FEATURE
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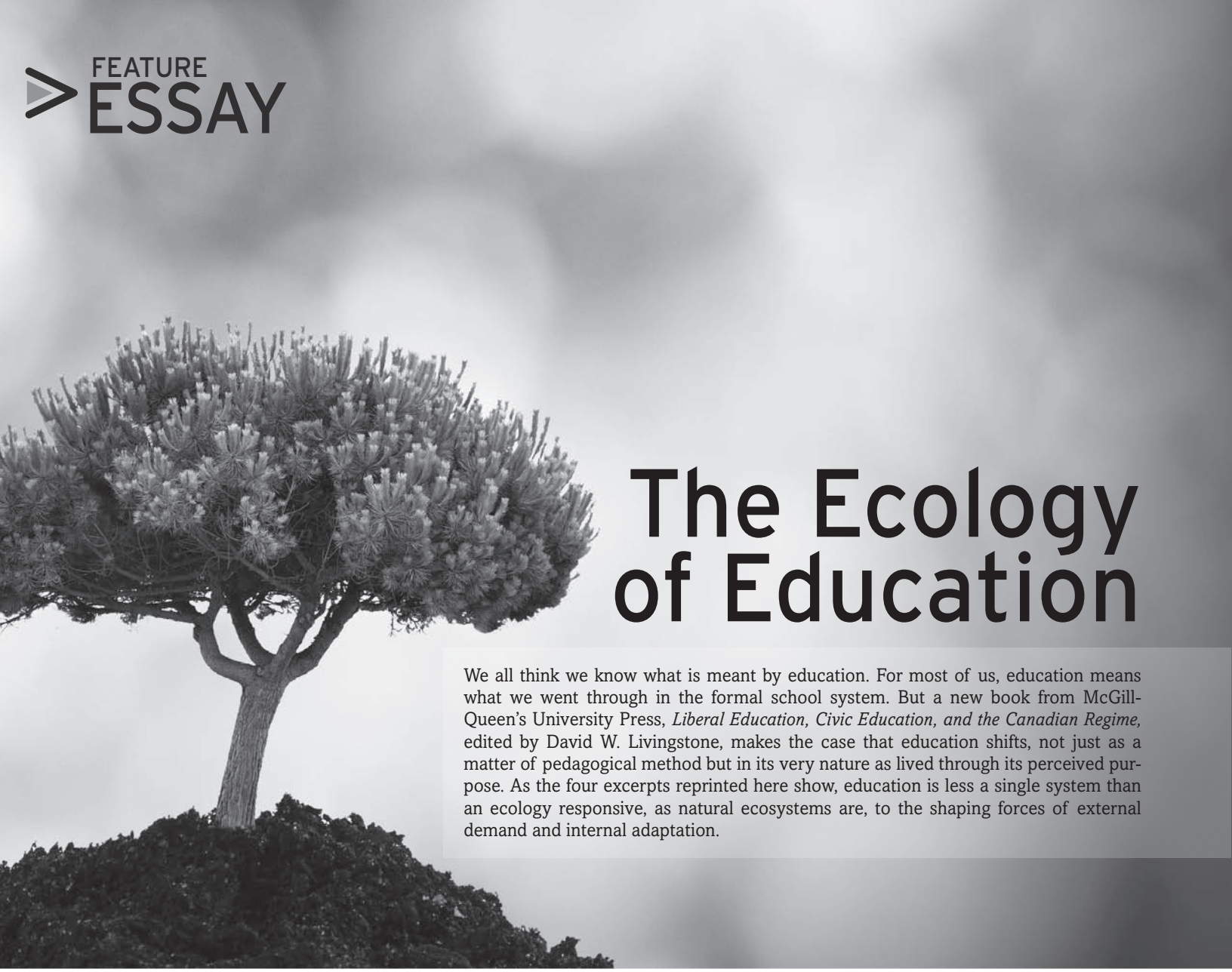

The Ecology of Education

We all think we know what is meant by education. For most of us, education means what we went through in the formal school system. But a new book from McGill-Queen's University Press, *Liberal Education, Civic Education, and the Canadian Regime,* edited by David W. Livingstone, makes the case that education shifts, not just as a matter of pedagogical method but in its very nature as lived through its perceived purpose. As the four excerpts reprinted here show, education is less a single system than an ecology responsive, as natural ecosystems are, to the shaping forces of external demand and internal adaptation.

