The Problem Is the Solution:

James Madison’s on the Problem of Tyranny

Tyranny is the timeless and universal problem of politics. From the time of classical antiquity to the present day, western civilization’s deepest political thinkers and statesmen have grappled with this perennial problem. In the pages that follow, we shall examine how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political thinkers and statesmen such as John Locke, Montesquieu, and America’s founding fathers understood the nature of tyranny, and, more importantly, how they developed a solution to this enduring political problem. In particular, we shall focus on the solution of James Madison.

Defining the Problem

For many political thinkers during the 18th century, the very real threat of tyranny was their greatest concern. The tyranny of absolute monarchies in Europe and Britain’s tyrannical rule over its American colonies were the most immediate examples. Despotic government represented everything they opposed and fought against: the use of arbitrary power wielded without regard for the lives, liberties, or properties of the people. But why have so many governments past and present become despotic? Why are tyranny and despotism omnipresent in human affairs?

The English philosopher John Locke defines tyranny in the Second Treatise of Government as “the exercise of power beyond right, which nobody can have a right to.” (2nd Treatise, p. 123). He also claims that “[w]herever law ends, tyranny begins” (2nd Treatise, p. 125). Locke goes on to explain his meaning in these terms: “And whosoever in authority exceeds the power given him by the law, and makes use of the force he has under his command, to compass that upon the subject which the law allows not, ceases in
that to be a magistrate” (2nd Treatise, p. 125). The proper function of government is to uphold and create the laws necessary to protect the people, but when its magistrates bend or break these laws, such a man is not a proper magistrate, but a despot. Locke further concretizes these abstract definitions by demonstrating how tyranny works in practice: “wherever the power . . . is put . . . to impoverish, harass, or subdue [the people] to the arbitrary and irregular commands of those that have it: there it presently becomes tyranny, whether those that thus use it are one or many” (2nd Treatise, p. 124). In other words, Locke recognizes, as did Aristotle before him, that all forms of government—e.g., kingly, aristocratic, and democratic—may abuse their power and become tyrannical. While no one man has, according to Locke, a natural or inherent right to rule over another without their consent, those in government quickly find that power is seductive, addictive, and easily abused.

Following in Locke’s footsteps a half century later, the great French political philosopher, the Baron de Montesquieu deepened and extended his English predecessor’s analysis. Tyranny, Montesquieu argued in The Spirit of the Laws, cannot exist without power used and abused. Power is the use of coercive force to impose the will of a despot (either the will of the one, the few, or the many) on the people. Law in a despotic state is, according to Montesquieu, synonymous with the will and the passions of the tyrant. In such governments laws “are not directed to the preservation of the properties of [the] people,” but to “the satisfaction of [the tyrant’s] own ambition, revenge, covetousness, or any other irregular passions” (Spirit of the Laws, p.123). Under such governments, liberty ceases to exist in society because laws change constantly to reflect the
unpredictable, mercurial, and irregular will of the despot. Montesquieu’s tyrant is guided by his passions—by fear, lust, greed, and anger—rather than reason.

At the deepest level, tyranny is an eternal and universal problem because human nature is so easily tempted and corrupted by the desire for power. The twin passions of ambition and vainglory are inherent in man. They seduce and tempt men to rationalize their thirst for power. Such passions tell power-lusting men that the end justifies the means, and that might makes right. As Montesquieu observed in *The Spirit of the Laws*, “it has eternally been observed that any man who has power is led to abuse it; he continues until he finds limits” (*Spirit of the Laws*, p. 155). Men in power are always greedy for more; they are grasping, trying to find new ways in which to seize more power and to control more people. Ambition and vainglory, therefore, are the passions that create tyrannies.

