

Individualist Populism and Contemporary Canadian Conservatism

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While much has been made of the resurgence of conservatism in Canada, most recent analyses have been journalistic or insider accounts of the political intrigues behind the federal unification of the Reform and Tory parties under the banner of the new Conservative Party of Canada.¹ Clearly, the unification of the two conservative political parties is a crucial reason for the electoral success of the new federal conservative party in Canada. And as success often breeds success, the reemergence of a viable national conservative party has no doubt made it more attractive for conservatively inclined citizens to more vigorously engage in the political realm. However, we believe that although this partisan context is an important part of the story about the renaissance of conservatism in Canada, it is far from the whole story. In particular, we believe that important philosophical and ideological developments are taking place beyond the narrow arena of party politics and that understanding these elements is crucial to any assessment of the nature, strength and the likely impact of the contemporary conservative movement in Canada.

Over the last several years, we have therefore been engaged in a two pronged research project that will likely continue for another several years. The first, more theoretical, part of this project is the attempt to develop a model of ideological/philosophical/discursive analysis that avoids some of the weaknesses of other theories of ideology.² The second and more empirical part of the project is the attempt to concretely analyze and understand the dominant philosophical principles and modes of public discourse of the contemporary conservative movement in Canada. In particular, we want to understand which are the most important philosophical values and discursive strategies that the Canadian conservative movement uses to persuade Canadians of its vision. We are especially interested in studying the ways that various popular ‘non-partisan’ sites of popular discourse (including academics, think tanks, talk radio, blogs, columnists and pundits, political consultants, etc) develop and employ these philosophical principles and rhetorical strategies; how these sites interact with one another to help shape a conservative viewpoint; and why/how these principles and strategies resonate, or fail to resonate, with their audiences.

Although our work remains preliminary and tentative, we have two emerging hypotheses that we believe are fairly reliable. The first is that over the last 10 years or so, there has been a remarkable growth in the attention and energy that important actors in the conservative movement have been investing developing and popularizing conservative ideas, values and modes of discourse. The second is that there seems to be an increasingly strong pattern of philosophical values and discourse within the conservative movement that, while borrowing from and building on older patterns of conservative discourse, is relatively distinct. We are calling this new ideological assemblage ‘individualist populism’ – and we see its tenets outlined in a wide variety of public discourse, across a range of media.

In this paper, we can only discuss a small part of what we have found so far. For example, this paper will not be able to touch on all the related philosophical values and rhetorical strategies that make up this current of conservatism. That is the goal of our book manuscript, tentatively titled *Speak Right*,

eh – but it is well out of reach of this paper. Similarly, this paper will not be able to discuss the theoretical model of ideology/popular political discourse that we are beginning to construct. Rather, this paper will limit itself to outlining and exploring the two hypotheses identified above: (a) our belief that the conservative movement in Canada is increasingly investing in the development and use of philosophical values, ideas and discourse and (b) that there is an increasingly strong, and relatively distinct, conservative philosophical perspective emerging that we are calling ‘individualist populism’. To do so, the paper will be structured as follows:

Section 1 paper will attempt two things. By examining the recent American political experience, it will seek to substantiate our belief that it is important and worthwhile to study popular philosophical and political ideas. Then, through an examination of a variety of indicators, it will provide evidence suggesting that we are seeing a significant investment in, and renaissance of, conservative philosophy in Canada. Section 2 will then turn to the content of this renaissance and present several key philosophical values, themes and discursive strategies that we believe are some of the most important elements of the individual populist perspective. Finally, the paper will end with a short conclusion that briefly outlines a number of possible implications and further questions.

Before we begin, however, we would like to note several issues with the paper. First, our theoretical model of ideological/philosophical/discursive analysis is still a work in process. For example, we have not yet come to any theoretical conclusions about what our empirical study can tell us about the ‘general’ impact/role of philosophical ideas. Moreover, we are still developing and refining the terms and concepts we want to use. Thus, in this paper we use the terms ideology, ideological assemblage, philosophy and patterns of discourse almost interchangeably. This terminological slippage has some disadvantages – especially as each term gestures towards different theoretical traditions and methods. However, since we are continuing to refine our own view of this, we prefer to highlight the ambiguity and inter-disciplinary nature of our approach, acknowledge its preliminary nature and accept its potential disadvantages rather than too quickly close down the theoretical space by employing a single, but overly restrictive, method.

Secondly, the type of empirical analysis we will offer in the second section begs at least one obvious and basic methodological question: what is the primary source material we are using to discern this current of conservative thought and is it important or representative enough to offer plausible conclusions? As mentioned above, in our broader project, we are analyzing widely diverse discourses in a variety of media. We cannot, however, begin to discuss this diversity in a short conference paper. As such, we decided that in this paper, we would limit ourselves to analyzing the values and discursive strategies used by conservative think tanks. We had originally intended to discuss two samples from this sector which would have included ‘visionary’ documents (to give a more general flavour) as well reports that focused on Health Care policy (since this is not only a very popular topic for conservative think tanks, but it would also allow us to show how these philosophical values and discourse play a key role in shaping and supporting various specific conservative policy proposals as well). Unfortunately, we have found that it is not possible to present our findings in sufficient detail while attempting to cover such a wide range of documents. Since our goal in this paper is first and foremost to offer a sketch of the main contours of individual populism, and as we recognize that it is only in our book that we will be able offer the breadth necessary to prove that this is a consistent and generalizable view that characterizes many different conservative discourses, we decided that we would reduce the sources discussed in this paper so that we offer as detailed and nuanced an analysis as possible.

As such, the primary source material we analyze in the second section will be the *Canada Strong and Free* series, authored by Mike Harris and Preston Manning and published by the Fraser Institute between 2005 and 2007. We believe that this series is a particularly compelling primary source for many reasons. First, it is a flagship series for the Fraser Institute, the most important conservative think tank in Canada. Second, not only has the Fraser Institute invested significant resources in this project

over an extended period of time, but it has also been a wide and highly collaborative project with input from many sectors of the conservative movement. Work on the series began in 2003 with a series of roundtable discussions on the “goals, principles and policies conducive to shaping and implementing a fresh Canadian vision for the future” with various conservative stakeholders, including other think tanks such as the Montreal Economic Institute (who also helped sponsor the series).³ Over the last 5 years, Manning and Harris, with the support of many members of the Fraser Institute, have synthesized, revised and honed the proposals. Third, as we shall see below, the series explicitly seeks to reflect on both principles and policy – and thus it offers an ideal example of the interplay between the two. Fourth, comprising 11 publications (in French and English) and culminating in a final, 378 page book that summarizes the findings of the entire series (but which does not include all of the prior material), the series offers an exceptionally large, diverse and rich sample of conservative philosophy and policy thought on a very wide set of issues. Finally, it is also a report that seems to have resonated in the conservative movement – as evidenced by the amount of collaborative consultation and resources put into it, the popularity of the annual ‘dinners’ that have been organized to celebrate the launch of each new installment, the media coverage they have received and the fact that the Institute reports that it was the subject of a “vigorous exchange in the House of Commons involving then-Prime Minister Paul Martin”.⁴ For these reasons, and since we have seen the use of many of these same principles and discursive strategies in other examples of contemporary Canadian conservative discourse, we believe that it is justifiable to use this series as the object of analysis and that its nature and importance in the contemporary conservative movement means that it is capable of acting as a preliminary exemplar for our project.

1. The Philosophical Renaissance of Canadian Conservatism – and why it matters!

We began this paper by stating that if we want to understand and assess the nature and likely impact of the contemporary conservative movement in Canada, we must analyze the ideological/philosophical developments taking place outside the narrow arena of party politics. Why do we believe this to be a defensible and valuable project? One way to answer this question would be to cite and discuss the many theoretical perspectives that suggest that ideas, principles, discursive patterns, etc can play an important role in influencing the thoughts, behaviours, and even subjectivities of individuals and groups. As we have discussed this elsewhere in some detail⁵, however, and because this paper has a more empirical focus, we thought that the best way to quickly address this question would be to discuss a concrete case that demonstrates the importance of philosophical ideas, values and discourse.

On this issue, several key arguments forwarded by Micklethwaite and Wooldridge in their recent study of American conservatism are helpful. Their book, titled *The Right Nation*, examines the growth and success of the conservative movement in the US over the last 40 years. At the most general level, Micklethwaite and Wooldridge want to argue that several unique, long term characteristics about American society, geography, and political culture and institutions have allowed a relatively distinct articulation of conservatism to develop.⁶ However, they also identify a variety of historically specific phenomenon that they believe have been responsible for shifting the political discourse and policy rightward over the last 40 years. What is perhaps most interesting for our project is that although they accept that the organizational strengths of the Republican Party is one of the more recent factors that explains the increasingly conservative tenor of American policy over the last 40 years, they insist that this is only one of many factors contributing to the rightward shift of the US during this period. In fact, Micklethwaite and Wooldridge are adamant that one of the main reasons explaining both the growth of this US conservative movement and the rightward shift in the policies of both the Republicans and the Democrats, is the massive investment in, and development of, conservative ideas, values and discourse at all levels – from broad philosophical principles, to modes of public discourse, to specific policy positions, to electoral communication strategies. According to Micklethwaite and Wooldridge, the conservative project of ideological renovation, innovation and popularization has been a key factor in

moving the US from a largely ‘liberal’ country in the 1960s to a proudly conservative one today. As they say, “it is hard to exaggerate the degree to which the *rive droite* has won the battle for ideas”.⁷ In this sense, their analysis suggests that the Republican party, far from being a ‘driver’ of the US shift towards conservatism, has simply been the party which has aligned itself best with this broader ideological and philosophical shift (they use the term ‘right nation’ to denote the breadth of this conservative movement).

Interestingly, they argue that the reason the *rive droite* has won the battle of ideas and values is not merely because they have better ideas, more defensible values or smarter thinkers. On their analysis, conservative think tanks in the US have won the war of ideas not because they had more money or support.⁸ Rather, conservative think tanks succeeded because “the conservative foundations know exactly what they want – to change the world in a conservative direction. And they know exactly how they want to achieve their aim – by bringing their ideas to bear on policy making. Their liberal rivals are woollier.” Moreover, Micklethwaite and Wooldridge (quoting the US conservative activist Grover Norquist) stress the importance of having a conservative press that is “self-consciously conservative and self-consciously part of the team” since this allows the conservative press to straightforwardly and effectively develop and defend a conservative philosophy where the liberal press, because it believes “it needs to be critical of both sides” is less effective at developing and communicating a counter-vision.⁹

While there are a variety of limitations to Micklethwaite and Wooldridge’s analysis¹⁰ - and we want to strenuously avoid the danger of making overly simplistic comparisons and analogies between what are two very different countries and political contexts - we believe that their analysis nonetheless offers three defensible insights that are relevant for our study of the Canadian context. First, and perhaps most obviously, by demonstrating that the development and popularization of conservative ideas can have a dramatic and relatively rapid impact on the cultural, political and policy landscape, Micklethwaite and Wooldridge’s analysis makes plausible our belief that if we want to understand the nature and possible future impact of the contemporary conservative movement in Canada, we need to analyze and evaluate its philosophical values and public discourse. Secondly, it supports our belief that when attempting to study the philosophy and public discourse of a political movement or ideology, partisan party discourse should be treated as merely one relevant site among many. In fact, if the portrait in the *Right Nation* is accurate, it shows that partisan discourse can sometimes be one of the least important sites in helping explain the development, meaning and success of a political movement’s values, ideas or discourse. Interestingly, this is a notion with which many seasoned politicians would agree. Even Preston Manning, founder of what was arguably the most innovative conservative political party in Canada, seems to share this view, since he recently commented that think tanks and advocacy groups are the actors who generate policy ideas and language whereas political parties simply consume and use them.¹¹ In relation to our project, then, both Manning and Micklethwaite and Wooldridge’s perspectives suggest that analyzing the discourse of a wider set of actors outside of the realm of party politics is crucial to understanding how and where these ideas and discourses are developed, how they fit together, and how/why they are (or aren’t) successful at influencing a wide variety of ‘political’ contexts.

