

ARTICLE

Special Issue / Numéro spécial : Envisioning Canada /
Envisager le Canada

Introduction to Special Issue / Introduction au
numéro spécial

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Abstract

In this introduction, we briefly define Canadian philosophy and discuss its importance before introducing the authors who contributed to this special issue and their articles. The history of Canadian philosophy has been understudied, and there is a need for new philosophical work on the challenges facing Canada. Some articles collected in this special issue examine the history of philosophy in Canada, while others subject contemporary issues to philosophical analysis. The contributors to this special issue include Ian H. Angus, Robert Timko, Anna Brinkerhoff, Stefan Lukits, Charles Blattberg, Ronald A. Kuipers, Jérôme Gosselin-Tapp, Delphine T. Raymond, Frédérique Jean, Rémi Poiré, Matthew Robertson, Janet C. Wesseliuss, and R. Bruce Elder.

Résumé

Dans cette introduction, nous définissons brièvement la philosophie canadienne et discutons de son importance avant de présenter les auteurs qui ont contribué à ce numéro spécial et leurs articles. L'histoire de la philosophie canadienne a été peu étudiée et il est nécessaire de réaliser de nouveaux travaux philosophiques sur les défis auxquels le Canada est confronté. Certains articles rassemblés dans ce numéro spécial examinent l'histoire de la philosophie au Canada, tandis que d'autres soumettent des questions contemporaines à une analyse philosophique. Les contributeurs à ce numéro spécial incluent Ian H. Angus, Robert Timko, Anna Brinkerhoff, Stefan Lukits, Charles Blattberg, Ronald A. Kuipers, Jérôme Gosselin-Tapp, Delphine T. Raymond, Frédérique Jean, Rémi Poiré, Matthew Robertson, Janet C. Wesseliuss, et R. Bruce Elder.

Keywords: Canada; Canadian philosophy; culture; national identity; diversity; public sphere

1. Canadian Philosophy

Any claim that there is a philosophy associated with a particular culture raises a question: how can a philosophy be associated with any one culture if philosophy's identifying characteristic is its pursuit of answers for universal questions? This question can be answered by understanding philosophy as an area of inquiry with a corresponding body of knowledge and methodology, similar to the sciences, literary studies, mathematics, and history. When exploring universal questions, the sciences rely on the methods of empirical verification, while mathematics demonstrates its usefulness through application. Alternatively, philosophy asserts its universality through the pursuit of similar questions concerning truth, immeasurable claims about the nature of existence, and identifying the measures recognized and applied by everyone in providing answers.

Different cultures can offer different explanations for the same phenomena, and thereby arrive at different conclusions and worldviews. Thus, the conceptual packaging associated with philosophy as a category of knowledge can differ considerably in its expressions, even when the various cultures in question share a commitment to reason, including its various uses ranging from logic to debate.

What we have before us when examining philosophical declarations and deductive propositions is form, but their content will reflect the different meanings associated with the topics under analysis. Differences between cultures are often associated with the expression of their worldviews through stories, music, food, political orders, or religious convictions. Yet, underlying all of these divergent contents of the cultures are distinct meanings — the relational concepts associated with variations in thought, memory, actions, and outcomes. The word “God” may be recognized by multiple cultures, but it will not convey the same idea and concept, or motivate the same beliefs or practices. Consequently, different cultures are expressions of divergent meanings and understandings of universally recognized concepts.

Cultures are often associated with and reflect developed, organized societies. Some societies assign a single, inflexible cultural meaning to concepts used to understand, interpret, and respond to problems, such as life and death. Meanwhile, other societies can support two or three cultures and in exceptional cases, multiple cultures, with their divergent conceptual frameworks.

So, particular philosophies can be associated with specific cultures, including cultures with more determined beliefs and practices, and cultures that are more flexible and evolving. The differences between these cultures are associated with variance in religions, political orders, the history of their philosophies as a subject matter, and all of the other ways that people gather and express meaning through their decisions and actions.

If one surveys the range of publications about the philosophies of various cultures, they will find discussions of the philosophies found in Ancient, Modern, Western, Eastern, American, Chinese, British, Indian, Catholic, Buddhist, and innumerable other cultural contexts. Given the breadth of recognizable philosophical traditions throughout the world, rather than expressing scepticism, the real question is: why would there not be Canadian philosophy?

