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Can Monarchies Be Justified?

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ABSTRACT

Although 43 countries have a monarch as their head of state, the question of whether monarchies can be morally justified has been neglected by contemporary philosophers. In this article, I argue that it is doubtful whether any existing monarchies can be morally justified. As I show, they all suffer from one or more of the following defects: they flout democratic principles; they are non-meritocratic; and/or they fail to provide at least some royals with an adequate range of lifestyle options. However, I go on to identify a novel type of elective monarchy that escapes these problems, and which, I submit, can be vindicated as long as it serves legitimate public objectives (e.g. by promoting social cohesion among citizens and/or by fostering international trade).

Keywords: monarchies, royal families, democracy, meritocracy, golden cage.

1. INTRODUCTION

Monarchies are sovereign politico-legal orders where a monarch—usually a member of an aristocratic family—is the head of state. A monarch might be a king or queen, but can have other titles as well, such as that of an emir (in Qatar and Kuwait), an emperor (in Japan), or a grand duke or duchess (in Luxemburg). While monarchies may seem anachronistic in an age where a large majority of states have some form of democracy no matter how imperfect, they have great sticking power. According to some estimates, there are 25 monarchies worldwide and a total of 43 countries with a monarch as the head of state[1].

Given how common this type of institution still is, it is surprising that contemporary philosophers have neglected to address the question that this article seeks to answer, namely whether monarchies can be morally

[1] As these figures suggest, some monarchies, such as the British monarchy, span multiple countries. See Dewey and Fisher (2013).

vindicated. The closest discussion of this question by a contemporary philosopher comes from Detlef von Daniels (2018). In a recent article, he asks whether the monarchies of current liberal democracies are compatible with liberalism, and he argues they are not, due to, *inter alia*, the far-reaching constraints that they impose on the fundamental liberties of major royals (think, for instance, of restrictions on their freedom of speech and freedom of occupation, which I will say more about in due course).

Building on Daniels's work, my contention in this article will be that it is doubtful whether any of the existing monarchies can be justified. As I show, they all suffer from one or more of the following defects: they flout democratic principles; they are non-meritocratic; and/or they fail to provide at least some royals with an adequate range of lifestyle options. However, I go on to identify a novel type of elective monarchy that escapes these problems, and which, I submit, can be vindicated as long as it serves legitimate public objectives (e.g. by promoting social cohesion among citizens and/or by fostering international trade).

2. THREE OBJECTIONS TO EXISTING MONARCHIES

2.1. Democratic Deficits

One problem that plagues several contemporary monarchies, albeit to varying degrees, is that they are *anti-democratic*, due to vesting formal and/or informal political powers in the hands of unelected officials.[2] An example of this is provided by Saudi Arabia's monarchy, where King Salman rules almost absolutely. Other examples can be found in countries such as Swaziland, where King Mswati III (who is sometimes referred to as "Africa's last absolute monarch") has the *de jure* and *de facto* power to appoint various high-rank government officials, including the prime minister, and Liechtenstein, where Prince Hans Adam II is able to veto legislation (in 2011, his son Alois, to whom he has delegated day-to-day decision-making, threatened to use this power to block a referendum on the legalization of abortion), while also holding the right to rule under emergency law (see Rohner 2012).

It should be clear that most current monarchs lack such extensive powers. For example, in countries such as Belgium, Cambodia, Japan, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, any special political rights held by the monarch—e.g. to

[2] For defenses of democracy, see e.g. Kolodny (2014) and Sen (2000).

dissolve parliament, appoint the prime minister, or sign acts of parliament into law—are predominantly, if not entirely, symbolic. By this, I mean that he or she is expected to abide by the will of elected political officials and does so routinely. (As followers of Benjamin Constant put it, such a monarch "reigns but does not govern" (see Selinger 2019: ch. 4); or, as Hegel (2005 [1820]) put it, only "says 'Yes', and so puts the dot on the 'i'".) What is important for us is that even within these countries, the monarch might still enjoy a greater-than-average amount of *informal political power* due to his or her position (cf. Daniels 2018: 463). Consider the weekly meetings between the Dutch monarch and the Dutch prime minister; although the prime minister is not bound by any advice that the monarch provides, former Dutch prime ministers are said to have been influenced by the outspoken opinions of Princess Beatrix (then Queen Beatrix) on a range of policy issues, including the opening of an embassy in Jordan; the planned closure of a military airport near the town of Valkenburg; and the proposal to let mayors be elected democratically (see Hoedeman and van Zijl 1996).

