

## James Doull On What It Means To Be A Philosopher In Canada<sup>1</sup>

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*“There only now begins to be an indigenous historical scholarship in Canada, and that at a time when the political unity of the country and its cultural survival are uncertain.”<sup>2</sup>*

In his editorial comment for the first issue of *Dionysius*, the Dalhousie University journal of Hellenic, Patristic and Christian philosophy that he co-founded in 1977, James Doull offered a reflection upon the significance of starting such a journal in Canada. Two striking claims underlie his reflection. First, Doull understands there to be, tied to our situation as Canadians, a particular kind of access to the historical study of the intellectual tradition. Second, he argues that a recovered understanding of this intellectual tradition is of central importance to the political survival of Canada. Since it seems fair to say that most philosophers and most Canadians would not see any connection between the survival of Canada and Doull’s commentary on Plato’s *Theaetetus* in the same issue of *Dionysius*, some clarification of his views on the connection between philosophy and Canada is in order.

Doull is not the first to have noticed an emphasis on the history of philosophy in Canadian thought.<sup>3</sup> Already in 1950, on the occasion of the first ever symposium on Canadian philosophy, John A. Irving, a professor at the University of Toronto, wrote about the “Philosophical Trends in Canada Between 1850 and 1950.” Irving contrasts Canadian thought with the emergence and dominance of the various philosophical ‘isms’ in American philosophy:

Whether fortunately or unfortunately, no such luxuriant native growths have sprung up in Canada. Faced with the multitude of American and European ‘isms,’ Canadians have emphasized anew the importance of the history of philosophy: the thing most worthwhile is the famous

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Neil Robertson for providing me with some of Doull’s unpublished works on Canada, and to Ian Angus for indispensable references to other works on Canadian philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> James Doull, “Editorial Comment,” *Dionysius* Vol. 1 (Dec. 1977) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Connected to this emphasis on the history of philosophy, it would also be of interest to consider why there has been such a strong and consistent Hegelian emphasis in Canadian thought.

philosophical literature of the past. The history of philosophy must be thoroughly mastered before critical and speculative activities can be profitably undertaken.<sup>4</sup>

This emphasis on the history of philosophy<sup>5</sup> is part of what Irving characterized as the attempt in early Canadian philosophical work “to resolve the conflicting ‘isms’ through the achievement of a balanced philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> The theme of a conservative, balanced philosophy resonates through much English Canadian thought. French Canadian thought, developing almost wholly independently of English Canadian work, shares with this other solitude an avoidance of positivism and materialism, focusing rather, due to its strongly Thomistic character, on a classical education. Important works on the history of philosophy in English and French Canada by Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott,<sup>7</sup> Roland Houde,<sup>8</sup> Yvan Lamonde,<sup>9</sup> and Raymond Klibansky<sup>10</sup> among others<sup>11</sup> have studied the various forms of philosophy in Canada throughout our history.

Though these studies are of great interest for the question before us, Doull’s focus on philosophy in Canada does not refer to an already existent body of scholarship,<sup>12</sup> but

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<sup>4</sup> John A. Irving, “Philosophical Trends in Canada Between 1850 and 1950,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 12, no. 2, (1951) 233.

<sup>5</sup> See also Leslie Armour, “Canada and the History of Philosophy” in Terry Goldie, Carmen Lambert, Rowland Lorimer (eds.) *Canada: Theoretical Discourse/Discours théorique* (Montréal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Irving, “Philosophical Trends in Canada Between 1850 and 1950,” 239.

