

## **John Locke's concept of paternal power: The parents' formative prerogative for the children's Social and Political Roles**

Longino Rutagwelera<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Paternal Power is among the key concepts which John Locke used to expound his epistemology and social-political doctrine. While used to refute the Cartesian epistemological innatism the concept also served the purpose of ruling out political innatism which the then British nobility used as a ground to claim a natural and innate right to rule. The concept exposes the formative role that parents have to play over their children, its non-absolute nature and its aim of leading children into maturity rather than being a ground for claiming absolute political control. The concept is viewed in its social-political dimensions in its relationship with the principle of separation of powers, its instrumental role of refuting absolute monarchical rule, its applicability in civic education and formation into mature and responsible freedom. The paper hinges on the argument that social roles are neither natural nor innate, they come with worked and lived experience.

**Keywords:** Paternal power, John Locke, social roles, philosophy

### **Introduction**

This research hinges on John Locke's understanding of paternal power and its social and political implications. My central argument is to establish, basing on John Locke's categorical denial of all forms of *innatism*, that each person's social and political place and role in society is neither natural nor genetic but rather a result from his/her formative environment. Parents have a role to play in the form of paternal power to mould the future social role of their children. This doctrine of Paternal Power had a background of refuting the then claim of the British nobility that it had a naturally innate aptitude and potential to rule. John Locke with this doctrine being inspired by his empirical stand, and being opposed to the said claim, maintained that all that a person is and what he/she

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<sup>1</sup> Archbishop James University College, Songea, Tanzania  
Email: rutagwelera2000@gmail.com

becomes is neither divinely given nor genetically and naturally innate but begins and comes from experience which, among others encompasses formation from parents in the form of paternal power. Just as the parents' role in the form of paternal power has a time limit to be exercised until children reach the age of reason, so also all social and political powers may not be exercised over subjects perpetually as the nobility claimed. The concept therefore, helps explain also the reason of denying political absolutism which was the claim of the nobility.

### **John Locke in brief: Life and background to his socio-political philosophy**

John Locke was born in England on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1632. He studied classical philosophy, medicine and experimental philosophy at The Westminster School and Christ Church – Oxford. He experienced social and political upheavals such as conflicts between the Anglicans, Protestants, and Catholics; political tensions between the monarchies and the parliament etc. He became part of this conflict and thus he lived in exile in Holland since 1683 until The Glorious Revolution of 1688. He died on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1704 (Chappell, 1994: 5-25).

For Locke, human persons were originally in the state of perfect freedom and were equal (Locke, 2005: 72-73). By perfect freedom he negatively means a state of not being under, or depending on the will of another person. In the positive sense, it means the capacity of self-determination in matters of ordering one's actions, disposing one's possessions according to what one thinks fit (Locke, 2005: 72-73). He qualifies this freedom as perfect but not as absolute (Tully, 1994: 19). It is not absolute because it is within the bounds of the laws of nature (Locke, 2005: 72-73) and of one's thinking nature (Locke, 2005: 72-73). This perfect freedom is the freedom for construction and preservation rather than for destruction; it is freedom for charity rather than for subordination (Locke, 2005: 73).

This original state of nature is as well qualified by equality of all human beings. By this equality he means that all human beings are equal in their nature, equally subject to God, equally disposed to use their natural faculties and are disposed to an equal exploitation and use of what nature offers (Ashcraft, 1991: 151). This equality is the ground for mutual love and reciprocation of duty, and foundation of justice and charity (Locke, 2005: 73). Taking God as the source of human equality and laws of nature, he conceives Him as the author of this state of nature and as with power to order it as He wills (Ashcraft, 1991: 221). It is against this background, that God whom he qualifies as the 'Lord and Master' (Locke, 2005: 83-84) bestowed power and responsibility over parents to will for

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their children while they are in their tender age. It is this responsibility of parents over children in their tender age which he conceives as paternal power.

### **Exposition of the concept of paternal power**

#### **Definition of paternal power**

John Locke defines paternal power as that power:

which parents have over their children, to govern them for the children's good, till they come to the use of reason, or a state of knowledge, wherein they may be supposed capable to understand that rule, whether it be the law of nature, or the municipal law of their country, they are to govern themselves (Locke, 2005: 123).

From this definition, we learn that although he qualifies this power as paternal, it is not confined to the father but it pertains to both parents. He justifies its parental aspect as opposed to being confined to the father by making recourse to its natural and divine origin which gives authority to both parents (Locke, 2005: 87). But does it logically follow that obeying the father and the mother entails that the two have the same power over their children? Answering this question, we proceed by arguing that obedience is a concept which necessarily entails a relation of response to some form of power. If children are divinely mandated to obey their father and mother, it follows that the father and the mother have power to which children reciprocate in the form of obedience. It would be logically absurd for child to be obedient to the father and to the mother if the two did not have power as a reality correlative to obedience. With this argument, I justify the necessary coexistence of the two concepts, that is, parental power and children's obedience. My next burden is to investigate the parental power in terms of its nature and origin and to see whether it is necessary or contingent.

