

Seeking Balance in Current Politics By John Chitty, Colorado School of Energy Studies

Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America

By Nancy MacLean
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"Balance personal rights with social duties."

—Georgia Guidestones, Principle #8, 1980, author unknown

I am frequently asked about the current political scene. Many people are upset by the daily news and fearful of where events might lead. I hear comments about anxiety, depression, "outrage fatigue," compulsive news-following and other symptoms of distress. This article is intended to offer an energy-based perspective that supports equanimity under today's conditions.

My main thesis has been about "Individualistic vs. Collectivistic" being a defining lens through which to view politics, and a direct expression of energy principles. Now a new book appears to support the idea: MacLean's excellent history even uses exactly the same terms that I have been using, in exactly the same context.

The Individualist holds that "personal responsibility" is the foundation for a healthy and prosperous society, as well as personal life. For the Individualist, life's inevitable meritocracy naturally has winners and losers ("makers and takers"), and the winners should not be penalized by the deficiencies and poor choices of the losers, who are seen as having few valid excuses. Individualists emphasize present-time pragmatism; past history is less important. Individualists like to minimize use of collective resources, preferring user-pay systems for services. They think taxation should be minimized so that all people can fully experience the full fruit of their labors, for good or bad. Individualists expect that the free market will self-regulate to everyone's advantage, and interventions such as regulatory agencies are often suspected of over-reach. "Every man for himself" is the mantra and there is a tendency to focus locally, within the tribe.

The Collectivist holds that working together is an important complement to individual effort, and necessary due to past events. History is considered to be more relevant, the story of a long gradual climb from exploitative brute force autocracy and privilege (often acquired unfairly) to an idealistic future of

fairness, social security and democracy. This perspective thinks society is well-served by uplifting the losers through various programs such as public education, protection from predatory exploiters, health care, enfranchisement as voters, progressive taxation and social safety nets. "One for all and all for one" is the mantra. In the modern world, "all" ultimately includes the whole planet.

This Individualist/Collectivist spectrum reflects Taoist (and Polarity Therapy) principles. The Individualists represent Yang (*Pitta* or *Rajas* in India) and the Collectivists represent Yin (*Kapha* or *Tamas* in India). Yang is the involutory, materialistic impulse, found in all phenomena and in the body as arteries, motor nerves, inhalation and flexion gestures. Yin is the evolutionary, spiritualizing impulse, also ever-present in phenomena and in the body as veins, sensory nerves, exhalation and extension gestures.

Both Yang and Yin are essential for healthy functioning. From this as a starting point, great insights become available for health care, psychology, sociology and other fields, as I have tried to explain in *Dancing with Yin and Yang* (2013) and elsewhere.

There is constant rhythmic interchange in any polarized field, just as breath, heart, nerves and muscles must complete their natural cycles. "The inward and outward energies must move in all fields to have health and happiness." (Randolph Stone, *Polarity Therapy Vol. 1*, Book 3 Chart 2). What we are experiencing now in national politics, a pendulum swing to the Individualistic right, is to be expected after the previous swing to the Collectivist left.

Expectations that are realistic can have a big effect on stress levels; when we are surprised, the impact is greater, whereas the same stimulus has much lower impact if it is expected. Having an energy understanding, including expecting the Individualist/Collectivist, Yang/Yin pendulum to swing naturally,

can protect us from excessive stress in reaction to events.

Extremism: Most people show a natural blend of both tendencies, somewhat favoring one or the other depending on the situation. But extremism also exists—in individuals, couples and groups, as well as in politics and economics. Softening extremism is a basic goal of therapy, at any level. Theoretically, long-term extremism is not sustainable, simply because the pendulum must swing, but it can definitely cause immense suffering while operating in extremes.

MacLean's book is the history of one side, the extreme Individualists, who have been gaining momentum recently. No doubt a history of Collectivist extremism would also be similarly illuminating. "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," in either case.

An excellent therapy exercise in any polarized situation is to use the Sedona Method, which is similar to Polarity Therapy in both theory and technique.

Among many aspects, it offers an exercise that asks of any dualistic dynamic, "What's good about _____?"