Not too long after Canadian Confederation in 1867, education became one of the most important means of uniting Canadians across the vast spaces of our fledgling country and of training individuals for the kind of civic life this new nation would demand as it grew. The founding fathers, therefore, made strong appeals for the creation of a robust educational system since education was, as Thomas D'Arcy McGee claimed, "an essential condition of our political independence." In his essay, excerpted below, Livingstone traces the lofty educational ideals of McGee, ideals that maintained that a distinctly Canadian education would not simply "inform" the best and brightest Canadians but form them with the civic virtues that would make Canada a distinct nation with its own distinct culture, literature and polity. As one of the founding voices of education in Canada, this tiny glimpse into McGee's thoughts starts the conversation that subsequent generations would respond to and react against.

THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE'S CIVIC PAIDEIA FOR CANADA

By David W. Livingstone

McGee argues that free government depends for its stability and longevity on the good character of the people who live under that government. Regarding the new Dominion, he remarked in 1867 in an address to the Literary Club of Montreal that "as an incipient new Nation, it seems to me that our mental self-reliance is an essential condition of our political independence." In that address he singles out in particular those he calls the talented, ambitious young men in Canada, i.e., Canada's natural *aristoi*. These young men could arise from any economic class; indeed it was the openness of Canada that might for once allow for the natural *aristoi* to

advance for the betterment of the society without being held back by the artificial barriers that held back those with talent in the older European societies. He summons them to "use their time; to exercise their powers of mind as well as body; to acquire the mental drill and discipline, which will enable them to bear the arms of a civilized State in times of peace, with honour and advantage." He also encourages Canadians to develop their own national literature and to "set up for ourselves, a distinct national existence." But this distinctive national literature would also have to be distinguished. It would be insufficient simply to have a literature that one could say was unique to Canada. Ideally it should also be of a high calibre and contribute to "the increase of the universal literary republic" while aiming at the "object of all intellectual pursuits… the attainment of *Truth*."

Guiding principles and deep reflections upon human nature that would inform the development of Canadian literature and political institutions could be discovered in the writers in the European intellectual tradition to whom McGee repeatedly gives credit in his own writings and speeches – including the Bible, Plato, William Shakespeare, Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville, among others. For Canadians to neglect the lessons of these authors would be to squander a precious inheritance. More important, it would leave future generations of Canadians less able to appreciate the principles of the new constitution itself, rendering them less capable of bearing the "arms of a civilized State in times of peace." The Bible, in particular, he recommends not because it is his place to "inculcate religious duties" but because it is "a family book mainly." "If we wish our younger generation to catch the inspiration of the highest eloquence, where else will they find it? If we wish to teach them lessons of patriotism, can we show it to them under nobler forms than in the maiden deliverer who smote the tyrant in the valley of Bethulia?" The Bible ought to be read, therefore, "not only as the spiritual corrective of all vicious reading but as the highest of histories, the truest of philosophies and the most eloquent utterance of human organs."

Grant Havers' essay, excerpted below, narrows in on the quarrels between ancients, moderns and protestants and how that impacted the role of education in Canada. One notes here a decided shift from the lofty educational idealism of McGee. What interests Havers is the "iconoclastic" tendencies of modernism to break apart the lofty, often Christian, ideals of an education designed to transform the civic character of a nation. Relying heavily upon Leo Strauss, Havers unpacks how the new modernism would "progress" beyond the ancients in ways that would have large repercussions for how education would be conceived into the 20th and 21st centuries.

THE ANCIENT-MODERN PROTESTANT QUARREL IN CANADA

By Grant N. Havers

Is Protestantism, then, an obstacle to the recovery of the classics that are vital to a liberal education? The quick answer to this question is that it all depends on what we mean by Protestantism, which has often been simplistically confused with other movements in modernity. Did the early Protestants repudiate antiquity for the same reasons that the early modern political philosophers had rejected the classics? The original objections that early modern Protestants levelled against classical antiquity are not necessarily identical to the objections that arose out of the Renaissance or Enlightenment traditions. The "ancient-modern quarrel" that the 18th century Enlightenment made famous is not necessarily the same as the "ancient-Protestant quarrel."

