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"Had Every Athenian Citizen Been a Socrates": Plato and James Madison in the Court of Rainer Knopff

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Introduction

Rainer Knopff of the University of Calgary is one of Canada's great political scientists who taught a generation of students as well as the broader Canadian public important principles of liberal democracy. He is primarily known as a critic of the judicialization of Canadian politics, as seen in books including *The Charter Revolution and the Court Party* (with F. L. Morton), *Charter Politics* (also with F. L. Morton), *Human Rights and Social Technology* (with Tom Flanagan), as well as in numerous articles, essays, and reports.[1] However, undergirding that work lies a deeper philosophical understanding of the fundamental principles of liberal democracy, which can be seen in a series of articles on a variety of controversies in Canadian political history that he describes as "regime politics" or what Alexis de Tocqueville called the politics of "great parties."[2] These controversies, which pitted classical liberals against Roman Catholic theocrats or "ultramontanists" in nineteenth century Canada and against cultural nationalists in the twentieth century, involved fundamental contestation over the basic principles of liberal democracy. In other words, for Knopff liberal democracy is a regime in the classical sense of *politeia*, a "way of life," and some principles and ways of life, most

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notably theocracy and certain versions of nationalism, are incompatible with it. Knopff's aim has been to articulate and to defend a version of liberal democracy as regime that maintains itself as a way of life while also maximizing pluralism. Knopff claims that his dissertation laid the groundwork for his fundamental thinking about liberal democracy.[3] He wrote it under the supervision of Peter H. Russell, a noted scholar of Canadian constitutionalism, at the University of Toronto, though he also credits his other main teachers, Howard Brotz, Walter Berns and Allan Bloom, for much of his intellectual formation.[4] In our conclusion, we shall note another personal and defining event that formed his soul as well as his intellectual outlook.

Recently Geoffrey Sigalet has demonstrated Knopff's allegiance to republicanism as key to understanding his critique of the judicialization of Canadian politics.[5] Sigalet highlights this allegiance to demonstrate how Knopff defends representative democracy against judicialization.[6] As a sign of the intellectual corruption of the academy in Canada, Sigalet notes the degree to which Knopff's critics, that is the defenders of what Knopff and Morton label the "court party," characterize him as a populist. Sigalet demonstrates that only a careless reading could produce such a "straw man" (Sigalet's term) of Knopff's position.

This essay complements Sigalet's analysis by exploring the nature of Knopff's republicanism. There are numerous republicanisms, with ancient and modern republicanism being the two starkest alternatives. Broadly speaking, ancient republicanism emphasizes civic virtue while modern republicanism emphasizes liberty and rights of the individual. Knopff himself raises the question of whether his republicanism is ancient or modern when he lists James Madison and Plato as his two biggest intellectual influences.[7]

This essay tries to make sense of how Madison and Plato combine in the soul of Rainer Knopff because combining them seems counter-intuitive. The two thinkers appear to be opposite to one another. Plato, the ancient, is a partisan of virtue and of what Stanley Rosen calls "erotic mania." Madison, the modern, is a

partisan of moderation and self-interest well understood. Plato seems to be a utopian on account of his view that a good regime is a form of friendship whereby "friends share all things in common."[8] Conversely, Madison seems to be a sober realist when it comes to politics. For example, in *The Federalist* No. 55, Madison states, "had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly still would have been a mob." He seems to think individually one can be wise and just, but, perhaps owing to his Calvinist-Augustinian education under John Witherspoon, he seems to think wisdom and justice have little chance to operate collectively.[9] Instead, Madison advocates extensive institutions to orient our ambitions and even our malicious inclinations toward the public good.

Yet, Knopff points out that for Madison, institutions are not enough. Madison would have disagreed with Kant's statement that well-constructed institutions could keep the peace for a society of devils.[10] Knopff likes to cite Madison's statement that the republican or liberal democratic form of government presupposes the virtues in a higher degree than any other form of regime. In Madison's words, "As there is a degree of depravity in mankind, which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form."[11] The politics of self-interest well understood therefore seems to depend in some part upon the politics of virtue.

Here I offer up a paradox that I shall use as a starting point of my discussion. Knopff's main scholarly effort has been to defend the Madisonian politics of self-interest well understood over and against proponents of what may be compared to Plato's politics of virtue. You can view his critique (with F. L. Morton) of the Court Party in this light. Court Party members purport to be Platonic Guardians whose claim to rule is based upon their professed virtue, which Knopff (with Morton) objects to on account of its immoderation. Yet Knopff admits that self-government depends on virtue. He likes Madison but he also likes (even prefers) Plato. How do we

resolve this Knopffian paradox of both affirming and objecting to the politics of virtue? Can this paradox be resolved?

