

## THE INFLUENCE OF GERMAN THOUGHT

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## INTELLECTUALS

Since the eighteenth century, the public sphere in France has given rise to a type of cultural producer

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who exerts considerable symbolic power over various fields, such as art, literature, humanities, science, and politics. Since the Dreyfus affair, the judiciary scandal that shook the Third Republic around 1900, such a cultural producer has been called an "intellectual." The intellectual is an engaged cultural producer—a professional who integrates a political and moral orientation with a scientific or high cultural project. The intellectual's political engagement may consist in articulating the legitimate interests of the people, in reclaiming the democratic and universal values of the republic, or in denouncing forms of social injustice.

A survey about French intellectuals in the twentieth century has to take into account the relationship between intellectual ideas and their political and social contexts. It also has to consider the historical configurations without which the richness of French intellectual history can hardly be grasped. Thus, in order to understand the cultural significance of the period from 1898 (outbreak of the Dreyfus affair) to 1984 (Foucault's death), it is necessary to put this short golden age of the modernist French intellectual in historical perspective. The other golden age was, of course, the era of the Enlightenment (*l'âge des lumières*), when the modern intellectual was born. However, if during the eighteenth century a distinct public sphere emerged against the absolutist state and the clerical system, what was the situation of the intellectuals who entered the scene over a hundred years after the French Revolution? Before we turn to French intellectuals in the twentieth century, let us dwell on the immediate prehistory of the modernist intellectual whose model was given by Zola.

Certainly the view that France's intellectual life in the nineteenth century was less intense as compared to its own immediate past and to other European countries needs in many ways correction. During this time, there was a significant group of autonomous literary producers, such as Victor Hugo, who were both eminent literary stars and political activists. Yet although the major republican narratives and the founding myths in national politics reached back to the French Revolution, the achievements of the more academic and scholarly producers were in a certain sense still dwarfed by the success of their German competitors. During the nineteenth century and despite the nationalist tendencies in Europe, a broad import of German academic works and academic standards set in, from idealist philosophy over sophisticated methods in philology to a high degree of division of labor. This trend continued until after World War II, when Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Husserl, Freud, Heidegger were greeted enthusiastically by many French intellectuals.

The main reason for the relative weakness of French academic life in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century was the absence of strong, autonomous institutions of higher education, which were not created until 1968, when the traditional faculties (*facultés*) were finally transformed into full-fledged universities. Although in the nineteenth century German bourgeois academics and intellectuals (*Bildungsbürger*) had a prestigious and well funded institution at their avail, that is, Humboldt's University, French faculties and schools (*écoles*) were an extension of the primary system of high or grammar schools (*lycées*) rather than an autonomous system of rigorous research, graduate education, and pure scholarship. As late as during the first half of the twentieth century, the faculties, whose roots mostly reached back before the Revolution, served primarily as the purveyors of academic degrees (for example, *licence*, *maîtrise*), but they did not offer comprehensive programs of advanced academic education, let alone independent research. The schools (*écoles*), by contrast, were products of the French Revolution. Although set up by the republican state in order to produce highly qualified state bureaucrats and teachers, they could not make up for the lack of prestigious academic work and rigorous research in the faculties either. Despite the high prestige and the splendid careers they promised (and continue to promise) to their graduates, these schools' primary purpose was to fulfill the state's needs and to produce future civil servants. Even the most "intellectual" of all elite schools, the *École Normale Supérieure (Rue d'Ulm)*, focused more on the reproductive drilling of philosophy teachers than on the productive creation of autonomous academic work.

Therefore it is important to note that during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century an important number of symbolic producers existed outside of the institutions of higher education and of the centers of traditional academic learning (like the *Sorbonne* and the *Académie française*). The modernist conjuncture of symbolic production that originated with the establishment of the modernist field of vanguard art in the last third of the nineteenth century would have been hardly conceivable without this growing group of independent high cultural producers both from the French province, where the secondary system absorbed only a marginal number of their graduates, and from abroad. As a consequence of the continuing influx of new ambitious producers into the capital, the market of symbolic production expanded to a degree that an autonomous subsector of restrained production emerged. According to Bourdieu, restrained production is geared toward the exclusive demands of other symbolic producers, and the modernist conjuncture can be seen as a spin-off of the differentia-

tion of cultural production. It is against the background of a well developed, both centralized and highly differentiated market of symbolic production that the modernist producers and intellectuals could gain such an important role in France. The concentration of cultural producers in Paris and the differentiated structure of the intellectual field did not only lead to a rapid succession of new trends and fads, but also promised high symbolic profits to those intellectual leaders able to assert themselves in the various fields of high cultural production, of academic excellence, and of national politics.

