The cases of “sciences Po Paris” and the ESSEC for two normative approaches of affirmative action in higher education in France: Where is the ideal of equality republican?

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Abstract:
In France, meritocracy was always a central pillar of public policies which had a function to ensure equal opportunity. Indeed, in the past, meritocracy proved its usefulness by ensuring renewal of elites. However, nowadays, it is highly challenged because of contemporary societies must answer a greater requirement of social justice which assigns to educational establishment and university a more increased role to reduce inequalities. Therefore, since 2002, in France, several devices have contributed to support social diversity in higher education. The most significant case is the setting up of Conventions Priority Education (CEP) by the Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris (more generally named “Sciences Po”). Since the implementation of CEP, other institutions (such as ESSEC or certain “Grandes Ecoles”) also established up such devices.

Shortly, I will present two historical dominant designs of school justice. After, my analysis will be supported by an empirical case: the one on a comparative examination of institutional devices of Sciences Po and ESSEC. Then, I will defend the idea according to which the existence of these two normative conceptions leads incomprehension about the French republican ideal. However, it is advisable to get to reconsider a meritocracy which answers the future objectives of equality of opportunity in France. For this aim, we must examine which normative conception converge more with the French ideal of republican equality.

Foreword: objective of perspective of my purpose.
My communication has for goal to provide two normative conceptions of meritocracy extremely different and perhaps rival. In concrete term, I propose to examine these conceptions such as they have prevailed and be promoted historically, in France, by two designs of school justice. My objective is to demonstrate which conception is more in accordance with a republican model such as the French democracy. Indeed, the stakes of equality of opportunity -such as an instrument ensuring the renewal of elites and like a challenge for reduce phenomenon as “social reproduction”- demands a greater requirement of social justice. In my opinion, existence of these two normative conceptions favors numerous lack of understanding about goals of the French republican ideal. Therefore, I will defend the idea that by affirmative action when it applied in schools and universities, meritocracy enables to grasp the French republicanism essence and by the way it modernity.

In a first time, for this examination, I will make a short presentation of two designs of school justice since the advent of the Third French Republic. After this, my interest will
be focused on institutional devices recently experienced in two French “Grandes Ecoles”. The most significant case is that of the Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris (more generally named “Sciences Po”), which set up Conventions Priority Education (CEP). This institutional device aims to reduce phenomena of self-censorship for young people who presently study in zone of priority education. This aim is to privilege the social diversity in higher education. Different researchers in social sciences -especially in educational sciences-, diagnose these effectives of “Grandes Ecoles” count only three at six per cent of young people came from disadvantaged social environments. Therefore, since the creation of CEP in 2002, the French Ministry in charge of Higher Education and Research regards these devices as being innovating to counter the phenomenon of inequality between opportunities. Moreover, nowadays, this goal became an important electoral strake. However, we can ask if on the long range, these devices will create new elite. This question justifies my interest about affirmative action such as means to counter higher impediment to equality of opportunity and to reach a society that have it foundations on cultural and social diversity. This aim is very important for the future of French democracy. But I understand three arguments that unanimously state a discrepancy between affirmative action and the French Republic. This discrepancy is reinforced by the evocation of two myths. The first myth is the exception of this political model; the second is a fear to become a society with communautarism (unfortunately called “American communautarism”).

My deep conviction is that republican school should be the first place where inequalities not only artificial but also natural must be compensated. In background, my presentation is guided by the following questions: how the concept of equality of opportunity can (and must) manage inequalities between talents and natural disability which pupils are carrying? How this management can reach a society more just outside schools too? For reasons of time, I will not be able to answer those questions here.

This communication will offer to me to approach my own design about aims of education. For this reason, its method will be centred on a presentation of the principles and on a reflexion as for their application.