#### **Origin and finality of paternal power**

Paternal power originates from God as a dimension of the divine mandate to the human persons to fill the world and subjugate it (Ashcraft, 1991: 164). Its divine origin is made concrete both through revelation in the scriptures in which children are mandated to obey their parents (Locke, 2005: 87) and through the human rational nature in which human beings in general are endowed with the

inclination of self-preservation and preservation of others (Ashcraft, 1991: 15-16).

As exposed above, for John Locke human persons originally were in the state of nature characterized by perfect freedom and equality (Locke, 2005: 72-73). If by freedom he objects subordination of one human person under any other human person, what justifies parental power which by its nature subordinates children under parents? Making recourse to his concept of the original state of nature, he maintains that, originally human beings had perfect freedom being guided by the law of nature through which they maintained order (Locke, 2005: 72-73). When human persons started to transgress the laws of nature, it was when infringing into others' freedom and rights became a reality (Locke, 2005: 74-75). This infringement however, did not abrogate the natural human right to self-preservation (Tully, 1994: 25). Children, in the thought of John Locke, as human beings have a right to self-preservation but due to the tenderness of their age are not capable of carrying it out on their own. It is here that God brings in the role of parents in the form of parental power in order to will for their children and to preserve them through nourishment, education and protection (Locke, 2005: 88). Paternal power therefore is divine in origin and it is necessary due to the tenderness of the children's age (Locke, 2005: 90).

But if parental power is necessitated by the tenderness of the children's age, does it not make parents infringe into children's freedom which is natural to them as human beings? Does the power-obedience relationship not subordinate children under their parents and thus contradict the natural equality among human beings? John Locke, referring to the divine source of human beings, maintains that Adam and Eve as the first human beings were created free and equal but the rest of humanity were created and born to be free and to be equal (Locke, 2005: 88). This is our interpretation in order to clarify the coexistence of natural freedom and subjection under parents. The interpretation also helps make a difference between the freedom of Adam and that of the other human beings. Tuckness (2010: 633) shedding light on the same, maintains that although human beings are born free and rational, they do not have actual ability to exercise them until age allows them. For him, freedom and equality go hand in hand with knowledge of the laws of nature which comes with age (Tarcov, 1999: 73). Adam and Eve who were created adults were equal and free right from the beginning because right from the moment of their creation they knew the laws of nature which guided their lives.

Children, on the other hand, interpreting the thought of John Locke though are born free, their freedom is limited by their tenderness and thus are born to be

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free and to be equal to their parents with age (Locke, 2005: 88). We interpret John Locke's thought as children not being actually free because due to their tender age they do not know the laws of nature which guide human life (Locke, 2005: 88). Without this knowledge, children cannot will for themselves and therefore cannot be deemed free. It is parents who will for children, and it is here that parental power comes into play in order to will for children leading them to freedom. Parental power therefore, is not parents' infringement into children's freedom because the latter are not free, and it is meant not to destroy but to preserve, nourish, educate and to orient children's potentiality towards freedom and equality (Ashcraft, 1991: 15-16).

### **Features of paternal power**

As maintained above, parental power is divine in origin and therefore it is not a human institution. Human persons become aware of it both through divine revelation and through natural light of reason. These two sources from which human persons know paternal power are not mutually exclusive because they both have God as their common author (Locke, 2005: 88). From what I have established above, I make an inference that parental power has both divine and natural aspects. It is divine both in the mode it is revealed through the scriptures (Locke, 2005: 87) and in its origin as a dimension of the divine mandate given to Adam and Eve to fill the world and subjugate it (Tarcov, 1999: 147). It is natural in its other mode of being known through the natural light of reason which comes with age (Locke, 2005: 89).

Both in its divine and natural dimensions, paternal power is both an obligation and a right. It is an obligation in the sense of being a mandate from an authority (Locke, 2005: 88). In the thought of John Locke, this power is an obligation due to its nature of being a mandate from God (Locke, 2005: 88). While it is a mandate of exercise on the side of parents, it is a mandate of obedience on the side of children (Locke, 2005: 93). Parental power is a right in the sense of being ordered either to exercise it or to receive it. Due to their tender age, children have a right of being under the paternal power of their parents who have to will for them in their tender age, to preserve them, to nourish them and educate them (Locke, 2005: 88). While children have a right to parental care in the form of paternal power, parents on the other hand have a parental right to exercise it on their children (Grant, 1991: 59).

But if parents have a right to exercise paternal power on their children, do they have a right to receive it from God? According to John Locke, God whom

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he conceives as the creator of all gave this power to parents as a privilege and as a forum of their parental obligation (Locke, 2005: 90). This privilege is rooted in God's freedom to create and His free determination of how human beings are to start existing (Locke, 2005: 95). His act of creation is free and all that pertains to it is free on His side but a mandate or a privilege on the side of creatures in relation to their creator (Parker, 2004: 139). While He created Adam and Eve as adults with full knowledge of the laws of nature and therefore needing not being under paternal power, He created the rest of humanity as infants needing paternal power to guide them. Just as He created Adam and Eve as adults, He could freely create the rest of humanity as adults. If God creates freely, it logically follows that paternal power as part of His creation is given freely and therefore parents are not to take it as their right before God.