In the discussion that follows, will be abundantly evident. The main reason for my reliance on the ideas of the philosopher Leo Strauss is that no thinker in the last century rivals Strauss for considering the full implications of the ancient-modern quarrel. In brief, Strauss contends that the moderns quarrelled with the ancients over the status of humanity in the universe: modern philosophy without exception enjoyed an "anthropocentric character" that privileged humanity as the master of nature, the sole source of morality and the successor to God as the centre of the universe. These humanistic teachings constituted a radical departure from even the atheistic philosophers of antiquity who "took it for granted that man is subject to something higher than himself, e.g., the whole cosmic order, and that man is not the origin of all meaning." The moderns, in accord with these new teachings, were convinced that they had "progressed" beyond the intellectually backward ancient philosophers.

Keeping to the educational trajectory set out in this collection of essays, Travis Smith's essay on the Hobbesian foundations of modern education, excerpted below, narrows in upon the decisive shift taking place in how the purpose of education is conceived in the modern leviathan of the nation-state. This is no longer about character formation but the perpetuation of State-approved ideology, the reduction of education to utility and, in short, a heavily bureaucratized institution more concerned with social control than free thought. It's hard not to see Hobbes' education vision, as Smith presents it, to be prophetic in terms of what our State-controlled education looks like today. From the Loyola case to the recent Trinity Western conflict, Smith has tapped into one of the roots where these recent conflicts originated. From Smith's account, Hobbes' ideas, and how they've seeped into our attitudes about education, signal a drastic break in the role of Canadian education to be a truly liberating force.

THE HOBBESIAN FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN ILLIBERAL EDUCATION

By Travis D. Smith

Universities in a Hobbesian regime are instruments of social control, public institutions operated by the State for the attainment of socially useful purposes, realizing the well-being of the people, conceptualized hedonistically. They are, in Hobbes' terminology, "bodies politic," not exempt from submitting to the civil sovereign's authority in any matter. The refinement of learning for its own sake is not their mission, less so the refinement of the learned. Intellectual and artistic pursuits must be justified in terms of utility to the collective in accordance with the governing ideology. It belongs to the state to determine the official definitions of things, even against long-standing traditions, especially in matters deemed a cause of quarrel, trusting that if the laws change the definitions of things, men's minds will follow. The State shall furthermore determine which kinds of learning have value, privileging those deemed salutary and disadvantaging and discrediting projects and purposes that fail to serve the public agenda. Amending and censoring university curricula is such a major issue for Hobbes that he raises it as early as the first chapter of *Leviathan*. In determining the doctrines and priorities of the elite classes of people – "lawful pastors," legal and medical professionals, and the gentry – the views and purposes they represent will be conveyed to the rest of the populace in trickle-down fashion. Eventually everyone will be educated to pose no obstacle and be no threat to anybody else's enjoyment of life. People may even facilitate others' enjoyments, although preferably indirectly, through the institutions and mechanisms of the State, so as to avoid generating feelings of personal obligation among either benefactors or recipients. So confident is Hobbes in the power of the State to re-educate a people that he permits parents the freedom to educate their children as they please, trusting that, in time, parents will follow the lead of the educated elites and educate their children as the State desires. Children will resist indoctrination by their parents where it diverges from what is socially acceptable. Parents may feel compelled to be inauthentic in their public expressions – arguably, for Hobbes, inauthenticity is the *sine qua non* of peaceable civilization – but the habituation of the next generation ought to yield a greater degree of authentic dedication to the desired prejudices. Hobbes describes human minds, especially those of "the common people," as "clean paper" to be "imprinted" with whatever doctrine the sovereign wishes. He trusts that it will be especially easy to imprint on people attitudes that flatter and magnify their naturally vulgar, fearful and proud personalities.

In order to illustrate some particulars of the general account I have outlined above, I will descend from my broader reading of Hobbes' psychology and focus more narrowly on how it can be seen as forming the ideological basis for efforts to abolish hate, especially by punishing people for beliefs, attitudes and utterances that may be designated hateful. As the embrace and internalization of Hobbesian psychology spreads, the implementation of these corrective measures should become more popular. One should expect their application to be most strident on university campuses, universities being the locus and vanguard of societal re-education – or, as Hobbes puts it, "the fountains of civil and moral doctrine," where what is said and taught should be "pure."