Thirdly, the US experience suggests that we should pay particular attention when multiple, diverse, well funded, well networked and strategically oriented attempts to develop philosophical ideas and modes of discourse begin to emerge. Traditionally, it is fair to say that the conservative movement in Canada has not been known for its valorization of ideas or for its philosophical and discursive innovation. Most practitioners of what we might call the organic, or Tory, tradition of conservatism in Canada have emphasized the importance of cleaving to traditional institutions (both political and social), the value of incremental and evolutionary change, the virtues of pragmatism, compromise and balance. Even Hugh Segal, arguably one of the few remaining embodiments of this tradition but also someone who highly values clear, principled political debate, stated in the mid-1990s that “ideology is

for students of history, self-absorbed think-tanks and the intemperate. Modern conservative politics is about practical issues that matter to people, such as tax cuts, the state of health care, lowering the debt, restraining government and enhancing equality of opportunity.”¹² While profoundly differing from the organic Tory tradition in many ways, the more revolutionary strain of the neo-liberal new right in the 1990s also displayed a clear disdain for philosophy and ideas. For what was the core message of Harris’ ‘Common Sense Revolution’ or Klein’s ‘everyman’ persona in Alberta but a fundamental repudiation of the importance of philosophical ideas and a valorization of a ‘common sense’ model of politics (where the policy answers were assumed to be obvious and the only issue to be resolved was one of political will)?¹³

The absence of a robust conservative philosophical underpinning and ideological infrastructure has been a sore point for a variety of Canadian conservative activists for some time now. In a book that became a *cause celebre* in conservative circles a few years back, two young conservative pundits Teisha Kheiriddin and Adam Daifallah argued that the failure of the right in Canada was largely due to the lack of compelling ideas and the inability of conservatives to embed those ideas in the larger Canadian culture. According to them, “Canada’s federal conservative parties have failed to develop a coherent ideology, to build an infrastructure to support and market that ideology, and to provide inspiring leadership...” around those ideas.¹⁴ In his foreword to the book, Mark Steyn’s seconds this idea, claiming that Reagan and Thatcher’s success was enabled by the “huge intellectual gusts at their back. They led parties with ideas, and they expressed those ideas unashamedly and optimistically” and that therefore Canadian conservatives “have to build a movement, as the American’s have done – through new magazines, and think-tanks, and talk radio, and internet sites, and non-party institutions”.¹⁵

We believe that the conservative movement in Canada has begun to increasingly appreciate the power and importance of philosophical values and ideas and has begun to increasingly invest in developing and popularizing innovative and dynamic philosophical values and modes of public discourse. Scanning the horizon of the conservative movement offers many pieces of evidence to substantiate this belief.

Consider the dramatic growth of the non-party ideological infrastructure of the conservative movement. Even if we restrict ourselves simply to the think tank sphere, it is very clear that the conservative movement in Canada has begun to dramatically address the capacity concerns outlined by Kheiriddin and Daifallah. For the last several decades, the largest, best funded and most visible think tank in Canada has been the new right Fraser Institute. While the Institute has been an important voice since its inception in the early 1970s, what is perhaps most remarkable in the context of this paper is its phenomenal growth over the last decade. In 1997, for example, the Fraser Institute had an annual budget of approximately \$3 million and listed 38 events it helped organize.¹⁶ In 2006, the Institute had more than tripled its annual budget (to almost \$11 million), more than doubled the number of events (93) events, reported a circulation of almost 60,000 for its monthly magazine, recorded 3.5 million documents as having been downloaded from its website, and identified over 5000 citations to its work in the media.¹⁷

Equally notable is the number and quality of new conservative think tanks that have emerged over the last decade or so. Even if one leaves aside the new regionally focused institutes (such as the Frontier Centre) and the several new smaller social conservative institutes founded (Institute for Canadian Values; Institute for Marriage and Family), three new and highly visible conservative think tanks have opened their doors for operation since 1995: the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (annual budget of just over \$1 million in 2006, 4.7 million annual hits on their website) was founded in 1995; the Montreal Economic Institute (annual budget of \$1.5 in 2007, 2,740 media mentions) began operation in 1999; and the Manning Centre for Building Democracy (annual budget not public) was founded in 2005.

Also worth noting is the fact that many of these conservative think tanks have branched out well beyond their traditional role of writing research reports. The Fraser Institute, for example, describes itself not merely as a research institute, but rather as an “independent, non-profit research and education organization”.¹⁸ What this highlights is the fact that the Fraser Institute is now deeply involved not only in producing research that offers a free-market perspective on public policy, but also in training a wide variety of non-institute actors to further popularize this perspective. For example, the Fraser Institute offers a variety of training sessions and awards for teachers and university students. The purpose of these is to help teachers and students not only understand, but also defend and spread, the free-market philosophy to their own networks. According to the Institute, in 2006 alone “9,567 high school students [were] influenced by their teachers’ participation in Fraser Institute Teacher Workshops”.¹⁹ The strategy is clear: whether training teachers to influence the next generation of secondary students or training university students to become future conservative leaders and pundits, the Institute is engaged in a serious, aggressive and proactive attempt to popularize conservative ideas throughout Canadian society.

If this growth and diversification of conservative Canadian think tanks suggest that the conservative movement is increasingly committed to developing and popularizing conservative ideas, there is also evidence to suggest that the conservative movement is also interested specifically on developing philosophical ideas and discourse. There are, for example, a growing number of influential actors who believe that the success of the conservative policies it is important not only to win electoral battles but also to cultivate a conservative public philosophy. Consider Hugh Segal’s recent thoughts on the importance of conservative principles. Segal remains, as we saw earlier, a critic of those who blindly follow narrow minded and rigid political theories and ideologies.²⁰ However, in his most recent book, he forcefully argues for the value and importance of recognizing and communicating conservative principles. According to Segal, what marks the Liberal Party of Canada is their rank opportunism and lack of principles. On his rather partisan interpretation, one of the key reasons that explains the Liberal Party’s “remarkable ability to cling to power” is that they are “deeply unburdened by conviction” and demonstrates a “marked willingness to modify their ideology as the times warrant”.²¹ In contrast, he sees the Conservative party as a bastion of philosophical and political principles. “While Conservatives and New Democrats may disagree intensely on how best to buttress individual freedom, collective responsibility and equality of opportunity within society, they both stay firmly rooted in their ideologies. These two parties have had rank-and-file and elite members who have been more loyal to ideas and principles than to their fellow party members or leaders”.²² Segal suggests that the conservative capacity to recognize and hold to the foundational principles is not only good for Canada²³ but is also a potentially crucial winning electoral strategy for the conservative party. For he believes an election campaign that focuses the ballot question on conservative values, ideas and principles “will continue to be welcome to Canadians embittered by the conviction-free Liberal approach”.²⁴ In fact, he suspects that the creation of a moderate conservative consensus could “fuel a future Conservative era of values, freedom, progress and stability”.²⁵

Segal’s appreciation of the importance of philosophical ideas and discourse is also reflected in another important, but very different player, in the conservative movement – Tom Flanagan. Flanagan has not only been one of the most important conservative academics in Canada (a key member of what many call the ‘Calgary School’). He has also been intensely involved in practical partisan politics for over 15 years. He was one of the Reform Party’s early intellectual supports and organizers (with the title of director of policy, strategy and communications, has been one of Harper’s closest advisors (having held various titles and roles including national campaign manager and chief of staff) and continues to play a significant role in the conservative movement (he was a speaker and key presence at the Manning Centre’s recent conference – and his most recent book, *Harper’s Team*, was the official gift to the speakers of the event). Flanagan’s background as a professor of political theory would suggest that he would be attentive to the importance of ideas and principles. However his most recent

and most clearly partisan book almost entirely avoids any discussion of philosophy, instead focusing virtually exclusively on the history and tactical details of the political renaissance of Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada. Describing an election campaign as a “kind of domesticated civil war, harnessed for the purpose of peacefully changing governments”, Flanagan suggests that campaigning “is a form of persuasion” that requires “total commitment, dedicating every waking hour to defeating your opponents”.²⁶ The key purpose of his book, therefore, is identifying the best practice campaign tactics and technology that all conservative candidates should employ. Moreover, at times, Flanagan actually seems to refute the importance of philosophical principles. For example, one of the key messages of Flanagan’s story is that compromises on the level of principles were required to ensure the eventual unification into the CPC and its later electoral victory.²⁷ Moreover, one of his key ‘10 Commandments’ for future conservatives is that they avoid the Reform mistake of “deducing policies from general principles, as if political reasoning were syllogistic”. In Flanagan’s view, since “politics is less about logic than it is about getting support”, “conservative statecraft has to be more than the logical deduction of policies from philosophical premises if it is going to succeed”.²⁸

A careful reading of Flanagan’s book reveals that contrary to appearances, Flanagan deeply believes in the importance of developing and popularizing a conservative political philosophy. At the beginning of his conclusion (where he lays out the 10 commandments of conservative campaigning), Flanagan reflects on the role and importance of ‘public philosophy’. There he not only acknowledges that “some have argued recently that Canadian conservatives have to build for the long term, trying to affect public opinion so that conservatism becomes an entrenched public philosophy”. He also states that he believes that efforts to cultivate an entrenched conservative public philosophy “are essential and I support them wholeheartedly”.²⁹ Moreover, he notes that these efforts are especially important because, on his view, “Canada is not yet a conservative or Conservative country; neither the philosophy of conservatism nor the party brand comes close to commanding majority support”.³⁰

So – why does Flanagan continue to work in the partisan arena? Flanagan, no doubt, has many reasons. What is notable, however, is the one that he chooses to discuss explicitly in his conclusion. To defend his participation in the electoral realm, he states that “winning elections and controlling the government as often as possible is the most effective way of shifting the public philosophy? Who would deny that Canada’s present climate of opinion has been fostered by the Liberal Party’s long-term dominance of federal institution? If you control the government, you choose judges, appoint the senior civil service, fund or de-fund advocacy groups, and do many other things that gradually influence the climate of opinion”.³¹ This is a remarkable statement. For Flanagan’s justification of the importance of engaging in party politics and winning elections does not rest on an appeal to the positive impact that the implementation of specific conservative policies would have. Rather, he inverts the traditional relationship that many politicians see between philosophy and political power so that political power is valued primarily as a means of shifting a broad public philosophy rather than philosophical principles being viewed as a means of attracting electoral success. Although the contents of his most recent book focus exclusively on ensuring conservative victories in elections, it seems that Flanagan’s ultimate reason for engaging in this activity is actually to change the much broader public philosophy of Canada. In this sense, Flanagan’s partisan work actually signals a much deeper and more profound respect for the importance of philosophical principles and discourse than a first reading of his book would suggest.

