

Philosophical Practices, Capital Structures and Academic Networks: The French Philosophers after World War II

Zeyuan Chen, Master student in Social Sciences - DiMS

December 3, 2025

1 Introduction

2 Literature Review

3 Theory

4 Data and Methods

4.1 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, and it allows us to observe the transformation around 1968. 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. The collection of nationality and other biographical information, along with the name disambiguation strategy, is detailed in Section 4.2. The threshold of three publications retains 713 disambiguated names from over 2,000 entries. Authors excluded were either scholars born too early or too late, 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.

4.2 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 depict their prestige within the academic field;

- 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 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, 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.

These 296 authors published 2,496 research articles (after filtering out non-research articles) in the eight core philosophy journals, and almost all of them were single-authored. Figure 1 reports the trend of publication counts in these eight journals over 40 years for the 296 authors.

4.3 Empirical Strategy: MCA

MCA modeling primarily follows Bourdieu’s work in *Homo Academicus* [1], as well as Hjellbrekke’s analysis of the Norwegian literary field [2], since the types of fields examined and the variables used in these two studies are relatively close to those in this research.

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

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

constructed by the MCA, which affects our interpretation. Therefore, following Hjellbrekke [2], 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. 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.
- Next, we conduct MCA only on the second set of variables, including the eight themes and the eight journals. An author is coded as 1 on a theme/journal dummy if they have published in that theme/journal, and 0 otherwise. This space is interpreted as the space of philosophical practices, that is, position-takings.
- Finally, we conduct MCA on the two sets of variables together. At this step, the eight journals are replaced with the three journal types in order to reduce dimensionality and prevent overfitting that would reduce interpretability. The space obtained from this MCA is used to examine the homology between positions and position-takings.

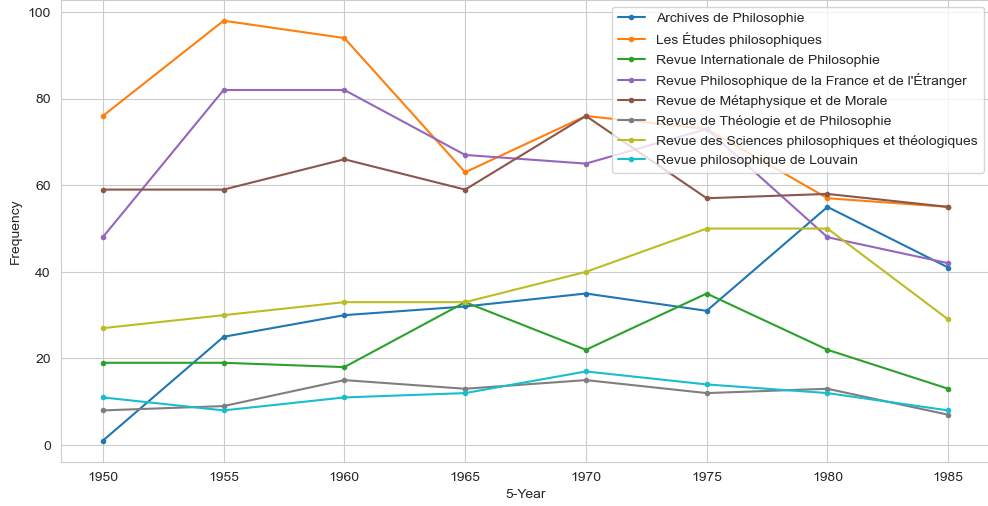


Figure 1: Publication Trends of Samples in Core Journals by every 5-year

4.4 Limitation and Future Work

5 Analysis

As described in Section 4.3, 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 philosophical practices for the entire sample (MCA-2), and the space of position & position-taking for the entire sample (MCA-3). For each MCA, we set the number of dimensions to 5 during modeling [2] and selected the leading dimensions as the top k dimensions that collectively explain at least 70% of the variance. These dimensions represent the dominant types of capital within the space [1]. For all four MCA models, k was 2 (Table 3). The first axis of all four MCAs explains over 50% of the variance, indicating the presence of a strong, distinct opposing structure within the field.

