

America. The land of the free. But how free are we? Are our rights to an uncorrupted government indeed cemented in truth, or are they a fantastical delusion of freedom? Humans, as we have seen, tend to be incredibly greedy, which can lead governments down a path of destruction—but there is a solution to the issue of inevitable human avarice. It is known as the separation of powers.

Our story begins with a young French man born Charles Louis de Secondat in 1689. He entered the world to a wealthy household, but was placed in the care of a poor family as a child. Unfortunately, Charles' mother died when he was just seven years old, as was the case for many children at the time. After young Charles' father passed away as well, he was deposited into the care of his eccentric uncle, the Baron de Montesquieu. Charles began to notice some of the flaws in local government, as Montesquieu (who Charles spent much time with) was deeply involved in activities of the sort. After Montesquieu passed away in 1716, Charles inherited the title of Baron and political position that his uncle had previously held, giving him quite the edge on the French political field.

After spending ample time studying the rather aged customs and governments of many European nations, the new Baron de Montesquieu decided to pour his thoughts out on paper. He gained fame in 1721 with his book entitled *Lettres Persanes*, or *Persian Letters*. He strayed slightly away from the comfortable zone of politics with the work, portraying two fictional Persian noblemen instead of explicitly writing down his thoughts on the unfortunately flawed French government as was expected. Indeed, though, he slipped in a few jabs at the French, criticizing the lifestyle and liberties of the excessively wealthy.

However, this is not where Montesquieu's role in this story ends. Though *Persian Letters* was a success, nothing could compare to the massive fame Montesquieu gained with another political text known as *The Spirit of Law*. Now, this work—this was something of which the self-absorbed Frenchmen took note. Montesquieu detailed all of the laws that we humans created for ourselves; unlike physical laws, which Montesquieu believed were created by God, these social laws were created by the utterly incompetent humans, many of which were incredibly prone to making grave mistakes.

In fact, Montesquieu was so bothered by how self-centered his peers were that he thought up a theory in *Persian Letters* to keep leaders from threatening the freedoms of people. He called his brilliant idea the “separation of powers”. Briefly, the idea is that government should be separated into multiple branches to ensure that no single leader has too much power and could potentially threaten the rights of citizens—Montesquieu thought that the English government, with its parliament, king, and judges, was a fantastic example of this.

Much to Montesquieu's chagrin, his part in our story ends here. Fear not, though, for he to live a long and prosperous life until he died of a fever in 1755.

About thirty-two years after the death of the Baron de Montesquieu, a certain group of old men were pacing back and forth in a rather dim courtroom, wrestling with the idea of how to rule their new nation. The notion of being able to command troves of people certainly got to the heads of the dozens of politicians, and, being the self-aware men that they were, they knew that they must think of a solution to prevent their nation from becoming corrupted. So, they put their heads together and stumbled upon the thoughts and writings of our favorite Frenchman—none other than the Baron de Montesquieu.



The men were stunned; this was exactly what they needed to ensure the best and prevent the worst! They drafted their spectacular document, staying true to what Montesquieu had taught; they outlined a perfect, theoretical government which had three branches to limit the power of the leaders. They also added in another part of Montesquieu’s theory, which is widely known in social studies classrooms as “checks and balances”—each branch of government has certain methods to prevent the other branches from ruling unjustly.

The thoughts of Montesquieu, which had once seemed to be rebellious, were now the basis of a brand-new nation’s government. Evidently, something must have clicked, because the nation eventually became known as one of the most free and fair in the world, and the men became famous as the founding fathers of America.

Our tale of separation of powers ends here, but Montesquieu’s theory continues to serve as the building block of our freedoms here in America.

Though a relatively new addition to governments worldwide, the separation of powers has become an invaluable asset in making sure that the freedoms of every citizen are protected. As is often repeated in history, new ideas (especially those that threaten the people in power) can be crushingly rejected by society. In fact, *The Spirit of the Laws* was put on the forbidden books list by the Catholic Church in 1751, widely preventing Baron de Montesquieu’s ideas from being spread.

However, what is sometimes missed by the history books is the stunning tales of persistence and bravery that our ancestors have laid out before us. The building blocks of our society, the very essence of our world—these creations, whether or not we succeed to realize it, are the fruits of the minds of our predecessors.

The separation of powers is just one of these gems of ingenuity that our society has to offer us; and, as we have seen, it was almost ignored, never to be employed in the real world. This would have been a terrible loss for humankind, and perhaps we would have gone on as monarchies and despotisms forever. But instead, society reached out and took Montesquieu’s idea, using it to start a brand new nation. There is no lack of genius around the world—we just have to be brave enough to grasp it.

