The Structure of Power and Practices: The French Philosophers after World War II

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December 15, 2025

1 Related Works and Research Question

Postwar French philosophy, shaped by the unique domestic circumstances of the time, occupies a significant place in the history of global thought and continues to influence contemporary research in the humanities and social sciences. However, empirical studies on the scholarly production of this period remain scarce. Bourdieu, in Homo Academicus [1], analyzed the field and the distribution of capital across a broad range of humanities disciplines, providing a methodological inspiration for this study. Yet, Bourdieu's analysis did not address the production of specific philosophical content or philosophical practices; rather, it focused solely on scholars' social origins and career trajectories to locate their positions within the field. Bourdieu's student Fabiani [2] discussed the transformations in the French philosophical field following the establishment of the Republic in the late nineteenth century, highlighting a connection between shifts in thought and changes in the field's structure. However, this discussion largely relied on case studies and qualitative reading, which may be dominated by highly visible individuals, potentially introducing bias.

Following this line of investigation, the objective of this study is to examine both the field positions and the intellectual practices of the vast majority of actors within the field, in order to uncover the underlying structures of power and practice [1], and thereby allow us to understand how structural conflicts within the philosophical community shaped the production and dissemination of French thought. More broadly, simultaneously mapping both philosophical practices and field position variables provides a more intuitive understanding of the relativity of field autonomy [3]: within our research context, a philosopher's intellectual stance should be considered alongside their position within relevant social spaces, and specific philosophical values may be amplified by other forms of capital.

Therefore, the research question of this study is framed as: How are philosophers' positions - represented by their social and institutional attributes - associated with their philosophical practices in the postwar French philosophical field?

2 Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu's notion of social space essentially makes it possible to geometrically depict social relations and actions. Within this space, distinct **positions** represent the proportional combination of different types of capital. Actors situated in different positions develop specific habitus (**position-takings** encompass not only behaviors but also subjective preferences, as Bourdieu notes that position fundamentally shapes an actor's

perception of possibilities [4]), thereby reproducing a particular social structure. Thus, for Bourdieusians, the crucial operationalization lies in extracting patterns of capital distribution - i.e., positions - from observable characteristics and institutions, and analyzing how actors occupying different positions exhibit differentiated behaviors and preferences (habitus).

For instance, Bourdieu concentrated on demonstrating this empirical strategy in two of his works. First, in *La Distinction*, his central question was how taste is socially constructed. To address this, he first used observable data on social origin to characterize a social space unevenly distributed with cultural/economic capital. He then employed data such as theater attendance rates to characterize a space of cultural practices. By revealing the association between these two spaces, Bourdieu demonstrates that cultural taste constitutes a symbolic form of social class. Similarly, in *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu reapplies this approach. He first uses observable data—such as disciplinary fields, institutional affiliations, and regional origins—to characterize the space of positions within French academia ("The structure of the space of the powers"). He then qualitatively identifies the direction of capital distribution within this space and assesses whether scholars occupying similar positions exhibit homogeneity in terms of habitus, such as political participation and cultural expression.

Therefore, as Rosenlund succinctly summarized, this theoretical and empirical framework constitutes a relational mode of thinking[5]: unlike traditional statistical approaches concerned with inference and probability, the Bourdieusian strategy does not fit data into a pre-given model for parameter estimation. Instead, it focuses on how to geometrically and quantitatively describe the intrinsic structure of the data itself. This approach, as Julien Duval aptly notes, of making the model serve the data, enables researchers to produce more grounded interpretations (combined with qualitative understanding) and to describe broader relationships that transcend individual variables[6]. Of course, it should be noted that this approach does not presuppose a complete isomorphism between the space of position and position-taking, as this is sensitive to the researcher's operationalization strategy on the one hand, and on the other, there may exist sociologically meaningful one-to-many or many-to-one relationships between these two types of variables. Furthermore, this theoretical framework does not assume causality; thus, we cannot infer that position leads to position-takings or vice versa. Instead, as Bourdieu argued, the processes of capital accumulation and position differentiation are mutually coupled [7]. What researchers can do is delineate the overall structure of the field in the notion of social space and then provide a qualitative interpretation.