<sup>7</sup> See Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason: An Essay on Philosophy and Culture in English Canada, 1850-1950* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1981). Armour and Trott have each written extensively on Canadian philosophy. See especially Leslie Armour, “The Canadian Tradition and the Common Good,” *Études Maritainiennes*, 5, 1989; Leslie Armour, “Canadian Ways of Thinking: Logic, Society, and Canadian Philosophy” in Allen Seager, Leonard Evenden, Rowland Lorimer and Robin Mathews (eds.) *Alternative Frontiers: Voices from the Mountain West Canadian Studies Conference* (Montréal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Roland Houde, *Histoire et philosophie au Québec: Anarchéologie du savoir historique* (Trois-Rivières: Éditions du Bien Public, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Yvan Lamonde, *Histoire sociale des idées au Québec* (Saint-Laurent, Québec: Fides, 2000); Yvan Lamonde, *L'Histoire des idées au Québec, 1760-1960 : bibliographie des études* (Montréal : Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1989); Yvan Lamonde, *La philosophie et son enseignement au Québec, 1605-1920* (Ville LaSalle: Hurtubise HMH, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Klibansky and Josiane Boulad-Ayoub (eds.), *La pensée philosophique d'expression française au Canada* (Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> See esp. Graeme Nicholson’s “Hermeneutics and Critical Theory in Canada,” *Eidos*, XI, 1 & 2 (June/December 1993) 131-141.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, Doull was quite disparaging at the actual state of academia, despite its vast proliferation of articles and books on every subject. See “Naturalistic Individualism: Quebec independence and an independent Canada,” in *Modernity and Responsibility: Essays for George Grant* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) 37: “The human spirit seems to itself rich when in truth it is empty and impoverished. For the past is not studied as educative and corrective, but as what one is already done with and liberated from. It is the object of an abstract and superficial reason that can without trouble rise above whatever content: and the arts and other works of the present endlessly repeat the same tale that between reason and the endlessness of the natural there is no congruity and true expression. There is sharing and communication of experience in which nothing is in truth shared or communicated, since that would be a true object and an offence thus to freedom.”

to the *potential* for an important Canadian scholarship. His conception of this philosophical potential emerges from his reflections upon the Canadian spirit as it is reflected in our constitution and other institutions. For this reason, rather than focusing upon this or that Canadian philosopher, I shall instead restrict myself to Doull's understanding of the contemporary difficulties facing the retrieval of an adequate understanding of the philosophical tradition. For Doull, the situation of Canadians both brings to light how these philosophical obstacles to understanding our intellectual tradition can be overcome, and urgently demands that we do so.

It is clear from Doull's approach to the history of philosophy that the obscurity of previous philosophies to our own time is not the result of certain universally inescapable, structural impediments to our understanding of previous ways of thinking, which would require the philosophical sub-field of hermeneutics. The problems of the foreignness of previous philosophies can only be solved through a systematic reading of the whole history of Western thought, which serves to give the contemporary positions clouding our understanding of the past the status of passing moments in a wider historical dialectic.<sup>13</sup> An understanding of the presuppositions that dominate contemporary thinking, combined with careful historical, philological, and philosophical attention to older texts, is sufficient to avoid naively reading modern attitudes into the past. Against those who might retort that Doull's own approach to texts is philosophically naive, being absent of hermeneutical reflection upon the structural incompatibility of different forms of thought and historical epochs, Doull said the following: "it is as though what Plato, Aristotle, or some other philosopher thought is not by us thinkable so far as we are also human! Their thoughts may be difficult for us, but the difficulty is partly in ourselves in that we are uncritical and cannot question our own dogmas."<sup>14</sup> There is no doubt that for Doull, reason is universal and transcends the ages, and that through sufficient study of the great thinkers and the historical context to which they were responding, we can see beyond the dogmas of our own time and make contemporary interlocutors of these older texts.

What then are the contours and the limits of the contemporary philosophical landscape according to Doull? He sees contemporary dogmas as splitting in two the unity of life and thought that he locates in the Christian Trinitarian principle, in which nature as primary is negated and thought discovered to be true grounds of our freedom, within which nature and the natural aspects of life can be restored and recognized as grounded in the rational.<sup>15</sup> Once this unity is broken up, there is on the one side an abstract, calculative thinking which is indifferent to any particular content, manifested in numerous ways: liberalism's adherence to individual rights prior to any mediating

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<sup>13</sup> Peddle and Robertson note that Doull and George Grant wrote "within the expanded horizon of the long history of western philosophy and culture, from the ancient world to their own twentieth century" ("Lamentation and Speculation: George Grant, James Doull, and the Possibility of Canada" in *Animus*, vol. 7 [2002]: <http://www.swgc.mun.ca/animus/2002vol7/peddleandrobertson7.pdf>, 2).

<sup>14</sup> Doull-Braybrooke Debate (unpublished), p. 4. This unpublished debate on the question "What is the proper business of philosophy today" took place in 1974 between James Doull and Wayne Hankey of the Dalhousie Classics Department and David Braybrooke and Robert Martin of the Dalhousie Philosophy Department.

