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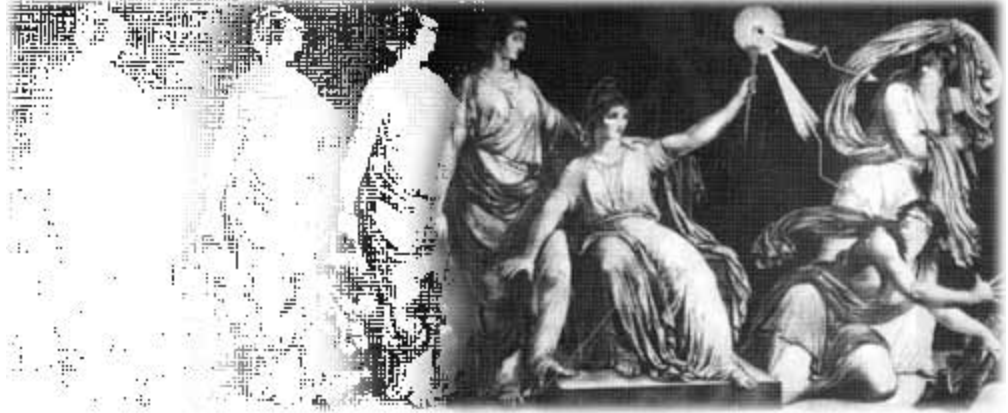
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**The Parent Report and the teaching
of philosophy in Quebec's *cégeps***
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1. Introduction

The teaching of Philosophy as an obligatory subject in Québec province's intermediate level colleges (known by the inelegant French language acronym *cégeps* ^[1]), although equivalent teaching does exist in some European countries, is perhaps unique in North America. It is an example of the distinctive cultural features of Canada's French-speaking Québec province. It is also an example of the cultural value of teaching philosophy at the transitional level between secondary schools and university. In this context, philosophy as a discipline has developed a particular style, close to its Socratic origins. This teaching began with the opening of the first *cégeps* in 1967, on the recommendation, dating from 1965, of the *Report of the royal commission of enquiry on education*.^[2] This important document was popularly to be known as the *Parent Report*, named after its chairman, Alphonse-Marie Parent, professor of philosophy at Laval University in Québec City.

2. Fields of study

Although philosophy teaching in this context has been the object of several partial studies^[3], it has not as yet been the object many attempts at exhaustive analysis. This presentation is in the nature of an essay rather than of a research paper. Its purpose is to describe a potential field of study from the point of view of the author who participated in it for thirty-nine years from the beginning until his recent retirement. It could be of

interest to students in several fields, firstly, to students of Canadian history and institutions, especially as related to the province of Québec. Secondly, it could be of interest to students in the field of public education as regards teaching of civics or general cultural education. Thirdly, it could be of interest to students of philosophy, to the extent that the discipline, in this particular context, is not primarily the object of specialized academic study, as at the university level, but is intended rather to broaden the citizen's general culture. As such, it constitutes a specific form of philosophy teaching, appropriate to contemporary society.

3. Beginnings in the 1960s

Before speaking of philosophy in particular it is necessary, for reasons that will appear later, to take a rather long detour and give a considerable amount of background information on the province of Quebec and the development of its educational institutions. This is important of course for presentation to a non-Canadian audience. However, there are other reasons. This type of philosophy teaching is closely related to the reform of Quebec's educational and political institutions. Its origin goes back to the period of intense change and development in the province of Quebec from 1960 on. That period gave rise to rapid development and is popularly known as the *Quiet Revolution*. In 1960, French speaking Canada was a traditional society where the Catholic Church was the dominant institution, equal in influence to that of the elected governments. To simplify for purposes of brevity: under the influence of rapid global post-war economic development, some sociologists have pointed out that the introduction of television during the 1950's had the effect of a catalyst for profound changes. The new window on the outside world helped predispose the majority of the population towards modernisation of their ideas and institutions. Of course, elite thinkers, artists and intellectuals, had already begun to propose this type of change. One should mention the influence of a manifesto significantly named *Total Refusal (Refus global)*, signed by a group of artists in 1948; the profound influence of such thinkers as Fernand Dumont and Guy Rocher and the far-reaching intellectual influence of the department of Social Sciences of Laval University in Quebec City, the provincial capital. Those who proposed these changes were social scientists with a philosophical rather than a purely technical turn of mind, trained in both North-American and European traditions.

Before 1960, philosophy based on the thinking of St. Thomas Aquinas was taught in the final years of study in the so called *Classical Colleges*, private institutions frequented a very small proportion of the population. They were organized by the Catholic Church, as were the majority of institutions in the fields of education, health and welfare at that time in Quebec. In 1960, Quebec had the general educational level of the least developed European countries. The Liberal government elected in 1960, put an end to the reign of the government of the ideologically conservative party known as the *National Union (Union nationale)*. The period ending in 1960 is popularly known, perhaps in some ways a little unjustly, as *the Great Darkness (la Grande noirceur)*. The government and the people of Quebec seemed to be suddenly possessed by a collective desire to become a normal modern developed country.