But what are the means by which despots come to power? Montesquieu repeatedly warns his reader that coercive force is the means by which despots assert and retain absolute authority and control, which in turn creates fear and obedience in the people. He explains that “[i]n despotic states the nature of the government requires extreme obedience, and the prince’s will, once known, should produce its effect as infallibly as does one ball thrown against another” (*Spirit of the Laws*, p. 29). No free man desires to be ruled by the will and passions of another, and so if a tyrant truly wishes to rule, he must have complete submission. The use of force and the fear it creates compel the people to submit to the will of the despot. Despotic government, therefore, “has fear as its principle,” according to Montesquieu, for if there is no fear, the tyrant has no power, and ceases to be a tyrant (*Spirit of the Laws*, p. 59).
America’s greatest founding statesmen were all students of Locke and Montesquieu. John Adams, one of America’s deepest political thinkers, agreed with Montesquieu, stating that “[t]he source of all these evils [is] a thirst of power, from rapacious and ambitious passions” (Adams quoting Thucydides in the “Preface” to A Defence of the Constitutions of Government, vol. 1, p. 111). He understood that the evils caused by tyranny are simply outcomes motivated by that which lies inherent in man. Thomas Jefferson was also well “aware of the tendency of power to degenerate into abuse” (Writings of Thomos Jefferson, p. 156). Like Adams, he feared that the lust for power would turn all men, including himself, into political “wolves.” Likewise, James Madison insisted “that power is of an encroaching nature, and that it ought to be effectually restrained from passing the limits assigned to it” (The Federalist, p. 332). The challenge for America’s founding fathers was, of course, to restrain power from breaching its banks. They saw the Revolution and their break from Great Britain as an opportunity to control the ever-expanding power of government through written constitutions. They had the chance to create a government that would not dissolve into tyranny. But the question was how?

The Americans had real experience with tyranny and the abuse of power. In 1776, the thirteen colonies of America published The Declaration of Independence, in which they showed that “[t]he history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States”. In this short document, the Founders listed 18 ways in which the King and Parliament of England had violated the fundamental rights or liberties of the American people. The Americans charged George III and the British
Parliament, for instance, with taxing them without their consent, dissolving or suspending their legislatures, filling their streets with British troops, denying them jury trials, and other such injustices. From the Sugar and Stamp Acts to the Coercive and Prohibitory Acts, the actions of George III demonstrated a tyrannical design against American rights and liberties.

In sum, to quote the immortal words of Lord Acton, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Ambition naturally drives men with power to seek more and more power. Montesquieu clearly understood that tyranny is the result of one man or one body of men seeking and acquiring powers not rightfully theirs by “by uniting in their person all the magistracies.” During his lifetime, Montesquieu watched as many European kings united “all the great posts of their state” (Spirit of the Laws, p. 158). These “magistracies” and “great posts” to which Montesquieu refers are the three great and natural powers found in virtually all governments: the judicial, legislative, and executive powers. Tyranny results when these three powers devolve to one person or body. America’s greatest founding statesman, James Madison, understood the danger of such an accumulation in these terms: “[t]he accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny” (The Federalist, p. 324). Therefore, the perennial problem of tyranny can be summed up in this question, one faced by the founding fathers of America: given the grasping nature of man, how can the concentration of power and tyranny be prevented?

*Discovering the Solution*
In response to the rise of absolute and divine monarchy in the 17th century, John Locke and Montesquieu developed a new science of politics in order to defang power-lusting despots. This new science was grounded on the moral basis of individual rights and on the political doctrine of limited, constitutional government. According to John Adams in his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, and Alexander Hamilton in the 9th essay of *The Federalist*, one of the principal discoveries and innovations of this new science was the doctrine of the separation of powers. As we shall see, though, the principle of separation of powers developed by Locke and Montesquieu and then later by America’s Revolutionary state constitution-makers provided an important but in the end only a partial solution to the problem of tyranny. It was left to James Madison to complete the work begun by his Enlightenment predecessors.