2.2. Violations of Meritocratic Principles

Another problem with contemporary monarchies, one that plagues all of them, is that they are *non-meritocratic*.[3] By this, I mean that they do not allocate the position of monarch (purely) on the basis of people's motivation and ability to fulfil this role, even when there are certain minimum requirements that monarchs ought to satisfy in terms of their mental and physical abilities.

To see that contemporary monarchies are not meritocratic thus understood, it should be noted that the lion's share of them are hereditary, in that the monarch's oldest child—or in countries such as Japan, the monarch's oldest male child—automatically becomes monarch when the current monarch dies or abdicates. Should the monarch be childless or without a male child, then the next in line is usually the oldest sibling or the oldest male sibling. What this means is that *even if* there are individuals who are at least as qualified and willing to be monarch as the current monarch is, or as the current crown prince or princess is, they will be denied this role for reasons that are unrelated to their ability and motivation to perform it, such as the fact that they were not born into the royal family, or the fact that they are not the monarch's first (male) child.

Now, there are a few monarchies, namely those of Cambodia, Malaysia, and Vatican City, that lack (strictly) hereditary succession rules.[4] What is

[3] For a defense of meritocracy, see e.g. Miller (1996).

[4] Poland also used to have an elective monarchy, which Rousseau (1782) defended.

pertinent for us is that even *these monarchies* are only partially meritocratic, as they do not allow the large majority of people to run for the position of monarch. In Malaysia, the monarch or Yang di-Pertuan Agong is chosen exclusively by, and from among, a group of local sultans whose sultanships are themselves hereditary (see Kaos Jr. 2012). In Cambodia, the king is elected from among the members of the royal Norodom and Sisowath bloodline, whereas in Vatican City, only male Catholics can be elected pope by the College of Cardinals, who usually pick someone from their own rank.[5]

2.3. Inadequate Ranges of Lifestyle Options

Still another problem with contemporary monarchies is that those of them that are hereditary tend to deprive at least some royals of an *adequate range of lifestyle options*. Consider some of the main formal and informal liberty-restrictions that major royals within these monarchies encounter, and in some cases their minor counterparts as well.

Marriage: One important set of restrictions pertains to royals' *marital choices*. Notwithstanding the fact that, within most OECD countries, marriage rates have dropped significantly over the past decades (see OECD 2018), there continue to be strong social expectations that (major) royals get married and marry the right person. This will usually be someone with a clean past who has the skills and temperament to be a worthy representative of the country. However, in some cases, the would-be spouse needs to satisfy *special formal criteria* as well, i.e. ones that do not apply to the marital choices of commoners.[6] These might include, but are not necessarily limited to, being of noble descent (e.g. in Japan, members of the imperial family lose their royal title once they marry a commoner), or having the same religion as the members of the royal family, or at least not the "wrong" religion (for example, until 2015, it was forbidden for the British monarch to marry a Catholic).

Procreation: As well as facing greater formal and informal restrictions on their marital choices than most people, some royals, especially monarchs and their heirs to the throne, face greater pressure to *procreate*. Such pressure can take a heavy psychological toll. Just witness the stress-induced illness that Princess Masako of Japan

[5] Although Vatican City is admittedly somewhat of a special case, considering that it is a theocracy with no more than a thousand inhabitants, most of whom are affiliated with the Catholic Church.

[6] I say "special formal criteria", as commoners usually have certain legal restrictions on their marital choices as well, such as that they cannot marry an underaged person or a sibling.

suffered in 2003, which is believed to have been caused in large part by the expectations for her to bear a male child. (Since Japan's monarchy is patrilineal, Masako's only child Aiko is unable to ascend to the throne. See *Globe and Mail* 2013.)

Political speech: Because of the cohesive function that the monarchy is expected to fulfil within most countries, (major) royals are not normally allowed to express controversial political views in public, or to reveal which political party they support. Even mere rumors about their political preferences can spark considerable consternation, as evinced by e.g. the commotion that followed reports that Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom had spoken out in favor of the UK leaving the European Union during a private lunch in 2016 (see Woodcock 2016).