<sup>15</sup> See for example "Naturalistic Individualism," 33.

institutions, Marxism's classless society beyond all difference, abstract and centralizing bureaucracies governing without respect for local traditions and customs, analytic philosophy's application of abstract and mathematized symbolic logic to older philosophical texts irrespective of their own internal logic and assumptions. In all these cases we have a thinking which excludes the dynamic character of life and nature. Diametrically opposed to these are various forms of existentialism, concerned with respecting nature, culture, and language, as opposed to an abstractly dominating reason. Doull sees this perspective as in turn emphasizing the flux of life apart from the order and stability of thought. For Doull, it is the task of philosophy throughout the ages to break down the separation of these kinds of divisions, and discover how life and thought are inherently connected. If one approaches the history of philosophy assuming the trans-historical universal applicability of modern symbolic logic as exhaustive of what reason is, or the Heideggerian view that the tradition is at its core the suppression of life and nature by a technical reason, the way that both sides can be held together with varying degrees of success will remain obscure. Only if philosophy can approach the past without our own pre-conceptions of the definition and limits of reason can we open ourselves to the truth in all forms of spiritual expression, "not only philosophical doctrines but poetical and other literary works, religious doctrines, and institutions."<sup>16</sup>

This assessment of the contemporary is directly connected with Doull's assessment of Canada and the United States. In their contribution to *Philosophy and Freedom*,<sup>17</sup> David Peddle and Neil Robertson have traced the development of Doull's interpretation of the United States, and the resulting change in his understanding of Canada. Until the mid-1980's Doull identifies the U.S. with the pole of a naturalistic, consumer-driven liberalism, destructive of nature and the existence of distinct cultures and communities. Having broken with European tradition and started radically anew with the Declaration of Independence, the U.S., in Doull's earlier view, has lost the depth of European culture, and the political capacity of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nation-state to unify the various ends of individuals in civil society. It is relative to this negative assessment of the United States that one should read Doull's original understanding of the peculiar task for Canadian philosophy.

Doull writes in the above mentioned editorial comment to the first *Dionysius*:

To have hold of their tradition and proper culture, while it is the common need of the present time, is peculiarly necessary to young Canadians. This country subsists in independence of the United States so far as Canadians have another and more conservative relation to the common European tradition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Editorial Comment," *Dionysius*, 3. In the Doull-Braybrooke debate, Doull states that "the recovery of the tradition must be through the study of texts literary, religious, historical as well as philosophical..." (p. 7).

<sup>17</sup> David Peddle and Neil Robertson, "North American Freedom: James Doull's Recent Political Thought" in *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 476-504.

<sup>18</sup> "Editorial Comment," *Dionysius*, 3.

Because the United States is here viewed as bound to the technocratic liberal side of the contemporary divide, the individual is prior to institutional life, and novelty is privileged over tradition. American philosophy, so long as it remains with contemporary liberalism's confidence in the immediate freedom of the natural individual, has no access to the richness of earlier European thought. Canada, in contrast, is founded upon the rejection of this American rupture with Europe and the embrace of radical democracy. Our preservation of European institutions gives us a fuller access to the more comprehensive reason of the European tradition. As such, Canadians can avoid the pitfalls of both American political life and of American philosophy by defining "their rejection of technological naturalism by means of the old tradition."<sup>19</sup> Peddle and Robertson bring out the problem of this analysis: why is Canada not subject to the same fate of 20<sup>th</sup> century European states if it is distinguished from the American state merely through the stability of its European tradition? Why would we be able to preserve the stability of this rational state while the European versions degenerated into fascism?

Doull elaborates this question further in a 1974 public debate at the University of King's College addressing the question "What is the proper business of philosophy today?", Doull made the following comments about the relevance of our national identity to the question of philosophy's true purpose:

We are not carrying this debate on the moon or at Harvard or Oxford but in Canada. Our question more exactly is, what is the 'business' of philosophy at present in Canada? In Britain or the United States the same question would be answered almost inescapably within a particular philosophical tradition. For Canadians there need not be the same restriction. Indeed if we are to be an independent country politically and culturally, we have to acquire another and more adequate relation to our traditions than simply through the British philosophy and its American extension. That is obvious from our English-French duality. We cannot be one country with the French if we build on our British colonial past alone, but only if we enliven our whole European inheritance.<sup>20</sup>

I believe that in this statement we have the key to what would eventually distinguish Doull's earlier reading of North American states from his final word on the issue. That Canada is beyond being simply another version of the European nation-state is seen by the simple fact that the political union between French and English Canada after the Conquest would be unthinkable from a European perspective. Articulating a genuinely common political spirit between the French and English traditions in Canada would prevent a nation from falling back upon its merely natural characteristics as the primary foundation of the state and its citizenship, in isolation from the universal freedom of its rational institutional life. For this reason, Doull's view of Canadian philosophy's capacity for a more objective view of the intellectual tradition cannot be labeled

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<sup>19</sup> "Naturalistic Individualism," 50.

