

compare Hobbes' and Locke's social contract theory.

or

Q.No.1. Critically examine the arguments of Hobbes and Locke regarding the creation of civil society. (20)

### Introduction:

The concept of civil society or social contract is one of the most crucial and debated topics in political philosophy, and the theories proposed by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke have profoundly influenced the development of modern political thought. Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (1651), argues that in state of nature, humans are driven by selfish instincts, leading to constant conflict and insecurity. To avoid this, individuals must surrender their rights to an absolute sovereign with unchecked power. Conversely, Locke, in *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), sees humans as rational beings capable of cooperation, with the state of nature being peaceful but prone to occasional conflicts over property. For Locke, the social contract established a government limited by law, existing to protect natural rights — life, liberty and property. While Hobbes prioritizes security and stability, and Locke emphasizes individual freedoms and the right to revolt against the tyranny. Their theories fundamentally differ in the role of



Government and the nature of human society

## 1. Overview of Hobbes' Social contract theory:

Hobbes, in his work *Leviathan* (1651), argues that without a strong central authority, human beings would descend into a "state of nature" characterized by chaos and violence. In this state, individuals are driven by self-preservation, and life is a constant struggle for resources. To avoid this, Hobbes believes people must enter into a social contract, surrendering their rights to a sovereign with absolute authority to maintain peace.

## 2. Overview of Locke's social contract theory:

Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), presents a contrasting view. He argues that in the state of nature, people are generally rational and capable of moral reasoning. Locke believes individuals form a social contract to protect their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Unlike Hobbes, Locke insists that the power of government should be limited, with the consent of the governed.

## 13. Human Nature: Hobbes' Pessimistic



view:

Hobbes has a negative view of human nature. He believes that in the absence of a sovereign, individuals act based on selfish desires and driven by fear and the need for self-preservation. This leads to constant conflict and insecurity as each person is motivated by their own interests. He tried to imagine what society would be like in a "state of nature" he says it would be; " ... Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"

#### 4. Human Nature: Locke's Optimistic View:

Locke, in contrast, sees human nature as rational beings who are capable of moral judgment and cooperation. He believes that individuals in state of nature are generally peaceful and that they act in accordance with reason, which governs their behavior and interactions with others. The state of nature to Locke is a "state of peace, goodwill, mutual assistance, and preservation".

He says that in state of nature man was pre-political but not anti-social.

#### 5. The state of Nature: Hobbes state of War:

For Hobbes, the state of nature is



peaceful but a "state of war," where individuals act out of self-interest, leading to constant conflict. Without a Sovereign, there would be no means of resolving disputes, and society would break down into violence and chaos.

Hobbes says;

"The condition of man... is a condition of war - of everyone against everyone".  
(Leviathan, ch. 13)

## 6. The state of Nature; Locke's State of peace;

Locke, however, believes that the state of nature is characterized by peace and mutual respect. Although there are occasional conflicts over property, these are not constant, and humans have the capacity to resolve disputes based on reason and natural law. The state of nature is not inherently violent for Locke.

"In the state of nature, every man is free to do what he wants, but within the bounds of the law of nature" (second Treatise of Govt, ch. 2).

## 7. The formation of the Social contract; Hobbes Absolute Sovereignty;

According to Hobbes, the social contract is an agreement



where individuals relinquish all their rights to a sovereign authority. This sovereign, whether a monarch or assembly, has absolute power to make laws and enforce them. Hobbes believes that a strong, central authority is necessary to prevent the chaos of the state of nature.

"Covenant, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all". (Leviathan, ch. 17).

### 8. The formation of the social contract: Locke's Limited Government:

Locke's social contract, on the other hand, is based on the idea that individuals agree to form a government to protect their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. The government's power is limited and must be based on the consent of the governed. Unlike Hobbes, Locke believes that individuals retain their natural rights even after forming a government. Locke says;

"The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom".

### 9. The role of the sovereign: Hobbes' Absolute power:

For Hobbes the sovereign has absolute powers once the social



is made, individuals give up their right to self-governance, and submit completely to the Sovereign's authority. The Sovereign must have unchecked power to ensure peace and order in society.

"The Sovereign is not subject to the civil laws... for he is the author of them" (Leviathan, ch. 26).

## 10. The Role of the Sovereign: Locke's Limited Power:

In contrast, Locke argues that the Sovereign must be limited in its powers and cannot infringe on the natural rights of individuals. The government's primary purpose is to protect these rights, and if it fails to do so, the people have the right to overthrow it. Locke emphasizes that the government operates with the consent of the governed and must be accountable to the people.

"The people have a right to remove or alter the legislative when they find that it is

destructive to the end for which they were constituted" (Locke)

## 11. The Right to Revolution: Hobbes vs. Locke:

One of the key differences between Hobbes and Locke is their views on the right to revolution. For Hobbes,



once the social contract is formed, the sovereign's authority cannot be challenged. Hobbes believes that even a tyrannical ruler must be obeyed, as the alternative is the return to chaos. In contrast, Locke strongly supports the right of the people to revolt if the government violates their natural rights or acts tyrannically. Locke says;

"Whenever the legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people... they put themselves into a state of war with the people".

## 12. The protection of property: Locke's Focus:

For Locke, property is a key element of the social contract. He argues that the primary role of government is to protect individuals' rights to property, which includes their life, liberty and the fruits of their labor. Locke's theory of property is grounded in the idea that individuals have a natural right to what they own, and govt. exists to preserve and protect this right. Locke says;

"The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his".



### 13. Legacy and Influence; Hobbes vs. Locke

The legacies of Hobbes and Locke are significant and have shaped modern political thought. Hobbes' theory laid the foundation for the idea of absolute sovereignty and influenced later realist political philosophies, while Locke's emphasis on natural rights, limited governments and the right to revolution has been fundamental to the development of liberal democracy and constitutionalism.

#### Conclusion:

In conclusion, Hobbes and Locke offer fundamentally different perspectives on the social contract. Hobbes views human nature as self-interested and violent, necessitating an absolute sovereign to maintain order, while Locke believes that humans are rational and capable of living in peace, with government primarily existing to protect natural rights. These differences in their theories continue to influence political thought today, with Hobbes providing the foundation for authoritarian ideologies and Locke shaping liberal democratic principles.