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Q1(e)

Locke's Social Contract.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- **Comment on the following in about 150 words:** Locke's Social Contract. (10 marks)

Revision summary

Locke's contract starts from natural rights and inconvenience, not from a war of all against all.

Consent creates a community and a trustee legislature.

The end is preservation of life, liberty, and estate.

Betrayal of trust justifies revolution.

Hobbes yields an absolute sword; Locke yields limited government.

Introduction

John Locke in the **Two Treatises** of Government treats political society as a contract among persons who already have natural rights. The contract creates a trustee government, not an unlimited sovereign.

Body**The argument**

- In the state of nature, persons are free and equal under natural law. Reason teaches that none may harm another in life, health, liberty, or possessions.
- **Inconvenience, not Hobbesian war, is the problem:** there is no known standing law, no impartial judge, and no executive power to enforce.
- People consent, expressly or tacitly, to form a community and then to set a legislature as the supreme fiduciary power.
- **Government is a trust for the preservation of property in Locke's wide sense:** life, liberty, and estate.
- When the trust is betrayed, the people have a right of revolution. **James II** is the historical target.

Contrast

- **Hobbes's** covenant yields an undivided sword; subjects retain only the right of self-preservation against immediate death.
- **Rousseau's** contract creates the general will; **Locke** keeps majority rule inside natural-law limits and private **property**.
- **Rawls** later rebuilt contract as a hypothetical original position. **Locke's** contract is more historical and proprietary.

- Indian "**We, the People**" and the right to constitutional remedies echo trust and limited government more than Leviathan.

Flow diagram

State of nature -> Natural rights
Natural rights -> Consent and trust
Consent and trust -> Limited government
Limited government -> Right of revolution

Conclusion

Locke's social contract is consent to a limited, fiduciary state that protects natural rights. It is the classic liberal alternative to Hobbesian absolutism and the ancestor of constitutional trust.

Facts & figures

Two Treatises

Locke's 1689 political work; the Second Treatise is the contract text.

Property

In **Locke**, a wide term covering life, liberty, and estate, not land alone.

Tacit consent

Residence and inheritance can bind, which critics say is too easy a title for obligation.

Hobbes contrast

Leviathan's covenant authorises an unaccountable sovereign; **Locke's** trust does not.