



Mains Practice Question

Q. Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have the right to do and what is right to do." - Potter Stewart. Discuss the significance of this quote in the context of public administration and decision-making. (150 words)

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Approach

- Begin your answer with a brief introduction to the quote and explain what the quote means.
- Discuss the significance of the quote in the realm of public administration and decision-making.
- You can end with a concise, impactful conclusion that reinforces the importance of ethics in the context of public administration and decision-making.

Introduction

The quote "Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have the right to do and what is right to do" by Potter Stewart encapsulates a fundamental principle that is highly relevant to the field of public administration and decision-making. In the context of public administration, this quote highlights the importance of distinguishing between actions that are legally permissible and those that are morally justifiable.

Body

Key points that highlight its significance:

- **Accountability and Responsibility:** Public administrators and officials must prioritize the public's best interests and consider ethical responsibility, not just legality, highlighting the need for accountability at all levels.
- **Upholding the Public Interest:** Public administration is all about serving the public interest by prioritizing citizens' welfare and making ethically sound choices for the greater good.
- **Differentiating between Legal and Ethical:** This quote highlights the difference between legality and ethics. Just because something is legal doesn't mean it's ethical. Public administrators should aim for decisions that align with both the law and ethical standards.
- **Ethical Dilemmas:** Public administrators, in complex situations, should heed Stewart's advice by contemplating not only their legal power but also the ethical dimensions of their decisions.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Ethical decision-making for public administrators prioritizes long-term outcomes, emphasizing sustainability, equity, and social justice over short-term gains.
- **Public Perception:** Public trust in government and officials hinges on ethical decision-making, which can boost the reputation of the public sector and its employees when consistently upheld.

Conclusion

This quote reminds us that public administration and decision-making must transcend mere legality. Ethical considerations should play a pivotal role in shaping decisions and actions in the public sector. By recognizing the distinction between what one has the right to do and what is right to do, public administrators can contribute to more responsible, accountable, and morally sound governance, ultimately

serving the best interests of society.

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