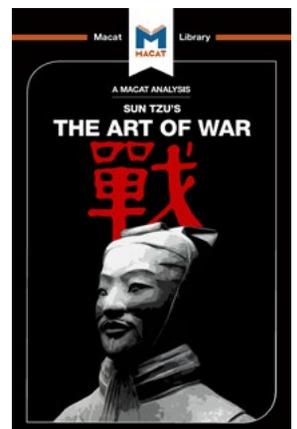
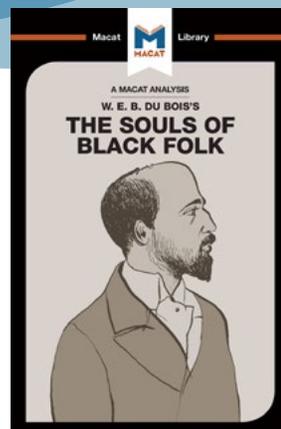
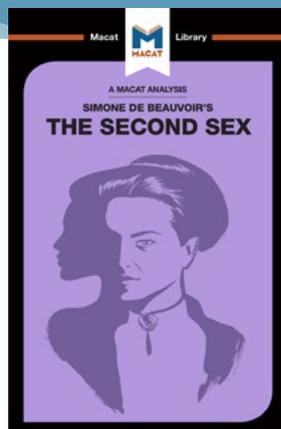
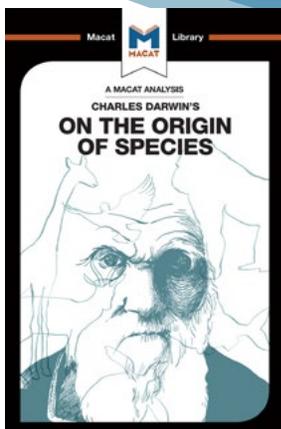
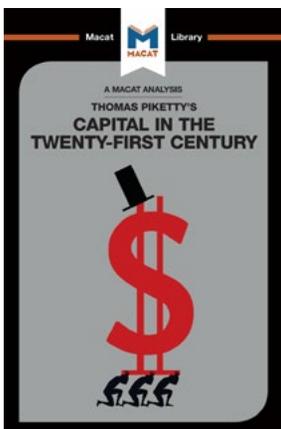


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# INTRODUCTION

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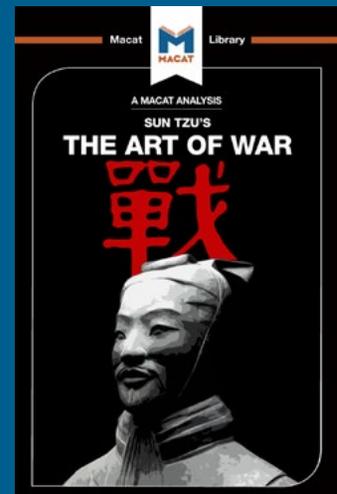
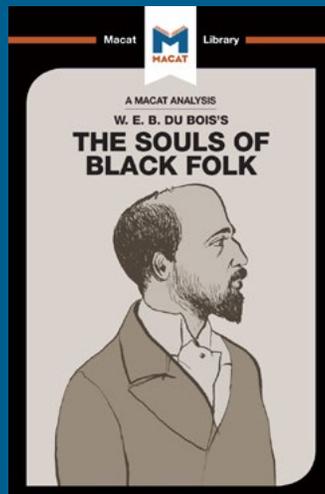
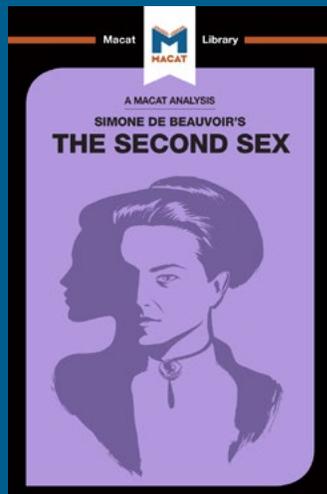
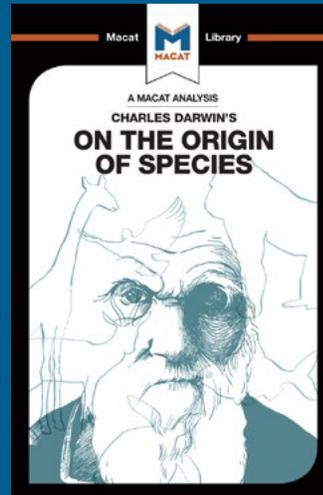
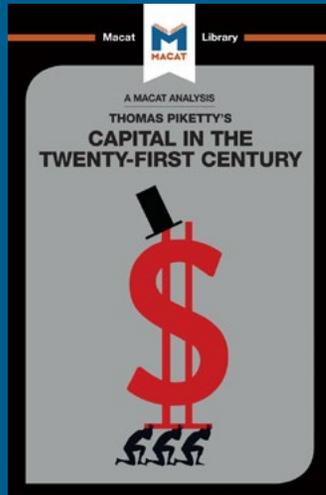
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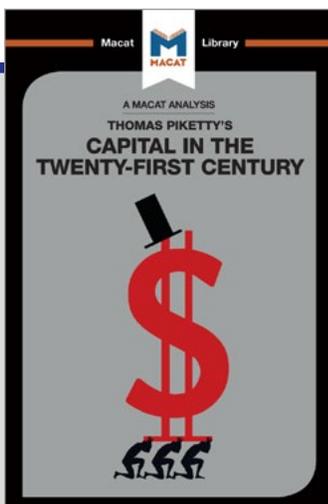
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CHAPTER

