

SELECTIONS FROM *THE SPIRIT OF THE LAWS* (1749)

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755)
(Primary Source)

Of Political Liberty and the Constitution of England

Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments; and even in these it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power: but constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go.

To prevent this abuse, it is necessary, from the very nature of things, that power should be a check to power.

The political liberty of the subject is a tranquility of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another.

When the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or in the same body of magistrates, there can be no liberty. . . .

Again, there is no liberty if the judiciary power be not separated from the legislative and executive.

In perusing the admirable treatise of Tacitus on the manners of the ancient German tribes, we find it is from that nation the English have borrowed the idea of their political government. This beautiful system was invented first in the woods. . . .

Neither do I pretend by this to undervalue other governments, nor to say that this extreme political liberty ought to give uneasiness to those who have only a moderate share of it. How should I have any such design; I who think that even the highest refinement of reason is not always desirable, and that mankind generally find their account better in mediums than in extremes?

Source: Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de *The Complete Works of M. de Montesquieu* (London: T. Evans and W. Davis, 1777).

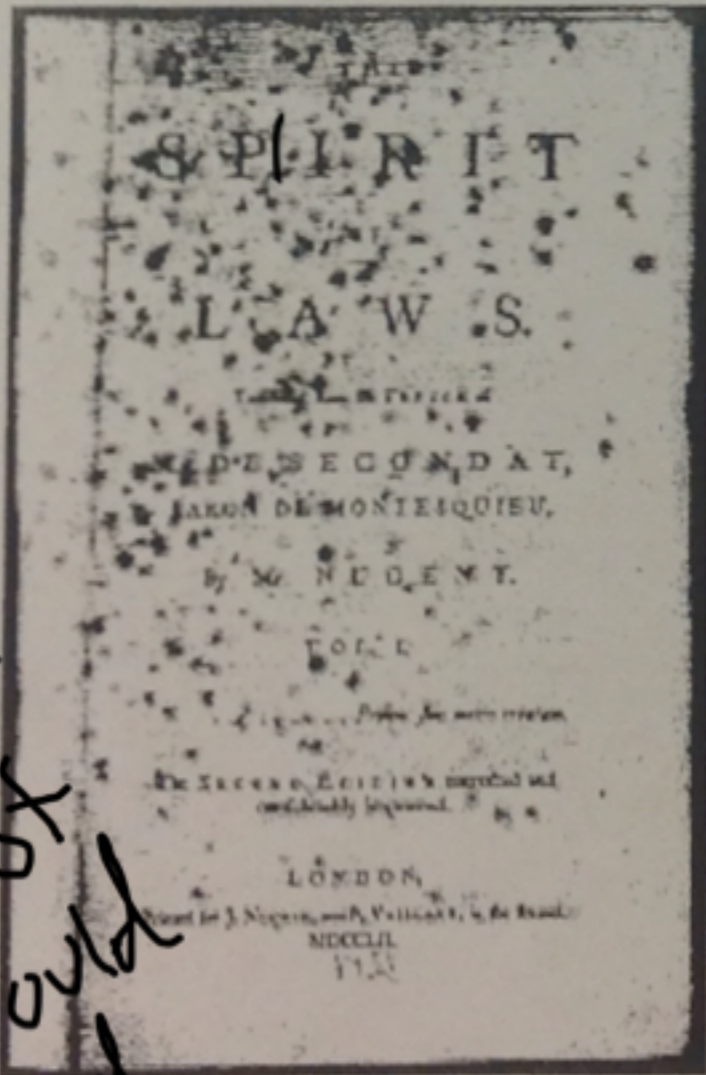


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What is the author saying?

What is the author doing?

Using 1st person language

If you give people power they will abuse it.

Peaceful recommended required

English Borrowed form of gov.

Need another power to make it work

Separation of power would be good

Treaty

Comparing different forms of gov.

*When answering the questions follow the ACE method:

A (Answer the question)

C (Cite Evidence from or about the text)

E (Explain Your answer)

*Do not use the pronouns 'I' or 'you' in your response

1. Is this document a primary or secondary source? How do you know?

A. This document is a _____ source because

C.

E.

2. What is the central idea of this text?

A. The central idea of this text

C.

E.