What's Good about Individualism: it is correct that personal responsibility is a foundation of wellness at all levels. Excessive dependence on others is unstable at best. Self-interest is a primary, inescapable feature of human nature. Capitalism (structural support for individual wealth) has created a high standard of living, and the activity of the winners often trickles down to benefit the losers. Creativity rises when outside restrictions (regulations) are reduced. The willpower/motivation/determination to pull oneself by the bootstraps up the prosperity ladder is an effective antidote to disadvantage of any kind, including economic.

What's Good about Collectivism: it is correct that there have been many large-scale exploitative sequences throughout history, with imperialism as a prime example. Slaves and their descendants are not really meritocracy "losers," because the system was unfairly skewed against them. The Collectivist mindset is supported by spiritual teachings such as the Golden Rule and the Beatitudes. It is correct that too great a differential between rich and poor inevitably becomes unstable and can lead to cataclysmic upheaval such as the French Revolution. With Collectivism, the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder is progressively raised away from abject poverty and suffering, and the upper rung of the ladder is not so threatened. Both

groups can breathe a little easier, instead of needing walls (such as gated communities and prisons) to keep them separated.

Both groups can also have major problems or failures that obscure their value. Extremism does not work for very long. Both groups would be well-served to examine and correct their extremist tendencies.

Failures of Excessive Individualism: extreme Individualists have perpetuated abusive systems such as slavery, crony capitalism, corruption, lobbying abuses and fascism (also known as corporatism).

Extreme Individualism has often meant despotism and enormous suffering for large sectors of the populace.

Pure capitalism lacks moral guidance other than profit. Unrestrained Individualism has caused major environmental damage, with the irresponsible perpetrators often making messes that hurt others.

Extreme Individualists are not much interested in majority rule or true democracy; they have created voter literacy tests, poll taxes and other current-day restrictive voter strategies. This is not surprising because true democracy means giving voice to the supposed meritocracy losers, which will feel threatening to the supposed meritocracy winners. Individualism does not work well with essentials such as health care or housing, as predatory exploitive suppliers may artificially manipulate prices; imagine if air or water could be patented, then owned by a monopoly.

Failures of Excessive Collectivism: Collectivists have engendered problems such as weak-willed, chronic dependence-poverty, and some unsuccessful experiments in communism/socialism. Unrestrained by Individualists, extreme Collectivists tend toward ever-increasing spending, higher taxes, larger and less efficient government, self-perpetuating bureaucracies and entrenched institutional corruption. Collectivists may foster complacency, such as thinking, "Why make an effort or do something difficult since my needs will be met by the group?" In extreme Collectivism, essential bottom-tier tasks involving hard labor may gradually go unfilled because there is no one left desperate enough to endure extreme conditions.

Government intervention may be required to supply workers, leading to awkward migrant-labor policies that can strain the social safety net. Oil-rich Middle Eastern countries provide several examples. In addition, Collectivism may not be as innovative as

Individualism because incentives for creativity may be reduced (conversely, innovation could also rise, through increased collaboration). Extreme Collectivist impulses can also lead to despotism, with many modern examples including Stalin and Mao.

As predicted by Taoism, “in the fullness of one is the seed of the other.” Individualists create corporations that then may become culturally uniform and repress individuality, while Collectivists may produce artists who are fiercely individualist. Collectivist candidates have sometimes been more charismatic (Individualistic), and Individualistic candidates have sometimes been less exciting individually (such as in Nixon vs. Kennedy or Romney vs. Obama).

The Middle Way: The challenge for everyone, and for both Individualists and Collectivists, is to use self-awareness and introspection to identify and articulate their values in a way that clearly acknowledges and steps away from predictable extremes. Just as we find in therapy for couples, each side needs to recognize and appreciate the value of the other. In energy theory, this introspective phase represents the Neutral (*Vata* or *Satva* in India) part of the grand universal sequence upon which Taoism and Polarity Therapy are based. Unfortunately, there is little introspective capacity evident in today’s climate, and our present-day public dialogue tends toward “partisan” fixation in one pole or the other. Imagine if a presidential debate started with candidates stating their appreciative understanding of the other’s guiding principles, and an intention to find compromise solutions that respected the other’s concerns.