1

# AN ANALYSIS OF THOMAS PIKETTY'S *CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY*

**NICK BROTEN,**  
CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY



This chapter is excerpted from  
*Thomas Piketty's Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

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# CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Thomas Piketty

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## WAYS IN TO THE TEXT

### KEY POINTS

- Thomas Piketty is a French economist who has made major contributions to the study of wealth and income inequality.
- *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* is the result of Piketty spending 15 years gathering real-world data on inequality. This data was sourced from several countries and covers a period of more than two centuries.
- The book makes the argument that market economies do not naturally tend towards equality. In fact, the opposite may be true: that they have a natural tendency towards greater inequality.

### *Who Is Thomas Piketty?*

Thomas Piketty was born in France in 1971 and is one of the world's leading young economists, best known for his work on wealth and income inequality—the gap between the rich and the poor. His academic output since the early 2000s has focused on measuring wealth and income inequality in several countries over the past three centuries. As part of this work, he has built the biggest database on inequality ever assembled.

Piketty was a young academic star in America, receiving a professorship in economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1993 when he was just 22. Unhappy with what he considered the over-mathematical American style of economics, however, he stayed there just three years before returning to his hometown of Paris.

In 2006, Piketty played a key role in founding the Paris School of Economics and, most important for this work, began developing the World Top Incomes Database (WTID). This huge collection of data forms the backbone of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Since 2001, he has also published several papers on income and wealth inequality, all leading up to the 577-page *Capital*. The book mainly draws on in-depth analyses of the United States, France, Germany, Britain, and Japan and examines the period from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century.

*Capital* is notable for the history and geography it covers, but also for how much attention it received in the news media. Published in 2013 following the financial crisis of 2007–08, the book appeared at a time when discussions about economic inequality in the United States and Europe were at their peak. Politicians, economists,

# CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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and the public at large were debating how markets—meaning the economy, which is mostly in private hands—can be regulated to maximize people’s welfare and avoid the growing gap between the rich and the poor. This debate is ongoing and, to some extent, Piketty’s long-term reputation will depend on how much his forecasts of increasing inequality prove to be true.

## *What Does Capital Say?*

*Capital* challenges the view widely held among economists that the economy has a natural tendency to close the gap between rich and poor. This idea is sometimes associated with the Belarusian-American economist Simon Kuznets and the Kuznets Curve that he proposed in the 1950s and 1960s. The Curve is a graph that illustrates Kuznets’ finding that, in market economies, inequality will first increase as a country moves from an agricultural to an industrial base, and then it will fall. Kuznets based this idea on the data available to him and saw this pattern emerging in America from the 1870s to the early twentieth century.

In *Capital*, Piketty extends Kuznets’ data to the early twenty-first century. He then divides that historical stretch into three periods. The first period—dating from 1871 to the beginning of World War I—was known as the Belle Epoque for its peace and artistic flourishing. That period saw very high inequality in Europe and, in a smaller way, the United States. In the period from 1914 to the mid-twentieth century, inequality fell quickly and remained low. Since 1980, inequality has grown in most countries, although the increase has been greatest in the United States. Piketty warns that inequality will heighten further unless governments adopt policies to counter it. He calls for a global tax on wealth.