3 Data and Methods

This section introduces the data sources and analytical methods. Section 3.1 reports the inclusion criteria for the sample, which involves establishing the boundaries of a field in a reasonable and as comprehensive manner as possible; Section 3.2 describes the variables used to operationalize position and position-taking, along with the collection and preprocessing of related data; Section 3.3 details how we constructed a social space based on variables through multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to characterize the power and practice structures within the field.

3.1 Sample Inclusion

There is no explicit definition of what constitutes a "philosopher," particularly within the vibrant, heterogeneous, and rapidly evolving French philosophical field of the 20th century. Many individuals who contributed to philosophical life were not affiliated with higher-education institutions, and some published primarily in

venues belonging to adjacent intellectual domains or in avant-garde magazines directed at broader publics. Nevertheless, because this study focuses on the philosophical subfield of the academic field, rather than on the wider intellectual or cultural field, it becomes feasible to construct a workable boundary. For example, Bourdieu's operationalize of the social and human-science field before and after May '68 typically relied on membership in a set of educational or research institutions deemed relevant. Yet this approach tends to skew the field toward Parisian academic institutions and largely overlooks (1) provincial institutions, (2) religious scholarly communities, and (3) secondary-school teachers. As an alternative definitional criterion, we assume that an individual occupies a position within the academic philosophical field if and only if he or she published actively in a set of "core academic philosophy journals" during the period of interest.

The period under consideration is defined as 1950 - 1989. This interval covers the relatively stable phase of the French academic system stretching from the postwar expansion to the onset of the late-century internationalization. The selection of core journals follows three criteria: (1) they are primarily French-language venues with active participation by French philosophers; (2) they primarily publish original research articles intended for an academic readership, rather than translations, book reviews, or short commentary; and (3) they operated continuously between 1950 and 1989. For reasons of data accessibility, we restrict attention to journals indexed in JSTOR, yielding a set of eight journals (Table 1), all operated by institutions in France or in neighboring Francophone regions.

To validate this inclusion criterion, we examined publication records of several well-known French philosophers. Most of them have at least four publications in this set of journals, which supports the adequacy and empirical relevance of the boundary we draw.

Journal	Abbrev.	Country	Founded / Published By	Time
Les Études philosophiques	EtudesPhilo	France	Presses Universitaires de France (PUF)	1923
Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger	PhiloEtranger	France	Presses Universitaires de France (PUF)	1876
Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale	MetaMorale	France	Presses Universitaires de France (PUF)	1893
Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques	SciPhiloTheo	France	Dominicains Français	1907
Archives de Philosophie	ArchivePhilo	France	Jésuite, Joseph Souilhé	1922
Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie	TheoPhilo	Switzerland	Philosophes et Théologiens Protestants	1868
Revue Internationale de Philosophie	InternaPhilo	Belgium	Karl Popper and Bertrand Russell	1938
Revue philosophique de Louvain	PhiloLouvain	Belgium	University of Louvain	1894

Table 1: Core Academic Philosophy Journals Used in the Analysis

Only French authors (after disambiguation) with at least three publication records in this set of journals were retained (This threshold allows us to retain most renowned philosophers while excluding most of the authors whose identities cannot be verified or whose names cannot be disambiguated). The collection of nationality and other biographical information, along with the name disambiguation strategy, is detailed in Section 3.2. The threshold of three publications retains 713 disambiguated names from over 2,000 entries. Authors excluded were either individuals whose names could not be disambiguated, or those deemed not to

have occupied a stable and active position within the contemporary French philosophical field at that period (including those who were born too early or too late).

3.2 Data Collection

Before collecting the data, name disambiguation was first performed. This procedure is necessary because the same author may appear under different recorded names across journals (e.g., `nicolas boussoulas`, `nicolas isidore boussoulas`, `n i boussoulas`, `n boussoulas`) or because OCR errors may occasionally introduce character-level discrepancies (e.g., `clémence ramnoux`, `clervence ramnoux`). We first excluded all names that consisted entirely of abbreviations. Then, we matched (1) the non-abbreviated components of names (capturing OCR-induced variants using string similarity) and (2) the extracted sequences of initials. If they fully matched, they were grouped as the same author; if a name matched multiple conflicting names simultaneously, manual verification was conducted based on their publication records (topics and publication dates). The disambiguation was conservative, meaning that names were merged only when there was strong evidence suggesting they referred to the same person.