During the Dreyfus affair the modernist intellectual subjectivity and discourse were articulated for the first time. Alfred Dreyfus was a captain on the French general staff convicted for espionage in 1894, although it soon became clear that his transgression consisted rather in his Jewish religion than in actual treason. From 1897 on, a growing number of literary and academic producers, among them Charles Péguy, André Gide, Marcel Proust, Lucien Herr, and Émile Zola, rallied in order to plea for a retrial, and Zola's famous article "I accuse" ("*J'accuse*", 1898) became the manifesto of the newly formed group of intellectuals. Rapidly, the affair became much more than a simple judiciary scandal and led to the explosion of a long and fierce conflict between the clerical conservative forces and the liberal democratic adherents of the Third Republic, who were represented by the intellectuals.

The activation of intellectual engagement that ensued thereafter has been characterized by rapid shifts and upheavals that can be broadly rubricated under five symbolic conjunctures represented by five major intellectual "pontificates": the first high modernist conjuncture of the historical avant-garde during World War I (for example, Marcel Proust), the second high modernist conjuncture of the *front populaire* and surrealism (for example, André Gide, André Breton), the first late modernist conjuncture or existentialism (led by Jean-Paul Sartre), the second late modernist conjuncture and the astounding success of the *sciences humaines* and the psycho-Marxo-structuralist discourse (whose politically most visible representative was Michel Foucault), and the postmodernist conjuncture (the return of liberal political theory and the "left of the left" intellectual Pierre Bourdieu). These symbolic conjunctures were supported by specific groups and networks that in most cases had an intellectual journal at their disposal, for example, *La Nouvelle revue française* (founded in 1908 by Gide), *Les Temps modernes* (founded in 1945 by Sartre), *Tel Quel* (founded in 1960 by the avant-garde theorist and writer Philippe Sollers), *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (founded in 1975 by Bourdieu), *Le Débat* (founded in 1980 by the liberal historian Pierre Nora).

The complex and contradictory tendencies of the intellectual history of the twentieth century notwithstanding, a constant factor in the transition from the high modernist to the late modernist conjunctures was the increasing role of academic producers, finally culminating in Bourdieu's social scientific pontificate. Although the two high modernist conjunctures were predominantly led by artists and writers, the late modernist period witnessed the rise of more academic intellectuals. Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, the first star intellectual earning both literary and academic recognition, became the exemplar of the French intellectual: A graduate from *École Normale*, he started out as a philosophy teacher at high school (*lycée*) and then became an independent writer who was politicized in the French *résistance*. His impact on French intellectual life was so decisive that his skillful shifting between hitherto separated fields of symbolic production (such as philosophy, literature, theater, print and radio journalism, compare Boschetti) left a durable imprint on the field of symbolic production (such as the French newspaper *Libération*, which began under his auspices in 1973). Sartre personifies the engaged intellectual who employs his consecration as a literary and scholarly producer in the service of political action.

In order to explain the receding dominance of non-academic high cultural producers, three important developments that occurred after World War II should be considered: 1) After the Sputnik shock and toward the end of the Algerian War (1954–1962), an unprecedented explosion of academic positions occurred under de Gaulle's ministry of Culture (1958–1969) and leftist intellectual André Malraux. In no other Western country did academic research and higher education expand so powerfully from such a low level in such a short period of time. As a consequence, freelance intellectuals, *hommes de lettres*, and autodidacts like Roland Barthes were rapidly absorbed by an academic system in full expansion. 2) The increasing standing of the more technocratic branches of higher education gradually undermined and devalued the prestige of the more intellectual schools, perhaps best exemplified by the success of the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA), founded in 1945, over the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS), Rue d'Ulm, founded in 1794. Up until after World War II, the philosophical, humanistic training of the ENS was considered sufficiently prestigious to lead their graduates to the highest positions in French politics, economy, or culture (compare Jean Jaurès, Léon Blum, and Georges Pompidou's splendid political careers). From the early 1960s on, however, the most brilliant students began to turn away from philosophy and the traditional humanistic canon. These students, still heavily imbued with French philosophical culture, either tried to adapt their cultural capital

to the new demands of the fledgling *sciences humaines* and its *science pilote*, linguistics, or they switched directly over to ENA, which promised more successful careers in French politics, administration, and economy. 3) With the advent of the society of the spectacle (Debord), the print media increasingly gave way to television. Television is not only much more prone to the diffusion of images and iconic representations; television journalists in France have also come to exert a far-reaching influence on political issues (Debray). Television offers a vast audience and rapid careers to symbolic producers who no longer have to be consecrated as legitimate high cultural or academic producers in order to gain an important voice in national politics. So even though intellectual journals and newspapers continue to thrive (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Le Monde*), the crisis of the modernist hegemony of nonacademic high cultural production could not help but sharpen.