As a multicultural country with a history that has included the promotion of and access to education from its earliest recognized settlements, Canada faced the challenges of adapting and integrating old ideas to a new setting, modifying and amalgamating established political theories and religious dogma, and navigating the different meanings assigned to the same events by its constituent cultural communities.¹ Of course, the question arises: how can multiple cultures have a shared philosophical perspective? Does Canada's internal cultural diversity suggest that Canadian culture is not a shared single culture? Not if you regard philosophy as both a category of knowledge — as way of understanding the universality of certain questions (e.g., truth) — and a category that recognizes multiple meanings that can be generated.

Canadian philosophy, then, reflects efforts to bridge differences, to find common ground, to support principles of accommodation, and yet regard the human condition as not so foreign and peculiar that one would refuse to help someone who appears to be dramatically different. Regardless of their differences, early philosophers who were born or arrived in what is today Canada lived among a people dependent on each other. The interdependence of all members of the community was a central value of most Indigenous peoples that enabled survival in an often-unforgiving climate. Likewise, in the earliest European settlements in Canada, if you refused to help your neighbour because you disagreed with their religion, you were risking your own life should you need help the next day.

Each foundational cultural community in Canada — the English, French, and Indigenous peoples — have practiced philosophy since their inception, and there has always been cross-pollination of ideas. In terms of formal contributions to the evolving culture in Canada, the first philosophical book written in French Canada was published by Jérôme Demers in 1835, and a philosophical work by James Beaven was written in English Canada in 1850. Philosophically informed works were published in English and French Canada before Demers or Beaven, including by Pierre du Calvet (1735–1786) and Egerton Ryerson (1803–1882). Earlier authors often combined philosophical insights with legal theory, public policy, educational proposals, and theology. If we restrict philosophy to what is written by academics at universities, then Demers and Beaven are the earliest recognized contributors in Canada.

Canadian philosophy began to receive some recognition a hundred years after Beaven's book first appeared, with the publication of *Philosophy in Canada: A Symposium*, by John Irving (1952) of the University of Toronto's Victoria College (now Victoria University, University of Toronto). Since then, interest in exploring Canada's philosophical traditions has led to multiple other works, but unfortunately little recognition in the philosophy classrooms of Canada's universities.² Likewise, many philosophy journals remain disinterested in Canadian philosophy, focusing on established and recognized traditions rather than exploring underappreciated ones. Thus, for *Dialogue* to open the door for this exposition of Canadian philosophical

¹ "As a rule one knows there are two cultures when there are two groups of people who, characteristically and repeatedly, assign different meanings to the same act or event" (Armour & Trott, 1981, xxiii–xxiv).

² Some important contributions to the history of Canadian philosophy include Armour (1981), Armour and Trott (1981), Lamonde (1972), and McKillop (1979).

thinking, those involved are grateful. *Dialogue* is an apt venue for this special issue, not just because it styles itself as the Canadian philosophical review, but because Canadian philosophy has always been furthered by dialogue, not the winning of arguments.

If Canadian philosophy in general has been under-studied, then Indigenous philosophies in what is today Canada have been doubly neglected. Nevertheless, it is with pride that we are increasingly able to include the thoughts, conceptual frameworks, and discursive problem-solving debates of historical and contemporary Indigenous philosophies. As these views receive more recognition, all scholars can benefit from increased access to new ways of thinking about problems. Aside from the intrinsic value of Indigenous philosophies, their objections and critical perspectives on Canada's other philosophical traditions enable us to approach an improved synthesis through dialogue. Everyday access to divergent understandings of our varying relationships with the indeterminate universe further enriches our understanding of the same shared experiences.

2. Contributors to the Special Issue

There are a few questions that arise naturally when reading the articles collected in this special issue. How does each contributor understand their place in Canada's philosophical tradition(s)? Does their article and its arguments reflect the principles of change, accommodation, diversity, and tolerance that has defined the Canadian identity, regardless of the individual person's more specific cultural roots? The reader can decide. Relatedly, one might ask whether courses on Canadian philosophy should be taught at Canadian universities and what contribution an issue like this one can make towards that goal. A university course would not break new ground, given the research that has already been done, but by including contributions that reflect the central principles of Canadian philosophical analysis and illustrating the breadth and applicability of our home-grown philosophical tradition, we hope to inspire the inclusion of at least some Canadian philosophy in courses at Canadian universities.

