



Mains Practice Question

Q. What is the 'ethics of care'? Contrast it with traditional ethical theories and discuss its significance in public administration. **(150 words)**

08 Aug, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining ethics of care
- Contrast it with traditional ethical theories
- Highlight its significance in public administration
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The ethics of care is a feminist approach to ethics that emphasizes the importance of response, relationships, and responsibilities. Developed by psychologist **Carol Gilligan in the 1980s, it focuses on contextual sensitivity and caring relations rather than abstract rules and individual rights.**

Body

Contrasting with Traditional Ethical Theories:

- **Utilitarianism:** Focuses on maximizing overall happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people.
 - **Ethics of Care:** Emphasizes the quality of relationships and individual needs rather than aggregate outcomes.
 - **Example:** In a public health crisis, **utilitarianism might justify sacrificing a few for the greater good**, while the ethics of care would consider the specific relationships and contexts of those affected.
- **Deontological Ethics:** Emphasizes universal moral rules and duties (e.g., **Kant's Categorical Imperative**).
 - **Ethics of Care:** Prioritizes the particular context and relationships involved in a situation over universal principles.
 - **Example:** A deontological approach might always prioritize truth-telling, while an ethics of care approach might **consider withholding information if it would protect a vulnerable individual** in a specific context.

Significance in Public Administration:

- **Personalized Approach:** The ethics of care encourages public administrators to consider the unique circumstances of individuals and communities **rather than applying one-size-fits-all policies**.
 - **Example:** In social welfare programs, **instead of having rigid eligibility criteria**, administrators might be empowered to consider individual cases more holistically.
- **Relationship-Building:** It emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining positive

relationships between government and citizens.

- **Example:** A police department adopting **community policing strategies** that focus on building trust and understanding with local residents.
- **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** The ethics of care values empathy and emotional intelligence in decision-making processes.
 - **Example:** In disaster management, considering not just the physical needs of affected populations but also their **emotional and psychological well-being**.
- **Contextual Decision-Making:** It encourages administrators to consider the broader context and potential impacts of their decisions on various stakeholders.
 - **Example:** In urban planning, **considering not just efficiency and cost**, but also how changes might affect community bonds and local traditions.
- **Focus on Marginalized Groups:** The ethics of care often highlights the needs of traditionally marginalized or vulnerable groups.
 - **Example:** Designing public transportation systems with a **focus on accessibility for elderly and disabled users**, even if it's not the most cost-efficient option.
- **Long-term Relationship Management:** It encourages thinking about the long-term impacts of policies on social relationships and community structures.
 - **Example:** In education policy, considering not just test scores but also how school programs affect family dynamics and community involvement.

Conclusion

The ethics of care provides a valuable complement to traditional ethical frameworks in public administration. By emphasizing **relationships, context, and responsiveness**, it can lead to more humane and effective governance. However, it's important to balance this approach with other ethical considerations to ensure fairness and efficiency in public service delivery