

# **The Canadian Plurality**

**A Submission by Christopher Edwards  
to  
The Special Committee on Electoral Reform  
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## **Summary**

I would like to consider the issue of electoral reform in a broad, historical context. I will argue that proportional representation has an essential role to play in the ongoing evolution of our governing institutions. However, this role should not undermine the coherence and efficacy of the structural relationships that have evolved over thousands of years. An exposition of these underlying relationships will suggest a number of procedural refinements to this structure as a whole.

## **The Emergent Form**

There is nothing arbitrary about the structure of our parliamentary democracy. It is the product of an ongoing, evolutionary process. What works survives; and what doesn't, disappears. The concept of a Canadian Plurality takes this selective process one step further. It identifies the image or ideal that orients this process and gives it a direction. It illuminates the dark and unforgiving path of trial and error with a conceptual model or hypothesis. In this light, we see the underlying structure of a conscious space; the realm of personal experience.

The coherent articulation of this underlying structure has been an object of human endeavour for thousands of years. So Canadians may be surprised to discover that twenty-five years ago, this model was revealed in a deadlocked constitutional debate, right here in our own backyard.

The Meech Lake Accords were a misguided attempt to entice Quebecers into the Canadian Constitution with the fuzzy notion of a "distinct society". Ironically, these empty words would have done nothing but undermine the coherent conception of a Canadian society and the founding principles of a parliamentary democracy. We came very close to a constitutional disaster. But we were spared, at the very last moment, by an unprecedented intervention. A single member of the Manitoba Legislature refused to fast-track the ratification process. As a result, the deadline passed and the agreement was voided. This member, his name was Elijah Harper, acted on behalf of Canada's Aboriginal community.

## **Four Rights Don't Make a Wrong**

Meech Lake reconfigured the underlying structure of our constitutional landscape. The familiar 'triad' of competing federal, national and provincial interests, that had dominated confederation from the very beginning, was replaced by a curious pattern of four, interlocking arguments. This pattern reflected our vague and often muddled conceptions of 'kingdom', 'country', 'nation' and 'state'. Each of these arguments was based on a different, but equally valid expression of a fundamental human need or "right". In this context, these expressions were no longer competing or contradictory, but mutually-dependent. Explaining this curious

pattern has been my preoccupation ever since. So perhaps I should begin by explaining this preoccupation.

Why was this pattern so interesting? There are two reasons. First of all, it should not have been there. Words give ideas a discrete shape or form. They are the ‘packaging’ that divides a particular idea from all others. Ideas can be connected in various ways, but the words that package these ideas cannot. They can only connect one particular content to one undifferentiated condition. When we put more than one word together, this particularity gets muddled. ‘Holes’ appear in the overlapping conditions that define these different ideas. To preserve the value or meaning of those original expressions, they are combined in the content of a new idea or concept that is bounded by a new condition, or context. And on we go. At every step in this process however, the distinctions that divide one particular from another particular and one condition from another condition are dissolved because content can only be particular and condition can only be everything that’s not particular. So how could a complex pattern of interlocking relationships articulate both the content and condition of four distinct, but often interchangeable words like ‘kingdom’, ‘country’, ‘nation’ and ‘state’?

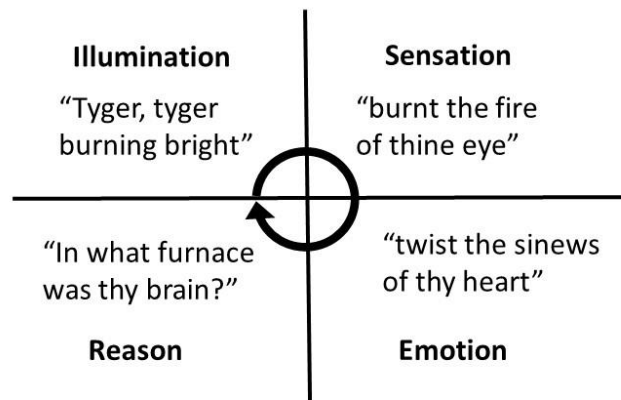
Federal Government	Aboriginal Canadians
Individual Rights	Territorial Rights
<b>The Kingdom</b>	<b>The Country</b>
<hr/>	
<b>The State</b>	<b>The Nation</b>
Democratic Rights	Language Rights
Provincial Governments	Francophone Quebecers

### The Meech Lake Deadlock

The second reason why this 'anomalous' pattern was so interesting was its striking familiarity.

This recognition also has a Canadian connection. Northrop Frye rocked the world of literary criticism with his study of William Blake. He chose "Fearful Symmetry" as the title of this book. This was a reference to one short poem in a huge body of Blake's work. This poem connected that curious pattern of interlocking relationships to the underlying structure of personal experience.