The doctrine of limited constitutional government originates with John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government*. Locke’s rudimentary solution to the problem of tyranny and power was to institute and separate the two natural powers of legislation and execution into government. These branches must be kept in separate hands, he argues, because it may be too great a temptation to human frailty apt to grasp at power, for the same persons who have the power of making laws, to have also in their hands the power to execute them, to their private advantage, and thereby come to have a distinct interest from the rest of the community, contrary to the end of society and government. (*2nd Treatise*, p. 89)

Locke understands the nature and threat of power and the need to keep these powers separate. He further divides the executive power into two corollary powers: those that concern things internal to the society and those that concern things external to the society.
He designates and distinguishes these complementary powers as the executive and the federative. The executive power executes the internal laws passed by the legislative power. On the other hand, the federative power controls foreign policy and foreign affairs. While Locke believes that the executive and federative powers are distinct, he does not think they should be put into separate hands (2nd Treatise, p. 91). If these two powers were divided between two different groups with dissimilar interests, the “force of the public would be under different commands: which would be apt sometime or other to cause disorder and ruin” (2nd Treatise, p. 91). Therefore, the only true separation of powers for Locke lies between the legislative and executive branches.

Montesquieu’s theory of the separation of powers is generally regarded as an advance on the Lockean teaching. The “celebrated Montesquieu,” according to James Madison, is the “oracle who is always consulted on this subject” (The Federalist, p. 324). The Frenchman makes two theoretical advances that distinguish him from Locke. His first innovation is to create a separate and distinct judicial power in its own right. He defines this new judicial power as the “executive power over the things depending on civil right” (Spirit of the Laws, p. 156). This branch is integral to the protection of the people’s liberties and to the protection of the rule of law. Like Locke, Montesquieu emphasizes the importance of a separation of powers, but he breaks from Locke in thinking that there cannot be liberty “if the power of judging is not separate from legislative power and from executive power. If the judicial power were joined to legislative power, the power over the life and liberty of the citizens would be arbitrary, for the judge would be the legislator” (Spirit of the Laws, p. 157). Montesquieu recognizes that tyrannical power can be held any one of the branches, not only the
executive. As an extra protection, the judiciary cannot be permanent, according to Montesquieu, and “should be exercised by persons drawn from the body of the people at certain times of the year in the manner prescribed by law to form a tribunal which lasts only as long as necessity requires” (Spirit of the Laws, p. 158). (This last point demonstrates how and why Montesquieu only glimpsed the idea of an independent judiciary.) The temporary nature of the judicial power prevents any possible accumulation of powers that might occur over time.

Montesquieu’s second innovation is to mix and balance the legislative, executive, and judicial powers. Montesquieu divides the legislative power into two separate bodies: a senate that represents the traditional social upper class and a house that represents the commons or people. Because there naturally occurs in every society an upper class of birth, wealth, or honors, the legislature must reflect the interests and passions of such social orders. For this aristocracy, “the common liberty would be their enslavement and they would have no interest in defending it, because most of the resolutions would be against them” (Spirit of the Laws, p. 160). Knowing this, Montesquieu ensures that neither the liberties of the aristocratic minority nor the common majority can be violated by the other:

Therefore, the part [the aristocracy] have in legislation should be in proportion to the other advantages they have in the state, which will happen if they form a body that has the right to check the enterprises of the people, as the people have the right to check theirs. (Spirit of the Laws, p. 160)

Such a division in the legislature creates yet another counterweight against the power that naturally accumulates in the legislative branch. Because the branch is divided, it is extremely difficult for either part to seize power without the other checking it.
A second example of Montesquieu’s mixing and balancing of powers concerns the executive power. The executive power for Montesquieu is permanent and should be held by a single individual, “because the part of the government that almost always needs immediate action is better administered by one than by many” (*Spirit of the Laws*, p. 161). This power requires instant decisions and actions, and if a senate controls it, differing interests and passions will only slow and hinder such action. To ensure that the legislative branch does not exceed its boundaries, Montesquieu’s executive is to participate in the legislative power through its veto power; otherwise “it will soon be stripped of its prerogatives” (*Spirit of the Laws*, p. 164). This power is yet another counter-balance for the executive branch that, if implemented, helps to create a government that not only governs its people but also governs itself.

