

Ethics Previous Year Questions for UPSC Mains

GS 4 Ethics Questions (Year-Wise)

We have segregated the ethics questions from the GS 4 papers of 2019-2013. There are two sets:

- Theoretical Questions
- Case Studies.

Candidates can find both the sets under each year one after another. Ethics forms a major chunk in GS 4 where both theoretical and case studies-bound questions revolve around this topic. You can get a complete trend analysis of general studies 4 in our [GS Paper 4 Strategy, Structure and Syllabus](#) page.

Ethics Questions – 2020

2020 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. Discuss the role of ethics and values in enhancing the following three major components of Comprehensive National Power (CNP) viz. human capital, soft power (culture and policies) and social harmony.
2. Distinguish between laws and rules. Discuss the role of ethics in formulating them.

2020 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. Rajesh Kumar is a senior public servant, with a reputation of honesty and forthrightness, currently posted in the Finance Ministry as Head of the Budget Division. His department is presently busy organising the budgetary support to the states, four of which are due to go to the polls within the financial _____ year. This year's annual budget had allotted 78300 crores for the National Housing Scheme (NHS), a centrally sponsored social housing scheme for the weaker sections of society. 775 crores have been drawn for NHS till June. The Ministry of Commerce had long been pursuing a case for setting up a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in a southern state to boost exports. After two years of detailed discussions between the centre and state, the Union Cabinet approved the project in August. The process was initiated to acquire the necessary land.

Eighteen months ago, a leading Public Sector Unit (PSU) had projected the need for setting up a large natural gas processing plant in a northern state for the regional gas grid. The required land is already in possession of the PSU. The gas grid is an essential component of the national energy security strategy. After three rounds of global bidding, the project was allotted to an MNC, M/s XYZ Hydrocarbons. The first tranche of payment to the MNC is scheduled to be made in December.

Finance Ministry was asked for a timely allocation of an additional 6000 crores for these two developmental projects. It was decided to recommend re-appropriation of this entire amount from the

NHS allocation. The file was forwarded to the Budget Department for their comments and further processing. On studying the case file, Rajesh Kumar realized that this re-appropriation may cause an inordinate delay in the execution of NHS, a project much publicized in the rallies of senior politicians. Correspondingly, the non-availability of finances would cause a financial loss in the SEZ and national embarrassment due to delayed payment in an international project.

Rajesh Kumar discussed the matter with his seniors. He was conveyed that this politically sensitive situation needs to be processed immediately. Rajesh Kumar realized that diversion of funds from NHS could raise difficult questions for the government in the Parliament.

Discuss the following with reference to this case:

- Ethical issues involved in re-appropriation of funds from a welfare project to the developmental projects.
 - Given the need for proper utilization of public funds, discuss the options available to Rajesh Kumar. Is resigning a worthy option?
2. The Chairman of Bharat Missiles Ltd (BML) was watching a program on TV wherein the Prime Minister was addressing the nation on the necessity of developing a self-reliant India. He subconsciously nodded in agreement and smiled to himself as he mentally reviewed BML's journey in the past two decades. BML had admirably progressed from producing first-generation anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMS) to designing and producing state of the art ATGM weapon systems that would be the envy of any army. He sighed in reconciliation with his assumptions that the government would probably not alter the status quo of a ban on the export of military weaponry. To his surprise, the very next day he got a telephone call from the Director-General, Ministry of Defence, asking him to discuss the modalities of increasing BML production of ATGMS as there is a possibility of exporting the same to a friendly foreign country. The Director-General wanted the Chairman to discuss the details with his staff at Delhi next week. Two days later, at a press conference, the Defence Minister stated that he aims to double the current weapons export levels within five years. This would give an impetus to financing the development and manufacture of indigenous weapons in the country. He also stated that all indigenous arms manufacturing nations have a very good record of the international arms trade. As Chairman of BML, what are your views on the following points?
- As an arms exporter of a responsible nation like India, what are the ethical issues involved in the arms trade?
 - List five ethical factors that would influence the decision to sell arms to foreign governments.
3. Rampura, a remote district inhabited by a tribal population, is marked by extreme backwardness and abject poverty. Agriculture is the mainstay of the local population, though it is primarily subsistence due to the very small landholdings. There is an insignificant industrial or mining activity. Even the targeted welfare programs have inadequately benefited the tribal population. In this restrictive scenario, the youth has begun to migrate to other states to supplement the family income. The plight of minor girls is that their parents are persuaded by labour contractors to send them to work in the Bt Cotton farms of a nearby state. The soft fingers of the minor girls are well suited for plucking the cotton. The inadequate living and working conditions in these farms have caused serious health issues for the minor girls. NGOs in the districts of domicile and the cotton farms appear to be compromised and have not effectively espoused the twin issues of child labour and development of

the _____ area.
You are appointed as the District Collector of Rampura. Identify the ethical issues involved. Which specific steps will you initiate to ameliorate the conditions of minor girls of your district and to improve the overall economic scenario in the district?