In the first four verses of "The Tyger", Blake describes four conscious capacities in a cycle of four consecutive events. The first is a radiant imaginative capacity that illuminates a dark, primeval forest. The second is an acquisitive sensory capacity that seizes the image of fire from a spacious, pastoral landscape. The third is an associative emotional capacity that twists "sinews" like the spinning process in cottage crafts. And the fourth is a definitive rational capacity that articulates form in the context of an industrial forge.

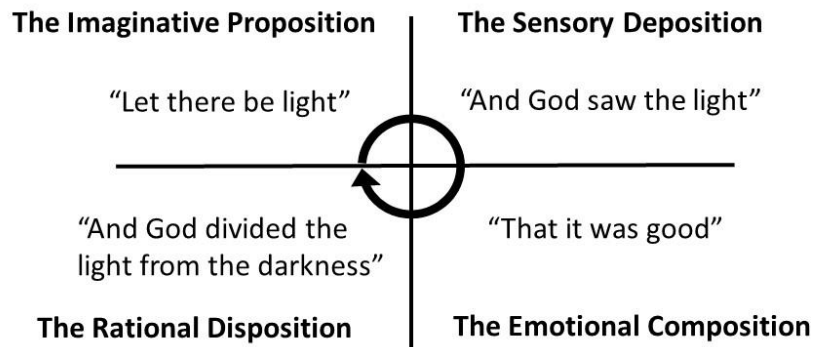


William Blake's Articulation of 'The Tyger'

The “enigmatic” fifth verse is a direct reference to Blake’s original source:

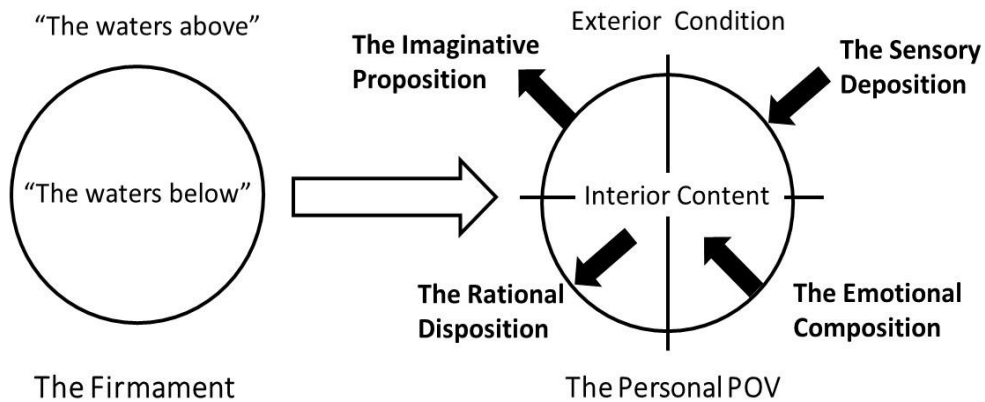
When the stars threw down their spears  
And water’d heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

The first chapter of Genesis describes the act of creation in the same pattern of oriented events. We see the imaginative proposition of light: “And God said, Let there be light”; its sensory deposition, “And God saw the light”; its emotional composition, “that *it was good*”; and finally, its rational disposition, “and God divided the light from the darkness.”



The Genesis Cycle

These events are configured by the geometric articulation of content and condition. This was described as the "firmament" or fixed position that divided "the waters which *were* under" "from the waters which *were* above." This hollow sphere was called “heaven” which is often considered the realm, residence or position of God in this conception of the world.



“The Firmament” as Personal Point of View

In this light, that spherical relation configures the conscious capacities that are attributed to God. But these capacities also belong to each and every conscious human being. So this relation clearly represents a personal point of view within the articulated landscapes of conscious experience.

The geometric structure of this spherical relation is reflected in the geometric structure of these interlocking events. But for our present purposes, it’s enough to recognize that all conscious experience is configured by that personal point of view. This has a direct impact on our conceptions of personal responsibility, sovereign authority, parliamentary democracy and a Canadian Plurality.

### **Sovereignty**

Personal responsibility configures the conscious capacities that we describe as imagination, perception, emotion and reason: I imagine a particular purpose or intention; I perceive a discernible effect; I imbue this effect with an associated content or meaning; and I attribute this meaningful content to the effects of my own intent. These capacities are manifest in the events

that constitute all personal experience. And all of these events either begin or end at the inside or outside `surface` of the spherical relation that articulates a conscious space. So the power or potential to do these things cannot be found within that conscious space. It is positioned between the opposing faces of that hollow sphere, 'between the cracks' in conscious experience.