To Piketty, the three periods he describes in *Capital* confirm his idea that markets will naturally move toward inequality, making the gap between rich and poor bigger, not smaller. Only when major shocks destroyed a sizeable amount of the wealth of the rich did inequality fall to a low level and remain there for some time. These shocks were primarily caused by the following:

- Two World Wars
- A global depression—a long term and severe downturn in economic output
- Progressive taxation—a system whereby higher earners are taxed at a higher rate.

All this leads Piketty in *Capital* to the central conflict of capitalism, an economic system based on private ownership, private enterprise and the maximization of profit.

# CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Thomas Piketty

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Throughout history, and with very few exceptions, the rate of return on capital—the interest or profit you can earn by investing, which he calls  $r$ —has been bigger than the growth rate of the economy, which he calls  $g$ .

Specifically,  $r$  has been quite constant—around 5 percent per year—despite big changes to the makeup of capital (for example, the economy going from mostly agricultural to industrial to information-based). Capital means effectively a person's wealth assets, including money, stocks and bonds, and land.

In contrast, for most of human history,  $g$  has been close to zero; the total output, including the salaries that most people live off, has not increased. Only in the last two centuries did  $g$  reach a level of 1–2 percent. The key point for Piketty is that  $r > g$  ( $r$  is greater than  $g$ ). Since capital is mostly held by the rich, even the so-called *rentiers*—people who live off of inherited capital—will be able to grow richer from generation to generation more quickly than people who depend on their work.

*Capital* has already changed the debate about inequality, but the book's long-term impact is yet to be seen. Most leading economists have responded to it in some way, and more generally it has raised the profile of economic research that studies real-world situations. American economist Tyler Cowen wrote: "Piketty's tome will put capitalist wealth back at the center of public debate, resurrect interest in the subject of wealth distribution, and revolutionize how people view the history of income inequality."

Perhaps most important, Piketty's call for a tax on wealth has entered the political debate. As an example, in his 2015 State of the Union Address, US President Barack Obama attacked gaps in taxes on the wealthy, saying: "Let's close loopholes that lead to inequality by allowing the top 1 percent to avoid paying taxes on their accumulated wealth."

## *Why Does Capital Matter?*

Students reading *Capital* will receive a lesson in the economic history of the two centuries plus that make up the modern industrial period.\* The book contains rich historical examples and dozens of charts that visually show the big changes to the economies of several countries over this time. In some cases, notably the United States and France, Piketty explores in-depth the sociological and political factors that shaped how wealth has spread. The huge amounts of data that he has collected allow him to write a rich and detailed account. *Capital* is a good entry point for students with little experience in data analysis, as Piketty's techniques are not complex but still lead to strong conclusions.

# CAPITAL IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Thomas Piketty

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*Capital* is also an excellent example of abstract economic reasoning and a good first look at the economy for students without a technical economics background. The book is not just data and charts. Piketty weaves his data together using economic theories in a way that is both simple and yet full of detail. Students who take the time to explore his technical appendix and grasp his main theory will learn how complex situations can be analyzed with simple theoretical tools. In that sense, *Capital* is an excellent introduction to economic modeling, even if some of his ideas are controversial.

More generally, readers of *Capital* will practice their critical-thinking skills. The book's conclusions are clearly stated and well supported with evidence, but big questions surround several of Piketty's ideas. While some readers have criticized the author purely because they don't like the policies he calls for, many others have made strong and thoughtful challenges to *Capital*. Readers who engage with this criticism and decide where they themselves stand will be well equipped to judge other, less thorny, disputes.

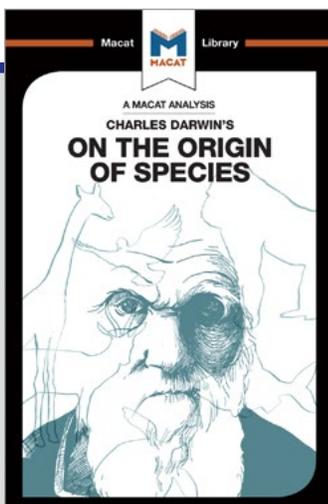
**Nick Broten** was educated at the California Institute of Technology and the London School of Economics. He is doing postgraduate work at the Pardee RAND Graduate School and works as an assistant policy analyst at RAND. His current policy interests include designing distribution methods for end-of-life care, closing labour market skill gaps, and understanding biases in risk-taking by venture capitalists.

