



LIBERTY MATTERS

IS THERE A ROLE FOR MONARCHY IN A FREE SOCIETY

It may seem odd that the topic of monarchy has been chosen for this month's Liberty Matters. Our stereotypical view of monarchy in the history of liberty is perhaps most often associated with the writings of someone like [Sir Robert Filmer](#) who argued that monarchical authority, no matter its origin, was "the only right and natural authority of a supreme father," making monarchs responsible to God alone, not to a free and responsible people. Or perhaps our views of monarchy are more like those of Mel Brooks in his classic film [History of the World Part I](#) in which Brooks plays a libertine, decadent King Louis in France proclaiming whenever he exercises his authority without limits that, "It's good to be the king!"

The recent death of England's longest reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, prompted a remarkable outpouring of affection for an individual who sat as the titular and unelected head of Britain's government and commonwealth for 70 years. As undemocratic as monarchy seems to be, the support for the institution in a free society seemed to be quite robust. And of course the history of monarchy and the flowering of liberty in Britain occurred side by side as both Steven Davies and Helen Dale discuss in their essays. Davies opens our forum by asking the key question roughly outlined above. This renewed and recent interest in monarchy flies in the face of hundreds of years of experience with the institutional development of modern political orders that support freer societies. Why should anyone take seriously the idea of monarchy as a bulwark for liberty? Davies explores some of the characteristics of the surviving monarchies to tease out an answer. Dale provides us with an historical answer in the context of monarchy's influence throughout the former British colonies and ties together the various institutions that have kept a lot of those nations relatively freer than many of their counterparts.

Perhaps the reason for this success has been the flexibility and adaptability of the institution, as Elena Woodacre argues in her theoretical interpretation of the relationship between monarchy and liberty. She notes quite clearly that tyranny is hardly confined to monarchical governments. History is full of examples of very oppressive regimes without kings. And as Carolyn Harris shows in her thoughtful review of the role the monarchy played in helping to shape the modern British Commonwealth, the subtle influence of the crown, such as Queen Elizabeth dancing with the newly elected Ghanaian president and toasting Nelson Mandela, helped to promote liberty in these newly minted countries.

Whether or not this reawakening of interest in the prospects for monarchy as a pillar of liberty is merely a response to the death of the queen or something more profound will take time to determine. Either way, these essays provide us with ample food for thought.

MONARCHY AND LIBERAL ORDER

by Stephen Davies

The recent death of Queen Elizabeth II has led to renewed interest in the institution of monarchy in various parts of the world. This may be a case of an event of real and symbolic significance adding impetus to something that was already there. Whisper it softly, but there is a gradual but definite increase of interest in the institution of monarchy both as an actual institution in the present and as a type of political order. The case for monarchy, which has hardly been made in political theory for the last century, is now reappearing. What, though, is the case for

monarchy? Is this a case that is intrinsically conservative, associated only with the conservative tradition in the modern political conversation or is there also a liberal case for monarchy?

The late Queen's funeral revealed how the British monarchy is a surviving grand or true monarchy and the UK a monarchical state, in a way that is no longer the case in other European monarchies, such as the Scandinavians or the Dutch. The latter are better thought of as crowned republics, political orders in which ultimate sovereignty resides in the people but the ceremonial and symbolic office of head of state is hereditary in a particular family. By contrast, in a sovereign monarchy the final sovereign power resides in a metaphysical entity

or defined set of powers that persists continuously through time (the Crown) and this is associated with or personified in an actual person (the monarch) who usually arrives at that position by heredity (there are exceptions, such as the Papacy).

The monarch may exercise the powers of the crown themselves, in which case you have an absolute sovereign monarchy. The alternative is a constitutional sovereign monarchy (sometimes called a mixed or limited monarchy) in which the powers may be exercised by others although derived from the Crown, or powers are limited by the requirement that they be expressed and exercised through a representative institution. The British monarchy, like the Japanese, is an example of this, while Saudi Arabia or the Papacy are examples of absolute monarchy. Crucially neither of these are arbitrary forms of rule or political order, and a sovereign monarch of either kind is not an autocrat, responsible to and guided only by themselves. The apparent difference between a constitutional sovereign monarchy and a crowned republic may be slight but they are actually different kinds of political order (though one can evolve into the other, as in the case of Sweden).

Why, though, should anyone take this seriously? The general belief is that sovereign monarchies are relicts, survivors from an earlier period of history, fated to either become actual republics or to change into crowned republics where the form endures but even the theory of monarchy has departed. This however is merely another instance of the dogma or superstition of progress, the idea that history has an arc or direction, something for which there is no evidence. From the perspective of pure political theory there is no reason not to consider monarchy alongside other types of political order that are rare or even no longer existent, such as classical republicanism and various forms of democracy. The degree to which these actually exist at present is not relevant to consideration of their advantages or qualities in theory. Finally, monarchy is in fact a still widespread kind of political order and is actually starting to gain support in various countries as different as Brazil and Germany.

The commonest arguments made for monarchy as a form of political order are pragmatic or consequential. These are that, as an empirical matter, monarchy is strongly correlated with other desirable things such as political stability, economic growth and prosperity, and civil liberty. Most of these arguments simply draw attention to the undoubted correlation and draw the conclusion that since there is an observable connection monarchy is therefore a good thing. The causal connection is only weakly made and usually consists of the argument that monarchies create a symbolism of unity and shared identity that promotes orderly politics with the other benefits flowing from that. While this is probably true, it is not sufficient. There is actually a stronger case for sovereign monarchy that rests upon its nature as a kind of political order and the kind of politics that this will therefore produce – one at odds with some of the dominant tendencies of our age.