Paternal power having been given freely by God to parents makes it to be limited on the part of parents. By being limited, parental power is not absolute (Locke, 2005: 87). It is not absolute in the sense that parents exercise it in the name of God who created it and who creates children upon whom it is exercised. Since God is the master of all: parents, children and parental power, He gives this power to parents who are to account for it (Horris, 1998: 230). As stewards, parents therefore exercise paternal power within limits set by God to whom they are to render account for it (Locke, 2005: 88). Paternal power is not regal as well in the sense that it is not for lording it over children but rather for preserving, nourishing and educating children leading them to freedom and equality (Locke, 2005: 88). Denying it a regal aspect, John Locke exposes it in the background of opposing absolute monarchy in which the absolute power of the king was claimed to be transmitted to the princes and thus making the latter a prolongation of the absolute power of their father (Parker, 2004: 115).

Another feature of paternal power is that it is temporary and transitory (Locke, 2005: 88). This means, parents are mandated to exercise it over children in their tender age in which they are not capable of willing for themselves as they do not know the dictates of the laws of nature (Locke, 2005: 88). When children reach an age of reason they are left on their own to be as free as their parents (Locke, 2005: 88). But if this power is not absolute and yet temporary and transitory, what factors determine maturity of children? Is it logically tenable that reaching a specific age is a guarantee of knowing the laws of nature? Does it follow that knowing the laws of nature guarantees living according to them?

John Locke does not specify an age at which a child is presumed mature enough to will for himself/herself. He still gives a hint that maturity comes as

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well with education from parents. For him, the combination of the two: age and education leads to maturity. The definition of parental power entails that a child's maturity goes hand in hand with knowledge of the laws of nature. But does this knowledge come with biological growth or growth in education? He resolves this question by citing examples of children who biologically are of age but still incapable of willing for themselves (Locke, 2005: 89). With this therefore, a mere biological growth does not guarantee maturity for one to will for himself/herself. Growth which comes with both biological maturity and educational maturity is what leads one to the state of willing for oneself. While biological maturity comes with a natural course of growth, educational maturity on the other hand presupposes knowledge and ability to transmit it on the part of parents (Locke, 2005: 89) and the ability to assimilate it on the part of children (Locke, 1996: 33).

My question of investigation in relation to what is established above is whether such education and the ability to transmit it are divinely given to parents or they receive it from their parents. If I have previously established that paternal power has a divine origin, does it not follow that education and the ability to transmit it and its component parts are divine in origin? In the light of John Locke I argue that parents are divinely given paternal power and are divinely mandated to exercise it (Locke, 2005: 90). Children as well are divinely mandated to submit to their parents (Locke, 2005: 87). The divine origin of the paternal power and of the filial obedience extends to the ability to transmit it and to the aptitude to assimilate it respectively. This is justified by what John Locke describes of parents as having "suitable inclinations of tenderness and concern" – the qualities which are divinely given to parents for the education of their children (Locke, 2005: 123). It is by such qualities that parents are naturally inclined to be concerned for the wellbeing of their children (Locke, 2005: 89).

Children on the other hand, are naturally endowed with the aptitude to assimilate formation from their parents. Parents in their paternal power are presumed to be knowledgeable as to what and how they are to educate, preserve and nourish their children. Although paternal power is divinely given and its purpose is determined by God, the content of education and the manner of transmitting it to children is left to the free discernment of parents (Parry, 1968: 31). In their state of freedom parents are to determine what is fit for the growth of their children and have to determine the mode of transmitting it. If parents were to be divinely instructed of what and how to educate their children as an exercise of their paternal power, then they would be as immature as their children and they would not be in use of reason (Locke, 2005: 88). Knowledge

of the content and the mode of exercising one's paternal power as dimensions of maturity therefore, come with age rather than being divinely infused or instructed. Just as Adam got neither divine nor human instruction as of what it means to be free and as of the limits of his freedom, so also parents as mature persons receive instruction neither from God nor from a human source as of what and how they are to instruct their children.

But if mature age is a criterion for one to be presumed of being able to use rightly his/her reason, does this not lead humanity into subjectivism and relativism in the sense that each parent educates his/her children the way he/she pleases and according to historical, geographical and cultural factors? To resolve this question, we make recourse to John Locke's doctrine of associating paternal power and his concept of political power (Parry, 1968: 65). As already maintained, for John Locke paternal power is not absolute. Not being absolute, makes paternal power limited and thus needs other types of power to complement it. It is against this background that John Locke's political doctrine of Separation of Powers comes into play. He contends for the split of power into administrative, executive and legislative divisions (Locke, 2005: 114). With this notion of separation of powers, paternal power is only administrative and not legislative nor executive (Locke, 2005: 93-94). With this limitation of paternal power, the role of the state comes into play to set rules and regulations which guide parents in their exercise of paternal power and thus eliminating subjectivism and relativism.