<sup>20</sup> Doull-Braybrooke p. 8.

nationalistic, because it is precisely in Canada's capacity to transcend nationality that he sees this potential. Its access to historical truth does not lie, for example, in a traditionally romantic appeal to our languages as having a deeper access to truth, as with the Heideggerian privileging of German and Greek as philosophically richer than languages at the disposal of other nations. Doull is of course critical of the naturalistic and relativizing view of philosophical positions as being inextricably bound to a particular national culture, as if they could only have been discovered or even understood by members of that culture. National character does not limit what can be grasped by the universality of thought, but only *disposes*<sup>21</sup> a thinker to apprehend a certain principle with clarity, though other principles or perspectives are far from inaccessible. The Canadian philosopher, not bound to one European national tradition, but without having radically broken off from European thought, should be disposed to consider more objectively the common European philosophical legacy.

This is not at all to say that cultural particularity inherently obscures one's grasp of history, as if a hypothetically nation-less philosopher would provide the most comprehensive point of access to the history of philosophy. There is something much more particular to the English-French duality which constitutes the Canadian state which might afford such a perspective on European intellectual history. Of the difference between the French and English traditions in Canada, Doull writes that it is "[n]ot just any difference, but that of the two peoples who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries discovered and brought into being the rational democratic freedom of the modern age."<sup>22</sup> I think Doull here concurs with Hegel's assessment of the relation between British and French thought.<sup>23</sup> Hegel himself thought that the German national character unified French rationalism and its ability to make explicit abstract universal principles, with British empiricism's attention towards the particular of sense and intuition.<sup>24</sup> Doull seemed to understand Canada as an even clearer and more stable reconciliation of the British and French character than Hegel's ascription of this potential to the German national character. With the German reconciliation of French and British character, the problem remains that this reconciliation itself belongs to a particular nation, exclusive of other naturally defined European nations, and thus one can easily fall into a confusion of its rational comprehensiveness and its natural exclusiveness. In Canada, by contrast, the British and French components constitute sovereign parts, but the unity of them is beyond either particular natural tradition, granting a certain protection against this confusion: "The different spirit of French and British culture and the consequent collisions and misunderstandings of the two not only sharpen in each the sense of its

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<sup>21</sup> "It is no longer in thought and a rational belief that Europeans and Americans have their essential tradition, but in the natural and the particular. One speaks, for example, of British, German, or some other national philosophy, as though national differences divided essentially and did not only dispose to the discovery of one rather than the other principle," in "Naturalistic individualism," 42.

<sup>22</sup> Doull, "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," in *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull*, 434.

<sup>23</sup> See in particular Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* in *Werke*, vol. 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969-71) 501-502; 520-540. For the English translation, see Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956) 421-2; 438-457.

<sup>24</sup> On the "logical" temper of the French and the "empirical" temper of the English, see "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 435.

difference but permit a recognition of the common European freedom which our federation and the American would variously realize."<sup>25</sup>

Yet in his later political thought, Doull argued that this federal unity which is prior to any particular nationality but can take into itself many such nations is common to both Canada and the U.S. In fact, he argues that the U.S. has a much clearer sense at this point in its history of this supra-national sovereignty than Canada, since Canadians still struggle to articulate how the particular sovereignties can be held within the federal sovereignty. It seems that this shift in his political analysis should have important consequences for Doull's view of the access of Canadian philosophy to a true grasp of the history of philosophy. American thought is no longer seen as inherently bound to a particular national tradition, and is, in its own political history, a synthesis of British and French political thought (although one which leans heavily towards its British origins).<sup>26</sup> In fact, insofar as we have not yet articulated how a common European humanism exists between French and English Canada, providing the basis for a genuine federal sovereignty, it seems as though American political life might in fact have a more explicit access to the history of thought. The possible access to the history of philosophy once ascribed by Doull to Canadians would seem, judging from his later political thought, to be fundamentally North American and not distinctively Canadian.

Despite this shift of emphasis from considering the virtues of the Canadian version of freedom as against the one-sided American version, to considering Canadian political life as belonging with the United States to the larger genus of North American freedom, Doull always kept in view certain particularities of Canadian political life which indicate that preserving the Canadian federation as a distinct form of North American freedom is not only worthwhile but has a certain world historical importance. Having the foundational French element which must be accommodated in its distinctness demands a place within our political life for "the more intellectual spirit of French culture" beyond the overwhelming British empirical orientation of the American spirit (however informed by the French tradition it may be).<sup>27</sup> In contrast to both the United States, where the

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<sup>25</sup> "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 459.

