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0521662125 - French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century

Gary Gutting

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FRENCH PHILOSOPHY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In this book Gary Gutting tells, clearly and comprehensively, the story of French philosophy from 1890 to 1990. He examines the often neglected background of spiritualism, university idealism, and early philosophy of science, and also discusses the privileged role of philosophy in the French education system. Taking account of this background, together with the influences of avant-garde literature and German philosophy, he develops a rich account of existential phenomenology, which he argues is the central achievement of French thought during the century, and of subsequent structuralist and poststructuralist developments. His discussion includes chapters on Bergson, Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, and Derrida, with sections on other major thinkers including Lyotard, Deleuze, Irigaray, Levinas, and Ricoeur. He offers challenging analyses of the often misunderstood relationship between existential phenomenology and structuralism and of the emergence of poststructuralism. Finally, he sketches the major current trends of French philosophy, including liberal political philosophy, the return to phenomenology, and French analytic philosophy.

GARY GUTTING is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and a leading authority on twentieth-century French philosophy. He is the author of *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (1994). His many publications also include *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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To Anastasia
with love
remembering our first day in Paris, June 20, 1968

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Preface

There is nothing sacred about the century as a unit of time, but there is a relatively self-contained and coherent story to be told about French philosophy from about 1890 to about 1990. In telling it, I have tried to be comprehensive although by no means exhaustive. There are full chapters on the half-dozen figures I regard as of the highest importance and substantial sections on about a dozen other major thinkers. Beyond that, I have let the logic of my narrative, more than any desire for encyclopedic completeness, determine whom I discuss and how. Given the constraints of length, it has been impossible to avoid arbitrary exclusions. Thoughtful readers will regret no more than I that there is little or nothing on André Lalande, Alain, Simone Weil, Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Badiou . . .

My approach has been that of a historically minded philosopher rather than a historian per se. I have, accordingly, paid more attention to the internal logic of ideas than to, for example, social-political contexts, economic determinants, or the psychology of influence. I have, however, tried to give a sense of the flow and interaction of ideas from one thinker to another and to explain, at least in intellectual terms, major changes in views (from, for example, idealism to existentialism and existentialism to poststructuralism). My main goal has been to provide the reader with lucid and fair analyses of what philosophers have thought and of how the thoughts of different philosophers are related. I have also paid some, necessarily limited, attention to the broader intellectual context of French philosophical thought (for example, German philosophy, avant-garde literature, and structuralist social science) and to its dependence on the distinctive French system of education. (The appendix provides a summary of basic facts and terminology that may be useful for understanding references to this system.)

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My first four chapters, on the years before World War II, cover much material seldom discussed in English. I hope that readers will see the importance of spiritualism, university idealism, Bergson, and French philosophy of science for understanding the developments of the latter half of the century. I also hope they will come to share my appreciation of the intrinsic philosophical value of what thinkers such as Lachelier, Poincaré, Brunschvicg, and Blondel achieved. My later chapters, covering better-known but often quite difficult philosophers, put a particularly strong emphasis on clarity of analysis. They also defend some controversial judgments about, for example, the centrality of Sartre's *L'être et le néant*, the philosophical importance of Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe*, the relatively marginal role of structuralism, and the significance of poststructuralism. The Conclusion presents my view that twentieth-century French philosophy is best read as a sustained reflection on the problem of individual freedom.

I am especially grateful to those who read and so perceptively commented on drafts of this book: Karl Ameriks, Philip Bartok, Frederick Crosson, Thomas Flynn, Anastasia Friel Gutting, and Stephen Watson. Warm thanks also to those who offered their expert assessment of particular chapters or sections: Alissa Branham, David Carr, Jean Gayon, Eric Matthews, Todd May, William McBride, and Ernan McMullin. Philip Bartok deserves special mention both for his acute close reading and his invaluable bibliographical assistance.

I also want to thank the University of Notre Dame's Erasmus Institute, which provided financial support and a splendid intellectual atmosphere for a semester's work on this book. I am especially grateful to the Director, James Turner, and the Associate Director, Robert Sullivan. Thanks are also due for all the stimulation and assistance I received from the 1999–2000 cohort of Erasmus fellows: Terry Bays, William Donahue, Anita Houck, Pamela Jason, Wesley Kort, Daniella Kostroun, Roger Lundin, John McGreevy, and Susan Rosa.

Special thanks are due to Hilary Gaskin, the philosophy editor at Cambridge University Press, who suggested that I write this book and encouraged me throughout its writing, and to Jocelyn Pye for excellent copy-editing.

Finally, as always, by far my greatest debt is to my family: to my children, Tom, Edward, and Tasha, for all the pride and joy they bring; and to my wife Anastasia for the perfect gift of loving and being loved by her.

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A note on references

Books and articles are cited simply by title, with full details given in the References. All citations are in English and are from a published translation when one is listed in the References. Otherwise, the English translations are my own. When a text is cited repeatedly, the title is abbreviated (e.g., *EN* for *L'être et le néant*) and page references are given in the main text, the first number referring to the French original and the second to the English translation.

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<i>A</i>	Maurice Blondel, <i>L'action</i>
<i>CRD</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre, <i>Critique de la raison dialectique</i>
<i>CS</i>	Luce Irigaray, <i>Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un</i>
<i>D</i>	Jean-François Lyotard, <i>Le différend</i>
<i>DS</i>	Simone de Beauvoir, <i>Le deuxième sexe</i>
<i>DSM</i>	Henri Bergson, <i>Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion</i>
<i>EC</i>	Henri Bergson, <i>L'évolution créatrice</i>
<i>EDI</i>	Henri Bergson, <i>Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience</i>
<i>EDS</i>	Luce Irigaray, <i>Éthique de la différence sexuelle</i>
<i>EH</i>	Léon Brunschvicg, <i>L'expérience humaine et la causalité physique</i>
<i>EN</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre, <i>L'être et le néant</i>
<i>FI</i>	Jules Lachelier, <i>Du fondement de l'induction</i>
<i>LI</i>	Jacques Derrida, <i>Limited Inc.</i>
<i>MC</i>	Michel Foucault, <i>Les mots et les choses</i>
<i>Mj</i>	Léon Brunschvicg, <i>La modalité du jugement</i>
<i>MM</i>	Henri Bergson, <i>Matière et mémoire</i>
<i>MP</i>	Jacques Derrida, <i>Marges de la philosophie</i>
<i>PK</i>	Michel Foucault, <i>Power/Knowledge</i>
<i>PP</i>	Maurice Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phénoménologie de la perception</i>
<i>PS</i>	Claude Lévi-Strauss, <i>La pensée sauvage</i>
<i>QM</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre, "Question de méthode"
<i>S</i>	Maurice Merleau-Ponty, <i>Signes</i>
<i>SH</i>	Henri Poincaré, <i>La science et l'hypothèse</i>
<i>SR</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre, "Jean-Paul Sartre répond"
<i>TI</i>	Emmanuel Levinas, <i>Totalité et infini</i>
<i>VS</i>	Henri Poincaré, <i>La valeur de la science</i>