

Monarchy vs republic assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Essay # 1 The question of monarchy versus republic is mostly discussed from a highly emotional rather than a rational point of view. A few undignified occupants of royal thrones are enumerated, and are then presented as examples of monarchy as such. The defenders of monarchy are no better. They point to corrupt professional politicians, of whom there exist a sufficient number, and claim that this is the necessary consequence of a republican constitution. Neither is a rational argument. There have been good and bad monarchies — good republics (like Switzerland), and others which are far from living up to the same standard.

Every human institution, after all, has its good and bad sides. As long as this world is inhabited by men, crimes and mistakes will continue to occur.

Republicans are fond of claiming that a monarchical regime means the rule of the aristocracy. Monarchists, on the other hand, point to the economic difficulties, the tax burdens, and state interference in private life in present-day republics, and compare this state of affairs with the freedom and economic well-being under the pre-1914 monarchies. Both arguments are unconvincing.

They use the old propagandist trick of comparing results brought about by entirely dissimilar causes. Anyone who is honest will compare present-day monarchies with present-day republics. It will then be apparent that the aristocracy of birth occupies no greater share of leading positions in monarchies than in republics, and that all states, whatever their form of government, are equally affected by the serious problems of the present day. Republicans frequently claim, in addition, that monarchy is a form of government belonging to the past, while republicanism is that of the future.

Even a slight knowledge of history is enough to disprove this. Both forms have been in existence since the earliest times. In any case, it is misleading to call an institution which we already find in ancient Greece and Rome, the form of government of the future. The essential purpose of the State, its “content,” is rooted in natural law. The State is not an end in itself; it exists for the sake of its citizens. It is therefore not the source of all law (a claim that is still far too widely accepted), nor is it all-powerful.

Its authority is circumscribed by the rights of its citizens. It is only free to act in those fields that are outside their free initiative. The State is therefore at all times the servant of natural law. Its task is to give practical effect to this law; nothing more. If the mission of the State is the practical realization of natural law, the form of government is a means by which the community attempts to achieve this aim. It is not an end in itself. This explains the relatively subordinate importance of this whole question.

Undoubtedly a great deal of importance attaches to the choice of the right means, since this choice will determine whether or not the end is attained. But what is lasting in political life is only natural law. The attempt to realize this law in practice will always have to take account of current conditions. To speak of an eternally valid form of government, right under all circumstances, shows ignorance and presumption. From this it would seem to follow that it is fruitless to try to determine, the objective value of one or the other form of government.

The discussion will only become fruitful if we keep in mind the end which every such form is intended to serve. It is therefore not a question of

investigating what value we are to attach to monarchies or republics as such. What we must ask ourselves is which form offers the best chances of safeguarding natural law under present-day conditions. Once this point has been clarified, we can pass on to two other problems, which have frequently been dragged into this discussion and are threatening to poison the whole atmosphere. There is constant controversy about the relation between monarchism, republicanism and democracy.

Here again we encounter the blurred thinking characteristic of our era of slogans and propaganda. The concept of democracy has become infinitely elastic. In Russia it is compatible with mass liquidations, secret police and labour camps. In America, and occasionally in Europe, even political theorists are frequently unable to distinguish between republicanism and democracy. Furthermore, both words are used to designate conceptions and characteristics that go far beyond the political field, and belong to the economic or sociological sphere.

It must therefore be clearly stated that, generally speaking, democracy means the right of the people to participate in determining their own development and future. Monarchists frequently claim democracy functions better under a monarchy than under a republic. If we look at present-day Europe, there is certainly some truth in this argument, though its validity may be restricted in time and space. At the same time, it is necessary to point out that in small states which are strongly rooted in their traditions, like Switzerland, democracy and republicanism can coexist successfully.

Whether or not this is true, the facts prove that it is unjustified to draw an artificial dividing-line between monarchism and socialism, or between monarchism and classical democracy. The same applies to republicanism. One other point must be mentioned. This is the frequent confusion, particularly among those not trained in political science, between monarchy as a form of government and one or other monarchical dynasty; in other words, the confusion between monarchism and legitimism. We are now in a position to define what we understand by a monarchy and a republic.