Candidates can find the remaining case study questions based on ethics from the [UPSC Mains GS IV Paper PDF](#) given in the linked article.

Ethics Questions – 2019

2019 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. What is meant by the term 'constitutional morality'? How does one uphold constitutional morality?

2019 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. An apparel manufacturing company having a large number of women employees was losing sales due to various factors. The company hired a reputed marketing executive, who increased the volume of sales within a short span of time. However, some unconfirmed reports came up regarding his indulgence in sexual harassment at the workplace. After some time a woman employee launched a formal complaint to the management against the marketing executive about sexually harassing her. Faced with the companies' indifference, in not taking cognizance of her grievances, she lodged an FIR with the police. Realizing the sensitivity and gravity of the situation, the company called the woman employee to negotiate. In that, she was offered a hefty sum of money to withdraw the complaint and the FIR and also give in writing that the marketing executive is not involved in the case.
 - Identify the ethical issues involved in this case.
 - What options are available to the woman employee?

Ethics Questions – 2018

2018 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. What is meant by conflict of interest? Illustrate with examples, the difference between the actual and potential conflicts of interest.
2. Suppose the Government of India is thinking of constructing a dam in a mountain valley bond by forests and inhabited by ethnic communities. What rational policy should it resort to in dealing with unforeseen contingencies

2018 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. As a senior officer in the Ministry, you have access to important policy decisions and upcoming big announcements such as road construction projects before they are notified in the public domain. The Ministry is about to announce a mega road project for which the drawings are already in place. Sufficient care was taken by the planners to make use of the government land with the minimum land acquisition from private parties. The compensation rate for private parties was also finalized as per government rules. Care was also taken to minimize deforestation. Once the project is announced, it is expected that there will be a huge spurt in real estate prices in and around that area. Meanwhile, the Minister concerned insists that you realign the road in such a way that it comes closer to his 20 acres farmhouse. He also suggests that he would facilitate the purchase of a big plot of land in your wife's name at the prevailing rate which is very nominal, in and around the proposed mega road project. He also tries to convince you by saying that there is no harm in it as he is buying the land legally. He even promises to supplement your savings in case you do not have sufficient funds to buy the land. However, by the act of realignment, a lot of agricultural lands has to be acquired, thereby causing a considerable financial burden on the government, and also the displacement of the farmers. As if this is not enough, it will involve cutting down a large number of trees denuding the area of its green cover.
 - Faced with this situation, what will you do?
 - Critically examine various conflicts of interest and explain what your responsibilities are as a public servant.
2. Edward Snowden, a computer expert and former CIA administrator, released confidential Government documents to the press about the existence of Government surveillance programmes. According to many legal experts and the US Government, his action violated the Espionage act of 1971, which identified the leak of State secret as an act of treason. Yet, despite the fact that he broke the law, Snowden argued that he had a moral obligation to act. He gave a justification for his "whistle blowing" by stating that he had a duty "to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them." According to Snowden, the Government's violation of privacy had to be exposed regardless of legality since more substantive issues of social action and public morality were involved here. Many agreed with Snowden. Few argued that he broke the law and compromised national security, for which he should be held accountable.
 - Do you agree that Snowden's actions were ethically justified even if legally prohibited? Why or why not?
 - Make an argument by weighing the competing values in this case

Ethics Questions – 2017

2017 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. One of the tests of integrity is complete refusal to be compromised. Explain with reference to a real life example.
2. Corporate social responsibility makes companies more profitable and sustainable. Analyse.
3. The crisis of ethical values in modern times is traced to a narrow perception of the good life. Discuss

2017 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. You are aspiring to become an IAS officer and you have cleared various stages and now you have been selected for the personal interview. On the day of the interview, on the way to the venue, you saw an accident where a mother and child who happen to be your relatives were badly injured. They needed immediate help. What would you have done in such a situation? Justify your action.
2. You are the manager of a spare parts company A and you have to negotiate a deal with the manager of a large manufacturing company B. The deal is highly competitive and sealing the deal is critical for your company. The deal is being worked out over dinner. After dinner, the manager of manufacturing company B offered to drop you to the hotel in his car. On the way to the hotel, he happens to hit a motorcycle injuring the motorcyclist badly. You know the manager was driving fast and thus lost control. The law enforcement officer comes to investigate the issue and you are the sole eyewitness to it. Knowing the strict laws pertaining to road accidents you are aware that your honest account of the incident would lead to the prosecution of the manager and as a consequence the deal is likely to be jeopardised, which is of immense importance to your company.
 - What are the dilemmas you face?
 - What will be your response to the situation?