If there are important individuals in the conservative movement who are vocally and explicitly identifying the development and popularization of a conservative philosophy as a key objective, there is also evidence that this is true of a variety of conservative think tanks. As we will see in the next section, even the Fraser Institute, whose primary mission is to change the climate of opinion through “rigorous research” based on quantitative “measurement”, has marshaled significant resources for their series ‘*Canada Strong and Free*’, a set of ‘visionary’ documents whose structure and argumentation are stunningly philosophical at various moments. The foreword of the final book version begins, for

example, by highlighting the centrality of principles as framing and orienting the entire work: “‘Whereas Canada is founded upon principles...’ With these words our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* begins. Principles are essential to realizing our vision of a Canada as truly strong and free as our national anthem boasts. We have therefore based our public policy recommendations on the following principles.”³² Moreover, Harris and Manning offer an extended defense of the importance of principles in this series, both because they believe that certain principles “have produced the dynamics that have brought the highest levels of prosperity, health, longevity and education that this planet has ever known”, but also because they are intrinsically “valuable in their own right”.³³ For an institute that lists measurable social scientific research as its primary task, the proud declaration that principles themselves are valuable in themselves and that the public policy recommendations of the report are based above all else on principles, is quite an admission.

Most telling of the increasing importance of philosophical principles for conservative think tanks is the emergence of the Manning Centre for Building Democracy. The Manning Centre’s mission is multi-dimensional and explicitly linked to the development and application of philosophical principles to political discourse. As the Centre’s current vision statement notes, “the primary purpose of the Manning Centre for Building Democracy is to prepare Canadians for principled participation in democratic politics.”³⁴ It is clear, however, that the Manning Centre is interested in preparing Canadians for very specific types of principles. For the second layer of its current mission statement states that the Centre is, above all, “committed to achieving a democratic society guided by conservative principles”.³⁵ An earlier articulation of the Centre’s mission statement was even clearer about its political mission, stating that its main goal was to help build “the democratic infrastructure, below the party level [such as think tanks, education and training programs, communications forums and vehicles] that will generate the forward looking policies and ideas that will allow the government to govern in accordance with those conservative principles”.³⁶ Moreover, in just two years, the Centre has made major progress in its attempt – offering more than half a dozen different types of training sessions for various types of citizens and conservative activists with some of them focusing primarily on philosophically oriented issues (such as their Navigating the Faith-Political Interface seminars) and many of the others touching on philosophical value and strategies of public discourse.

Finally, there is also some evidence to suggest that some in the realm of party politics are listening. For example, despite the fact that the key goal of the Manning Centre’s Networking Conference was primarily practical (e.g. to facilitate networking and the sharing best practices for campaigning, etc), many of the main partisan speakers explicitly and repeatedly highlighted the importance of ideas and values. Of the 7 ‘lessons’ Bernard Lord wanted to share with his audience, the first and most important one was that “Politics is about ideas and ideals”.³⁷ Lord stated, in fact, that he joined the Conservative Party because he “believed in the aims, principles and philosophy” of the party and he concluded by saying that if the party is to be successful, it needs to continue to explicitly develop and speak about its values, principles and ideals.³⁸ Another key speaker, Mark Textor (a pollster and strategist who was one of the prime architects of John Howard’s conservative victories in Australia between 1996 – 2006) similarly noted the importance of developing and speaking to compelling philosophical values and principles.³⁹ Although much of his presentation focused on the importance of a variety of non-philosophical aspects (skills of candidates, certain key policies, etc), one of the points he stressed most strongly was the importance of philosophical values to John Howard’s victory. Not only did he claim that Howard’s ability to defend unpopular decisions based on principle was a key element of his electoral success. Textor also claimed that the key to politically effective polling is tapping into the level of values and principles. On Textor’s view, the public’s opinions about specific policies and issues are so fluid and variable and the level of understanding that is required to understand various policies is so high, that most voters look to make their political judgments on the basis of their perceptions about the values and principles of a candidate or party (as shorthand ways to categorize and

evaluate them). In this context, Textor argues, developing the principles and values – and then effectively communicating them – is an essential element of contemporary political campaigns.⁴⁰

Finally, it seems quite possible that the current leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada might also be open to the idea that philosophical principles and discourse are important to electoral politics. In Stephen Harper, the Conservative Party of Canada seems to have a leader who is, if not philosophical, at least very committed to the importance of sticking to principles. It is not coincidental, we would argue, that some of his closest advisors and confidants over the years (e.g. Flanagan, Brodie, etc) are not only intellectuals, but intellectuals with very strong opinions about political philosophies and ideologies. Yes, Harper is also someone who has been intensely concerned with political strategies and tactics – and he has shown himself to be someone who is increasingly willing to bend some of his previously stated principles for political exigencies. But we don't believe this means that he isn't attuned to the importance of philosophical principles, even in the electoral arena. From this perspective, it seems completely consistent that just after taking power, Harper not only attended the annual conference of Civitas (a members-only gathering of conservative activists, thinkers and politicians whose purpose is to discuss conservative ideas and whose membership once apparently included Harper) but also met privately with the keynote speaker of the conference, Frank Luntz (a longtime Republican pollster/strategist famous for helping write Gingrich's 1994 Contract with America and advised Preston Manning on various occasions in the past).⁴¹ For Luntz manages to combine an interest in philosophical principles with a ruthless focus on electoral victory. Moreover, he believes that philosophical values are crucial for electoral victory. The second of his 10 strategic guidelines he identified for the Republican's 2006 election battle, for example, argues that conservatives should explicitly discuss philosophical principles and ideas. According to Luntz, conservatives should "talk about the principles of democracy and justice and explain how they fit into your policies. The public is ready for a philosophical discussion if you link philosophy to their day to day concerns". Moreover, he claims that conservatives "need to be FOR something; rather than just AGAINST something".⁴² This was a message he apparently conveyed to the Canadian audience at Civitas as well – and presumably to Harper himself during their private meeting.⁴³

While these examples are not necessarily conclusive, we believe that they are relevant, exemplary and convincing pieces of evidence which demonstrate that the conservative movement in Canada is increasingly embracing the importance of developing and popularizing a distinctly conservative philosophy and mode of discourse. Moreover, given the impact that such a revival of conservative ideas and discourse has had in the US and the fact that this contemporary ideological/philosophical renaissance in Canada has been relatively little studied, we believe that our interest in the renewal of conservative ideology in Canada is both timely and important.

We are therefore left with the following question: if the contemporary conservative movement in Canada is increasingly working to develop and popularize a renewed conservative philosophy and discourse, what are the main contours of this philosophy? Are there consistent patterns in contemporary popular conservative philosophical discourse in Canada? And are these patterns distinct enough from previous modes of conservative discourse in Canada to be worthy of detailed analysis?

We believe that there is a relatively consistent philosophy emerging and that it although it borrow from and builds on previous strains of conservatism, it is, when taken in its totality, relatively distinct. As such, in the remainder of the paper, we will offer our analysis of this current which we are calling 'Individualist Populism'.

2. Individualist Populism

A rigorous examination of contemporary conservative discourse in Canada reveals a wide diversity of perspectives which have developed and employ very different philosophical values and discursive strategies. Despite having been fairly effectively overtaken in the federal partisan realm, there are voters, pundits and politicians who embody a Red Tory or organic conservative vision that

privileges balance, incremental change, a valorization of the community and nation, respect for traditional political and social institutions, and a willingness to find practical and pragmatic compromises. There are strongly neo-liberal technocratic perspectives that coolly disparage the role of government for its apparent inefficiencies. There are angry anti-statist ‘populist’ perspectives such as Harris’ Common Sense Revolution. Though less dominant than in the US, there are also some neo-libertarian strains whose proponents seek to reduce state intervention across the board, including on moral issues. There are strongly grassroots perspectives which forward a conservative version of direct democracy populism. There are also social conservative elements whose members focus on the ‘moral decay’ of Canadian society and morality. We therefore strongly believe that to speak of the contemporary Canadian conservative movement is to speak of an assemblage that includes many diverse, and not always complimentary, philosophical perspectives.

However, we also believe that there is at least one current that is becoming increasingly influential and that is relatively distinct from these other variants outlined above – even though we also believe that it takes up and adopts certain philosophical values and discursive strategies from a variety of the perspectives outlined above. We have termed this current ‘Individualist Populism’ and for the remainder of the paper, we will offer a brief sketch of some of its main characteristics. However, just to be clear: we are not arguing that this current is the only perspective in the contemporary conservative movement in Canada. Nor are we arguing that it is completely unique and unrelated to other models. For many of the elements of individualist populism are shared by other strains of conservatism. We are simply arguing that it is one increasingly important perspective in Canadian conservatism and that the way that this perspective organizes its philosophical values and discursive strategies are distinct enough to merit further analysis.

So – what are the main characteristics of the perspective we are calling individualist populism? Here they are in point form:

- An ability to marshal an affirmative and positive tone
- An employment and defense of ‘free and responsible choice’ as the foundational philosophical and moral value
- The use of the principle of ‘choice’ to forward and defend a largely individualist and market-oriented vision of society and public policy
- The use of the principle of ‘responsible choice’ to justify the disciplinary effects of the market as well as enable an anti-elitist and anti-statist populist critique of government programs

We will discuss each of these in turn.

Affirmative and Positive

Arguably, there are a variety of ‘tones’ of political discourse with the Canadian conservative movement. Some are remarkably open, relatively cooperative, and explicitly aimed at finding pragmatic and widely accepted solutions to issues of public concern.⁴⁴ We believe, however, that the dominant tone of the conservative movement in Canada over the last twenty years – especially in the West and in Ontario – has been largely negative and often angry. Consider, for example, the following statements. The first is by Stephen Harper when he was an executive with the National Citizens’ Coalition in June 1997:

First, facts about Canada. Canada is a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term, and very proud of it. Canadians make no connection between the fact that they are a Northern European welfare state and the fact that we have very low economic growth, a standard of living substantially lower than yours, a massive brain drain of young professionals to your country, and double the unemployment rate of the United States. In terms of the unemployed, of which we have over a million-and-a-half, don’t

feel particularly bad for many of these people. They don't feel bad about it themselves, as long as they're receiving generous social assistance and unemployment insurance.⁴⁵

The second is how the opening policy statement of Mike Harris' Progressive Conservatives in 1994 just before they overcame a 22 point deficit to stage a stunning under-dog victory that was known as Common Sense Revolution:

"The people of Ontario have a message for their politicians -- government isn't working anymore. The system is broken.