<sup>26</sup> "Those who designed the institutions of the American republic were often well acquainted with the French culture of the time. Americans in their subsequent development have drawn also on other European cultures and can with reason regard themselves as heirs to the whole European tradition, however much they continue to be regarded by some Europeans as barbarians." ("The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 394). Concerning the formula of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' Doull writes that "the basis of American independence as expressed in this formula and explicated afterward in the Constitution is the British freedom of that time as conceptually clarified and concentrated by French political thought" ("The Relation of the 'Canada Clause' to the Concept of Quebec as a 'Distinct Society'" [unpublished], 2).

<sup>27</sup> "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 394. It seems to me that the difference between the rationalist French tradition and empiricist British tradition goes a long way towards explaining the differing reactions in English Canada and Quebec to our constitutional impasse. Quebecers expect an explicit and written resolution of our national question, included in the constitution itself, which expresses their understanding of their distinct and foundational place in the Canadian federation. Quebecers are so attached to the explicit resolution of the question of its place within Canada that a significant part of their population are willing to risk the existence of one of the world's most envied

multiplicity of its European heritage is combined into something more homogenous in which the elements have no independent institutional expression, and to the European Union, in which the various nationalities understand themselves as having the same independent national status they held prior to entering into their common political institutions, in Canada French and British versions of European freedom have each been given a degree of autonomous, institutional expression, such that both can be preserved in order to animate the whole. Doull writes that “such a relation of the two peoples as exists imperfectly in Canada, and threatens to dissolve, is without precedent.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps as a result of needing to balance the English and French elements in confederation, all the Canadian provinces have developed a stronger sense of their sovereignty than the American states. In terms of the philosophical perspective implied by this political reality, one might expect a less overwhelmingly empiricist tendency in Canadian thought than in American thought, since the French rationalist component has its own continued separate existence. Further, the relation of individuals to the state differs in the Canadian and American versions of North American states. The freedom of the individual is given primacy over the state in the U.S., leading to “an unresolved tension...between individual freedom and a recognized obligation of government to correct and complement the competitive economic society.”<sup>29</sup> This antagonism between individual and state is largely absent from Canadian political life, though not generally at the expense of free individuals. This can provide a particularly Canadian perspective on the debate between liberal and communitarian which dominates contemporary debates in political philosophy.

But a fundamental question presses itself upon us. One may ask: why should the thoughts of a philosopher be restricted by a national experience? On what basis does nationality have any bearing on an individual's philosophical perspective? If the contemporary philosopher reads books by authors from various national perspectives, travels to internationally attended conferences, has cosmopolitan exchanges with scholars from all over the world, then how can one even talk about one's particular national history as constitutive of what philosophical truth can be apprehended by these individuals? We have already seen that for Doull, by the mere fact of being human, there remains for us the basic possibility of access to any form of thought. Yet Doull does clearly associate particular philosophical standpoints with certain national characters (each having a “characteristic temper and mentality”),<sup>30</sup> as philosophical perspectives

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democracies. English Canadians tend to regard such a demand as abstract in the face of how the country functions (more or less) well, its recognition and respect of fundamental freedoms, the prosperity of the majority of its citizens. It tends to recognize Quebec's distinctiveness through individual gestures and agreements, without grasping the legitimacy of the need for explicit rational expression of how there can be one political community inclusive and respectful of the two founding peoples. Doull writes: “The exasperating immobility of Canadians of British culture in the face of an impending ruin to their country has in part a like explanation: somehow Canada will remain together, the constitutional problem is not as bad as it appears to be, that is, an undefined solution is assumed” (“The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada,” 449).

<sup>28</sup> “The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada,” 394.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 405.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 399.

emerge from a comprehensive national spirit which pervades all aspects of a nation's existence.