4.1 Éducation – the *Parent Report*

The provincial government of Premier Jean Lesage launched an ambitious but risky process of rapid change. The royal commission of enquiry on education, mentioned above, eventually published its *Report* which came to be renowned for its considerable influence on Québec's development, in and beyond the field of education. This extensive three volume, five tome, document is an astonishing example of progressive thinking. Though relying on impressive quantities of sociological data, its fundamental position is philosophical, embodying the ideals of the Enlightenment. Far from being an artificial adjunct to public policy, this position inspired all theoretical and practical aspects of the reform. Teaching philosophy as an obligatory subject in the new *cégeps* (called 'institutes' in the *Report*) was an essential intellectual cornerstone of these proposals. The citizens of the new society were to understand and accept their participation in the new society through what a colleague has called the 'pedagogy of liberty'^[4]. The relative underdevelopment of Québec before 1960 and the possibility to effect a rapid turn around gave rise to an astonishing, perhaps unique, social experiment.

4.2 Aims of this teaching

In hindsight, despite the obvious differences in scale and genre, the *Parent Report* had something of the tone and intentions in Quebec of the *Declaration of Independence* in the United States or, in the field of philosophy, René Descartes' *Meditations on the First Philosophy*. One finds a blueprint for far reaching social reform, educational institutions being seen as the essential motive force for social change. Rereading the *Report* several decades later, one is impressed by the unequivocally progressive nature of its premises, its profound understanding of the educational needs of a modern State in the context of the 1960s as well as the gift of foresight with which its members were endowed. An intellectual and social transition was proposed as if to catapult Québec into the modern world, two centuries late. Québec' *Meiji Reformation*, so to speak! One almost hears accents of René Descartes at the moment when he initiated a similar intellectual transition (albeit at a much earlier date!).

Several years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterwards based on such principles was highly doubtful; and from that time I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation, if I desired to establish a firm and abiding superstructure in the sciences.^[5]

The subjects covered are revealing of the scope and intent of the *Report*, particularly in Volume I, chapter IV, *Contemporary society and education*; chapter V, *Problems and responsibilities of education* and Volume II, Chapter I, *Contemporary humanism and education*. One finds a coherent scientific and philosophical position outlining the direction of the proposed changes.^[6]

The reforms were conceived as systematic tools for change based on a classic position of egalitarian, secular, pluralistic democracy. All details of the reforms were predicated on this basis. These ideas were built into the institutions, from such lowly but necessary details as school bus transportation, to the size of the buildings, the curriculum offered and pedagogical theory. Details included the original idea of the 'institutes' which were to offer a group of obligatory subjects to all students, including philosophy, for purposes of 'General Culture'.

Some aspects of these ideas should be explained. Québec's democratic institutions were inherited from the British who took power by conquest in 1760. In 1837, an armed movement for responsible government was violently suppressed but left its mark and Québec eventually acquired democratic institutions, following the gradual evolution of British institutions. These were integrated into the Canadian Confederation in 1867. In the 1950s, they were generally subservient to foreign economic influence as well as leaving a very large measure of influence in the social sphere to the Catholic Church as already mentioned.

The transition towards effective secular institutions was to be rapid and radical. The displacement of power from the Catholic Church to the new Ministry of Education, non-existent until then, was essential and ensured that there was to be little ambiguity on the question. At the primary and secondary levels, the transition to purely secular School Boards, initiated in the 1960s, would take several decades, only being completed recently.^[7] However, at the post secondary level, the new *cégeps* were to be entirely secular in structure and curriculum. This transition was achieved with surprising ease, the former *Classical Colleges* accepting to transfer buildings, resources and staff to the newly chartered secular public institutions. In general, Quebec went very quickly from being a society where all aspects of life were dominated by religious institutions to one where institutions and ideas were clearly secular.

