



Mains Practice Question

Q. Morality is doing what's right regardless of what you're told. Obedience is doing what is told regardless of what is right. - H. L. Mencken. What does this quotation convey to you in the current context? **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by justifying the statement of H. L. Mencken.
- Highlight the Significance of Morality in Today's World
- Delve into Obedience as a Double-Edged Sword
- Give Morality vs. Obedience: Finding the Balance
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The quotation by H. L. Mencken underscores the **distinction between morality and obedience**. Morality stems from an individual's **intrinsic sense of right and wrong**, while obedience is **adherence to external authority**, often devoid of ethical evaluation.

- In the current context of increasing challenges—**ranging from bureaucratic complacency to authoritarianism**—the quote prompts reflection on the balance between ethical autonomy and the obligation to follow orders.

Body

Significance of Morality in Today's World

- **Ethical Leadership:** Leaders with moral courage prioritize the greater good over blind allegiance to norms.
 - **Example:** IAS officer **Armstrong Pame** built a road in Manipur without government funds, demonstrating moral responsibility over bureaucratic inaction.
- **Social Justice Movements:** Morality drives individuals to stand up against societal injustices, even when laws or systems remain indifferent.
 - **Example:** **Medha Patkar's** leadership in the **Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)** exemplifies how morality drives individuals to stand up against societal injustices, even when laws or systems remain indifferent.
- **Role in Governance:** Morality helps **civil servants and policymakers** navigate ethical dilemmas where legal provisions may conflict with human values.

Obedience: A Double-Edged Sword

- **Positive Role of Obedience:** Following lawful instructions is essential for maintaining order and discipline in society.
 - **Example:** Obedience to **Covid-19 lockdown protocols** during the pandemic helped save

lives.

- **Blind Obedience and Ethical Failures:** Unquestioning compliance with authority can lead to moral catastrophes.
 - **Example:** The **Nuremberg Trials** highlighted how **Nazi officers defended their actions** as mere obedience to orders, ignoring their moral implications.
- **Corporate and Bureaucratic Malfeasance:** Employees or officials blindly adhering to unethical instructions often perpetuate corruption and malpractice.
 - **Example:** The **2008 financial crisis** saw professionals in banking comply with high-risk, unethical financial practices despite knowing the potential harm.

Morality vs. Obedience: Finding the Balance

- **Ethical Autonomy in Public Service:** Civil servants are often faced with the choice between implementing harmful policies and standing up for what is just.
 - **Example:** Whistleblowers like **Suchir Balaji** prioritizing morality over obedience.
- **Critical Thinking and Education:** Cultivating ethical reasoning helps individuals evaluate orders critically before acting on them.
 - **Example:** Programs in **ethics and governance within public administration training** can bridge the gap between moral values and institutional obedience.
- **Reforms in Institutional Culture:** Organizations must encourage ethical decision-making alongside compliance to foster accountability.

Conclusion

Mencken's quote is a powerful reminder that **morality must serve as the compass for human actions, while obedience should be guided by ethical reasoning rather than blind conformity.** In the current context, where societal, environmental, and political challenges demand principled actions, the need for morally courageous individuals is more pressing than ever.

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