1. Enumerate and describe the features of contemporary political theory.

**Ans:** Since 1970s, there has been a revival of interest in political theory in USA, Europe and other parts of the world. At the heart of this renaissance has been the emerging clash of values on the one hand and the changes in the humanities and social sciences, on the other. Moreover, the passing away of the shadows of Second World War, reemergence of Europe, and crisis in the ideologies of socialism and Marxism brought about a new fluidity in political ideologies. Whether it is Marxism or socialism, liberalism or democracy - all stand challenged and new powerful social movements are seeking to redraw the issues in political theory. During the era of domination of behaviourism, political theory was overpowered by political science. Theory was denied the status of a legitimate form of knowledge and inquiry. Though the hold of empiricism did not last long, yet it left an enduring legacy in the development of political and social sciences particularly in North America in the form of ‘scienticism’. The encouragement for the regeneration of political theory came from many sources.

While a number of thinkers challenged the whole model of what is science, there were others who felt that there are distinctive problems of understanding the social sciences and social issues which could not be grasped by the model of a unified science. As a result of the great debates, a number of important innovations in the study of political theory followed which culminated into a broad understanding of contemporary political theory.

According to David Held, contemporary political theory involves four distinct tasks: Firstly, it is philosophical, i.e. it is concerned with the normative and conceptual framework; secondly, it is empirical, i.e., it is concerned with the problem of understanding and explanation of the concepts; thirdly, it is historical, i.e., it is concerned with the examination of the key concepts of political theory in historical context; and finally, it is strategic, i.e. it is concerned with an assessment of the feasibility of moving from where we are to where we might likely to be. It is only through the combination of these elements that the central problems of political theory can be solved.

2. Discuss the choice theory of duties and rights.

**Ans:** The choice theory is motivated by two objections to a rival theory, the benefit (or interest) theory of rights. According to the benefit theory, having a right is the same thing as being the beneficiary of the performance of another person’s duty.

One problem with this theory concerns third party beneficiaries, people who benefit from the performance of a duty but, on the face of it, lack the relevant rights. Another concerns the redundancy of rights and duties. It doesn’t explain what rights add that could not be expressed by talking about duties alone. (Of course, this is only a problem if you think that rights really do add something.) Choice theory is resonant of a kind of rights theory much in evidence before this century and not so much thereafter. This theory states that the only genuine right that exists is the right to liberty. The theory lent itself to minimalism, laissezfaire government, which was merely required not to stand in the way of anyone exercising his liberty except in so far as it harmed others. It required no action to ensure that rights were upheld. On this account, socio-economic rights such as the right to free medical assistance, elementary education and a basic standard of living were regarded as debasing the language of rights and a category error. This century has seen a greater recognition of these services as rights, following the extended interest theory Waldron proposes. If we regard such services as medical assistance as a right, then active duties are demanded, if not of us, then of someone. If, on the other hand, we see only liberty as a right, no such activity is demanded, since all we have to do is not to intervene. So the problem lies with deciding what is ours by right, and what is not. If more rights than liberty are claimed, then interest theory has to be employed. If only liberty, then choice theory will suffice. One important consequence of this distinction is that under the choice theory of rights, only autonomous beings can have rights, because only autonomous beings are capable of exercising the liberty of choice that it then becomes our duty not to obstruct. Interest theory confers rights upon those without autonomy, such as the baby in Somalia. The task interest theory has, however, is to state what rights people do have other than liberty, and this, I admit, is impossible to do in any way which can be practical. This is the predicament the NHS faces in trying to decide what treatments people have a right to expect, free at the point of delivery. It is failing to suggest answers which are capable of rational defence and often resource allocation decisions change with geography. Without a sound basis upon which to determine the rights it is proper to defend, interest theory is in danger of turning into Karl Marx’s understanding of rights. He thought that rights separated people from their communities and bound them in their own private interests (Marx, 1843).

Choice theory of rights is capable of a more rational defence than interest theory. The mutual recognition of the right to liberty would go a long way towards according the respect that human beings should receive from each other, further, perhaps, than is clear at first sight, which sees only the laissez faire nature of the duties this right demands. If each one of our actions has an impact, the extent of which cannot be predicted, but which we assume goes further than we are able to see, respecting the liberty of (all) others demands unsellish behaviour even when we are alone. For example, taking more than we need of anything has an ultimate impact on the environment and ecological balance of the world. Demanding first place necessitates others taking second place.

Of course, the right to liberty can be abused. It only works if we use it as a basis for respecting another’s right to liberty, rather than trying to exercise our own. If the right is understood in the Marxist sense of giving us freedom to do what we want, it becomes licence and there is no constraint on the choices made. But if it is taken as a basis upon which to recognize the essential reasonableness and freedom in each person with whom we come into contact, and indeed those with whom we do not come into contact (who may nevertheless be affected by our actions), it forms a useful guide to conduct, which is what ethics is about. That is to say, we should not claim rights for ourselves, only respect them in others. This, in my view, is the ethical value of the language of rights.

3. Examine the Marxist view of citizenship.

**Ans:** Marxist theory of citizenship treats the rights associated with citizenship as the product of class conflict.