The variables fall into two types.

- The first type contains information about the authors themselves and is used to describe their positions within the field. Among these, `gender`, `religious background`, and `place of birth` characterize the authors' social origin, while `institution` and the `publication counts` (normalized within cohorts and classified into `more` or `less`, when included into MCA) in the eight academic journals are considered as important elements of field-specific capital;

- The second type consists of information related to the authors' philosophical practice / position-takings, constructed entirely from their publication records in the eight journals, including the philosophical topics they published on and the types of journals in which they published.

For the first type, data collection began with a Python pipeline that retrieved records from WikiData and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF); missing values were then collected manually (from biographical pages, obituaries, interviews, etc.). Data annotation was conducted and assisted by LLM. Detailed procedures are provided in the appendix. It is worth noting that for the `institution` variable, we distinguish institutions in central Paris (e.g., the Sorbonne) from those in the suburbs (e.g., Université de Nanterre), which serves both as a geographically grounded measure of academic prestige and as a way to capture the consequences of the post-1968 division of the University of Paris. For the second type, philosophical topics were obtained by applying a FastText + K-Means topic-modeling framework to the cleaned texts; the resulting topics were then manually grouped into **eight themes** based on statistical distances and qualitative reading. Details are provided in the appendix. The text data were requested from JSTOR. For journal types, we classify the three French journals founded by secular philosophers and published by PUF as `Academic`, the two French journals with religious backgrounds as `Religious`, and the final three journals founded by scholars outside France as `International`.

A key challenge concerns how to handle missing values. Authors with severely missing data were excluded from the analysis, leaving 296 philosophers of French nationality (N=296). If an author's institutional information was missing, we assumed that the author was not affiliated with any higher academic institution (indeed, my checks confirmed that two authors were secondary-school teachers, and their `institution` variable was coded as 0). This does not affect the MCA modeling, because MCA only considers whether individuals belong to a given category of institution, rather than requiring complete information. In addition,

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when `place of birth` was missing, it was coded as `Non-Paris`, because missingness was rare and treating it as a separate category might introduce outliers into the MCA. Religious background was coded only into `Catholic` and `Other`, because among those with recorded religious affiliation, the overwhelming majority were Catholic; the remaining categories—Protestant, atheist, Jewish—had very small sample sizes and were therefore merged with those missing religious information. In fact, Catholic communities did occupy a special position in the French philosophical field at the time, which makes this recoding reasonable. Table **??** reports the descriptive statistics of some variables.

Variable	Mean (Proportion)	Std. Var.	Median
Birth Year	1919	18	1921
Pub Count	8.52	9.39	6
Religion			
Catholic	23.0%		
Others	77.0%		
Birth Place			
Paris	17.6%		
Non Paris	82.4%		
Institutions			
Paris Center	44.3%		
Paris Suburbs	11.1%		
Provinces	45.9%		
European	20.6%		
Other Countries	8.1%		
Religious	10.5%		

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on key variables

3.3   Empirical Strategy: MCA

The research question involves simultaneously mapping two sets of categorical variables—position and position-taking—within the same space, and uncovering the dominant power (capital) and practice structures within them. MCA, as a method for conducting principal component analysis on multiple categorical variables, is therefore well-suited to this context. Our MCA modeling primarily follows Bourdieu's work in Homo Academicus [1], as well as Hjellbrekke's analysis of the Norwegian literary field [3], since the types of fields examined and the variables used in these two studies are relatively close to those in this research.

Our aim is to map the overall structure of the field, that is, to examine the co-occurrence patterns between positions and position-takings within the contemporary philosophical field (to determine the structure of this field and define / discover the features of each dimension). Therefore, for each MCA model, we treat all variables as main or active variables[1]. This approach is similar to Bourdieu's analysis in Homo Aca-

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[1]Otherwise, the following situation may arise: as Section 4 will demonstrate, in a space constructed solely by the position variable, the categories of women and Paris Suburbs institution employment are positioned at the bottom and top of the diagram, respectively; whereas in the space jointly constructed by position and position-taking, both female philosophers and

demicus [1], where he treated distinct variables including gender, birthplace, institutional affiliations and publication practices all as main variables, while only those variables with low reliability or sociologically redundant were treated as illustrative (supplementary) variables.