Rainer Knopff: A Madison for Our Times

Knopff is a partisan of moderation, and like others of that ilk—e.g., Wilfrid Laurier, Alexander Galt, and before them the philosophers of liberalism, and going back to the ancient Greeks, including Plato (yes, him), and Diodotus of Athens, whom Thucydides describes as going head-to-head against the self-righteous demagogue Cleon—Knopff enlists self-interest well-understood as the means of obtaining civic peace and, indeed, civic friendship. Self-interest well-understood is more effective at achieving these important political ends than appeals to justice, right, and piety. A politics predicated upon the latter simply divides the world into the just and unjust, the righteous and unrighteous, the pious and impious. That is a Manichaean political world of black and white, whereas politics properly understood is divided into shades of gray. A politics predicated upon self-interest well understood allows citizens to view themselves as reasonable people disagreeing reasonably—to use a phrase Knopff frequently enlists. Self-interest well understood lowers the temperature of politics, which, because it is so prone to inflammation at the best of times, does not need the additional combustibles including virtue and piety to enflame it further.

Knopff calls himself a "Laurier liberal, the kind of classical liberal who today counts as a conservative."[12] He has devoted his career to advancing a vision of politics based upon self-interest well understood as a means of upholding the deliberative nature of liberal democracy. His work on the Court Party is probably the best-known example of this. The Court Party, with its "unconstrained vision" of postmaterialist politics that owes more to Rousseau than to Madison, on account of its effort to effect social change through the courts, sees politics as a zero-sum game where winners gain permanent victory over losers.[13] Their "politics of rights" thus divides society into the pious who are said to support rights, and heretics who are said to be hateful.[14] The new "politics of rights" is a replay of the kind of theocratic politics that Wilfrid

Laurier and Alexander Galt confronted when it was the priests of the church, not the priests of the legal profession, who held the keys to shaping the mores of Canadians.

Knopff prefers to keep politics within the parameters of deliberative bodies like Parliament because they are more suited to the give-and-take of most political issues. Indeed, in countering the Court Party and the "politics of rights" (or its older version, theocratic politics), Knopff, as a partisan of moderation, supports representative government. The opposite of the "politics of rights" is not popular sovereignty or populism, but representative government[15] because parliamentary institutions, with all its procedures, forms, and even formalities, is the best institution we have to give what James Madison calls the "mild voice of reason" a chance at being heard and governing us.[16]

To this end, Knopff cites James Madison as one of two authors who have influenced him the most. Indeed, one can see the influence of Madison more readily in Knopff's writings than one can see that of Plato. It is the purpose of this essay to show that one cannot see Madison's hand without also seeing Plato's hand.

Madison's account of faction animates Knopff's liberalism. Madison understood that faction is a permanent part of human life, and thus politics. Thus it is better to structure politics in such a way that property is the basic root of faction, more so than religion or virtue.[17] Property changes hands and is the basis upon which citizens calculate their self-interest.[18] Property allows people to rank their preferences, while religion is not a preference.[19] In his work on Laurier, Knopff cites the examples of British aristocrats in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who went from Tory to Liberal as a way of coopting communism in Great Britain. Knopff cites the "admirable" example of upper-class Englishmen like MacAuley who voted to destroy the rotten boroughs. They acted against their short-term interest but for their long-term interest.[20]

Knopff cites Madison's concern for the role ambition plays as the root of his thoughts on factions and how to deal with them. People are most animated not by benevolence or reason, but by

their ambition, which means their own sense of self-worth. At the root even of this, I believe, is Madison's view that our sense of self-worth is based upon how smart we think we are. What really animates our ambition is that we exaggerate how intelligent we and our opinions are. My ambition is most strongly expressed as my belief that my intelligence gives me a claim to rule over you. My intelligence is greater than yours, my opinions are more enlightened. This does not just make me better than you in some abstract sense; it means I have the right to rule over you. This danger is the despotism of reason, which below I shall distinguish from the political rule of reason.[21]

Knopff admits that when he was an immoderate youth, he was attracted to the despotism of reason. He describes his initial attraction to the communism of Plato's *Republic*: "My youthful Marxist heart leapt when Socrates and his interlocutors concluded that a kind of communism was necessary to perfect justice, and that private interest must be overcome to achieve natural meritocracy."[22] I shall return to how Plato helped purge Knopff of his "youthful Marxist heart", to replace the despotism of reason with the political rule of reason. But for now, I simply point out that the political prescription to have the wise and virtuous rule is more likely to result not in philosopher-kings, but in a Hobbesian war of all against all, which is James Madison's nightmare scenario. I do not simply claim to be worthy of rule over you in isolation of you. I make the claim *over* you, in anticipation of you lying prostrate beneath me. It is not enough for me to kill or enslave you, and you me. I must also lord it over you and shame and taunt you so that you and everyone else recognize my rule. And you make the same claim over me. This is the full meaning of Knopff's "youthful Marxist heart" and its desire to eliminate private interest "to achieve natural meritocracy."