In the first half of the 1980s, the era of the modernist intellectual, who mediated between academic and non-academic symbolic production, ended and the post-modernist or, to be more precise, an antimodernist period was heralded. A great many of the intellectual stars of the preceding period passed away or disappeared from the public (Sartre, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault; Althusser was interned after murdering his wife, and Sollers terminated *Tel Quel*) and a new generation of liberal intellectuals entered the scene. This crisis of modernist ideology and subjectivity set in soon after the French publication of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1976), which ushered in a period not only of de-Marxification of French intellectual life, but also of the disenchantment with the major intellectual prophets of the past, be they Marxists, existentialists, psychoanalysts, or structuralists (Hourmant). Thus this postmodernist period—which should not be confounded with the Anglo-American phenomenon of postmodernism or poststructuralism, a term not familiar in the French context—has led to a rehabilitation of liberal and antitotalitarian thinkers of the past (compare Raymond Aron or the anti-Stalinist circle *Socialisme ou Barbarie* of Claude Lefort and Cornélius Castoriadis) and to a resurgence of liberal and neoliberal ideas (compare Ferry/Renaut's assault on the "*pensée 68*"). The so-called new philosophers (*nouveaux philosophes*) were the first to get wide attention by articulating the crisis of the left project that was also a crisis of intellectual prophethood. As late modernist intellectuals (compare Deleuze) have pointed out, the success of this group of young *normalien* philosophers and ex-Maoists who gathered around the illustrious Bernard-Henri Lévy demonstrates the increasing influence of national television on intellectual strategies and careers.

With the demise of the modernist intellectual, French intellectual life entered a period of redifferentiation and recompartimentalization. No longer did intellectuals bridge the various subfields of symbolic production as they did until the mid-1970s; academics, journalists, and artists increasingly opted for a return to their respective disciplinary, journalistic, or artistic origins. When in 1981 the Left under François Mitterrand finally came to power, the major intellectual newspaper *Le Monde* announced the curious disengagement of intellectual production (publicized under the slogan of *le silence des intellectuels*). The intellectuals who now became politically dominant no longer climbed trash cans to arouse the revolutionary spirit of the people (as Sartre did). Instead, in becoming a political counselor, commentator, and analyst, the successor of the modernist intellectual prefers American-style engagement, for example, the sociologist Alain Touraine, whose political analyses have gained wide diffusion both with the media networks and with political think tanks (like the *Fondation Saint-Simon*), or the aforementioned Luc Ferry, who became Minister of Culture after Chirac's electoral triumph in 2002.

Thus for French intellectuals the early 1980s marked a caesura in both theoretical and political terms: The structuralist critique of the free autonomous subject was abandoned in favor of a renewed interest in human rights, ethics, and morality. Philosophers reclaimed the liberal heritage of the Republic and pleaded against the "irresponsible" politico-philosophical projects of the 1960s and 1970s represented by German philosophers like Nietzsche and Heidegger (compare Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, 1987, or Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Heidegger et les modernes*, 1988). The period since 1980 has also been a period of a sharpening crisis of journals and publishing houses. Intellectual works and products, it seems, are no longer as controversial and influential as they used to be. Although France's major publishing firms pull back from the market of intellectual production (compare the financial difficulties of *Presses Universitaires de France*), the massive export of certain French intellectual brands—Derridian deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis, Sartrean existentialism, which, it is true, never represented more than a fraction of French intellectual life—to humanities departments in North America and Great Britain has diminished.

But even though there is evidence that intellectual power in France is on the decline, the 1990s have seen a growing movement of political contestation whose undisputed intellectual leader became the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Adopting in a certain sense the radical political rhetoric of his late modernist predecessors, Bourdieu insisted on a clear demarcation from the "non-scientific," that is, philosophical and aesthetic

preoccupation of the modernist producers. Ironically enough, it is the anti-Sartrean social scientist Pierre Bourdieu who turned out to be the most faithful adherent of the Sartrean model of an engaged intellectual combining sophisticated scholarly capacities with a strong political perspective. But through his emphasis on rigorous academic work and scientific methodology, Bourdieu epitomizes the overarching success of the certified academic worker over the independent *homme de lettres* and avant-garde artist. Bourdieu's success as both a sociologist and political activist testifies that French intellectuals continue to play an important role vis-à-vis the current political challenges, such as racial and social discrimination (*exclusion*), neo-liberalism, and globalization.

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See also Louis Althusser; Raymond Aron; Roland Barthes; Pierre Bourdieu; Andre Breton; Cornelius Castoriadis; Guy Debord; Régis Debray; Gilles Deleuze; Jacques Derrida; Michel Foucault; Andre Gide; Jean Jaures; Jacques Lacan; Claude Lefort; Bernard-Henri Levy; Jean-Paul Sartre

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#### IRIGARAY, LUCE

*Philosopher, Psychoanalyst, Linguist, Feminist, Theorist*

The considerable influence of Luce Irigaray's work, including some nineteen books to date, extends across the humanistic disciplines, informing such fields as philosophy, literary theory, film studies, art criticism,