CHAPTER

# 2

## AN ANALYSIS OF CHARLES DARWIN'S *ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES*

**KATHLEEN BRYSON,**  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON  
**NADEZDA JOSEPHINE MSINDAI,**  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON



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*Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species*

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# ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

CHARLES DARWIN

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## MODULE 3: THE PROBLEM

“How have all those exquisite adaptations of one part of the organization to another part, and to the conditions of life, and of one distinct organic being to another being, been perfected?”

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*

### KEY POINTS

- Organisms change and adapt in nature according to their specific environment and the organisms they are descended from.
- Biblical literalists (those who take the explanations offered by the Bible literally) disagreed; some esteemed scientists agreed with them.
- Darwin proposed that species do indeed change over time, and set out to discover the mechanism that underpins such changes.

### Core Question

*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* by Charles Darwin explains how all life on earth has evolved by the process of natural selection.

At the core of Darwin’s investigation are the questions as to why some animals and plants have continued to exist for long periods of time while others have become extinct, and why there are similarities between many of these extinct forms and present-day species.

In the nineteenth century, it was assumed that the world and its inhabitants had always been the same and that everything was created by God. After his voyage around the world on the *Beagle*, Darwin began to question this doctrine, having seen firsthand evidence in the geology of South America and its fossils that contradicted this belief. By 1837, he was convinced that life had evolved, and he wanted to know how these evolutionary changes had taken place. Over time he would come to believe that new species come about not as the result of divine intervention but by adapting to changing conditions.

### The Participants

Christian doctrine claimed that the world had not changed since God created it, which placed a 6,000-year limit on the age of the planet. If the earth never changes

# ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

CHARLES DARWIN

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physically, then there is no need for living things to alter either. In 1749, however, the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc (later Comte de Buffon) questioned this, arguing that life had a history of its own and that the earth was more than 6,000 years old. Buffon also observed similarities between humans and other primates such as chimpanzees, and suggested that human beings and the other apes share a common ancestry. While he raised the idea of biological change, Buffon did not, however, provide a coherent mechanism for how such changes occur.

The naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck presented another challenge to the biblical view in his *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809), offering a theory of evolution based on the mutation of species: his argument was that environmental challenges could force species to modify their bodies over time to gain personal advantage. He also suggested that offspring inherit these modifications from their parents. In 1826, the British naturalist Robert Grant began to speak publicly about evolution and promoted Lamarck's theory of transmutation of species in Britain.

In response to these challenges to creationism, Bishop William Paley argued that adaptations are the supernatural creation of God; the anatomist Georges Cuvier also criticized Lamarck's ideas, insisting that species are immutable (unchanging, and unchangeable). He did not reject evolution for religious reasons, however, but for reasons to do with evidence—the fossil record did not show any striving toward perfection. For Cuvier, catastrophic changes were followed by acts of spontaneous generation.

### *The Contemporary Debate*

In the 1700s, geologists began to discover rocks that contained within them records of previous extinction events (periods when large numbers of species die out simultaneously). Scientists at the time tried to accommodate Christian belief by introducing the theory of intermittent catastrophes, which posited that after each disaster, God had recreated the living forms on earth. The final catastrophe was Noah's flood. Such explanations nevertheless failed to explain why some animal types had perished during these events, while others had survived: a badger species existed in the Miocene Age, for example, that was almost identical to the badger of the present day.

Building on the evidence from fossils found in ancient rocks, in 1788 the Scottish geologist James Hutton introduced the theory of uniformitarianism: the idea that the earth had undergone continuous physical change in the past and that the same

# ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

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transformative process is continuing to the present day. This change is constant and gradual rather than a series of catastrophic events. Hutton's theory was largely overlooked until the nineteenth century, when the geologist Charles Lyell sought to develop and popularize it.

The French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck made a forceful argument in his *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809). Having absorbed the ideas of essentialism from the thought of the Greek philosopher Plato, according to which any animal or physical object possesses a set of attributes necessary to its identity and function, and also that of the Great Chain of Being (the idea that organisms are structured hierarchically, with those higher up superior to those below), Lamarck believed that all living things are engaged in a constant struggle to reach ever-greater complexity. Their ultimate goal is to become as complex as man. As some organisms become more complex, gaps appear at the bottom of the ladder, to be filled by simple, spontaneously generated organisms. Lamarck thought that two forces direct this process: the inherent drive toward complexity, and the environment. Living things, he believed, rise to ecological challenges by modifying their bodies, and these changes are passed on to the next generation. His argument was so persuasive that it remained the most influential evolutionary theory until that of Darwin and the Welsh naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, who came to very similar conclusions.