Almost 30 years after Montesquieu developed his solution to tyranny in *The Spirit of the Laws*, Western civilization witnessed the founding of new republics in the New World. America’s Revolutionary constitution-makers advanced the theories of Montesquieu and then put them into practice. After 1776, the Americans created 11 new state governments (Connecticut and Rhode Island retained their colonial charters), each of which had its own unique way of separating, mixing, and balancing the three natural powers of government. These state governments were the next logical step in the development of Montesquieu’s theory of the separation of powers. While the Frenchman argued that a limited government must have a judicial power separate from the other two, he does not describe where this power might reside. The Americans answered this question with the creation of a completely new political body: an independent judiciary embodied in a Supreme Court at both the state and federal levels. While the governor of
the state holds the executive power, the Senate and House both represent the legislative power, this new Supreme Court and its subsidiaries hold the judicial power. Such an idea was unavailable and unknown to Montesquieu.

Despite the great theoretical and practical advances made by America’s Revolutionary state constitution-makers, the doctrine of separation of powers was still incomplete and flawed. James Madison took the final step in its development and perfection. In *Federalist 47*, the Virginian defines the problem of tyranny and then in the four essays that follow, he presents his solution to the problem: a radically new and philosophically sophisticated theory of the separation of powers. His particular and immediate concern is to respond to antifederalist criticisms that the powers of the federal government are inadequately separated and contain too much mixing and balancing, which destroys “all symmetry and beauty of form” (*The Federalist*, pp. 323-324). Madison certainly agrees with the antifederalists that “[t]he accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny” (*The Federalist*, p. 324). However, Madison believes that some mixing and balancing of powers is required to keep these powers separate over time and he decides to “investigate the sense, in which the preservation of liberty requires, that the three great departments of power should be separate and distinct” (*The Federalist*, p. 324). To provide support for his view that the separation of powers requires some mixing and blending, Madison spends the rest of *Federalist 47* showing how both Montesquieu and the state constitutions blend the powers of government in order to keep the powers distinct.
The great theoretical and practical problem for Madison was how to maintain a separation of powers over time given man’s grasping nature. In Federalist 48, he shows “that unless these departments be so far connected and blended, as to give to each a constitutional control over the others, the degree of separation which the maxim requires as essential to a free government, can never in practice, be duly maintained”. More particularly, “[t]he next and most difficult task,” according to Madison, “is to provide some practical security for each against the invasion of the others” (The Federalist, p. 332). Madison therefore identifies four possible solutions to the problem of maintaining the separation of powers. Although he seriously considers each of these, he ultimately rejects the first three as he regards them to be inadequate or flawed.

The first such solution, advocated by the Antifederalists and virtually the entire founding generation, is to “mark with precision the boundaries of these departments in the Constitution of the government and to trust these parchment barriers against the encroaching spirit of power” (The Federalist, pp. 332-333). By marking out the powers and limits of each of the branches in the constitution of a government, the constitution itself becomes the only defense for separation. But this “parchment barrier” really is nothing more than that—a paper barrier that can be disregarded at will. Experience taught Madison “some more adequate defense is indispensably necessary for the more feeble, against the more powerful members of the government”. He understands that in America’s republican governments, “[t]he legislative department is every where extending the sphere of its activity, and drawing all power into its impetuous vortex”. Previous political thinkers and philosophers had always feared the tyranny of a single despot. Because power in the republican form of government ultimately rests with the
people and the legislative branch, tyranny by the many is much more dangerous. The American Founders, he notes, “seem never to have recollected the danger from legislative usurpations; which by assembling all power in the same hands, must lead to the same tyranny as is threatened by executive usurpations” (*The Federalist*, p. 333). Tyranny is not simply the rule of the one over the many; it can be the rule of the one, the few, or the many over the rest. It matters not who holds the powers, for, as Madison quoting Thomas Jefferson writes, “[t]he concentrating these in the same hands is precisely the definition of despotic government . . . . 173 despots would surely be as oppressive as one” (*The Federalist*, p. 335). Simply defining the limits of the three different powers in the constitution, Madison argues, is insufficient: “a mere demarkation on parchment of the constitutional limits of several departments, is not a sufficient guard against those encroachments which lead to a tyrannical concentration of all the power of government in the same hands” (*The Federalist*, p. 338). Locke, Montesquieu, and the Founding Fathers all understood—as we have seen—that man is ambitious and grasping for power. Words on paper will do nothing to curb man’s natural ambitions or to satisfy his vainglory, and so the first solution considered by Madison is inadequate to the task preventing power from accumulating in one branch of government.

