

Olanipekun, Victor Olusola

Between divine right monarchy and natural freedom of mankind

Studia philosophica. 2022, vol. 69, iss. 2, pp. 27-44

ISSN 1803-7445 (print); ISSN 2336-453X (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/SPH2022-2-3>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.77293>

License: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Access Date: 29. 11. 2024

Version: 20230202

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

Between Divine Right Monarchy and Natural Freedom of Mankind

Mezi monarchií založenou na božím právu a přirozenou svobodou lidstva

Victor Olusola Olanipekun

Abstract

The paper examines Robert Filmer's arguments in defence of the divine right of kings in *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings*. Filmer argues that human beings are not born free by nature and, as a result, are expected to obey the kings/monarchs absolutely without questioning, due to the arbitrary power and the divine right bestowed upon the kings. This position defended by Filmer is antithetical to the notion of natural freedom of mankind defended by John Locke and other social contract theorists. Contrary to Filmer's view, this paper suggests that Filmer exaggerated the power of kings. In this paper, I wish to critically examine Filmer's arguments with which he supported his claim. The paper argues against Filmer's divine right monarchy for the following reasons: (i) it lacks rational justification, (ii) it was founded on misinterpretation of the scriptures, and (iii) it fails to address the atheists' question. In the final analysis, the paper concludes with the argument that the question of mutual exclusivity of the concepts in the discussion rests upon manifest misinterpretations of divine right and the natural freedom of mankind.

Keywords

Divine Right – Monarchy – *Patriarcha* – Natural Freedom – Democracy

Abstrakt

Článek se zabývá argumenty Roberta Filmera na obranu božského práva králů v knize *Patriarcha aneb Přirozená moc králů*. Filmer tvrdí, že lidé se nerodí přirozeně svobodní, a proto se

od nich očekává, že budou krále poslouchat bez jakýchkoli výhrad z toho důvodu, že králům byly propůjčeny moc a božské právo. Tento Filmerem obhajovaný postoj je v rozporu s pojetím přirozené svobody člověka, kterou hájil John Locke a další teoretici společenské smlouvy. Tento článek naznačuje, že Filmer moc králů přeceňuje. V článku chci kriticky prozkoumat Filmerovy argumenty, jimiž své tvrzení podporoval. Příspěvek polemizuje s Filmerovou tezí o božském právu monarchie z následujících důvodů: (i) teze postrádá racionální zdůvodnění, (ii) byla založena na nesprávném výkladu Písma a (iii) neřeší otázku ateistů. V závěru článek předkládá argument, že otázka vzájemné vylučnosti diskutovaných pojmů spočívá na zjevně nesprávné interpretaci božského práva a přirozené svobody člověka.

Klíčová slova

Božské právo – monarchie – *Patriarcha* – přirozená svoboda – demokracie

Introduction

Sir Robert Filmer is a distinguished and important figure in the history of political philosophy in the English revolution. Filmer has made significant contributions to core issues in the history of political thought in his *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings*. Essentially, it will not be inappropriate to begin a paper of this nature by considering first the quotations below in order to have a glimpse of the controversy from the start:

X:

That there is no form of government, but monarchy only. That there is no monarchy, but paternal. That there is no paternal monarchy, but absolute, or arbitrary. That there is no such thing as an aristocracy or democracy. That there is no such form of government as a tyranny. That the people are not born free by nature.¹

Y:

Mankind is naturally endowed and born with freedom from all subjection, and at liberty to choose what form of government it please, and that the power which anyone man has over others was at the first by human right bestowed according to the discretion of the multitude.²

1 FILMER, R. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings...*, p. 25.

2 *Ibidem*, p. 1.

X represents Robert Filmer's claim on divine right monarchy. Meanwhile, Y represents the view of the defenders of natural freedom as stated by Filmer. Arising from the two quotations above, it is evident that the issues of "divine right"³ and "natural freedom"⁴ are two controversial issues in social and political philosophy. One essential question that forms the focus of this paper is this: Are the two concepts mutually exclusive? Scholars provided controversial responses to the above question. One popular school of thought defended by scholars is that the two concepts are mutually exclusive. The reason is that if you accept one, you have to reject the other. However, it is our view in this paper that the two concepts need not be antithetical. We shall return to this for details in the last section of the paper.

