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“The Expected Tradition”:

Innis, State Rationality and the Governmentalisation of Communication

“Les peuples se ressentent toujours de leur origine. Les circonstances qui ont accompagné leur naissance et servi à leur développement influent sur tout le reste de leur carrière.”

Tocqueville in Dumont (1993)

“The physiognomy of a government can best be judged in its colonies, for there its characteristic traits usually appear larger and more distinct. When I wish to judge of the spirit and faults of the administration of Louis XIV, I must go to Canada. Its deformity is there seen as through a microscope.”

Tocqueville in Parkman (1899)

What follows is an argument about the historical origins of Canadian state formation and their influence upon the present. The argument orients itself from certain observations of Harold Innis, particularly in his writings of the mid-1940s concerning the relation between church and state in Canada; that is to say, on the delimitation of the realm of the symbolic order in a society, and the control exercised by institutional bodies, such as church and state, over the extent of the symbolic order. In texts such as “The Church in Canada” (1947, 1956) and “Political Economy in the Modern State” (1944, 1946), Innis had made a hitherto underappreciated contribution

to understanding the history of cultural — as opposed to economic — development in the Canadian context. By the former, one understands that which precedes, contains or interacts with economic development; the cultural, organisational or ideological contexts that give shape to particular forms of economic action.

Thus, in “The Church in Canada,” for example, Innis observes that:

Students of cultural development in Canada have failed to realize the extent to which religion in English-speaking Canada has been influenced indirectly by the traditions of the Gallican Church in Quebec (1956:384).

One realises soon enough that Innis here is talking about something more than religion. He continues:

Nor do we appreciate the significance of the political background of the France of Colbert and Louis XIV. State and Church under an absolute monarchy in France was State and Church under an absolute monarchy in New France (1956:384).

This has been a favored thesis of English-Canadian and American historians since Parkman (Dumont 1993:357). Innis, however, goes on to draw out some of the implications, pushing them further than other historians had attempted up to the time of his writing:

Great Britain ... succeeded in the second empire to a greater extent than is generally realized because French bureaucracy had become solidly entrenched in New France. It was this bureaucracy which enabled the British to govern New France and which enabled Canadians through governmental activity to develop their natural resources by construction of canals, railways, hydro-electric power facilities, and other undertakings. It was this bureaucracy in Church and State which was reflected in the place of Quebec in Confederation and in turn of English-speaking provinces. Clemenceau once remarked that England was a French colony gone wrong. He might have felt that in Canada the French colony had followed expected traditions (1956:384).

There are so many intricate leaps in this passage that it is worth attempting to pin some of them down. Innis is suggesting, it seems to me, that key aspects of European absolutist statecraft are preserved in sedimented form in Canadian state formation, political organisation and culture. That is, the absolutist state and church shared a common form of organisation; more exactly, of bureau-

cratic rationality. It is this common bureaucratic rationality that would determine the trajectory of Canadian institutional history. It will allow, he argues, 1) the State to dominate the Church, which in turn 2) will allow the British, through the Church, to govern New France, 3) on a more general plane of the same order of domination, enable Canadians to develop their natural resources by the construction of canals and other channels of transportation/communication, and 4) determine Québec's place in Confederation. For Innis, the bureaucratic rationality of the contemporary Canadian state thus has its roots in an unbroken continuum reaching back to the early modern emergence of the European, absolutist state. As a result of such an unbroken continuum (the famed absence of a revolutionary tradition), Canadian institutional development has been marked simultaneously by "relative stability" and by "continuous repression": on the one hand, by the relative stability of large-scale forms of social organisation; yet, on the other hand, within these same organisations and in their cultural footprints, by a repressive symbolic culture of highly formalised, unimaginative "ecclesiasticism" or Puritanism, "the arts of *suppressio veri, suggestio falsi*," that have been particularly evident in "our literature, in our art and in our cultural life." For Innis, the cramped public sphere of the time of his writing was characterised by a) the longevity of political leadership — ie., the domination of politics over other discursive forms, b) the supinuity of public opinion and the hazards of public expression, and c) the settling of all great public questions in Canada on the basis of personal prejudices; in brief, by what he termed "the fundamental corruption of Canadian public life" (1956:386). However, and this is, I think, his principal point, the forms of organisation and the means of expression go hand-in-hand: in significant respects, the contemporary Canadian state remained an absolutist state with grievous consequences for the development of Canadian public life.

