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## The Societal Costs of Surveillance: An Alternative View on Civil Liberties Constraints

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**Abstract.** This article explores some psychological phenomena bearing on the consequences of civil liberties constraints.

In political entities purporting to be representative democracies, civil liberties constraints “in peacetime and in war” ineluctably elicit public discourse of two main kinds. The first is that civil liberties constraints may be unfortunate but necessary to guard against security threats. This discourse features perspectives on trade-offs between civil liberties constraints and security benefits, hypotheses about benign and malignant intentions and motivations of government authorities implementing constraints and trumpeting security threats, and conclusions bearing on the comparative worth of life and values. An example of this last type of conclusion is the old chestnut that a political constitution or bill of rights is not a suicidal pact, usually meaning that staying alive trumps how one stays alive or lives.

The second public discourse is related to the first and bears on the various noxious consequences of civil liberties constraints. As a former editor of *The Prague Post* has opined concerning the United States Justice Department’s support for enlisting meter readers, cable installers, various couriers, and the like to observe their clients and report anything suspicious, constraint “erodes the soul of the watcher and the watched, replacing healthy national pride with suspicion, breeding insular individuals more concerned with self-preservation than with society at large” (See Kayal, 2002).

So it seems that both kinds of public discourse assume as Truth that civil liberties constraints (in isolation) are bad, not good, e.g., in a more perfect world constraints would decrease and then fade into nothingness as perfection appeared. But is there a case for the intrinsically positive features of constraints?

Perhaps, there are several. For those who believe in a Hobbesian world, the *sine qua non* of Government is constraint that be founded on some sort of utilitarianism that is itself predicated on a nasty, brutish, and short life alternative.

Others believe that living in truth with constraints is the purest way of living. The purity may evolve through an expiation of assumed Original, original, or common Sin. Or the purity may evolve through a Will to Power that allows one to be True and Real through throwing off a world of alternate constraints and through creating a new world for oneself. In addition, the purity may evolve through the very experience of experiencing constraint with a total toleration that precludes any resistance.

From a psychological perspective, positive consequences might comprise the association of constraint not only with compliance with social norms - this predicated on good social norms - but internalization of, introjection of, and identification with such norms. Such consequences might be the case for combinations of individuals who seek close and meaningful interpersonal relationships and those who seek self-worth and self-identity.

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The perspectives that civil liberties constraints are necessarily bad or good are too often ideological stances, which assume some sort of True Reality independent of perception and interpretation. Epistemological techniques including the empirical may challenge and even support one or both stances so that surveillance may have social benefits as well as or instead of costs. (See Blatt, S. J., Shahar, G., & Zuroff, D. C. (2001). Anaclitic (sociotropic) and introjective (autonomous) dimensions. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 38, 449-454; Kayal, M. (July 26, 2002). The societal costs of surveillance. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Morin, A. (1997). History of exposure to self-focusing stimuli as a developmental antecedent of self-consciousness. *Psychological Reports*, 80, 1252-1254; Scandell, D.J. (1998). The personality correlates of public and private self-consciousness from a five-factor perspective. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality*, 13, 579-592; Soffer, J. (2001). Embodied perception: Redefining the social. *Theory & Psychology*, 11, 655-670.)(Keywords: Civil Liberties, Ideology, Security.)