

[In Defense of Monarchy](http://bonald.wordpress.com/in-defense-of-monarchy/)

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The principle of authority

The distinguishing characteristic of primitive peoples, according to Emile Durkheim, is the strength and rigidity of the conscience collective, the moral consensus of the community. This collective consciousness is above and distinct from the consciousness of each individual member of the community, and it possesses an authoritative character by its connection to the social order. The primitive man experiences the will of society as the will of a higher being, who he imagines to be God. Justice in such societies is retributive; it expresses the community's outrage over the violation of its norms. For an atheist liberal, Professor Durkheim was quite perceptive.

It is quite true that the purpose of the state—any state, not just a primitive one—is to embody the conscience collective. This is only to repeat Cicero's observation that a republic is distinguished from lesser forms of association by possessing a shared conception of justice. A strong conscience collective can obviously be a powerful force for encouraging just behavior and discouraging unjust behavior. However, the purpose of collective morality is not just to promote individual morality: public laws and standards have a positive moral value in themselves. For example, suppose there were two cities in which the citizens were so peaceful that no murders ever took place in either one. Now suppose that murder is prohibited by law in one polity but not the other. The society which prohibits murder would be morally superior to the society which doesn't. In both cities, each individual respects his neighbor's right to live, but only one citizenry collectively recognizes these rights. In the other city, each individual may be morally upstanding, but their society is still morally deficient. The opposite situation is more common: laws may have positive moral value even when they can't be effectively enforced.

The function of government is to symbolize justice—to represent the community's moral consensus to itself—and to execute justice by punishing the wicked. Of these two functions, it is government's symbolic role which is the more important. It is the ability to symbolize justice that gives the state its authority over its subjects. This is the meaning of the scholastic doctrine that government derives its authority from being "established". The very fact that, through whatever series of historical accidents, a people has come to see a governing body as the representative of justice suffices to give that body real moral authority. The source of the state's authority is in the minds of its subjects. It is, however, in their intellects, not in their wills. The state's authority has nothing to do with anybody's consent; a man might wish he didn't have to obey his government while still recognizing its legitimacy. Moreover, we should not think that a people first exists and then decides on a principle of legitimacy (a constitution). It is such a principle which makes a people to be one people and not a mere aggregate.

So, for example, there is a French people, but there is no united “Caucasian people” or “people of western Illinois”. Caucasians are found among many people, and western Illinoisans recognize no authority which is not also recognized by eastern Illinoisans. Also, it’s not true that Americans created their principle of legitimacy at the Constitutional Convention. The procedural rules which we call the U.S. “Constitution” draw their authority from America’s prior sense of legitimacy. The “Constitution” had to be ratified by the thirteen states, whose authority was taken as given, and the delegates of the Convention never imagined questioning that the United States comprised these and (at the time) only these states.

The branches of government

By symbolizing justice, the state is also a symbol of God (as Durkheim realized in his way). In particular, it represents God’s role as the just Judge. A healthy state is structured to make this symbolization as clear as possible. Thus, there are three branches of government, corresponding to the triad of memory, intellect, and will in Augustine and Bonaventure’s psychological model of the Trinity. Note that this triad does not correspond to Montesquieu’s better-known division of the state into legislature, executive, and judiciary. Monarchy cannot be properly understood using this latter scheme.

The first branch of government is the traditional or repository branch, corresponding to government’s role as the memory or self-consciousness of the nation. Included in this branch are the king, the hereditary nobility, and the ministers of the established church. The repository reminds citizens that they are members of a nation which endures through time, that they have a collective past and a collective future. As the representative of the past, the repository upholds inherited traditions, the will of the dead, against the transient will of the living. It also upholds the nation’s inherited commitments and obligations: treaties, debts, etc. It is responsible in a particular way for honoring the dead and promoting whatever basic historical narratives the nation uses to understand itself. Finally, the repository is the defender of the nation’s most basic principles, including its constitution (which, as Aristotle pointed out, guarantees the continuity of the state) and its religion. Since the repository represents the past against the present, its officeholders (the nobles) are ideally chosen by their connection to the past, i.e. by hereditary succession. By choosing them in this way, the king and nobility are given a strong incentive to fulfill their duty of defending tradition, since this is the only basis of their own authority.