This argument by Innis, or at least some aspects of it, although not usually referred back to his profound insights of the mid-1940s, finds a contemporary evocation in the current work of Canadian historians of state formation. Bernier and Salée (1987), for instance, comment on the "strange" silence of contemporary political science as regards the history of the Canadian state; yet note that "in many respects, state power as exercised today continues practices that date to the nineteenth and *even* the eighteenth centuries," practices which they trace back to "a *remarkably pure* model" of the absolutist state (1987:101, 128, emphases added). Resnick (1990) has also commented on the paucity of theoretical work on the history of the Canadian state: "... in this country, writing about the state (and indeed civil society) has barely proceeded beyond square one" (152). If some of these lacunae have been to some extent remedied by the work of Greer and Radforth (1992) on mid-nineteenth-century state formation, few contemporary writers in English have matched Fernand Dumont's (1993) attempt to extend the historical framework back to the sev-

enteenth century and argue the strong case for the sedimentation of past practices into the present day. Except perhaps for Innis.

In what follows, I will contextualise Innis' approach by way of two hypotheses: firstly, that what Innis is attempting to describe becomes much clearer if read through the prism of Foucault's theories of governmentality and, secondly, in the light of the theory of governmentality, that the "corruption" of the Canadian public sphere can be better grasped as an aspect of the limited extent of the development of civil society — that is, of the extent and duration of the symbolic order — and, as a result, the truncated forms of public expression.

Foucault, Governmentality and the Theory of Police

The nature of early modern bureaucratic rationality particularly preoccupied Michel Foucault in the late 1970s; that task has since been continued in the work of his students in Britain, France and Italy (see Burchell et al. 1991), exploring the complex zone of research Foucault had come to term "governmentality." For Foucault, here following Friedrich Meinecke's great study (1957), what distinguished the early modern state (16th century) was the emergence of a form of rationality particular to itself: *Raison d'Etat*. Described by the 17th-century German academic statist Hermann Conring as "the polar star of modern politics," *Raison d'Etat* is the modern form of governmental rationality as an autonomous rationality. As historian Étienne Thuau has written, it is a form of reason "born of the calculation and ruse of men," and makes of the state "a knowing machine, a work of reason;" the state ceases to be derived from the divine order of the universe and is henceforth subject to its own particular necessities (Thuau 1966:9). In the international system of states that took shape in late sixteenth-century Europe, *Raison d'Etat*, in effect, bifurcates into two distinct logics: an *external* form of *Raison d'Etat* governing relations between states, or what German political theorists would term "Politik"; and an *internal* form of *Raison d'Etat* that would govern relations between the state and its "subjects," though it would be more accurate, if more unwieldy here, to say relations between the state and its knowing arts of exercising power within a field of intervention crystallising in a concept of "economy." In Foucault's words, "To govern a state will therefore mean to ... set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control" that German administrative thought would designate by the term "Polizei" (Foucault 1978, in Burchell 1991:92). If police theory (or policy science) developed in its most systematised form in the numerous 17th-century German principalities grappling with the problems of governance, it would also come to constitute a substantial pan-European body of literature increasingly disseminated throughout the 17th and 18th centuries (and resurfacing in

American sociological scholarship of the late 19th century). Police theory, then, was the theoretical distillation of reflection

formed by the institutions, processes, analyses ...the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and its essential technical means apparatuses of security (Foucault 1978/ Burchell 1991:102).

