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Q6

What do each of the following quotations mean to you? (a) "Condemn none: if you can stretch out a helping hand, do so. If not, fold your hands, bless your brothers, and let them go their own way." - Swami Vivekanand (b) "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." - Mahatma Gandhi (c) "A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true." - Socrates.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS IV · 10 marks · Moral Thinkers and Philosophers

Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and the world.

Core demand of the question

- What do each of the following quotations mean to you?
- (a) "Condemn none: if you can stretch out a helping hand, do so. If not, fold your hands, bless your brothers, and let them go their own way." - **Swami Vivekananda**
- (b) "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." - **Mahatma Gandhi**
- (c) "A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true." - **Socrates**

Revision summary

- **Vivekananda:** help when you can; do not add condemnation when you cannot; still punish crime.
- **Gandhi:** identity is discovered in service to others, not in title; do not misread this as forced unpaid labour.
- **Socrates:** a morality of shifting feelings is unsound; public right needs reasons that outlast a mood.

Emotion informs; it does not replace duty.

- **Together:** a hand, a broom, and a principle.

Introduction

- **Three sentences for a public life:** help without contempt, find the self in seva, and refuse a morality that is only a mood. Each is a present work-rule, not a biography.

Body**(a) Vivekananda: a helping hand, not a curse**

- The line forbids the cheap pleasure of condemnation - the tweet, the caste slur, the officer's sneer at a petitioner who failed a form.
- **Practical meaning:** if you have power, money, skill or a file, use them as a hand. If you do not, do not add a sermon. Bless and step aside.

- It is not moral indifference. Letting someone "go their own way" is for the adult who is not harming another. It is not a licence to ignore a child in labour or a woman being beaten next door.
- **For a civil servant:** complete the lawful case; do not humiliate the person you cannot yet help; do not perform rage on a file to look strict.
- **For a citizen:** volunteer, donate, teach - and if you cannot, refuse the hobby of hating the poor for their poverty.
- **Present context:** disaster relief that photographs the giver and shames the receiver fails **Vivekananda**. Quiet competence, and a refusal to curse the other community, passes.
- **Limit:** "condemn none" does not mean "prosecute none." A rioter, a rapist, a corrupt nexus is condemned by law. The quote targets contempt of persons, not the end of justice.

(b) **Gandhi:** lose yourself in the service of others

- **Gandhi** is inverting the career self. Identity is not found in a title, a bank balance or a pure ancestry. It is found when those are put down for a concrete service.
- **Losing yourself is not erasing rights. It is ego-reduction:** the ashram broom, the nursing of a plague patient, the constructive programme, the willingness to be nobody in a march so that a mill-worker becomes somebody.
- **For public service:** the IAS rank is a tool. The self that needs to be found is the one that can sit in a flood camp without asking who is watching.
- **Present context:** a pandemic volunteer, a teacher in a basti, an engineer who stays with a cracked pier rather than a ribbon - these are self-knowledge as duty.
- **Danger of the quote if misread:** a woman told to lose herself only in unpaid care, or a subordinate told to erase dissent, is not **Gandhi**. Service is chosen toward the weaker other, not extracted as caste or gender fate.
- **The best way is "best," not "only":** contemplation and skill still matter. **Gandhi's** point is that a self that never serves remains a theory.

(c) **Socrates:** against merely relative emotional morality

- **Socrates** is attacking a morality that is only "how I feel tonight," or "how my crowd feels," as if right and wrong were a fashion.
- **Relative emotional values:** I am kind when I like you, cruel when I am tired; my group's tears are sacred, the other group's are fake.
- That system is called illusion and vulgar because it cannot be taught, cannot be argued, and cannot protect a stranger. It is the ethics of the mob and of the mood.
- **Meaning for today:** viral outrage is not a moral philosophy. A lynching justified by "hurt sentiment" is the vulgar conception in the street.
- **Public ethics needs reasons that survive a change of mood:** dignity of persons, truth-telling, promise-keeping, and law that is the same after lunch.
- It is not a claim that emotion is useless. Compassion and indignation are data. They are not the statute.
- **For the civil servant:** do not let an angry minister's emotion, or your own humiliation after a scolding, become the principle of a demolition or a transfer. Write the reason that a court could read.
- **Socratic limit:** some values are debated (how much tax, how much speech). The quote forbids reducing even that debate to a feeling. It demands argument, not a vibe.
- **RIGHT stance:** moral realism of a practical kind - some acts are wrong though a majority cheers, and some duties remain though you do not feel like them.

Flow diagram

Vivekananda -> Help if you can
Vivekananda -> No cheap condemnation
Gandhi -> Lose ego in service
Lose ego in service -> Self found
Socrates -> Reasons not moods
Relative emotion -> Illusion and vulgar ethics

Conclusion

Vivekananda asks for help without contempt, and silence without a curse when you cannot help - never a shrug at a crime. **Gandhi** asks that the self be found in service, not in rank, without turning women or juniors into fuel. **Socrates** asks that morality be more than a relative emotion: reasons, law and a truth that a mob cannot vote away.

Facts & figures

Swami Vivekananda

Vedanta as practical strength and service; the quote fits his refusal of contempt toward the poor and the other faith.

Gandhian constructive programme

Spinning, sanitation, communal unity and village work as the daily meaning of losing the self in service.

Socratic ethics

Virtue as knowledge and argument, against the sophist claim that justice is only the interest or feeling of the stronger.

Article 14, Constitution of India

Equal protection is a non-emotional public standard; it is what Socratic morality looks like in a republic.

Conduct Rules on courtesy and integrity

A civil servant's minimum **Vivekananda**: no contempt at the counter; a minimum **Socrates**: a speaking order, not a mood.

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