The “middle way” (*Tao*) would seek to identify strengths and weaknesses of each extreme, and gently borrow main aspects of each under the common intention of real-world problem-solving. For example, the leadership would gather detailed information about a particular problem, then bring in appropriate aspects of both Individualism and Collectivism to create a solution. The resulting action would gently oscillate between the two poles, and would avoid extremes. Any solution would be viewed as temporary, expecting that a further refinement would be required after the effects were fully experienced.

A reassuring aspect of all this is that “larger forces are at work.” There must be an ebb and flow between Yang and Yin, and this current sequence is just another turn of the same old wheel. Individualists will have their

day, then the pendulum will reverse and swing back to Collectivism. In the fullness of each phase, the errors and failures will propel the body politic to make a correction, spiraling upward in a long march out of primitive conditions to generally greater longevity.

It is unrealistic to fear that extreme Individualism or extreme Collectivism would ever actually endure. Inhalation without exhalation, arteries without veins, daytime without night or summer without winter-- these are just not on the menu. Extremists may wreak havoc for a time but the extremists of either camp will not permanently achieve their agendas, because the implementation has to activate the reverse forces. “The bigger the front, the bigger the back,” is the relevant adage from Taoism. Viewing the Individualist side as an example, because it is the subject of this book, the Cato Institute may dream of a time with minimal government, maximum privatization, minimal taxes, no foreign aid, no public education, no unions and no restraints on capitalism (to pick a few of its published goals). But such a gravity-defying situation is only hypothetical, just as “singularities” (monopoles) exist mainly in physics theory and are inherently unstable. Extreme Individualism begets extreme Collectivism, and vice versa.

MacLean notes that extreme Individualism’s seminal spokesman, James M. Buchanan (1919-2013), had little interest in real-world applications or empirical data. Ideas may sound interesting on paper, but until they have been actually attempted and the results objectively assessed with real people, the process is incomplete. Recent reports about “Libertarian” experiments in Colorado Springs, Kansas and Indiana make good case studies, as extreme Individualist experiments have inevitably created a backlash. These sequences could be viewed as a beneficial correction to the previous excesses of Collectivism, but they cannot be sustained; something else must arise. Extremism generates suffering in either case, with many modern examples such as Pinochet’s Chile for Individualists and Mao’s China for Collectivists.

An example of functional blending and interdependence in modern society is useful here. To see how the sociological grand cycle plays out in a functional way, the modern pro sports industry provides an interesting study. The sports industry shows how Individualists and Collectivists can work together. It is a relatively pure Individualistic

meritocracy on one level (play well or lose your job, regardless of education, age, race or creed), yet its enormous prosperity has included strong Collectivist factors, such as collective bargaining, league luxury taxes, TV revenue sharing and pensions. These do not offend Individualists because the need for them is so inescapable. Personal achievement is celebrated side-by-side with team achievement. Individualist and Collectivist factors ebb and flow effectively. Owners and city governments all play a role, for overall financial benefit. For example, NBA finals MVP Kevin Durant recently gave up big money because he had plenty already, and he saw that Stephan Curry had been undervalued due to his ankle injuries; he saw that together they had an opportunity to do something that could not be done alone. Such balancing acts between Individualists and Collectivists are everyday common news in pro sports, but not in politics. In addition to sports being an “opiate of the masses” and “large-scale popular autonomic fulfillment” (as I described in *Dancing with Yin and Yang*), these very public operations give people a constant subliminal message about effective real-world blending of the two great polarities. This omnipresent messaging and example of functionality could be playing a useful part in subconsciously stabilizing today’s society, a “reality TV” that gives an important message about balance. This observation is not meant to imply that sports is an Utopian enterprise, just that it offers a real-world example of functionality in current events.

Popular stories often explore the Individualist/Collectivist continuum. For example, *Robin Hood* has an enduring appeal, with a charismatic, super-competent individual coming to the rescue of unfairly oppressed serfs, establishing a new, more functional order in society around a strong but benevolent leader.

Understanding Yin and Yang does not negate the great value of political and economic activism. However, activism can be approached more consciously than we sometimes see today. Activism with consciousness creates less stress for the activist and may be more effective. Gandhi and Mandela exemplify activism with consciousness that led to good outcomes. No cause is furthered by taking oneself out of action through poorly-conceived strategies.