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Types of political order do not derive from ideologies. They are not articulated ideas or theories made material. Real political orders of all kinds grow out of actual material ways of living and the shared consciousness (mentalité) that they generate. (The ideologies are ex-post rationalisations or explanations). Monarchy is a widespread and durable form of order precisely because it grows out of persistent features of human existence, above all the reality that most people live not as isolated individuals but as members of families that endure through time. Monarchy as a regime founds the political order on the most fundamental human social institution, the family, and thereby also gives the order a quality of durability and persistence that enables it to survive fluctuations in circumstances and events.

This means that monarchy as a form of political order leads to an emphasis on the longer term and the durable.

It is not incompatible with change or reform, as the history of many monarchical regimes demonstrates, but it means that change will typically be gradual and piecemeal rather than total and radical. This should be welcome even to those who want change because it means that change will be more likely to survive and have legitimacy. That legitimacy leads to the widely noted empirical reality that monarchies (including crowned republics) are more stable and resistant to political radicalism and extremism than other kinds of polity.

Constitutional sovereign monarchies also separate the symbolic or sacral aspect of politics from its everyday reality. This is very important. The sacral quality of political order is inevitable, no matter how much technocrats may wish it were not. In monarchies the symbolic and ceremonial parts of politics are reserved to the person of the monarch and the institution of the Crown and are thus removed from the game of electoral or factional politics and its winners. This separation denies political winners an ultimate legitimacy or sanction that it would be very dangerous for them to enjoy. It also embodies the principle that the social and political order are ultimately not a human contrivance or invention but a natural phenomenon (ultimately divinely sanctioned if you are a believer).



Finally, monarchy as a regime also requires us to consider political life in a more realistic and thoughtful way than is common nowadays. It embodies the reality that in any political order other than anarchy (and maybe even then) there is a ruling or governing class. The question to consider is, given that, what kind of governing class do we want? The ultimate answer is one that is aware of the nature or end of the role they occupy and of the need for

them to fit themselves to it. No regime is perfect in this, but its actual nature means that monarchy is more likely to achieve this. At one time this was a central concern of political thinking.

Why, though, should liberals go along with this? Surely the argument just made is a quintessentially conservative one that runs counter to essential liberal principles? There is in fact a strong liberal (or perhaps Whig) argument in favour of monarchy in most times and places. For liberals of all kinds the goal of political order is to maximise human flourishing in its widest possible diversity. The central defining belief is that liberty is a necessary condition for doing this. It is not, though, for most a sufficient condition – there also has to be a culture and way of life with certain qualities, and the political order as well as ensuring liberty has to also ensure other essential things, most notably the rule of law and civil order. The form of the political order is secondary. It then becomes an argument as to which, if any, of the many kinds of political order are best suited to this. This is why there is no necessary connection between liberalism and democracy (and many historic liberals have been sceptical of democracy) while there is for other things, such as religious toleration and free expression.

There is a liberal argument that, for the reasons given above and others, a monarchy is more likely to be successful in maintaining these preconditions and circumstances and in resisting the most dangerous threat to them in the contemporary world, revolutionary, arbitrary, and unlimited politics. The evidence of history is taken to support this. Monarchy is a corrective to one of the besetting problems of modern politics in general and liberal democracy in particular, which is a fixation on the short term and immediate and the ignoring of the longer term and permanent. This matters for sensible liberals as well as conservatives. The separation of ultimate sovereignty from popular will and short-term fads and fancies and also from oligarchic concentrations of wealth and economic power are also important arguments for this kind of polity from a liberal point of view, particularly at the present time. The argument (not shared by all liberals but undoubtedly a liberal one) is that

a sovereign monarchy, even perhaps an absolute one, is more likely to promote and sustain liberal ends than a democracy. This case is made in general but also with particular reference to the contemporary world.

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MONARCHY, TYRANNY AND LIBERTY

by Elena Woodacre

Evidence of a positive connection between monarchy and liberty in the modern world can be seen in recent lists of most liberal and most progressive countries which feature long enduring monarchies. Both World Population Review and MoveHub's 2022 rankings of the most liberal countries in the world were topped by Norway, Sweden and Denmark—all states with long running constitutional monarchies. U.S. News' current ranking of "Most Progressive Countries" was topped by Japan, with Sweden fourth and Norway, Denmark and Britain twelfth to fourteenth respectively.^[1] These same five monarchies all came in the top 15 of U.S. News' overall "Best Countries" ranking which includes metrics with particular emphasis on "Quality of Life", "Agility" and "Social Purpose" which are all arguably underpinned by liberty.^[2]

In spite of this positive evidence, there is still a perception that monarchy creates an environment where liberty cannot thrive. To understand this perception, we need to take a *longue durée* view of ideals of rulership and ideas about ideal governments. James Hankins has explored the "cult of liberty" in Renaissance Italy which derived inspiration from Rome's republican era and the ideas of Greco-Roman philosophers. For those living in Italian city-states it was "a sign of their status as free men that they did not live under a single lord."^[3] The political tracts of Renaissance Italy, informed by Greco-Roman ideas, in turn fed the evolving ideas of early modern Europe and the Enlightenment which sought to find an ideal form of government. Enlightenment writers felt

that this perfect form of government was one that would guarantee "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence—a document which itself is both a product and a hallmark of early modern political philosophy.^[4]



