Mains Practice Question

Q. What are the key ethical theories and frameworks, and how can they be applied to real-world ethical dilemmas? (150 words)

23 Feb, 2023   GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly introducing ethical theories.
- Discuss various ethical theories and their application in real-world ethical dilemmas.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

- Ethical theories provide a framework for understanding and analyzing ethical issues and dilemmas, helping individuals and organizations to make informed and responsible decisions.

Body

- There are several key ethical theories and frameworks that can be used to analyze and address ethical dilemmas in the real world. Here are a few examples:
  - **Utilitarianism:** This theory proposes that the best action is the one that maximizes overall happiness or well-being. Utilitarianism suggests that we should evaluate the consequences of our actions and **choose the course of action that leads to the greatest good for the greatest number of people.**
    - **Example:** An engineer is designing a new product that will be used by thousands of people. They need to decide whether to use a cheaper material that may break down faster or a more expensive material that will last longer.
      - Applying utilitarianism, the engineer would choose the material that would result in the greatest overall well-being for the most people.
  - **Deontology:** This theory suggests that **actions should be based on a sense of duty or moral obligation.** It emphasizes universal moral principles and the idea that certain actions are inherently right or wrong, regardless of their consequences.
    - **Example:** A doctor is treating a patient who is terminally ill and in severe pain. The patient requests that the doctor provide a lethal dose of medication so they can end their suffering.
      - Applying deontology, the doctor would not provide the medication because it goes against the principle of preserving life and the Hippocratic Oath to "do no harm."
  - **Virtue ethics:** This theory emphasizes the **development of moral character and virtues such as honesty, compassion, and fairness.** It suggests that ethical behavior stems from individuals who strive to embody these virtues in their actions.
    - **Example:** A company is deciding whether to implement a new policy that would increase profits but also harm the environment.
      - Applying virtue ethics, the company would consider the virtues of responsibility, environmental stewardship, and compassion for future generations when making their decision.

- **Care ethics:** This theory emphasizes the **importance of personal relationships and empathy in ethical decision-making**. It suggests that we have ethical obligations to those we care for, such as family members, friends, and community members.
    - **Example**: A social worker is working with a family experiencing financial hardship. The family needs access to resources to meet their basic needs, but the social worker is also concerned about preserving their dignity and autonomy.
        - Applying care ethics, the social worker would prioritize building a relationship of trust and empathy with the family and working collaboratively to find solutions that meet their needs while also preserving their sense of agency.
- These are just a few examples of ethical theories and frameworks that can be applied to real-world ethical dilemmas. Ultimately, the best approach will depend on the specific context and circumstances of each situation, as well as the values and beliefs of the individuals involved.

Conclusion

In applying these ethical theories and frameworks to real-world ethical dilemmas, it is important to consider the specific details of the situation and to weigh the various ethical considerations involved. It is also important to recognize that different ethical theories and frameworks may lead to different conclusions about what is ethical in a given situation, and that ethical decision-making often involves complex trade-offs and compromises.