With this as a general backdrop, several more specific conversations attract my interest.

American political history represents a blend of Individualist and Collectivist impulses. At its founding, America incorporated an unprecedented appreciation of Collectivist thinking compared to previous governmental models (i.e., “...of the people, by the people, for the people...”). However, it also preserved Individualist values through Constitutional strategies such as the Senate and Electoral College, both of which enable disproportionate power for an elite or a minority. Similarly, the initial privilege of voting was for men of property only, not everyone. A “strict Constitutionalist” today often is code for a return to 1776’s Individualist structures. The subsequent years have been a long, slow, continuous struggle by Collectivists for equal rights, with the Civil War, enfranchisement of Women, New Deal and the Equal Rights Amendment being key turning points.

Modern Republicans have been more Individualistic. We have had a recognizable pendulum pattern with our Presidents, going back and forth between Individualist (I) and Collectivist (C): Hoover (I), FDR-Truman (C), Eisenhower (I), Kennedy-Johnson (C), Nixon-Ford (I), Carter (C), Reagan-Bush (I), Clinton (C), Bush (I), Obama (C), Trump (I). Of course, these cannot be classified too neatly, as each President exhibited anomalous behavior (Eisenhower supported desegregation, Johnson expanded the Vietnam War, Reagan tripled the deficit, and so on). The transitions from one phase to the next have often been turbulent, even involving coups, counter-coups and apparent voting manipulations such as 1960, 2000 and 2016.

There has been great confusion in American foreign policy. Legitimate impulses to undo imperialism have been often mistaken as communistic and attacked as a threat to Individualist values. Again, Individualists tend to focus on the present, not history. The Age of Imperialism was a real phenomenon in which the “Guns/Germs/Steel” group (famously described by author Jared Diamond), methodically exploited the rest of the world. Extreme Individualists may think of imperialism as a golden era, whereas Collectivists may tend to feel guilty that it happened. “Nationalism” is often an authentic Collectivist impulse to undo the whole imperialistic phase of history. Nationalism’s tragic examples include Mossadegh in Iran (1952), Lumumba in Congo (1961), Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam (1965), to name a few of the authentic nationalists crushed by secretive American Individualists in a

mistaken-identity effort to protect their turf. In the Vietnam War, the two strands of Individualism and Collectivism were quite intermingled, with the former starting the very profitable war, and the latter eventually stopping it on humanitarian grounds.

Observations about the Republican Party:

MacLean's book notes that the current GOP lacks unity, with several factions operating under different intentions. Even the main body of Individualists are fragmented, with an extremist (Koch) wing and a more moderate wing (Romney).

Today's extreme Individualists have their roots in segregation, monopoly capitalism, and self-serving protection of privilege that was often unfairly acquired. These impulses are disguised as "Liberty," which in this case means freedom to exploit and dominate others. Current-day racist groups feel comfortable with the GOP for a good historical reason, and Trump has been careful to not explicitly disavow this subgroup, in order to keep their votes.

Similarly, the GOP's evangelical wing lacks coherent allegiance to the primary Individualist theme, and mainly cares about specific agendas such as anti-abortion, anti-LGBT and its other ideas of morality. MacLean shows how this group is easily manipulated due to this mono-focus. A similar effect comes from its tendency toward cognitive dissonance, such as when its leaders have no moralistic problem with Trump's personal behavior. Trump is equally careful with this group; he can keep their votes as Individualists as long as he does not alienate them with direct language.

Much goes unsaid in the Individualist world, to maintain tenuous alliances, similar to how much often goes unsaid by stressed Yang in a personal relationship.

Trump found the right tone to pull these together temporarily, apparently with outside help. But MacLean scores Trump as not a true member of the extreme Individualist group, but rather an anomaly; she sees Charles Koch as the real present-day leader.

Trump certainly implements extreme Individualism, such has been demonstrated by his selection of privatization champions in education, health care and finance, as well as his Voter Fraud initiative, but MacLean shows how the underlying impulse comes from Koch and others who pull strings secretly. Trump provides an important value by creating an attention-soaking entertainment spectacle so that other

initiatives by the extreme Individualists receive less air time.

