Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

“In law, a man is guilty when he violates the rights of others. In ethics, he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so.” — Immanuel Kant.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Law and ethics, intention, moral conscience, rights, mens rea, self-regulation, integrity, moral responsibility

Model Answer

Introduction

Kant distinguishes legal responsibility from moral responsibility. Law primarily judges externally manifested conduct, whereas ethics also examines the intention and moral character underlying an action.

Body

An individual may formulate an intention to harm another person without actually committing the prohibited act. In such circumstances, legal liability may not arise merely from the thought, but ethically the intention reveals a moral deficiency.

For example, a public official may technically comply with procurement rules while secretly intending to favour a particular contractor. Even if corruption is not ultimately committed, the intention conflicts with the values of integrity and impartiality expected from public service.

The quotation highlights the importance of **self-regulation and conscience**. Laws cannot regulate every thought or anticipate every unethical possibility. Ethical individuals therefore act responsibly even when external

supervision is absent.

However, ethical judgement should not become punishment for mere thoughts. Human beings experience unwanted thoughts, and morality should distinguish passing thoughts from deliberate intentions translated into choices.

Conclusion

Kant's statement emphasises that ethical conduct requires an **inner commitment to doing what is right**, not merely avoiding legal punishment. Law establishes minimum standards; ethics encourages higher standards of character and conscience.

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