Now if we put all these articulated worlds together, we create a universe of shared or common experience. But this universe will still be an articulated space that is constituted by the manifest effects of that power that resides between the opposing faces of a personal point of view. Because this power lies beyond our capacity to imagine, sense, feel or reason, it remains unbounded and undifferentiated, and therefore infinite and absolute. The only thing we can truly know about this power is its personal nature. So it represents the one and only power that is shared by each and every human being.

This means that the realization of this personal power creates the universe of common experience. This universe is subject to the `authorship` or authority of that personal power. So when we recognize the sovereign authority of a particular human being, we are actually recognizing the singular authority of that personal power. Democracy is also a tacit recognition of that personal authority. But this is often confused with the coercive influence of a numerical majority. So monarchy, or the rule of a personal sovereign, and democracy are two different faces of the same power; the same authority; the same responsibility. When we compare this conception of personal authority to the republic, we see a personal power that is falsely attributed to an object of our own creation.

So let us consider how this conception of sovereignty is reflected in the structure of our governing institutions.

### **The Legislative Cycle**

Personal responsibility articulates content and condition within a conscious space. But it also articulates before and after within a conscious time or procession. Subsequent effects are

attributed to previous influences. This precedence is evident in the articulation of a legislative cycle.

The parliamentary process begins with The Throne Speech and an expression of intent. These goals are addressed by the administrative authority of the presiding Cabinet with a prospective action. This action is submitted to the constitutive authority of the Commons for consideration and support. If accepted, it is submitted to the Senate, representing the constitutional authority of the provinces. And the final step is the ceremonial endorsement of this action by the Governor General who represents the Sovereign authority of the Crown.

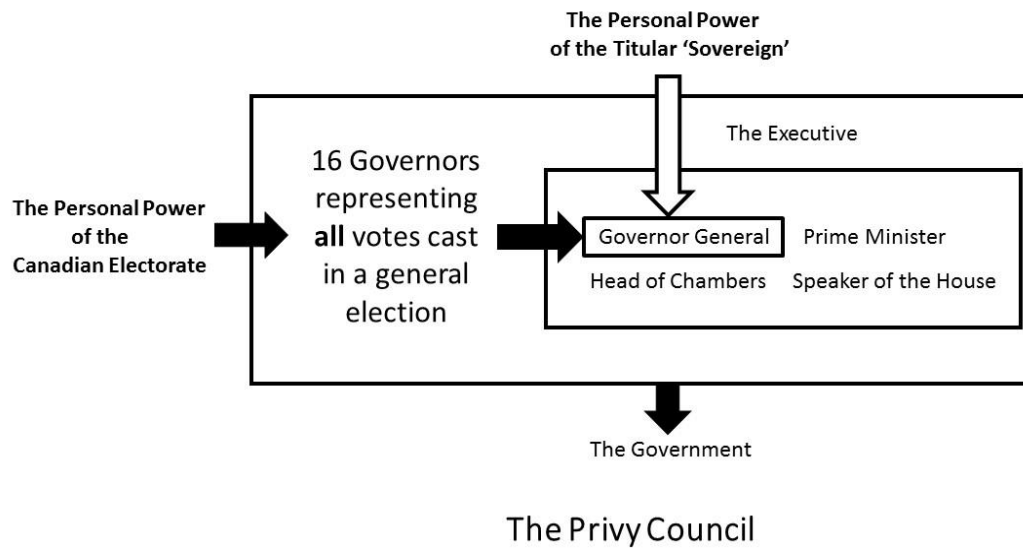
Despite the clear articulation of four, interlocking steps, this process has been confounded by political self-interest. At present, the Governor General, who represents the Sovereign Authority is appointed by the Prime Minister. This is like hiring an employee who then chooses their own employer. The Senate has also been compromised by partisan politics, the repression of dissent, patronage and outright corruption. Rather than address these issues, the Senate is considered irrelevant and we have lost a vital step in the legislative cycle. This has muzzled the clear and coherent articulation of constitutional authority and threatened our conception of a single society.

A Canadian Plurality would re-establish the interlocking structure of a legislative process that has evolved over thousands of years. It is a refinement of existing practice, not a radical or revolutionary departure. This refinement is guided by coherence instead of compromise.

### **The Privy Council**

In broad strokes, the legislative process would begin with the recognition of our singular power. This power is manifest in the act of choosing. Every vote in a general election is an expression of sovereign authority and should be treated as such. All of these votes would be applied to the election of 16 Governors in a system of proportional representation. These Governors would then elect the Governor General who would lead the executive offices of a reformed Privy Council. These offices would include the leaders of all four houses of Parliament.





This body would articulate the wishes and priorities of the electorate in The Throne Speech. It would also serve as an independent body that could initiate inquiries or Royal Commissions that would hold the presiding government accountable to all Canadians. This would also include dissolving Parliament, giving royal assent, etc.