Koch receives lots of attention from MacLean. To have one family's massive wealth applied so extravagantly for so long to such extreme Individualist impulses is unprecedented. The Koch influence often determines who gets elected in government and the judiciary, and what information gets offered to the public. MacLean's historical details were often revelations for me. There are also wealthy Collectivists at work behind the scenes, of course, and many wealthy advocates of either camp are not extremists like Koch. These exceptional individual resources are necessarily temporary, limited by life spans; extremist Individualism sustained a major loss when its intellectual hero Buchanan finally passed in 2013, at the age of 93, and Koch is now 81.

A way with words: Buchanan had a gift for obfuscation and euphemism; he could offer extreme Individualist ideas in a coded language that sounded intelligent without plainly conveying their real meaning. He started in the 1950s by advocating segregation without actually using the word. Instead, following in the tradition of John C. Calhoun, he argued for "personal choice" and "state's rights." Buchanan made a whole career out of generating socio-babble for the extreme Individualists, even winning the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1986 with complex discourses on free markets, "fiscal equity" and self-interest as the key behavioral factor in market activity and government.

Buchanan started a "Libertarian" study center at the University of Virginia, The Thomas Jefferson Center (1955), which later was moved to Virginia Tech and then to George Mason University near Washington, DC as the Center for the Study of Public Choice. These think tanks have been the origin of ongoing rationalizations for the extreme Individualist cause. The list of these institutions includes the Cato Institute and Heritage Foundation, and subsequently dozens of other academic initiatives and media operations funded by Individualist extremist wealth.

The modern extreme Individualist camp still relies on ambiguity to keep its coalition together; it cannot state its intentions clearly, such as in a campaign for election. To articulate the real agenda of Buchanan and his colleagues (including the allied University of

Chicago “free market” economists) is basically taboo in current society.

Trump continues the language confusion tradition, speaking in veiled coded language that his disparate alliance can interpret as they like. The super-ambiguous motto, “Make American “Great Again” could mean anything. The presumed era of greatness is the early 1950s, which just happens to be immediately before *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the beginning of the end for segregation and the ignition point for the modern extreme Individualist movement.

The extreme Individualist agenda implies increasing poverty and a widening gap between winners and losers. However, by appealing to Individualist sensibilities instead of issues, the GOP also manages to attract many voters who are already suffering as losers, who vote for style against their own self-interest. Extreme GOP could be an acronym for Greedy One Percent, ironically elected mainly by those who were “left behind.” Skilled phrasing like Buchanan’s keeps this seemingly contradictory sequence alive.

We don’t have to dig very deeply to discover the real intentions of the extreme Individualists. Buchanan’s successor as director of the study center at George Mason University, Tyler Cowan, speaks in more plain ways that are unlikely to gain traction. Here is a composite of Cowan’s actual words, gathered by MacLean (p. 212):

“With the re-writing of the social contract [when Cowan’s extreme Individualists win the culture war for good], people will be expected to fend for themselves much more than they do now. Some will flourish, other will fall by the wayside. Worthy individuals will climb out of poverty, making it easier to ignore those who are left behind. [Note Cowan’s use of an evangelical phrase] We will cut Medicaid for the poor. The fiscal shortfall will come out of real wages as various cost burdens are shifted to workers from employers and a government that does less. To compensate, the people who have had their benefits cut or pared back should pack up and move to lower-cost states like Texas. USA as a whole will end up looking more like Texas. Lower income parts of America will re-create a Mexico-like or

Brazil-like environment complete with *favelas* like those in Rio de Janeiro.”

MacLean also offers another version of the extreme Individualist intention, using the 50th anniversary writings of the Mont Pelerin Society (an extreme Individualist group established in Switzerland after WWII), expressed by Buchanan. For this group, phenomena that must be stopped include:

- Excessive government regulation of business
- Environmental control over business
- Government-backed health and welfare
- Progressive taxation (redistribution of wealth)
- Government monopoly in schooling
- Majority voting
- Feminism, which is called “heavily socialistic for no apparent reason.” [For students of Yin/Yang, the reason is readily apparent, because Yin, the feminine principle, tends to have a Collectivist bias].

Imagine trying to win an election on such a platform, stated overtly.

