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. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions. This policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced through the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public. We see it particularly displayed in all the subordinate distributions of power, where the constant aim is to divide and arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other that the private interest of every individual may be a sentinel over the public rights.

What does the author mean by “If men were angels, no government would be necessary”?

How does a dependence on the people act as a check on government?

Here, the author means that, no matter how good the motives of people in power are, there is still a defect (as in, self-interest) that needs to be checked.

This last sentence is a long one. On the back of this sheet, rewrite it in your own words, and feel free to break into more than one sentence. (Words to watch out for: “several,” which has a meaning a bit different from today’s, and “sentinel.”)