Let me emphasize that when it comes to demonstrating the power of our wisdom, our claim to rule, the two of us are not likely going to contest one another's wisdom in a match of Socratic dialectics. After all, in that contest nothing is lost if I lose the argument. Rather, in dialectics, I will thank you for defeating me

because in losing to you, I am actually gaining because you have released me from the grip of my own ignorance. In the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates lament that interlocutors rarely thank him for correcting them in dialectics and thus for making them just. Socrates knows why. Most hate appearing ignorant. Most prefer enjoying the reputation for wisdom over wisdom itself. Most prefer eristics over dialectics, the use of reason to combat instead of the use of reason to learn. Our desire for reputation is often a desire to rule.

Instead of engaging in friendly Socratic dialectic, where friends share all things in common, the two of us rather will contest our wisdom in demonstrating the *power of that wisdom*, its efficacy to rule which is the despotism of reason. Our desire for our wisdom to rule effectively is what we, along with Madison, mean by ambition.[23] And that will result in our respective efforts to kill each other. This is exactly what Hobbes, and then later Locke, Madison, and subsequent liberals, wanted to avoid. The "politics of rights," which divides the world into the partisans of light and darkness (or hate), is simply a replay of those who claim wisdom to rule over the unwise and impure.

Indeed, the "unconstrained" politics of identity supported by today's anti-liberals really is about being morally "pure" and "clean."[24] Behind them lurks the Manichaeism, and even Gnosticism, of Rousseau, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Freud, and the Frankfurt School, a perspective that views all forms of reason, especially self-interest well understood, as the problem. Anti-liberals reject the liberal fable of the autonomous rational individual. Joshua Mitchell explains:

> What if reason is the condition of our bondage," asks the anti-Liberal. "Might it be that freedom consists in our liberation from reason, in the embrace of sentiments and desires that well up against reason," the anti-Liberal wonders. "Might the 'individual' be but a fiction, invented for the dark political purpose of serving a specific racial (white), class (bourgeois), or gendered (male) interest,"

> the anti-Liberal asserts. To come to its central thesis today: Might pre- or supra-rational "identity" be the answer to every vexing question of domestic politics, of commerce, and of society?[25]

I think Knopff would agree with Mitchell's claim that anti-liberals have a fundamentally apolitical outlook. Theirs is the "unconstrained" political vision that tries to save us from our alienation from the means of production as well as from each other; it is a post-materialist vision of society that regards materialism—and indeed, matter—as impure, tainted, and constraining.[26] Think how dirty we meat-eating hunter Albertans and our "tarsands" appear to the post-materialist mindset.[27] Postmaterialist "politics" is a form of social hygiene.

The agents of our salvation from inauthenticity, impurity, and materialism include those non-democratic or representative institutions that purport to govern rationally, including the judiciary which purports to provide rational correction to democratic passions, and the bureaucracy (or administrative state) which purports to govern more efficiently than those same democratic passions. Knopff and Morton focus their discussion of the "court party" on the judiciary but they also show how the "court party" is spread through numerous institutions, including the bureaucracy, as well as non-government institutions including academia (especially law schools) and media. The purported benevolence and neutrality of these institutions stands above the impurity of parties and the institutions in which parties operate, namely, representative assemblies—Parliament. As Knopff's friend Janet Ajzenstat has argued, distrust in parliamentary institutions is shaped in no small way by a desire to be ruled by the wise for only they can lift us up from the muddiness and impurity of the cave, from partisan politics.[28] You might think their faith in the judiciary and bureaucracy contradicts their own distrust in reason because, with its Hegelian pedigree, these institutions embody the very Enlightenment rationality that the anti-liberals reject. However, do not forget that the anti-liberals, in rejecting reason, think they have

our number because they identify "pre- or supra-rational "identit[ies]" at work behind all utterances of purported rationality. This is why they cast the arguments of their enemies in terms of "phobia"; all opinions uttered by the other side are simply motivated by "phobia." As Harvey Mansfield notes, as soon as politics becomes a clash of sub- or supra-rational "motivations" or "humors" (to use Machiavelli's terms), debate over competing opinions, and therefore political life, can no longer take place, thus rendering politics a species of warfare.[29]

We are back to who has the superior and purer motivations, which can only be resolved, as a I noted above, by fighting. Or, as Knopff and Morton show in their book, *The Charter Revolution and the Court Party*, by looking to the "court party" as vanguard guardians who lead (that is, rule) because they know us better than we know ourselves—in effect because they understand how our "pre- or supra-rational "identit[ies]" (our "phobias") operate better than we can understand. The Court Party presents itself as leading us to a higher form of democracy than we can know ourselves.[30]

