



Mains Practice Question

Q. Compare and contrast Virtue Ethics with Consequentialism. Which approach do you think is most valuable for building a strong ethical character in a civil servant? **(150 words)**

27 Jun, 2024 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining virtue ethics and consequentialism
- Compare virtue ethics with consequentialism
- Highlight how virtue ethics and consequentialism offer significant value for civil servants
- Conclude positively.

Introduction

Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism are two key ethical theories. **Virtue Ethics** focuses on the character and virtues of a person, emphasizing moral character over specific actions.

- **Consequentialism**, on the other hand, judges the morality of actions based on their outcomes, with utilitarianism seeking to maximize overall happiness or utility.

Body

Comparing Virtue Ethics with Consequentialism:

Aspect	Virtue Ethics	Consequentialism
Core Focus	Character and moral virtues	Outcomes of actions
Key Question	"What would a virtuous person do?"	"What action will produce the best results?"
Ethical Basis	Virtues (e.g., honesty, courage, compassion)	Consequences of actions
Decision-making	Based on cultivated virtues and practical wisdom	Based on calculation of expected outcomes
Flexibility	Context-sensitive, adaptable to situations	Universal principles, but adaptable to new information
Accountability	Judges the person's character	Judges the results of actions
Weaknesses	May lack clear action guidance in some situations	Can potentially justify unethical means for "good" ends

Value for Civil Servants:

Both virtue ethics and consequentialism offer significant value for building strong ethical character in civil servants. A comprehensive approach **incorporating elements from both frameworks is likely to be most effective.**

- **Comprehensive Decision-Making:** Virtue ethics can guide overall character and intentions, while consequentialism can inform specific policy choices.
- **Balancing Competing Interests:** The combination helps in navigating tensions between **personal integrity and maximizing public good.**
- **Ethical Resilience:** Virtue ethics provides a stable moral foundation, while consequentialism offers tools **for tackling complex policy challenges.**
- **Public Trust and Effectiveness:** Strong character (virtue ethics) combined with a focus on positive outcomes (consequentialism) can enhance both public trust and government effectiveness.
- **Ethical Leadership:** The dual approach equips civil servants to be both moral exemplars and effective problem-solvers.

Conclusion

While both approaches are crucial, **virtue ethics might be considered slightly more important for civil servants** because it forms the foundational character upon which all decisions are based. A civil servant with a strong ethical character is more likely to **consistently make good decisions and resist corruption**, even in situations where consequences are uncertain or hard to measure.

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