SuchitraACS

Ethics

<u>About</u>

- "Ethics is study of ideal human character and its purpose is to determine moral principles that govern human behavior, guiding us to live a virtuous and happy life." – Aristotle.

<u>Essence / Positive Consequences of Ethics</u>

1. **Guides Individual Behaviour**

   o Ethics shapes personal choices, ensuring honesty, compassion, and fairness.

   o *Example:* A civil servant refuses bribes for favour, thereby upholding integrity in public life.

2. **Foundation of Governance**

   o Ethical governance builds trust between state and citizens.

   o *Example (Assam):* **Mission Sadbhavana (2023)** cleared lakhs of pending files, upholding administrative ethics.

3. **Ensures Social Harmony**

   o Promotes tolerance, inclusivity, and peaceful coexistence.

   o *Example (Assam):* Ethical leadership during NRC implementation emphasized fairness and safeguarding genuine citizens' rights.

4. **Economic and Developmental Impact**

   o Ethical conduct reduces corruption and leakage, leading to efficient use of resources.

5. **Disaster Management and Welfare**

   o Ethics ensures relief reaches the most vulnerable during crises.

   o *Example (Assam floods 2024):* Relief camps prioritized women, children, and the elderly in food and medical supply distribution.

6. **Environmental Sustainability**

   o Ethics protects nature for inter-generational equity.

   o *Example (Assam):* The harmonious coexistence of the Moran community in Barekuri village of Tinsukia with the endangered Western Hoolock Gibbon.

7. **Strengthens Institutions and Democracy**

- Ethics is the bedrock of impartial judiciary, free press, and accountable legislature.
  - *Example (India):* Supreme Court's judgments striking down arbitrary laws (e.g., electoral bond) highlight the ethical role of institutions.

8. **Global and Technological Relevance**
   - In the age of AI and digital governance, ethics ensures privacy, fairness, and dignity.

Implication of Absence / Negative Consequences of Ethics

1. **Corruption & Nepotism** – Jobs, contracts, and resources are sold rather than earned.
   - *Example:* APSC Cash-for-Job Scam (2016, Assam) where officials sold government posts.

2. **Erosion of Trust in Institutions** – Citizens lose faith in the system.
   - *Example:* Assam Police SI recruitment scam (2020) where question papers were leaked.

3. **Disaster Mismanagement** – Lack of empathy delays rescue, worsening crises.
   - *Example:* Allegations of irregular flood relief distribution in Assam's Dhemaji and Majuli.

4. **Social Injustice** – Marginalized suffer due to bias and unethical practices.
   - *Example:* Assam's witch-hunting deaths (before 2015 Act) reflected absence of ethical awareness.

5. **Economic Drain** – Development funds get siphoned off.
   - *Example:* PDS rice scam in Assam (2014) exposed large-scale diversion of foodgrains.

6. **Environmental Damage** – Greed-driven exploitation of nature.
   - *Example:* Illegal coal mining in Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary (Assam) raised ethical concerns.

Nature of Ethics

1. **Normative Nature** – Ethics sets standards of right and wrong.
   - *Example:* Gandhi's concept of *Satya* and *Ahimsa* set the standard of ethics in the India's freedom struggle.

2. **Universal yet Relative** – Values like justice, honesty, and compassion are universal, but their application differs.
   - *Assam Example:* Universal ethical principle: Equality — seen in Sankardeva's *Ekasarana Dharma* as well as Kabir and Nanak's teachings.

3. **Practical & Applied** – Ethics comes alive in decision-making and real-life dilemmas.

4. **Dynamic & Evolving** – Ethical standards change with social progress.

   o *Example:* Abolition of Sati and child marriage in India.

5. **Human-Centered** – Ethics is rooted in dignity, rights, and welfare of people.

   o *Example:* Supreme Court's emphasis on "Right to Privacy" (2017) as a fundamental right.

6. **Integrative Nature** – Ethics intersects with law, religion, culture, and governance.

   o *Assam Example:* Anti-Witch Hunting Act (2015): Criminalizes harmful superstitions, promoting ethical justice.

What Ethics is Not About?

1. **Not Mere Law** – Law is enforceable by the state; ethics is guided by conscience.

   o *Example:* Following traffic rules only out of fear of fine is legality, not ethics.