The structures of MCA-1.1 and MCA-1.2 are highly similar. It is clear that the first axis, which explains the largest share of variance, captures an opposition between the religious and the secular. As shown in Figure 2a and Figure 2b, 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, 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 (scholars who sought to advance philosophical discussion through interdisciplinary and avant-garde theoretical practices). 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, 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

Axis	MCA-1.2	MCA-1.1	MCA-2	MCA-3
Axis 1				
Corrected	54.61%	56.27%	52.82%	61.26%
Cumulative	54.61%	56.27%	52.82%	61.26%
Axis 2				
Corrected	17.09%	17.89%	21.23%	19.55%
Cumulative	71.70%	74.16%	74.05%	80.81%
Axis 3				
Corrected	13.82%	12.35%	13.95%	8.84%
Cumulative	85.51%	86.51%	88.00%	89.66%
Axis 4				
Corrected	8.61%	7.73%	6.32%	5.60%
Cumulative	94.13%	94.24%	94.31%	95.26%
Axis 5				
Corrected	5.87%	5.76%	5.69%	4.74%
Cumulative	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

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

those born outside Paris lie toward the bottom. Male and female scholars also differ along this vertical axis to some extent. Together, these features describe the position of elite scholars within the field at that time. 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.

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 2c maps the space of philosophical practices. Unsurprisingly, the first axis of MCA-2, which explains the largest share of variance, also represents an opposition between the secular and the religious. On the right-hand side of the plot are the topic of Scholastic philosophy and the journal *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, a venue with a strong theological orientation founded by the Dominicans. Similarly, the topic Religion and Spiritualism reflects a certain religious inclination. By contrast, the left-hand side clusters more technical philosophical topics and journals concerned with non-religious philosophical issues. Notably, the three journals categorized as *Academic*, i.e., *Les Études philosophiques*, *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, and *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, all appear on the left. These journals were

founded by professional philosophers in the traditional sense. In addition, Archives de Philosophie, a Jesuit-founded journal, is also positioned on the left of the vertical axis, consistent with its broad engagement with diverse philosophical debates. The journal showed early interest in the phenomenological movement and later incorporated discussions of psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, and North American philosophy.

The second axis of MCA-2, which explains the next largest share of variance, represents a contrast between transcendence and immanence within philosophical traditions, or alternatively, between rational-idealist and empiricist orientations. Scholars positioned at the top tend to publish on topics related to religion, spirituality, consciousness, and German phenomenology, whereas those at the bottom are more concerned with sensibility and philosophy of science. Although not entirely precise, this dimension may also be interpreted as an opposition between the traditional and the radical. For example, Georges Canguilhem, whose work shaped a generation of radical thinkers including Macherey, Foucault, and Althusser, published primarily (60%) in the two topics located at the bottom. The topics of History of Philosophy and Critical Theory of the Political and Social lie near the center, which accurately reflects their distinctive position in philosophical practice: scholars across camps and generations engage with these domains. Topic modeling based on word frequency and co-occurrence is ill-suited to capture the qualitative differences in how different groups approach these topics; as a result, they are positioned near the horizontal axis. Earlier generations may have adopted a traditional approach to the history of philosophy, while later historians of philosophy (for instance, Gilles Deleuze) addressed figures like Hume and Spinoza in more revolutionary ways. In fact, contemporary imaginaries of “French Theory” are to a large extent shaped by these two topics, which likely constituted the intellectual battleground on which opposing groups of scholars struggled within the field of philosophical practice.

Finally, as shown in Figure 2d, when we jointly model position and position-taking, we observe that the first axis explaining the most variance is 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 philosophical topics. However, on the second axis explaining the next-highest variance, while the overall structure of the space of positions (academic prestige / social origin) is largely preserved, the opposition between idealism and empiricism previously evident in Figure 2c is disrupted. This indicates that this thematic axis does not fully align with the field structure. Furthermore, the distances between categories along the vertical axis appear somewhat compressed. This reflects a limitation of the MCA method noted in Section 4.3: when variables of different types are plotted together, distinctions between certain categories can be neutralized.