Primarily, the paper undertakes a critical assessment of Filmer's response to the claims of the social contract theorists or the defenders of natural freedom of mankind. The paper is divided into three main sections. First, I will briefly discuss the question of natural freedom of mankind. The second task of this paper is to present a synoptic view of Filmer's claim and arguments in defence of divine right monarchy. Thirdly, I will consider several interpretations and critiques of Filmer's view, showing through the literatures, how and why Filmer's view is not error free.

Understanding the Question of Natural Rights and Freedom of Mankind

What are rights to begin with? Generally speaking, rights are entitlement.⁵ For Robert Audi, rights are defined as advantageous positions conferred on some possessor by law, morals, rules, or other norms.⁶ While divine right is an endowed entitlement conferred on people by God or divine being,⁷ natural rights are always conceived as those rights that are grounded in human

3 Divine right is a political and religious doctrine or concept that attributes political legitimacy to kings or monarchs. It is the view that kings are endowed with absolute rights by God, and therefore, not subject to any earthly authority.

4 In this paper, natural freedom will be used interchangeably with natural rights.

5 YEZZI, R. *Medical Ethics...*, p. 24.

6 AUDI, R. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy...*, p. 796.

7 FIGGIS, J. N. *The Divine Right of Kings...*, p. 14.

nature.⁸ In other words, natural rights are entitlements endowed essentially by the reason of being human. It is also believed that natural law confers natural rights or freedom. It should be noted that there is no consensus as to what natural rights are. In *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Philosophy*, Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, declared that “there are no such rights as natural rights, and belief in them is one with belief in witches and in unicorns”.⁹ Does that mean natural rights do not really exist as claimed by MacIntyre? The answer to this question is debatable and this is actually not our focus in this paper.

In *Are There Natural Rights?* H. L. A. Hart, argues that “if there are any moral rights at all, it follows that there is at least one natural right, the equal right of all men to be free.”¹⁰ Taking a cue from Hart’s definition, natural rights, moral rights and freedom of mankind are interconnected. Does that mean natural rights and moral rights are the same with equal right to be free? Hart’s view suggests so. But are human beings really born free? The social contract theorists as well as the liberals supply a positive answer to this question. J. J. Rousseau for instance, in *The Social Contract*, pointed out: “Man is born free, and yet we see him everywhere in chains.”¹¹ This quotation suggests that Rousseau acknowledges the natural freedom of mankind. However, it is not out of place to argue that part of what Rousseau envisioned as chain or unfreedom is the idea of divine right monarchy. Why do I think so? The reason is simply because human freedom is not guaranteed under an absolute monarchy like the type defended by Filmer. Instead, people will be made to live in accordance with the will and dictates of the monarchs. Also, in a broader way, Richard Tuck argues:

Mankind is naturally endowed and born with freedom from all subjection, and at liberty to choose what form of government it please.¹²

The above quotation is also corroborated by art. 2(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which contains elements of naturalness in it. The Universal Declaration states:

8 AUDI, R. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy...*, p. 796.

9 MACINTYRE, A. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory...*, p. 69.

10 HART, H. L. A. *Are There Any Natural Rights...*, p. 175.

11 ROUSSEAU, J. J. *The Social Contract...*, p. 5.

12 TUCK, R. *A New Date for Filmer’s Patriarcha...*, p. 183.

Everyone is entitled to all the *rights and freedoms* set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.¹³

Now, the above section is relevant to this paper because the issue of the divine right or the natural freedom of mankind must be established first for us to be able to understand Filmer's arguments in defence of divine right. With this understanding, will a defender of the divine right theory accept that human beings are naturally endowed and born with freedom from all subjection? We now turn to the next section to consider Filmer's account of divine right monarchy for a possible answer to this question.

Filmer's Arguments in Defence of Divine Right Monarchy Considered

Filmer advanced three important arguments in defence of divine right monarchy because, for him, society was not based on agreement between individuals or, indeed, on consciously thought-out relationship at all. The consent of an individual to live in any society was simply irrelevant.¹⁴ The arguments are the argument about the problem of natural freedom of mankind, the argument from divine arrangement and the paternal and royal power argument.

