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Q1(a)

The application of Artificial Intelligence as a dependable source of input for administrative rational decision-making is a debatable issue. Critically examine the statement from the ethical point of view

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS IV · 10 marks · Probity in Governance

Probity in Governance: Concept of public service; Philosophical basis of governance and probity; Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.

Core demand of the question

- (a) Examine AI as administrative input: speed and pattern versus bias, opacity, dignity and who is answerable
- (b) Name key dimensions of ethics that shape human action; show how they structure professional ethical decisions

Revision summary

AI can speed pattern-finding in administration, but it is ethically unsafe as an unreviewed verdict.

Bias, opacity, privacy harm and an accountability gap mean the officer remains answerable.

A dependable use is explainable input plus human review of high-stakes harm.

Ethics that shapes action includes duty, consequence, virtue, rights, role and care.

A professional framework turns those dimensions into stakeholders, reasons, records and appeal.

Introduction

A file used to wait for a human. It now waits for a **model**. Part (a) asks whether that model can be a **dependable source** for **rational** administrative choice, and what **ethics says when the model is wrong about a widow's ration**. Part (b) steps back: **ethics is not one slogan**. It is **several dimensions** that already live in a civil servant's Tuesday - intent, consequence, duty, virtue, rights and the role.

Body

(a) AI as input for administrative rational decision-making

Rational administration, in **Weber's** sense, is **reasoned, rule-bound and reviewable**. AI can help that reason: it can flag a flood village, match a duplicate PAN, or queue a hospital bed. Speed and pattern-finding are real goods. The ethical debate begins when the same tool is treated as a verdict, not as an input.

Bias. Training data copy old exclusion. A credit or policing score can punish a **pincode** or a **caste cluster** that the officer never named. **Kant's** test fails if a person is used as a **data**

point, not an **end**. **Opacity**. A black box cannot give the **reasons** that natural justice and administrative law demand. An order that says "the model scored you low" is not a **speaking order**. **Accountability**. When a death follows an automated stop of dialysis funds, who is guilty - the vendor, the secretary, or "the algorithm"? Ethics of **responsibility** (Jonas, and ordinary service rules) says the **human in the chair** remains answerable. **Dignity and privacy**. Facial recognition in a protest, or Aadhaar-linked welfare without a **manual override**, can starve a rights-holder for a "tech glitch". **Autonomy of the officer**. Over-trust is a new vice: the file is signed because the dashboard is green.

So the statement is **half right**. AI is a **dependable aid only inside a cage: explainability, audit of bias, human review of high-stakes harm, data minimisation** (DPDP Act as a floor), and a published **redress**. It is not a dependable **source of moral judgement**. **Aristotle's** prudence still sits with the officer who **visits the village** the model has erased.

(b) Key dimensions of ethics and professional decision-making

Ethics that actually **moves a hand** has several dimensions, not one exam heading.

Normative content: what is **right** - duty (**Kant**, Gita's nishkama), consequence (Mill: greatest sustainable good), virtue (**Aristotle**: courage, temperance, justice). **Intent and motive**: a lawful transfer done to punish a whistle-blower is still rotten inside. **Rights and dignity**: **Article 14 and 21** as ethical floors, not only clauses. **Character and habit**: one honest year is a **disposition**, not a poster. **Context and role**: a doctor's confidentiality is not a journalist's; a District Magistrate's **role morality** is not a private citizen's. **Social dimension**: **Durkheim's** conscience of the group; **Vivekananda's** **man-making**. **Relational care**: Gilligan's reminder that a rule can be correct and still **cruel** to the person in the queue.

In **professional** ethical decision-making these dimensions become a **sequence**, not a speech. Name the **stakeholders**. Name the **duty of office** (Constitution, law, Conduct Rules). Test **consequences** for the weakest face (**Gandhi's** talisman). Check **conflict of interest** and **appearance of bias**. Record **reasons**. Leave a path for **appeal**. A well-structured professional framework is therefore **values written down, rules that bite, cases practised in training, and leaders who eat last**. Dimensions without that structure stay as **optional poetry**. Structure without dimensions becomes **GFR theatre** that still starves a person.

Flow diagram

AI as input as input -> Human review
 Bias opacity -> Human review
 Duty consequence virtue rights -> Professional decision
 Human review -> Professional decision

Conclusion

AI can inform a rational file; it cannot own the file. Bias, opacity and the accountability gap make it an aid under human review, not a moral authority. Ethics works through duty, consequence, virtue, rights, role and care; a profession is ethical when those dimensions are built into reasons, records and redress.

Facts & figures

Speaking order

Indian administrative law expects a reasoned decision that a person can challenge; a model score is not by itself a reason.

DPDP Act, 2023

India's Digital Personal Data Protection law sets a statutory floor for how personal data may be used, including by public bodies in many settings.

Human in the loop

The practice of keeping a named officer responsible for high-stakes automated recommendations, especially welfare, policing and health.

Kant's end-not-means

Persons must not be treated only as instruments; a welfare algorithm that discards a life to clean a dashboard fails this test.

Gandhi's talisman

Recall the face of the poorest person who will bear the decision; useful when a model has never met that person.

Role morality

Duties that attach to an office - judge, doctor, DM - and that a private interest cannot cancel.

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