I. Two designs of school justice.

As each one knows, the equality of opportunity base it achievements on two fundamental postulates. The first postulate is that a society must allow to each citizen the possibility to have a satisfaction in its aspirations. This satisfaction is according to fruits of its efforts. The first postulate seems trivial. But, this facts prove its opposite. The second assumption is in relation with the human nature. This postulate is that each citizen can develop its capacities as far as its energy enables it. Between these two postulates the line is very thin. But, we must understand that efforts must be done by institutions and by citizens both (citizens and institution must not rest one on other. Efforts must be in accordance). Unfortunately, individuals as far as we knows in their childhood, are placed under conditions which support (or not) development of their talents. In the same period, others individual must carrying handicaps. School justice is highly challenged. For this reason, the States can provide numerous devices for to manage social inequalities. So, our idea about meritocracy must be review. Then in order to study how affirmative action could be a
relevant concept for support application of the equality of opportunity in educational system is suitable.

Everybody knows that education plays an important and durable role in the training and flourishing of each individual. So, designs of school justice are not neutral in our society whose often its institutions is an analogical model. Indeed, school justice and social justice are based on a same framework and same values (for examples: respect of pluralism -especially, tolerance religious values by secularism in public institutions). The school justice sets two central questions. The first is: how set up of equality of opportunity can be able to manage many differences among students inside school (intrinsic value)? The second is: how school justice can contribute to give a better social justice and better representation of diversity outside school (instrumental value)? Yet, if schools have for objective of to reduce and to correct inequalities, schools must be a place where inequalities between students must be invisible. Nevertheless, this aim is a fiction. The educational system is with catches with situations generated by existence of moral, religious and cultural pluralism and by existing social differences between pupils.

Therefore, two central questions about equality of opportunity are very relevant. Indeed, this relevance is proved by empirical studies in sociology. This studies show that social conditions have an impact on school trajectory of each student. It is the greatest impediment. In particular, they have an impact on their choices formulated by students and their families when must be taken decisions about school orientation (or a career choice). Moreover, social and cultural conventions play an important role when students have a competitive examination. Different studies in docimologie (the science of scoring) attest that when professors know social origin of them students, this knowledge plays a role in a score unconsciously or not. Consequences are that the students who live in poor conditions are not sure have a better situation that them parents because them social conditions are considered by himself, by them parents or by the educational team.

In this respect, my purpose is in agreement with those of the sociologists -such as Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron- who highly challenged the dynamics of “social reproduction” by the educational system (in a book explicitly named The heir in 1965). These problems explain my interest for affirmative action in Higher education. Really, affirmative action in the French “Grandes Ecoles” can correct the dysfunctions which its were not by the primary education and secondary school system? Can we consider that affirmative action in higher education has more value and more interest for the future of French society? Its goals are more in agreement with the ideal of republican equality such as them were thought at foundation of the French Republic? Equality is the backbone of the French republicanism. In particular, equality of opportunity is linked intrinsically with the French politic strakes. For this reason, historically, since the Third Republic, in France, equality of opportunity by school and in school took one pattern. However, like I think that this history could have several interpretations, So, I distinguish between two approaches of this French equality.

a) From individual approach ...  
The first design lean on desire to expand autonomy among population. In particular, goal is to give to each on a better opportunity to reach to them aspirations for their own life. Before, according to this design, application of principle of equal opportunity in school and by school re-examines with following question: does goal of
education is to allow wellbeing of individuals? The defenders of a conventional design of equality of opportunity would be in agreement with such an objective. But, they will say that is not sufficiency. Indeed, some of them consider that equal opportunity must be in accordance with public policies allowing to erase impediment came from morally arbitrary factors while respecting student’s and his family’s autonomy. This design implies that the State guarantees to each one to make its own choices for his future. For this aim, school justice must give to each student numerous means to develop their autonomy. Indeed, republican equality applied in school is based on a duty to give each other the means to purchase knowledge proportionally to them brain and them time. Since the advent of French Republic this conception has historically prevailed. The Condorcet’s ideas inspire directly this conviction.