Knopff and Morton are not simply describing the Madisonian institutional check that courts and the legal class generally place upon representative and "democratic" institutions. This is not the salutary check that, in Tocqueville's terms, the "aristocratic" legal class places upon the willfulness of the demos.[31] As the title of their book suggests, the "court" party is a function of an executive-dominated regime where parliamentary institutions, the very institutions of Canadians' self-government, have been eclipsed by a centralized power that distributes benefits to various courtiers. To the Court Party partisan or courtier, the judiciary and bureaucracy are more efficient routes to "true" democracy than representative government, and along with it the various lower levels of representative government and civil society where habits of self-government get inculcated. They are like hubristic Odysseus who mans "the ship's sail the whole time, never handing them over to any of my shipmates, so we might reach our fatherland more quickly."[32] As Ajzenstat argues, it reflects the desire for the rule of the ostensibly wise over and against the motion and uncertainties associated with

representative or responsible government where neither wisdom nor even "the people" can be concretely and statically represented because the very essence of our parliamentary democracy is perpetual debate or conversation—government by talking as Winston Churchill described it—where answers and solutions are never final.[33]

Plato's Moderation

I think it is at this point that Knopff looks away from Madison and towards Plato for guidance. As Mitchell notes, in denying the liberal fable of the self-sustaining individual and his or her intellect, the anti-liberal is fundamentally a- or supra-political, and so the Madisonian liberal has almost nothing to respond with. Knopff alludes to this when, in highlighting what Madison can teach us about terrorism and tyrants (which is a lot), he suggests that Plato (and Shakespeare) "go deeper into the heart of the human soul" and thus can provide a deeper "analysis of human passions and their relationship to public life."[34]

Knopff's writings throughout his career are alert to this, but the more recent ones most explicitly acknowledge the Platonic insight over Madison. For example, he explains that Plato taught him moderation by showing him where the immoderation of his "youthful Marxist heart"—the despotism of his reason—led. After youthfully admiring Socrates's proposals to abolish ever-evil self-interest to achieve natural aristocracy, Knopff explains:

> But they demanded a steep price. Communal childrearing could overcome the unjust advantages or disadvantages conferred by parents on their differently talented children, but only if the natural preference of parents for their own children could be disrupted. For example, mothers could not be allowed to recognize their biological offspring. Simply put, the biological family, a primary source of unjust private interest, had to be destroyed. Purges and family destruction! Were these abhorrent features of modern communism the logical flip side of its idealism—my

> idealism? As I would later read in one of Strauss' books, "the *Republic* conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made." Perhaps, I thought, some moderation—some realism—was in order.[35]

Plato, with an assist from Allan Bloom and Leo Strauss's *City and Man*, taught Knopff where his "youthful Marxist heart"—or what I am calling his despotism of reason—leads. It leads to the destruction of our humanity. Plato shows this road in its greatest clarity.

But the *Republic* is not simply a critique of utopianism any more than it promotes utopianism. There is a positive message that goes beyond the critique and promotion of a utopia, which is to remind readers how *kallipolis* is the paradigm of our own souls. In our contemporary situation where students are corrupted by being told they must "change the world," the *Republic* reminds us of the importance, and difficulty, of obtaining self-knowledge as the route to justice. As Tilo Schabert notes, the genesis and degeneration of *kallipolis*, because it is of both the soul and the city, is the "whole story of creation."[36] In their nightlong conversation, Plato shows the despotism of reason as well as the political rule of reason, which is the nightlong conversation itself. Plato shows us where eristics leads, but also where dialectics leads, and he uses dialectics (and a lot of images) to lead us. It leads not to what "youthful Marxist heart" promises, but to the genuine communism of thought that Plato expresses when he predicates *kallipolis* upon the old proverb that friends share all things in common.[37]

Moreover, Plato, by telling the story of the genesis and degeneration of *kallipolis*, intends it only as a reminder of what we already know. As Schabert explains: "The *kallipolis* already 'existed' before human beings discovered it. It lies in the act of putting thoughtful dialogue on stage; it is not fashioned for the first time in this dialogue. A paradigm's strength lies precisely in its power of actualization. Human beings can follow a paradigm because it is already a form of their actuality."[38] Knopff learned from Plato, again with an assist from Strauss and Bloom, that the *Republic* is ultimately about the political rule of reason as expressed in dialectics.

This is why Plato goes "deeper into the heart of the human soul." Or put another way, Madisonian political science is not about the soul as Plato's political science is. Rather, Madison's political science is *from* the Platonic paradigm that Madison had already in actuality in his soul, and that Plato was the first to articulate (though he did not fabricate it). Knopff operates within the Madisonian paradox that articulates a Madisonian politics based upon a Platonic *paideia*.