In a Hobbesian commonwealth, all disagreement is perceived as a portent of and pretext for quarrel. All argumentation is tantamount to attack and all disapproval is harmful. According to Hobbesian psychology, pleasure and pain are our masters. Whenever people express disapproval of something, it must be because they feel or expect pain from it, and therefore find it fearful. Because reason

only ever serves the passions, all of the arguments that people fabricate to justify their expressions of disagreement and disapproval are ultimately emanations from their fears and rationalizations for the hatreds those fears inspire. Hatred is an aversion to something actually hurtful, apparently hurtful or imagined to be possibly hurtful, often grounded in ignorance. People are said to hate what they think is bad, but what they think is bad is merely what they dislike, and what they dislike is simply what they fear, because they expect pain from it. Those pains may be purely conjectural or altogether phantasmical, the fancied fallout of some improbable war, societal collapse, divine wrath or natural catastrophe that shall befall us for permitting this or enjoying that. The antipathies that these phobias engender beget so much needless suffering.

If you trace the line of argument in these essays, Ryan N.S. Topping's treatment of Catholic education in the late 20th century, excerpted below, provides an appropriate denouement to the story this collection tells. Just as the Hobbesian vision marked a turning point for Canadian education, the real manifestation of this became evident in what happened to Catholic Schools in the late 1970s. That is, the power of State-controlled secular ideology runs counter to the Christian tradition would begin to mark the slow and steady extinction of vibrant Catholic educational institutions, at least in the forms in which they had been known for many years.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND THE CULTURE OF LIFE

By Ryan N.S. Topping

Beginning with his final chapter of *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada*, Father Laurence Shook offers a series of judgments about the future of Catholic education. In the 1970s anything seemed possible for the church of the future. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had surely been an epoch-making event. But its meaning was still unclear. Did it inaugurate a new church? Did it mark a point of no return? For many, in those years between Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 (which reaffirmed the Church's ban on artificial contraception) and Karol Wojtyla's election in 1978, the answer was: yes. Recalling Hegel's metaphor "the owl of Minerva takes flight at dusk," at the time of Shook's history, in Canada at least, the first stars had already appeared in the turn from the Church of Trent to the Church of Vatican II. What strikes the reader 40 years on is not, as is so often the case with the predictions of an historian, that Shook was wrong; indeed he saw correctly. What startles is the serenity with which he welcomed the tempest. After noting, among other things, the then-present trends of priests exiting Catholic schools, and laity rushing into secular ones, Shook anticipates the imminent closure of Catholic colleges. As he writes, these "hard facts" do not necessarily point to the total disappearance of Catholic colleges in the country, but first "to a real and relative curtailment of their operation," and second "to the need of transferring their basic functions into the large public university." He predicts that there will remain only "one or two" English Catholic universities; the colleges that survive will exist as appendages to the body of their larger provincially funded host universities. In addition to these, also standing after the storm will be a few research centres, presumably like Toronto's Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (PIMS), of which Father Shook was president from 1961-1973.

What happened in the history after Shook's History? Catholic institutions did indeed close. In 1968, for example, there were some 57 Catholic colleges or universities outside of Quebec, including junior colleges (offering one- or two-year programs that weren't equivalent to a university bachelor degree). Over the next 15 years, this network virtually collapsed. Thus, between 1970 and 1983, 23 institutions closed, bringing the total from 40 to 17. As of today, 19 belong to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities of Canada (ACCUC). By any reckoning, the 20 years after the Council for Catholic Education in Canada were lean. The number of institutions has held steady over the last quarter of a century. But bear in mind that the surviving colleges are all small, each serving (roughly) between 100 and 5,000 students, and that these vary in their attachment to their religious identity. When you add to this the increase in Canada's Catholic population since 1983 (by about 2.5 million), the achievement diminishes. From a demographic point of view, parents in Canada hoping for their children to study at a Catholic college will likely send them far from home. Canada's relative lack of institutions becomes clearer by comparison: in the United States there is one college or university for every 300,000 Catholics; in Canada, roughly one for every 750,000.

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