Occupation: The range of professional activities in which (major) royals are allowed to engage tends to be severely limited. While the precise range varies among countries, prohibited occupations will ordinarily include those of politician and political commentator for the reasons just mentioned, as well as any job the performance of which by a (major) royal would imperil their own safety and/or that of others, at least in the absence of far-reaching—and therefore expensive—security measures. One might think here of the occupations of e.g. police officer, soldier, and touring musician.[7]

Movement, association, and privacy. In many countries, the security situation is such that at least high-ranked royals are unable to appear in public without bodyguards, which can be psychologically difficult. (For example, Princess Irene of the Netherlands once confessed that, throughout her childhood, she "felt spied upon". See *RTL Nieuws* 2017.) What is more, there are various mundane activities—e.g. shopping, cycling, jogging, watching movies in public cinemas—in which (high-ranked) royals are not ordinarily allowed to engage, or not simply spontaneously, which can take a heavy toll from a young age onwards as well. Just witness the following testimony by a former secondary schoolteacher of King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands: "The term 'spontaneity' was not found in the royal dictionary. Children are very easy in arranging playdates: 'Oh, I will just come to your place this afternoon.' Willem-Alexander was unable to make or accept such invitations over security concerns. Everything had to be worked out

[7] To be sure, there are certain jobs that royals might be able to perform anonymously, which would otherwise be too risky or costly for them to perform. For example, King Willem Alexander of the Netherlands secretly worked as a KLM pilot for over two decades. See McKirdy (2017).

well in advance, but this really does not suit a child of that age" (see van Sadelhoff 2015).

I should flag at this point that in saying that (major) royals suffer far-reaching restrictions on their freedom as a result of their royal pedigree, I am not denying that being a royal also provides them with *opportunities* that most citizens lack. Such opportunities typically include, but are not necessarily limited to, the opportunity to act as an official representative of one's country, the opportunity to use one's fame to promote charitable causes of one's own choosing (think e.g. of Prince Harry's work for the Invictus Foundation, which supports injured soldiers and veterans), the opportunity to live in luxury and be free from financial worries, and the opportunity to travel the globe. What is apposite for us is that as valuable as these prerogatives are, or may be, they *do not seem to compensate* for the severe liberty-constraints that a large proportion of born royals face.

To vindicate this claim, consider again the fact that major royals who want to go out in public are normally highly limited in terms of where they can go, along with the fact that they will normally have to inform security personnel well in advance of such wishes, and will in most cases be surrounded by bodyguards once they leave the door. These restrictions alone seem to be enough to deny them an adequate range of lifestyle options. After all, being able to decide whether to appear in public and where to do so is of great value, as is the freedom to be all by oneself outdoors (e.g. to go on a solitary hike) and the freedom to socialize in public with individuals who are entirely of one's own choosing (e.g. to meet one's friends in a pub without any unwanted bodyguards being present), which explains why *even when offered the position of (major) royal,* many of us are likely to decline the offer.

In response, a critic might deny that the abovementioned restrictions deprive (major) royals of an adequate range of lifestyle options, by noting that contemporary royals are free *to renounce their royal title*, which she might say gives them access to all the lifestyle options that are available to commoners.

My rejoinder is twofold. First, even if the option to renounce one's royal title justifies the substantial liberty-constraints suffered by royals with the competence to decide about such a renunciation, it does not seem to justify the substantial liberty-constraints suffered by e.g. young underaged royals and by royals with severe mental disabilities, given that these individuals lack the capacity to make such life-altering decisions. Second, there are good grounds for doubting whether someone's renounce their royal title will always make a meaningful range of lifestyle options available to them.

For at least when they are major royals, they are likely to *continue to require extensive security protection* as their persisting biological ties, and in most cases persisting social ties, to members of the royal family will ensure that they remain attractive targets for kidnappers, terrorists, and other ill-intentioned individuals.

3. TOWARDS A NEW TYPE OF (NON-HEREDITARY) MONARCHY

Thus far, I have suggested that contemporary monarchies cannot be morally justified, as they all fall prey to serious objections: they flout democratic principles; they are non-meritocratic; and/or they fail to provide at least some royals with an adequate range of lifestyle options. My aim in this section is to sketch the contours of a novel type of monarchy that I believe *can be vindicated*. For this to be the case, five necessary and jointly sufficient conditions must be satisfied.