A brief introduction to the themes and interests of our contributors will allow readers to choose their path in reading this issue focused on Canadian philosophy.

Ian H. Angus introduces Canadian philosophy with a thorough analysis of one specific concept — border — identifying it as a flexible metaphor. Angus reveals the multiple meanings that can be associated with border as it relates to state, nation, multiculturalism, and national identity. In relation to the idea of a nation-state, he refers to a lecture given in a European prison by a maritime WW1 survivor, Winthrop Pickford Bell. Angus addresses the ideas of political and geographical borders — ones that can also be used in philosophical explorations into identity. The concept of border has meanings that encompass personal identity associated with one's inherited community, such as Indigenous, as well as distinctions that establish both our divisions from others and yet our recognition of shared relations with others.

Robert Timko supports the concept of interculturalism as he begins his exploration of Canadian philosophy. Whereas Angus outlines the comprehensive role that a single concept, "border," can play in developing the philosophical ground of cultural identity, Timko explores philosophical theory adapted and expressed through different concepts, such as "place," "North," and "community" — ones associated

with a growing national identity. The orientation towards “community,” being as equally important as “individual,” inclined many Canadian philosophers to apply the metaphysical theory of idealism to experienced life because idealism generates adaptability that is necessary for the survival of a culture and/or a national identity. Timko demonstrates how philosophical issues can be expressed through diverse cultural voices, as a search for common ground and the good of all begins to unite people. Canadian philosophy is not a settled theory but an ongoing exercise, (a *nisus*), that includes recognition of new collaborations with Indigenous, African Canadian, and feminist perspectives.

Anna Brinkerhoff begins her article on the demands of patriotism with a discussion of the demands of friendship. Does being a good friend require having positively biased beliefs about one’s friends? It has been argued that being partial to one’s friends benefits them in various ways. Brinkerhoff analogizes this to patriotism, focusing on the Canadian case. Does being a patriot require doxastic partiality — i.e., that one has positively biased beliefs about one’s country? Ultimately, Brinkerhoff concludes that patriotism does demand certain norms, although these norms are attentional rather than doxastic. That is to say, patriots should attend to positive features of their country, rather than simply have positively tilted beliefs about it. According to Brinkerhoff, understanding the demands of patriotism as attentional rather than doxastic helps explain the appropriate relationship between patriotism, national solidarity, and moral progress within a national community.

Stefan Lukits, in his article, argues that apologies are an inadequate starting point on the road to moral repair. Apology occupies a prominent place in Canada’s national imagination. One longstanding stereotype about Canadians is that they are overly apologetic. For Lukits, apologies have a paradoxical quality: while purporting to address an injustice, they in fact cultivate a false consciousness and obscure the inequalities that must be addressed in order to rectify injustice. Instead, Lukits advocates for forgiveness. Rather than being primarily linguistic, forgiveness is a social phenomenon concerned with action, and therefore correlated with reconciliation and restorative justice. The pursuit of truth and justice, which are aims of Canadian democracy, is at odds with the ways in which apologies obscure relations of power. Conversely, his conception of forgiveness “tends a garden of weeds and wildflowers,” making space for mutual survival and coexistence despite the messiness of life, both past and present.

Charles Blattberg’s contribution to this special issue unpacks Charles Taylor’s concept of “deep diversity,” which has informed the development of multicultural theory and public policy in Canada and throughout the world. The notion was originally developed to make sense of how the different founding communities within Canada — the English, French, and Indigenous — belonged to the broader, unified Canadian national community in distinct ways. After elucidating Taylor’s conception of deep diversity, Blattberg examines its relationship to the account of “open secularism” developed by Taylor and his collaborator Jocelyn Maclure. Blattberg argues that what is required is not the “neutrality” suggested by Maclure and Taylor’s open secularism, but instead an “impartiality” wherein practical reasoning treats different views as part of the common good. Blattberg also identifies other limits of

Taylor's theory, particularly how it risks aestheticizing politics, and how open secularism may demand too much unity and thus remain closed to many people.