Condorcet had conceived a vast plan for public education. This program gave birth to a new model from instruction for all and for training throughout to human life with distinction in age. Condorcet saw that instruction is the base of freedom for all citizens. For Condorcet, freedom as equality are a same idea. In its writings, these two terms have a close significance. Freedom allows the realization of equality and equality gives more significance to freedom. According to Condorcet, citizens must be released of them ignorance. Citizens must realize their ideal. Condorcet sets up a distinction between public instruction and private education. Public instruction must be given by the States. Education is dependant on family and concern only private sphere. This distinction is justified by the fact that instruction does not diffuse the opinions. Instruction allows to find the bases to think by one and to grasp policy issues. In this conception, equality of opportunity is a factor for ensure a better participation in society. Therefore, it is not a mistake, if I consider Condorcet like a best defender to a conventional design. The Condorcet’s plan is in accordance with the aim to give at each one the means to develop is autonomy but it is respect private decision that leads to achievement of families’ duty.

According to my understanding about this history, I consider that nowadays the first design is established and reaffirmed by socio-economic facts. Cultural and handicaps of pupils as their ethnic membership affect them academic success more considerably that previously. The need to allow to a broad class of pupils the means to arrive to their aspirations became an emergency. This equal opportunity which refuses that academic success is conditioned by morally arbitrary factors gives place to several subcategories also (minimal, conventional and radical). These categories establish each degree in approach of the school justice. However, we retain radical subcategories as it engages a rather original version of the merit that we classified in a second approach.

b) ...toward holistic approach:

One finds an illustration of this radical design in the thought of Ronald Dworkin. The philosopher defends a thesis related to his version of political liberalism. For him, the society must be organized according to principles of liberal politic. In his variant of

1 We refer to Adam Swift (2001), Political Philosophy, Cambridge-London, Polity Press.
2 Here, it is the sense of the sentence of Condorcet (1792), Cinq mémoires sur l'instruction publique, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1994, p.65 : « C'est donc encore un devoir de la société que d'offrir à tous les moyens d'acquérir les connaissances auxquelles la force de leur intelligence et le temps qu’ils peuvent employer à s'instruire leur permettent d’atteindre. »
political liberalism, necessary, the redistribution compensates for handicaps and implies to consider the contexts in which the individuals are placed. However, Dworkin holds an assured conception because it affirms that since the ethnic origin of individuals constitutes a handicap as well as social environment of birth. So, it is necessary to recognize criteria such as the occupied place, in the society, by the group of membership of pupil. Also, the merit can be considered like whole qualities whose an institution needs to achieve its social goals.

By this very short—and very incomplete- presentation of the design of Dworkin, I want to show that the second pattern is based an instrumental value: to give and to ensure a better political representation and to create a neocitizens. This pattern is linked with the first significance of merit which is intrinsically related to political concept from which it rises: meritocracy. The meritocracy is based on the refusal of the place of heritage in acquisition towards a social position. Indeed, meritocracy was born from a will of rupture with aristocratic elitism. Thus, it is not innocent if it has appeared in a same time when modern democracies has adopted political systems for promote equality of opportunity between citizens. In France, meritocracy was a fundamental instrument for foundation of the Republic. Concretely, it is the result of installation of purses to merit for most gifted pupils among workmen’s and peasant’s children for they reach in a prestigious higher education (of Sciences Po Paris, National university, Polytechnic school). The objective was that these children become the future elites of the Nation. Indeed, always, equality by the school was one of the instruments used to make evolve the society. Its aims are also to modify contours in economic and social life, to change the strong values and to make occur a new social order. But, intrinsically, meritocracy is linked with an other aim: a condition for vote was being able to read and write. By the way, in 1833, the Board of education voted the Guizot Law which gave gratuity for school. But, proletarians left school at twelve years old without this elementary knowledge. Twelve years old was limit which somebody is considered like an adult. So, equality of opportunity had to be in continuing education. For this reason, a democratic education was a priority. In particular, for give to proletarians most political rights to pass a vote. In 1896, George Deherme was created the Popular University. The aim was to give to adults who do not have luck to have an instruction, the possibility to receive an education.