In *Federalist* nos. 49 and 50, Madison considers two additional solutions—what he later describes in *Federalist 51* as “external” solutions—to the problem of maintaining a separation of powers over time. In 49, Madison examines Thomas Jefferson’s solution presented as a draft constitution his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Jefferson there proposes the calling of “occasional” constitutional conventions, the purpose of which is
to purge the constitution of any defects or corruptions. In his draft constitution, Jefferson proposes that

> Whenever any two of the three branches of government shall concur in opinion, each by the voices of two thirds of their whole number, that a convention is necessary for altering the constitution or correcting breaches of it, a convention shall be called for the purpose. *(The Federalist, p. 339)*

This is an external solution, one that creates a new body (a constitutional convention) outside the reach of government in order to reform any violations of the constitution. The second “external” solution, discussed in *Federalist 50*, is the so-called “Council of Censors” created by the Pennsylvania constitution. This body was required to meet every seven years. Its function, however, is ultimately similar to Jefferson’s constitutional convention: i.e., to make “periodical appeals” to special conventions of the people as “the proper and adequate means of preventing an correcting infractions of the constitution” *(The Federalist, p. 344)*. In theory at least, the purpose of creating such a body external to the government was to detect and correct any violations of one power upon another, thereby controlling the grasping nature of man.

Although Madison seriously considers both solutions in 49 and 50, he ultimately rejects both. Jefferson’s occasional constitutional convention would dissolve, Madison noted, into frequent appeals that “would in great measure deprive the government of that veneration, which time bestows on everything, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability”. Only a nation of philosophers would retain respect for the laws, but “a nation of philosophers is as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wised for by Plato” *(The Federalist, p.
Madison therefore rejects Jefferson’s solution, as it does not adequately create boundaries against the passions and ambitions of man. In 50, Madison shows that those elected into the first Council of Censors were not dispassionate men, and more often they were men with ulterior motives. Such a Council, Madison argued, will often divide along party lines and so “[e]very unbiased observer, may infer without danger of mistake . . . that unfortunately passion, not reason, must have presided over their decisions”. And what is the result of continuously succumbing to one’s individual or party passions over time? Madison claims that the Council of Censors became, in effect, just another legislative body influenced by the same passions, opinions, and interests of a regular legislature. The Pennsylvania Council of Censors proves “by its researches, the existence of the disease; and by its example, the inefficacy of the remedy” (The Federalist, p. 46). These exterior solutions fail to suitably guard against that which is inherent in man: his passions, and, more specifically, his ambition.

In Federalist 51, Madison finally presents his grand solution to the defining problem of politics. He begins Federalist 51 by demonstrating “all these exterior provisions are found to be inadequate” for “maintaining in practice the necessary partition of power among the several departments, as laid down in the constitution”. Madison’s solution to this perennial problem is to supply the defect, that is, “by so contriving the interior structure of the government, as that its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places” (The Federalist, p. 347, italics added). Madison then presents “a few general observations” on how to maintain a separation of powers over time (The Federalist, p. 347). To that end, he discusses three major principles supporting the principle of
separation of powers, and then he adds three additional “auxiliary precautions” to separate, mix, and balance the powers of the federal government (The Federalist, p. 349).

The first method for supporting a separation of powers concerns the mode of elections for each power of government. It is evident, Madison writes, “that each department should have a will of its own; and consequently should be so constituted, that the members of each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others” (The Federalist, p. 348). By ensuring that none of the powers has undue influence over the elections of any of the others, one can better avoid an accumulation of power. He adds that all political positions are to be temporary except for the judiciary. The Justices of the Supreme Court shall hold their offices for life in order to protect the independence of the weakest branch. They “must soon destroy all sense of dependence on authority conferring them” (The Federalist, p. 348). It is much more difficult for power to accumulate if most political positions are temporary and cannot influence the elections of the others.

The second method for securing the separation of powers is the simple idea that “the members of each department should be as little dependent as possible on those of the others, for the emoluments annexed to their offices” (The Federalist, p. 348). In other words, if one power were to decide the salary of another, it can much more easily strong-arm or bribe the other.