However, Lamarck's theory of the transmutation of species was associated with the radical materialism of the Enlightenment ("materialism" here means the assumption that all physical phenomena have physical causes), and was greeted with hostility. In his youth Darwin had read Bishop's Paley's *Natural Theology* (1809), a book written partly in response to this theory. In it, Paley declares adaptations to be the supernatural creations of God. Indeed, the existence of such adaptations in nature provides one of the main philosophical arguments for the existence of God. This is known as the argument for "providential design."

Lyell also criticized Lamarck's theories in *Principles of Geology* (1830, 1833). Although Lyell wrote about uniform change in inorganic matter, he refused to believe in the possibility of biological change. Instead, he proposed that each species has its "centre of creation" and is designed for a particular environment; species become extinct when the environment that supports them changes.

# ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

CHARLES DARWIN

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**Kathleen Bryson** is a PhD candidate in evolutionary anthropology at University College, London, where the focus of her research is on the cognitive and adaptative roots of prejudice and discrimination in humans and other apes.

**Nadezda Josephine Msindai** is a PhD candidate in evolutionary anthropology at University College, London, where she is examining construction behaviour in an introduced population of chimpanzees.

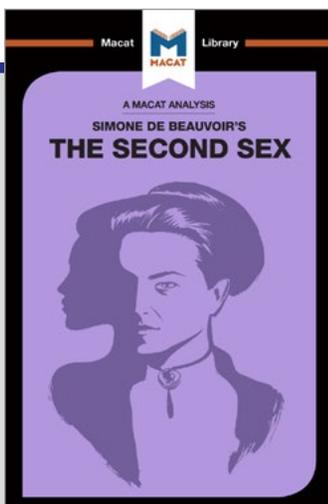
CHAPTER

# 3

## AN ANALYSIS OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S

*THE SECOND SEX*

**RACHELE DINI,  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**



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*Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex*

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# THE SECOND SEX

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

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## MODULE 5: MAIN IDEAS

“To recognize in woman a human being is not to impoverish man’s experience ... To discard the myths is not to destroy all dramatic relation between the sexes ... it is not to do away with poetry, love, adventure, happiness, dreaming. It is simply to ask that behavior, sentiment, passion be founded upon the truth.”

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

### KEY POINTS

- Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* argues that the world has always been run for the benefit of men.
- De Beauvoir insists that women must be treated as equal to men if civilization is to advance.
- She traces the long history of women’s secondary status, argues they are effectively treated as objects, and examines what lies behind popular ideas about what it is to be female.

### Key Themes

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir looks at the broad sweep of history to chart the oppression of women from earliest times to the modern day. She argues that the world is run for the benefit of men first and women second.

Her challenge to this patriarchal society has several themes—sexual equality, female objectification (treating women as objects), socio-economic unfairness, and how cultural myths influence the way people behave and think.

De Beauvoir sets out to analyze gender relations in every area of life. She covers the home and the workplace, the social sphere and politics, literature and art, religion and popular culture. She writes about the roots of women’s status as secondary citizens, then explores what their oppression means for society as a whole.

The book investigates deep-seated beliefs about femininity, showing how women are taught from childhood to view themselves negatively in relation to men. Her analysis of gender relations shows how women’s lives are shaped by the ambitions and desires of their fathers, brothers, and husbands: “To pose woman is to pose the absolute Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being.” Traditional institutions such as marriage, de

# THE SECOND SEX

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Beauvoir argues, result in women's enslavement by relegating them to the roles of wife, mother, servant, and caretaker.

De Beauvoir's main argument is that these oppressive forces are not only damaging to women, but to society as a whole. She proposes that equality between the sexes is *necessary* for human progress, and that female emancipation would benefit all society. In *The Second Sex* she champions egalitarianism, the belief that all humans should be treated the same way. She insists that women and men are not inherently different, but that society treats them as being different.

## *Exploring the Ideas*

*The Second Sex* argues that women have been oppressed since the beginning of the human race. This makes the fight for emancipation (or liberation) twice as difficult because, unlike Jewish people or African Americans, women have no previous experience of freedom and no shared history.