Take the example of European thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Doull, these philosophical positions arise out of the experience of the contradictions and tensions of life in declining nation states, just as Hegel's philosophy could only arise at the height of these very same states. As Doull formulates the tension, the natural finitude and particularity of language, custom and geography which form the foundation of these nation states is so immediately identified with the common universality of human rights which they render possible, that the instability and destruction of these states are implicit in their very greatness. Heidegger's understanding of poetry's importance and Wittgenstein's language games are for Doull philosophical expressions of the twilight of the nation state, where the primacy of the particularity of language as separated from universal human reason and any rational basis for individual human rights becomes the exclusive basis for a unified political state.<sup>31</sup> The French post-modern skeptical tradition of Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida, attending to the endless otherness of a purely linguistic unity, expresses the logic underlying the impossibility of these nation states, along with the apparently impossible unification of the communities subsequent to their destruction as sovereign nations.<sup>32</sup> Their distrust of genuinely comprehensive universality comes out of their experience of the transition towards European unification, in which the humanism common to European countries is present only abstractly through economic associations and as rights wholly prior to government. The most complete deconstruction is the one which can reveal the contradictions which result in locating sovereignty and freedom on the side of the finite apart from the infinite,<sup>33</sup> or the infinite to the exclusion of the finite, while also showing the contradictions of a perspective which seeks to show how the finite and infinite can be thought together.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, Doull confirms the relative truth of post-modern positions, by the fact that these thinkers give rational expression to the political *aporiae* confronting the thoughtful European. However, if these thinkers have given us the logical form of their political culture at present, this does not mean that they will be able to grasp the fullness of the intellectual tradition from their perspective.

For Doull, this negative result of contemporary European political life provides inadequate categories for grasping the truth of the Canadian or American experience. For example, Doull is critical of Richard Rorty for his appeal to an "alien logic" which distorts the significance of the negative result of New Deal policies in America.<sup>35</sup> Since

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 401.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 401, 462 (n.3).

<sup>33</sup> Here and throughout I use the distinction between infinite and finite in the Hegelian sense. Something is infinite in the positive sense for Hegel when there is nothing which is opposed to its self-referring totality. What is infinite is not limited or excluded by another, as one finite thing is the limit of another finite thing. Rather, everything finite exists only in relation to the infinite, and its relationship to finite things is ultimately a relation to itself as including them within its own activity.

<sup>34</sup> This logic is particularly evident in Derrida's work. For its clearest formulation, see his later work on hospitality and forgiveness, in which he treats the relation between the unconditional and the conditional.

<sup>35</sup> "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 425.

Roosevelt's social policies have been felt as an encroachment upon civil society, Rorty denies the possibility of a complete society uniting within itself the diverse ends of individuals in society, what Hegel would call the infinity of the state. The infinite is absent from our lives, according to Rorty, as proved by the endlessly unsuccessful process of unifying all these disparate ends in society.<sup>36</sup> John Rawls is commended by Doull, in contrast, for bringing American thought in the right direction through turning to the Enlightenment tradition upon which its constitution is based, reflecting upon American political reality rather than contemporary European abstractions inadequate for the analysis of North American post-national states.<sup>37</sup> From this appropriate beginning with Enlightenment, American political thinkers need merely to reach a fuller grasp than one finds in Rawls of the Enlightenment spirit as a whole in order to understand their freedom more adequately. Both Canadian and American thinkers must not think through the philosophical and political problems not in a vacuum, but with reference to the history and institutions underlying their freedom.<sup>38</sup> As we have seen, Doull might even have viewed his earlier interpretation of the United States and Canada as somewhat guilty of this application of a foreign logic to North American reality.

A few words should also be said about how Doull's conception differs from many other Canadian understandings of what might constitute Canadian philosophy. In a book entitled *Is there a Canadian Philosophy? Reflections on a Canadian Identity*, a particular understanding of the philosophy to be drawn from the Canadian experience is clearly articulated which has become dominant within many Canadian discussions. The authors' central thesis is that "the Canadian civic philosophy is one that articulates a way of life and philosophy of pluralism within a framework of individual rights."<sup>39</sup> This view is extremely characteristic of English Canadian formulations of the ideas underlying our political life, though Quebec thinkers have in general clearly understood that this Trudeauite preservation of culture as a right predicated of free individuals, if institutionalized, would be the dissolution of French culture in Canada. I think that Doull's resistance to understanding the Canadian spirit as founded upon a philosophy of multiculturalism, a philosophy of pure non-identity at the level of the state, in no way seeks to deny the multicultural character of our country. Rather, Doull would want to say that before we change the fundamental character of our institutions to conform to this

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<sup>36</sup> Doull characterizes Rorty's position in this way: "that the 'pragmatic' individual is cut off by an ever-recurrent negativity from an ascent to the universal" ("The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 421). For Rorty's political thought, see especially *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998) and *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> From the perspective of Enlightenment, there is no absolute division between infinite and finite, precisely because the enlightened individual is able to immerse himself in nature and experience without losing his unity and rationality in the process. In the Hegelian sense, the Enlightened individual is free in what is other, and is thus already beyond the mere separation of infinite and finite.

