**POL 402 CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY**

1. **Concepts and Theories in Politics**
2. Politics is in part a struggle over thelegitimate meaning of terms and concepts. Words are seldom neutral but carry political and ideological baggage.
3. Concepts are building blocks of knowledge. They are sometimes abstract models or ideal-types, which only approximate to the reality they help to understand. They can be descriptive or normative.
4. Political theory involves the analytical study of ideas and concepts, both normative and descriptive.
5. Political theory confronts a number of problems and challenges in the 21st century.
6. **Human Nature, Individualism versus Collectivism**

1.Human nature refers to the essential and immutable character of all human beings. For sme scholars, humans are shapes by biology or society and influenced by reason or non-rational drives. For others, it is either naturally cooperative or competitive.

2.Individualism is a belief in the primacy of the human individual over any social group.

3.Collectivism refers to a belief in the community, group, or collective, stressing the importance of a common identity and the capacity for collective action.

1. **Politics, Government and the State**
2. While some have seen politics as narrowly related to the affairs of government or to a public sphere of life, others believe that it reflects the distribution of power and resources and so can be found in every social institution.
3. Government refers to ordered rule, a characteristic of all organised societies, and the executive.
4. The state is a sovereign political association operating in a defined territorial area. In the view ofpluralists, the liberal democratic state acts impartially and responds to popular pressures. However, others suggest that the state is characterized by biases which either systematically favour the bureaucracy or state elit or benefit major economic interests.
5. The role of the state differs from a variety of perspectives. While some wish roll back the state and leave matters in the hand of individuals and the market, others want to roll it forward in the cause of social justice and widespread prosperity.
6. **Democracy, Representation, the Public Interest**
7. A number of models of democracy can be identified. The principal distinction is between the classical ideal of direct democracy and modern forms of representative democracy. While in direct democracy, people literally govern themselves, in the representative model, professional politicians govern on behalf of the people.
8. Liberal democracy is based on the twin principles of limited government and popular consent expressed at election time.
9. Representation means, broadly, acting on behalf of others, but opinions differ about how this is best achieved. Some argue that representatives hould think for themselves, exercising their own wisdom or judgement; others believe that representaatives have a mandate from the voters to fulfill their election pledges; still others think that representatives must resemble or be drawn from the group they aim to represent.
10. All notions of democracy are based, to some degree, upon the idea that government can and does act in the public interest, the common or collective interests of society. But individualists and pluralists have questioned whether there is any such thing as public interest separate from the private interests of citizens. Others have doubted if there exists an electoral or constitutional mechanism through which the public interest can in practice be defined.
11. **Rights, Obligations and Citizenship**
12. The relationship between individuals and the state-citizenship- is established by the allocation of rights and obligations to each.
13. Political obligation refers to the duty of citizens to acknowledge the authority of the state and obey its laws.
14. Social citizenship is based upon the belief that citizens are entitled to social rights and not merely civil and political rights.
15. The traditional conception of citizenship is based on the idea of universality, and derived its emancipatory charecter from the notion that disadvantaged groups could aspire to full citizenship rights.