The Problem of Natural Freedom of Mankind

Filmer started by considering what he regarded as the foundational or fundamental threat/problem to the question of the divine right of kings or monarchs. This problem is what he described as "the problem of natural freedom of mankind"¹⁵, a view defended by the social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and J. J. Rousseau. The argument is that

13 United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 1948.

14 LASLETT, P. Introduction..., p. 13.

15 The question of natural freedom of mankind is the idea that men are born free and that all governments are product of people's consent.

the problem of natural freedom of mankind serves as the major threat to the question of divine right monarchy. However, Filmer presented a sharp refutation to the above position with the following reasons:

First, the desire of liberty was the cause of fall of (man) Adam. (Thus, it is wrong to desire liberty.¹⁶)

Second, desiring liberty contradicts the doctrine and history of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁷

Third, it contradicts the ancient monarchical practice.¹⁸

Fourth, it contradicts the principle of divine and natural laws.¹⁹

Reinforcing the above point, Filmer noted that over reliance on the notion of natural freedom prompted the defenders of such view to build what he called “perilous conclusion”. Perilous conclusion is simply the view that “the people or multitude have power to punish or deprive the Prince if he transgresses the laws of the kingdom”.²⁰ This conclusion is an attempt to make the kings to be accountable for their deeds. This view was defended by Jean Calvin and his followers. The devastating effect of the view is that even those who earlier believed in the right of kings got their mind changed upon contacting the works of those who defended the idea of natural freedom of mankind. Another implication of this is that people are made to believe that they also have the liberty to choose the form of government that pleases them.

Cardinal Robert Bellarmine was one of the earliest scholars and theologians who defended the notion that power resides with the people due to his belief in the question of natural freedom. Bellarmine argues that:

Secular or civil power is instituted by men; it is in the people unless they bestow it on a Prince. This power is immediately in the whole multitude, as in the subject of it; for this power is by the Divine law, but the Divine law has given this power to no particular man to bear rule over the rest. Power is given by the multitude [...].

16 See Genesis Chapter 3.

17 FILMER, R. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings...*, p. 2.

18 *Ibidem*.

19 *Ibidem*.

20 *Ibidem*.

It depends upon the consent of the multitude to ordain over themselves a King, or consul, or other magistrate; and if there be a lawful cause, the multitude may change the kingdom into an aristocracy or democracy.²¹

In Filmer's view, the above quotation is a summary of Bellarmine's defence of the freedom and natural liberty of the subject. Bellarmine's point is so clear and germane. Contrary to Filmer's claim, democracy in Bellarmine's view can be given a divine backing. The reason is that God created all men and vested the secular or civil power in them. Thus, the people have all the right to bestow the rights to rule on whoever they wish. But does Bellarmine's position constitute a serious threat to Filmer's view? It may not really be so because the focus of the arguments of the two scholars is not the same. While the focus of Filmer's argument is on monarchical system of government, Bellarmine's focus is on democracy but not in the modern sense as we know it today. This is a discussion for another day. Let us consider more of Filmer's criticisms against the view of the advocates of natural freedom of mankind.

Argument from Divine Arrangement

Bellarmino argues in defence of natural liberty of the people thus:

It is evident in Scriptures that God has given or ordained power; but God has given it to no particular man, because by nature all men are equal; therefore, he has given power to the people or multitude.²²

Filmer refuted Bellarmine's view with what could be described as an argument from divine arrangement:

I do not see how the children of Adam, or of any other man, can be free from subjection to their parents. And this subordination of children is the fountain of all royal authority, by the ordination of God himself. Thus, civil power, not only

21 *Ibidem.*

22 *Ibidem*, p. 3.

in general is by Divine institution, but even the assigning of it specifically to the eldest parent.²³

The reason why Filmer argues as seen above is because he believed that kings have absolute power and control over their subjects just as first parent (Adam) was endowed with absolute power and control over his children. Filmer's argument that Kings possess supreme power finds support in the word of King James of England. For King James,

The State of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth: For Kings are not only Gods Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon Gods throne, but even by God himself they are called Gods.²⁴

King James argues this way in order to establish the relevance of the monarchs in the scheme of things. One could consider this to be a fraud, selfish conclusion and misinterpretation of the scripture. This truth is so clear in Psalms 82, verse 6, which says: "ye are gods and all of you are the Children of the Most-High."²⁵ King James actually misinterpreted this verse because God in fact called all His children gods and not the kings alone. Unless James wants to say that only kings are children of God and others are not.²⁶

Paternal and Royal Power Argument

This argument is quite similar to the one above. Filmer's view on this argument is that the relationship between the kings and their subject is analogous to that of a father and his children. According to Filmer, if we compare the natural duties of a Father with those of a King, we find them to be all one, with no difference at all except in their latitude or extent. As the Father over one family, so the King, as Father over many families.²⁷

23 *Ibidem*, p. 4.