An innate limitation of MCA is that if two categories that should, in the structure of the field, stand in opposition to each other both frequently co-occur with the same category of another variable, their distance will be neutralized. As a result, these opposed categories will appear close to each other in the space constructed by the MCA, which affects our interpretation. Therefore, we choose to introduce variables into the MCA model stepwisely:

- First, we conduct MCA only on the first set of variables, including gender, religion, birthplace, institutional affiliations, and PubCount (coded as `More` if above the 75% threshold within the cohort, and `Less` otherwise). It should be noted that an individual may be affiliated with multiple types of institutions at the same time; therefore, institutional affiliation is constructed as a set of dummy variables rather than a single categorical variable, including six dummies: Paris Center, Paris Suburbs, Provinces, Religious institutions, European institutions, and institutions outside Europe. This space is interpreted as the space of scholars' positions within the academic field (MCA-1.1). In particular, given the substantial generational span among scholars active between the 1950s and 1980s (those born in the nineteenth century, whose career trajectories differ radically from those of more recent scholars) which may introduce bias, we also conduct a separate MCA on scholars only born after 1910 (MCA-1.2).

- Next, we conduct MCA on the two sets of variables together. The space obtained from this MCA is used to examine the homology between positions and position-takings (MCA-2.1). However, since we observed that the dimension explaining the largest variance was the opposition between Catholic background and secular philosophy, and that philosophers with Catholic backgrounds (23%) seemed to form a separate network, we further conducted an MCA on philosophers without Catholic backgrounds, referencing Hjellbrekke [3] practice. This space can be considered a subspace to observe whether more subtle structures would be revealed after excluding the religious-secular dimension (MCA-2.2).

3.4   Limitation and Future Work

Due to data availability, the classification of many position variables is relatively coarse and in some cases inaccurate. For instance, birthplace is categorized simply as Paris versus other locations, and CNRS is grouped together with the Sorbonne under the Paris category for institutional affiliation. Furthermore, there are numerous occupation-related variables that could potentially be included as illustrative variables, such as membership in the Société Française de Philosophie, invitations to participate in society seminars, or editorial roles in specific journals.

The construction of position-taking variables entails more apparent limitations: (1) due to time constraints, the accuracy of topic modeling on textual data and the subsequent clustering from topics to themes has not been formally evaluated; (2) additional cultural, interdisciplinary, and avant-garde journals—such as Revue des Deux Mondes or Esprit—could be incorporated to enrich the dataset.

those affiliated with Paris Suburbs institutions—sharing affinities with similar philosophical practices—experience reduced distances. This highlights the distinct position on the left side of the diagram: squeezed to the periphery of the academic center due to the non-traditional nature of their philosophical practices. However, if we simply project position-takings as supplementary variables onto the space of position, we would miss this observation, and philosophical themes would tend to be placed at the center of the diagram due to these complex relationships.

I have already identified supplementary data sources that could address some of these limitations, including metadata of publications in other journals and records of participants and topics from Société Française de Philosophie seminars. Once data collection is complete, these variables can be added to the models as either active or illustrative variables depending on data completeness. In addition, increasing the sample size is necessary to prevent potential overfitting. I am still manually collecting missing information for authors with incomplete data.

4 Analysis

As described in Section 3.3, we conducted four MCAs: the space of position for the entire sample (MCA-1.1), the space of position for the post-1910 sample (MCA-1.2), the space of position & position-taking for the entire sample (MCA-2.1), and the space of position & position-taking for non-Catholic sample (MCA-2.2). For each MCA, we set the number of dimensions to 5 during modeling [3] and selected the leading dimensions as the top 2 dimensions, which in the end collectively explain at least 60% of the variance for all the models (Table **??**). These two dimensions collectively represent the dominant structure of power and practices within the space [1]. The first axis of all MCAs except MCA-2.2 explains over 50% of the variance, indicating the religious-secular dimension represents a strong, distinct opposing structure within the field.