Egalitarianism was more difficult. Quebec society, a minority in Canada, depended on its elites, especially in the field of culture, as bastions of excellence in defence of the French speaking identity. The *Parent Report* breaks radically from the traditional elitist cultural ideology of Quebec's conservative thinkers.^[8] For the *Parent Report*, national development is not simply a question of the cultural excellence of the elite but henceforth a matter of the development of the human potential of all citizens, freed by education. The *Report* gave detailed attention to practical details to ensure empowerment to all. The new idea of 'pluralism' was introduced in the *Parent Report* in this special sense, intersocial rather than intercultural. *Pluralism* was proposed as 'a new synthesis of humanism, widely open, welcoming to all forms of thought and expression.' At that time, the preoccupation was for all citizens, whatever their income, have access to all fields of culture, 'arts, sciences, humanities, technology' as opposed to a conception of education where certain elements of culture were reserved for certain elite groups.^[9] One mistake was made. In exchange for accepting the creation of the Ministry of

Education, religious authorities demanded the maintenance of subsidies to private schools. This unfortunate decision has to a certain extent perpetuated social division on the basis of income.^[10]

At the time, the question of ethnic minorities was only taken up from the point of view that the great majority of immigrants sent their children to English language schools, endangering the linguistic balance of Quebec society.^[11] This problem was later to be at least partially resolved in 1977 by the *Quebec Language Charter*. The matter of a frontal attack on the universality of the ideals of the Enlightenment from the point of view of radical minority positions, such as that of conservative Islamic ideology, was not yet imagined. Quebec was eventually to receive more and more immigrants, adding a constant challenge to integrate and harmonize new citizens into society. However, the ideas and means to resolve the question were already put in place in the *Parent Report*. A recent debate on the question was resolved in terms of compromise with the acceptance of the notion of ‘reasonable accommodation’ to minority behaviour, on condition of respect for common values.

Though the *Report* refers to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, it dates from a period in Canadian history before the granting of predominant legal status to federal and provincial charters of human rights. Its thinking is not based on the absolute legal primacy of human rights above the status of institutions. Specific reference is made to the ‘rights’ and ‘obligations’ of the ‘nation’ and the ‘collectivity’ of which the citizen is a member. A set of common cultural values must be known and accepted by all. The *Report’s* position is practical rather than abstract, the individual only being free if provided with the means to be free. One remembers a terse footnote to Jean-Jacques J Rousseau’s *Social Contract*: ‘In fact, laws are always useful to those who possess and harmful to those who have nothing, from which it follows that the State of Society is only advantageous to men to the extent that they all have something and that none of them has too much.’^[12] Education should serve to enrich each person on the individual level and on the social level as both citizen and worker.

In Volume II, Chapter I, education in modern societies is said to have three goals :

In modern societies, the system of education pursues three aims: to provide everyone with the possibility to be educated; to make available to all programmes of study best adapted to their aptitudes and preferences; to prepare the individual for life in society.^[13]

These three objectives are explained as follows. Firstly, opportunities must be equal for all:

The obligation for each nation to ensure the education of all citizens is recognized in the *Universal Declarations of Human Rights*^[14] and in the *Déclaration of the*

Rights of Children . But the requirements of general welfare (*'le bien commun'*) make this duty even more imperative for nations that must adapt rapidly to new socio-economic conditions. Schools in the province of Québec must therefore be accessible to each child without any distinction on the basis of creed, racial or cultural origin, social status, age, sex, physical or mental health.

Secondly, post secondary education must be accessible to all citizens according to their needs and preferences: 'the new ages requires that all school children have access to levels of education corresponding to their aptitudes'. The citizen is not a tool for the economic system but an individual to whom society must provide the means for individual self determination, so to speak.

Thirdly, the educational system must prepare all citizens for life in society:

The modern conception of education aims to prepare each citizen to earn his living by useful work and to assume his social obligations intelligently. This is a right of the individual and of the 'collectivity' (*'collectivité'*). The complex and evolving tasks of industries and services require that all children be assured of an education which prepares them for the job market. This training must be diversified (*'polyvalent'*) enough to permit rapid adaptation to technological change.

Considerable attention is given to the individual's need to adapt constantly to the evolution of the economic system and to be able to function in groups. However, we are far from the type of ideological conception that was to come into play in the 1980s, with the individual seen as an interchangeable unit, an abstract, passive element of 'human resources' to be consumed by industry.

A four level set of institutions was proposed, permitting all citizens to go to school to any level desired. Primary schools (6 years), secondary school (5 years), were to offer obligatory education till 16 years of age. The new 'institutes' were not obligatory but to this day *cégeps* have no tuition fees, making them more easily available than university studies. University education would be offered with fees that have traditionally been the lowest in all North-America (today a subject of intense debate given universities exploding financial needs).