If paternal power were to be absolute and thus encompassing all administrative, executive and legislative aspects, then in the thought of John Locke, parents would transgress into others' freedom and rights and would result into conflicts and insecurity (Epstein, 1984: 129). With the split of power which is the result of voluntarily forming what John Locke calls a commonwealth, (Locke, 2005: 100) parents as mature persons voluntarily consent to entrust their power to the commonwealth which in its legislative and executive powers leads the whole commonwealth to the right end of humanity (Locke, 2005: 100-101). In its legislative and executive powers, the commonwealth sets regulations and executes them for the good of all and therefore eliminates chances for each parent to educate his/her children the way he/she pleases (Parry, 1968: 130).

Being limited to the administrative dimension which encompasses education, nourishment and preservation of children until they come of age, and the age of reason being a criterion for freedom, paternal power is transient and temporary (Locke, 2005: 88). Making a reflection on its transient and temporary nature, the

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question before us is at what exact age a person is presumed mature enough to will for himself/herself and thus be left free? Is this age to be set by parents, by the state or it is naturally fixed? If the age of maturity were naturally fixed, the role of parents to educate their children would be superfluous and there would be uniformity of maturity among people of different cultures and countries, but this is not the case. If it were to be fixed by parents, families would succumb into relativism and subjectivism as the same person could be deemed a child to some people and an adult to others. Basing ourselves on John Locke's understanding of the origin and finality of the commonwealth, we take determination of the age of maturity as one of the prerogatives of the commonwealth which aims at the good of all citizens (Locke, 2005: 90).

### **Social implications of paternal power**

Basing on the concept of paternal power in its meaning, its features, its source and its relation with the whole spectrum of John Locke's philosophical thoughts, I am now in a position to give a critical analysis of its implications and impact in the social life both in the time John Locke and in our time. I will focus my critique on its relationship with maternal power and filial duty.

### **Paternal power vis-à-vis maternal power**

As John Locke poses the question, does the term 'paternal' in reference to paternal power exclude the mother in the responsibility of parents over children? For him, however, paternal power is equivalent to parental power (Locke, 2005: 123-124). The word 'paternal' in its Greek and Latin roots, literally means 'father'. But in its Latin usage, it was much more of the social sense meaning a parent, head of a household rather than a mere biological sense of a male parent (Andre, 1979: 487). John Locke, therefore, takes 'paternal' to mean 'parental' rather than confining it to the father at the exclusion of the mother (Locke, 2005: 87). But what was an interest of John Locke to go into the etymological analysis of the word 'paternal'? Was gender and parental inequality an alarming issue at his time to an extent of calling for a need of clarifying the term as embracing both the father and mother?

Although gender and parental inequality were not issues calling for special attention, John Locke's critical analysis of the term 'paternal' is in the background of what prompted him to write the Two Treatises of Government in the year 1689. In 1680, there was a posthumous publication of Sir Robert

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Filmer's work entitled *Patriarcha* in which he advocated absolute monarchy and people's unconditional subjection defending the kings' divine right to rule. In this book, Sir Robert Filmer maintained that a family under the authority of a father is divinely instituted and that it is the model of all authentic governments. For him, the authority to head the family is given by God exclusively to the father just as it was given to Adam. This authority is absolute over property and over people's life and death. From Adam this power was inherited by Noah and finally by his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth. From these patriarchs kings inherited the absolute power to exercise it over their families, their subjects and over all property.

In a negative response to Sir Robert Filmer, John Locke objects the monopoly of the father over the family and children. John Locke's motive for this contention is much more to object the claimed absolute monarchical power rather than to promote gender equality in the family. His contention that the mother in the family has a role to play (Locke, 2005: 87) creates bases for the promotion of his political doctrine of division of powers rather than to promote gender equality. He justifies his contention of 'paternal power' being synonymous to 'parental power' by making recourse to the mandate given to children to obey parents rather than obeying fathers (Locke, 2005: 87). He also equates the term 'paternal' to 'parental' in order to rule out Sir Robert Filmer's claim of equating paternal power with regal power which is absolute and is to be transmitted from the monarch to his descendants (Locke, 2005: 7-8).

But if John Locke takes paternal power as synonymous to parental power, it presupposes children. Does this power pertain to human persons in as much as they are human persons or rather in as much as they are parents? If it pertains to them in as much as they are human persons, are we not justified to affirm that each human person has it even if he/she has no children? But if being a parent is a relational concept can one be a parent without children? If on the other hand, parents have paternal power in as much as they are parents, is it tenable that those without children do not have it?

To resolve the questions posed above, I make recourse to what John Locke maintains as for the meaning, the origin and finality of paternal power. This power is that ability of forming, educating and orienting children to the understanding of the laws of nature and moral principles (Locke, 2005: 123-124). It has a divine origin and its finality is to lead children towards maturity and thus rendering them have a right use of reason, to be free and responsible. When children pass from the age of childhood to maturity they become

responsible for themselves and capable to educate and orient their children as they were treated by their parents.