2. **Not Just Religion** – Ethics is broader than religious beliefs; it applies to all, irrespective of faith.

   o *Example (Assam):* Sankardeva's teachings were religious but also ethical, promoting equality beyond rituals.

3. **Not Only Custom or Tradition** – Customs may be outdated or discriminatory, whereas ethics evaluates their morality.

   o *Example:* Some social practices in *India* like child marriage were customs but not ethical.

4. **Not Personal Whims or Desires** – Ethics is based on universal values, not individual convenience.

   o *Example:* A civil servant can't justify nepotism as a "personal choice."

5. **Not Absolute or Static** – Ethics evolves with time and context.

   o *Example:* Environmental ethics like Wildlife conservation in Assam became crucial only in recent decades.

6. **Not About Success at Any Cost** – Ethics values means as much as ends.

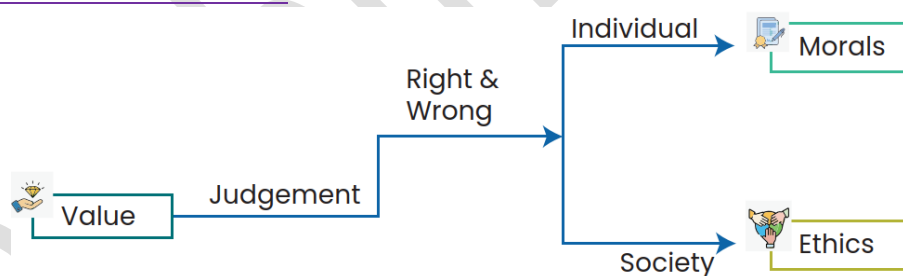   o *Example:* Cheating in Exam may give us success, but it is unethical.

Absolute Vs. Relative Ethics

Aspect	Absolute Ethics	Relative Ethics

Definition	These ethical principles are universal, unchanging, and valid for all times & places.	Ethics depends on culture, society, and context; Here ethical values are flexible.
Basis	Fixed Ethical standards (truth, justice, honesty).	Social norms, customs, and situational needs.
Application	Same for everyone, everywhere.	Varies across societies and situations.
Philosophical Root	Inspired by Kant's *categorical imperative* – duty-based.	Inspired by relativist view – "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."
Strength	Provides consistency, stability, and universal justice.	Provides flexibility, adaptability to social change.
Weakness	Can become rigid and ignore cultural differences.	May lead to moral subjectivism and justify wrong practices.
Example (General)	Truth is always right, even if it leads to personal loss.	In diplomacy, partial truth may be used to avoid conflict.
Example (Assam)	Srimanta Sankardeva's principle of equality before God was an **absolute ethic**.	Certain tribal customs in Assam (e.g., traditional alcoholic beverages) reflect **relative ethics**.

Ethics vs. Morals vs. Values

Aspect	Ethics	Morals	Values
Meaning	Set of rules/principles that guide professional & societal conduct.	Personal principles of right & wrong shaped by culture/religion.	Deeply held beliefs/ideals that shape behavior & choices.
Source	External – codes, laws, professional standards, governance.	Individual Conscience	Culture, Society, Family
Nature	Objective, can be codified	Subjective, varies by individual/community.	Abstract, broad guiding ideals.

Stability	More stable, formalized.	May evolve with education.	Most enduring, long-term guiding force.
Scope	Concerned with "What is right conduct?"	Concerned with "What I believe is right or wrong?"	Concerned with "What is important to me?"
Example	Giving Justice to the victims by the Judiciary	Practicing vegetarianism due to out of animal love.	People of Guwahati not allowed tree cutting near Dighalipukhuri because of Environmental Ethics

Ethics Vs. Law

About

Law defines what is permissible, while ethics defines what is right; yet the two do not always coincide. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, *"An unjust law is no law at all,"* highlighting the gap between legality and morality.

