



Mains Practice Question

Q. What do you understand by ethical dilemmas? Give examples of some of the ethical dilemmas faced by the civil servants in present times. (250 words)

28 May, 2020 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

References: [ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN PUBLIC SERVICE](#)

Approach

- Explain with example the concept of ethical dilemma.
- Briefly explain the kind of ethical dilemmas faced by the present day civil servants. This would give a context to mention the examples, as asked in the question, maintaining the flow of the answer.
- List examples and briefly suggest some measures that can be helpful to tackle these ethical dilemmas.

Introduction

- Ethical dilemma is a complex decision making situation in which all the available options are in conflict, making it difficult for the decision maker to follow any one course of action in the given situation.
 - Ethical dilemmas largely emerge in situations where conscience of an individual comes into the conflict with the stated rule or norm.
 - For example, a migrant worker breaks the rule of lockdown in the wake of a pandemic to reach his/her hometown on foot. While the breach of rule calls for punishment, there arises a dilemma of punishing a human being who has already been deprived of the basic amenities.

Body

For civil servants, ethical dilemmas arise when they have to choose between competing considerations of ethical values and rules, in order to determine the right thing to do. Some of the dilemmas faced are-

- Situations in which compliance with ethical conduct results in a significant personal cost (e.g jeopardising held position, injuring valued relationship) to the Public Servant.
- Situations of two or more conflicting sets of ethical values (public servants responsibility of being open and accountable to Citizens versus that of adhering to oath of secrecy/confidentiality etc).
- Situations in which a conscientious public servant is exposed to a combination of personal or other conflicting ethical values in order to decide the right thing to do.

Ethical Dilemmas in Present Times

- **Individual obligations and organizations' obligations:** Conflict between an individual's privately held convictions and publicly held obligations as determined by her organization.
- **Interpretation of government policies:** Should a public servant interpret government policies and programmes according to her personal sense of right and wrong?

- **Sense of loyalty:** When a public servant feels that there is a clear-cut conflict between what he/she is required (by her senior officials) to do and what she really thinks is right, where should her loyalty lie?
- **Information sharing:** Is a public servant committed to keeping information secret that might be embarrassing to the government of the day?
- **Accountability towards public vs service obligation:** What should an employee do when he/she finds certain indications of deliberate inefficiency, protection of incompetence, extravagant and unreasonable use of public funds, deployment of government equipment and machinery for personal use, subjective criteria used in recruitment or in the award of government grants or licenses?
- **Conflict in conscience and prevailing political ideology:** To what extent should a public servant support the political ideology practised by the current government?
- **Private life vs public life:** When a person accepts public service employment, how much should he/she subordinate or abdicate his/her claims to private life, property and values?

Conclusion

A code of conduct cannot cover all such situations. Thus, in addition to having a code of conduct or ethical guidelines, a public servant needs to develop an inner sense of professional responsibility. A strong emphasis should be laid on values like empathy, compassion, integrity and will to serve humanity at large. Encouraging a sense of responsibility and focusing on greater good for larger interest can guide the actions of a public servant and can resolve most of the dilemmas.

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