Mains Practice Question

Q. Explore the contrasting approaches of the Ethics of Care and the Ethics of Justice. Discuss how a civil servant might navigate situations where these ethical principles seem to conflict. **(150 words)**

20 Jun, 2024   GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach:

- Introduce by linking Ethics of Care and the Ethics of Justice with civil servants
- Highlight the contrasting approaches of the Ethics of Care and the Ethics of Justice
- Suggest ways to navigate situations where these ethical principles seem to conflict
- Conclude in a balanced manner.

Introduction:

The **ethical landscape for a civil servant is a complex terrain.** Two dominant yet contrasting frameworks guide moral decision-making: **Ethics of Care (EoC) and Ethics of Justice (EoJ).**

- Understanding these contrasting approaches and navigating their potential conflicts is crucial for effective and ethical governance.

Body:

Ethics of Care vs. Ethics of Justice:

Aspect	Ethics of Care(EoC)	Ethics of Justice (EoJ)
Philosophical roots	Feminist philosophy (e.g., **Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings**)	Traditional moral philosophy (e.g., **John Rawls, Immanuel Kant**)
Core focus	Relationships, context, empathy	Universal principles, fairness, impartiality
Key values	Compassion, responsibility, attentiveness	Equality, rights, duty
View of individuals	Interconnected, part of social networks	Autonomous agents with rights
Moral reasoning	Narrative-based, contextual	Abstract, principle-based
Conflict resolution	Seeks to maintain relationships, minimize harm	Aims for fair outcomes based on rules
Concept of justice	Contextual, based on needs and relationships	Universal, based on equality and rights
Primary ethical question	"How to respond?"	"What's fair?"
View of autonomy	Relational autonomy	Individual self-determination
Potential weaknesses	May lead to favoritism or bias	May overlook individual circumstances

Application in policy	Community-based, responsive	Standardized, universally applied

Navigate Situations Where These Ethical Principles Seem to Conflict:

- **Context-Specific Analysis:**
  - **Identify Stakeholders and Needs:** Analyze the **specific context,** including the individuals or groups involved, their needs, and potential harms.
    - This helps determine which ethical framework **(EoC's focus on relationships or EoJ's focus on rights)** is most relevant.
  - **Example**: A civil servant might prioritize enforcing pollution regulations (EoJ) in an industrial area to protect the health of residents (EoC).
- **Multi-Level Reasoning:**
  - **Harmonize Principles:** Exploring if there's a way to achieve the goals of both frameworks.
    - Can **a fair policy (EoJ)** be implemented with **care and empathy (EoC)?**
  - **Example:** A policy requiring stricter safety standards in construction (EoJ) might lead to job losses (against EoC).
    - The civil servant might explore training programs (EoC) to help workers transition to safer jobs.
- **Transparency and Participation:**
  - **Involve Stakeholders:** Include those affected in the decision-making process. This fosters trust (EoC), helps gather valuable information about the context, and potentially leads to solutions that consider both fairness (EoJ) and specific needs (EoC).
  - **Example:** In a land acquisition project, **a civil servant might hold consultations with both** the acquiring company and the affected community (EoC).
    - This allows for exploring fair compensation (EoJ) while understanding the community's specific concerns (EoC).
- **Utilizing Procedural Justice:**
  - **Fairness in Process:** Even when a decision favors one framework over the other, ensure the process itself is fair and transparent (EoJ).
    - This upholds the principles of impartial decision-making and accountability.
  - **Example:** Denying a permit to a factory violating environmental regulations can be done with a **transparent appeals process (EoJ)**, allowing the company to address the concerns while upholding fairness.

Conclusion:

By understanding EoC and EoJ, and skillfully navigating their potential conflicts, **civil servants can make well-rounded ethical decisions.** This fosters governance that is not only just but also humane, ultimately leading to a more **equitable and harmonious society.**