As evidence of my claim, one could consider Madison's classical and Augustinian education at the feet of John Witherspoon at Princeton.[39] But one need not go that far. One need only consult Madison's argument in *The Federalist* No. 51, where he states: "But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." This statement is frequently and rightly taken as a reflection of Madison's political Augustinian realism. Though government be "the greatest of all reflections on human nature," that same human nature is flawed or fallen. Separation of powers is the government of fallen humanity because that humanity cannot be entrusted with absolute power. However, it must be recalled that not all angels have pure wills (as the example might suggest) and some human beings have their wills redeemed. Madison's comment also serves as an antidote to the same "youthful Marxist heart" that Knopff suffered. Angels are pure intellects and lack bodies. Knopff was repulsed by Socrates's communism because of what it did to the "biological family," and as I argue in the conclusion of this essay, this repulsion was based upon more than mere theory. Angels have no need for a governing power to unite their bodies because as pure intellects they lack bodies. Madison's hypothetical, which is meant to remind the reader of the political importance of bodies, is predicated upon the Platonic insight concerning the political rule of reason over and against the despotic rule of reason.[40]

Knopff's Platonism can also be seen in his recent appreciation of one of his other teachers, Walter Berns. There he explains why

self-interest is a necessary but not sufficient basis upon which to build a liberal democracy. There he writes: "even a regime of self-interested checks and balances depends on some degree of citizen character. As Berns put it, 'a country founded on the principle of self-interest…could not be expected to flourish if it consisted only, or mainly, of self-interested men.'"[41] In one sense, Knopff's appreciation of Berns restates his Ph.D. dissertation on Laurier as a Madisonian practitioner of political liberalism and defends Tocqueville's small-party politics. The political liberal wants "small parties" who argue over means rather than ends, or virtues. But Knopff indicates replacing "great parties" with "small parties"—the substance of his argument concerning Laurier—"is the necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, condition for lowering the temperature of politics."[42]

Lowering the ends or purposes of politics as a strategy of "lowering the temperature," while necessary, is insufficient. The remedies Knopff lists that are subsequently needed, I suggest, owe more to Plato than to Madison. To state my point more clearly, I think the extra remedies are only possible when the despotism of reason Madison (and Plato) so feared—Knopff's "youthful Marxist heart"—is purged and replaced by the political rule of reason, or when the soul is habituated in friendly dialectic over eristic.

Consider the first remedy Knopff lists:

> Somehow, the naturally violent inclinations of the political partisan—even the "small party" partisan—must be moderated by good sportsmanship. Having actually encouraged citizens to indulge their partisan inclinations, to form parties and engage in political battle, liberal democracy then requires them to do something difficult and uncommon: To accept defeat. To use a formulation by Ralph Lerner with which Berns agreed, liberal democracy depends on the willingness to concede that even on "difficult questions" people "may differ in opinion and yet be patriots."[43]

Winston Churchill credits the "friendliness of British politics" to the relative ease with which the office of prime minister was

transferred to him from Neville Chamberlain. He also regarded politics as a form of play, serious play to be sure, but play because it is not as serious as other things, including friendship.[44]

Knopff's (and Berns's) use of the term "patriot" shows him moving beyond political liberalism. He does not use the language of political friendship in this passage, but the meaning is there. Something like friendship—both personal and political—must be operative among sportsmanlike players for power who are magnanimous in victory and in defeat because victories and defeats are never final.

Knopff continues by pointing out that there is an "educative effect of political institutions," and he specifies how habits in deliberation bring this about:

> The deliberative processes of representative government, writes my co-panelist Joseph Bessette, require participants to "be open to the facts, arguments, and proposals that come to their attention," and to "share a general willingness to learn from their colleagues and others." Indeed, representative processes arguably help to produce the very virtues they require. For Berns, the rules for constructing legislative majorities "encourage accommodation."[45]

Within the frame of political liberalism, the friendliness of representative institutions can be explained to some extent according to self-interest. I shall accommodate your interests when I enjoy power with the hope you will reciprocate and accommodate my interests when you enjoy power. Our self-interest does not lead us to accommodate our rival because we trust his good will. Rather, we entrust representative institutions that are structured in such a way that they always disperse power, which obliges politicians to cooperate with others so that they may construct successful coalitions that enable them to wield power. We accommodate the interests of others because we have to, according to this line of reasoning. Representative institutions are predicated upon the paradox of power whereby power is dispersed as soon as it is consolidated.[46]

Yet, Knopff observes that self-interest is insufficient and thus goes further than political liberalism in his exegesis of Berns. Citing Bessette's *Mild Voice of Reason*, he argues that democratic deliberation requires politicians who "share a general willingness to learn from their colleagues and others." Immediately after, he cites Berns himself, who states that political debate implies "a capacity and willingness to be persuaded, persuaded by another with an equal right to form the majority or to be part of it, with an equally legitimate interest, and, perhaps, with a superior argument. And it implies, and even encourages, the willingness to abide by the vote of the majority assembled."[47]

Twice in the same paragraph, Knopff cites as key to representative democracy a Platonic insight concerning dialectic (not eristic)—i.e., "a general willingness to learn from their colleagues and others" and "a capacity and willingness to be persuaded … with a superior argument." The capacity to learn and to be persuaded is not the Hobbesian spectre of violent and shameful death that Laurier raised in his "Political Liberalism" speech. Nor is it the posture of self-interest well understood that craftily forges coalitions as a means of preventing one's power from seeping away. Moreover, one's capacity to be "persuaded" is not achieved simply out of self-interest or out of a sense of expediency. Rather, the capacity "to learn" is the capacity to have one's soul turned around to justice and to right. This is the paradigm of Plato, who, as Knopff notes, goes "deeper into the heart of the human soul" than do the liberals.