Axis	MCA-1.1	MCA-1.2	MCA-2.1	MCA-2.2
Axis 1				
Corrected	56.27%	54.61%	61.26%	39.40%
Cumulative	56.27%	54.61%	61.26%	39.40%
Axis 2				
Corrected	17.89%	17.09%	19.55%	23.47%
Cumulative	74.16%	71.70%	80.81%	62.87%
Axis 3				
Corrected	12.35%	13.82%	8.84%	13.30%
Cumulative	86.51%	85.51%	89.66%	76.17%
Axis 4				
Corrected	7.73%	8.61%	5.60%	12.96%
Cumulative	94.24%	94.13%	95.26%	89.13%
Axis 5				
Corrected	5.76%	5.87%	4.74%	10.87%
Cumulative	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 3: Benzécri-corrected rates for each dimension of the MCA models

The structures of MCA-1.1 and MCA-1.2 are highly similar. It is clear that the first axis (horizontal), which explains the largest share of variance, captures an opposition between the religious and the secular. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the far right side of the plot is associated with a Catholic background and employment in religious institutions, whereas scholars without a Catholic background lie on the left side of the horizontal axis. In addition, we observe that scholars working in institutions located in the suburbs of

Paris, as well as female scholars, appear on the far left of the plot. This pattern suggests that these two groups are located at the most secular extreme of the field. Indeed, Considering that institutions in the Paris suburbs, such as the University of Nanterre, were mostly spun off from the University of Paris in the 1970s, and that women only gradually attained higher education status comparable to men after the war, these groups to some extent represent the generation of scholars who grew up after the war, were shaped by the internationalization of academia, and were influenced by the intellectual shock of 1968. In contrast, categories such as scholars employed at central Paris institutions or international institutions, as well as male scholars, cluster around the vertical axis, indicating a more balanced distribution along the religious–secular dimension.

The second axis (vertical), which explains the second largest share of variance, captures differences in academic prestige or academic capital, as suggested by the position of the `PubCount` variable. We can also observe that institutions located in Paris and abroad cluster toward the upper part of the plot, whereas provincial institutions appear toward the bottom; similarly, scholars born in Paris are concentrated toward the top, while those born outside Paris lie toward the bottom. Male and female scholars also differ along this vertical axis to some extent. Together, these features may describe the position of elite scholars within the field at that time, the varying levels of access to academic resources among different groups. Overall, male scholars, those embedded in more international academic networks, and scholars born in Paris tend to cluster toward the more elite pole of the academic field.
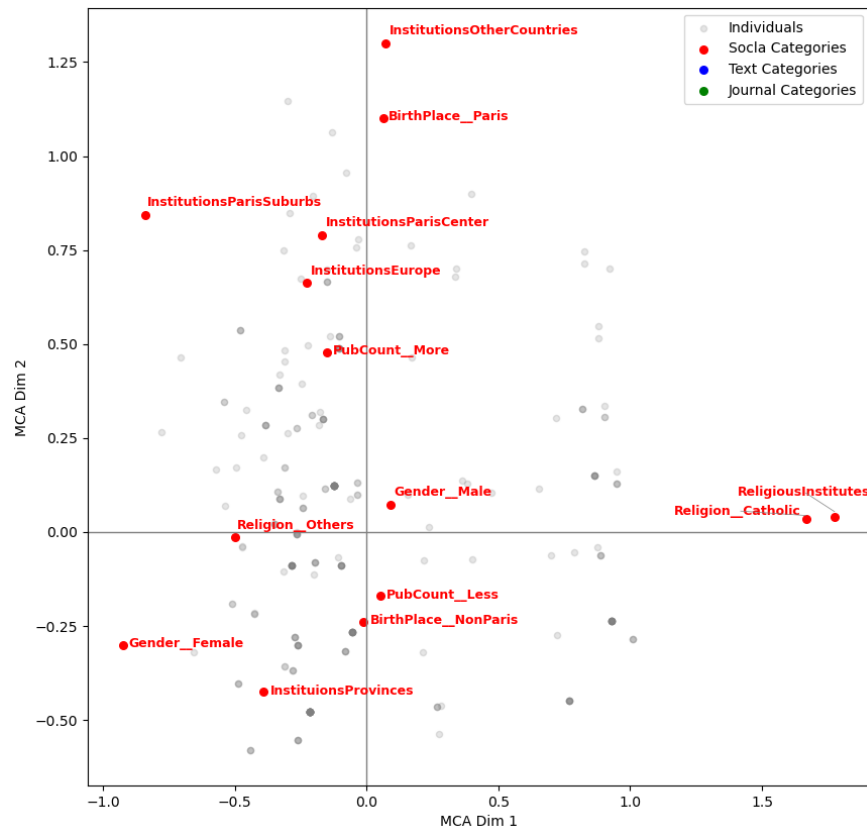