Paternal power is one dimension of human maturity and therefore come with age and experience rather than with the fact of begetting children (Locke, 2005: 65). I therefore affirm that human persons get paternal power in as much as they reach the age of right use of reason. Being a dimension of human maturity every mature human person has it whether he/she has children or not. The relational aspect of parental power as an endowment of every mature human person in the context of John Locke's socio-political philosophy, rather than being for the necessity of having children, contributes to his rejection of the monarchical absolutism. In his thought, if all mature human persons are endowed with paternal power, there are no grounds of claiming it as an exclusive prerogative of monarchs and their descendants. Paternal power as the ability of parents to guide children to maturity leads us to a critical analysis of the response from children in the form of filial obedience.

### **Paternal power vis-à-vis filial obedience**

As established already, paternal power has a relational dimension of the ability to guide rather than actual having of children. When this power is exercised, it coincides with its relational counterpart of obedience from children. John Locke describes children's response to paternal power as filial obedience and duty entailing respect, gratitude and assistance (Locke, 2005: 90-91). But if paternal power is not absolute as we have exposed, does this give us a firm ground to affirm that filial obedience does not entail absolute submission to parents? If the answer is in the affirmative, there must be another source of formative power which provides for what parents are not entitled to. If the answer is in the negative, then there are aspects of children's life in which the role of parents is superfluous. Attempting to resolve this question, I make an appeal to John Locke's work in which he describes paternal power saying:

But this is very far from giving parents a power of command over their children, or an authority to make laws and dispose as they please of their lives or liberties. It is one thing to owe honour, respect, gratitude and assistance; another to require an absolute obedience and submission (Locke, 2005: 91).

Making reference to this quotation, paternal power does not entail absolute obedience and submission from children. Limitations inherent to the nature of its

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exercise are the same limitations that deny it prerogatives of receiving obedience in matters it cannot dispose. John Locke specifies areas of powers excluded from parental power. These are legislative power and executive power, (Locke, 2005: 92) which according to him, pertain to the civil authorities (Parry, 1969: 124). They pertain to the civil society as a commonwealth, that is, a sovereign society entrusted with power for the good of all (Locke, 2005: 100-101). If such powers were to be in the hands of parents, the role of the civil society would be undermined and its role of keeping order for the good of all would be superfluous as each parent in his/her household would exercise all powers at the expense of others' rights.

If the civil society has a role to play on the growth of children while complementing paternal power, is Sir Robert Filmer not justified to take filial obedience as the same as subjects' obedience and submission to the monarch? (Locke, 2005: 7-8). According to John Locke, paternal power is not the same as monarchical power and therefore subjects' allegiance to the monarch is not the same as children's obedience to parents. He justifies this by maintaining that while paternal power and its corresponding filial obedience are divine in origin; monarchical power and subjects' allegiance to it are divine in origin (Locke, 2005: 78). While parents are divinely endowed with the ability to guide their children to reach discernment and maturity, and children are divinely mandated to obey their parents, (Locke, 2005: 89-90) the monarchy on the other hand is purely a human institution rooted in the consent and contract of people (Tully, 1993: 37).

As paternal power is divinely instituted, its relationship with filial obedience has a divine origin and carries with it accountability before God (Locke, 2005: 88). The relationship between monarchical power and subjects' allegiance on the other hand, as it is a human institution directly bears accountability to the society and indirectly and in isolated cases to God. For instance, for children who in their tender age happen to lose their parents, the society chips in to give them guardians to play a paternal role with paternal accountability (Locke, 2005: 89). This however provokes another question: if orphans in their tender age are given guardians to guide them, are mature people without children to be given children from whom they may get filial assistance?

For John Locke, both paternal power and filial obedience are for the good of children and not for that of parents (Locke, 2005: 57). Due to their tender age, children necessarily need paternal guidance. Obedience from children in their tender age as a positive response to paternal duty makes paternal power realize its finality of leading children to maturity. Parents therefore, do not achieve

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anything for themselves through exercising paternal power but rather, children achieve maturity through obedience to their parents' paternal power. But still as John Locke maintains, while paternal power is temporary (Locke, 2005: 88-89), filial obedience is perpetual (Locke, 2005: 91). This means, while parents exercise paternal power when their children are below the age of reason, children on the other hand are to obey their parents both in their tender age and in their mature age (Locke, 2005: 91). Here, we differentiate tender age filial obedience from mature age filial obedience. While the former is for guidance towards discernment and maturity, the latter is the concretization of maturity in the form of gratitude (Locke, 2005: 92). While tender age filial obedience is a right of parents in order to realize their parental power, mature age filial obedience is a right of parents primarily not for their need but for gratitude (Locke, 2005: 92). An aspect of assistance and support which parents may get from their mature sons/daughters is not necessarily filial nor is it necessarily obediential. This gives me a basis to make a conclusion that while orphans need guardians to guide them to maturity, mature persons without children do not necessarily need a supplement of adopted children. The social implications of the concept of paternal power as exposed above bring us to the political implications of the same as explicated in the following section.