You sent that message when you handed the provincial government its dramatic defeat in 1990. You sent it in the referendum campaign in 1992. You sent it in the federal election. And yet, no one seems to be listening... I have heard your message. You are looking for a Common Sense Revolution in the way our province is run...

I'm not talking about tinkering, about incremental changes, or about short term solutions. After all, the changes we have all experienced in our personal lives have been much more fundamental than that... It will not be easy, but it CAN be done, and it WILL be worth it... Tinkering with the system will not be enough. It is time for fundamental change, and change is never easy.

The political system itself stands in the way of making many of the changes we need right now.

Our political system has become a captive to big special interests. It is full of people who are afraid to face the difficult issues, or even talk about them. It is full of people doing all too well as a result of the status quo.

We need a revolution in this province....a Common Sense Revolution."⁴⁶

Our sense is that these latter two types of statements by Harris and Harper are fairly typical of an important strain of the new right in Canada during the 1990s. Angry about government waste, angry about the laziness government handouts supposedly engendered, angry about the control that 'special interests' supposedly exercised, angry about political correctness and political dithering. In sum, the rhetoric was deeply anti-state, anti-elite, pseudo-populist – and seemingly pro-market by default, primarily because the state was so problematic.⁴⁷

This angry neo-liberal anti-statism still has vocal proponents.⁴⁸ As we will discuss below, individualist populism is still very capable of mobilizing an angry, harsh attack on special interests and the government. Moreover, in certain media (especially talk radio and blogging), the dominant tone of individualist populism tends to be quite angry and dismissive.

However, we are finding that one of the innovations of the individualist populist perspective is that it can also mobilize a much more positive, solution (rather than problem) oriented perspective that is almost self-consciously idealistic. Some influential conservative pundits have already explicitly argued for this change of tone. This is one of the key premises of David Frum's new book, for example. While the book, titled *Comeback: Conservatism that can Win Again*, was written about the US, Frum also seems to believe that it is relevant for Canadian conservative thinking as he has spoken about it at a variety of Fraser Institute and other conservative events. Frum has often been at the leading edge of conservative thought and politics in Canada and the US – and it seems that he once again senses a new trend in the offing.

In the context of our paper, what is most interesting about Frum's book is that he explicitly argues that the policy and communication models employed by conservatives for the last 30 years are becoming less and less effective as a result of the important social and political changes that have occurred. For example, Frum forwards the almost heretical (to many US conservatives, at least) argument that contemporary conservatism can no longer simply accept and reproduce the core ideas, values and policies that characterized the 'Reagan/Bush/Bush' model of conservatism. On Frum's telling, what made Reagan great was not his particular policy prescriptions, but rather the fact that "his ability to respond to the demands of his times" allowed him to propose new, appropriate policies that

addressed the actual issues of his day.⁴⁹ Frum worries, however, that contemporary conservatives have forgotten that the strength of Reagan's policies rested on their historical context and have instead adopted them as orthodoxy. This is a major problem, according to Frum, because he believes that the conditions that made Reagan's policies appropriate and popular are no longer present. Taxes have been significantly lowered, Frum argues. And the government regulates far less than it did 30 years ago. Frum's conclusion? That "few of [the country's most pressing domestic problems] can be fixed by Reagan-style tax cutting and deregulation".⁵⁰ He therefore argues that conservatives must do what Reagan did (e.g. create new ideas and policies to respond to contemporary problems) rather than simply espousing the specific policies and ideas that Reagan outlined.

Frum also believes that these changing conditions mean that conservatives need to pursue a different model of discursive persuasion. According to Frum, an important factor behind the growth of conservatism in the US over the last 30 years was the reaction against the dominance of the big government and social licentiousness of the liberalism of the 60s and 70s. This created a backlash which, Frum believes, the Republicans successfully tapped into. As Frum puts it, the conservative political operatives of the last 30 years studied and mimicked Nixon's strategy – for it was Nixon "who discovered that middle-class Americans despised arrogant and permissive social elites much more than they resented wealthy economic elites".⁵¹ The difficulty, according to Frum, is that "as the excesses of the 1960s have dwindled into history, the 1972 campaign has worked less and less well".⁵² Voters are increasingly unsatisfied with angry rhetoric alone. "Voters want solutions to the problems of today". According to Frum, conservatives must end their reliance on the angry populism of the last 30 years and instead start to "invent and develop" solutions to the problems of today.⁵³

We believe that we can see evidence of a similar shift in the tone of influential conservative discourse in Canada as well. Consider the dominant tone of Harris and Manning's *Canada Strong and Free* series. What is notable is that the tone could not be more different than the angry, resentful and anti-political notes of the early quotes by Harper and Harris in the mid 1990s. First, the degree to which the *Canada Strong and Free* vision values the 'newness' and 'freshness' of its ideas is clearly highlighted. This series does not primarily harken back to some nostalgic past (although they do argue that Canada's standard of living has dropped on certain indicators) or the common sense of some ur-state where everything was settled and good (or would have been but for the nefarious special interests). Rather, it is self-consciously forward looking and embraces novelty and policy innovation and frequently celebrates itself for providing Canada with a "fresh vision with better public policies for the future".⁵⁴

Second, as if in direct answer to Frum's request, *Canada Strong and Free* explicitly seeks to combine philosophical vision with practical, actionable public policies that address a wide variety of public policy 'problems'. The series insists that both vision and concrete policy suggestions are necessary to help ensure that Canada realizes its potential. What is interesting about this is that the document clearly takes the need for public policy very seriously. There is little of the dismissive tone or anti-expert sentiment that characterized Harris' vision in the 1990s (although as mentioned above, this anti-expert and dismissive tone is more present in other media).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the tone of this series is strongly positive and affirmative. In Harper's speech quoted above, he dismissively characterized Canada as "a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term, and very proud of it." In contrast, the *Canada Strong and Free* series begins with a veneration of Canada: "We believe Canada has not yet reached its zenith – that the best is yet to come. And we believe that this will always be true. Canada is such a land of opportunity that the future can always be bigger, brighter, and better than the past, no matter how great our achievements have been".⁵⁵ They begin their first chapter (titled 'Why Canada needs a fresh vision') with a proud description of the founding principles and historical successes of Canada, they argue that "without a doubt, we have accomplished great things together in the past" and use this

foundation to argue that to continue on this positive trajectory, a “strong clear vision for the future” is necessary to further “unite and guide Canada for the twenty-first century”.⁵⁶

Nowhere is the optimistic and engaged nature of their rhetorical strategy more evident than in the way they end their introductory chapter. For Manning and Harris neither berate us with our failures nor demand that we accept their view to avoid the certain catastrophe/corruption that awaits if we do nothing. Rather, they invite us to join them in their vision. In their words, they offer us “An Invitation to Climb: Just as Canada’s first residents – the aboriginal peoples – would visit high and sacred places of their territories to dream dreams and see visions of the future, you are invited to climb in your mind’s eye to the high and inspirational places of our country and to look out on the horizon of what the future could hold for Canada and for all of us”.⁵⁷

The intricacies and ironies of this invitation are numerous. In our larger project, we will evaluate whether – and if so to what degree – the spirit of this principled invitation is embodied in their specific policy suggestions. In the context of this paper, however, what is most important is the stunning and self-conscious idealism and utopianism of the invitation. The contrast with Harper’s speech or Harris’ common sense manifesto could not be more different. Where Harper’s speech drips with embarrassment, anger and contempt as he excoriates the Canada he sees and Harris 1995 manifesto seethes with anger and resentment against politics, special interests and everything that is the status quo, *Canada Strong and Free* brims with optimism and positivity, focusing first of all on the successes and future potential rather than past and present failures.

This, we argue, is a very different strategy of persuasion. For in contrast to Harper or Harris’ earlier rhetoric, the persuasive force of *Canada Strong and Free* does not primarily rely on activating a resentful or angry emotion in its readers.⁵⁸ Rather than excoriating us for being lazy Northern Europeans, the positive tone of *Canada Strong and Free* attempts to inspire us to take up the “challenge” of using our “drive and ingenuity” to improve Canada. It is no longer our rage that is evoked. Rather, they seek to capture our idealism through a discourse of affirmation. They no longer offer to execute our righteous anger. They now offer to help us to a ‘high and sacred place’ so that we might dream inspirational visions of the future.⁵⁹

Of course, this is only one example. As mentioned earlier, individualist populism does mobilize a different tone at different points and in different media. Yet, we believe that it is still important that a more positive and inspirational tone is being developed and used at certain moments. For this report could easily been written in a different tone. In their previous political lives, Manning and Harris were well versed in mobilizing the discourse of angry populism and alienation. And the Fraser Institute publications have also been more than willing to make their case using strongly negative tones. We believe that it is therefore notable that in this series, Manning and Harris explicitly start from a stunningly positive appreciation of Canadian society and history. Moreover, even if this is simply the conservative movement adding another tonal arrow to their quiver of discursive strategies, this is an important development. For altering the tone of a discourse (such as making it more positive and optimistic) can dramatically change its affectivity, the meaning it is given by its audience, the constituencies it can speak to, and the degree to which it can, or can’t, resonate with very different audiences. In this sense, the fact that the conservative movement is developing an inspirational rhetorical approach that seeks to inspire Canadians to affirm and hold sacred conservative principles and ideals is an important innovation, even if this tone does not characterize the entirety of individualist populist discourse.

The Freedom to Choose

So – what are these conservatives dreaming of? What sacred and high principles underpin their vision of a Canada striving to reach its true potential? We believe that at the core of this positive conservative vision lies a defense and employment of the principle or moral value of ‘choice’.

The idea that a deeply moralized principle of choice is becoming an important philosophical cornerstone for Canadian conservatism first struck us squarely during an unusual press conference we observed at the Conservative Party of Canada's first national policy convention. The convention took place in 2005, in the midst of the national debate on same sex marriage, and in a context where the large majority of CPC members were firmly against it. Standing in the midst of the Montreal convention centre the morning before the party was to formally vote on their position, we received a furtive and somewhat cryptic cell call informing us that "a group called Conservatives for Equal Marriage will be giving a press conference in 45 minutes. It will be held in the Hotel Intercontinental – a two minute walk from the convention hall. Go to the lobby and someone will give directions in the lobby". Upon our arrival at the Hotel, a young staffer lurking the corner of the hotel lobby gave us directions, almost in a whisper: "Go to the back of the hotel, up three flights of stairs, and down the hall".