The elected government would receive the Throne Speech priorities as their mandate. On this basis, the Cabinet would articulate legislation and present it to the Commons for debate. The stability and accountability of these Canadian refinements of the British model are widely acknowledged. However, the system breaks down when prospective legislation is passed to the Senate. This poor imitation of the House of Lords exposes our failure to grasp the significance of Confederation in the on-going evolution of responsible government.

In this context, even the word 'Senate' is a problem. It is a regressive term that refers to the traditional prerogatives of wealthy, old men in a slave-owning society. I suggest we call its replacement 'The Red Chamber' or simply 'The Chambers'. This reflects its definitive function as the body responsible for constitutional form and the interlocking structure of Confederation.

## The Chambers

This house reflects the fourfold structure of an articulated plurality. It expands and clarifies our fuzzy conceptions of “multiculturalism” in a federal context. It also acknowledges the unmet goals of the existing Senate. This is not the place to describe each delegation in detail. The most important feature is the clear articulation of the interlocking authorities that are structured by confederation. The purpose of this body is to safeguard the integrity of these constitutive authorities. Only on this basis can one government represent the great diversity of unique, individual Canadians in a just and equitable alliance.

		<b>The Authorities</b>			
		Material	Cultural	Democratic	Conventional
<b>The Jurisdictions</b>	<b>Protected Lands</b> 10 Seats	<b>The First Nations</b> 10 Seats	<b>Municipal</b> 10 Seats	<b>Treaty Law</b> 10 Seats	
	<b>Native Lands</b> 10 Seats	<b>La Francophonie</b> 10 Seats	<b>Territorial</b> 10 Seats	<b>Civil Law</b> 10 Seats	
	<b>Crown Lands</b> 10 Seats	<b>The Commonwealth</b> 10 Seats	<b>Provincial</b> 10 Seats	<b>Common Law</b> 10 Seats	
	<b>Private Lands</b> 10 Seats	<b>The Comity</b> 10 Seats	<b>Federal</b> 10 Seats	<b>The Charter</b> 10 Seats	

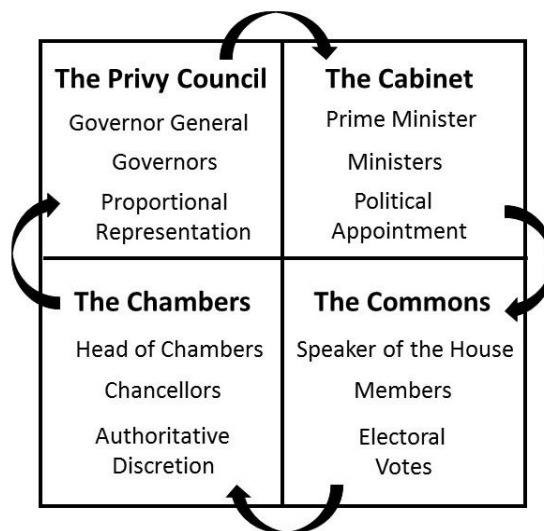
**The Chambers**

The Chambers cannot ‘trump’ the authority of Commons or Cabinet. It would only ensure that legislation was consistent with the principles of Confederation and the clear articulation of responsibility. If prospective legislation infringed on the jurisdiction of a national or territorial body, the legislation would be returned, either for revision or for formal ratification by the affected authorities. In this way, the Chambers protects the ‘word’ of the law from opportunistic ideological or political interpretations. This legal foundation is not subject to majority rule. The legal rights of one person, province or territory are just as valid as all others. This begins with the equal representation of the 10 provinces and extends to a delegation of 10

chancellors in every chamber. The constitutive authorities would decide how chancellors were selected, but this should emphasize their expertise in governance, science, culture or law.

### The Houses of Parliament

Once legislation passes the scrutiny of Chambers, it would be submitted to the Privy Council for royal assent. This would complete the legislative cycle that configures the four Houses of Parliament. In this structure, we see a coherent articulation of the four interlocking functions that structure the realm or ‘Dominion’ of a conscious human being.



The Houses of Parliament and the Legislative Cycle

### Conclusion

The mandate of this committee is to assess how certain electoral models could advance the principles of “effectiveness and legitimacy” “engagement”; “accessibility and inclusion”; “integrity”; and “local representation” In one way or another, each of these principles refers to the articulation of a shared or common space. In this light, your mandate is a reflection of that

ongoing refinement of forms and relationships that structure our representations of personal experience. This process is commonly described as 'mythopoeia', which simply means 'the making of myths'. So the coherent articulation of our common principles and governing institutions is also a mythopoeic process.

I have tried to explain how this process has defined the 'Canadian' experience as an important step in the ongoing evolution of an ideal society, a "plurality" of sovereign individuals. These individuals are defined by their acceptance of personal responsibility and nothing more. I hope that you will consider this curious structure of interlocking relationships in your deliberations.