### **Political implications of paternal power**

As John Locke developed the concept of paternal power as a part of his philosophical thought in general, it bears some political implications. In the following subsection, I will carry out a critical analysis of paternal power as opposed to monarchical power and its relation with the concept of freedom and finally, the way it implies separation of powers.

### **Paternal power vis-à-vis monarchical power**

Being an opponent of absolute monarchy, John Locke advances his socio-political philosophy in response to Sir Robert Filmer whose socio-political thought advocated absolute monarchy (Wootton, 2002: 92). While he agrees with Sir Robert Filmer that paternal power has a divine origin (Locke, 2005: 90), he radically differs from him by denying conceiving monarchical power as an extension of paternal power (Locke, 2005: 93). For John Locke, paternal power is limited as it is only administrative and temporary in the sense of guiding and educating children only in their tender age. Since this power is meant for the

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education and for guiding children before they reach the age of reason, there cannot be a justification of extending it to adults who have full use of reason. Still, if in creation God gave limited power to the human person, there are no grounds for the same human person to claim having it absolutely. If paternal power were to be continued in the form of monarchical power, then every parent would have a right to be a monarch. Hence, paternal power is not political power (Ashcraft, 1991: 34) and absolute monarchy is absurd. Still, if monarchical power was to be traced back to Adam as its proponents claimed, still every human person as a descendant of Adam would have a right to be a monarch.

If all human beings were naturally not free, needing an absolute monarch to rule them as Sir Robert Filmer maintained, then even the monarch would need another monarch over him, hence the absurdity of absolutism in monarchical politics. Conceiving paternal power as limited in application only to children and as a duty for every parent, John Locke waters down the claim of the princes' and princesses' natural right to rule (Locke: 2005: 78). Advocating education and formation as integral dimensions of paternal power, John Locke takes it to be a parental obligation of whoever is a parent: be it a monarch or a subject. Being a parent therefore, a monarch is to educate and guide his own children like any other parent. John Locke bases this contention on his epistemological doctrine that all human beings are born with plane minds (Locke, 1996: 33). This doctrine rules out the claim that princes/princesses are born with infused qualities to rule, and it proves absurd giving a person responsibility over something he/she does not know.

John Locke's contention that paternal power is divine in origin and that monarchical power is human in origin provokes a question. In his thought, he takes as the prerogative of the civil society vested with political power which is human in origin to determine and direct some aspects of paternal power which is divine in origin. How does he justify what is human to direct and control what is divine? This question leads us to a critical analysis of the split or Separation of Powers as exposed in the following section.

### **Paternal power and the separation of powers**

By the separation of powers, John Locke means entrusting different competencies to different persons or to organs with an aim of maintaining a just pursuit of the finality of a commonwealth, that is the preservation of property (Tully, 1993: 36). Keeping the human persons in the state of nature, each with a right to self-preservation and to execute the laws of nature would result into

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anarchy (Locke, 2005: 75-76). It is this situation which necessitates formation of a civil society through a consent which results into separation of powers which each human person had in the state of nature. In the separation of powers, legislative and executive powers are entrusted into the hands of the civil authority for the good of the whole commonwealth (Locke, 2005: 78).

By his theory of the origin and finality of society and by his concept of consent, John Locke justifies the role of civil power which is human by origin, in some aspects to control parental power which is divine by origin. Civil society and its respective power are a result of the consent given by people, and thus entrusting some of their natural powers to the civil authority for the preservation of what John Locke collectively calls property (Locke, 2005: 108-109). Civil authority which is established through human consent is meant to establish law and to execute it for the good of all, hence it is for the legislative and executive powers which supplement paternal administrative power (Locke, 2005: 109-110).

As an answer to our question, civil authorities which are human by origin, by the consent of people for their own good and for the good of the whole commonwealth, are given power to control paternal power which is divine by origin. We deem this as not contrary to the will of God because a voluntary consent of entrusting their rights to the hands of civil authorities contributes to the proof of human wisdom of promoting and maintaining order which makes self-preservation realizable.

But if John Locke advocates the legitimacy of power: be it paternal or civil, how does he consistently maintain his philosophical tenet that every human person is free while power is necessarily directed to some people as its subject? My interest in this question is to investigate as to how parents are naturally invested with paternal power while *ipso facto* not infringing into the freedom of their children. This is the central point of discussion in the following section.

### **Paternal power and the concept of freedom**

John Locke expounds his concept of freedom in relation to his opposition to the absolute monarchy (Tarcov, 1999: 9-10). Sir Robert Filmer who advocated the absolute monarchy claimed that human persons by their nature are not free (Locke, 2005: 7-8). It is against this background that John Locke develops his concept of freedom both in its negative and positive dimensions, while making a difference between mature human persons and children rather than taking human persons in general. For him, freedom in the negative sense means the

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absence of constraint and violence from others (Locke, 2005: 88). In the positive sense, he defines it as: “liberty to dispose, and order as he lists, his person, actions, possessions, and his whole property, within the allowance of those laws under which he is” (Locke, 2005: 88).