For a group supporting same sex marriage, it wasn't exactly a loud and proud debut. The possibilities for satirical commentary only grew as we wound our way up the stairs (which seemed to be the back-of-the-hotel stairs), noted the meeting of the conservative 'multiculturalism' policy group in the Salle Vieux Montreal, passed the Salle Sarah Bernhardt (which was not the venue for the press conference) and continued up towards our final destination on third floor: La Salle St. Pierre.

The press conference was interesting both for what was said and for what was not said. For anyone versed in the traditional philosophy of conservatism, it was fascinating to hear one speaker say that they were for "championing equality – because it's the conservative thing to do". For us, however, what was perhaps even more interesting was what was not said: specifically, the fact that the speakers were largely unable to explain what – if not social conservative values – defined conservatism. In response to our question about why – in principled terms – someone should vote for the Conservative party (as opposed to the Liberals) if it wasn't to defend distinctly conservative social values on abortion, marriage, etc., one speaker responded simply "Because I am Conservative". While this certainly says something about the power of identity, it doesn't much help us to understand what Conservatism stands for.

Later, however, the lead organizer was able to articulate some notion of the principled difference between the two parties. The difference, he told us, was that he was against the "culture of dependency" that is created by an overbearing, nanny state. Another of his colleagues enthusiastically developed this line of thinking and suggested that "conservatives are basically optimists about people" who trust the family and the individual more than the government – and are thus all about giving those smaller units responsibility, choice and empowerment. One of the most pressing problems, he thought, was the fact that parents were no longer willing or able to raise their children properly. According to his analysis, the cause of this was not something as esoteric as the pressures of an economic system that requires working parents to spend more and more at work and less and less time at home. Rather, the problem was that the state had made parents lazy – giving them so much help (like the national day-care system the Liberals had just proposed) that they no longer understood that they had child-rearing responsibilities and instead expected schools to raise their kids for them. Moreover, the state's overly interventionist regulation and taxation policies punished women who chose to stay at home. The problem, according to these folks, was both that the state restricted people's choices through regulation (because of its paternalistic assumptions which didn't trust people to make the right choices) and that the state then coddled us along when we made the wrong choice (which ensured that we never learned to make correct choices). What struck us about this exchange was not only the sense that these young conservatives weren't exactly sure what conservatism stood for – but also that they became so enthusiastic and engaged once they hit on the theme of choice as the philosophical good/value conservatism defended and cultivated, even when the issue was 'the traditional family'.

Now, this anecdote is only an anecdote. However, since then, we have found that the choice as a moral value or a philosophical principle appears to be a foundational value in a wide variety of

conservative discourse. Moreover, we believe that it is an absolute core value that is at the heart of the perspective we are calling individualist populism. We can see this clearly if we return to Manning and Harris' report. As we alluded to above, according to Manning and Harris, any new vision for Canada must be fundamentally based on principles. And what are these principles? Manning and Harris slightly reword and add to the list of key principles between the first and final version of the report, the three foundational principles outlined in their 2005 report express the three most important basic principles guiding the report. They are:

- “a dramatic expansion of *freedom of choice* in every dimension of Canadian life – economic, scientific, social, cultural, religious, political – and in the world at large;
- a greater acceptance by Canadians, and better enforcement, of the *responsibilities and obligations* that attend any expansion or exercise of freedom
- a strengthening of *democratic freedoms and responsibilities*, particularly through devolving power to the levels of government that are closest to the people...”⁶⁰

While we will return to discuss the second and third principles later in the paper, here we want simply to highlight the vastness of the first principle. For as Manning and Harris' unpack what they mean by this dramatic expansion of *freedom of choice*, the breadth of their vision is truly surprising. According to them, freedom is unjustly limited in all of the following cases:

- when “monopolistic practices in either the public or private sector limit our choice of goods and services”
- when “barriers to free movement and exchange of ideas, information, labour, capital, goods and services limit freedom across provincial and national boundaries:
- when “freedom is limited by poverty, discrimination, and segregation (as in the case of many of our aboriginal peoples) which deny people the opportunity or the means to exercise freedoms”
- when “the state commands too large a proportion of the nation's wealth and confiscates too large a proportion of the incomes of individuals and businesses”
- when “governments or private monopolies restrict scientific inquiry, lifestyle choices, freedom of expression, or the ability of people to act on their most deeply held beliefs”
- when “political freedom is limited [by a context where] one party, ideology or viewpoint dominates the political landscape and voters are denied the opportunity to make choices among real public-policy options”⁶¹

It is noteworthy that only a few of these would traditionally be found on a typical 1990s outrage list – and some – such as poverty and discrimination – would rarely be given even a token nod of the head, never mind listed as the third most important type of freedom limitation, especially among libertarians.

Our feeling is that this list – and the articulation of freedom of choice as the most important basic principle – is not simply a ‘watered down’, Canadianized version of compassionate conservatism aimed at wooing the Canadian centre (though it may be this too). In our view, Manning and Harris highlight the intrinsic and instrumental value of ‘choice’ as a principle too forcefully and too consistently – and must be aware of the risks that such an ideological move potentially holds – that they can't be making this move without being very serious about its value to their renewed ideology of conservatism. Moreover, as noted earlier, Harris and Manning vigorously defend and justify these principles (but especially freedom of choice). They argue that these principles are instrumentally and pragmatically justifiable because “individuals and families, given freedom and responsibility, simply look after themselves far better than government can.”⁶² But they also argue that these principles are intrinsically valuable in their own right. In their words, “individuals have the intrinsic right to determine their future course, make choices as they see fit for themselves, read and watch what they wish, associate (or not associate) with whom they please, bear the responsibility for these choices, and

exercise effective democratic control over their own governments”.⁶³ Freedom of choice, in sum, is a (the) key foundational and affirmative principle in Harris and Manning’s vision for Canada.

Rebalancing Canadian public policy: Choosing a market-based approach

An analysis of Harris and Manning’s general policy orientation and their specific policy recommendations further reveal the concrete role that the principle of choice plays in this affirmative version of conservatism. In one sense, Manning and Harris’ broad approach to public policy is very familiar and entirely consistent with many prior conservative articulations of a neo-liberal, pro-market oriented approach to solving public issues. Harris and Manning suggest that one of their key objectives is to “to implement policies that rebalance the roles of the public and private sectors in the financing and delivery of social services”.⁶⁴ It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the task of rebalancing the roles is, in practice, one of reducing the role of government and increasing the role of the market. Hence, their use of the title ‘Market-based approaches to public policy’ to describe their overall approach.⁶⁵ They argue that market-based approaches have significant advantages and should to be more widely employed: “Economic freedom and personal responsibility, exercised through market oriented policy regimes offer flexible, efficient alternatives or complements to conventional ‘command and control’ strategies for addressing these pressing challenges, yet solid research to that end is extremely limited and underfunded in Canada. We therefore call on market participants, policy developers, and citizen activists, to give this approach the priority it deserves.”⁶⁶

In fact, in the final version of their report, they embed their strong faith in market-oriented solutions into their list of key principles. In this version, the 4th and 5th most important principles include the belief that “there is an optimal division of activity and resources between the public and private sectors and among the three levels of government, and public policy should seek to achieve this division” and the conviction that “poverty is sooner and more permanently alleviated by broader distribution of the ‘tools of wealth creation’ – property rights, markets and improved access to capital, financial instruments, information, technology, education, and health services – than by redistributing wealth itself.”⁶⁷

If the general gist of their approach is familiar, however, several unique elements about Harris and Manning’s call for a ‘rebalanced’ market-oriented approach are worth noting. First, while it is true that their market-based approach attempts to create a ‘balance’ between the public and private sector usually becomes a call for less government intervention and a valorization of the market’s ability to better solve policy issues, Harris and Manning do not primarily employ the aggressive, slash and burn, ‘government must be drowned in a bathtub’, rhetoric so characteristic of Harris’ common sense revolution and the neo-liberalism of the 1990s. The use of the language of ‘balance’ is much more nuanced and less extremist than other discursive strategies – and it is important to note their use of a much more affirmative register since these rhetorical alterations can have an important impact on who, and why, their arguments resonate with.

Second, their discussion of their general approach reveals how important the principle of choice is for justifying their general market-based orientation. For their ultimate defense of their market-oriented approach relies largely on their valorization of the principle of choice. They first introduce the need for more market-based solutions, for example, immediately after arguing that freedom of choice is a fundamental right and value. After affirming that individuals and families are more capable of making good choices than is the government, they immediately use this principle to affirm that the market is the institution that should be privileged in public policy since “the drive and ingenuity of individuals in free markets consistently produce greater prosperity and lower levels of poverty than other alternatives”.⁶⁸ The validity of a market based approach is thus not only established by their belief that it the market is the best institutional expression of our nature as beings who value the principle of free choice and their faith that the market will allow for the greatest orderly expansion of choice for all citizens, but also by their conviction that an increase in the “freedoms, responsibilities

and resources available to individuals, families, businesses and non-governmental enterprises” are the “key to higher productivity, better economic performance and a higher quality of life”.⁶⁹

Finally, an analysis of Manning and Harris specific policy recommendations further highlights the absolutely crucial role that the principle of choice plays in solidifying their policy recommendations. For what becomes clear is that Manning and Harris’ faith in the principles of expanded choice and increased individual responsibility is often employed to paper over and resolve difficult aporia, inconsistencies or contestable conclusions in many of their policy prescriptions. Consider Harris and Manning’s second, more policy-centric volume, titled *Caring for Canadians in a Canada Strong and Free*. There they once again re-articulate the centrality of the principle of choice as being central to creating best-in-class policies in health care, education, welfare and child-care. While in this volume, the principle is re-articulated into a more concrete and consumer-oriented language (and more explicitly linked with accountability and responsibility), the principle remains clear: “maximization of freedom of choice for service recipients and acceptance of greater responsibility for choices and personal well-being”.⁷⁰ According to Harris and Manning, Canada’s performance on this dimension is best in the field of education. Moreover, they assert that the strength of Canada’s education system is due to the fact that this is the sector in which there has been the most robust freedom of choice and the least monopolistic meddling of the federal government. They thus make much of the fact that Alberta “which has gone the furthest to encourage choice and responsibility, is a world leader” in educational results.⁷¹

Interestingly, however, they do not examine whether this correlation is a reliable indicator of causality. For example, though they offer anecdotal links between Alberta’s performance and their system of choice/responsibility, they neither show that these links are generalizable nor prove that they are the cause of increased performance. Similarly, for a report that explicitly benchmarks Canadian provinces against ‘best in world’ performance and draws conclusions from the high performers in Canada, they do not explore the key characteristics and ‘best practices’ of those systems which perform essentially as well or even better than Alberta on various dimensions – e.g. Finland, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, the Netherlands. Nor do they comment on the fact that the US consistently scores low on the various benchmarking exercises they cite. Rather, in each case our faith in the principle of freedom of choice and its intrinsic link to high levels of prosperity, health, etc., is apparently sufficient. In this sense, we can see exactly how important starting from first principles is for their vision of Canada and for their defense of their policy recommendations.