U.S. Declaration of Independence

The [Declaration of Independence](#) marked the moment when the American colonies threw off their allegiance to the British monarchy and the rule of George III, claiming that they had every right to rebel against a government that they called an "absolute Tyranny". The fear of a tyrant, someone with absolute power who governs in an oppressive and unjust way which completely suppresses liberty, is another thread which runs through the history of political philosophy. A tyrant, like a sovereign or monarch, is a ruler—while it is possible for a monarch to become a tyrant, it is erroneous to assume that monarchy and tyranny are the same. The Romans of the republican era particularly associated tyranny with monarchical rule which they strove to avoid—[Cicero](#) cast the murder of Julius Caesar as righteous tyrannicide and later generations of writers into the Italian Renaissance continued to debate whether it was fair to cast Caesar as a tyrant.^[5] Perhaps the real question should be whether it is fair to cast all monarchs as tyrants—or potential ones. In the Middle Ages, John of Salisbury noted that "not only kings practice tyranny" while [Thomas Aquinas](#) also noted that tyranny was unique to a monarch, that tyranny could equally be practiced by an oligarchy or even in a democracy when "the whole people becomes virtually a single tyrant."^[6] Premodern political philosophers also discussed whether being the subject of a monarch—and

thus subject to the monarch's will—put one in hock to a tyrant or constrained liberty. In [Dante's](#) work on monarchy, he argued instead that the reverse was true: “it is apparent that, although a consul or a king are masters over others with respect to means, with respect to ends they are the servants of others; and this is especially true of the monarch, who is to be considered without doubt the servant of all men.”[\[7\]](#)

Monarchy is not static, for it to endure over centuries, or even millennia, it must continue to evolve in line with changes in society. A failure to adapt or keep in step with political and societal changes risks the institution being seen as irrelevant, or at the most extreme end, an institution which is inhibiting the nation's growth and must be removed—sometimes violently, as seen in the French or Russian Revolution. A shared characteristic of these examples of long surviving monarchies noted at the outset of this piece—Japan, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Britain—is that they are all constitutional monarchies, as are the rest of the remaining monarchies in Europe in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Spain.



King James I of England and VI of Scotland

As discussed previously, the early modern period was a key moment in the development of European political philosophy. Existing modes of governance, primarily monarchies at that point, were questioned regarding

whether they were ideal or appropriate political frameworks which could ensure the survival of the state as well as the wellbeing of their subjects. Debate raged between proponents of absolute monarchy who cited a divine mandate to rule including James VI/I of Scotland and England in his work *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies: or, the reciproock and mutuall dutie betwixt a free King, and his natural Subiectes* (1598). Indeed Jean Bodin, in his *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, counselled his readers against “the illusory hope of enjoying liberty under a popular government” claiming that “unless its government is in the hands of wise and virtuous men, a popular government is the worst tyranny there is,” as it would be riven with faction and therefore ineffective.[\[8\]](#) Monarchy, he claimed, most mirrored the natural order—just as a body has one head, so should the body of state have one leader—a king, who would secure and protect the liberty of his subjects.

Equally passionate were those who advocated new forms of rule, rejecting monarchy for republican or democratic forms of governance which they argued were necessary to ensure liberty for all. George Tridimas has systematically analyzed the process of governmental change in Europe, creating a model which examines the conflict between a hereditary monarch and a “liberal challenger” and the various potential outcomes.[\[9\]](#) The evolution of the British monarchy demonstrates two possible outcomes—the regicide of Charles I in 1649 and the brief establishment of a republic is at the extreme end of these outcomes, in complete favour of the “challenger”. Yet the monarchy was re-established under his son, Charles II, in 1660 and shortly thereafter followed the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 which created the model of constitutional monarchy in Britain which has continually evolved to the present day. Tridimas argues that constitutional monarchy represents a power sharing scenario for the monarch and the “liberal challenger” where trade-offs are made between the exercise of power and policy and the control of rents. This model is one means of explaining the evolution of monarchy in Europe—that those which have survived into the present day have done so because they were able to develop these power sharing, constitutional systems

which have retained a monarch as a largely ceremonial head of state.

Shifting to a constitutional monarchy can also be seen as a way of preventing the monarch from the possibility of becoming a tyrant who might constrain liberty, as they lack the uninhibited power of an absolute monarch. Stripped of the need to govern or to concern themselves with securing their re-election or that of their political party, these constitutional monarchs can use their elevated and highly visible position to enact the best side of leadership “to protect the oppressed, raise up the afflicted, assist the needy, aid our friends, give rewards to the virtuous and benefit as many people as possible.”^[10] While modern royals are not perfect individuals, many have used their role as leaders to support and draw attention to worthy causes. Examples in modern Britain include Prince Philip’s Duke of Edinburgh initiative, Diana, Princess of Wales’ championing of HIV/AIDS patients and victims of landmines as well as the work of her sons and daughters-in-law to draw greater attention to the importance of mental health. This, coupled with the recognition that nations with long enduring constitutional monarchies are some of the most progressive, liberal and stable nations in the modern world demonstrate “why virtuous rule did not compromise the liberty of the ruled.”^[11] The perception that monarchy is synonymous with tyranny and therefore incompatible with liberty is a connection which needs to be broken. While (absolute) monarchs can be tyrants, history as well as the present day offers countless examples of leaders raised up by seemingly democratic systems who become demagogues or tyrants. Thus, it is not monarchy, nor any particular governmental framework, but the personnel which inhabits it, that create tyranny and constrain liberty.

Endnotes

[1] Anon, “These are the Most Progressive Countries”, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings/progressive>, accessed November 24, 2022.

[2] Anon, “U.S. News Best Countries” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings>, accessed November 24, 2022.

[countries/rankings](https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/methodology), accessed November 24, 2022. Their rankings were Sweden (5th), Japan (6th), United Kingdom (8th), Denmark (10th), Norway (13th). For more detail on their metrics, see <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/methodology>, accessed November 24, 2022.

[3] James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft & Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2019), 92.

[4] “Declaration of Independence”, July 4, 1776, transcription at the U.S. National Archives website: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript#:~:text=We%20hold%20these%20truths%20to,their%20just%20powers%20from%20the> accessed November 24, 2022.

[5] See particularly chapter 4 of Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, “Taming the Tyrant”.

[6] See selections from the works of John of Salisbury and Thomas Aquinas in Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon Forhan eds, *Medieval Political Theory-A Reader: The Quest for the Body Politic, 1100-1400* (London: Routledge, 1993). Quotations from pages 54 (John of Salisbury) and 101 (Thomas Aquinas).