24 JAMES I. A Speech to the Lords and Commons..., p. 529.

25 See *The Holy Bible*. Psalms 82, verse 6.

26 ZAGORIN, P. *A History of Political Thought in The English Revolution...*, p. 204.

27 FILMER, R. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings...*, p. 4.

Just like Cardinal Bellarmine, Hugo Grotius also defended the view that power resides with people in his book titled *De Jure Belli et Pacis*. Grotius' dangerous conclusion could be summarised with these quotations: "The people may choose what form of government they please, and their will is the rule of right."²⁸ Is the above view by Grotius a direct refutation of Filmer's divine right monarchy? I do not think so because going by Grotius' view that people have the rights to choose their preferred system of government, it is not impossible for them to choose monarchy as their preferred system of government and his view will still be consistent with Filmer's view.

Filmer also cites from Grotius that:

The people choosing a King may reserve some acts to themselves, and may bestow others upon the King, with full authority, if either an express partition be appointed, or if the people being yet free do command their future King, by way of a standing command, or if anything be added by which it may be understood, that the King may be compelled or else punished.²⁹

The implication of Grotius' view is that both the kings and the people have rights and, contrary to Filmer's claim, the absolute power resides with the people and not with the kings. Now, let us move to the next section to consider Locke's critique of Filmer's arguments.

Case against Filmer's Divine Right Monarchs: John Locke's Interpretation and Critique

One question that is central to this section is how and why is John Locke's idea and argument in *Two Treatises* relevant to our discussion on Filmer's *Patriarcha*? Locke's work is relevant because his *First Treatise of Government* which represents one of his outstanding works in political philosophy is simply a direct criticism of Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*. Locke argued against the divine right of kings or hereditary monarchy as a result of his advocacy for equality of human beings.³⁰ Locke's view is actually in agreement with

28 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

29 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

30 LOCKE, J. *Two Treatise of Government...*, pp. 4–5.

the universal declaration of human rights considered earlier. Contrary to Filmer's view, Locke developed a political theory based on natural freedom, which establishes the democratic ideal that all people were born free and equal and are at liberty to choose the form of government that pleases them.

Sir Robert Filmer's great position is that "men are not naturally free".³¹ This is the foundation on which his absolute monarchy stands. For Filmer, "[m]en are born in subjection to their parents"³², and therefore cannot be free. Similarly, this authority that parents have over their children is what Filmer calls "royal authority"³³, "fatherly authority, right of fatherhood"³⁴.

However, Locke disagrees with Filmer about the above stated position:

[...] I expected, that, in his *Patriarcha*, this his main supposition would have been proved and established with all that evidence of arguments that such a fundamental tenet required [...].³⁵

The point raised by Locke against Filmer is germane in the sense that Filmer's argument on paternal and royal authority lacks sufficient evidence for validation. Thus, Locke sees this as a mere assertion which is common in Filmer's writings. Locke is of the opinion that Filmer's reliance on the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) where the Bible says "Honour thy father and thy mother" to justify this natural right of regal power, is not correct. Locke's contention is that all power were not originally given to the father alone; mother is also included.

Also, Filmer holds the view that Adam has the sovereign right by creation. In his reading of Aristotle, Filmer argues that "[a] natural freedom of mankind cannot be supposed, without the denial of the creation of Adam".³⁶ Filmer's argument is that if the view that mankind is naturally free is upheld, then the implication will be to deny Adam his rightful title as a sovereign by creation. Against this Locke contends

31 FILMER, R. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings...*, p. 1.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 12.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 14.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 20.