Other characteristics of extremism: Both sides have been known to use brute force to accomplish their goals, but the extreme Individualists are much more inclined to Yang violence. The same Yang tendency is found in domestic quarrels. In the modern era, the assassinations, Vietnam War and 9/11 are examples. Violence and conflict is a symptom of the absence of the *Satva* principle of self-awareness. Meanwhile, the Collectivists tend toward more gradual negotiated change via legislation, such as in the Equal Rights Amendment and ACA. The same Yin preference exists in using counseling and talking to resolve domestic problems.

Individualists generate larger prison populations, as the gulf between winners and losers is amplified, and the prison population provides a profitable business and a form of modern slavery for the winners. Individualists will tend toward harsher punishment with longer prison terms, to isolate the losers and feed the economic machine, whereas Collectivists will prefer smaller prison populations and more focus on rehabilitation, to uplift the most disadvantaged. Police power is on the very short list of an extremist’s approved spending list, along with national defense and a few other very large projects.

Psychologically, in autonomic nervous system stress responses, Individualists may initially use sympathetic ANS strategies but then tend toward parasympathetic autonomic (“hunker down”) strategies. Collectivists may initially seem more reserved but then may tend toward sympathetic autonomic (“mobilize”) strategies. Demographic maps of the country show close correlation between voting patterns and autonomic-based conditions such as poverty, disease, low education, obesity and others. The Taoist adage mentioned earlier, “In the fullness of one is the seed of the other,” predicts this correlation.

Some final energy interpretations about politics:

The associations of dimensions (Right vs. Left) and colors (Red vs. Blue) with Individualism and Collectivism deserves consideration. How did Red and Right come to be linked with “Conservative” and the inverse for “Liberal”? These are the appropriate colors and sides of the body from Taoism; is that just a coincidence? Also, the origins of the terms “Conservative” and “Liberal” are another curiosity. I keep waiting for Conservatives to embrace Conservation, just because the words are similar. To make sense of it, “to conserve” comes from “to preserve” as in to preserve the status quo of wealth and privilege (involution, Yang) and “Liberal” comes from “freedom” and “generosity” (evolution, Yin).

Why do current-time “conservatives” oppose “conservation?” Some factors include: unbalanced Yang is not much interested in responsibility, environmentalism can shrink short-term profits and dreaded government regulation is often the agent of enforcement. The Flint water crisis happened when Individualist extremists (supported by the Koch-funded Mackinac Center) took over the water system and the new manager sought to reduce costs by tapping into a cheaper source. Similarly, one of Trump’s first moves was to weaken or eliminate the EPA. My prediction is that anti-environment strategies will work only until the next disaster, then a backlash will materialize after a wave of suffering has been created.

There is a gender correlate for this whole discussion, in that men are usually slightly predisposed to Yang (Individualistic) and women are usually slightly predisposed to Yin (Collectivistic) perspectives. The gender differential is found in many studies such as stress responses. When danger appears, men tend to

look outward toward the threat, and women tend to look inward to protect their immediate circle.

Disinterest in consequences (“irresponsibility”) is a textbook signature of out-of-balance Yang energy. In the heat of passion, dysfunctional Yang does not think about long-term effects. The famous athlete with nine children by nine different women or the British sperm-donation entrepreneur with more than 800 children are examples of this notorious Yang error. We can only imagine what future suffering has been set in motion by these Yang errors.

Energy theory predicts a worldwide long-term trend from (I) to (C). Stone described how we are here to learn and become wiser: “The purpose of life is the fulfillment of consciousness.” (Stone, 1948). The long-term progression is explained in books such as Riane Eisler’s *The Chalice and the Blade* (1988) or Leonard Shlain’s *The Alphabet vs. the Goddess* (1999). It is very difficult to turn back the clock. Once people have experienced a benefit, it is hard to take it away from them.

I hope that this discussion is helpful in relaxing and observing or participating in events as they develop, with less stress. The pendulum must swing. The details of betrayal, intrigue and silliness are just disturbing fragments of the whole story; by keeping the big picture in mind we can observe the ups and downs without as much fear. Our first task is to do our best in our immediate sphere of influence, and we will do that much better if we are acting from a state of relative equanimity. Let us focus on creating balance in our own immediate surroundings, using both Yin and Yang perspectives in a moderate way, and let that balance be an influence on those around us.