3.1. Legitimate Public Objectives

The first condition is that a monarchy serve legitimate public objectives that justify the financial costs that this type of institution imposes on society. One such objective that monarchies are well-placed to promote is that of *fostering social cohesion and trust among citizens*, which are goods that, apart from being valuable in their own right, are understood by many scholars to be necessary for having well-functioning democracies and for creating and maintaining popular support for socio-economic redistribution (see e.g. Miller 1995; Kymlicka 2018). To realize this objective, there are several things that monarchs may need to do in order to bring their respective societies together, including:

- Making regular visits to different parts of their country.
- Meeting people from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
- Meeting people with different (non-extremist) ideological outlooks.[8]

[8] Which is particularly important in countries with high levels of political polarization. Just think of the United States, where according to some reports, 44% of Democrats now view the Republican Party very unfavorably and 45% of Republicans view the Democratic Party very unfavorably. See Pew Research Center (2019).

At same time, there certain things from which they will need to abstain, including:

- Venting views in public that are (deeply) controversial within society, whether politically or otherwise (cf. Constant 1988: 183-7; Bagehot 1873: ch. 2).
- Stoking republican sentiments by treating people as if they were subjects rather than fellow citizens, for example by talking down to them.

Another important way in which monarchies may help to justify their price tag is by *bringing benefits to the domestic economy*. This might happen, for instance, when royal events (e.g. royal weddings such as the one between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle) help to attract foreign tourists by creating publicity for the country's culture (see Euromonitor 2018). However, it might also happen when the existence of a monarchy helps to boost trade with other countries, as suggested by a 2015 report by the University of Amsterdam and the Dutch Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, which found that "personal ties between monarchs and their families" lead to "improved market access" that cause monarchies to export significantly more to countries with a monarchy than do republics (see Dijkstra and Overvest 2015).[9]

3.2. Meritocracy

To avoid the meritocratic objection to contemporary monarchies, which we have seen besets even those that are not strictly hereditary, the second condition that justifiable monarchies need to satisfy is that the position of monarch be open to people *irrespective* of features that are irrelevant to their ability to be a good monarch. This means, among other things, that they should not be barred from this position because they are not biologically related to the current monarch (if there is one) or because they are not of noble descent. Other features that are to be treated as irrelevant include people's sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, racial background, and religion.

To be sure, there are certain possible eligibility-criteria whose relevance is subject to reasonable disagreement. For example, it looks like we might reasonably disagree about whether would-be monarchs ought to be citizens of the country of which they seek to become monarch, as well as

[9] This also seems to support the conjecture of the 19th-century writer Walter Bagehot (1873: ch. 2) that meetings with monarchs tend to have significantly more symbolic weight and prestige than ones with professional politicians.

about whether they ought to have lived in the country for an extensive period, in the same way that the United States requires presidents to have lived in the country for such a period, namely 14 years. While these requirements may seem fitting by ensuring that individuals have (strong) connections to the country of which they seek to become monarch, there have been various monarchs throughout history who came from abroad and, especially in highly divided societies, there may be benefits to having an outsider on the throne.

Rather than evaluating these and other potentially relevant eligibility-criteria here, my aim in this article is more modest. What I seek to do is to sketch the *contours* of a morally justifiable monarchy, which does not require us to settle all its details, even though this remains an important task for future research.

3.3. Democracy

To escape the democratic objection to contemporary monarchies, the third condition that justifiable monarchies need to fulfil is that the monarch be elected by the citizenry. While an alternative solution would be for states to ensure that those who ascend the throne do not gain any formal or informal political power as a result, thereby eliminating (much of) the need for democratic legitimation of this position, I do not think that this is a viable solution. As the head of state, it seems symbolically indispensable that the monarch has at least occasional meetings with high-ranked government officials (e.g. the prime minister) and with foreign dignitaries, which will inevitably provide her with a certain amount of informal political power that most citizens lack. Indeed, apart from being symbolically necessary, it was noted above (in subsection 3.1) that meetings with foreign dignitaries can help to cultivate trade relationships with foreign countries and be highly desirable on those grounds.