35 LOCKE, J. *Two Treatises of Government...*, p. 13.

36 FILMER, R. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings...*, p. 14.

[...] but how Adam's being created, [...] gave Adam a sovereignty over anything, I cannot see; nor consequently understand, how a supposition of natural freedom is a denial of Adam's creation.³⁷

The point Locke is making is that it is not difficult to suppose the freedom of mankind and at the same time to believe in the creation of Adam. The argument is that supporting or defending the natural freedom of mankind does not remove the fact that Adam was created by God, the only problem is that he was not created as a natural sovereign over other men.

Similarly, Locke noted a serious contradiction in the way Filmer interpreted Genesis 1:28. This is the passage of the Bible where God handed authority over other creatures to man (man in the generic sense which includes Adam and Eve). It reads:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.³⁸

Locke argues in opposition to Filmer's doctrine that "Adam was monarch of the whole world". His argument is:

1. That by this grant, Genesis 1:28, God gave no immediate power to Adam over men, over his children, over those of his own species; and so, he was not made ruler, or monarch, by this charter.

2. That by this grant God gave him not private dominion over the inferior creatures, but right in common with all mankind; so, neither was he monarch upon the account of the property here given him. That this donation, Genesis 1:28, gave Adam no power over men.³⁹

In other words, in the book of Genesis, God does not give Adam the right to rule over other men or to do to them what he pleases, he was only given rights over the inferior creatures. Also, God does not give Adam a unique right. The phrase "God said to them" used in this passage shows that God was not referring to Adam alone. Eve was also included.

37 LOCKE, J. *Two Treatises of Government...*, p. 14.

38 Genesis 1:28.

39 LOCKE, J. *Two Treatise of Government...*, p. 20.

In another development, Filmer quoted this aspect of Genesis 3:16:

And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. Here we have (says he) the original grant of government.⁴⁰

This is where Filmer derived the conclusion that “[t]he supreme power is settled in the fatherhood, and limited to one kind of government, that is, to monarchy”.⁴¹ On the contrary, for Locke,

The words in Gen. 3:16 are the curse of God upon the woman for having been the first and forwardest in the disobedience; [...] we cannot suppose that this was the time wherein God was granting Adam prerogatives and privileges, investing him with dignity and authority, elevating him to dominion and monarchy.⁴²

Relying on the above quotation, I also join Locke to argue that Filmer quoted Gen. 3:16 out of context. Let us examine the full quotation of that verse:

To the woman He (God) said I will greatly multiply your grief and your suffering in pregnancy and the pangs of childbearing; with spasms of distress you will bring forth children. Yet your craving will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.⁴³

A critical evaluation of the above view shows that this was a statement of punishment issued by God after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. It should be noted that the man (Adam) was not exonerated from the punishment in the following three verses. In fact, Adam got greater punishment. God did not only punish the woman; the man too was punished in Genesis chapter 3. Thus, for Locke, “[t]his was not a time when Adam could expect any favours, any grant of privileges, from his offended Maker”.⁴⁴ This view will be further expounded in the last section of the paper.

40 Genesis 3:26.

41 FILMER, R. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings...*, p. 11.

42 LOCKE, J., *Two Treatise of Government...*, p. 32.

43 Genesis 3:16.

44 LOCKE, J., *Two Treatise of Government...*, p. 32.

Critical Assessment of Filmer's Arguments

Aside Locke's criticism, there are other ways by which Filmer's view is opened to criticisms. Below are some of the criticisms considered.

Filmer's Argument Lacks Rational/Logical Justification

Filmer's view can be expressed with this syllogism:

- (1) All human beings are children of Adam.
- (2) Some human beings (kings/monarchs) are heirs of Adam.
- (3) Therefore, some human beings (kings/monarchs) have the divine right to reign over others.

The above points represent the view that Filmer defended. Why do I think so? It is clear that Filmer is a creationist, who accepts the fact that God is the creator of all with reference to the Book of Genesis which is evident in his quotations. Filmer himself alluded to the fact that Adam was the first man to be created and every other person came from Adam. Consequently, all human beings are children of Adam. Thus, premise (1) is true for Filmer. Similarly, Filmer also accept premise (2) as contained on page 4 of his *Patriarcha*. The point Filmer is making is that all human beings cannot be Kings. Thus, one or some of them have the rights to be kings. Moreover, the point (3), which is the conclusion, is obviously the thesis that Filmer defended in his book *Patriarcha*.