The third and most important method demonstrates Madison’s brilliance and the true scope and depth of his understanding of politics and man’s nature. Madison here provides the solution to that great perennial problem of politics: that “the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in
giving to those who administer each department, the necessary constitutional means, and personal motives, to resist encroachments of others”. Madison’s solution separates, but not completely, the three natural powers of government. His great insight was to pit each of the powers against the others. He understands man’s grasping nature, which means “[a]mbition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place”. Provisions must be included in the constitution that will give men in power checks over each other. Therefore they will guard their powers jealously against the infringements of others. Such an arrangement of powers creates balance, as no power can easily steal the powers from another. Madison explains that “[y]ou must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place, oblige it to control itself”. A government that can control its people and not itself is tyrannical. Madison is channeling the passions and ambitions of men for the betterment of all: “[t]his 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” (The Federalist, p. 349). Since passions are inherent in man and everything he touches, why not use them to support the structural integrity of the constitution? For many political thinkers, such passions appear to be the inexorable problem, but, for Madison, they provide the solution to the problem:

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. (The Federalist, p. 349)

This “auxiliary precaution” provides the best protection against any accumulation of powers.
Madison concludes *Federalist 51* by discussing what he calls three “inventions of prudence” to shore up his mixing and balancing of the three natural powers of government. The first such invention concerns the principle of bicameralism. He includes this “invention” because “[i]n republican government the legislative authority necessarily predominates”. The obvious solution is “to divide the legislature into different branches, and to render them by different modes of election, and different principles of action, as little connected with each other, as the nature of their common functions, and their common dependence on the society will admit” (*The Federalist*, p. 350). By separating the powers and dividing the legislature in two, even more counter-acting passions are brought to the fore, further preventing an accumulations of such power.

The second “invention of prudence” is, following Montesquieu, the executive veto. Without it, the executive is too weak to protect itself from attacks from the legislature, and so it “appears at first view to be the natural defence with which the executive with which the executive magistrate should be armed” (*The Federalist*, p. 350). It provides yet another check and balance between the powers.

The third and final prudential invention is composed of two related principles. The first presents the idea of the “compound republic” or, federalism. This theory divides the powers of government vertically, instead of horizontally. America’s constitutional system divides power amongst three distinct political entities: the federal government, the separate state governments, and the subsidiary local governments inside each of the states: “Hence a double security arises to the rights of the people. The different governments will controul each other; at the same time that each will be
controled by itself” (The Federalist, p. 351.) Like all the other parts, this theory hinges upon the idea of balancing ambition against ambition.

The second subsidiary principle refers to the idea of the extended republic: It is of great importance in a republic, not only to guard the society against the oppression of its rulers; but to guard one part of the society against the injustice of the other . . . . If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure. (The Federalist, p. 351)

This is the threat—the threat of tyrannical majority factions—that Madison refers to in Federalist 10; the true threat of tyranny in a republic comes not from the “one” but from the “many”. Madison’s solution is to extend the geographical territory of the republic, thereby creating “in the society so many separate descriptions of citizens as will render an unjust combination of a majority of the whole, very improbable, if not impracticable” (The Federalist, p. 351). Such a society is achievable, especially by America, considering the great territorial size of the country. Because so many people with their different passions, opinions, and interests, live in this great country, “a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take a place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good; and there being thus less danger to a minor from the will of the major party” (The Federalist, p. 353). This final prudential invention provided the last crucial pillar for Madison’s solution. While others invented many of these parts, Madison formulated them in such a way that he created a limited government that just might withstand the pressure of politics and the test of time. It was an ingenious solution to a perennial problem.

Madison’s contribution to the science of politics is less about inventing a new theory of the separation of powers and more about defending the structural integrity of
the constitution so that it may last forever. He stands on the shoulders of philosophic giants such as Locke and Montesquieu, but Madison extends their ideas to their logical conclusion. He demonstrates that while man’s ambition appears to be the perennial problem of politics, it ultimately provides the solution as well. Tyranny and the abuse of power can be avoided through the channeling and counter-channeling of man’s inherent passions and ambition. Ambition must be made to fight ambition, thereby providing balance for all.
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