In the past, these devices had functioned. But, nowadays, like I already underlined, access to the “Grandes Ecoles” are conditioned by the possession of the cultural codes of the elite which are evaluated during the examinations. This report illustrates, in itself, the limits of the meritocracy. Does not it serve only the interests of the most favoured groups? Consequently, we can ask if the meritocracy such as it is practiced today, in France, still respects its bases and its vocation. Promote in Higher Educational School for the most pupils among those of the most popular citizens must be an aim. These facts are affirmed by Richard Descoing in charge to the “Sciences Po” Paris. For him, the existence of an elitism meritocratic replacing of the aristocratic elitism who leads gradually to the decline of the elites.

II. The Science Po device and another plan meritorious? :

Because only three per cent of students in the prestigious Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris and other “Grandes Écoles” came from underprivileged social
environment, the French Boards (Education and both Higher education and Research) has taken a mutual agreement in order to bridge a grasp in representation of this students. Thus, Science Po Paris was the first institution to affirm that: “It is allocated to the actors of higher education to facilitate the bonds, to reinforce mobility, to establish footbridges where the capacity does not have any intellectual legitimacy and to give content to integration”. Like I am a defender of this idea, I consider that this concept is in heart of equality of opportunity when it is applied in higher educational system. So, I will present this CEP device with more details. In order to do it, I would like to present the arguments given by public opinion. Lastly, I would like to try a short comparison between the CEP device and another policy for equal opportunity implemented by the ESSEC. By this comparison, my aims are to put emphasizing on the effective Republican objective of equal opportunity.

a) To ZEP toward IEP:

Science Po Paris sets up “Conventions priority education” in order to allow to pupils ranked establishments in “ZEP” means to reach prestigious higher Educational institution without to subject to a traditional examination for admittance. Indeed, often, this competitive examination represents an impediment. Implicitly, this examination checks the specific knowledge whose only the children who came from favoured middle class could know. Consequently, the children who came from underprivileged classes rarely passed successfully the competitive examination for access to the “Grandes Écoles”. Thus, for this reason, in 2002, Science Po Paris has set up a partnership among suburban Secondary schools in order to “leave them a chance” for those pupils can postulate.

But, even if, this alternative method of competition is different that of the traditional competitive examination, it does not remain less selective. Indeed, to subject itself to this alternative examination, pupils must prepare an oral about a political and economic set of themes. During the year before the French “Baccalauréat”, they are preselected by a jury made up French personalities resulting from the economic world, politic, academic, financier, etc. Then, the students who are admissible, successfully must passed their French baccalauréat with the first group of tests (named “first turn”). The French bachelors must subject themselves to a « Big Oral” examination which determines their motivations and their capacities to follow schooling in “Sciences Po”. The strong idea of this selection trial is to detect the talents which could not be detected by the traditional competitive examination. Indeed, the written test of General Culture is a mean for to judge not only social knowledge but else competences: capacity of written expression, argumentation, etc. Cyril Delhay affirms “The mode of selection for CEP clarifies the qualities which were learned elsewhere than at the school.4"

In spite of a great distrust on behalf of defenders of competitive traditional examination this alternative method produces good performances. Since 2002, we can note that the pupils retained by this way are integrated very positively within institution and inside continue a brilliant schooling. The advantage resides in a mutual contribution

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4 In an interview who he granted me in March 2006 for preparation of my research of Master in Philosophy.
between young people resulting from a popular culture and those having a more traditional background. Thus, partly, “Sciences Po” achieve his objective as pupils coming from to CEP obtain their diploma in the same time like their school-fellows having passed a competitive traditional examination. So, since the installation of this project, “Sciences Po” affirms that conventions had a beneficial effects for educational establishments located in ZEP. So, in a first assessment, the Regional Inspection for Academy at Versailles indicates that this is very favourable. The teaching, psychological and social dividends lead to a good result. Consequently, we can consider that this device lead to a “levelling by the top”. This type of device creates emulation among pupils and among higher educational institutions. Thus, CEP took up a challenge: to offer to the high-school pupils provided to the areas of relegation a new confidence in their potentialities.