As such, within the Foucauldian theorisation of governmentality, it would be the outstanding manifestation of early modern rationality, internal to the workings of the state. With the early modern emergence of *Raison d'Etat* and, within the state, the theory of police, power is no longer based upon a legalistic conception of justice (divine or natural), but instead becomes rational on the basis of a logic proper to itself. The function of a rational politics is to guarantee that there be “communication” between humans. As Foucault states it:

As a form of rational intervention exercising political power over men, the role of politics is to grant them something more than mere existence; and, in so doing, to give the state a little more power. This is achieved by the control of “communication”; that is, the common activities of individuals (labour, production, exchange, comforts) (Foucault 1979:29).

In eighteenth-century France, Gordon observes in his commentary on Foucault, urbanisation and police are almost synonymous. One formulation of the objective of police was that of organising the entire royal territory like one great city. Public space, bridges, roads and rivers are prominent among the objects of police attention.

(T)his physical infrastructure of connection and mobility is seen by police theorist Jean Domat as the means whereby the policed city can function as a place of assembly and *communication*, a term whose meaning embraces all the processes of human intercourse, exchange, circulation and cohabitation within a governed population (in Burchell 1991:20, original emphasis).

However, the aims of the early modern state were still imbricated with ethical, religious and political considerations (just as, for example, contemporary Canadian politics remain far more entangled with religious, ethnic and linguistic considerations than with class). To the extent that accumulation was not yet an end in itself, the aims of the state derived from a conception of innate human sociability. Thus, the ruler could conceive of himself as the prudent manager of a large-scale household modeled on the classical *oikos*. In this still-

limited sense, economic action was the prerogative of the state and economic order flowed from the prudent direction of such action. In this conception, however, the individual subject had no independent initiative, nor interests potentially or autonomously productive of order. As historian Keith Tribe states, “Humanity confronts the state as ‘population,’ a subject mass to be regulated, enhanced and supervised” (Tribe 1988:27-29). As a result, the concepts of society and polity are synonymous: one cannot exist without the other, and they are as such conceptually indistinguishable. It would not be a great leap to the assumption that social order was owed *uniquely* to governing activity, and that the proper concern of government was “the happiness” of a population. As an innately social being, a creature of wants and needs — of commerce broadly understood — the happiness of the human being could be attained by the proper administration of human needs, and these could only be assured by good government (“gute Polizei”). Thus, the primary task of the ruler was to ensure 1) the numerical sufficiency of the population, 2) that it was provided with the institutions necessary for its subsistence (such as academies and entertainments), 3) the regulation of prices, 4) the proper punishment of crime, 5) the prevention of disease, and similar social policies (Tribe 1988:29-33). The policy-ing of society implies infinite, ever-extending networks of regulation. As Foucault put it, “police oversee everything that regulates society. ... It is life itself that is the object of police: in whatever is indispensable, useful and superfluous. It is the responsibility of police to make it possible for men to survive, to live and improve themselves” (Foucault 1979:31). As Tribe observes, “Unlike a legal order which defines transgressions and prescribes punishments, *Polizei* remained a prescriptive model of social order” (Tribe 1988:31).

Policing Canada: The National Insecurity State

Contra Innis, Eccles has argued that “for the better part of two centuries war, and the threat of war, was one of the great staples of the Canadian economy” (1987:124). If Mirabeau had once remarked that the primary industry of Prussia was war, the same could be said of New France, and in this perspective “it likely would be found that the military establishment runs the fur trade a close second in the economic mainstay of the colony.” But, Eccles continues, it was not only the economy that was affected by this establishment. The whole fabric of Canadian society — of Canadian culture as it were — was imbued with the military — or police — ethos (1987:110). It is from the perspective of a social fabric saturated with a military ethos that one has to consider the police powers of the Intendant. The Intendant was, it will be recalled, no doubt the most important official in New France, responsible for the civil administration of the colony, for justice, for the colony’s finances, and the development of the colony’s economy. As Lanctot remarks, “il possédait le droit de faire seul les règlements de police générale” (1971:139). Originally a military appointment

— in France, intendants had been appointed to the provinces to strengthen the royal power against the nobility — the appointment of the intendant to the colony would, by the 1660s-1670s, end clerical authority in civil affairs. As well, the success or failure of military operations were to a great extent dependent upon the intendant's military responsibilities, such as paying, feeding, clothing and billeting the troops, supplying them with arms and munitions, hospitalisation, allocation of materials and labour for work on fortifications, and for transport and supplies during campaigns (Eccles 1964:30-31).