[7] Dante, *Monarchy*, ed and trans Prue Shaw (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

[8] Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, ed and abridged by M.J. Tooley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 201. Available online at <http://constitution.org/2-Authors/bodin/bodin.htm>

[9] George Tridimas, “Constitutional monarchy as power sharing”, *Constitutional Political Economy* 32 (2021), 431-461, <https://rdcu.be/c0oz0>

[10] Carlo Marsuppini as quoted in Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, 136.

[11] Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, 512.

GOODBYE, MRS. QUEEN

by Helen Dale

The morning after the Queen's death, judgment in an Australian criminal appeal was handed down. *Zirilli v The King*, it read. "A judgment with a King," [said the law professor who brought it to Twitter's attention](#). She'd spotted the first legal ruling in the UK and Commonwealth made in the name of King Charles III. And not only that: the QCs who appeared at trial had become, by a bit of succession magic, KCs.



Queen Elizabeth II

It will take time to get used to a King. "KC" seems harder to say. New but ordinary words — "the King" — seem strangely discordant, a constitutional malfunction. On the Thursday evening of her death, in his grief and shock, one of the talking heads on ITV said "His Majesty the Queen" three times.

Well, it is the 21st century and all.

Every obituary, from the BBC's on down, referred to the Queen's sense of duty. Duty, it seems, is the hardest value to model, and to uphold. It doesn't mean being a doormat, but it does mean being constant, and brave, and decent.

Sometimes people come to duty late. Others never learn to appreciate it, at least not until it's gone.

A sovereign to whom people get too close loses authority; a sovereign to whom people feel no connection loses legitimacy. Queen Elizabeth had a genius for balancing this tension. On her death, the way the monarchy's constituent parts moved smoothly into place was also a reminder of the extent to which the common law nestling under the Crown she both wore and represented is a living thing.

When Elizabeth II was crowned on 2 June 1953, the ceremony's basic structure [dated](#) to the coronation of the first English monarch, Æthelstan, on 4th September 925, over a thousand years earlier. This sequence: Kingdom of Wessex→Kingdom of England→Kingdom of Great Britain→United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland represents a state's continuing lineage.



Queen Elizabeth II at Coronation

The Kingdom of Wessex, founded in 519—through successfully resisting the Norse onslaught—made itself into the Kingdom of England. The Norman Conquest of 1066 changed the English state but did not replace it. With distance, [Oliver Cromwell](#) looks like a mistake, a mere interruption. Meanwhile, the Dutch conquest of 1688 was indigenised as *The Glorious Revolution*. Apparently, it doesn't count as conquest if the right

sort invited the conqueror to arrive with an army. Mind you, the conqueror's wife being the presumptive heir to the overthrown monarch helped, too.

The Kingdom of England joined with the Kingdom of Scotland in 1707 to form the Kingdom of Great Britain. This wasn't a replacement for the existing state, but a union of adjacent states already sharing (since 1603) the same Crown. The Kingdom of Ireland joined the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1800 to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. After the Irish Republic went its own way in 1922, the state became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Across each transition, laws continued, organisations and institutions continued, offices, and officeholders continued: even as the state's territory waxed and waned. An unbroken state lineage that goes back to the founding of the Kingdom of Wessex in 519. The ending of the Wars of the Roses in 1485 at the [Battle of Bosworth Field](#) is closer to us in time than that battle was to the founding of the state whose monarch it enthroned.

When you study the common law, as you learn its long history and grasp its effects on the present, you realise you're dealing with something like one of those plants that propagates via rhizomes underground. It's why evolved systems tend to work better than designed ones, even if they seem maddeningly irrational to those who presume to know better. Evolved systems are a conversation between the generations in a way those created ab *initio* are not.



Walter Bagehot

In 1867, [Walter Bagehot](#) argued that one function of a monarchy is to disguise underlying changes taking place in society and government. He had Queen Victoria in mind, but the observation is truer for Elizabeth II, who inherited an Empire and left a Commonwealth.

The sentimental poem he quoted is more often remembered than the surrounding context, but Sir Robert Menzies, Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister, spoke for the country when, in 1963, [he addressed her thus](#): "All I ask you to remember in this country of yours is that every man, woman and child who even sees you with a passing glimpse as you go by will remember it, remember it with joy, remember it — in the words of the old 17th century poet who wrote those famous words, *I did but see her passing by and yet I love her till I die.*"

About 70 per cent of the Australian population of about 10 million saw her on her first visit to the country in 1954. Nearly a million people crowded Sydney's foreshores and streets when she arrived on February 3. At the time, Sydney's total population was 1.8 million. About 150,000 packed the streets around Sydney Town Hall when she attended the Lord Mayor's Ball. Communism was the bogey. Stalin ruled the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong's communists had won in China. Menzies ordered charges against Rex Chiplin, a Communist, for criticising the

coronation. Yet, two other Communist Sydney City aldermen lined up to shake the gloved royal hand.

Bagehot went on to warn, also speaking of the monarchy, that “we must not let daylight in upon magic.” The Queen’s reign did see quite a bit of daylight let in upon magic, yet somehow the Queen herself still retained an enchantment in her person, three centuries after the monarchy itself lost its aura of Divine Right.

And yes, some of that personal magic passed with her: the Aberdeenshire farmers who [positioned their tractors to form a guard of honour](#) as her coffin traced its path from Balmoral to Edinburgh; the graphic designer who put [her official funeral plans to the theme music from Game of Thrones](#); the Ukrainian soldiers who, in wonky Latin script, [inscribed tributes to her on missiles](#) before firing them at Russian forces; the ten mile queue beside the Thames to pass her catafalque in Westminster Hall soon became The Queue, a monument to British orderliness and restraint which at one point [had its own weather forecast](#).