Before moving on, I should highlight that one promising way of ensuring that citizens are able to make informed decisions about who their (next) monarch should be would be for states to launch televised talent shows for candidate monarchs.[10] During these shows, the format of which would be comparable to those of popular singing contests such as *The X-Factor* and *The Voice*, candidate monarchs would be given the opportunity to explain to the public how they would fulfil the role of monarch and what makes them qualified to hold this position. In addition to this, said shows could be used to test their knowledge of the country's history, culture(s),

[10] As suggested to me by an editor of this journal.

politico-legal structure, and geography, as well as their ability to speak the country's official languages, insofar as there are more than one. Still other forms of job-relevant knowledge and skills that might be tested concern the candidates' knowledge of foreign countries and their ability to speak foreign languages, given that, as was mentioned, meetings with foreign dignitaries are an integral part of this position.

3.4. Political Influence

Having suggested in the previous subsection that it is both unavoidable and desirable that monarchs enjoy greater (informal) political power than the average citizen, I now want to suggest that their role should nonetheless remain mostly ceremonial, as the role of many contemporary monarchs is, *even when* their being democratically elected justifies them in being somewhat more politically assertive than would be justified for them if they lacked a popular mandate.[11] (A parallel may be drawn here with the roles of e.g. the Austrian president and the Irish president, who are expected to act in a largely non-partisan manner despite having been democratically elected.) This means, among other things, that they should not have the (effective) freedom to veto legislation or to appoint government officials of their own choosing. In addition to this, there should be laws prohibiting them from publicly expressing support for a political party, as well as from taking a public stance on controversial political issues, such as that of exactly how many immigrants ought to be admitted to the country, and that of exactly how much the government ought to regulate private companies.

Why think that this fourth condition is necessary? One major reason was mentioned already, namely that politically assertive monarchs are less likely to promote social cohesion among citizens than politically neutral ones, which is true especially—but not exclusively—within countries that are heavily polarized along political lines, such as the United States. However, I believe that another, more fundamental, reason exists. This is that high levels of political partisanship on the part of monarchs prevent them from being a symbolical representative of *all their citizen*s within societies that are ideologically diverse (as virtually all contemporary societies are), which I here assume they should be as the head of state. [12]

[11] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify my views on this issue.

[12] Notice that these reasons for having a largely ceremonial monarch exist even if there is a popular majority for having a politically partisan monarch. Because of this, I do not think that such a majority can justify a politically partisan monarch.

3.5. Differences with Democratically Elected Ceremonial Presidents

At this point, it must be asked: if, as I am proposing, the monarch is to be democratically elected, and if her role should be largely ceremonial even if she will enjoy greater-than-average informal political power due to her meetings with domestic and foreign dignitaries, then how does this type of monarchy differ from a system where a (largely) ceremonial president is democratically elected, as exists in countries such as Austria and Ireland? Is the difference simply that the monarch will have a different title and, to the extent that there is a pre-existing monarchy, live in the residence(s) of former monarchs and perform various functions that her royal predecessors used to perform, such as awarding knighthoods; giving Christmas speeches, etc.? [13]

The answer is "no", even though it is true that the type of monarchy that I am defending is significantly closer to a system with a (largely) ceremonial democratically elected president than a hereditary monarchy is. One important additional difference is that whereas presidential candidates tend to be affiliated with a political party, such affiliations are not allowed for candidate-monarchs within the proposed monarchical system. As was mentioned, this is partly because, as the head of state, monarchs have a duty to represent *all citizens*, and it is partly because being politically partisan weakens their ability to promote social cohesion.

Another important additional difference has to do with how long monarchs are allowed to hold their position. Whereas presidents typically serve terms of 3 to 6 years and can be re-elected only once in most countries, the type of monarchy defended in this article allows monarchs to remain in office for at least a decade, if not indefinitely. One reason for permitting such prolonged "reigns" is that they help monarchs to act as a unifying figure within society by increasing the symbolic weight of their position,[14] and by providing them with more time to build relationships with various groups of citizens and non-citizen residents. Another reason is that greater time in office comes with greater opportunities for them to establish and cultivate relationships with foreign dignitaries, which, as we saw at the outset of this section, can be economically lucrative. (Notice that when monarchs serve such prolonged periods, it becomes more important still that their role be largely ceremonial, given that there will be few, if any, opportunities for people to vote them out of office, which I take to be a key

[13] I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this.

[14] So the most weight is likely to be added when monarchs are allowed to serve indefinitely. Compare Bagehot's claim that "if a king is a useful public functionary who may be changed, and in whose place you may make another, you cannot regard him with mystic awe and wonder: and if you are bound to worship him, of course you cannot change him" (1873: ch. 2).

component of democracy. Cf. Phillip Pettit's (2012) discussion of the editorial aspect of democratic control.)