De Beauvoir shows that women have never held domestic and public influence at the same time. For example, she notes how in Ancient Greece women had legal powers such as the right to buy or sell property but they had virtually no power in the home. The women's quarters were at the back of the house, and mothers had no control over their children's upbringing. Women in Ancient Rome, by contrast, had no legal powers but inhabited the central quarters of the home, and had limited powers such as the right to manage the servants and their children's tutors. For de Beauvoir, these instances show that women's legal freedom comes at the expense of domestic freedom, and domestic freedom comes at the expense of legal freedom. Only men have both.

This means "woman's place in society is that which man assigns to her; at no time has she ever imposed her own law." And since men have greater economic, political, and social power, they also play a more prominent role in cultural and historical events. De Beauvoir observes, "it is not the inferiority of women that has caused their historical insignificance: it is rather their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority."

De Beauvoir argues that this inferior status influences all aspects of a woman's experience. Building on the existentialist idea that identity is produced rather than being something that is inside of us from the very start, de Beauvoir argues that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman." In other words, femininity is learned. The criteria for defining femininity also ensure that women see themselves as inferior.

# THE SECOND SEX

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For de Beauvoir, femininity is a social construct with a political subtext. That means our understanding of feminine behavior is influenced by custom, culture, and language, all designed to underline women's inferior status to men. We associate femininity with physical weakness and emotional vulnerability, reinforcing the belief that women are unsuitable for the workforce or for positions of leadership.

## *Language and Expression*

De Beauvoir saw herself first and foremost as a writer of novels and autobiographies. It may be the reason why her philosophical writings are much more accessible than those of her contemporaries. Compared with the work of fellow thinker and de Beauvoir's partner Jean-Paul Sartre, her writing is largely free of jargon. She assumes little knowledge of psychoanalysis or existentialist thought on the reader's part, and explains tricky theoretical concepts clearly before giving her reasons for opposing them.

For English-language readers, the text's main challenge is how it was abridged. The original French version of *The Second Sex* is more than 900 pages long, but the book's first translator, H. M. Parshley, cut out nearly 300 pages. He left out significant chunks of two of its most important sections, including the one on history and the essay on marriage.

Philosopher Margaret Simons argued that Parshley, a zoologist, was not qualified to translate a book on philosophy and the book suffered as a result. For one thing, Parshley frequently used language that undermined de Beauvoir's arguments. For example, he translated the French word for "humanity", *humanité*, as "mankind." He also mistranslated a number of important philosophical concepts. The existentialist term de Beauvoir and Sartre used to define human consciousness, *etre-pour-soi*—whose standard English translation is "being-for-itself"—implies the potential for free will. Parshley translated it as various versions of "in accordance with one's true nature," distorting its meaning.

Although these issues did not necessarily reduce the work's impact on mainstream audiences (existentialism would, after all, have been quite foreign to them), it did affect the work's critical reception and how it was used by English-speaking philosophers.

For decades, de Beauvoir's English-language publishers Alfred A. Knopf shrugged off requests by French scholars for a new translation, complete with the missing sections. It was only in 2009 that a new English-language version appeared. In 2012 an updated edition of *The Second Sex* was published with previously absent

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material—including the many biographies of women from history that Parshley left out. However, these new editions were also heavily criticized by de Beauvoir scholar Toril Moi for allegedly mistranslating the original text. It is important than any reader studying the text in translation is at least aware of these issues.

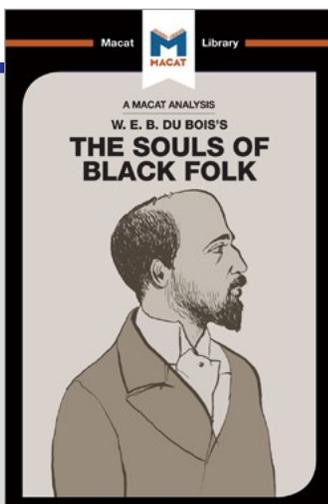
**Rachele Dini** studied at Cambridge, King's College London and University College London. Much of her current work focuses on the representation of production and consumption in modern and contemporary Anglo-American fiction. She is Lecturer in English at the University of Roehampton, and her first monograph, *Consumerism, Waste and Re-use in Twentieth-century Fiction: Legacies of the Avant-Garde*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2016.