Occasionally, the disenchanted world of politics intruded. *Who was Prime Minister when the Queen died* is destined to be a pub quiz question for the ages, so short was Liz Truss’s tenure in Number 10. The Great British Public discovered that many—perhaps even a majority—of Americans do not like them very much. [This has been known in the Westminster Village for some time](#), but it came as a shock (for the majority, who don’t watch the news) to see foul-mouthed abuse on social media and mean-spirited, inaccurate reporting in established outlets like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

Within hours of the Queen’s death, the NYT’s opinion page was [running a screed from an academic](#) saying the late monarch had covered up colonial bloodshed. The NYT approach is ruthless and commercially canny, however. Its “dystopian UK” attack pieces are intended to go viral, to attract attention and amuse or impress Americans who get a thrill from seeing Britons on social media express annoyance or bewilderment at vile copy.

This time, coming when it did—straight after the Queen’s death—the American nastiness became an

exemplar of America’s larger image problem, something I know worries thoughtful American friends. Stunned and wounded Brits sputtered about the *special relationship*. Meanwhile, as is their wont, Australians ([who voted in a 1999 referendum to retain the monarchy](#)) soon waded into the fray.

Australians may share the UK’s monarch but any cultural resemblance between the two nations ends there. Australians loathe deference and only Scots equal their mastery of the blue. Americans were treated to lectures on how badly their county is run and how their much-vaunted Constitution *doesn’t even work*. [This clip from The West Wing](#) is widely used in Australian civics classes and a lot of smug Australians proceeded to shove it in American faces. “Don’t you know that the American presidential system is your most dangerous export, responsible for wreaking havoc in over thirty countries?”

Martin Amis once observed that “the Royal Family is just a family, writ inordinately large. They are the glory, not the power.” Many Americans no doubt think it would be rational to do away with them. However, presidential republics have a bad habit of embedding the irrational *within* their politics. This is why, I suspect, inaugurations look like coronations. Far better a crowned republic than somewhere where pageantry makes common cause with power.

THE MONARCHY AND THE MODERN COMMONWEALTH OF EQUAL NATIONS

by Carolyn Harris

On 21 April 1947, the future Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her 21st birthday during a royal tour of southern Africa with her parents King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the Queen Mother) and younger sister Princess Margaret. In a speech broadcast on the radio from Cape Town, the young princess declared “I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of

our great imperial family to which we all belong.” The speech took place during a period of transition in the monarchy’s relationship with the wider world as the British Empire and Dominions evolved into a Commonwealth of equal nations. Over the course of her 70-year reign from 1952 to 2022, Queen Elizabeth II was committed to her role as Head of the Commonwealth. As the head of a voluntary association of constitutional monarchies and republics that now comprises fifty-six independent countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, the Americas and the Pacific region, the Queen was able to exercise subtle diplomatic influence in support of the sovereignty of Commonwealth nations and the individual liberties of their inhabitants.



Queen Victoria

The close relationship between the monarchy and the development of the modern Commonwealth dates from the last decades of the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1887 brought representatives of the wider British Empire together and therefore served as the occasion for the first Colonial Conference among representatives of British colonies and self-governing dominions. These representatives discussed opportunities for increased trade and communication including the laying of a trans-Atlantic telegraph. Ten years later, in 1897, Queen Victoria tacitly

expressed her approval for new technologies that allowed information to spread more quickly around the British Empire and Dominions by acknowledging Diamond Jubilee greetings by telegraph and appearing in newsreel footage while on holiday with her children and grandchildren at Balmoral Castle in Scotland.

The transition from Empire and Dominions to Commonwealth of equal nations continued with the Balfour Declaration of 1926, which stated that the United Kingdom and self governing Dominions such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa were “autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.” The subsequent statute of Westminster in 1931 gave these Dominions control over their own foreign policy, creating distinct constitutional monarchies that shared the same monarch.

In common with his grandmother Queen Victoria, King George V (reigned 1910-1936), made use of new technologies to emphasize that he represented the interests of all nations and social classes, working toward a more prosperous society that would benefit people from a wide range of backgrounds in the aftermath of economic hardships and the First World War. In his first Christmas broadcast in 1932, which became an annual tradition for the monarch that continues to the present day, he marvelled at the opportunity created by the radio to connect with people around the world and “For the present, the work to which we are all equally bound is to arrive at a reasoned tranquillity within our borders; to regain prosperity without self-seeking, and to carry with us those whom the burden of past years has disheartened or overborne. My life's aim has been to serve as I might, towards those ends.”

King George V’s second son, King George VI (reigned 1936-1952) was the first monarch to formally hold the title of Head of the Commonwealth, according to the terms of the London declaration decided at the Commonwealth Prime Minister’s Conference that year.

The idea of a Commonwealth of equal nations evolving from the British Empire had been discussed in political circles during the late nineteenth century then gained additional public recognition from the speeches of South African general, then Prime Minister, Jan Christian Smuts who praised the principles of freedom and equality that he believed informed the societies of the Commonwealth nations. The contributions of the Commonwealth nations to the allied cause during the First and Second World Wars and the emergence of independent crowns held by the same monarch between the wars accelerated this progress.

Queen Elizabeth II (reigned 1952-2022) was the longest reigning and most well traveled monarch in British history and her overseas tours to Commonwealth nations were especially politically significant over the course of the Cold War, supporting the territorial integrity of Commonwealth nations, discouraging the expansion of the soviet sphere of influence into the nations that comprises the former British Empire and upholding the liberty and equality of the citizens of Commonwealth nations. The Commonwealth was originally conceived as an organization where the monarch would serve as head of state for each independent nation with a Prime Minister serving as Head of Government.

When India, having achieved independence in 1947, decided to become a Republic in 1950, the definition of the Commonwealth was expanded to allow for a variety of forms of government including independent constitutional monarchies with the same monarch as the United Kingdom, republics and monarchies with local monarchs. This change reflected both King George VI's wishes and wider concerns that countries that departed the Commonwealth might become part of the Soviet sphere of influence. These concerns informed the Queen's engagement with the wider Commonwealth over the course of the Cold War. In 1961, the British government discouraged the Queen from visiting Ghana because of security considerations. She nevertheless undertook the trip because of concerns that Ghana might become part of the Soviet sphere of influence if Soviet

leader Nikita Khrushchev visited Ghana and the Queen did not do so.