The second branch is the legislature, the creator of laws. The third branch is the executive or ministry, which applies the laws to specific cases and enforces them. Each of these branches operates on a more specific level than the branches above it. The repository (analog of the memory) expounds general historical commitments. The legislature (analog of the intellect) translates these into abstract laws. The executive (analog of the will) in its judicial aspect determines how the laws apply to specific cases, while the executive in its civil

service aspect is authorized to make technical decisions regarding how the legislature's desires can be fulfilled most expediently. The executive includes most of the employees of the state: judges, policemen, soldiers, teachers, and bureaucrats. Since their jobs require special expertise, it is reasonable that they should be chosen by merit. That is, executive functionaries should be hired or appointed; they should not be elected to their posts or inherit them. The legislature includes the national parliament, state or district legislatures, and city councils. Lawmakers are usually elected; choosing them in a way different from that used by the repository and executive branch ensures that the legislature will have an independent character. (The separation of the legislative and executive guarantees the rule of law.) The state will thus have a mixture of monarchical, aristocratic (meritocratic), and democratic elements, as recommended by Cicero and Thomas Aquinas.

The role of the monarch was misunderstood by some eighteenth and nineteenth century observers of imperfectly functioning monarchies. Thus, Montesquieu identified the English monarch with the executive, and Bonald more or less identified the French monarch with the legislature. The former's confusion was carried over into the constitution of the United States, with the president being given some of the features of a monarch and some of the features of a prime minister. In fact, the branch of America's federal government which most closely resembles the repository branch is the Supreme Court. Not all philosophers mistook the true division of the branches of government. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Right*, provides a rationalization of the modern state which is very similar to the description I've given above. Unfortunately, the true genius of Hegel's political thought is often obscured by the Marxist lens through which he is generally read.

Other advantages of monarchy

From the previous chapter, one easily sees the primary shortcoming of democracy: it allows no real repository organ in the state. God and ancestors are completely disenfranchised, and the desires of the current generation are entirely unchecked. As Charles Maurras wisely put it, "democracy is forgetting." Many are the blessings of living under a hereditary monarch, but a few deserve special mention. First, hereditary monarchy is the only form of government which assumes a real equality of all human beings. Both technocracy and democracy are designed to fill positions with the "best" men. In a technocratic regime, positions are filled by the man whose aptitude and qualifications most impress his fellow experts. In an election, each candidate tries to convince the populace that he is superior to his rivals. Actually, of course, winning an election only proves that a person is a good campaigner, which has nothing to do with being a good leader. For the position of monarch, however, we do not choose the most experienced man, the most intelligent man, the bravest man, or the most popular man. We reject the association of government office and personal greatness. The greatest man in the kingdom may well be a garbage collector or kindergarten teacher; the honor we give the king derives entirely from his role, because of

what he represents. Unlike an expert or a democratic politician, the king knows that as a man he is no better than those born into less illustrious roles. This is one reason to expect humility to be more common among kings than among experts and politicians. Also not to be ignored are the advantages of being ruled by a man who has not actively sought power for himself, but who has inherited it as a duty. In democracies and meritocracies, power can only be acquired through grueling competition, so that those who win power in such societies are most often power-mad megalomaniacs.

By his hereditary status, the king is uniquely independent of popular and expert opinion. Already when our republic was young, Tocqueville observed that politicians flatter the people with greater obsequiousness than was seen at Louis XIV's court, and the passage of years has made them yet more shameless. How often do we hear that "the American people deserve better" or that "the American people are the greatest on Earth" or other such inanities? What if what the American people actually deserve is to be rebuked for our decadence, greed, criminality, cowardice, impiety, and selfishness? Who would ever tell us? Certainly a politician facing reelection would never speak this way. Yet to criticize faults is a basic function of authority, one that belongs naturally to the king in his fatherly role.

Finally, there is the fact that the monarch is a person to whom we relate personally, while the legislative and executive are and must be impersonal—as impersonal as the law, as faceless as bureaucracy. Thus the king is uniquely suited to certain personal tasks. One such task is the issuing of pardons to convicted criminals. Forgiveness is an act that can only be directed from one person to another. If instead the executive operated a "Bureau of Mercy" it would need an impersonal rule: commute these punishments for these acts in these circumstances. But this would be no different than just making a law against assigning such punishments; it would be, not mercy, but a dilution of justice. Justice demands that the act be condemned and a proportionate penalty assigned, but the king can pardon the man, although only on a case-by-case, that is only on a personal, basis.