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# XI.2 Various meanings given to the word freedom

- The Spirit of Law - Book XI. On the laws that constitute political freedom in their relation to the constitution -

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There is no word that has received more different meanings, and which has struck minds in so many ways, as that of *freedom*. Some have taken it to be the ease of deposing the man to whom tyrannical power has been given ; others the faculty of electing the man whom they must obey ; others the right to bear arms, and be able to exercise violence ; still others, the privilege of being governed only by a man of their nation or by their own laws. [1] A certain people long identified freedom with the custom of wearing a long beard. [2] Some have attached that name to a form of government, and excluded the others. Those who had appreciated republican government placed it in that government ; those who had enjoyed monarchical government placed it in monarchy. [3] In short, everyone called *freedom* the government that conformed to his customs or inclinations ; and since in a republic one does not always have in plain view, and in such a present manner, the instruments of the ills one protests, and since even the laws there seem to speak more, and the executors of the law to speak less, it is ordinarily identified with republics, and excluded from monarchies. In short, since in democracies the people appear to do more or less what they want, freedom has been identified with those sorts of governments, and power of the people has been conflated with the people's freedom.

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[1] Cicero said, "I have copied Scævola's edict allowing the Greeks to settle their differences amongst themselves in accordance with their laws, with the result that they consider themselves as free peoples."

[2] The Muscovites could not stand it when the czar Peter made them cut it off.

[3] The Capadocians refused the republican state which the Romans offered them.