The photographs from the 1961 royal tour of Ghana showing the Queen dancing with Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah were published in newspapers and magazines around the world and sent a clear message concerning the Queen's support for racial equality in the Commonwealth and the wider world. South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1960 and became a republic. Following the end of apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela as President, South Africa was invited to rejoin the Commonwealth and did so in 1994. The Queen exerted diplomatic influence in support of Commonwealth countries imposing sanctions on South Africa to end apartheid. Former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney explained to the *Toronto Star*, "[The Queen] and I became quite close during the fight to free Mandela. She was very unhappy, as you know, with the British government's position, as articulated by Margaret (Thatcher)." The Queen and Mandela became good friends raising toasts to one another on a South African state visit to the United Kingdom as "this gracious lady" and "this wonderful man."



Nelson Mandela

Throughout the Queen's reign, both the sovereign and senior members of the royal family emphasized that the relationship between the monarchy and Commonwealth

nations was a voluntary one and expressed support for national self-determination. In 1969, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh stated at a press conference in Ottawa, Canada, “The monarchy exists in Canada for historical reasons and it exists in the sense that it is of benefit, to the country or to the nation. If at any stage any nation decides that the system is unacceptable then it’s up to them to change it. I think it’s a complete misconception to imagine that the Monarchy exists in the interests of the Monarch — it doesn’t. It exists in the interests of the people.” These remarks were intended to clarify the relationship between the monarchy and the people of Canada and other Commonwealth nations, emphasizing the importance of national self determination in the relationship between individual countries and the monarchy. However, the speech was remembered for Prince Philip’s subsequent remark, “We don’t come here for our health, so to speak. We can think of other ways of enjoying ourselves,” which became known as one of his famous remarks, obscuring the original intent of the speech.

The Queen’s support for national self determination was clearly expressed in her speeches and actions. When Australia held a referendum on whether to remain a constitutional monarchy in 1999, the Queen refrained from visiting the country around the time of the vote to avoid influencing the outcome. Australia remained a constitutional monarchy and royal visits resumed. When the legislature in Barbados voted to become a republic in 2021, while still remaining part of the Commonwealth, the Queen sent a warm message to the Barbadian people, stating, “As you celebrate this momentous day, I send you and all Barbadians my warmest good wishes for your happiness, peace and prosperity in the future.”

Today, King Charles III is head of a Commonwealth that consists of fifty-six member states: fifteen countries where Charles III is Head of State, thirty-six republics, and five countries that have their own local monarchs. The new King is continuing the role defined by his mother, Queen Elizabeth II. As a constitutional monarch, the Queen was expected to remain above party politics, act on the advice of her minister, and avoid expressing

controversial opinions, but she was able to make clear through her official speeches, attendance at Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, and subtle diplomatic influence that she favoured the development of a society where individuals have the liberty to achieve their full potential.

THE COMPLICATED HISTORY OF LIBERALISM AND MONARCHY

by Stephen Davies

The essays in this forum all complement each other and in doing so cast light on several interrelated questions. The first concerns the historical and contemporary relationship between monarchy as a regime or type of political order. The second concerns both liberty and a range of social values and practices commonly described as ‘progressive’ that are often associated with contemporary liberalism. As Elena Woodacre says, these are nowadays strongly connected with monarchies but this is surprising for some because monarchy has historically been associated with the contrasting opposite practice of tyranny and arbitrary rule, by a succession of authors and movements from the early modern period onwards. Her key point is that this is incorrect – tyranny is a quality of governance and practice that can be found in any kind of political order, and monarchy is not especially susceptible to it. Tyrannical government often takes the form of personal rule as in Putin’s Russia, but this is not always the same as monarchy (North Korea is a case where it is) and, more importantly, personal rule is only one kind of tyranny, as examples like Iran and the post-Stalin Soviet Union demonstrate.

A central question arises from the four essays: the nature of the connection between historical liberalism and the ideal of self-government, whether individual or collective. As Woodacre says, this is often seen as embodied in the republican form of political order as articulated by a succession of authors from Cicero to the civic humanists

of the Renaissance and later. Liberalism, I would argue, can find either monarchy or classical republicanism a congenial regime – there is no inherent incompatibility in either case – so the question becomes the empirical one of which regime has proved to be most congenial historically and in practice. The empirical evidence is not decisive but leans towards monarchy – the challenge is in distinguishing the impact of a regime from that of its specific or contingent factors. One major question that has exercised republican theorists is that of the longevity or otherwise of republican institutions – here monarchy generally has the upper hand despite examples of long-lived republics such as Venice and the United States. One question we might ask is how far any of the extant regimes that claim to be republican actually are, in the sense that people such as Machiavelli or Harrington used the term. Maybe they are more forms of either oligarchy or democracy, to use the classical categories.



Niccolo Machiavelli

This brings us to the point made in Helen Dale's essay, where she drew attention to the connection of the British monarchy to a certain kind of legal order and the way that this was clearly misunderstood and misinterpreted in the churlish reaction of much American media, and above all the New York Times, to the death of Queen Elizabeth II. This response, which as she says provoked scathing reactions from people in several Commonwealth countries, was in marked contrast to that of the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, and the

Northern Ireland leader of Sinn Féin, Michelle O'Neill. Their reactions were dignified and respectful rather than childish and petulant. Neither Macron or O'Neill compromised their own republican convictions, but their reaction reflected republican traditions that have a historical sense and awareness. This means being conscious of the persistence and development of institutions and identities through time and their embodiment in customs, rituals, and practices – the legal order being an instance of this. Both this kind of historically rooted and constituted republicanism, and monarchy, are clearly distinct from the kind of present-minded outlook expressed by the New York Times in which only the current instant matters and the past has no weight, whether in sentiment or, more significantly, in law. The nature of monarchy and its usual connection to family and descent mean that as a regime it is more likely to have this historical sense than most contemporary soi-disant republics. This has major implications for the law in contemporary polities.