It is equally significant that the first representative organs of public opinion in the colony would be the “assemblées de police.” These were not, however, an initiative of the intendant, but of the governor. According to Lanctot,

Ce fut Frontenac qui en eut la première idée. Dans ses règlements de police de mars 1673, il établit qu'à l'avenir, il se tiendrait, tous les six mois, une assemblée publique où tous les habitants du pays pourraient se trouver pour communiquer leurs vues sur la culture des terres, les entreprises et les commerces ...et régler le tarif des marchandises, les conclusions de l'assemblée devaient être mises devant le gouverneur qui, à sa discrétion, pourrait en faire l'objet d'une ordonnance pour le bien public (1971:144).

Frontenac's initiative seems to have met with royal opposition, unwilling to tolerate in the colony anything equivalent to the estates of the metropolitan society. Lanctot, however, cites evidence of police assemblies of the citizens of Québec as of 1677, dealing principally with issues of municipal administration (cf. Greer & Radforth 1992). Furthermore, the preoccupation with the policing of “well regulated communities,” in the absolutist sense, will outlast not only the ancien régime itself, but can also be found in the representations of the merchants of Québec City as well as Montréal to the legislative council established subsequent to the British conquest. Thus in a January 1787 report to the Legislative Council's Committee on Commercial Affairs and Police, the merchants of Montréal (who include James McGill, Benjamin Frobisher and Thomas McCord, among others) detail not only the specific interaction of commerce with police, but the all-encompassing nature of this approach to governance in which commerce, communication and education are profoundly intertwined. For instance, the merchants' report observes that

One of the first things necessary to the facility of commerce is good roads, a subject which perhaps comes more properly under the head of Police than of Trade but in the instance at present to be spoken of, these two objects are so intimately connected as to render the consideration under either applicable to both.

Here, the domain of police extends narrowly from the building of a jail in the District of Montréal, to the prohibition of bringing slaves into the country (but keeping “the few Negroes and Indian slaves already in servitude”), to the regulation of roaming cattle, improving and keeping in repair roads and bridges, regulating beggars and vagrants, providing for “helpless foundlings,” regulation of weights and measures, municipal charters for Québec City and Montréal, and finally “the surest and best means of obtaining a cheerful and dutiful obedience to the laws and Government from Subjects in general” by establishing public schools and seminaries for the education of youth “for the purpose of enlarging the human mind, conciliating the affections of all His Majesty’s subjects ... to render this a happy and flourishing Province” (National Archives, RG1, E1, v 9, Québec Legislative Council, E, Part II, 194-230).

All this to emphasise the extent to which the civil administration of New France and later that of the ‘Old Province of Québec’ in the early years of British rule constituted a police state in Foucault’s sense of the term:

The sum of means which need to be put into practice in order to ensure the ‘public good’ in a way which goes beyond the maintenance of peace and good order is, in general terms, that which in Germany and France is called the ‘police.’ ... Understood in this way, the police extend their domain beyond that of surveillance and the maintenance of order. They look to the abundance of population ...to the elementary necessities of life and its preservation ... to the activities of individuals ... to the movement of things and people It can be seen that the police force is the whole management of the social body. This term ‘body’ should not be understood in a simply metaphorical way, for it deals with a complex and multiple materiality ... the police force, as an institutional grouping and as a modality of intervention, takes charge of the physical element of the social body (in Armstrong 1992:194).

If, furthermore, one keeps centrally in mind Eccles’ point about the lasting significance in Canadian history, prior and subsequent to the Conquest, of the military deviation of Canadian economic development towards security ends (economist Hugh Aitken’s “defensive expansionism”), one can begin to more fully appreciate the felicitousness of Westley Wark’s characterisation of Canadian governance as “a national *insecurity* state” (Wark 1993:286).