In *Ronald A. Kuipers's* article, the relationship between religious difference and the public sphere in Canada is even more prominent. Kuipers asks what the place of religious voices in Canada's public sphere should look like, critically engaging with the liberal strategy of containment — represented historically by authors like Hugo Grotius or John Locke — in order to advance a theory of pluralistic engagement. In particular, Kuipers argues that the liberal strategy of containment limits the democratic potential that deeper engagement with religious and cultural pluralism might make possible. Although the pluralistic strategy that Kuipers advocates might be more difficult and agonizing to pursue, he argues that the potential rewards of inclusion and the achievement of justice for those involved make it preferable. If the deeper listening and constitutional dialogue Kuipers promotes can secure these goods, then the rewards may be worth the risks.

Authors *Jérôme Gosselin-Tapp, Delphine T. Raymond, Frédérique Jean, and Rémi Poiré* continue with the theme of examining the public sphere in Canada, turning their attention to the linguistic landscape of Québec. In particular, they identify a tension between Québec's language policies — embodied in the Charter of the French Language — and recent attempts to establish a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples. Challenging the notion of a "common language," which forms the foundation of Québec's language policies, the authors instead make the case for linguistic sovereignty for each of the various nations within the province of Québec. This view of linguistic sovereignty is linked directly by the authors to both the cultural aspect of national identity and the right of national self-determination possessed by each nation. By advancing this account of linguistic justice, the authors indicate what kind of approach would facilitate a nation-to-nation relationship and reconciliation in Québec.

Matthew Robertson also reflects on how justice for Indigenous peoples in Canada could be achieved in his analysis of how "empty signifiers" can be leveraged for Indigenous resistance. An empty signifier is an open-ended or vague term that carries different meanings for different political actors. Robertson observes that, in the past, Indigenous political actors experienced marginalization or misrepresentation within broader social movements in Canada. This has presented a problem for Indigenous resistance movements that have sought to align themselves with a broader popular social movement. Robertson suggests that one way that Indigenous peoples could overcome this difficulty is by leveraging empty signifiers. By identifying and strategically deploying the right empty signifier, Indigenous people could, in principle, become the leading faction in a broader populist social movement, thereby avoiding marginalization and achieving their goals. Although Robertson is not sanguine about the immediate prospects of such an approach, he believes it could have potential in the long run.

Janet Catherina Wesselius further discusses Winthrop Pickford Bell — introduced by Ian Angus — and establishes a conceptual trail to nationhood outlined by Bell, through writings by Roméo Dallaire and Harold Johnson. Bell predicted the evolution of Canada towards its status as a nation; Dallaire expanded on the role of moral theory that was emerging in Canada as a unifying force in highly divergent communities;

Johnson extended the idea of metaphor, also introduced by Angus, in philosophical analysis by re-conceiving of concepts of nation and membership as “stories” expressed by individuals and communities. Such stories begin to comprise culture — Canadian culture — and can be transitioned for widespread communication through the arts, such as songs and other musical journeys. Wesselius explores the balance between inevitable errors, well-intended efforts, and honest outcomes — a trio of cultural components in Canadian stories that reveal a prioritized recognition of others.

R. Bruce Elder provides clear evidence of Canadian philosophical theory in an applied artistic context: music. Ideas conjoined create meanings, and meanings can be expressed through artistic media such as visual art forms, literary works, and planned sound arrangements, the most impactful of which are musical compositions. Elder argues that embodying ideas in aural media, including the expression of Canadian philosophical concepts, such as dialectical tensions in music, stimulates listeners’ discovery, influenced by their lived experiences, including living in Canada. While we may assume that all musical compositions have beginnings, climaxes, and determined endings, composers can also challenge the probable modes of pattern continuation, generating uncertainty about the expected consequence. Such uncertainty, a well-known Canadian lived experience, can be detected in some Canadian compositions (e.g., a piano journey that ends with a single note). Elder provides an analysis of seven Canadian composers including Léo-Pol Morin, Udo Kasemets, and David Jaeger.

The contributors share a recognition that Canada is a multicultural idea, held together not by overpowering pronouncements but by dialectical tensions and perpetual debates. Philosophy helps to reveal new meanings, not just confirm old ones. It also helps to sustain the idea of Canada, a place where we need each other to survive.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank the editors of *Dialogue*, Nancy Salay and Charles Côté-Bouchard, as well as the editorial staff, Jill Flohil and Cécile Facal. We are also thankful to the anonymous referees who reviewed each article that was considered for this special issue.

Competing interests. The authors declare none.

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Cite this article: Wilkinson, E. R. & Trott, E. (2026). Introduction to Special Issue / Introduction au numéro special. *Dialogue* 65(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217325100681>