Both in its positive and negative senses, John Locke understands freedom to be within the bounds of the laws of nature. It is against this background that John Locke conceives human freedom as not absolute. In this sense therefore, transgressing the laws of nature is not only infringing into others’ freedom but also enslavement of the self under the pretext of being free (Locke, 2005: 88). For John Locke, freedom both in its positive and negative dimensions necessarily requires maturity which goes hand in hand with knowledge of the laws of nature (Tarcov, 1999: 73). It is against this background he makes a difference between Adam and Eve on one hand and the rest of humanity on the other maintaining that Adam and Eve, created as adults, were created free as they knew the laws of nature (Locke, 2005: 88). The rest of human beings are born as infants, ignorant of the laws of nature and therefore not as free as Adam and Eve. Interpreting his concept of being born free, the actuality of human freedom does not come with birth as such but comes with age and maturity (Locke, 2005: 88).

Our interpretation that human beings are born to be free implies the aspect of growth into, and guidance towards freedom. This guidance towards maturity which entails freedom, in the thought of John Locke is given by a person who is mature and thus who knows what it entails to be mature. This is the role played by parents in the form of paternal power. Paternal power therefore, does not infringe into children’s freedom because they do not have actual ability to exercise it. It rather nurtures and leads children to actual freedom through educating them on the laws of nature, the knowledge of which makes them actually and actively free.

If he takes freedom as necessarily associated with knowledge of the laws of nature, does the same contention rule out a mere biological maturity to be criterion of freedom? And if freedom goes with responsibility, what are the grounds of holding responsible a person who is biologically of age but ignorant of the laws of nature? For John Locke, a mere biological attainment of the age of reason is not enough for one to know the laws of nature (Locke, 1996: 14). The mere biological attainment of the age of reason may be due to the natural incapacity (Locke, 2005: 89) or lack of guidance by paternal power (Locke, 2005: 89). As for the first case, a human person who biologically reaches the age of reason, but naturally incapacitated to know the laws of nature, remains under

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the paternal care of parents (Locke, 2005: 89). Since the concept of freedom and what it entails do not apply to such a person, his/her parents in the capacity of their paternal power remain responsible for his/her actions (Locke, 2005: 89).

As for the second case, if children do not have parents to guide them, the civil authority finds guardians for them (Locke, 2005: 89). But if the civil society does not find guardians for such orphans, are they not able to learn the laws of nature by themselves and apply them without depending on paternal guidance? Making recourse to John Locke's epistemology, the laws of nature are neither innate (Locke, 1996: 10) nor self-evident (Locke, 1996: 18). They are not innate in the sense that they are not imprinted on the human mind at the moment of creation, and they are not self-evident in the sense that they are known through being exposed (Locke, 1996: 18). Denying the Cartesian *innatism*, human beings are not born with imprinted ideas and principles. They get them by experience. By experience he does not mean a mere living up to the age of reason but being exposed to truth by a person who knows it. In relation to this research, knowledge of the laws of nature which is necessary for human persons to be deemed mature comes with experience in the sense of those laws being exposed by other persons who know them (Tarcov, 1999: 73). With this therefore, he proves that for children to know the laws of nature paternal power is necessary.

### **Evaluation**

Paternal power is one of the key concepts in John Locke's socio-political and moral philosophy. It is also related with his epistemology in which it plays an important role of guiding children to knowledge of the laws of nature. In this final section, I evaluate it in its strong and weak areas and thus highlight areas that call for further research together with its rightful place and relevance in the contemporary world.

### **Appraisal of John Locke's concept of paternal power**

John Locke's concept of paternal power is subject to appraisal in what it is and its application to, and implication in the socio-political and moral dimensions of the human existence. I deem it strong and recommendable as he conceives it as naturally indispensable for children's responsible maturity. As he takes it a necessary factor for guiding and orienting children, it is necessary not only for children who are guided through it but also good for the society at large.

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Authentic freedom, justice and order in societies which contribute to responsible citizenship are possible only if citizens are well guided and formed from their infancy – a formation which is done through paternal power. His criteria of maturity and its implications make part of the strong areas of his philosophy. He contends for the ability to use the faculty of reason as one of the criteria for maturity, freedom and responsibility. With this he rules out the Cartesian *innatism* and a mere biological maturity as criteria of knowing the laws of nature which guide human life. We take this contention as strong and recommendable in his philosophy in the sense that maturity and its implications of freedom and responsibility must be backed by a right use of reason rather than being based on a mere attainment of a specific age.