<sup>38</sup> "The true implication of patriation is that we have to give up looking to Europe as a model and guide to the independence whether of Canada or Quebec. It is still a species of colonialism..." ("The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 395).

<sup>39</sup> G.B. Madison, Paul Fairfield, Ingrid Harris (eds.) *Is there a Canadian Philosophy? Reflections on a Canadian Identity* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2000) 3.

vision of Canada, we must look to our history and grasp what it is in our constitution, institutions, and political life that made Canada so open to various cultures in the first place. For example, if our openness to a plurality of cultures emerged through the constant tension and interplay between English and French Canada, and between sovereign provinces and the federal government, tension which prevented Canadian citizenship from being based directly upon some exclusive nationality, then undermining what made this openness possible could be destructive of the individual freedoms multicultural doctrines seek.

What distinguishes Doull's account of Canada from the one articulated by the authors of *Is there a Canadian Philosophy?* is the weight afforded to the concrete history of Canada. If one were simply to look at the result of this history, it could seem that their multiculturalist interpretation of Canadian identity is the more adequate formulation of our national spirit than the seemingly outdated concepts in Doull's account, such as the necessity of the sovereignty of Parliament. As they write, "adoption of the Charter put an end to the British doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament that had hitherto prevailed in Canada, an age old doctrine that Britain's venerable *Economist* has rightly called 'anachronistic'."<sup>40</sup> For the authors, true to their pluralistic logic, "community and identity is itself an imagined construct,"<sup>41</sup> since it is in perpetual evolution and could never be unanimously articulated by its members. Yet as Leslie Armour notes, it is crucial to distinguish between "states of mind of those who think of themselves as Canadian" and "those ideas which, whether anyone consciously attends to them or not, are dispositional states which large numbers of Canadians have in common and which shape, to one degree or another, our communal life."<sup>42</sup> The latter provide the wider background within which revolutionary and counter-revolutionary moments of a nation's history occur, which lie beyond but are also determinative of the changing self-understanding of its citizens. This larger institutional context can only be grasped by a more fully historical account of Canada (though careful attention to what is contradictory in contemporary freedom, independently of a historical account, should also be able to point towards the resolution of our current situation, since on a Hegelian account the past stages of a development are always implicitly present in what follows).<sup>43</sup> Doull does not merely assert the country's origin against its present self-understanding as having a more adequate grasp of the Canadian spirit. If this were the case, Sir John A. MacDonald's highly centralized vision of Canada could merely confirm many of Trudeau's reforms most detested by Doull; or in another context, Doull would be arguing not for the importance of institutions, but for the essentially polemical attitude towards institutions present in Christianity's origins. In the thoroughly historical nature of Doull's analysis,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Leslie Armour, *The Idea of Canada and the Crisis of Community* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Pub, 1981) 108.

<sup>43</sup> See Peddle and Robertson, "Lamentation and Speculation: George Grant, James Doull, and the Possibility of Canada," 14: "But equally for Doull, the contemporary is the fullness of the whole historical development." A historical perspective makes the true apprehension of the present easier, but this is obviously not to say that thoughtful observers of the present, without a comprehensive historical perspective, cannot see the limits of the contemporary and offer true solutions.

which necessarily includes a systematic analysis of Canadian history from its early settlement to the present day, what is authoritative is neither the present nor the origin, but the historical movement itself taken as a whole. Only then does it become clear how “there is not only a separate history of Quebec and another of a British ‘nation’; there is also a common Canadian history more basic than either of these abstractions.”<sup>44</sup>

It seems to me that Doull’s conception of the potential of Canadian philosophy makes certain demands upon the direction of philosophical study in this country:

- 1) A substantial engagement between the philosophical activity in French and English Canada must be encouraged, which should take the form not merely of individual engagement with the work of the other side, but also of institutionally entrenched opportunities for real exchanges between students from universities in both Quebec and the English provinces. This engagement of course presupposes promoting the knowledge of the other language in the university curriculum.
- 2) In general, political thought should not be abstracted from a serious reflection on the country’s history, and should include a particular focus on the concrete institutions of our political life.
- 3) Doull encourages thoughtful recovery of our Canadian history within the larger context of the development of the West as a whole. This is where careful study of the history of philosophy is absolutely crucial. Within the Canadian context, this demands the careful study of European history and thought, so that we can better understand the genuine differences which exist between Quebec and other English-speaking provinces, differences which originate in the difference between the French and British traditions. This broad perspective would also aid the understanding of the common European heritage which alone can instruct us how the French and British approaches to contemporary political life are different but complementary.
- 4) This historical approach to political thought would help to move us out of our contemporary naturalistic assumption that the external aspects of a people’s identity, its language, cultural traditions, music and so on,<sup>45</sup> are primary. If one remains with these natural aspects of culture, English and French Canada are truly two separate and particular entities with no real relation. The connection can only be found through recovering the rational, Enlightenment foundations of each culture,<sup>46</sup> without neglecting the justified criticism of the abstract nature of the