However, from logical consideration, it is obvious that the conclusion do not follow from the premises, because while premise (1) is true, premise (2) is false. Hence, the conclusion does not follow. Let us move over to the next section to consider another criticism.

The Problem of Over Reliance on the Scriptures and the Atheists' Question

Obviously, "Creationist Account"⁴⁵ is not a view that is universally accepted during Filmer's time. Filmer was not sensitive to the fact that not everyone is

45 By "Creationist Account" I mean the account of how the world was created as recorded in the Bible.

a Christian. This points to the fact that not everyone shares the same account of divine creationism. Filmer can be accused of over reliance on the scriptures in his attempt to defend the absolute divine right of kings or monarchs. He assumed that everyone believes in God and the Biblical records without envisaging those who believe that the Bible is just a book of history of the Jews or the atheists who do not believe in God's existence in the first place. Given that the defining characteristic of the atheists is that they do not believe in a divinity, it is therefore obvious that atheists will not accept Filmer's divine right argument.

Filmer rejected the democratic ideal that all people were born free and equal, using the analogy that everyone was born subordinate to a father. This analogy may not be correct because the fact that a child is born subordinate to a father does not mean the child is inferior nor subservient to the father. In a liberal society, everyone is born free with equal rights and freedom.

Divine Right, Natural Freedom and the Problem of Interpretations

Arising from the position maintained in this paper, one essential question that requires consideration is: Can divine right and the natural freedom of mankind coexist? In other words, are the two concepts mutually exclusive? As considered earlier, the argument between Locke and Filmer indicates that the two concepts are mutually exclusive; if you accept one, you have to reject the other. However, it is our view in this paper that the two concepts need not be antithetical.

One of the reasons in support of the above claim is that both concepts are bestowed by God or the divine force behind nature. Given that God or some divine being is the source of divine rights that are bestowed on the kings, it is clear that the same God (or the same divine force behind the material universe called nature) is also the source of natural rights/freedom that are bestowed on human beings generally. Our argument in this paper is that if God/nature is the source of both the divine right and the natural rights/freedom, then by implication, the former doesn't need to be antithetical to the later. The point is that the bestowal of power to the political rulers does not necessarily amount to the suspension of the natural freedom/rights con-

ferred on all human beings. God has given the divine right for the purpose of administration to the kings, but that does not imply that the natural freedom of mankind is thereby suspended.

Also, Filmer's arguments about the arbitrariness of the power of the kings could be contested. For George Sabine, all peoples have a natural right to govern themselves; they can choose their rulers as they see fit; government derives its power from the people; it exists for their safety and well-being and may be held accountable for these ends.⁴⁶ The above view is contrary to Filmer's claim.

Essentially, it may not be out of point to argue that Filmer misinterpreted the Bible. Given our present understanding of the reality, the absolute power that Filmer ascribed to the kings is not as straightforward as it is believed. Our argument is that Filmer exaggerated the natural power and roles of the kings or monarchs. The claim that the kings have the absolute and arbitrary power ought to be taken with caution, since it is obvious that Filmer did not pay attention to the Book of 1 Samuel. In this aspect of the scripture, we have the example of King Saul, the first king in the land of Israel, who lost the throne for two major reasons:

First, disobedience to divine commands.

Second, he did not stick to his role as a king, but arbitrarily performed the role of a priest which is beyond the role of a king.

The consequence of such arbitrariness was grievous because Saul eventually lost the throne. The above reasons are clear indications that kings do not have the absolute power they arrogate to themselves. Furthermore, having considered Filmer's thesis, it is obvious that Filmer's arguments are not strong enough to completely refute the force of democracy. The reason is that one can just as well interpret the Bible to justify why democracy is important. In fact, it should be noted that Cardinal Bellarmine, who defended the natural freedom of mankind, was also a theologian who believed in the authority of the Bible.

The idea of the divine right of kings by Filmer and his followers is further criticized by scholars such as Westel W. Willoughby. He finds out that the defenders of divine right are

46 SABINE, G. H. Filmer and Sidney..., p. 513.

[...] paying but little attention to the selfish and despotic ends to which the divine theory was devoted by the English Church and Crown, or to the resulting oppression of the people; while the utmost stress is laid upon the merit of the theory as affording a basis for preserving the unity of the state in a time of social and political unrest.⁴⁷

What Filmer did in *Patriarcha* was mainly an attempt to cow people with religion and keep them perpetually bound in ignorance (of their rights and freedom) so that they will never think of any act of rebellion against the ruling authority. I agree with Locke that sovereignty resides in the people. People have the right to choose the form of government that pleases them. People should not be made to forget their rights and abandon their freedom all in the name of religion.

