



Mains Practice Question

Q. “Happiness is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.” - Aristotle
Discuss the relationship between virtue, character, and happiness in the context of public service. **(150 words)**

25 Jul, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by delving into Aristotle’s quote
- Highlight the significance of Virtue in Public Service, Character Building and Public Service and Happiness and Fulfillment in Public Service
- Discuss the interplay of Virtue, Character, and Happiness in Public Service
- Conclude positively.

Introduction

Aristotle's assertion that happiness is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue underscores the **intrinsic link between ethical conduct and human fulfillment.**

- In the context of public service, this philosophy delves into the relationship between **virtue, character, and happiness.**

Body

Virtue in Public Service:

Virtue, as defined by Aristotle, is an **excellence of character**, a disposition to behave in the right way. In the context of public service, it manifests as a constellation of qualities like:

- **Integrity:** Upholding moral and ethical principles, even in the face of adversity. For instance, **IAS officer Durga Shakti Nagpal's 2013 crackdown on illegal sand mining** in Uttar Pradesh, despite facing political backlash
- **Impartiality:** Treating all citizens and stakeholders fairly, without bias or prejudice. The implementation of various social welfare schemes, such as the Former Chief Election Commissioner **T.N. Seshan's reforms in the 1990s**, including strict enforcement of the **Model Code of Conduct.**
- **Objectivity:** Making decisions based on evidence and reason, rather than personal opinions or emotions. The **Bhilwara Model of Coping with Covid-19**, demonstrating the importance of objectivity in crisis management.
- **Empathy:** Understanding and sharing the feelings of others. The success of various government initiatives aimed at empowering marginalized sections of society, such as the **IAS officer Armstrong Pame**, exemplified empathy by building a **100-km road in Manipur in 2012** without government funds, connecting remote villages to vital services.

Character Building and Public Service

Character, the sum total of a person's moral and ethical qualities, is shaped by a complex interplay of factors including upbringing, education, and life experiences.

- **Leadership by Example:** Senior civil servants serve as **role models for their subordinates**. Former President **A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** continued teaching and inspiring youth even after his presidency, embodying lifelong learning and service
- **Continuous Learning:** A strong character is built through lifelong learning. The government's initiatives to promote capacity building among civil servants, such as the **Mission Karmayogi**, reflect the recognition of the need for continuous learning and development.
- **Ethical Dilemmas:** Public service is often fraught with ethical dilemmas. How individuals respond to these challenges shapes their character. **Delhi Police Man Raj Singh** in case held his duty first, helped arrest his own son who stabbed a woman.

Happiness and Fulfillment in Public Service

While happiness is not the primary objective of public service, it is a natural corollary of virtuous action and character development. Public servants who are driven by a **sense of purpose and a desire to make a difference** are more likely to experience job satisfaction.

Interplay of Virtue, Character, and Happiness in Public Service:

- **Virtue as the Foundation of Character and Happiness:** Virtue serves as the bedrock for character development.
 - As individuals in public service cultivate these virtues, their character strengthens, enabling them to **make ethical decisions and serve the public interest effectively**.
 - This, in turn, contributes to a **sense of fulfillment and happiness** derived from meaningful work.
- **Character as the Bridge Between Virtue and Happiness:** Character, shaped by both innate qualities and experiences, is the practical manifestation of virtue.
 - A strong character allows public servants to **translate their values into actions**, fostering a sense of purpose and satisfaction.
 - By consistently adhering to ethical principles, **individuals build a strong reputation and contribute to a positive work environment**, enhancing overall well-being.
- **Happiness as the Culmination of Virtuous Character:** While not the primary objective, happiness is a natural outcome of a life well-lived in public service.
 - When individuals align their actions with their values and make a positive impact on society, they **experience a deep sense of fulfillment and contentment**.
 - This happiness is reinforced by the respect and admiration of colleagues and the community.

Conclusion

The interplay between virtue, character, and happiness is a **dynamic and multifaceted process**. In the context of public service, it is a journey of **continuous learning, growth, and fulfillment**. By cultivating virtue, building strong character, and finding meaning in their work, public servants can contribute significantly to the **overall well-being of society**.