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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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# TO THE MEMORY OF MSGR. MAURICE DIONNE

Duane H. BERQUIST

“One man is to me as the thousand if he be the best”  
(Heraclitus, DK49).

THE DEATH of Monsignor Maurice Dionne the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1980 was the sad occasion for his disciples to reflect upon the distinctive character of his teaching and the example of his life. Our filial piety, our gratitude and our love oblige us to acknowledge the great debt which we owe him for his teaching and his example.

Principle certainly among the distinctive traits of this great philosopher were his love for, and his understanding of, reason. These two traits were inseparably bound together in Monsignor's life, for a mature love of reason (as his certainly was) must be determined by a clear understanding of its exigencies when ordered to knowing truth. Such a love is in no way blind to the weaknesses nor to the defects of reason; rather, it zealously seeks to know all those things which are necessary to the intellectual life and which assure its well-being. Such an understanding of reason can only lead, as it did in the case of Monsignor Dionne, to an ever more profound and intense love of man's supreme faculty.

Indeed, almost the whole of the master's teaching and research could be divided according as it touched upon one or the other of the needs of reason in its pursuit of truth. His courses not only pointed out these needs and indicated how they were to be met, they effectively met them. Moreover, our own increasing awareness of these needs, through the able guidance of Monsignor, made us all more acutely conscious of their neglect throughout the history of philosophy, and very especially in our own times, a neglect which has led to so many tragic consequences.

Among the many needs of theoretical (or “looking”) reason, we can name here but a few of those which Monsignor treated in his courses over the years. These might conveniently be divided into those of reason considered by itself (along with the sense powers), those of reason in relation to sense appetite (emotions) and will, and those of reason in relation to the teacher. This division does involve some material overlap, however.

Two considerations stand out especially in the teaching of Monsignor Dionne on the needs of theoretical reason considered by itself. The first of these is *paideia*, which is

necessary both in regard to the principles of the thing under consideration and in regard to the method or way of proceeding. As to the second of these, we are indebted to Monsignor for the explicit division of the three ways of proceeding of theoretical reason, their order, and their necessity. The need for logic, as one of these ways, and its relation to the other ways, was brought out in this context. Indeed, to logic as the common method of the sciences Monsignor devoted many courses, emphasizing especially its nature, and how it ought to be taught. In addition, there were many particular considerations bearing on the principal tools of reason.

Another very important aspect of his consideration of the intellectual life was his insistence, through the years, on the necessity of the liberal arts as a preparation for philosophy.

Because the use of reason depends upon the appetite (both will and emotions) in various ways, Monsignor devoted much time and thought to the needs of theoretical reason in comparison to the appetite. He brought out clearly the need of a complete rectification of the appetite in regard to knowing.

His recognition of our need to be taught by the great masters led him to investigate the consequent need for two kinds of disposition to learn: One of these in the will, and the other in the intellect. He showed also the indispensable rôle played by the prooemium in a philosophical treatise, tying this in equally with the disposition to learn on the part of the intellect.

Another point for which his students will remember him was his development of the notion of *manuductio*, or the need of reason to be led, so to say, by the hand, either *per modum naturae*, or *per modum voluntatis* or *per modum rationis*. Especially important was his emphasis on the neglect of this last kind of *manuductio* in those difficult sciences of logic and metaphysics, and his teaching on the sort of *manuductio* required for them.

Finally, running through the warp and woof of all the above as a constant theme was the insistence upon the necessity of beginning well, for the beginning determines all that follows.

What we have said here is but some slight indication of Monsignor Dionne's concern with the needs of reason in its pursuit of knowledge. He made us, who had the good fortune of studying under him, aware of these needs. Whatever success we have had in meeting those needs has been with the help of the inspiration and direction he gave us.

When we consider the vigorous seeds of knowledge which he planted in our minds and the many pitfalls which he helped us to avoid, we are constrained to say with Antony, "When comes such another?"