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<sup>44</sup> Doull, “The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada,” 398. See Christian Dufour, *Le défi québécois* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2000) for an argument against viewing Quebec and Canadian history as two separable narratives.

<sup>45</sup> Doull refers to these as “the linguistic and other natural expressions of a vanishing order” (“Naturalistic individualism,” 31).

<sup>46</sup> See “The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada,” 401: “Rights were predicated formerly of individuals in virtue of their common rationality. According to the latest European thought such individuals do not exist.”

Enlightenment's self-understanding.<sup>47</sup> Only then can we understand how the English and French were able to come together in one country in the first place.<sup>48</sup>

- 5) Beyond the focus on European and Canadian history and thought, an emphasis on American history would be crucial for several reasons: to understand this new genus of North-American freedom which has emerged most clearly through American history in the form of post-national federations; to understand our difference from American political life; and to understand the history of their nation at the point where secessionist movements appeared likely to tear the country apart.<sup>49</sup>

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I would like to conclude this reflection upon the connection between Doull's political and philosophical position by citing Hegel's own closing words in his inaugural lecture at Heidelberg in 1816:

We older men who have grown up amid the storms of the time may call you happy who in your youth can devote yourselves undisturbed to truth and philosophy. I have consecrated my life to philosophy and I rejoice to find myself now in a situation where in higher measure and a wider sphere of work I can co-operate in diffusing and vivifying the higher interest of philosophy and especially can contribute to introducing you to it. I hope I may succeed in deserving and gaining your confidence. But in the first place I may not claim to do more than to bring you above all to confidence in philosophy and in yourselves.<sup>50</sup>

It seems that these words could have been just as well spoken by Doull to young Canadian scholars. In both his theoretical and practical writing, it is just this confidence, what Peddle and Robertson call a "speculative hope,"<sup>51</sup> which Doull seeks to inspire. It is a confidence in our own Canadian freedom which allows us to discover what is implicit in our history rather than simply abandoning it in lieu of some logic external to our experience. For Doull, everything points us beyond the abstractions that have gripped contemporary consciousness for so long, abstractions which served to conceal the meaning of our institutions and the intellectual tradition which provides the only context

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<sup>47</sup> See Doull's "Faith and Enlightenment" and "The Concept of Enlightenment" for his analysis of the consequences of Enlightenment thought.

<sup>48</sup> On avoiding anachronistic interpretations of the original union of French and English in Canada, see "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 435.

<sup>49</sup> For Doull, Canada is at the same stage as the United States around the time of its Civil War and the discovery of a true basis for substantial unification of its parts both constitutionally and in the hearts and minds of its citizens. See "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 393, 418.

<sup>50</sup> Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 3.

<sup>51</sup> Peddle and Robertson, ("Lamentation and Speculation: George Grant, James Doull, and the Possibility of Canada," 24.

within which they can become fully coherent to us. In respect to the work of philosophy and the future of Canada, Doull's work is an inspiration on both counts through the unity of the theoretical and practical that it exhibits. As Floy Doull has shown us in her presentation,<sup>52</sup> these are not for James Doull separate interests, but rather, the preservation of his country depends upon a better understanding of the common European tradition behind our two-fold national origin, and the grasp of past philosophy is made possible thanks to the fact that this common tradition is already implicitly present within and moving Canadian freedom. If Doull is correct, and solving our constitutional impasse is primarily a question of properly *understanding* the already existent principles of the country,<sup>53</sup> then Canadian philosophy has an important role to play in preserving the future of Canada.

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<sup>52</sup> Floy Elizabeth Doull, "Towards an Intellectual Biography: James Doull's work from 1980-2001," *Animus*.

<sup>53</sup> "...we have less need to amend than to understand the principles of our freedom... To live with a constitution which is not grasped in its principles, given conceptual and written form, is however unworthy of a cultivated people." ("The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada," 435).