



Mains Practice Question

Essay Topics:

1. In matters of conscience, the law of the majority has no place.
2. The ends do not justify the means.

07 Jun, 2025 Essay Essay

1):

Quotes to Enrich Your Essay:

- "The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still small voice within me." Mahatma Gandhi
- "Conscience is the root of all true courage." Martin Luther King Jr.

Philosophical and Theoretical Dimensions

- **Moral Autonomy vs. Majoritarianism:** Conscience refers to the internal moral compass that guides individuals in distinguishing right from wrong.
- **Natural Law Theory:** Classical philosophers like Cicero and Aquinas argue that true law is derived from universal moral principles- conscience being its expression. If majority law violates natural justice, conscience must prevail.
 - **As per Rousseau**, the general will of society must not override natural law or individual rights rooted in reason.
 - **Immanuel Kant** emphasized that **conscience is the voice of reason guiding one's duty. Moral autonomy is central**, individuals must act based on moral law, not societal approval.
- **Indian Perspective:** Gandhiji's life is a testimony to moral resistance. His **civil disobedience** was based on the **idea that unjust laws**, even if supported by a majority, must be resisted through Satyagraha, an act of conscience grounded in truth.
- **In Indian scriptures, Dharma transcends numerical strength. In the Mahabharata**, Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to act according to his **Swadharma**, not popular consensus, demonstrating that conscience must guide duty.
- **Buddhist Ethics:** Conscience is aligned with **right intention** and **right action** from the Eightfold Path-ethical conduct must come from within.

Conscience Vs Democratic Ethics

- **Freedom of Conscience (Article 25 of Indian Constitution):** The law protects **conscience and beliefs as essential human rights**, implying their primacy even over majority will.
- **Right to Dissent:** Democracies must allow space for ethical dissent. **Dr. Ambedkar**, while drafting the Constitution, emphasized constitutional morality to prevent majority dominance.

Historical and Contemporary Examples

- **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** opposed the **practice of Sati**, despite its social acceptance at the time. He adhered to his moral convictions rather than conforming to the prevailing customs.

- Rejection of caste oppression by **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, despite its majoritarian social approval.
- **Justice H.R. Khanna's Dissent during the Emergency (ADM Jabalpur Case, 1976)**, As a **lone dissenting voice**, Justice Khanna upheld the primacy of individual liberty and conscience over executive power during the Emergency.
- **Satyendra Dubey (2003)** exposed corruption in NHAI's **Golden Quadrilateral project**. upheld conscience over personal safety.
- In the **Navtej Singh Johar case (2018)**, the SC decriminalized homosexuality, affirming that individual identity and conscience must be respected, even if not accepted by the majority.

Global Example

- Opposition of apartheid laws by **Nelson Mandela** imposed by a white-majority regime, guided by a moral vision of equality.

Challenges to Conscience

- **Conscience Misused for Extremism:** False claims of conscience (e.g., hate speech or religious radicalism) can threaten social harmony.
- **Need for Ethical Education:** True conscience must be informed by empathy, rationality, and universal moral values, not prejudice.

Conclusion

The essence of a just society lies in protecting the inner voice of conscience, even when it stands alone against the tide of public opinion. In democracies like India, **true moral progress often begins when one individual, guided by conscience, resists the unjust will of the majority**. Conscience, when exercised ethically, becomes the bedrock of reform, justice, and human dignity.

2):

Quotes to Enrich Your Essay:

- "Karmanyevādhikāraṁ mā phaleṣu kadācana. Mā karmaphalaheturbhūr mā te saṅgo'stvakarmaṇi." Bhagavad Gita
- "You can't do the right thing the wrong way." Martin Luther King Jr.

Philosophical and Ethical Underpinnings

- The age-old moral dictum, The ends do not justify the means, encapsulates a critical ethical viewpoint **that values the process of achieving an outcome as much as the result itself**.
 - This philosophical stance posits that no matter how noble the intended goal, it cannot legitimize the use of unethical or immoral methods to attain it.
- **Consequentialism vs. Ethics of Duty:** Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative emphasizes that the morality of an action is determined by whether it adheres to **universal principles of duty, not by its consequences**.
 - Contrarily, John Stuart Mill, advocating for utilitarianism, **argued that the consequences of an action should be the primary determinant of its moral value**. According to utilitarian thought, if a harmful means leads to a greater good, it could be justified.
- **Bhagavad Gita:** Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to act according to Dharma, not based solely on outcome. One's duty (Karma) must be righteous in both intention and action.
- **Buddhist Philosophy:** Emphasizes right action (**Samyak Karmanta**) as a part of the Eightfold Path. Even noble goals like **liberation (Nirvana)** must be pursued through ethically sound conduct.
- **Gandhian Ethics of Non-violence:** Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence (Ahimsa) and truth (Satya) are key tenets that echo the **assertion that ends should never justify immoral means**.
 - Gandhi's commitment to non-violence during India's struggle for independence exemplifies that **moral consistency is paramount**, even when confronting oppressive forces.

Historical and Political Examples:

- **Indian Independence Movement (Gandhi vs. Revolutionaries):** In contrast to the violent struggles for freedom in other parts of the world, Gandhi's non-violent resistance to British rule illustrates **that moral ends and means can coexist**.
 - This approach demonstrated that achieving independence did not require sacrificing one's ethical principles. **Gandhi's methods inspired global movements for justice**, demonstrating that achieving noble goals without compromising one's values is possible.
- **Encounter Killings:** Used as a shortcut to justice, but violate the principle of due process and weaken faith in legal institutions.
- **The Holocaust and Totalitarianism:** The atrocities committed by Nazi Germany during World War II present a stark example of **how the justification of horrific means for achieving a perceived noble end can result in unimaginable destruction**.
 - Adolf Hitler and his regime justified the genocide of millions, including Jews, claiming it was for the "greater good" of the nation.
 - The Holocaust, therefore, stands as a testament to the devastating consequences of abandoning ethical boundaries in pursuit of a warped vision of national superiority..
- **The U.S. Civil Rights Movement:** Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the **U.S. Civil Rights Movement** rejected violence, even in the face of brutal oppression.
- **The Iraq War and the Doctrine of Preemption:** The **2003 Iraq War** is a recent example where the U.S. government justified military intervention based on the **goal of dismantling weapons of mass destruction**.
 - Despite the end goal of ensuring global security, the means, unilateral invasion and occupation, resulted in massive loss of life, long-term instability, and regional destruction.
- **Civil Services Integrity:** In governance, civil servants may face ethical dilemmas where their personal or political interests conflict with public duty.
 - A notable example is that of **TN Seshan**, former CEC of India, who used his position to clean up electoral processes, even when faced with political resistance.
- **International Human Rights Law:** Modern international human rights law reflects the principle that means cannot be compromised for any end.
 - **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN, asserts that all people are entitled to live with **dignity and free from torture, slavery, and inhumane treatment**, regardless of the justification provided.
- **AI and Privacy:** Using AI for public safety must be balanced with protecting privacy, ends of security don't justify mass surveillance.
- **Climate Change:** debate around sacrificing environmental ethics in the name of economic growth undermines sustainability and justice for future generations.

Conclusion

A just society is built not merely on goals but on **how those goals are pursued**. As Gandhi asserted, the means are the seed and the end is the tree, only ethical seeds can yield just outcomes. While history may remember results, **conscience, law, and human dignity are preserved only when the path to those results is morally sound**.