CHAPTER

# 4

## AN ANALYSIS OF W.E.B. DU BOIS'S *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*

**JASON XIDIAS,  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**



This chapter is excerpted from  
*W.E.B. Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk*

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# THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK

W.E.B. DU BOIS

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## MODULE 7: ACHIEVEMENT

“He [Du Bois] symbolized in his being his pride in the black man. He did not apologize for being black and, because of it, handicapped. Instead he attacked the oppressor for the crime of stunting black men. He confronted the establishment as a model of militant manhood and integrity. He defied them and, though they heaped venom and scorn on him, his powerful voice was never stilled.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

### KEY POINTS

- W. E. B. Du Bois challenged the dominant view in American society that racism existed because blacks were biologically inferior. He did this by showing how capitalism used the idea of supposed black racial inferiority to justify cheap labor. This view inspired black struggles across the world.
- Du Bois did not agree with the more militant stance of Marcus Garvey, who called on black Americans to abandon their country and return to their ancestral homeland.
- Du Bois saw huge advances in the black struggle during his lifetime, but his hope for human harmony has not been fully realized because racism still exists.

### *Assessing the Argument*

As an academic researcher, teacher, journalist and activist, W. E. B. Du Bois encouraged black struggle on a global scale by highlighting the connection between capitalist greed and racism in the United States and beyond. He encouraged blacks to fight for equality and not to accept white political rule and discrimination in exchange for a few basic concessions. The three most important concepts in *The Souls of Black Folk*—the color line, double consciousness and the veil—continue to have an important influence on race and ethnicity studies and post-colonial studies.

Despite widespread racism in American society in 1903, *Souls* made an immediate impact. Only two months after publication it was in its third printing. Although the author had already published two books and numerous scholarly and journalistic articles, this was the text that brought him international recognition. Important figures such as writer and literary critic Henry James praised the book for its literary and social value. At the same time, many prominent southerners including another black leader, Booker T. Washington, criticized Du Bois for stirring up

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“unnecessary” controversy. Between 1903 and 1940 the text sold in the region of 20,000 copies. In 1953 the Blue Heron Press of New York published 1,000 copies of a 50-year commemoration edition, for which Du Bois supplied a new foreword. In 2003 commemoration events took place throughout the United States and elsewhere in appreciation of the author’s legacy. Despite all this, Du Bois’s full intent has not been realized because racism and inequality still exist.

## *Achievement in Context*

Building on the scholarship and activism of former slave Frederick Douglass, Du Bois challenged white supremacy and Booker T. Washington’s position that blacks should accept discrimination in exchange for modest advances in society. Yet he also opposed the more militant stance of Marcus Garvey.

Garvey was a Jamaican-born black nationalist who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914. He subsequently moved to Harlem, New York, where he argued for black purity and separation from white society, calling on all black Americans to “return” to their ancestral homeland, Africa. Although Du Bois commended Garvey for promoting black pride and confidence, he strongly disagreed with his views. Du Bois maintained that blacks were both African and American, and that neither aspect should at any point be lost. He believed that blacks could achieve equality in American society, while preserving the richness of their heritage and cultural identity, if they were properly led by an intellectual elite, or as he called it a “Talented Tenth.” Du Bois used the term to describe his original idea that one in 10 black men could become leaders and help their black fellow-men rise up. Du Bois thought that the process of black struggle and white recognition of black identity was required to cleanse the soul of both the oppressor and the oppressed, and to reach a higher state of humanity.

*Souls* has served as a foundation for a better understanding of racism and black identity and has provided inspiration for future black leaders and for liberation struggles, both in the United States and in former European colonies.

Although *Souls* argued for equal civil and political rights for blacks, as well as equal education and the establishment of a meritocracy, its aims have not been entirely fulfilled since publication in 1903. The author should, nevertheless, be remembered as one of the foremost sociologists in history and as someone who played an instrumental role in advancing the position of all the oppressed peoples of the world.

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## *Limitations*

*The Souls of Black Folk* applies first and foremost to racism and identity in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The text depicts a society that functions on white privilege and a dominant belief in white racial supremacy. As a result, blacks are second-class citizens. The 14 essays Du Bois wrote dealt with the Civil War, slavery, Reconstruction, the link between capitalism and racism, the effects of racism on African American identity, religion and the black Church, pride, resistance, and struggle. But the text also has a broader relevance, highlighting the ways in which whites in a capitalist society oppress ethnic minorities and how this holds back the whole of society, preventing democracy from functioning. *Souls* should be regarded as an interdisciplinary masterpiece relevant to more than one academic area of study and a text that has had considerable relevance over time.