Nevertheless, in spite of these good results, we must not forget that this project is always contested until nowadays. When this device was created, this project has caused numerous polemics and lack of understanding. However, the modes of recruitment by open competition for pupils called “students CEP” remain a random access. This recruitment is too selective than the other access roads (competitive traditional examination, with a mention Very Well, foreign students recruit on criteria of excellence). This alternative mode considers that equality between candidates is not broken a priori but simply adapted to realities of the French Educational system.

For partisans of French Republican equality such an idea is unacceptable. This concept is based on strictly speaking an equal treatment and it is highly forbidden because dangerous to depart from the constitutional principle off not discrimination between different class of citizens. In France, it is on the principle of non-discrimination that forges major oppositions to implementation of affirmative action. This behaviour of refusal of positive discrimination by recourse to this kind of argument precisely was that of certain students of “Sciences Po” selected by the traditional ways of access. When CEP has set up towards admission of their school-fellow by this means. They used of same voice, as artifice rhetoric, the argument of a rupture in the Republican equality. Without remaking here the debate which opposed the Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris to UNI (one of the student syndicate), I must specify that, the UNI trade union has deposited, four appeals to justice in order to make bend the device. But these requests were nonsuit by the Conseil d’État (Council of State). Also, the Cour d’Appel Administrative de Paris validated the CEP in November 2003. Thereafter, this position defended by some of Sciences Po’s students arrived by the traditional access roads was also sustained officially.

In particular, among contemners most official, the Conseil d’analyse de la société seemingly the most singular. For this Council, adoption of affirmative action policies for counter gap create in the French society does not concern obviousness. Indeed, they affirm: “Indeed, between the republican method and strictly speaking positive discrimination, it is necessary to choose: there is no possible compromise. The formal equality of opportunity from a republican point of view is not certainly a sufficient condition to carry out the equal

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5 The Council for to analyse about the French society is a Ministerial Council create in 2004 for give a better analyse about the social facts
opportunity, but it is undoubtedly a requirement, as it concretizes the principle of non-discrimination without which the principle meritocratic has itself no direction".

I affirm that they forget, in their affirmation, that the Article first of Human rights Declaration poses an equality by nature recognized with all individuals without distinction. Thus, the contemners of affirmative action accept his first premise according to which “all the men are born free and equal in right”, but make of it act of refusal towards its second. Consequently, there has no reason to consider that affirmative action like a rupture with a principle of equality. Indeed, the Sciences Po’s policy concerns the implementation of the principle of social distinctions founded on the common utility. On the one side, with this device, it is possible that young people resulting from different social environments as to meet together. On the other hand, it gives an account of the need for using alternative devices to give opportunities similar between individuals placed in various situations. In my opinion, it is not immoral to apply a deviation in the principle of equal treatment between all the French pupils to carry out the equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is not like a cake shared in numerous equal pieces. Unfortunately, often, it is understood like this. This conception came from another lack of understanding about the Republican equality essence.

Firstly, even if, the equality of opportunity requires a deviation in equal treatment; we do not confuse between this two forms of equality. Indeed, if the Nationalist Republicans confuse between them, I affirm that this mistake is a denial on application of an affirmative action in France. In particular, I consider that this incomprehension came from a disorder between equality of opportunity and equality of result. For many thinkers, the affirmative action corresponds to a mathematical rebalancing. For example, Jeannette Bougrab affirms that its application makes it possible to pass “to high speed, by affirming the need for giving more to those which have less and less to those which have more?”. This kind assertion lets suppose that claims of defenders of affirmative action in higher education relate to a request of arithmetic distribution. In addition, the error consists in a fact that the conception of Bougrab feeds implicitly the thesis according to which affirmative action will cause a reverse discrimination. Consequently, such a result is refused with for reason that it breaks in equal treatment.

