists and anthropologists who work in Weber’s wake have been known use “judgments of value” and “value judgments” interchangeably, both in Aron’s time and in our own,³ and thus to critique the translation of making a misstep in rendering “*jugements de valeurs*” as “judgments of value” because it does not attend to “the Weberian notion” is inapt.

That which is denuded of sense carries the implication that some sense was present prior to being stripped off. That which is meaningless or devoid of meaning does not carry this implication. If a philosophic and thoughtful writer wishes to say “*sans signification*” in place of “*dénué de sens*,” this choice is open and the translation respects this choice.

As a final overall comment, there were multiple native-speaking French readers of the translation. Notwithstanding the questioning of choices addressed here, Marcotte Chénard maintains that “Zeitlin has for the most part succeeded in maintaining the experience of reading Aron in the original French.”

The translation of Aron’s *Liberty and Equality* had no higher (and no other) aim.

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³ See Harry Walker, “Three Questions About the Social Life of Values,” *Anthropological Forum* Vol. 31:1 (2021): 94-105, at 99; Patrice Duran, “Max Weber and the Making of Politicians: A Sociology of Political Responsibility,” *Max Weber Studies* (2009), Vol. 9, No. 1/2 (2009): 51-93, here 83; Asok Sen, “Weber, Gramsci and Capitalism,” *Social Scientist* 13:1 (January 1985): 3-22, at 8; J.J.R. Thomas, “Rationalization and the Status of Gender Divisions,” *Sociology* (August 1985), Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 1985): 409-420, 419, note 6: “Weber’s adherence to a strict separation between judgements of fact and judgements of value means, of course, that no question of meaning or ethical commitment can ever be justified other than contingently. But this in turn, it is important to emphasize, is in his eyes a general feature of our intellectual culture engendered by the rationalization process.”