Some might agree that the differences just mentioned—i.e. the ones concerning the level of permitted partisanship and the time spent in office—are relevant, but maintain that the institution being outlined here remains best thought of as a type of presidential system. They are most likely to do so on the basis of the belief espoused by e.g. Daniels (2018: 461) that "monarchs are not elected but come to power as a result of hereditary rule".

There are a few things to be said in response. First, when we consider how the terms "monarch" and "monarchy" are often used (e.g. in Malaysia, the member of the nobility who is elected head of state is referred to as the "monarch") and have been used historically (e.g. Rousseau (1782) defended what he labelled an "elective monarchy" in the case of Poland), there appears to be nothing contradictory about an elective or non-hereditary monarchy. Second, although there are noteworthy differences between the proposed institution and both current and past monarchies, a system where someone is the head of state for at least a decade, if not indefinitely, and where she is not allowed to be a member of a political party is one that is also markedly different from both current and past presidential systems, including from ones with a democratically elected (largely) ceremonial president, as found in countries such as Austria and Ireland. Given all this, I believe that it does not unduly stretch the meaning of the term "monarchy" if we refer to the proposed institution as a non-traditional type of monarchy, *even if* we are at least as justified in describing it as a non-traditional type of presidential system.[15]

3.6. Inadequate Ranges of Lifestyle Options

This brings us to the fifth and final condition that I believe needs to be satisfied in order for monarchies to be justifiable. According to this condition, a monarchy should not deprive people of an adequate range of lifestyle options. One way in which the proposed monarchy avoids this is by having the monarch *elected*, as opposed to being appointed on the basis of her family ties (see subsection 3.3). Not only will this prevent situations where individuals are expected to become monarch from a young age onwards and where they are socialized accordingly, but it will ensure that there is no pressure on monarchs to produce offspring in order to continue the royal bloodline.

[15] Note that, if I am wrong about this, then what I am defending in this article is an institution that is not quite a monarchy but something very akin to it.

Lest I be misunderstood, I am not suggesting that monarchs will not face significant restrictions on their liberties within the proposed monarchy. Besides the already mentioned restrictions on their (political) speech, they are likely to suffer far-reaching constraints on their freedom of movement, freedom of association, and privacy because of their need for extensive security protection, including bodyguard-protection, which might persist even after a possible abdication.[16] What is apposite for us is that, while these restrictions are substantial, they are unlikely to render the proposed monarchy unjustified, given that what seems to matter morally is *not* that individuals retain a diverse set of lifestyle options regardless of their choices in life, but rather that, as young adults, they *start out* with an adequate range of lifestyle options.[17] On this view, respecting people as autonomous beings requires us to respect their life-defining choices *even when* said choices impose heavy restrictions on certain of their liberties, provided that they do not harm others and were not made simply because there were no acceptable alternatives (cf. Colburn 2010). (While a defense of this view is beyond this article's remit, it is worth noting that it undergirds many widely-held beliefs, including the belief that it is morally appropriate for adults, but not for minors, to marry and to make financially weighty decisions, such as whether to take out loans.)

Of course, monarchs are not the *only people* who might suffer severe restrictions on their liberties as a result of their royal status. The same can be, and often is, true of their direct relatives, such as any children, parents, and siblings that they may have. Although these individuals would not be royals in the proposed monarchy, they are likely to require extensive security protection nonetheless because of their biological, and in most cases close social ties to the monarch, which will make them attractive targets for kidnappers, terrorists, and other evildoers as well. The problem that arises here is that, unlike the monarch, they will not have made a decision to embark on a career in which such protection is necessary, together with all the movement-, association-, and privacy-restrictions that come with it. (Even if for these individuals to suffer such restrictions is tolerable up to, say, eight years, which is how long many direct relatives of presidents and prime ministers maximally suffer them, it bears mentioning that, under the type of monarchy sketched so far, they might last considerably longer than that.)

One solution here would be to ask the people who would require

[16] To see this, note that, while they would no longer be monarchs or royalty after abdicating, their public profile would continue to render them an attractive target for terrorists and other evildoers, in the same way that e.g. former US Presidents remain attractive targets.