Secondly, it would be legitimate to regard a second confusion as having for source the existing natural distinctions between the individuals. These natural inequalities force to carry out a correction. Emmanuel Renault wonders about this point: “another paradox suitable for the equality is due to the fact that not only the human ones are “naturally

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6 Trois débats autour de la discrimination positive : les grandes écoles, l’égalité dans l’entreprise, la loi de 1905 » in Pour une société de la nouvelle chance. Conseil d’Analyse de la Société, La documentation française, 2005, p.206. We can read: « Entre la méthode républicaine et la discrimination positive stricto sensu, en effet, il faut choisir: il n’y a aucun compromis possible. L’égalité formelle des chances, d’un point de vue républicain n’est certes pas une condition suffisante pour réaliser l’égalité des chances, mais elle en est assurément une condition nécessaire, en tant qu’elle concrétise le principe de non-discrimination sans lequel le principe méritocratique n’a lui-même aucun sens. »

distinct, but also that their reports are animated by the desire to be distinguished. The levelling relation makes it possible to enter in competition and even tends to cause it by desire of distinction [...] the equality contains a double movement thus: an equalization which makes the individuals commensurable, and a confrontation during which the equal ones are distinguished. Transposed in the time modern, and applied to the economic domain and social, this logic can be translated in the opposition between two designs of the equality: equal opportunity and equality of results⁸. I can not to develop this idea here. But, I think important to mention by this sentence.

Equality of opportunity is not an unattainable myth. It is an attempt to applicate in the reality equality wanted not like a utilitarian principle aiming at maximizing a sum of wellbeing for a maximum of individuals and which would make systematically affirmitative action. Moreover, consequently, the defenses about these arguments have for effect to disavow the first approach of the Republican equality of opportunity which I presented higher. Indeed, as Condorcet affirmed with force and accuracy, “it would be a disastrous love of equality which would fear to extend the class of the enlightened human and to increase the lights there⁹”. Indeed, with introduction of CEP, the idea was to allow those having talent necessary to pass from potentiality to the act. The Sciences Po rehabilitated the concept to have fallen on the French Republic. This concept is to offer to each one means for developing their talents. It is not any objective reason to disavow such this device. This disavowal comes from by another policy supposed to produce equality of opportunity in higher education. This policy is that of Essec’s device. Is this device in agreement with the objective of Republican equality such as in the two approaches presented higher? It is manifest that not and I will show it quickly. If the CEP device promotes equality of opportunity, the Essec’s device seems to promote equality of result.

b) When equal opportunity becomes elitism

Out of dispute for which it was object, we can report which Sciences Po’s device carries a deep reflexion in public opinion about equality of opportunity in the higher education. Also, other projects were born. Besides, a Charter for equality of opportunity in the access to the formations recognized like excellence was signed in 2005¹⁰. The remarks of the signatories asserted this report “By closing the ways of excellence to those which are not likely to evolve/move in a home environment economically extremely or culturally

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⁸ Emmanuel Renault, « Egalité, justice, équité : John Rawls et l’idéal égalitaire » in Revue de l’IRES, printemps été, 1995, p.36-37. « Un autre paradoxe propre à l’égalité tient au fait que non seulement les humains sont « naturellement » distincts, mais aussi que leurs rapports sont animés par le désir de se distinguer. La relation égalitaire permet d’entrer en compétition et tend même à la susciter par désir de distinction [...] L’égalité contient ainsi un double mouvement: une égalisation qui rend les individus commensurables, et une confrontation au cours de laquelle les égaux se distinguent. Transposée dans l’époque moderne, et appliquée au domaine économique et social, cette logique peut se traduire dans l’opposition entre deux conceptions de l’égalité : l’égalité des chances et l’égalité de résultats

⁹ Condorcet (1792), Cinq mémoires sur l’instruction publique, op.cit, p.64 « ce serait un amour de l’égalité bien funeste que celui qui craindrait d’étendre la classe des hommes éclairés et d’y augmenter les lumières ».

