Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

“The true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject anything, is not whether it has any evil in it; but whether it has more evil than good. There are few things wholly evil or wholly good. Almost everything, especially of governmental policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgement of the preponderance between them is continually demanded. ”Abraham Lincoln

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2018	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Ethical decision-making; weighing benefits and harms; utilitarian reasoning; public interest; proportionality; protection of rights; evidence-based governance; long-term consequences

Model Answer

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln's quotation highlights the complexity of moral and administrative decisions. Most policies involve both benefits and costs; therefore, sound judgement requires evaluating their relative significance rather than expecting absolute perfection.

Meaning in the Present Context

1. Balanced Evaluation: Public policies should be assessed by comparing their likely benefits with their social, economic, environmental, and ethical costs.

2. Public Interest: Decisions should prioritise collective welfare over narrow political interests. For example, infrastructure development may generate employment but also cause displacement and ecological damage.

3. Evidence-Based Judgement: Administrators must rely on scientific evidence, stakeholder consultations, and credible data instead of assumptions or personal biases.

4. Proportionality: A policy should not impose excessive harm when a less harmful alternative can achieve similar objectives.

5. Protection of Rights: The majority's benefit cannot automatically justify violating fundamental rights, human dignity, or the rights of vulnerable communities.

6. Long-Term Perspective: Decision-makers must consider future generations, sustainability, unintended consequences, and the reversibility of possible damage.

7. Accountability: Governments should explain the reasoning behind decisions and revise policies when evidence reveals disproportionate harm.

Conclusion

Lincoln's message encourages practical wisdom and balanced judgement. Ethical governance requires maximising public good while minimising harm, without compromising constitutional values and fundamental rights.

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