

 **HUMAN NATURE  
AND THE  
U.S. CONSTITUTION:  
Self Control  
VS.  
Government Control**

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**Our Founders view of individuals: collectively powerful, deserving of freedom and liberty, but nevertheless flawed – our form of government flows from that reality.**

Curiously consistent with Judeo/Christian tradition, our Founders felt that given the opportunity, and encouraged by temptation, humans are flawed and display many imperfections. Consider these words:

*A fondness for power is implanted in most men, and it is natural to abuse it when acquired.* – Alexander Hamilton

*There is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust.* – James Madison

*If men were angels, no government would be necessary.* – James Madison



Just like Darth Vader, individuals have a "dark side."

Because of this very wise assessment, they designed the Constitution to deal with it. The Constitution did not grant rights to citizens – to the contrary, it enumerated the specific powers granted by the people to the Federal government. And in that government, the number one priority was to set up a system of checks and balances to guard against tyranny. Remember that **tyranny is committed by individuals upon other individuals!** Thus there were conceived the three branches of government and we often see the inherent conflicts that were actually intentional – we have separation of power which creates “checks and balances.”

**But “checks and balances” don’t stop with the three branches!**

In addition there’s something most of us don’t often think of under the banner of “checks and balances.” Remember, the Federal government was conceived at a gathering of the states’ representatives – the Constitutional Convention. And remember that old adage that in the United States, power is invested in the people. Therefore we can see that the concept of separation of powers applies to the three vertical levels of influence – the people, the state governments, and the Federal government. Voila! We have even more checks and balances. Three branches keep an eye on each other, and the three levels do likewise! **Or at least that’s the way it was intended.** Consider these words:

*In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.* – Thomas Jefferson

*The Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intentions.*

– Daniel Webster

After going through all of that we must recall that our Founders also carved out another important “check” on all of what’s going on – freedom of the press was intended to ensure that objective information, good and bad, supportive or condemning, was always available to keep the citizens informed. HMMMMM! At least that’s the way it was supposed to work.

**So, what shall it be? Government control or self control? (I thank Dennis Prager for supplying at least the description, if not the entire concept of government control vs. self control.)**

There it is folks! Our founders knew that if too much power was left unchecked in one person or a group of like-minded individuals, tyranny would result. What we are talking about here really boils down to something we continue to grapple with today – the issue of choosing between government control vs. individual, or self control. And sadly, some of the same human flaws the Founders identified among powerful government officials, also exist at the level of individual common citizens. A choice had to be made, and wisely the founders went with the individual. I personally think they saw the “check” on individual misbehavior was the system of laws that was being set up as well as other fellow citizens. That’s a very sensible approach in my opinion!

**Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century!**



*Would you trust this “rascal” running your government and making choices for you?*

As I’ve written many times, one of the most fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives is the vision for the role of government in our lives. In reaching a personal opinion on this, you need to ask yourself: **How much government control do I want to deal with vs. how much do I trust the ability of individuals to make reasonably wise choices and solve individual problems?** It’s not black and white, and it’s not all or nothing – but it is a continuum that defines the tendencies of liberals on one side, and conservatives occupying the other side.

Political commentator John Hawkins picks up on this conservative theme in his analysis of certain aspects of human nature that seem to “baffle liberals.” His assertion is that personal responsibility is good for people. He recently wrote:

*The easiest way to foul anything up is to put someone in charge of it who won’t pay any price if it goes wrong ..... (liberals) don’t realize it’s bad for people to have someone else making the decisions about their kids’ education, their retirement, and their health care ..... (and who are) usually given a free pass when they screw-up.*

## **Liberals (God bless 'em) often expect an ideal outcome – conservatives not!**

Liberals often expect an ideal outcome – conservatives not! Yet conservatives are willing to be more reliant on self control and initiative. Does that help explain it for you? I didn't think so! Perhaps the confusion still lies in the fact that conservatives **ALWAYS** factor in the "rascal factor." Individuals alone or groups are capable of wonderful **AND** awful things. There is no hope for a perfect "nirvana" or "heaven on earth."

If you study history, extended periods of absolute peace are an aberration, few and far between – regrettably! If you look at chunks of history, the unrest we now experience is not so uncommon. That doesn't mean war is inevitable. But one common thread in history, is that extended periods of peace are often "stand-offs" – recently we called it "the cold war." And for peace to extend itself in time, there often has had to be a stabilizing influence which can and has taken many forms – some good, some not so good.

Nevertheless, conservatives for the most part want to be part of that stabilizing influence. I concede that liberals want the same thing, but conservatives believe it comes from power responsibly used. Liberals tend to look first to the positive human motivations that I've already described as undependable. I like the quote that I recently read from conservative commentator Michael Ledeen: ***We prepared for war to make peace possible.***



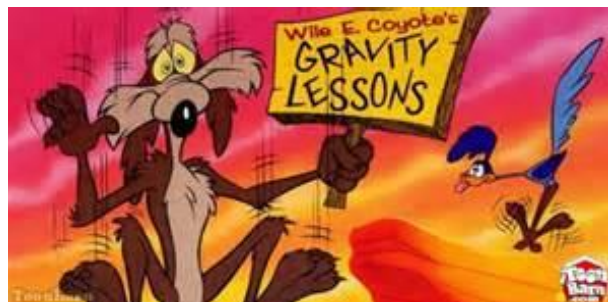
*Guarding against "rascals"!  
Bugs Bunny – Now there's a rascally character!*

## **OK, so I got a little Machiavellian there in the last section!**

Yes, of course conservatives want us to be powerful – if for no other reasons than self respect and national security. Remember, conservatives respect the individual but also see the darkness they are capable of, even if we agree to talk and negotiate and have summits and, and ..... delay the inevitable result. But the important thing to remember from this writing by yours truly is that our form of government is what makes us exceptional and which gives us the highest (not certain) likelihood of prevailing. Fortunately, we have our form of government to help us get through all of this! Glorify the individual while keeping a wary eye on the rascal. I guess it's something like "trust but verify." It makes sense to me!

## **In Conclusion**

Who would you rather be – the roadrunner or the coyote? Who really is the "bad guy"? For me, the answer isn't always clear. Think about it! (A college debate could spring from that question.)



*Who do you want to be, the roadrunner, or the coyote? HMMMM?*