¹⁰ The consultation of this Charter is available on the following site http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid618/signature-de-la-charte-pour-l-egalite-des-chances-dans-l-acces-aux-formations-d-excellence.html (last consultation in septembre 2009). An attentive reader will notice that this Charter is accompanied by a presentation of the Essec’s device.
carrier, it weakens their legitimacy”. It is thus necessary, consequently, to reconsider the methods of access to the Grandes Écoles without compromising the so much defended “republican method”. In addition, this charter indicates: “By excluding the talents which are long in opening out because of social blockings, it deprives diversity of the origins, guarantor of intellectual richness, and the elites which aspire to exert responsibilities. The students draw with personal capacity, the greatest profit to attend young people resulting from social background different from their.”

In the new wind of the “labelisation” of equality of opportunity, The ESSEC affirms that its program aims to the equal opportunity for the pupils in secondary high-school resulting from modest or underprivileged environments. Since 2002, the ESSEC have a partnership with the Secondary schools located in its immediate environment. Which is this device? In what is it different from that of the Sciences Po of Paris? Is it relevant? It is advisable to analyze it clearly but quickly.

The ESSEC’s device has formulated its objectives in different terms that those from Sciences Po. The ESSEC affirms: “a true” equal opportunity consists in giving to all the means of making a success of the same tests. The program maintains the same contest of access for all. Also, its objective is clearly displayed. It is necessary to underline the use of the adjective “true” which contains the opposition between the designs of this two Grandes Écoles on equality of opportunity. Indeed, ESSEC wants to give a pupil a specific guidance for to prepare the students at its competitive examination. The goal is to learn the cultural and social codes necessary for this goal. That thus supposes that underprivileged children can catch up with social competences which they do not have. These competences are presented as follows by the business school: verbal ease, open-minded, adaptability, sociability, direction of the responsibilities. Would the young people in the secondary school located in ZEP be without of these qualities? This speech is not that of Sciences Po that estimate some of them have these aptitudes and that it is necessary to envisage a mode of alternative recruitment to detect them. Other share, the program of the ESSEC is given for objective to offer to pupils the means of increasing the assimilation of knowledge “at intervals higher than that of the Secondary school”: is the goal of the equal opportunity? An answer by the affirmative would be shameless: the last years in secondary school is very busy with the objective to succeed the Baccalaureat. In the field of diversity, the ESSEC attests to want “to contribute to diversify the recruitment of the “Grandes Écoles” and more generally of the dies of excellence”, which locates the program in a total device. This device does not ensure that the selected young people will be integrated into the Educational establishment. Even if one can understand that they start from a good intention, the ESSEC’s objective appears curious a priori.

The guidance is weekly three hours and is carried out in the buildings of the ESSEC. The modules concern “acquisition of cultural capital”, “behaviour in society”, “techniques of expression”. Once a month are organized cultural exits. The recruitment of the pupils is done by the main teachers, on the criterion of motivation by the pupil. The program supposes the adhesion of them parents. Only the establishments present in a periphery of the ESSEC can be eligible for the program. It is not the same case for Sciences

11 See this reference on the web site http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/82/0/3820.pdf
Po which covers and exceeds the metropolitan framework. Moreover, the program of ESSEC has a cost of 2000 Euros per year and by pupil, while that of Sciences Po is free.

I affirm that this program does not aim the equality of opportunity. Worse I believe that it reinforces the inequalities whose are already victims the young people concerned, like their families. Indeed, at first sight, the ESSEC’s program and the modules prepared are based on a stigmatizing vision about these pupils (they do not have basic social codes?) and their families (they are devoid of any educational good sense?). Moreover, this device denial the work of teachers made in ZEP (if exceeded by the social width of their labour that they are not able to ensure the educational minimum any more?). In the name of which principle can one defend such a program? Certainly this is not the principle of equality of opportunity. Nevertheless, this program enjoys a great tolerance by the partisans who challenge the device set up by Sciences Po. Indeed, Luc Ferry, then Minister of Education affirmed that “the teaching experiment of the ESSEC falls under the traditional Republican model of policies of grant and support for the most underprivileged people12”. But, to create a form of sociocultural association for to carry out the recruitment of its future members directly in manpower of the school of the Republic is quite republican?