Ethics Questions – 2016

2016 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. Explain how ethics contributes to social and human well-being.
2. Analyse John Rawls's concept of social justice in the Indian Context.
3. Law and ethics are considered to be the two tools for controlling human conduct so as to make it conducive to civilized social existence.
 - Discuss how they achieve this objective.
 - Giving examples, show how the two differ in their approaches.
4. Anger is a harmful negative emotion. It is injurious to both personal life and work life.
 - Discuss how it leads to negative emotions and undesirable behaviors.
 - How can it be managed and controlled?

2016 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. A fresh engineering graduate gets a job in the prestigious chemical industry. She likes the work. The salary is also good. However, after a few months, she accidentally discovers that highly toxic waste is being secretly discharged into a river nearby. This is causing health problems to the villagers downstream who depend on the river for their water needs. She is perturbed and mentions her concern to her colleagues who have been with the company for longer periods. They advise her to keep quiet as anyone who mentions the topic is summarily dismissed. She cannot risk losing her job as she is the sole bread-winner for her family and has to support her ailing parents and siblings. At

first, she thinks that if her seniors are keeping quiet, why should she stick out her neck. But her conscience pricks her to do something to save the river and the people who depend upon it. At heart, she feels that the advice of silence given by her friends is not correct though she cannot give reasons for it. She thinks you are a wise person and seeks your advice.

- What arguments can you advance to show her that keeping quiet is not morally right?
 - What course of action would you advise her to adopt and why?
2. You are a young, aspiring and sincere employee in a Government office working as an assistant to the director of your department. Since you have joined recently, you need to learn and progress. Luckily your superior is very kind and ready to train you for your job. He is a very intelligent and well-informed person having knowledge of various departments. In short, you respect your boss and are looking forward to learning a lot from him. Since you have good tuning with the boss, he started depending on you. One day due to ill health he invited you to his place for finishing some urgent work. You reached his house and before you could ring the bell you heard shouting noises. You waited for a while. After entering the house the boss greeted you and explained the work. But you were constantly disturbed by the crying of a woman. At last, you inquired with the boss but his answer did not satisfy you. The next day, you were compelled to inquire further in the office and found out that his behavior is very bad at home with his wife. He also beats up his wife. His wife is not well educated and is a simple woman in comparison to her husband. you see that though your boss is a nice person in the office, he is engaged in domestic violence at home. In such a situation, you are left with the following options. Analyse each option with its consequences.
- Just ignore thinking about it because it is their personal matter.
 - Report the case to the appropriate authority.
 - Your own innovative approach towards the situation.
3. ABC Ltd. is a large transnational company having diversified business activities with a huge shareholder base. The company is continuously expanding generating employment. The company, in its expansion and diversification program, decides to establish a new plant at Vikaspuri, an area that is underdeveloped. The new plant is designed to use energy-efficient technology that will help the company to save production costs by 20%. The company's decision goes well with the Government policy of attracting investment to develop such underdeveloped regions. The government has also announced a tax holiday for five years for the companies that invest in underdeveloped areas. However, the new plant may bring chaos for the inhabitants of Vikaspuri region, which is otherwise tranquil. The new plant may result in an increased cost of living, aliens migrating to the region, disturbing the social and economic order. The company sensing the possible protest tried to educate the people of Vikaspuri region and the public in general that its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy would help overcome the likely difficulties of the residents of Vikaspuri region. In spite of this, the protests began and some of the residents decided to approach the judiciary as their plea before the Government did not yield any result.
- Identify the issues involved in the case.
 - What can be suggested to satisfy the company's goal and to address the residents' concerns?

Ethics Questions – 2015

2015 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. What is meant by 'environmental ethics'? Why is it important to study? Discuss any one environmental issue from the viewpoint of environmental ethics.
2. Differentiate between the following:
 - Law and ethics
 - Ethical management and management of ethics
 - Discrimination and preferential treatment
 - Personal Ethics and Professional Ethics
3. How do the virtues of trustworthiness and fortitude get manifested in public service? Explain with examples
4. Social values are more important than economic values. Discuss the above statement with examples in the context of inclusive growth of a nation.