Carolyn Harris meanwhile poses another question both theoretical and historical, the relationship between monarchy and imperialism. The New York Times article that Dale referenced argued that in the British case at least there was a deep connection between monarchy as a regime and the theory and reality of imperialism. Harris's account of the evolution of the British Empire into the Commonwealth and the part played by the late Queen in that process suggests a different take, to put it mildly. One point is that historically imperialism is as much associated with republics as with monarchies, from Athens and Rome onwards (we could also mention Venice and even the contemporary United States). The more significant matter, which Harris sets out, is the way that monarchy can be a key element in the emergence of a different kind of international order to either empire or the Westphalian world of separate sovereign states. The latter now takes the form of systems of pooled or qualified sovereignty, as in the EU or the many UN conventions and other international institutions. The Commonwealth suggests a different model, one that does not require surrender of self-governance but is held together by a monarchy (even when many of the

constituent states are republics). In some ways this is a revival of the old late medieval and early modern phenomenon of multiple kingdoms, where a single person would be simultaneously monarch of several distinct kingdoms, wearing a different crown in each. Spain was one example of this as was the Habsburg monarchy. The problems of combining nationalism and the sovereign nation with democracy and pluralism, and the dysfunctionality and fragility of the existing international order suggests that this is also an area where the forms of monarchical government are worth thinking about, as a way of resolving what are otherwise difficult challenges for liberalism.

COMMON THREADS IN FOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

by Elena Woodacre

Many thanks for my fellow contributors in this Liberty Fund forum on monarchy and liberty for their thoughtful and thought-provoking pieces, all connected by a common inspiration in the recent passing of Queen Elizabeth II. Each of my colleagues took their reflections on this momentous event in very different directions, exploring the place of monarchy in modern society in different ways.

I found a great deal of common ground between my own piece and Stephen Davies' contribution on monarchy and liberal order. Both of us reflected on the advent of modern constitutional monarchies or "crowned republics" which he felt was a more appropriate way of describing many of the monarchies of modern Europe. Both of us also reflected on the durability of monarchy and the necessity of change and reform in order to endure. I thought Davies' suggestion that the durability of monarchy could be due to its familial connection which speaks to a core element of society, was intriguing. I also

found myself nodding in agreement when he discussed the value of monarchy as a "corrective" to modern short-termist politics and as a basis which was "more likely to promote and sustain liberal ends than a democracy"—certainly some of the statistics I featured in my piece concurred with that assessment.



Queen Elizabeth II

Davies' discussion of constitutional monarchy also resonated well with Helen Dale's piece "Goodbye Mrs. Queen". While Dale's highly reflective piece was grounded in a legal basis, her brief history of the development of constitutional monarchy connected well with both Davies' and my discussions on that topic. Dale and Davies also had a key point of agreement regarding ceremony. Davies noted that there was value in separating out the sacral aspects of politics, which a monarchy could fulfil in state visits, services of thanksgiving or anniversaries of important events. Dale concurred, ending her piece by stating "Far better a crowned republic than somewhere where pageantry makes common cause with power."

Dale's piece brought in reactions to Queen Elizabeth's reign and passing in former colonies like the USA and particularly Australia. Here, we have a clear link to Carolyn Harris' contribution which reflected on the transition from the British empire to the Commonwealth and the role of Elizabeth II in sustaining and promoting this change. Harris noted the role of Elizabeth II in

making connections across the globe in her royal tours and her diplomatic influence—demonstrating the “soft power” of constitutional monarchy and how it can continue to add value in a liberal, modern context.

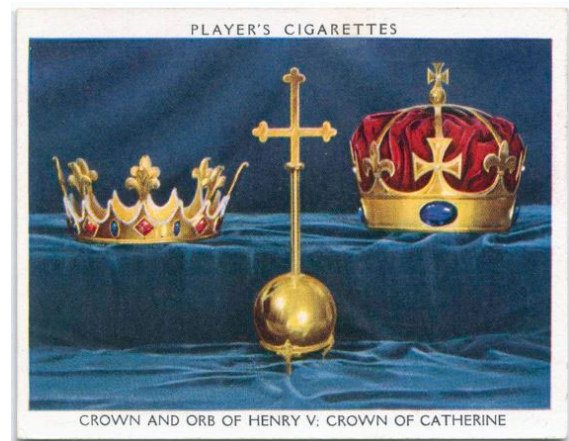
In sum, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the contributions of my colleagues in this Liberty Fund forum. While we all took our reflections on monarchy and liberty in different directions, there was far more common ground and connection, than dissonance and dispute. Indeed, I believe all of us provided evidence that monarchy and liberty can be completely compatible. While it is an institution with a very long history, it is more than a relic from a bygone age—if monarchy can continue to adapt to reflect the changes in society, it can form a positive basis for a modern, liberal society.

AUSTRALIA— CONSTITUTIONAL SOVEREIGN MONARCHY OR CROWNED REPUBLIC?

by Helen Dale

Carelessly, I used the phrase “crowned republic” in the last sentence of my lead essay. I say “careless”, because I can’t recall whether I had the UK or Australia in mind when I wrote it.

This was brought home to me while reading Stephen Davies’s piece, where he draws a careful distinction between constitutional sovereign monarchies and crowned republics. The UK really is a place where powers are exercised by others but reside in the Crown. Every British lawyer knows that prerogative powers were once monarchical powers. That prime ministers and their cabinets now wield them is in many respects an accident of history.