We can understand that if this method seems more acceptable that Sciences Po’s device, it is because it asserts itself like a method in respect with the republican elitism. Pierre Tapie, the director in charge of the ESSEC, expresses himself as follows: “It seemed desirable to us to base for step on the French tradition of republican elitism and not to call into question a system based on the contests13”. Under these conditions, how can to contribute to the equal opportunity? It is impossible with the method tested by Essec. I do not consider the device like contributing to develop one or other of the approaches of equal opportunity that I developed higher as being the goals of Republican equality.

By founding this device, Sciences Po give to the selected young people the means to “reach their lights” While preserving and by setting up in dogma the republican elitism - but is this well a qualifier which one can apply to the elitism? – The ESSEC’s device could not contribute that the talents can leave the shade. Indeed, equality of opportunity has for essence that each one can have opportunity of developing its talents. In this several respect, we do not accept a device based on pleasure in a victimisation of its own (in) capacities. The “sapere Aude” of Kant is the objective of school. This aim must become that of the higher educational system and in particular formations of excellence closed by their system of recruitment to the pupils resulting from popular class. One can thus say that, in a sense, the Kant’s objective joined that of Condorcet’s aim when he affirms the need opening the doors of the Republican school without discrimination between social classes. So, the Philosopher affirms “It would be thus important to have a form of state education which let escape no talent without being seen, and which then offered all the helps reserved to him up to now to the children of the rich person14.”. Is not

12 Ferry, Luc (Dir.), Pour une société de la nouvelle chance, une approche républicaine de la discrimination positive, Conseil d’Analyse de la Société, La documentation française, 2005
14 Condorcet (1792), Cinq mémoires sur l’instruction publique, op.cit,
this there the objective posted by Sciences Po for higher education? It seems that CEP contributes well to this realization.

**Conclusion:**

As Richard Descoings affirms, “by its program, Sciences Po, showed that the social question also arise in the universities (...) The social question thus arises today at all the higher establishments, confused universities and Grandes Écoles.15” Sciences Po founded by Emile Boutmy in 1871 in order to create the new elite for the French Nation, by integrating this new device of recruitment in conformity with the Republican meritocracy found again its fundamental values in its bases and stakes. It is related with the project which Condorcet had formulated. Sciences Po is based on the idea that “an education which equity must intend for all would be more combined for the small number of the men only nature or fortune supported16”.

Moreover, the device inaugurates a form of affirmative action which is neither founded on ethnic criteria, nor on a policy of redistribution like a forms of charity for the disadvantaged pupils. This aim is not a levelling down, without giving access to the high positions. This device is innovative. Indeed, in France, certain forms of affirmative action socio-economic such as they are proposed, concern concretely the policies of redistribution. But sometimes, only these policies strengthen the disadvantaged citizens in their district and with locking up there, without enabling them to leave there, nor to move socially. By the CEP, Sciences Po offers a real affirmative action by a device allowing the geographical and social mobility for these young recruits. Strongly, let us wish that the students, who already obtain and will obtain their diploma, will be the good ambassadors for the future. We can wish that them presence of this students within the large companies will contribute to change mentalities. These arguments are in connection with the equality of opportunity reveal the way in which the French republican model - who is not curiously, in this debate, ever attached to Republicanism - is the object of falsification. By this presentation, I wish has defended how much the republican equality is vilified and debased with the liking of discursive imaginations for the thinkers and politician who should however know it well before speaking about it.

**Références:**


16 Condorcet (1792), *Cinq mémoires sur l’instruction publique*, op.cit., p.77. « Une éducation que l’équité doit destiner à tous ne serait plus combinée pour le petit nombre des hommes que la nature ou la fortune a favorisé ». 


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