



How the French Think: An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People

By Sudhir Hazareesingh

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Why are the French such an exceptional nation? Why do they think they are so exceptional? The French take pride in the fact that their history and culture have decisively shaped the values and ideals of the modern world. French ideas are no less distinct in their form: while French thought is abstract, stylish and often opaque, it has always been bold and creative, and driven by the relentless pursuit of innovation.

In *How the French Think*, the internationally-renowned historian Sudhir Hazareesingh tells the epic and tumultuous story of French intellectual thought from Descartes, Rousseau, and Auguste Comte to Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Derrida. He shows how French thinking has shaped fundamental Western ideas about freedom, rationality, and justice, and how the French mind-set is intimately connected to their own way of life—in particular to the French tendency towards individualism, their passion for nature, their celebration of their historical heritage, and their fascination with death. Hazareesingh explores the French veneration of dissent and skepticism, from Voltaire to the Dreyfus Affair and beyond; the obsession with the protection of French language and culture; the rhetorical flair embodied by the *philosophes*, which today's intellectuals still try to recapture; the astonishing influence of French postmodern thinkers, including Foucault and Barthes, on postwar American education and life, and also the growing French anxiety about a globalized world order under American hegemony.

How the French Think sweeps aside generalizations and easy stereotypes to offer an incisive and revealing exploration of the French intellectual tradition. Steeped in a colorful range of sources, and written with warmth and humor, this book will appeal to all lovers of France and of European culture.

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Editorial Review

Review

Newsweek Europe

“A whirlwind tour of intellectual history from Descartes to Derrida. Jumping from Napoleon to postcolonial immigration, the narrative is brimming with fascinating tidbits...a lively introduction to a French elite that likes to tell itself it has a unique mission to save the world.... This sensitive and detailed book is so passionate about it can sometimes feel like French people have completely different brains, like Frenchmen come from Mars and Britons from Venus. Maybe, disappointingly, the French think just like everyone else.”

Publishers Weekly

“An equally informative and colorful tour d'horizon of the many strands of, and contradictions in, French philosophy and political thought during the past four centuries.”

Kirkus Reviews

“A thoughtful study...[Hazareesingh] achieves the right distance from and intimacy with his subject... A rarefied and compelling study.”

Chosen by *Foreign Affairs* as one of the Best Books of 2015.

New York Review of Books

“A stimulating contribution.... In this work [Hazareesingh] displays not only a deep familiarity with French society, but a rare sense for a foreigner of what really matters in French intellectual life once you dig below the surface. He is an excellent teller of tales with a good eye for the revealing anecdote.”

Financial Times

“[A] thoughtful, stimulating and witty historical survey of French thought.”

Economist

“[An] impressive study.”

Foreign Affairs

“Focusing with great intelligence and subtlety on distinctively French conceptions of history, nationhood, democratic participation, existentialism, and the creative tension between order and imagination...Anyone who loves, loathes, or is just perplexed by self-styled French intellectuals—that is, most educated French people—should read this book.”

New Republic

“Hazareesingh has a gift for distilling mounds of information into clear, engrossing prose. This is above all a convivial book, true to its subtitle though not without a finely tuned bullshit detector.... What one comes away with is the unshakable sense that however they do it, the French really do think differently than we do—and this is what we love about them.”

Observer, Book of the Day (UK)

“[A] lively guide to the French mind...Hazareesingh's prose is lively and clear and his erudition and elegance recall Theodore Zeldin, still perhaps the most distinguished guide in the English language to the intricacies of the French imagination...Hazareesingh's tone is playful and sharp...it is worth reading...Hazareesingh for insights into how the French became who they are.”

The Scotsman (UK)

“[A] lively and informative account of French thought from Descartes to the present day...expansive in reference, detailed in reading...Hazareesingh has a quick eye to the telling detail, the curious story that illuminates the whole.

Standpoint Magazine (UK)

“In exploring with sharpness and humour the patterns of thought the French have developed over the centuries, he finds some interesting and unexpected relationships between eras and personalities, and explains France's intellectual evolution. The book is rich in information and easy to read...”

Independent (UK)

“Scholarly, penetrating and sometimes very funny.... This is a marvellous, and marvellously readable book: by turns illuminating, affectionate and exasperated.”

France Today

“[An] engaging, accessible book... Hazareesingh's superbly researched work traces the history of this spirit, from Descartes, Rousseau and Voltaire to latter-day politicians who talk of France's 'great destiny'. Read this excellent book and next time you witness vigorous finger-pointing in a bistrot, you'll know why the subject being debated is likely to be very lofty indeed!”

Prospect (UK)

“Superb.... Hazareesingh has done more than anyone writing in English to unravel what the sociologist Emmanuel Todd recently called the ‘le mystère français.’”

Times Higher Education Supplement (UK)

“Thoughtful and carefully researched observations on French literary life.”

The Times (UK)

“Hazareesingh's book is an excellent antidote to British smugness”

Spectator (UK)

“[A] bold new book.... Hazareesingh's portrait is affectionate in the fullest sense: familiar and fondly teasing...he has a sense of humour to match his intellect.”

Guardian (UK)

“[A] fascinating book...”

David Bell, author of *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*

“Few historians would have the courage to write a book with a title like *How the French Think*. But few historians know France, and the French, better than Sudhir Hazareesingh. He has brought his formidable knowledge and experience of the country to bear in a book that is consistently engaging and thought-provoking, and written with a light touch that makes it a delight to read.”

Robert Tombs, Professor of French History at Cambridge University

“It is unusual to laugh aloud when reading a history of ideas, but I did so more than once while reading *How the French Think*. Its sweep is thrilling and its expositions lucid, but it carries its learning lightly and is written with an astringent wit. Everyone interested in France and the French will enjoy and learn from this book.”

Patrice Higonnet, Professor of French History at Harvard University

“Stendhal wrote that a novel was ‘un miroir qu'on promène le long d'un chemin.’ And no better mirror on the wandering path of French culture of yesterday and today could be found than this wise and gentle book, as learned as it is engaging. Péguy was worried about what God would have to think about if the French were not there to amuse and inform him. Now we know why this might still be so.”

About the Author

Sudhir Hazareesingh is a Fellow in Politics at Balliol College, Oxford, a Fellow of the British Academy, and author of the prize-winning books *The Legend of Napoleon* and *In the Shadow of the General*. He divides his time between Paris and Oxford.

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Jessica Hurst:

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can see that now, a lot of publisher that print many kinds of book. The particular book that recommended for you is *How the French Think: An Affectionate Portrait of an Intellectual People* this guide consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This specific book was represented how can the world has grown up. The words styles that writer require to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some research when he makes this book. That is why this book ideal all of you.

Lorraine Paisley:

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