What, then, does that make Australia, a constitutional sovereign monarchy, or a crowned republic? Although [it has unusual institutions and electoral arrangements](#)—two houses of equal power, compulsory registration and voting, a federal structure, no entrenched constitutional rights—its governance is nonetheless recognisably Westminster. The powers its executive wields also have roots in the UK’s royal prerogative.

My instinct is to call Australia a crowned republic, not only because ultimate sovereignty resides in the people, but given the form that sovereignty takes. Ever since Federation in 1901, Australia as a polity has always been more concerned with democracy and majorities than with liberty and rights.

However, that raises further questions. There was a period when Australia, like the UK, was a constitutional sovereign monarchy. Working out when it *stopped* being one is hard. Meanwhile, Carolyn Harris’s and Elena Woodacre’s pieces are a reminder that this is the sort of inquiry one must make for multiple countries, each with their distinctive histories, and that one form isn’t better than the other.

At least in Australia’s case, the shift from constitutional sovereign monarchy to crowned republic didn’t come about through passage of specific legislation (*Statute of Westminster* 1931 and the *Australia Acts* 1986 both being possible candidates) but thanks to an historical event: [the 1975 Constitutional Crisis](#).

Known as “the Dismissal” in Australia, the 1975 Crisis emerged because the country’s constitutional Framers

had built a system whereby the House of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house) are not only elected using different—and equally democratic—voting methods, but also enjoy near-equal power. The Senate cannot initiate money bills, for example, but it can block them. In 1975, when it was controlled by a different political party from that commanding a majority in the lower house, it “blocked supply”, meaning that unless the incumbent prime minister called an election, the government would run out of funds to pay the country’s military and civil service.

The prime minister refused to call an election, with the result that the Queen’s official representative, the Governor-General, sacked him. A caretaker PM was installed, and only *then* was an election called.

In the upshot, Australia’s political establishment had to do two things. First, it had to acknowledge that the problem was of local origin: the UK did not draft Australia’s Constitution. Secondly, Australians had to find a solution themselves, without calling on either the Palace or the UK Parliament.

This happened in stages, first with [a \(successful\) referendum](#) to change the Constitution, and secondly when the country’s major political parties undertook never to use their numbers in the Senate to block essential money bills. Both groups of political combatants recognised they had taken the nation to the brink, and any further attempt to involve the Palace would be deeply improper.

Little wonder, then—when asked in 1999—the sovereign Australian people voted to retain their crowned republic.

supporting long term concerns, balancing the short-term issues that are often the focus of individual election cycles. Davies states that monarchy is “a corrective to a fixation on the short term and immediate and the ignoring of the longer term and permanent” while Dale discusses how the common law system evolved with the development of constitutional monarchy. Woodacre observes that a monarchy “must continue to evolve in line with changes in society” in order to survive. My own essay discusses the evolution from the British Empire to a Commonwealth of equal nations. The philanthropic and advocacy work of individual members of reigning houses in modern constitutional monarchies reflects this historic focus on considering long term political, societal, environmental, and cultural trends over comparatively short-term concerns.



Queen Victoria

ROYALTY, HEALTH, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

by Carolyn Harris

The essays by Elena Woodacre, Helen Dale, Stephen Davies, and myself all discuss the role of monarchical government, as well as individual members of royal families in modern constitutional monarchies, in

The members of reigning families in modern constitutional monarchies often employ their considerable public profiles to raise awareness of issues that will take generations to resolve. Since the eighteenth century, royalty have raised funds for hospitals as well as awareness of physical and mental health conditions, contributing to the development of modern health care systems. For example, Queen Victoria’s jubilees were

occasions for the founding of new nursing orders. The Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses was chartered in the United Kingdom in 1889, two years after Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and continues to the present day as the Queen's Nursing Institute, a charity whose mission is to improve the nursing care of people in their homes in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In Canada, the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 was commemorated with the founding of the Victorian Order of Nurses, one of the first organizations in Canada to provide prenatal education, school health services and co-ordinated home care programs. Like the Queen's Nursing Institute, the VON continues to provide home care in the 21st century. Royal support of these initiatives helped to counter the reservations of members of the medical establishment concerning new ideas and structures for providing health care. Queen Victoria's third daughter Princess Helena (Princess Christian) was a friend of Florence Nightingale and advocated for nursing to become a recognized and respected profession. In times of war, royal women often worked as nurses or hospital volunteers themselves, inspiring others to follow their example. In recent decades, the late Diana, Princess of Wales famously worked to destigmatize HIV/AIDS patients and both her sons, Prince William, Prince of Wales and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex have advocated for greater support for people experiencing mental illness, through such organizations as Heads Together in the United Kingdom.

In the 21st century, the most notable example of royal advocacy for sustained progress addressing long term issues is the involvement of members of royal houses in initiatives supporting environmental conservation and sustainable development. Multiple generations of royal families have built on past initiatives to support the preservation of the natural world and brought together leading experts in environmental science to address this long-term issue that impacts societies around the globe. The late Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was the patron of the World Wildlife Fund while the current King Charles III has advocated for organic farming and sustainable development over the course of his adult life. Prince William, the Prince of Wales, recently visited

Boston for the Earthshot Prize Awards, which is awarded to five winners each year for their contributions to environmentalism. The environment is also an important focus of advocacy and philanthropy for members of other reigning houses in constitutional monarchies around the world. Several members of the Japanese Imperial family have published articles in scientific journals concerning fish and bird species while King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands served as Chairperson of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation prior to succeeding to the throne in 2013. Crown Prince Frederick of Denmark has participated in expeditions, conferences, and events intended to raise awareness of climate change.

The essays in this collection all highlight the role of constitutional monarchies in addressing issues that take generations to solve, far beyond the scope of a single election cycle. The philanthropy and advocacy of individual members of royal houses in the fields of health care and environmentalism demonstrate the role of modern royalty in raising awareness of complex issues that affect the quality of life of people around the world.

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