However, the second axis does reveal several new substantive insights. Overall, the second axis reflects an opposition between high international influence/strong theoretical traditions and low international influence/weak theoretical traditions:

- First, we observe that institutions located in Paris, especially those in the Paris suburbs, are pulled substantially toward the center of the plot, whereas foreign institutions appear much higher on the dimension of academic prestige. This shift allows the vertical axis to distinguish scholars with influence in international networks from those whose influence is largely confined to the domestic elite academic sphere. Correspondingly, we notice that the topics *Philosophical History* and *Politics and Society* are pulled upward because of their proximity to international-network categories. This partly explains why, for a long period, international perceptions of “French theory” were dominated by these two themes.
- Another topic that moves considerably is *Sensibility and Psychoanalysis*. In addition to more interest from international philosophical networks, a further explanation may lie in the fact that this topic

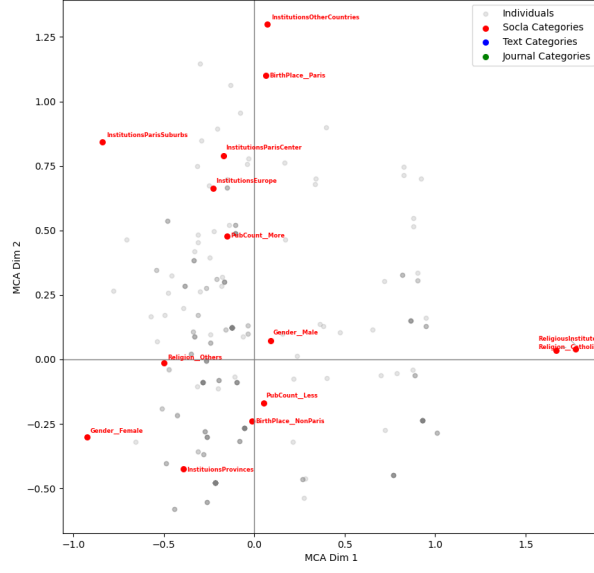
includes work on aesthetics and psychoanalysis—two traditions typically accessible exclusively through elite philosophical training. As a result, this theme is drawn closer to the categories *BirthPlace_Paris* and *InstitutionsParisCenter*.

- Theological and religious topics retain relatively high academic prestige. This is reasonable, since even after 1968 the development of French philosophical thought remained closely intertwined with theological traditions. This suggests the continued influence of Catholic scholarly networks in the French philosophical field. A typical case is Jean-Luc Marion, who introduced strong theological elements into Cartesian and Husserlian studies.
- The categories *BirthPlace_NonParis* and *Gender_Female* remain in the lower part of the plot, indicating that their scholarly influence tends to be confined within the national context (their philosophical practices are excluded from international journals) and that they also enjoy lower prestige domestically. Correspondingly, the topic *Science and Logic* is closest to them, suggesting that their philosophical interests are more likely to lie in areas with lower theoretical load (while the topics in the upper part of the plot carry heavier theoretical traditions). Notably, Fabiani [3], in his analysis of the philosophical field of the late nineteenth century, similarly identified an opposition between science and theology, in which newcomers to the field were more likely to adopt scientific positions.
- Finally, an interesting shift is that the new institutions in the Paris suburbs appear lower on the vertical axis, even lower than institutions in the provinces. This is largely due to the differences in their philosophical orientations: provincial institutions may retain an interest in traditional philosophical theory, whereas Paris suburbs institutions more radically explored interdisciplinary and emergent topics. Scholars from disadvantaged backgrounds can thus secure a place within the domestic academic sphere through these emerging institutions, rather than being wholly excluded by elite scholars with strong theoretical training and classical formation.