Conclusion: Home to Ithaca

Rainer Knopff cites Plato and James Madison as his two greatest influences (aside from his teachers). At first glance, his claim seems strange because the two figures appear not to agree with one another. But fuller consideration suggests otherwise. Both were seriously concerned with what in this essay I have called the despotism of reason, or what Knopff refers to as his "youthful Marxist heart." This refers to reason's prejudice regarding the efficacy of its rule, and to the partisan's claim that his own wisdom

makes him a natural ruler. Knopff has battled against the claims of the despotism of reason ever since Plato, with the assistance of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom, purged it from his youthful soul. He has waged this battle under the banner of political liberalism, whose greatest guide is James Madison. I have shown that Knopff and Madison's political science comes from the Platonic paradigm of the political rule of reason, which is not the despotic rule of philosopher-kings. Rather, it is the political rule of reason whose main expression is dialectic, with its willingness and capacity to be persuaded and to learn, which is a victory far more glorious and fitting for someone suited to rule than is what the many courtiers take political victory to mean.

While in graduate school, my friends and I often observed that one of the key differences between an ideologue and someone whose soul is open to wisdom is that an ideologue has never fallen in love. This of course is the kind of vain, self-flattering sentiment at which Madison would smile. Even so, I think there is a grain of truth to it. This thought introduces my final comment on Knopff's autobiographical note, "How Love and Plato Transformed My Life." There he describes the odyssey across Europe he took in his youth with Robin, his then-future wife, and his other love, Bloom's translation of the *Republic*. "Together," he explains "they would change my life immeasurably for the better. Robin became my wife and the mother of our two wonderful sons; the book transformed my intellectual horizon and academic trajectory."

Recall how reading the *Republic* purged Knopff's youthful heart of its Marxism because it showed what happens when you eliminate self-interest, and it destroys "biological family" and "biological offspring." Let me replace the liberal term "self-interest" with the Platonic term, "one's own" to hint where I am going with this. Knopff describes some inauspicious and panicked moments at the start of his and Robin's European odyssey when he thought the train from Milan to Spain had taken her away from him. It turns out the train had just temporarily changed tracks and he describes how he was reunited with, "a tearful Robin, perched with our backpacks at a rail-car doorway, where she had been

poised to jump off had the train not stopped and returned." The prospect of losing Robin probably made her dearer to him, as did her astonishing courage that prepared her to leap off that doomed train so she could be reunited with her beloved. Knopff indicates how the odyssey "transformed" him, which suggests it seemed to have taught him that "own's own" is something significantly more important and morally uplifting than what a youthful Marxist heart would regard.

The *Republic* can be read as retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*[48] where, after twenty years away, Odysseus comes home to his beloved Penelope to reestablish "the great blessing of like-mindedness. For when a husband and wife maintain a united home, of one mind in all their purposes, there's nothing more advantageous and powerful than that."[49] Both *Odyssey* and *Republic* can be understood as extended reflections of how love of one's own gets reoriented—"transformed," to use Knopff's term—when excessive love of one's own is purged by the Good. Consider, for example, how Odysseus's problems are caused by the exaggerated regard of his own mastery of things, his own despotism of reason.[50] The *Odyssey* and *Republic* teach that what is truly one's own is not something one exercises dominion over, like one's property for instance. What is truly one's own is the love and friendship of another, one's spouse or one's friend. They transform us. Plato's term for this is *periagoge*, the turning around of the soul. This is the true teaching of Platonic communism, the full meaning of the old proverb that informs *kallipolis*, where "friends share all things in common," and the "great blessing of likemindedness."

Notes

1. *The Charter Revolution and the Court Party*, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000); *Charter Politics*, (Toronto: Nelson, 1992); *Human Rights and Social Technology*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989). A full list of publications can be found at his personal website: http://rainerknopff.com.
2. "The Triumph of Liberalism in Canada: Laurier on Representation and Party Government," in *Canada's Origins: Tory, Liberal, or Republican?* edited by Janet Ajzenstat and Peter J. Smith, (Ottawa: Carleton

University Press, 1995), 159–180; "Religious Freedom and Party Government: The Galt-White Debate of 1876," in *Political Thought in Canada*, edited by Stephen Brooks, (Toronto: Irwin, 1984), 23–48; "Quebec's 'Holy War' as 'Regime' Politics: Reflections on the Guibord Case," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 12(2) (1979): 315–331. "Language and Culture in the Canadian Debate: The Battle of the White Papers. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 6(1) (1979): 64–82. "Democracy vs. Liberal Democracy: The Nationalist Conundrum," *Dalhousie Review* 58(4) (1978–79): 315–331. "Nationalism, Liberalism, and Federalism: Elements of Canada's Constitutional Crisis," *Dalhousie Review* 59(4) (1979–80): 651–658. "Pierre Trudeau and the Problem of Liberal Democratic Statesmanship," *Dalhousie Review* 60(4) (1980–81): 712–726. "Liberal Democracy and the Challenge of Nationalism in Canadian Politics," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 9(1) (1982): 23–42.