4.3 General culture

The notion of *general culture* (*'culture générale'*) was basic to the thinking of the *Parent Report* and oriented certain choices at all levels. The following paragraph from chapter IV, *Contemporary Humanism and Education*, makes clear the idea that the aims of general education should see the individual in the context of a universal conception of civilisation:

Today the elementary school must be terminal for no one. Hence a change in its aim; it must impart, to all, the fundamentals of authentic intellectual training. In

addition, the first years of secondary instruction are now regarded in all parts of the world as a period both for the orientation of pupils and for a deepening of their general culture. General culture will henceforth reach a broader segment of the population and will extend for everyone over a greater span of time. This is the protective device which can safeguard modern culture against the excesses of specialization. For civilization does not in fact rest on economic, political and technical foundations alone; it depends fully as much on a cultural and spiritual unity, to which education must contribute. This unity consists of a single world outlook, common attitudes, shared values. Moreover, because of the identity it displays throughout the diversity of individual aptitudes, the human spirit seeks a basic culture which will allow it to reach its full flower and which will at the same time serve as preparation for whatever specialization is necessary. This double concern - for the unity of civilization and the universal needs of the human person - must be the guiding principle for that general education henceforth required of everyone.^[16]

We see here a generous conception of the status of the individual in society, in the context of the modern economy, to be provided by the community with the intellectual and practical means to be free. The social dimension of education is expressly related to a philosophical conception of 'civilisation'. Education liberates the person from economic domination, enabling one to understand the world and to be able to make the right choices.

A delicate balance must be respected between 'General training and specialisation', again in the context of the training of the citizen's autonomy:

Our century has laid sharp emphasis on the problem of general training and specialization. In Chapter I we stated that it is necessary both to impart a better general training to all students and to have them begin their specialized studies earlier.

These two aspects of education are indeed complementary rather than opposed. True specialization is based on general training, and the one enriches the other. It is in order to achieve this aim that we recommend composite education during the twelfth and thirteenth years [*i.e. cégep level, author's note*] as well as in the secondary school course. The mind of the seventeen-year-old student needs to find its nourishment in the intellectual disciplines and in the laboratory or shop work which best suit its aptitudes. Through deep exploration of a given order of knowledge it will discover new horizons and find motivation for study. Yet it has an equal need to remain in contact with other worlds of knowledge, so as not prematurely to narrow its outlook on life. ^[17]

4.4 The 'institutes'

The 'institutes', eventually named *cégeps*, were to be set up at the age-level of the former *Classical Colleges*, traditionally reserved to those who could pay tuition fees.

The *Parent Report* conceived the ‘institutes’ as separate institutions, as opposed to the French *baccalauréat* or the British *Sixth Form*, situated at the end of secondary education. They also differ in two important ways from American so-called *Junior Colleges* that offer the first two years of university instruction. Firstly, a student must go to a *cégep* **before** going to university. Secondly, besides two-year preuniversity courses, they offer a large variety of three-year technical or professional courses not leading to university but directly to employment.

In the *cégeps*, the *Parent Report* applied its egalitarian, pluralist ideals in expressly proposing to bring together all students choosing to go on to post-secondary non-obligatory education, whatever their social origin. It was hoped that, with the increase of the importance of higher education in the new economic context, the *cégeps* would reach the majority of all citizens. Today, they are frequented by some 80,000 students, representing 40% of the population aged 17 to 19.^[18] There is still ample room for progress. Over time, the *cégeps* have been accepted as important institutions, taking post secondary education to all parts of the province, where they are often the principal cultural institution in many small towns. Of those who do finish secondary school (admittedly, there are still too many drop-outs) Québec has a relatively high percentages of students continuing to post secondary education. The absence of tuition fees and the diversity of programmes are major reasons explaining this success. Also, 17 year-old students appreciate the fact of leaving secondary school for different institution where they can make important programme choices, without the financial stress of university enrolment. It should be noted that the generous idea of bringing together students in preuniversity and vocational courses has been a challenge to apply in practice.

4.5 General culture in the *cégeps*

From the beginning, several obligatory subjects, including philosophy, were offered to all students, whether in preuniversity or professional programmes. Again, the purpose was to offer a *common cultural base* (*‘fond culturel commun’*) to all as a contribution citizens’ civic education. At the outset, subjects included four philosophy courses, four French courses, four physical education courses and four complementary courses, chosen freely in fields parallel to or outside the students’ particular programme of studies. This programme was and still is relatively heavy, constituting almost half of the courses in preuniversity programmes and about a third of courses in professional programmes. It was maintained through a reform in 1984, until the major reform of 1993-94. The programme now includes the following courses: three philosophy, four French, two English second language, three physical education and two complementary.

This programme has no exact parallel elsewhere. In terms of objectives, the closest continental European equivalent is to be found in the French *baccalauréat*. However, in terms of content, the inspiration was not primarily French but notably American, or British. It is classified, however, as post secondary education, beyond the North American High School level. French, English, physical education and complementary courses were obvious choices. Philosophy was chosen as the appropriate subject to

further the cultural aims set out in the *Parent Report*. The main competitors for the status of philosophy were of course social studies, sociology, history, economics and psychology. The debate on this choice still continues but, given the intellectual position of the *Parent Report*, this choice of philosophy was coherent and inescapable.^[19]

It is interesting to note that in the English-Language colleges, ministerial regulations permit the equivalent teaching of a choice à la carte, so to speak, among a list of subjects, predominantly in the Social Sciences. The province of Québec, in respect for its linguistic minority, went so far as to adopt two sets of regulations based on two different philosophical conceptions. It would be interesting to study the differences between the results of the two systems.