Let me sum it up with the argument of Benhabib:

If the people are viewed not merely as subject to the law but also as authors of the law then the contextualization and interpretation of human rights can be said to result from public and free processes of democratic opinion and will-formation.⁴⁸

It should be noted that Filmer is just a theologian who retired to such a partial view. Some of the issues raised in his work are so germane that philosophers like Locke and others could not overlook or sweep them under the carpet.

Conclusion

The above analysis suggests that the divine right monarchy according to Filmer contradicts the natural freedom of mankind. This paper contended that Filmer exaggerated the natural power of the kings. The article examined Robert Filmer's defence of natural rights of kings or monarchs in his *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings* and it argued that Filmer's defense of natural rights of kings is unsuccessful on at least three major grounds. First,

47 WILLOUGHBY, W. W. *The Theory of the Divine Right of Kings...*, pp. 158–160.

48 BENHABIB, S. *Another Universalism: On the Unity and Diversity of Human Rights...*, p. 21.

it lacks rational/logical justification. Second, Filmer wrongly assumed that everyone believes in creationism. Third, the paper concluded by showing how Filmer exaggerated the natural power of kings.

The paper considered Filmer's *Patriarcha* in several aspects. The first is Filmer's critical remark about some of the key ideas of his opponents and his analysis of concepts such as natural freedom, social contract and supremacy of the people. Also, Filmer presented his assimilation and analogy of royalty to paternal power. Moreover, the summary of Filmer's argument in this paper is that one cannot defend the undemocratic conclusion from democratic premises. That is, if one is to defend the divine right or supreme authority of the kings, one must reject the premise that all men are naturally free and equal, and that legitimate government therefore arises from people's consent.

Bibliography

- AUDI, Robert. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999.
- BENHABIB, Seyla. Another Universalism: On the Unity and Diversity of Human Rights. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*. 2007, 81(2), pp. 7–32.
- FIGGIS, John Neville. *The Divine Right of Kings*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1914.
- FILMER, Robert. *Patriarcha and Other Writings*. Edited by Johann P. SOMMERVILLE. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press 1996.
- FILMER, Robert. *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings*. London: DCK Book Binder 1680.
- GEERTZ, Clifford. *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2000.
- HART, Herbert Lionel Adolphus. Are There Any Natural Rights? *Philosophical Review*. 1955, 64(5), pp. 175–191.
- LASLETT, Peter. Introduction. In FILMER Robert. *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*. Oxford: Blackwell's Political Texts 1949.
- LOCKE, John. *Two Treatise of Government*. London: Thomas Tegg 1823.
- LOCKE, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. Revised edition. Edited and introduced by Peter LASLETT. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press 1963.
- MACINTYRE, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Second Edition. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1984.
- JAMES I, King of England 1566–1625. A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-Hall, on Wednesday the XXI. of March. Anno Dom 1609

- (1610). In *The Workes of the most high and mightie Prince, James, by the grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith &c.* London 1616.
- ROUSSEAU, Jean Jacques. *The Social Contract*. New York: Hafner Publishing Co. 1947.
- SABINE, George Holland. Filmer and Sidney. In SABINE, George H. – CORWIN, Edward S. (eds.). *A History of Political Theory*. London 1951, pp. 434–437.
- TUCK, Richard. A New Date for Filmer’s Patriarcha. *The Historical Journal*. 1986, **29**(1), pp. 183–186.
- WILLOUGHBY, Westel Woodbury. Review of *The Theory of the Divine Right of Kings* by John Neville Figgis. *Political Science Quarterly*. 1897, **12**(1), pp. 158–160.
- YEZZI, Ronald. *Medical Ethics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1980.
- ZAGORIN, Perez. *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1954.
- The Holy Bible*, King James Version.
- United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 1948.
-

Victor Olusola Olanipekun

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University
P.M.B. 13, Ile-Ife. Osun State. 220282. Nigeria.
olanipekuno@oauife.edu.ng



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as image or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.