[17] Which requires, *inter alia*, that people be provided with a decent education, that they are not married off as minors, and that they enjoy a reasonable range of occupational options.

extensive security protection if their relative becomes monarch to *approve* their relative's candidature before he or she can ascend the throne. However, I think that we should resist this approach. One problem with it is that it does not offer a solution in cases where relatives cannot provide meaningful consent because they are underage and/or have severe cognitive disabilities. Another problem with it is that there exists a real risk that some individuals will be pressured into approving a relative's candidature, as family members are often well placed to financially and/or emotionally blackmail one another (see Keller 2016). [18]

My preferred solution, then, is a different one. I believe that people should be able to run for the position of monarch *only if* they do not have any relatives who would require extensive security protection if they become monarch. What this means in practice is that, given prevailing threat levels, only individuals without direct relatives will be able to candidate themselves within most societies. This is a regrettable implication; for one thing, it constitutes a substantial restriction on the pool of eligible candidates, even though there are likely to remain qualified candidates, given the millions of inhabitants that most contemporary societies have and the prestige that the position of monarch possesses. For another, it significantly reduces the average amount of time that monarchs spend in office, as most of them will be relatively old upon assuming this position, due to the fact they will have had to await their parents' death and possibly that of other relatives as well (this is true even if the average period in office will still exceed the 3-6 years that most presidents serve), thereby making the aforementioned public benefits of longer reigns more difficult to obtain (see the previous subsection). However, I think it is safe to say that the alternative—namely that some individuals will require bodyguard-protection and other forms of heavy security protection for decades, and possibly their entire lives, because of a relative's career choices—is worse from a moral perspective. To bring this out, notice that if I am right that respecting people's autonomy demands that competent adults be able to choose such constrained lives for themselves, then the same value of individual self-direction must demand that they *do not impose such lives on others*, whether or not they are related to the individuals involved.[19] Yet, if this is correct, then unless the current eligibility restrictions are observed,

[18] While states could try to investigate, for each candidate, whether this has occurred, doing so will be difficult and costly, as well as something that is likely to encroach on people's privacy.

[19] A noteworthy corollary of this view is that when a monarch becomes a parent during his time in office, or when he starts a romantic relationship with someone who already has a child, it will often become necessary for him to abdicate. However, since candidate monarchs in the proposed system are likely to be relatively old, I do not think that such cases will be common, also because those who wish for children are less likely to want to become monarch in the first place.

states will fail to show adequate concern for the ability of some individuals to live self-directed lives, which, together with e.g. John Rawls (1999) and Ronald Dworkin (2000), I assume here would violate a side-constraint on what is morally permissible for them to do.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has argued that it is doubtful whether any existing monarchies can be morally justified, but went on to show that this does not mean that the notion of a "morally justifiable monarchy" is oxymoronic. As I suggested, it seems that monarchies can be vindicated insofar as they:

I. serve legitimate public objectives (e.g. by promoting social cohesion among citizens and/or by fostering international trade);

II. make the position of monarch open to people *regardless* of features that are irrelevant to their ability to be a good monarch (e.g. their religion, sex, and family ties);

III. have the monarch elected through a popular vote;

IV. make the position of monarch largely—but not completely—apolitical or ceremonial; and

V. do not deprive anyone of an adequate range of lifestyle options, which is prevented by only allowing individuals whose relatives would not require extensive security protection if they are elected to run for monarch.

I want to end by noting that, if I am right that monarchies can be morally justified under these conditions, there remain several important details that need to be settled. One is what kinds of ties, if any, individuals ought to have to the country of which they seek to become monarch. Should they be citizens? Should they be residents and, if so, how long should they have lived within the country? Other ones are whether monarchs ought to serve indefinitely or rather for fixed periods, e.g. 10 years, and whether citizens should be able to oust them via legally binding referenda if and when there exists widespread dissatisfaction about their functioning. Still another unresolved issue arises exclusively for countries with a hereditary monarchy, namely that of how the transition to an elective monarchy can be permissibly made. Assuming that it would be problematic to simply sack existing monarchs, one thing that must be considered here is whether those next in line—e.g. Prince Charles in the United Kingdom and Princess Amalia in the Netherlands—have a moral right to inherit the throne, given that they have lived their entire lives under the assumption that they would

do so one day—albeit Charles for a significantly longer period than Amalia.

Having merely sought to sketch the contours of a justifiable monarchy within this article, a treatment of these issues has to await another occasion.

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