5.1 Development of philosophy programme 1967-80 / 1980-2009

In detail, we now have a complete picture of the context and intentions defining the teaching of philosophy as an obligatory subject in Québec's *cégeps*. The programme developed in two stages with the 1980s constituting a transitional period between the two. From 1967 through the 1970s, there was a programme of four, three hour courses defined by topics or subject matter.^[20] The introductory course (101) served to present this new discipline to students arriving from secondary school. The second course (201) was devoted to reflection on science and technology. The third (301) examined philosophical conceptions of human nature and the fourth (401) dealt with ethical and political philosophy.

In the reform of 1993-94, the second philosophy course on science and technology was unfortunately abolished. The reasons seem to have been largely economic or practical in order to make space for English second-language courses. This change certainly demonstrated a lack of understanding of the objectives of the *Parent Report*. The three others survived but with some notable changes in emphasis. Two axes were defined in order to make the programme more coherent, a historical axis and a methodological axis. The first course (103) now introduces students to philosophy through the origins of Western Philosophy in Greece, the second (102) emphasizes modern thinkers and the final course, putting increased emphasis on ethics rather than political thought, introduces contemporary philosophical thinkers. The third course was also to be partially adapted to the needs of the students' specific programme of studies, though not to the point of being devoted to specific professional deontology. Fortunately a proposal, from some representatives of the Ministry of Education to exclude political philosophy from the last course, was refused.

The three courses now also devote efforts to methods for structured thinking and writing, seen as deficient among young students in Quebec. This idea corresponds to the traditional association of philosophy with logic, though it pursues other objectives that could just as well be reached by other disciplines than philosophy. The first course now culminates with an 'argumentative text' for which a fourth hour was added per week, the second with a 'critical commentary' and the third with a comparative essay

discussing two different philosophical perspectives on the same philosophical problem. This essay still quite different from the *dissertation* that comes at the end of the French *baccalauréat*.

5.2 Details of this teaching

The programme of philosophy courses has been surprisingly faithful to the intentions laid out in the *Parent Report*. A form of practical, egalitarian humanism was proposed as the common ideological orientation of Quebec society. Teachers of philosophy did not have the mandate to simply impart an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of philosophy. Those who attempted to transpose this university approach were not very successful. Learning depends on motivation. Young citizens must be provided with the intellectual means to understand the direction given to their education and how this relates to their lives.

These objectives determined the nature of philosophy teaching at the *cégep* level. Teaching is generally conducted with what could best be called a ‘Socratic’ approach. In the *cégeps*, the primary aim is to confront and modify, or at least broaden, the student’s attitudes. To neglect this is to miss the goal. In universities, teaching is often secondary to research and less provision has to be made for students’ pedagogical difficulties. In *cégeps*, teaching is the first priority. A considerable amount of research is carried on in the *cégeps* despite the fact that it is not a professional requirement for teachers as compared to universities. However, this research is generally closely related to the content or methods of teaching.

In practice, the context of rapid change imposed by the government and the world context of social revolution in the late sixties gave rise to various attempts to achieve these aims with more or less successful results. The course outlines were so general as to permit varied experiments. Some older teachers continued to teach some elements of the former *Classical College* programme. The majority of the teachers were young and no programme of teacher training existed at the time. Teaching was extremely diversified in method and content, occasionally with bizarre results. Several teachers directed their teaching towards radical ideas of social analysis, anti-imperialist revolution, national liberation struggles or counter cultural approaches popular at the time. This was the period of the so-called *October Crisis*, provoked by the (sometimes violent) actions of the self styled *Quebec Liberation Front*. In some cases, new forms of dogmatism replaced the old scholastic approach. Some teachers had recourse to sociological and or psychological data without relating it to philosophical perspectives. Other teachers even reduced the content to various forms of esoteric religion or forms of psychological conditioning. For the first ten years of the existence of the *cégeps*, only one or two academic sessions were completed without at least one day on strike, typical of the general social effervescence at that time.

Out of this bizarre bazaar of experiments, in tune with the free thinking of the 60s and 70s, it should be stated that serious approaches were none the less patiently developed

on the job by the majority of teachers. What are the most appropriate topics, who are the most appropriate authors to study and what aspects of their thought are important the average seventeen-year old? Since no text books or manuals existed, how should teaching be organized? Given that philosophy exists through its constantly self-referential history, what is the best way to approach the history of ideas? How can references to artistic, scientific or political topics be integrated as material useful in the context of philosophical, civic education? What pedagogical approaches are the most appropriate to young people at seventeen years of age?