Taking God as the creator and master of all is another area of strength in his philosophy. He expounds his concept of paternal power by referring it to Holy Scriptures as its source. Although his empirical approach to reality limits his understanding of God and His rightful role, we give him a credit of not ruling Him out and of not reducing all existence to a natural mechanism. Another strong feature of the concept of paternal power is to associate guidance with power. In this way of thinking, while guiding children, the parents' role of guiding children is not subject to voluntary acceptance or refusal, but rather, it is a mandate. Parental guidance therefore, realizes its finality if it is backed by power. We deem it a strong area of advocating paternal power as opposed to Cartesian *innatism*. Putting it in its rightful context, all children, of royal and common origin alike, need paternal guidance to maturity rather than presuming the former to have innate qualities even of ruling others.

Despite its strength, paternal power is not without setbacks. His empirical approach to reality in general and to the human person in particular, makes him use interchangeably what is divine and what is natural (Grant, 1991: 21). Although he takes God to be the author and master of nature (Locke, 2005: 72-73), he does not make a difference between what is natural and what is supernatural. It is against this background that though he conceives paternal power as divine in origin, he takes it to serve natural purposes of leading children to know the laws of nature. His empirical approach leads him to phenomenalism and thus deprives reality its metaphysical foundation.

As another weakness, he does not specify the age of reason at which the application of paternal power has to cease. Leaving this age unspecified creates a possibility of subjectivism and relativism among civil authorities of different societies in which one society may claim its citizens to have reached maturity while the same persons deemed children by other societies. If he had to specify

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it, still it would have been difficult to have an international and intercultural viability as formation and education of children in different societies are not the same for they depend on cultures, socio-political settings and historical backgrounds.

I question John Locke's consistency as he maintains that paternal power is temporary but its corresponding filial obedience is permanent (Locke, 2005: 88). In his empirical approach to reality, he takes the parent – child relation to be guided by the laws of nature in the sense that it changes with age. With this approach, he denies this relationship a permanent parental sentiment which transcends age barriers. He conceives filial obedience in adulthood as not filial subjection to parents but as a form of gratitude and assistance to parents. I question this understanding as to whether there can be obedience of whatever form without its corresponding power. The root of this inconsistency is his narrow concept of paternal power as confined to coercive guidance rather than taking it as extended to moral authority. He would be more consistent if he had maintained that after the age of reason, as filial obedience changes to filial duty of gratitude, so also paternal power cease to be coercive power of guidance and permanently continues to be paternal moral power of respect, knowledge, wisdom and exemplarity. If John Locke were to extend the concept of paternal power to retain moral authority to sons and daughters in their adulthood, then he would have eliminated a moral vacuum which he creates by conceiving adults as mature enough of not needing moral guidance. John Locke's concept of paternal power has bearing and relevance in the contemporary world. Some philosophical questions it provokes call for further research in the contemporary world and some of its implications are relevant and applicable to various situations of our time as exposed in the following section.

### **Relevance of John Locke's paternal power in the contemporary world**

I deem it viable and valid that parents should play a formative role to their children leading them to free and responsible maturity. In the contemporary world in which the concept of freedom is blurred by relativism, the role of paternal power becomes more relevant in order to form children as regards the meaning and implications of freedom. In the contemporary world, there still exists the fluidity of the exact age of maturity. It remains difficult to determine whether biological adulthood based on age necessarily coincides with social and political maturity which imply one's responsible and rightful place in his/her society. The question before us is whether maturity should be based on the

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natural biological course or on experience and paternal formation. Today, according to various countries and institutions late teenage or early twenties is deemed the age of maturity at which a person is deemed competent for a variety of eligibilities such as marriage, employment, legal prosecution, smoking, drinking of alcohol, driving, active voting in politics etc. (Jacobs, 1989: 174; Maisel, 2004: 79; Stark, 2005: 24). It is here that we recommend further philosophical investigation as to what criteria are to determine maturity.

At the time of John Locke, Sir Robert Filmer had taken an extreme of maintaining that by nature human persons are not free (Parker, 2004: 90). From the time of enlightenment to the contemporary world there have been some theories for another extreme of absolute human freedom (Wright, 2002: 33). In the light of John Locke, we recommend as relevant in the contemporary world that freedom has limits (Locke, 2005: 87). People therefore, are not free to do what they want to do, but are free to do what is according to reason within the bounds of the laws of nature (Parker, 2004: 70). Relating freedom with the role of paternal power, John Locke's concept of freedom is interpreted as coming with age and formation. In this sense children are not born free as such, but rather, are born to be free in the sense that they are to be guided to be free (Parker, 2004: 139). Basing on this contention, if paternal power is essentially for the formative guidance of children, is it justifiable to involve children in activities which are currently deemed dimensions of freedom such as strikes and demonstrations?

### **Conclusion**

For John Locke, human beings are not born free, but are born to be free. The paternal power plays an instrumental role in nurturing the freedom potential, preparing children in their tender age to be responsible free citizens. With an empirical stance, people are what they are not by nature but rather by the formative experience they pass through. Social places and roles that citizens vie for should be experience-inspired and should be on experience-merit which partly come with formative experience. John Locke's concept of paternal power gives parents a parental right and duty to orient future of parents. It also gives children a filial right and duty to docilely be receptive to formation.

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