Figure 1: MCA-1.1: Mean Category Points and Individual Points, with Top-2 Axis

There are generational differences in our sample. For instance, earlier cohorts of scholars were almost never employed in institutions located in the Paris suburbs (as such institutions were mostly established after

the 1960s). Almost all scholars from earlier cohorts were men, and provincial scholars in the early period faced relatively few barriers to entering Parisian academic institutions—barriers that intensified only after the postwar expansion of the educational system. After excluding scholars born before 1910, several subtle differences emerge between MCA-1.2 and MCA-1.1 (which includes the full sample). These differences appear mainly along the second axis: in MCA-1.2, the vertical gap between male and female scholars becomes even more pronounced, and Paris-based institutions are located more clearly toward the elite end. This contrast further highlights the regional (Paris vs. provinces) and gendered oppositions embedded in the structure of academic capital.
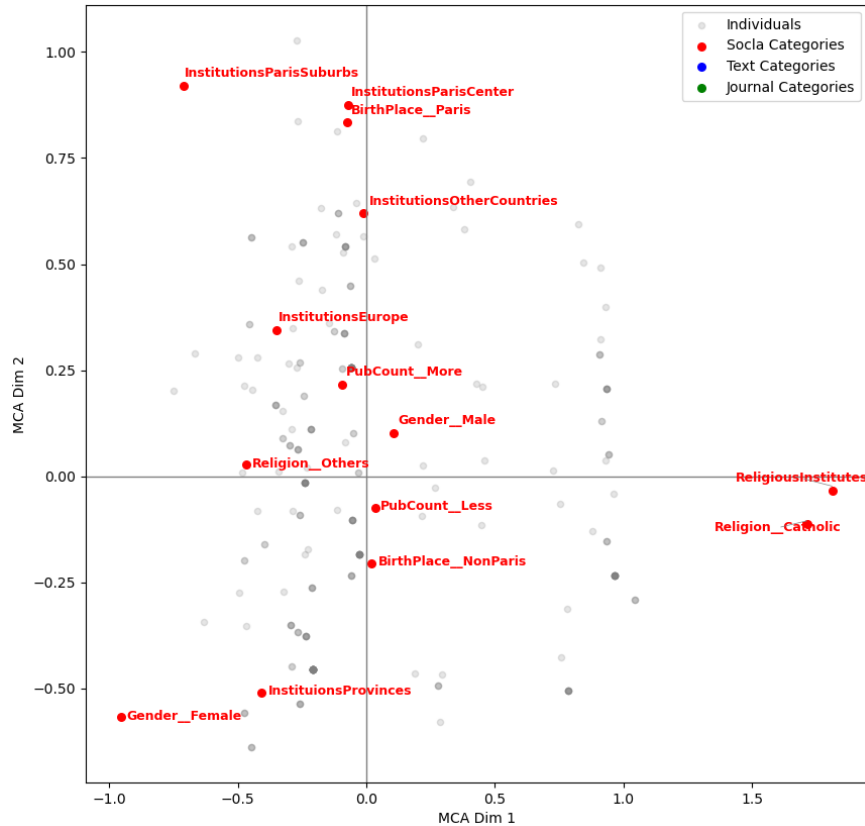

Figure 2: MCA-1.2: Mean Category Points and Individual Points, with Top-2 Axis

As shown in Figure 3, when we jointly model position and position-taking, we observe that the two axis explaining the most variance is generally retained: scholars with religious backgrounds publish more theologically oriented philosophical discussions, while those excluded from the religious-theological network (including women and scholars affiliated with institutions in the Paris suburbs) tend to publish on more secular and technical philosophical topics. On the other hand, the second MCA axis can still be interpreted as reflecting access to academic resources, as indicated by the positioning of the publication volume variable. However, a notable shift occurs: scholars affiliated with Parisian institutions, particularly suburban ones, occupy lower positions along this axis, whereas those affiliated with international institutions remain relatively high. This shift reveals, on the one hand, a composite power structure along the second axis (as illustrated in Figure 4) and, on the other hand, necessitates an explanation of how the inclusion of philosophical practice variables interacts with this pattern. Specifically, topics associated with high theoretical tradition and classical or early modern philosophy cluster at the top (international institutions / Paris-born scholars), whereas