Innis, Church and State: The Extent of the Symbolic Order

Having then provided a contextualisation for Innis’ argument, let us look in greater detail at some of his specific points. For one, it would seem, in a general way, that English-Canadian historians have tended more to emphasise and

be impressed by the direct, unbroken influence of French absolutism upon the institutional development of the colony than their Québec counterparts, more sensitive to the responses of the local environment (Dumont 1993). On this point, Innis is categorical: “State and Church under an absolute monarchy in France was State and Church under an absolute monarchy in New France.” For Innis, religion in Canada, whether Catholic or Protestant, is “Erastian” and because of this would be “largely concerned with the development of organisation” (1956:384). For Eccles, on the other hand, Erastianism begins “to creep in” but only after the French Crown takes over the administration of the colony in 1663 (1964:239). Both end up with a characterisation of the relations of State to Church as Erastian, although in Eccles that relationship is historically specific and incremental, whereas in Innis it is ahistorical and generalised (which is perhaps why he bizarrely refers to the Church in New France as “Gallican”). The key term here would then appear to be that of “Erastianism.” Hastings, in his 1912 encyclopedia article on the term, comments on its “notorious fluidity” and “the contradictory judgements of historians and political philosophers” in “estimating the quantity or the quality of the Erastianism that has actuated the great makers of Church history” (1912:359). For our purposes, it may be sufficient to follow Figgis’ (1900) “simpler definition of Erastianism as the theory that religion is the creature of the State,” although it is also important to recall the specific origins of the term in the 1843 Disruption in the Established Church of Scotland. In that context, Thomas Erastus wrote “to prevent the evangelical churches becoming what one of them claimed to be in Scotland and actually became in Geneva, a *societas perfecta*, with all its means of jurisdiction, complete and independent” (in Hastings 355). Given that in 1875 the Québec Catholic Church would also define itself as “a *societas perfecta*,” as an original society, distinct and independent of civil society, to which it is superior “par son origine, par son étendue et par sa fin,” as a result of which “l’Etat est dans l’Eglise et non pas l’Eglise dans l’Etat” (Dumont 1993:225), Innis’ characterisation of the relation of State to Church as Erastian is perhaps of limited generalisability. In other words, if one is to characterise that relationship as Erastian, it is clear that it is not, as Innis suggests, fixed and immutable throughout the duration of Canadian history, but on the contrary, has been fluid, changeable, and negotiated — ie., inscribes itself within a long (and continuing) struggle over both the duration and the extent of the symbolic order.

This is more in line with the argument put forth by Guy Rocher in his unpublished Harvard dissertation that deals specifically with church and state relations in the 17th century. There, Rocher distinguishes two periods in relations between Church and State: prior to 1660 or what he terms the phase of the “comptoir,” a form of social organisation established in a new land for purposes of commercial enterprise, in which the Church is “primarily a missionary

church” (1957:271), and from 1660 to the end of the French regime, the period of the colony, in which the Church is increasingly subordinated to the gallicanism of the civil administration’s extreme centralisation by the metropolitan public administration upon Versailles. However, and here too Innis seems to have got it wrong, it does not follow that the “servitude” (G. Lanctot) of the church in the latter part of the French regime, made it a Gallican church as Innis would have it. On the contrary, if the civil administration adopted Gallican principles after 1660 in respect of the Church, “the clergy of New France ...remained outside the gallican movement of thought which characterised the French clergy ...under Louis XIV” (1957:282). Rocher distinguishes, in France, four types of gallicanism (that of the bishops under Bossuet, a theological gallicanism, and royal and parliamentary gallicanisms). However, the French Gallican Declaration “was never signed by the bishops in New France, and was never made official in the colony” (1957:282). In Rocher’s terms, the Church in New France was never Gallican, but remained ideologically what it had been *prior* to the gallican turn: “devoutist.” Rocher defines “devoutism” as a mixture of mysticism and action, an asceticism of life and a moral rigorism; anti-intellectual; ultramontane and greatly concerned with orthodoxy (1957:85-86). It is precisely what Rocher terms devoutism — the ideology that precedes and resists gallicanisation — that Innis claims is an effect derived from the Erastian character of religion: organisational development marked by a repressive symbolic culture of ecclesiastism.