The principle of choice plays a similar role in their discussion of child care policy as well. According to Harris and Manning, Canada needs to “put children first”, which means “a Canada where every parent has the freedom to bring up their children as they consider best – as well as child care choices that suit their unique needs”.⁷² Their preferred policy solution? A market-based solution that offers some government assistance to individual families while leaving the development and delivery of child care services to the private sector. And once again, an appeal to the moral and principled value of choice is the bedrock of their case against publicly provided day care. They do not, for example, provide evidence to prove that child care in the home is uniformly better for the development of the child.⁷³ Instead, they spend the bulk (e.g. 80%) of their arguments against publicly funded and regulated day care by arguing that parents deserve choice on principle, and prefer choice in reality. On their view, the most crucial issue is that a federal program would unnecessarily limit choice since if the government set up a day care system with public funds, they would “increasingly coerce parental choice, subsidizing some child care options and not others”, and thus ensure that “thousands of Canadian children are being funneled into formalized daycare, though this is far from their preferred options”.⁷⁴ Moreover, despite the explicitly public policy orientation of the discussion, although they discuss in detail what people would “prefer” in an ideal situation (and unsurprisingly find that most people would like to care for their children themselves or with a relative), they do not explore the question of whether this is a realistic option for most Canadians. This is not to say that there isn’t

merit in some of the concerns and proposals they raise, nor to argue that there aren't good reasons to consider a more decentralized approach to child care. Rather, it is to highlight the degree to which a faith in freedom of choice supports and defines their position – even to the degree that it erases and trumps the discussion of other, very real, considerations relevant to this area of public policy.

Lazy children-citizens and the indulgent nanny-state: The disciplinary side of individualist populism

Up to this point, we have been focusing on the affirmative and individualist characteristics of individual populism. However, no discussion of individual populism would be complete without an investigation of the fascinating ways in which this optimistic and individualist foundation also requires an importantly disciplinary dimension. Perhaps the best way to unpack this element of individualist populism is to examine the role played by Harris and Manning's second foundational principle. As noted above, Manning and Harris outline 3 foundational principles. The third – the principle of increased democratic freedoms and responsibilities in the political realm – is derivative of the first two and therefore won't be discussed in detail here. The second principle, however, "a greater acceptance by Canadians, and better enforcement, of the *responsibilities and obligations* that attend any expansion or exercise of freedom", is crucial.⁷⁵ In fact, it is such a crucial principle that Manning and Harris assert that the principle of "freedom [of choice] cannot exist without personal responsibility."⁷⁶

Why is the acceptance of responsibility and obligations a crucial rejoinder to the principle of freedom of choice? Many social (or even traditional organic) conservatives could easily answer this question with a response that highlighted the intrinsic value of community, tradition or duty. However, what is fascinating about Manning and Harris' logic is that they do not rely on any intrinsic, traditional or teleological argument. Rather, their arguments rest primarily, and only slightly paradoxically, on the first principle of choice.

To do so, Harris and Manning begin by admitting that allowing and expanding freedom of choice is risky and can have some unpleasant consequences. Individuals can abuse this freedom – transgress other people's freedom, disrespect others' rights, ignore their responsibility to respect and protect the social and political context that allows the exercise of rights. This, in turn, causes citizens to seek protection against these types of abuse. On their reading of history, if people don't exercise responsibility themselves, the community will ask the state to step in: "traditionally in Canada, fears about the real or potential abuse of freedoms by individuals or corporations have led to demands for heavy-handed interventions by governments and an expansion of the role of the state in society."⁷⁷ This dynamic has several disastrous consequences, according to Manning and Harris. First of all, it limits freedom of choice: "as the state assumes more and more responsibility, our freedom and personal choices are eroded. When the state assumes responsibility for individual choices, it limits freedom."⁷⁸ Even worse than this immediate limitation of freedom, however, are the long term effects of the vicious circle that state intervention initiates. For on Harris and Manning's telling, the more the state accepts responsibility for people's choices, the less responsible people will become, and thus the more interventionist the state will become. "If individuals do not bear the consequences of bad choices, more people will make them and the rest of us will be forced to bear the burden. That, in turn, forces the state to adopt coercive measures to ensure that individuals make the choices the state considers appropriate, and liberty is even further eroded."⁷⁹ Irresponsible exercise of choice, therefore, facilitates the growth of an interventionist state that will increasingly control all citizens' choices – even those who have the capacity for responsible self-governance. This is a truly impressive philosophical tour de force. For by its end, it appears that a larger, more interventionist state can not be blamed on conservatives seeking moral universalism, special interests in Ottawa, big business or institutionalized unions looking for breaks. Rather, it is the fault of individuals who have not had to accept the consequences of their bad choices. Moreover, it is the rest of us who have had to bear the consequences in the form not only of higher taxes, but an expanding neo-totalitarian Nanny state who wants to coerce us into giving up our children to a Kafkaesque day care experience.

Their use of the principle of responsibility is thus fascinating for several reasons. First, along with the principle of freedom of choice, the principle of responsibility reinforces Manning and Harris' market-oriented approach. For if, as they argue, irresponsible choice leads to state intervention, which in turn limits freedom of choice and encourages a culture that disavows freedom, it makes sense to privilege market-friendly policies that "expand private property rights and the rule of law in such a way as to give a far greater number of individual citizens, organizations, and communities the tools to protect their own rights and freedoms when those are infringed upon by others, including the state."⁸⁰

Second, it is also a crucial discursive technique in forwarding specific policy recommendations. Consider, once again, their child care policy. Arguably, it was the debate over day care that saw the recent popularization of the term Nanny State in Canadian politics.⁸¹ The idea of the Nanny State is obviously not new. However, its emergence as a term with widespread and popular resonance is relatively new in Canada. In Harris and Manning's report, we can see how powerful this perspective can be once the idea of the overly interventionist, choice-limiting nanny-state has been developed. For if, as we have seen above, their primary argument against a federal child care system was that it reduced parental choice, their important secondary argument focuses on the vicious cycle that irresponsible choice and the nanny state create. Hence, Harris and Manning consistently reiterate the theme that federal programs in day care will simply encourage people to make irresponsible choices – which not only hurt the taxpayer who helps fund the programs, but also the recipients since it teaches them to remain dependent on state handouts.

Third, and no less important despite its paradoxical nature, is that this principled invocation of responsibility allows individualist populists to simultaneously (a) champion the market for its ability to discipline (or in more affirmative tones, its ability to incentivize) individuals to cultivate certain habits, beliefs, values, and behaviors necessary for the smooth functioning of their ideal society while also (b) in practice denying that this process of training/cultivation is essential to a conservative society as well. Many conservatives (including ones we would identify as individualist populists) critique the Left for trying to use government policy (especially the Charter and various other anti-discrimination policies) as a "social technology" to build a utopian society.⁸² Harris and Manning's defense and use of their second principle, however, reveals that even the highly individualistic model of individual populism also deeply rely on certain social technologies to cultivate certain types of ideas, values, virtues, habits and behaviors.

One of the most obvious social technologies employed by Manning and Harris are their moral principles. Up to this point, we have focused on Harris and Manning's use of the principle of choice and responsibility as a philosophical cornerstone that justifies their general market orientation and strengthens their specific policy recommendations. However, we can also view Manning and Harris' invocation of the three foundational principles as a potentially powerful social technology of training. For moral codes and principles have long been recognized as a crucial technique of shaping, altering or reinforcing the values, beliefs, habits and behaviors of humans for many millennia. [cite Foucault, etc]. From this perspective, Manning and Harris' defense of freedom of responsible choice as the primary moral principle of our society should be viewed not simply as a philosophical defense or foundation, but also an attempt to cultivate these values (and the set of beliefs and behaviors they imply) as a central feature of Canadian political culture.

The other central social technology championed by Manning and Harris is the free market. For on their view, government intervention is a social technology that encourages dependence, laziness and irresponsibility. In contrast, the market is a social technology that trains independence, productivity and responsibility. And as we have seen in the quotations above, Harris and Manning frequently defend the value of the market as an institution is not primarily through an appeal to its neutral, technocratic efficiency but rather by using a highly moralized argument about the virtuous individuals and responsible subjects it cultivates. From our perspective, then, while many conservatives (and individualist populists) harshly critique the use of the state and other collective techniques of

cultivation, Harris and Manning's project reveals how an individualist populist perspective is also deeply involved in cultivating a subjectivity with specific virtues, habits, beliefs and behaviors. For the importance they place on their second principle, combined with their profound fear that government programs can quickly and easily corrupt the virtuous and individualist subjectivity required for their model, clearly demonstrates their recognition that cultivation is a crucial process and a fragile accomplishment that must be continuously reinforced. In this, there is little, if any, categorical difference between their approach and that of the Left – for both use a variety of social technologies to transform and train our moral, political and social subjectivities. The difference lies merely in which social technologies are employed. The Left tends to believe that collective political measures (legislation, judicial rulings, governmental incentive programmes such as tax credits, social security, etc) can be crucial tools of cultivation in certain cases. In contrast, individualist populists are skeptical of these modes of cultivation and instead prefer what they might refer to as 'voluntary' techniques. For them, moral principles and the institution of the free market are the preferable social technologies of cultivation because although they do discipline/cultivate a certain type of subjectivity and certain types of 'responsible choice' through the spontaneous application of punitive consequences for poor choices, these practices are formally 'voluntary'.⁸³ Thus, they are not considered social technologies at all – for if we voluntarily enter them, they cannot be coercive, even if they are disciplinary.

Fourth, Manning and Harris' use of the fused principle of "freedom of personally responsible choice", combined with their presentation of the market as a crucial but voluntary/invisible mechanism of cultivation, allows them to subtly activate and authorize a certain anti-statist, anti-elitist populism. On one hand, Harris and Manning's reports are notable insofar as they do not viciously attack the state as the bastion of special interests and a stultifying status quo as they had often done in the 1990s. In his remarks to the Manning Centre Networking Conference, Manning even admitted that "some enlightened government regulation and intervention" is a good thing.⁸⁴

We would argue, however, that this less dismissive orientation toward government intervention nonetheless offers a philosophical justification and rhetorical structure that can evoke, activate and authorize a much angrier anti-statist and anti-elitist populist discourse. For as we have seen, Manning and Harris believe that "it is so clear from recent history" that the market is the best possible way to encourage individuals and families to make better choices, to become better people, and to improve society that they find it almost impossible "to understand why the arguments continue that government needs to intervene ever more into our everyday lives and that government, and not the individuals who made them, must bear responsibility for bad choices."⁸⁵ And as we have seen in many of the quotes, they believe that the dangers of most government programs far outweigh their value. Their assessment of the proposed federal system of child care is typical of their tone: "this federal initiative threatens to lead us onto the same road – since abandoned – that we once went down with respect to social assistance: heavy handed, monolithic federal interventions that too often felt to recipients more like a trap than a helping hand."⁸⁶ Critical, but not too angry or negative.