relatively interdisciplinary, emerging, and analytically oriented philosophical topics cluster near the bottom (suburban Paris / provincial institutions / scholars born outside Paris / female scholars). This indicates that philosophers with greater access to broad and elite academic resources were also typically those who received rigorous and traditional theoretical training. For example, Sensibility and Psychoanalysis required substantial aesthetic and psychiatric training, which at the time was almost exclusively available in Paris. These findings thus support Bourdieu's theory that an individual's initial capital shapes the trajectory of their capital accumulation within the field. Moreover, the observed affinity between institutional affiliation and philosophical practices suggests that a philosopher's embedding within academic networks is strongly associated with their intellectual interests, helping us better understand the relationship between positions and practices within this field.
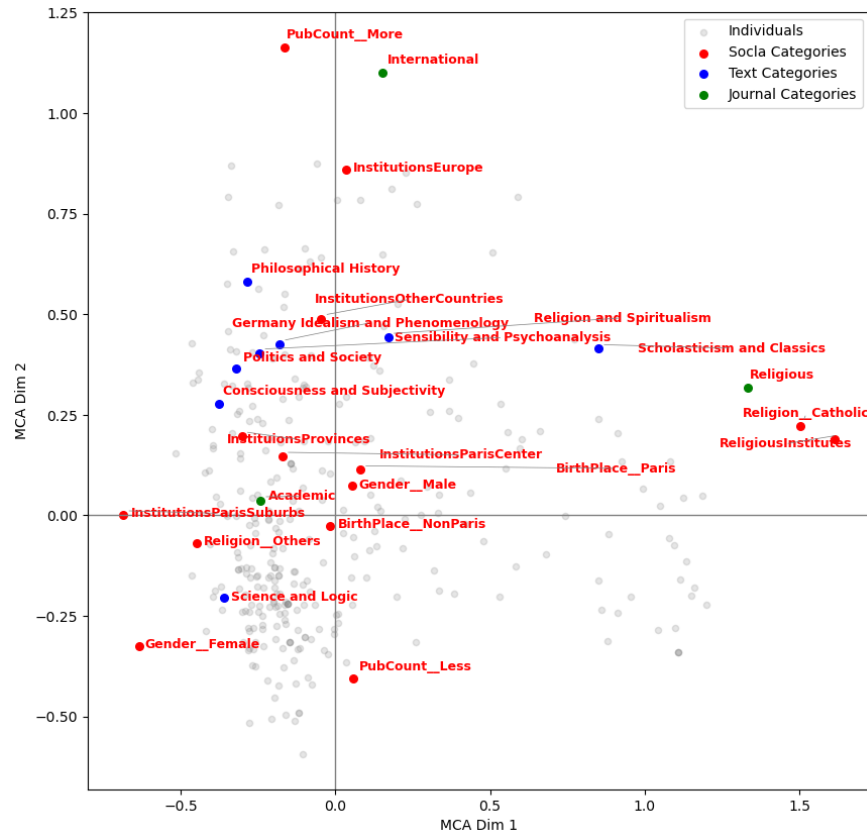

Figure 3: MCA-2.1: Mean Category Points and Individual Points, with Top-2 Axis

As noted above, the change in the second axis in MCA-2.1 relative to MCA-1.1 suggests that this axis captures a multidimensional structure of power and practice. Considering that scholars with a Catholic background occupy relatively isolated positions and exhibit distinct patterns of practice, we excluded them from the analysis (thereby weakening the first axis, i.e., the religion–secular dimension) to examine whether the second axis reveals internal differentiation.