3. Personal communication with author. *In Defense of Liberal Democracy: An Inquiry Into The Philosophical Premises Underlying French Canadian Liberalism's Battle With Theocracy And Nationalism,* (dissertation, University of Toronto, 1980). The title indicates Knopff's concern with "regime politics."
4. "How Love and Plato Transformed My Life," *C2C Journal*, March 1, 2015 (http://www.c2cjournal.ca/2015/03/how-love-and-plato-transformed-my-life/)
5. Geoffrey Sigalet, "Between Populism and Juristocracy: The Republicanism of Rainer Knopff," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (2021): 1–21.
6. For example, see Knopff, "Populism and the Politics of Rights: The Dual Attack on Representative Democracy," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 31(4) (1998): 683–705.
7. Knopff, "The Federalist Papers," *Policy Options*, January 1, 2002 (http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/great-policy-books/the-book-that-influenced-me-most/); "How Love and Plato Transformed My Life," *C2C Journal*, March 1, 2015 (http://www.c2cjournal.ca/2015/03/how-love-and-plato-transformed-my-life/)
8. Plato, *Republic* 424a and 449c; *Laws* 739c; *Phaedrus* 279c.
9. Another view of political Augustinianism argues that civic virtue is a possibility. See my *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001).
10. Knopff, "Walter Berns (1919–2015) and Harry Jaffa (1918–2015): A Canadian's Appreciation," https://www.policyschool.ca/walter-berns-

1919-2015-and-harry-jaffa-1918-2015-canadians-appreciation/, referring to Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, First Supplement.

11. James Madison, *The Federalist* No. 55, in *The Federalist: The Gideon Edition*, edited by George W. Carey and James McClellan, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 291.
12. Knopff, "How Love and Plato Transformed My Life."
13. Knopff and Morton draw from Thomas Sowell's *Conflict of Visions* to contrast the "constrained" politics of Madison with the "unconstrained" and perfectionist politics of Rousseau and his heirs (*Charter Politics*, chapter 9; *The Charter Revolution and the Court Party*, 81–82).
14. Knopff, "Charter Hyperbole: The New Politics of Heresy," *C2C Journal*, March 19, 2012 (http://www.c2cjournal.ca/2012/03/charter-hyperbole-the-new-politics-of-heresy/)
15. Knopff, "Populism and the Politics of Rights: The Dual Attack on Representative Democracy."
16. See Sigalet, "Between Populism and Juristocracy."
17. Knopff, "Populism and the Politics of Rights," 686–687.
18. It may be no coincidence that leftist "check your privilege" rhetoric in the United States heats up at a time when wages and social mobility are most stagnant. See F. H. Buckley, *The Way Back: Restoring the Promise of America*, (Encounter Books, 2016). Buckley points out that Canada is much better off than the United States in this regard ("You're More Conservative Thank You Think," *National Post*, April 22, 2016.
19. Joshua Mitchell, "Religion Is Not a Preference," *The Journal of Politics* 69(2) (2007): 351–62.
20. Knopff, "The Triumph of Liberalism in Canada," 159–180.
21. This distinction explains the difference between the despotism of the philosopher-kings in the *Republic* and the political rule of Nous in the *Laws* (see John von Heyking *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Plato on Friendship*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016), 132–6). However, as I argue in this essay and as Knopff learned with the assistance of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom, the despotism of reason in the *Republic* is not that dialogue's final teaching on the rule of reason.
22. Knopff, "How Love and Plato Transformed My Life."
23. David F. Epstein, *The Political Theory of the Federalist*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). This is not to say that Socratic wisdom is ineffective. In the *Hiero*, Xenophon has Hiero the tyrant claim the sage is strong enough to convince him he is so miserable that he would rather kill himself than remain tyrant (*Hiero*, 7.12).