Below this affirmative tone, however, are a variety of less obvious, semi-submerged argumentative strategies that evoke a much harder conservative populist network of associations. For example, Harris and Manning often obliquely accuse the government of harbouring class based elitist tendencies. Discussing the federal child care proposal, they argue that "our government continues to divert resources to some of Canada's most prosperous families—those with two wage earners—away from single earner families that often struggle financially to raise their children. This is particularly unfair to poorer Canadians, without the means to make other choices."⁸⁷ "Most prosperous families"; "two wage earners", "unfair to poorer Canadians" – these terms evoke images of wealthy urban yuppies as the primary recipients of government largesse and encourage the audience of Harris and Manning's discourse to react angrily to the unfair, self-interested and biased nature of government policies.

Manning and Harris further authorize an anti-elitist/anti-statist anger by subtly creating a vision in which civil servants are explicitly counter-posed against normal people and ‘families’. “Most importantly, our vision for child care is centered on the family. *Families*, not state bureaucrats or politicians, should make the choices that best suit their needs. This key principle has two sides: families should have the freedom, means, and responsibility for raising children— and government should not interfere in these choices, except in truly exceptional circumstances.”⁸⁸ This portrait – with knowledgeable, well meaning families on one hand and distant, interfering bureaucrats on the other – is a deliberate and telling. Using italics to establish an unbridgeable gap between *families* and the the state, and using the word ‘bureaucrat’ (with all its negative connotations of uncaring, uninterested and obstinate) rather than the term civil servant (which implies service, civility, a certain nobility and a care for the community) are subtle but important ways in which Manning and Harris’ discourse serves to evoke and cultivate a deep suspicion and resentment towards government initiatives.

Finally, they conclude their populist invocation by suggesting that government programs are not only elitist, unfair and uncaring, but also, and most problematically, out of touch with the desires of the citizenry, and therefore undemocratic and authoritarian. For they find that “perhaps most damning of all” is the fact when asked to rank a federal day care system against other options, “most parents put government supported child care last on their list of preferred choices.” Not only do they cite polling results for the country or certain provinces. They also single out the view of women as especially important on this issue and suggest that “in other historical analyses of preference, Canadian women agreed most frequently and strongly on policies that supported choice in how they care for children”.⁸⁹ Once again, the message is clear. Federal initiatives are out of touch, undemocratic and unconcerned with the actual wishes of the population they address. This is not just a question of efficiency, then. It is a question of justice, fairness and the most fundamental democratic values. And on their telling, the solution is obvious. Populist democracy requires the market, not the government.

What is fascinating, moreover, is the fact that during the 2006 election, we had a chance to watch exactly how this affirmation of responsible choice and anger over the paternalism of the state can move from think tank rhetoric to vote-influencing actuality. For during the 2006 election, Scott Reid, the Liberal Prime Minister’s Director of Communication, conducted an interview in which he attacked the conservative child care policy (which promised to give a tax refund of \$1200 for each child). In that interview, he stated that the Liberal proposal was best since it would provide the universal “care that is regulated, safe and secure” whereas the Conservative tax refund proposal would essentially give parents “\$25 a day to blow on beer and popcorn.”⁹⁰ The reaction was immediate and forceful. Many voters were outraged, flooding call in shows, letters and public reactions strongly attacking the elitist attitudes of the Liberals. Moreover, the conservative party immediately pursued this strategy and attacked the liberals not merely as corrupt, but also arrogant, out of touch and elitist. Calling this comment a turning point in the election would be too strong. But it certainly had a huge impact. For the purposes of this paper, however, it highlights the importance of the fact that this version of conservatism has been able to activate and authorize a populist dimension alongside its heavily individualist philosophy.

Moreover, it suggests that the vision of a society where “responsible choice” is enabled and disciplined by the market has a variety of very powerful affective resonances for various constituencies as well. As we have seen, Harris and Manning’s celebration of choice and their subtle critiques of the state as biased, elitist and authoritarian nature of the state allows them authorize and cultivate an anger/resentment against a paternalistic elite – which potentially allows their discourse to resonate with a variety of constituencies who feel discomfort or resentment against a wide variety of individuals or groups who voters see as unproductive ‘hangers-on’. Moreover, we suspect that this affective resonance is, far from being diminished by its affirmative starting point and subtle articulation, is potentially all the more effective because of that. For it allows voters to hear and express their frustration without appearing extreme.

Furthermore, we believe that the principle of responsible free choice also plays a positive affective role. For individualist populism gives those who have ‘chosen responsibly’ (or at least believe they have exercised responsible choice and have been rewarded for it by the market) a sense of vindication, or even a sense of virtue. From this perspective, the policies of individualist populism are justified not only because they’ll help your self-interest. Nor simply because you’ll be more free. It is not merely because you’ll pay fewer taxes that you should become an individual populist. Nor is it simply because you’ll suffer less governmental intervention personally. For in addition to all of this, the positive affective side of individualist populism is its idealist and utopian belief that by adopting its philosophy and perspectives, you’ll help cultivate a stronger, more responsible, more meritocratic society that will ensure others similarly ennoble themselves and take up the mantle and right of freedom and responsibility.

In this sense, the power of the conservative vision of individual populism is not only that it provides a principled and affirmative foundation for conservatism. Its force also derives from the fact that, in starting from an argument about allowing more freedom for all, it allows its advocates to simultaneously feel good about the privilege they have; angry that the government wants to take ‘more than its fair share’ away from those who succeed (since they deserve it); annoyed at people at the bottom of society (since their very existence is provoking the emergence of an Nanny state); and justified about not providing more support to them (since they are the ones who chose irresponsibly).

3. Conclusion

There is much more that could be discussed, even simply in relation to the Harris and Manning reports. We have not, for example, fully fleshed out their recommendations on increasing participatory democracy and the ways in which this strategy increases the populist appeal of individualist populism. We will examine this area more fully in the future – but in the mean time we believe that we can conclude without an analysis of this dimension since other scholars have offered insightful analyses of similar and prior versions of these proposals.⁹¹ As such, we will conclude by simply noting a few of the questions we are currently contemplating in relationship to our findings.

- What is the relationship between our experience of the market and this discourse? Traditionally, political thought has tended to primarily examine political discourses as if they either (a) emerged directly from political philosophy or prior political discourse or (b) emerged directly from crude class economic interest defined by classical roles of production. We suspect, however, that the political discourse of choice might be an excellent site to re-examine the complexity of late-modern political discourse and its relationship to the market. For we suspect that the political discourse of choice might not only piggy back off of more economic discourse (whether popular variants as Thomas Frank analyzed in *One Market Under God* or the more academic variants we can in Hayek and Friedman, for example) but also gain its persuasive power as a result of our experience as consumers in a highly market-saturated society in which choice is the ultimate consumer virtue.
- Does this shift towards not merely ‘pro-market’ policies but a fundamentally market-defined moral framework suggest a much larger philosophical rewriting of the social contract in which the primary link is no longer between the individual and the state but rather between the individual and the market?
- What are the likely implications of setting up the market is increasingly set up as the arbiter of justice? Does this reinforce and intensify, through slightly different techniques, the ‘anti-

political/anti-democratic' tendency that David Laycock demonstrated was one of the consequences of the Reform Party's approach to direct democracy?⁹²

- How do the moral values of individualist populism rewrite/contest some of the key philosophical terms of political debate in Canada? We believe that this discourse is deeply involved in an attempt to redefine certain key terms such as choice, freedom, equality, politics, justice, etc. Moreover, we suspect that individualist populism seeks to revise these values in ways that are related to what Laycock found in his analysis of the New Right. In particular, we are interested in further exploring the revisions to the idea of 'equality' that using 'choice' as a primary value engenders.
 - Does the use of a market-inflected interpretation of choice allow individual populism to prime equality as 'equality of opportunity of choice'? This alone would be important enough since once equality is interpreted as market equality – this means that only formal equality of entry is required. Moreover, since the market is one place where we allow a profound inequality based on wealth, interpreting political values using this lens, allows individualist populism to import a drastically 'thinner' conception of equality into politics that disallows all collective attempts to rectify structural inequalities that are not the immediate result of 'intentional' discrimination.
 - Or does the market-inflected interpretation of choice actually usher in a new discursive strategy where the end goal is actually to explicitly justify profound inequality in both the market and in society? In this sense, the use of a market inflected principle of choice might be an attempt to disconnect equality from our conceptions of justice and fairness altogether. David Laycock has suggested that the Reform attack on politics was possibly the only response possible for a new right that disagreed with the substantive equality that thick political citizenship can imply and could no longer explicitly defend, as had older organic conservatives, the political principles of hierarchy, elite rule and social hierarchy.⁹³ It might be the case that what we are seeing is the flip side of that – the development of a more affirmative market-oriented vision that doesn't merely seek to destroy the political realm, but also seeks to reengineer the political as a market, complete with market-inflected principles and the justification of inequality that is a completely acceptable part of the market.

Endnotes

¹ For example, Paul Wells, *Right Side Up*, (Toronto: Douglas Gibson Books, 2006); Tom Flanagan *Harper's Team*, (Montreal: McGill/Queen's, 2007); Hugh Segal *The Long Road Back* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2006); Bob Plamondon *Full Circle* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2006); Chantal Hebert, *French Kiss*, (Toronto: Knopf Canada: 2007).

² For example, we are trying to develop an approach which avoids the tendency to over-simplification and over-generalization; that offers detailed analyses of popular public discourse rather than overviews of 'high philosophy'; that reflects on the complex relationship between various sites of philosophical/ideological/discursive development and transmission, and especially between old and new media forms; that seeks to ask why certain ideas resonate when others don't – in a non-deterministic way that pays attention to various 'sociological' dimensions such as our experiences of the market as consumers, the unique modes of persuasion that different media embody, the influence of opinion leaders, etc.

³ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. ix.

⁴ Fraser Institute, *2006 Annual Report*, p. 14.

⁵ Paul Saurette, Shane Gunster, Kathryn Trevenen, « Un Conservatisme renouvelé: L'étude des idéologies au Canada » in *Politiques Publiques*, ed. D. Karmis and L. Cardinal, (Quebec : Presses de l'Université Laval, forthcoming 2009); and Paul Saurette and Kathryn Trevenen, "Feelings, Nothing more than Feelings : Affect, Emotion and Political Ideas" in *Ceci n'est pas une idée politique: Reflexions sur les approches a l'etude des idées politiques*, ed. D. Giroux and D. Karmis (Montreal: Presses l'Université de Montreal, forthcoming 2009)

⁶ Micklethwaite and Wooldridge, *Right Nation*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 11-14.

⁷ Micklethwaite and Wooldridge, *Right Nation*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 165.

⁸ In fact, on their reading, centrist and progressive think tanks in the US have "more brainpower...more money and more resources" than conservative ones. See *Right Nation*, p. 166. Other authors have a very different interpretation of the relative balance of funding. And it is important to note that in Canada, it seems that right wing think tanks have a significant edge in funding. However, that only makes it even more important to watch these developments in Canada...

⁹ Micklethwaite and Wooldridge, *Right Nation*, p. 166-67.