2015 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. One of the scientists working in the R&D laboratory of a major pharmaceutical company discovers that one of the company's best selling veterinary drugs has the potential to cure a currently incurable liver disease which is prevalent in tribal areas. However, developing a variant of the drug suitable for human beings entailed a lot of research and development having a huge expenditure to the extent of Rs. 50 crores. It was unlikely that the company would recover the cost as the disease was rampant only in poverty-stricken areas having very little market otherwise. If you were the CEO, then
 - Identify the various actions that you could take
 - Evaluate the pros and cons of each of your actions

Ethics Questions – 2014

2014 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. All human beings aspire for happiness. Do you agree? What does happiness mean to you? Explain with answers.
2. What does ethics seek to promote human life? Why is it all the more important in Public Administration?
3. Which eminent personality has inspired you the most in the context of ethical conduct in life? Give the Gist of his/her teachings. Giving specific examples describe how you have been able to apply these teachings for your own ethical development.
4. There is a heavy ethical responsibility on the public servants because they occupy positions of power, handle huge amounts of public funds, and their decisions have a wide-ranging impact on

society and the environment. What steps have you taken to improve your ethical competence to handle such responsibility?

5. The current society is plagued with widespread trust-deficit. What are the consequences of this situation for personal well-being and for societal well-being? What can you do at a personal level to make yourself trustworthy?
6. It is often said that poverty leads to corruption. However, there is no dearth of instances where affluent and powerful people indulge in corruption in a big way. What are the basic causes of corruption among people? Support your answer with examples.
7. We are witnessing increasing instances of sexual violence against women in the country. Despite existing legal provisions against it, the number of such incidences is on the rise. Suggest some innovative measures to tackle this menace.

2014 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. Rameshwar successfully cleared the prestigious civil services examination and was excited about the opportunity that he would get through the civil services to serve the country. However, soon after joining the services, he realized that things are not as rosy as he had imagined. He found a number of malpractices prevailing in the department assigned to him. For example, funds under various schemes and grants were being misappropriated. The official facilities were frequently being used for personal needs by the officers and staff. After some time, he noticed that the process of recruiting the staff was also not up to the mark. Prospective candidates were required to write an examination in which a lot of cheating was going on. Some candidates were provided external help in the examination. Rameshwar brought these incidents to the notice of his seniors. However, he was advised to keep his eyes, ears and mouth shut and ignore all these things which were taking place with the connivance of the higher-ups. Rameshwar felt highly disillusioned and uncomfortable. He comes to you seeking your advice.
 - Indicate various options that you think are available in this situation.
 - How would you help him to evaluate these options and choose the most appropriate path to be adopted?
2. In our country, the migration of rural people to towns and cities is increasing drastically. This is causing serious problems both in the rural as well as in the urban areas. In fact, things are becoming really unmanageable. Can you analyze this problem in detail and indicate not only the socio-economic but also the emotional and attitudinal factors responsible for this problem? Also, distinctly bring out why –
 - Educated youth are trying to shift to urban areas
 - Landless poor people are migrating to urban slums
 - Even some farmers are selling off the land and trying to settle in urban areas taking petty jobs.

What feasible steps can you suggest which will be effective in controlling this serious problem in our country?

Ethics Questions – UPSC Mains

2013 – Ethics Questions Theory-Based

1. What do you understand by 'values' and 'ethics'? In what way is it important to be ethical along with being professionally competent?
2. Some people feel that values keep changing with time and situation, while others strongly believe that there are certain universal and eternal human values. Give your perception in this regard with due justification.
3. "The good of an individual is contained in the good of all." What do you understand by this statement? How can this principle be implemented in public life?
4. It is often said that 'politics' and 'ethics' do not go together. What is your opinion in this regard? Justify your answer with illustrations.

2013 – Ethics Questions Case Study

1. You are heading a leading technical institute in the country. The institute is planning to convene an interview panel shortly under your chairmanship for the selection of the post of professors. A few days before the interview, you get a call from the Personal Secretary (PS) of a senior government functionary seeking your intervention in favour of the selection of a close relative of the functionary for this post. The PS also informs you that he is aware of the long pending and urgent proposals of your institute for grant of funds for modernization, which are awaiting the functionary's approval. He assures you that he would get these proposals cleared.
 - What are the options available to you?
 - Evaluate each of these options and choose the option which you would adopt, giving reasons.
2. You are the Executive Director of an upcoming InfoTech Company which is making a name for itself in the market. Mr. A, who is a star performer, is heading the marketing team. In a short period of one year, he has helped in doubling the revenues as well as creating high brand equity for the Company so much so that you are thinking of promoting him. However, you have been receiving information from many corners about his attitude towards the female colleagues; particularly his habit of making loose comments on women. In addition, he regularly sends indecent SMS to all the team members including his female colleagues. One day, late in the evening, Mrs. X, who is one of Mr. A's team members, comes to you visibly disturbed. She complains against the continued misconduct of Mr. A, who has been making undesirable advances towards her and has even tried to touch her inappropriately in his cabin. She tendered her resignation and left your office.
 - What are the options available to you?
 - Evaluate each of these options and choose the option you would adopt, giving reasons