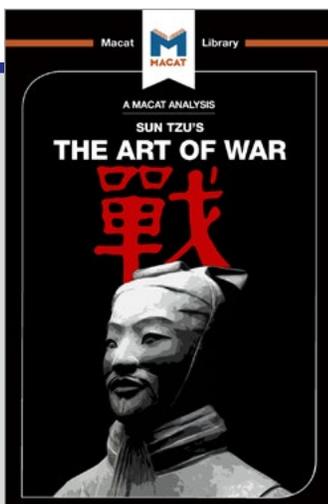
**Jason Xidias** holds a PhD in European Politics from King's College London, where he completed a comparative dissertation on immigration and citizenship in Britain and France. He was also a Visiting Fellow in European Politics at the University of California, Berkeley. Currently, he is Lecturer in Political Science at New York University.

CHAPTER

# 5

## AN ANALYSIS OF SUN TZU'S *THE ART OF WAR*

**RAMON PACHEDO PARDO,**  
KING'S COLLEGE LONDON



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*Sun Tzu's The Art of War*

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# THE ART OF WAR

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## MODULE 11: IMPACT AND INFLUENCE TODAY

“Yeah, yeah, I know you’ve heard all about *The Art of War*—what self-respecting business person hasn’t, right? Chances are you are among millions around the world who already own a copy, strategically positioned at eye level on your bookshelf.”

Karen McCreadie, *Sun Tzu’s the Art of War: A 52 Brilliant Ideas Interpretation*

### KEY POINTS

- *The Art of War* is still widely read by students of many disciplines who want to understand warfare, strategy, and tactics.
- Sun Tzu’s book is a central work in the discipline of war science.
- Most common criticisms of *The Art of War* come from pacifists and those who accuse Sun of a lack of morals.

### *Position*

As long as humanity continues to engage in warfare—or any form of win-lose competition—Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* will continue to be relevant and influential. It includes lessons about being prepared for conflict, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your adversary, and using whatever means you have available to ensure victory. These are just as relevant today as they were in the sixth century B.C.E.

Warfare has a very long history and we are unlikely to solve the crises that continue to provoke us to conflict; indeed, competition for resources, for example, seems likely to increase. That *The Art of War* has found unexpected relevance in fields outside of war studies proves that it is not a narrowly focused military text, however. It may be considered a book on the philosophy and practicalities of preparing for and engaging in confrontations. Although Sun focused on the planning and conduct of military engagement, his ideas are appropriate to any situation that involves conflict between two or more parties.

### *Interaction*

As an analysis of the conduct of warfare, *The Art of War* is considered to fit into the political school of thought in war studies. War studies, however, is not a discipline in which theoretical discussion takes precedence over matters of practical analysis,

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observation and recommendation; debates about the purpose of war, in other words, are secondary to questions of how a war is best won.

*The Art of War* is easy to understand. Its lessons for the military on the planning and conduct of warfare are clearly explained—and this clarity has undoubtedly contributed both to its reputation as a masterpiece and to the longevity of its influence. As there is no school of thought attacking the text's usefulness, there is no school of thought defending it. And, as we have seen, the work has applications and influence in disciplines outside the field of war studies.

### *The Continuing Debate*

The debate about possible flaws of *The Art of War*, such as the moral criticism of its emphasis on deception, has not affected its popularity or usefulness over time; these criticisms are a product of the personal ethics of the critics more than they are of Sun's theories.

It might be thought that a pacifist who is part of an anti-war movement would never be able to appreciate the value or importance of Sun Tzu's text since their personal beliefs would not allow it. But our imaginary activist could actually benefit from some of the advice that Sun imparts on the importance of proper preparation and knowing your enemy. Readers who recognize that the text is not meant to be held to the moral standards of the current age will perhaps benefit most from the lessons it imparts.

*The Art of War* remains significant in contemporary debates on warfare because it emphasizes solid preparation and a variety of strategies and tactics. Equally importantly, it advocates the avoidance of warfare and the importance of minimizing the costs of confrontation whenever possible. In this way, Sun's work anticipates many of the teachings of modern war science.

**Ramon Pacheco Pardo** is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at King's College London. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics and is a research associate at the Lau China Institute and the Global Studies Institute in Hong Kong. Dr Pacheco Pardo has held visiting positions at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and Korea University and sits on the editorial board of *Global Studies Journal*.