Some random examples of course content might serve to illustrate all this. In the introductory course, what more appropriate than to begin at the beginning and study one of Plato's dialogues, but which one? Among Plato's earlier dialogues, the *Crito* is quite appropriate. One finds a truculent old man, calmly facing death the next day, ostensibly out of respect for the ideal notion of Justice according to Plato's version of Socrates, but also clearly out of a characteristic streak of pure stubbornness. This appeals to average seventeen year old. The second course was never a purely abstract course in philosophical epistemology. The study of Kuhn's theory of the scientific 'paradigm'^[21], for example, was undertaken of course to help better understand the functioning of scientific thought. However, the intellectual horizon of this study was intended to put science, all too often invoked as one of the sacred cows of our time, in a historical and social perspective. The third course confronted the students with the so called 'Copernican revolutions' of contemporary thought initiated by such thinkers as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, again not studied in a technical perspective but to make a student understand the bases of the contemporary intellectual predicament. In the final course, ethical and political considerations were always present, both being obviously pertinent to general education in a democratic society. For example, to continue to exist, democracy must be actively understood. Study of Rousseau's *Social Contract* confronts students with the notions of 'general interest' and 'general will' in a society where discussion must replace violence as the arbiter of conflict and the means to make decisions.

Given the extreme haste and lack of training and resources at the time, it is not surprising that some bizarre experiments were attempted. However, teachers were given great freedom to experiment in the context of general course outlines. This freedom eventually gave valid results. The practice of providing detailed course outlines as well as study questions was developed and could well serve as an example to university level undergraduate instruction. Appropriate ways were found to present classical authors and texts to the students as well as ways to study topical subjects from a philosophical perspective. Ways were found to motivate the students, the most important point being that the student must understand the practical implications of theoretical questions in his or her own life.

Adulthood comes late in contemporary society. Philosophical education is a part of the process of reaching maturity for young adults. Firstly, they should realize that ideas and

beliefs are not permanent absolutes but are developed by individuals and groups in context over time. The aim is not relativism but a certain intellectual modesty, based on knowledge about the origins of particular ideas. The same question can be seen to be understood from several different, potentially valid, points of view and one must respect the right to disagree. Secondly, adherence to particular political or economic ideas is not an innocent process but has consequences, for oneself and for others, locally or elsewhere in the world.

A colleague at the college in Rimouski, on the south shore of the gulf of the St. Lawrence River, concludes, convincingly, that this teaching has given rise to a specific form of philosophical practice.^[22] He enumerates its four characteristics as follows: firstly a 'humanist ontology', secondly reference to mainly continental European authors, thirdly, 'Socratic pedagogy', fourthly a 'reflexive method'. The first, was obviously defined, as we have now seen, by the *Rapport Parent*, the second was determined by the language, culture and university training of the teachers, the third by the stated intentions of 'general education' and the fourth was developed through trial and error. In practice, his study shows that the majority of texts used, were of French or German origin^[23], recourse to British philosophy being most common in the final course on ethics and politics. British and American analytic orientations are less well known among Quebec teachers and are usually seen as too technical and, more importantly, quite inappropriate to the cultural aims of teaching at this level and even to the nature of this type of philosophical practice.

Inevitably, this period of experimentation had to be evaluated and adjusted. The more demanding social and economic context of the 1980s brought pressure on philosophy teachers to evaluate and correct their practice. This produced reforms in 1984. The idea of 'intellectual skills' (*habiletés intellectuelles*) became important. Some objected that this preoccupation was not exclusively the intellectual property of philosophy as a discipline, and could just as well be entrusted to other disciplines. In general, the tendency was to return to respect for the ideals proposed by the *Parent Report*. *General education* can not be dogmatic but must give place to respect for pluralistic diversity.

The new programme adopted in the 1990s incorporated the new notion proposed by the Ministry of Education, that of 'intellectual competence'. Cynics have said that this approach was developed in the American army for purposes of assembling bazookas, and is therefore inappropriate to a discipline such as philosophy. However, as usual in debates on pedagogical terminology, much depends on the correct understanding of terms and how they are applied. The first aim of this approach is to ensure that teaching is appropriate to the students' mental equipment. It is useless for a teacher to give a university level lecture on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* if the students are unable to understand what is discussed and, especially, in what way it is of importance to their lives. To teach, one must know how the students think when they arrive in class. They must be taken as they are, in the context of obligatory teaching. To take them to point B,

one must understand and respect the point A where they are and then proceed to point B by an appropriate series of stages. At the university level, one can be more brutal and simply fail those who are not already at the required point A.

The second problem with the vocabulary of *'intellectual competence'* is that, incorrectly understood, it seems to reduce teaching to the level of specific mental functions, any 'content' defined in classical terms being secondary and in effect dispensable. This is a serious mistake and it has done some harm. It is to be hoped that this difficulty will be left behind, eventually.

