



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

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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