



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Discuss the importance of virtues for civil services conduct. (150 words)

23 Jul, 2020 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

### Approach

- Start your answer by briefly expanding what you mean by virtues.
- Briefly discuss the virtues which civil servants should ideally possess.
- Discuss the views of some moral thinkers in your answer, regarding virtues.
- Conclude your answer by stating why there is a need to imbibe virtues in civil services conduct.

### Introduction

Virtue can be defined as an excellence of character which leads one to act in a morally praiseworthy manner. Thus, Virtue ethics propounds the view that while doing right things is important, it is equally or more important to be a virtuous person.

For example, a person will not act kindly mainly because he thinks that it is his duty to do so or because he calculates that acting kindly will maximise total utility in society.

### Body

#### Theory of Cardinal Virtues

- Although there are many virtues like honor, kindness, honesty, etc, a civil servant needs to imbibe a few cardinal virtues that can be subsumed within one or the other.
- In this context, a civil servant can draw inspiration from Aristotle's theory of cardinal virtues viz. **prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.**
  - **Prudence:** It refers to the ability to recognize the most suitable, political, or practical course of action. It also signifies practical wisdom and discretion.
  - **Fortitude:** It refers to moral strength or moral courage in enduring pain or adversity. Fortitude is often associated with soldiers facing tough battle field situations.
  - **Temperance:** It signifies the ability to control one's anger, emotions and desires.
    - It can be regarded as rational self restraint.
  - **Justice:** It is the most common goal of almost any philosophy. However, it is also very vague.
    - Though, it can be narrowed down to social justice or economic justice, ensuring justice remains the goal of any polity.
- Apart from it, civil servants can also think of **Mahatma Gandhi's Seven Deadly Sins**, for restraining them from any immoral activity. The seven sins enumerated by Gandhiji are as follows:
  - Wealth Without Work
  - Pleasure Without Conscience

- Knowledge Without Character
- Commerce (Business) Without Morality (Ethics)
- Science Without Humanity
- Religion Without Sacrifice
- Politics Without Principle

### Relevance of Virtues for Civil Servants

- Civil service involves **decision-making in the public sphere**. They have to deal with many matters that are anonymous and discrete. Due to this, prudence is an eminent desirable quality in civil servants.
- A civil servant needs fortitude to stand up for their principles and **withstand immoral or illegal pressures**.
- Temperance or moderation is especially important for public servants. While taking decisions or responding to situations, civil servants have to be moderate. They should **not swing to extremes**, but act judiciously in a balanced manner.
- Apart from it, civil servants have to not only **ensure the equality and dignity of individual citizens** but also actively encourage their participation in the process of governance.

### Conclusion

Virtue ethics allows people to maintain personal and interpersonal connections important for the good life. It is more so relevant for civil servants due to the underlying trust and confidence of people in public service.

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