24. For details, see Joshua Mitchell, "The Age of Exhaustion," *The American Interest*, 11(2), October 10, 2015 (http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/10/10/age-of-exhaustion).
25. Mitchell, "The Age of Exhaustion."
26. Writing from a perspective of Hobbesian realism that Madison would appreciate but not fully endorse, John Gray argues that much of contemporary progressive politics as a Gnostic attempt to liberate humanity from its material constraints, and it also entails an attempt to free humanity from freedom itself, an effort that can only end in enslavement (*The Soul of the Marionette*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015). See also F.L. Morton and Rainer Knopff, "The Supreme Court as the Vanguard of the Intelligentsia: The Charter Movement as Post-Materialist Politics." In *Canadian Constitutionalism: 1791–1991*, ed. Janet Ajzenstat (Ottawa: Canadian Study of Parliament Group, 1992), 57–80.
27. On hunting, see Knopff, "Hunting for Cowboys," in *Hunting and Weaving: Empiricism and Political Philosophy,* edited by Thomas Heilke and John von Heyking, (South Bend IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2013), 65–74.
28. Janet Ajzenstat, *Discovering Confederation: A Canadian's Story*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014).
29. Harvey Mansfield, *Student's Guide to Political Philosophy*, (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2000), 33–35. For the same reason, contemporary political scientists have difficulty understanding the difference between party and faction (Mansfield, "On the Difference Between Party and Faction," in *Philosophy, Politics, and the Conversation of Mankind: Essays in Honor of Timothy Fuller*, edited by Todd Breyfogle, Paul Franco, and Eric Kos, (Colorado Springs: Colorado College (Colorado Springs: Hensius Press), 2016), 213–30.
30. For elaboration of this new postmaterialist religion, see John von Heyking, "Civil Religion and Associational Life under Canada's 'Ephemeral Monster': Canada's Multi-Headed Constitution," in *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, edited by Ronald Weed and John von Heyking, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 298–328 and "The Charter of Rights and Civil Religion," in *Faith in Democracy: Religion and Politics in Canada*, edited by John Young and Boris DeWiel, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), 36–60.
31. Tocqueville's treatment of a salutary legal class is considered at length in chapter 9 of Knopff and Morton, *Charter Politics*.

32. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans., Joe Sachs, (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2014), X.32–34.
33. Janet Ajzenstat, *Discovering Confederation*. On the failure of Canadian educators to inculcate habits of debate and conversation into their students, and the consequence now of Canadians seeking an identifiable source of wise authority to guide them, see John von Heyking "Liberal Education Embedded in Civic Education for Responsible Government: The Case of John George Bourinot," in *Liberal Education and Canadian Political Culture: The Legacy, The Need, And The Prospects*, edited By David Livingstone, (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 44–76.
34. Knopff, "The Federalist Papers."
35. Knopff, "How Love and Plato Transformed My Life."
36. Tilo Schabert, *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence,* translated by Javier Ibáñez-Noé, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 71.
37. For elaboration of my claim, see Heyking *The Form of Politics: Aristotle and Politics on Friendship*.
38. Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 71.
39. Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion and the American Founding*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 177–89.
40. Tilo Schabert suggests Madison's hypothetical is a congruent with a Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophical anthropology, according to which bodies repel one another on account of their inability to understand one another, while "nonbodily beings" (i.e., souls) are able to join with one another because they are capable of understanding one another. Schabert points out that Madison's likely ignorance of Platonic and neo-Platonic texts on this question is no hindrance to his having understood the problem of governing bodies and souls (*The Second Birth*, 17–18).
41. Knopff, "Courts and Character: Reflections on the Work of Walter Berns," (http://rainerknopff.com/2015/12/courts-and-character-reflections-on-the-work-of-walter-berns/). Originally posted on School of Public Policy blog, October 8, 2015 (http://www.policyschool.ca/courts-and-character-reflections-work-walter-berns/).
42. Knopff, "Courts and Character: Reflections on the Work of Walter Berns."
43. Knopff, "Courts and Character: Reflections on the Work of Walter Berns."

44. For details, see John von Heyking *Comprehensive Judgment and Absolute Selflessness: Winston Churchill on Politics as Friendship*, (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2018).
45. Knopff, "Courts and Character: Reflections on the Work of Walter Berns," citing Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason: Deliberative Democracy and American National Government*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 46 and Berns, *Taking the Constitution Seriously*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 143.
46. Schabert, *The Second Birth*, 118–22.
47. Knopff, "Courts and Character: Reflections on the Work of Walter Berns," citing Berns, *Taking the Constitution Seriously*, 143.
48. See Zdravko Planinc, "Tracking the Good in Plato's *Republic*: The Literary and Dialogic Form of the Sun, Line, and Cave Imagery," in *Hunting and Weaving, Empiricism and Political Philosophy*, 154–78. See also Heyking, "History Brought into a Form: Political Storytelling," in *Wherefrom Does History Emerge?: Inquiries in Political Cosmogony*, edited by Tilo Schabert and John von Heyking, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 77–96.
49. Homer, *Odyssey*, VI.181-3 (Odysseus speaking to Nausicaa).
50. Odysseus explains he refused to share with his men in handling the sheets of the ship's sail, which led to them jealously and foolishly opening Aeolus's windbag, which, though having sighted Ithaca, sent them veering off course on a journey where all except Odysseus would die, and Odysseus would not arrive home for many more years (Homer, *Odyssey*, X.28–50).