Figure 4 shows that the original second axis appears to have split into two largely independent axes: one reflecting access to international academic networks (first axis) and the other reflecting access to Parisian academic resources (second axis). Differences between male and female scholars are primarily observed in terms of access to international networks (noting that many women are affiliated with suburban Paris institutions), and, interestingly, publication volume also largely depends on the extent of a scholar's embedding
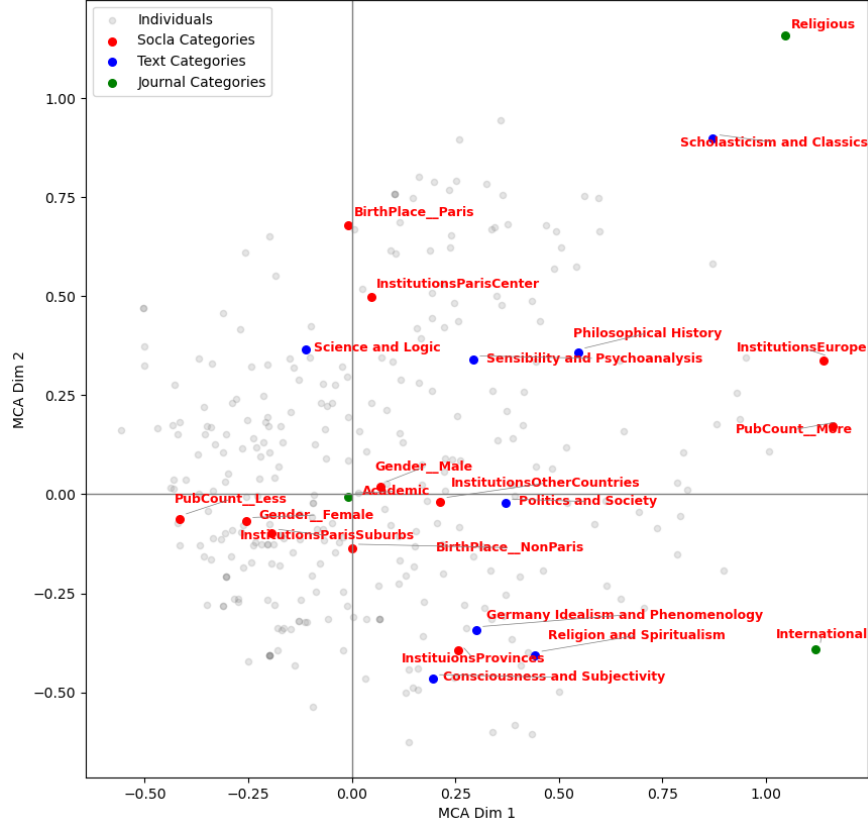
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Figure 4: MCA-2.2: Mean Category Points and Individual Points, with Top-2 Axis

within international networks. Paris-centered academic resources were almost exclusively accessible to Paris-born scholars, whereas non-Paris-born scholars were more likely to enter emerging institutions in suburban Paris or take positions in the provinces.

Similarly, we can observe the relationship between philosophical practices and these positions. International networks tend to favor topics rooted in strong theoretical traditions, such as philosophical history and scholastic philosophy, while analytically oriented topics, such as science, logic, and consciousness (psychology), are less favored. This pattern mirrors the ordering along the second axis in Figure 3. Conversely, scholars in provincial institutions are more likely to publish on issues related to idealism, whereas Parisian scholars tend to focus on empirical topics. This also illustrates that scholars with similar intellectual interests tend to cluster within proximate networks.

Overall, it was precisely the topics positioned closer to the Parisian and international academic networks that later came to dominate perceptions of French theoretical thought.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

We find that the postwar French philosophical landscape exhibited a multidimensional structure of power and practice: the network of Catholic philosophers continued to play a relatively independent yet highly prestigious role within the French philosophical sphere at the time. This helps explain why the later phase of the French phenomenological movement underwent a theological turn and rapidly gained international

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influence. More generally, we observe a clear correlation between scholars' social and institutional positions and their philosophical practices. The distribution of academic resources and the types of philosophical themes jointly shape core-periphery distinctions. We further find that international academic networks and the domestic Parisian academic network appear as two independent, competing resources. Embedding in international networks correlates more strongly with scholars' publication output (a proxy for academic prestige), from which women are excluded.

Therefore, by simultaneously incorporating both scholars' position and position-taking variables into our analysis, we extend Bourdieu's study of the academic field in Homo Academicus. This approach moves beyond focusing solely on social origin and career trajectories to also reflect specific patterns of knowledge production. Consequently, it reveals the complex interplay between academic capital, social background, and intellectual practices within the philosophical field at that period. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the popularity of philosophical themes and the transmission of theoretical traditions should be understood in conjunction with other social spaces and forms of capital.

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