Monarchy is that form of government in which the head of State is not elected, bases his office on a higher law, with the claim that all power derives from a transcendental source. In a republic, the highest officer of State is elected, and hence derives his authority from his electors, that is, from the particular group which elected him. Leaving aside purely emotional considerations, there are good arguments for both of these basic forms of government. The most important arguments in favour of republicanism can be summarized as follows: In the first place, republics are, with few exceptions, secular.

They require no appeal to God in order to justify their authority. Their sovereignty, the source of their authority, derives from the people. In our time, which turns increasingly away from religious concepts, or at least refers them into the realm of metaphysics, secular constitutional concepts and a secular form of government are more easily acceptable than a form rooted, in the last resort, in theocratic ideas. It is, therefore, also easier for a republic to embrace a secular version of the Rights of Man.

The advantage this form of government offers would therefore seem to be that it is in closer touch with the spirit of our time, and hence with the great mass of the population. In addition, the choice of the head of State depends not on an accident of birth, but on the will of the people or of elite. The president's term of office is limited. He can be removed, and if he is incapable it is easy to replace him. Himself an ordinary citizen, he is in closer touch with real life. And it is to be hoped that, with better education, the masses will become increasingly capable of choosing the right man. In a monarchy, on the other hand, once a bad ruler has ascended the throne, it is almost impossible to remove him without overthrowing the whole regime. And lastly it is claimed that the fact that every citizen can, at least theoretically, become president, encourages a sense of political responsibility and helps the population to attain political maturity. The patriarchal character of a monarchy, on the other hand, leads the citizens to rely on their ruler, and to shift all political responsibility on to his shoulders.

In favour of monarchism, the following arguments are put forward:

Experience shows that kings mostly rule better, not worse, than presidents. There is a practical reason for this. A king is born to his office. He grows up in it. He is, in the truest sense of the word, a "professional," an expert in the field of statecraft. In all walks of life, the fully qualified expert is rated higher than the amateur, however brilliant. For particularly in a difficult, highly technical subject — and what is more difficult than the modern State? — Knowledge and experience outweigh sheer brilliance. The danger certainly exists that an incompetent may succeed to the throne. But was not a Hitler chosen as leader, and a Warren Harding elected president? In the classical

monarchies of the Middle Ages, it was almost always possible to replace an obviously incapable successor to the throne by a more suitable one. It was only with the decadence of monarchism, in the age of the courtly despotism of Versailles, that this corrective was discarded.

Nothing would be more appropriate in a modern monarchy than the institution of a judicial tribunal, which could, if necessary, intervene to change the order of succession to the throne. Finally, the Crown contributes to political life that stability without which no great problems can be solved. In a republic, the firm foundation is lacking. Whoever is in power must achieve a positive success in the shortest possible time, otherwise he will not be re-elected. This leads to short-term policies, which will not be able to cope successfully with problems of world-historical scope.

While there is much to be said for a hereditary transmission of the supreme position of the State, there is also one serious drawback, which has already been mentioned. If the succession occurs automatically, there is the possibility that the throne will be occupied by an incompetent. This is the greatest danger of the monarchical system. On the other hand, this danger only dates from the period when the inflexible legitimism of Versailles came into being, and the safeguards present in one form or another in most classical monarchies disappeared.

Such safeguards would therefore have to be built into any future monarchical constitution. It would be wrong to hand this task over to political bodies, as that would open the door to private interests. The decision should be left to a judicial tribunal. The king, as the highest constitutional judge of

the State, cannot exercise his function in a vacuum. He will have to be assisted by a body representing the highest judicial authority, of which he forms the head. It is this body which should pronounce on whether a law or a regulation is constitutional, that is, in accordance with the purpose of the State.

When the ruler dies, the other judges will continue in office. It should be their duty to pronounce on the suitability of the heir presumptive, and, if necessary, to replace him by the next in succession. The activity of the head of State will undoubtedly go beyond the purely judicial field. He will have to control the executive, since it is his duty to see that the decisions of the judicial power are carried out in practice. Nevertheless, all these tasks will remain of secondary importance. It is in his judicial function that a twentieth-century monarch will find his primary justification.