¹⁰ For example, their work implicitly accepts a rather anemic theoretical conception of how and why ideas either resonate or fail to resonate with the larger population. Arguably, their approach falls squarely in what we have elsewhere termed the 'intellectualist' or 'rationalist' perspective (see Saurette et al, "Un conservatisme renouvelé"). In this tradition, the success of ideas is largely explained by their theoretical coherency, their problem solving power, or the power and consistency of the way that they are delivered. They never consider other factors, however, such as the degree to which ideas appeal to the 'interests' of the audiences, the emotional triggers and network associations that certain discourses activate, or the ways in which discourses resonate with and reinforce a variety of other 'everyday' experiences and common sense. From an academic point of view, these are all serious weaknesses with the implicit theory they use to frame their investigation. However, it is our judgment that their basic point – that conservative ideas, values and discourses developed outside of the narrowly partisan realm – have been an important factor in enabling a conservative shift in many political contexts. Moreover, there are very clear structural differences between Canada and the US on these dimensions that militate against using one as an overly simplistic analogy for the other.

¹¹ Preston Manning, Opening Comments, Manning Centre Networking Conference, Ottawa, February 28, 2008.

¹² Hugh Segal, "Canadian Voters Frown on Parties Seized by Ideology. Modern conservatism about practical issues", *The Financial Post*, April 4, 1998, p. 20.

¹³ This is an over-generalization and over-simplification, of course. There was much ideological, philosophical and policy innovation in the Reform Party, for example. However, even while Reform's discourse and policy sought to profoundly redefine a variety of core philosophical and political values in Canada, this attempt was often framed as if it was nothing more than a return to straightforward and common sense practices. In this sense, while the Reform party offered new policies, ideas and language, they were valued not because of their novelty and innovative nature, but rather because, like cough syrup, they were necessary to counter the corrosive effects of the high falutin' theories of the liberal political establishment and other interests.

¹⁴ Tasha Kheirridin and Adam Daifallah, *Rescuing Canada's Right*, (Toronto: Wiley, 2005), p. xiv.

¹⁵ Mark Steyn, Foreword, Kheirridin and Daifallah, p. xii

¹⁶ Fraser Institute, *1998 Annual Report*, p. 25. Accessed at http://www.fraserinstitute.org/files/PDFs/annual_reports/1998_Annual_Report.pdf, May 6, 2008.

¹⁷ Numbers compiled from Fraser Institute, *2006 Annual Report*, accessed at http://www.fraserinstitute.org/files/PDFs/annual_reports/2006_Annual_Report.pdf and 'By the Numbers 2006' accessed at <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/aboutus/whoweare/thefiinnnumbers.htm>, May 6, 2008.

¹⁸ Fraser Institute website home page, <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/> accessed May 8, 2008.

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- ¹⁹ Fraser Institute, *By the Numbers*, <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/aboutus/whoware/thefinnumbers.htm> accessed May 8, 2008.
- ²⁰ As he states, “the broader public good requires setting aside the indulgence of ideological and regional nativism”, Hugh Segal, *The Long Road Back*, (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 6. See also p. 223.
- ²¹ Hugh Segal, *The Long Road Back*, (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 27-8.
- ²² Segal, *Long Road Back*, p. 27. Cf p. 30.
- ²³ Segal, *The Long Road Back*, p.3.
- ²⁴ Segal, *The Long Road Back*, p.223
- ²⁵ Segal, *The Long Road Back*, p.239.
- ²⁶ Tom Flanagan, *Harper’s Team*, (Montreal: McGill/Queen’s, 2007), p.7.
- ²⁷ See, for example, his discussion on the various negotiations around unification and the new policy adoption process, *Harper’s Team*, ch. 7.
- ²⁸ Flanagan, *Harper’s Team*, p. 283.
- ²⁹ Flanagan, *Harper’s Team*, p. 274.
- ³⁰ Flanagan, *Harper’s Team*, p. 274.
- ³¹ Flanagan, *Harper’s Team*, p. 274.
- ³² Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Vision for a Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2007, p. ix.
- ³³ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.
- ³⁴ Manning Centre, *Our Vision*, http://www.manningcentre.ca/docs/MCBDBrochure_Apr_2007.pdf accessed May 8, 2008.
- ³⁵ Manning Centre, *Our Vision*, http://www.manningcentre.ca/docs/MCBDBrochure_Apr_2007.pdf accessed May 8, 2008.
- ³⁶ Manning Centre <http://www.manningcentre.ca/whatwedo/challenge>, accessed May 17, 2006.
- ³⁷ Bernard Lord, speech to Manning Centre’s Networking Conference, February 28, 2008.
- ³⁸ Bernard Lord, speech to Manning Centre’s Networking Conference, February 28, 2008.
- ³⁹ Mark Textor, speech to the Manning Centre’s Networking Conference, March 1, 2008.
- ⁴⁰ Mark Textor, speech to the Manning Centre’s Networking Conference, March 1, 2008.
- ⁴¹ Reported by Elizabeth Thompson, “American strategist teaches Tories tips on keeping power.”, *Montreal Gazette*, May 7, 2006.
- ⁴² Frank Luntz, *Republican Playbook*, accessed at <http://www.politicalstrategy.org/archives/001187.php#1187>, May 7, 2006.
- ⁴³ Reported by Elizabeth Thompson, “American strategist teaches Tories tips on keeping power.”, *Montreal Gazette*, May 7, 2006.
- ⁴⁴ Hugh Segal is an excellent representative of this model.
- ⁴⁵ Stephen Harper, full text of a speech by Stephen Harper, then vice-president of the National Citizens Coalition, to a June 1997 Montreal meeting of the Council for National Policy, a right-wing U.S. think tank; available at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20051214.wtext1214/BNStory>, accessed July 20, 2006.
- ⁴⁶ Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, *The Common Sense Revolution*, released May 1994, accessed at http://www.ontariopc.com/feature/csr/csr_text.htm on Jul 30, 2006.
- ⁴⁷ Manning’s Reform Party approach shared many of these elements (Stephen Harper was Manning’s Chief of Policy) – even though Manning also added various other types of populist trappings to Reform’s anti-state approach. Manning’s populism is an important variant, but I won’t pursue it here for reasons of space. Examining the links and cleavages between the strain outlined here and the Reform populism will form the basis of another paper.
- ⁴⁸ Daifallah and Kheirridan’s book *Rescuing Canada’s Right* is perhaps one of the most vitriolic and recent restatements of this perspective.
- ⁴⁹ David Frum, *Comeback*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 16
- ⁵⁰ David Frum, *Comeback*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 17
- ⁵¹ David Frum, *Comeback*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 18
- ⁵² David Frum, *Comeback*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 18
- ⁵³ David Frum, *Comeback*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 18
- ⁵⁴ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. ix.
- ⁵⁵ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. ix.
- ⁵⁶ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 3
- ⁵⁷ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 8
- ⁵⁸ To be fair, *Canada Strong and Free* certainly highlights many areas where they think Canada can do things much better than they currently are. And the series does not shy away from highlighting areas where they think Canada lags far behind ‘best in class’ practices. Moreover, there is definitely a harder edge to their prescriptions and vision – as we will discuss below. But the point is that their dominant tone and their primary strategy of affective resonance are largely positive and inspirational. For example, the fact that the series starts above all else in an optimistic positive tone is a huge difference

since it has a significant impact framing the report and thus influences how the critical moments of the report are taken. Second, even the critical moments of the report are very ‘solution-oriented’. What we mean by that is that the problems as they are identified do not offer a totalizing indictment of the state of the union or Canadian identity. Moreover, this report rarely identifies easy and general ‘scapegoats’ as a way of focusing blame and inspiring an outraged and angry response.

⁵⁹ Manning and Harris, of course, still identify a number of problems and challenges in their new reports. Without a problem, there would be no need for a ‘fresh vision’, as they call it. Thus I am not at all arguing that Canadian conservatism is abandoning its willingness to focus on the negative failures of government and even, perhaps, evoke some pseudo-populist outrage. However, two points are worth noting here. First, the tone they use to approach these issues is not one of raging against the machine or holier than thou outrage and populism. Rather, it is a very ‘problem solving’ tone – in which the challenges are identified and solutions proposed. It is backed up by statistics, comparative in form and ends not with the demand that we dismantle and grind down government – but a positive vision of a better society. Even taking into account the fact that it is a think tank report rather than a politicians speech, this is a very marked shift for two politicians who gained prominence and success using populist outrage in the 1990s. Secondly, my argument is not that we are seeing a whole-scale replacement of an undifferentiated ‘outraged anti-state populism’ with an equally monolithic ‘affirmative choice based vision’. Rather, my argument is that this more affirmative orientation is an emerging framing which is supplementing and in some cases replacing the earlier, more negative, articulation. Or at least, that it is a new element that is being emphasized more than in the past – and that understanding this has important consequences.

⁶⁰ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 12.

⁶¹ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 14.

⁶² Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁶³ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Vision for a Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2007, p. xi.

⁶⁶ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Vision for a Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2007, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Vision for a Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2007, p. x.

⁶⁸ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 1.

⁷¹ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 5.

⁷² Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 59.

⁷³ Rather, in one page of discussion, they simply argue that it is not clear that either home care or public care is necessarily better based on the studies available.

⁷⁴ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 59.

⁷⁵ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 12.

⁷⁶ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁷⁷ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁸⁰ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 15.

⁸¹ Another area for future analysis is the fact – no less interesting for the fact that it is so clichéd – that it seems that those areas in which strong state intervention is promoted by conservatives (crime, foreign policy, security, etc) the state is usually gendered male and portrayed as strong and fighting for the good of all, where those in which it is challenged it is gendered female and portrayed as overly nurturing and spoiling.

⁸² This is a frequent theme perhaps most ably and subtly put forward by members of the Calgary School. See Rainer Knopf’s *Human Rights and Social Technology* (Ottawa: Carlton University Press, 1989) for one key example of this.

⁸³ Obviously, this contention is a major subject of controversy between individualist populists and more left-wing theories who would argue that the market’s formally ‘free’ nature masks a variety of less visible relations of power, privilege, inequality, and coercion. We plan to unpack and evaluate this debate in the book – but we do not have the space to touch on it in this paper.

⁸⁴ Preston Manning, concluding remarks to the Manning Centre Networking Conference, March 1, 2008.

⁸⁵ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *A Canada Strong and Free*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 63.

⁸⁷ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 59.

⁸⁸ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 71.

⁸⁹ Mike Harris and Preston Manning, *Caring for Canadians*, Fraser Institute, 2005, p. 71.

⁹⁰ See the media coverage of the event, for example, CTV at [http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20051208/elxn_campaign_stops_051211/20051211?s_name=electi
on2006](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20051208/elxn_campaign_stops_051211/20051211?s_name=electi
on2006)

⁹¹ Most notably David Laycock in *The New Right and Democracy in Canada*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹² David Laycock, *The New Right and Democracy in Canada*, (Oxford: OUP, 2002)

⁹³ David Laycock, *the New Right and Democracy in Canada*, p. 10.