The religious project of the Church in the New World was, as Dumont has recently argued, profoundly utopian: the establishment of an autonomous theocracy, separate from the surrounding society, modelled on the re-creation of the apostolic church around the ideals of poverty, community and mission (Dumont 1993:40-46). Delage (1991) sees the deployment of the religious apparatus as a crucial component of the entire French strategy of colonisation: as the ideological mechanism by which the French empire will compensate for its economic backwardness in comparison to those of Holland or England. For Delage, it is the archaic production structures of a still-predominantly feudal French economy that join the missionary and the merchant in a symbiosis of mutual need: the survival of the missions depends upon that of the fur trade (1991:129), just as the later survival and growth of church organisation always depended on the annuities and gratuities of the royal budget. Dumont, for his part, sees an irreconcilable conflict between evangelisation and commerce, a conflict that he argues will never subsequently be reconciled (1993:41).

In any event, the theocratic utopia will prove short-lived — shattered after 1663 by the rise of the state and the fur trade (Delage:334) — but its historical brevity will, as Dumont argues, be compensated for by a myth of glorious collective origins and the promise of a radiant future that will provide one of the major currents of Québécois historiography. As Dumont puts it, “les utopies

présentes à l'origine ont retrouvé plus tard le statut de mythe" (57). Most significantly, "Bien avant que survint la Conquête anglaise de la Nouvelle France, cette société a subi un traumatisme de l'enfance qui devra faire appel dans l'avenir au travail compensatoire de l'imaginaire" (1993:57).

As Rocher suggests, the significance of the debate between Church and State in the 17th century can be inscribed within a larger conflict over a whole range of symbols of authority: from rules of precedence to economic policy, from no conflict in the period of the *comptoir*, to the period after 1660 marked by a number of such symbolic conflicts between Church and State. "They resulted from a larger system of symbols which discriminate between [social] functions at different levels ..." (1957:314). What is at stake in the 17th century struggle between Church and State is a struggle over symbolic control that, I want to suggest, presages the emergence of civil society as the autonomy of a plurality of social subsystems. If by the end of the French regime, the church had indeed been reduced to "servitude" (in Lanctot's image), or to "an inferior and dependent position" (Rocher 1957:349), it would, under British rule, soon rapidly regain "une surprenante liberté, qui devint de plus en plus grande et finit même par accéder à une indépendance totale" (Lanctot 1942:5). Parkman, it would seem, was not entirely wrong in his famous conclusion to *The Old Regime* that "A happier calamity never befell a people than the conquest of Canada by the British arms" (1887:401), but that is perhaps another story — that of the French colony gone wrong.

Innis, Civil Society and the Forms of Public Expression

What, given these qualifications, is left of Innis' argument? Not only was the Church in Québec not Gallican, but Innis' postulation of an essential Erastianism in the relations of State to Church would also appear to require additional distinctions. Furthermore, if these initial premises are dubious, what happens to the rest of the equation, specifically the relationship between governmental activity and the development of transportation/communication networks, and the place of Québec and the English-speaking provinces in Confederation? But perhaps what Innis is saying here amounts to this: It's not the specific details that matter as much as it is of grasping the general tendency, which is one of duration. Furthermore, the general tendency here is, in the last instance, *always* Erastian, always one of political and organisational domination for control of communication — but in the *police* sense of the term. In this sense, it doesn't really matter whether one is talking about State or Church; for both act in the same manner, as totalitarian institutions that have no sense of their limitations, that interfere thoughtlessly in people's lives through the fanatical manipulation of both dogma and data. The problem with institutions of social action (whether of State, of Church, or of education) is that they have become institutions of social surveillance and the enforcement