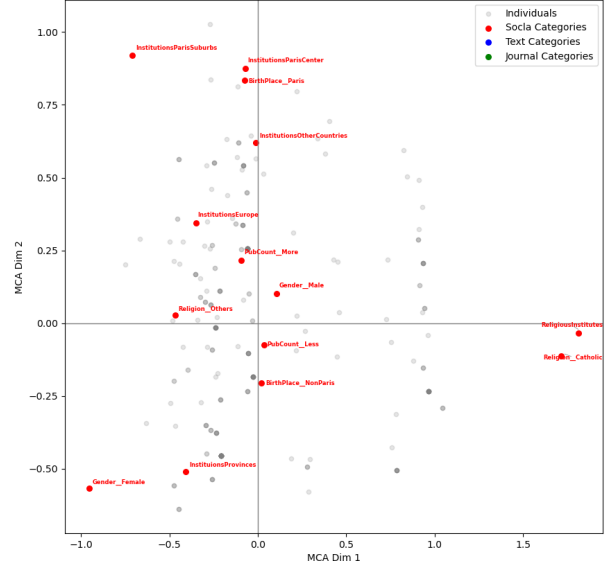
6 Discussion and Conclusion

References

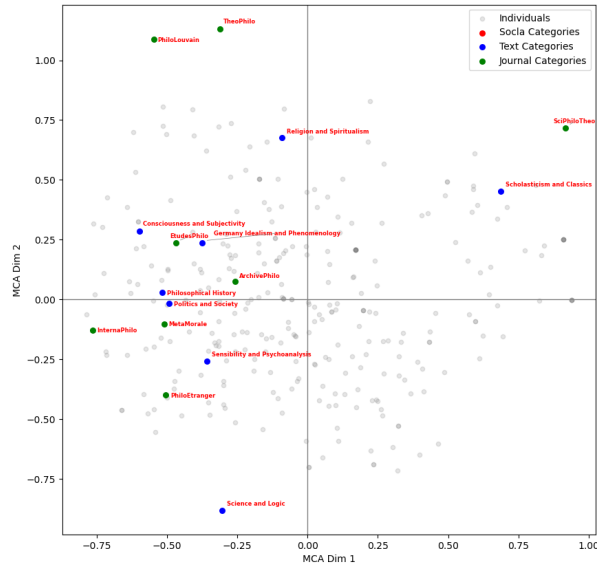
- [1] Pierre Bourdieu. *Homo academicus*. Stanford University Press, 1988.
- [2] Johs Hjelbrekke et al. “Literary practices, capital structures and political position-taking: The Norwegian writers during World War II”. In: *Poetics* 109 (2025), p. 101981.
- [3] Jean-Louis Fabiani. *Les philosophes de la République*. Les Editions de Minuit, 1988.



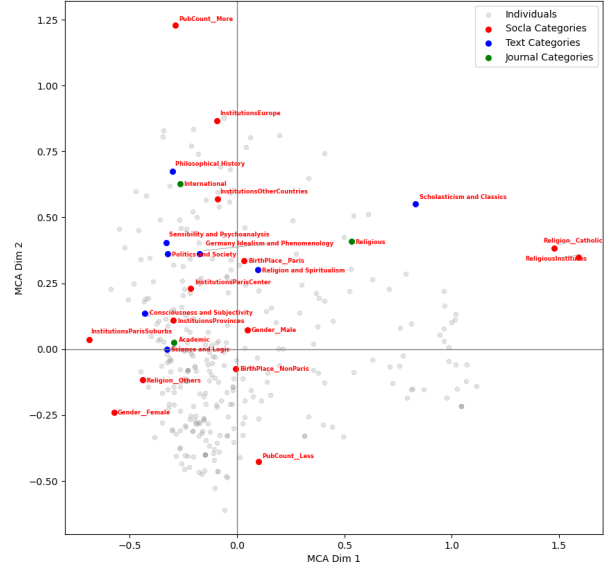
(a) MCA-1.1



(b) MCA-1.2



(c) MCA-2



(d) MCA-3

Figure 2: Mean Category Points and Individual Points of Four MCA Models, with Top-2 Axis