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Q1(c)

Locke's views on Revolution.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- **State Locke's premises:** trust, consent, and natural rights (10 marks)
- Explain when the people may resume power
- Show how revolution differs from ordinary rebellion
- Keep the note on the **Two Treatises**

Revision summary

Locke treats government as a trust to protect life, liberty, and estate under standing law.

When the trust is destroyed by arbitrary rule, the government is dissolved and power returns to the community.

Revolution is this resumption of original right, not every private act of force against a lawful magistrate.

The argument rejects Filmer and answers **Hobbes** by making a last appeal against tyranny.

1688 and the American Declaration used this grammar of consent and the right to alter destructive government.

Introduction

John Locke in the **Two Treatises** of Government treats government as a trust created by consent to protect life, liberty, and estate. Revolution is not a taste for disorder. It is the residual right of the people when that trust is dissolved by arbitrary power.

Body**The trust and its breach**

In the state of nature people have natural law but lack an impartial judge. They form political society and set a legislature that must rule by standing law. The executive is a fiduciary power. If the prince or the legislature acts contrary to the trust - by arbitrary taxation, by destroying the legislature, by placing the people under a foreign power, or by a long train of abuses - government is dissolved. Power returns to the community.

Locke insists that this is not a licence for every discontent. Private force against a lawful magistrate is not the same as the people acting when the constitution is already broken. The appeal is to heaven only when no earthly judge remains. **Filmer's** patriarchal kingship is rejected because no one is born the property of a ruler.

Political meaning

The argument armed 1688 and later **Jefferson's 1776** claim that a people may alter a government destructive of rights. It also limits revolution: the end is the restoration of law and property, not a war of all against all. **Hobbes** feared that right; **Locke** made it the last check on tyranny. Later constitutional democracy regularises the same idea as elections, higher law, and removable rulers.

Flow diagram

Government as trust -> Consent and standing law
Government as trust -> Breach: arbitrary power
Breach: arbitrary power -> People resume power
People resume power -> New legislature under rights

Conclusion

Locke's view of revolution is the people's right to resume original power when rulers destroy the trust of consent, law, and rights. It is a constitutional last resort, not a theory of permanent insurrection. Western bills of rights still speak in that language.

Facts & figures

Two Treatises

Locke's work, published 1689, locates legitimate power in consent and treats the right of revolution as a consequence of a broken trust.

Appeal to heaven

When no impartial earthly judge remains, the people may resist; **Locke** presents this as last resort, not as daily politics.

1776

Jefferson restated the Lockean claim that a people may alter government that becomes destructive of natural rights.