The teaching of philosophy was regularly questioned and its abolition suggested every five years or so, either to the advantage of its main competitors, disciplines in the field of the Social Sciences, or with the simple purpose of reducing the costs to the State. One can not deny the obvious pertinence of courses in history, sociology, economics or psychology. However, philosophy teaching, though regularly attacked, is appropriate to the ideals of the *Parent Report*. During the reform of 1993-94, a public parliamentary commission opened the question to public debate. The context of the day was that of conservative economic ideology proposing that general education was a luxury too expensive to be maintained. The commission was the focus of a serious public debate where, although one course was abolished, the teaching of philosophy was defended principally by various individuals and social groups who agreed with its aims. One could conclude that, from that point on, this teaching has become a fundamental element of education in Québec and will no longer be put in question. The public in general, including those who have been through the colleges, usually have positive memories of these courses, sometimes in hindsight, even if at seventeen they had more difficulty to understand.

Given the difference in social ideology between French Canada and parts of English speaking Canada, one might conclude that the teaching of philosophy has had some effect on Quebec's popular culture. The so-called *Quebec Model* for society is generally more open to social-democratic ideas whereas parts of Canada, especially Western Canada, are much more open to conservative, Republican ideas of American origin.

6. Philosophy in complementary courses and in specific programmes^[24]

Some other philosophy courses are given in the context of general education courses classified as 'complementary'. At the *Cégep du Vieux Montréal (Old Montreal College)* where the author of this essay taught, a philosophical aesthetics course is open to students in various visual arts preuniversity or technical graphics programmes. Secondly, a course in Chinese Thought has been in considerable demand and illustrates a healthy interest in non-European philosophy. Also, philosophy as a discipline in the *cégeps* is not restricted to purely obligatory courses. In various *cégeps*, philosophy courses are also included among courses specific to some programmes, for example, courses in the epistemology of science in Physical or Social Science programmes, or courses on the critique of culture in Arts and Letters programmes. It is important to

teachers to have the possibility to give courses other the three obligatory ones in order to vary their career and keep them in touch with other fields of research.

7. Conclusions

We see that the process of social reform, initiated through public education by the *Parent Report* (1965), has had lasting influence in Canada's Québec province. The obligatory teaching of philosophy in a context of general civic education in the *cégeps*, transitional between secondary school and university or employment, was an integral part of this reform. It came to represent an original type of philosophical practice, different in nature from that found in universities. Probably unique in North America, this teaching has models in Europe, for example, in France and Germany. Its existence is now part of the popular culture of Quebec where it has perhaps had some lasting influence on the evolution of ideas.

Philosophy has a special status among the Social Sciences whose field it shares on a peculiarly ambiguous basis. It must constantly justify its existence, perceived as unscientific. This teaching is an example of the survival and evolution of this discipline, one of the oldest in the Western tradition. We find a new practice of reflexive hermeneutics appropriate for young citizens. Paradoxically, attempts to demonstrate the death of philosophy generally add more chapters to its history. Mankind will always create representations of the meaning of existence. Young citizens can be brought to understand this as part of their common human heritage.

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9. Summary

The process of social reform, initiated through public education by the *Parent Report* (1965), has had lasting influence in Canada's Québec province. The obligatory teaching of philosophy in a context of general civic education in the *cégeps*, transitional between secondary school and university or employment, was an integral part of this reform. It came to represent an original type of philosophical practice, different in nature from that found in universities. Probably unique in North America, this teaching has models in Europe, for example, in France and Germany. Its existence is now part of the popular culture of Quebec where it has perhaps had some lasting influence on the evolution of ideas.

10. CV [Charles de Mestral](#)

Born in Montreal, (Quebec), Canada August 28th, 1944

Studies:

1966 B.A. philosophy and English literature, University of Toronto (Senior English Essay on the theatre of Willam Butler Yeats under the direction of direction de Northrop Frye).

1970 M.A. Université de Montréal (dissertation, using a computer assisted concordance, on Kierkegaard's concept of dialectic).

1976 B.Mus. McGill University (studied musical composition with Allan Heard, Mario Bertoncini, Harry Freedman).

1981 Ph.D. Université de Montréal (thesis on Georg Lukàcs' conception of the specificity of aesthetics).

Career :

1968-2007 teacher of philosophy at the *Cégep du Vieux Montréal*.

1990-2000 (approx.) joint coordinator of the department of philosophy.

1997-2007 teacher of Communications in the Arts and Letters, Communication, programme.

2001-2006 coordinator of the Arts and Letters programme.

1987-90 (approx.) secretary of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community (CEC).

1975-87 member of the Montreal electroacoustic group *SONDE*.

1985-2009 installation artist in the field of public acoustic ecology.

[1] Cégep stands for ‘college of general and professional education’, i.e. preuniversity and technical (pre-employment) schools.

[2] Government of the Province of Quebec, **Report of the royal commission of enquiry on education**, 1965. This document exists in English and French versions.

[3] One can cite a recent important contribution by Jean-Claude SIMARD, August, 2009. La philosophie au collège : quatre décennies d’enseignement et de recherche [*Philosophy in the colleges: four decades of teaching and research*]. Presented to the NAPAC (New association for philosophy in the cégeps). He mentions the following studies : LECLERC, Bruno, 1983. *L’enseignement de la philosophie au collège. Au présent de la question*, Mémoire de maîtrise, UQAR (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Sciences de l’Éducation). LEVASSEUR, Louis, 1996. *Savoirs traditionnels, savoirs modernes et enseignement philosophique de niveau collégial dans la modernité québécoise*, Thèse de doctorat (Sociologie), Université de Montréal.

[4] Jean-Claude SIMARD, of the cégep of Rimouski (on the south shore of the Gulf of the St. Lawrence River), op. cit., 2009.

[5] *Meditations on the first philosophy*, translation John Veitch, beginning of Meditation I.

[6] The content includes the following subjects: Volume I, [Chapter IV: Today’s society and teaching](#), [I. The educational explosion](#), [II. The scientific and technological revolution](#), [III. The transformation of living conditions](#), [IV. The evolution of ideas](#), [V. Modern society and teaching](#). [Chapter V: The problems and responsibilities of education](#), [I. Objectives, needs and problems](#), [II. The responsibility of political institutions](#), [III. The requirements of efficient democratic policy](#). Volume II, chapter I, I. The Pluralism of Culture, II. The Aims of Education, III. The Contributions of Modern Pedagogy, IV. Conclusions.

[7] Recently, a new secular course in ethics and religious culture was added to the primary and secondary school curriculum.

[8] For example, this ideological position is seen in the following quotation from the nationalist publication, *L’Action nationale*, Vol X, no 3, November, 1937, page 235. We read that ‘Montreal constitutes the largest collectivity of Franco-Canadians in the world. It should be, it is its duty, to be the center par excellence of the spiritual, literary and artistic life of French Canada’.

[9] Volume III, Chapter I, section 7, The pluralism of culture.

[10] On the island of Montreal, for example, some 40% of students are enrolled in private secondary schools, reputed to be better than the public schools. In the neighboring province of Ontario, in comparison, private schools were not financed publicly and the public school system has institutions comparable in quality to Québec’s private ones.

[11] Volume III, chapter III, section IV, Minority ethnic groups in the school system.

[12] Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter nine, footnote 1 (translation by the author).

[13] Volume I, Chapter V, section I, Aims, needs and problems, paragraphs 115, 116, 117, 118. Translation by the author.

[14] *Universal declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations Organisation, 1948.

[15] *Déclaration of the Rights of Children*, United Nations Organisation, November 20, 1959.

[16] *Report of the royal commission of enquiry on education*, Volume II, Chapter I, section II, paragraph 19. This text and the following quotations from the *Parent Report* are quoted from the official English version.

[17] *Report of the royal commission of enquiry on education*, Volume II, chapter VI, section II, paragraph 261.

[18] Jean-Claude SIMARD, op. cit., page 2.

[19] The *Parent Report* was inspired in part by the UNESCO report on the teaching of philosophy dating from 1953.

[20] Course descriptions can be found on line, in French, at:

<http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/ens-sup/ens-coll/Cahiers/cours-comp/discipline.asp?disc=340> .

The four courses in the 1984 version are identified as 340-101-84, 340-201-84, 301-301-84, 340-401-84.

The first two courses taught now are identified as: 340-103-04, 340-102-03 and the third is defined locally in each college. For example, see course outlines at the *Cégep du Vieux Montréal*,

<http://www.cvm.qc.ca/philosophie/cours.htm> .

[21] Thomas S. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1962.

[22] A practice which he characterizes, borrowing a term from the French author, Châtelet, as 'psychophilosophie', used in a non-pejorative, neutral sense of a philosophical approach which : 'consequently refuses the primacy of language [*as in analytic philosophy, author's note*] and the questioning of the primacy of consciousness [*as in Structuralism or Marxism*]'. In the original: 'refuse en conséquence l'autonomie du langage et la remise en question du primat de la conscience'. This term translates with difficulty into English and underlines a reflexive humanist practice, not a psychological orientation.

[23] Jean-Claude SIMARD, op.cit., cites Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Habermas, Jonas, among German authors and Descartes, Pascal, Sartre, Camus, Deleuze, Foucault, among the French.

[24] The list of these various courses can be found on line at <http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/ens-sup/ens-coll/Cahiers/cours-comp/discipline.asp?disc=340> .