Differences

Aspect	Ethics	Law
Meaning	Principles of right & wrong based on conscience and values.	Rules framed and enforced by the state to regulate conduct.
Source	Conscience, culture, philosophy, religion.	Legislature, judiciary, constitution.
Nature	Voluntary, moral in nature.	Compulsory, coercive in nature.
Scope	Broader; covers what *ought* to be done, even beyond legality.	Narrower; deals with what *must* be done as per rules.
Enforcement	No formal enforcement; depends on individual morality.	Backed by penalties, police, and judiciary.
Flexibility	Dynamic, evolves with social values.	More rigid, though can be amended with procedure.
Violation Consequence	Social disapproval, loss of respect, guilt.	Punishment, fines, imprisonment.
Example (General)	Disclosing information by any govt. department to ensure transparency and accountability.	RTI Act mandates disclosure of information by government.

Example (Assam)	Villagers protecting **sacred groves** out of respect for nature, even without legal compulsion.	**Assam Forest Regulation Act, 1891** penalizes illegal tree felling and poaching in Kaziranga.

Similarities

1. **Both regulate human conduct** – Aim to guide behavior towards order and justice.

   o *Example:* Anti-poaching laws in Kaziranga (law) and community opposition to hunting (ethics) both protect wildlife.

2. **Both promote social harmony** – Encourage peaceful coexistence and discourage harmful acts.

   o *Example:* Assam's prohibition of witch-hunting (*Prevention of Witch Hunting Act, 2015*) aligns with ethical condemnation of the practice.

3. **Both are value-based** – Rooted in ideals like justice, equality, honesty, and welfare.

   o *Example:* **Mission Sadbhavana (2022)** in Assam reflected legal obligation of governance + ethical duty of transparency.

4. **Both may overlap** – Many laws are codified ethics.

   o *Example:* Prohibition of child marriage in Assam reflects both legal mandate and ethical principle of protecting children.

5. **Both aim at common good** – Ensure welfare of society.

   o *Example:* Bihar government's ban on Alcohol (law) also reflects ethical duty to protect public health.

6. **Both evolve with society** – Change with time and societal needs.

   o *Example:* Decriminalization of homosexuality (Navtej Singh Johar case, 2018) shows law catching up with evolving ethical standards of equality.

Actions may be Legal but Unethical or Illegal but Ethical

I. Legal but Unethical

1. **Exploitation of Loopholes** – Using tax havens to avoid tax.

   o *Example:* Companies shifting profits abroad, legally reducing tax but unethical.

2. **Harmful but Permitted Activities** – Selling tobacco, alcohol, or junk food.

3. **Environmental Exploitation** – Law allows certain industries to exploit environment, but overuse harms ecology.

o *Assam Example:* **Legal sand/gravel mining** often carried out excessively in Brahmaputra, threatening river dolphins.

4. **Administrative Apathy** – Officials delaying files; technically within procedure, but unethical.

o *Assam Example:* Before **Mission Sadbhavana (2022)**, lakhs of files pending in Secretariat—legal inaction but unethical neglect.

II. Illegal but Ethical

1. **Civil Disobedience for Justice** – Breaking unjust laws for moral cause.

o *General:* Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha (1930).

o *Assam Example:* **Assam Movement (1979–85)** – defiance of curfews, illegal rallies, but aimed at protecting indigenous identity.

2. **Whistleblowing** – Leaking confidential information to expose corruption.

o *General:* Edward Snowden's case internationally.

3. **Saving Human Lives** – Breaking rules for humanitarian reasons.

o *General:* Driving above speed limit to rush an accident victim to hospital.

4. **Protecting Nature/Community Rights** – Illegal protest for ethical cause.

o *Assam Example:* Tribal villagers resisting tree cutting in sacred groves, though technically violating forest laws.

Conclusion

Law without ethics is tyranny, and ethics without law is anarchy. A just society strives for harmony where **law becomes an instrument of ethics**, so that what is legal is also moral.

Determinants of Ethics

1. **Religion** – Religious teachings strongly influence ethical standards.

o *Example:* Ahimsa in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism → ethical value of non-violence.

2. **Culture & Tradition** – Social customs shape what is considered right/wrong.

o *Example:* Respect for elders in Assamese society as an ethical norm.

3. **Philosophy & Ideology** – Rational thought and schools of philosophy guide ethical reasoning.

o *Example:* Gandhian philosophy of truth influencing Indian politics.

4. **Law** – Laws often set minimum ethical standards.

o *Example:* Anti-corruption laws reflect ethical expectations of integrity in public life.

5. **Education & Knowledge** – Higher awareness leads to better ethical decision-making.

   o *Example:* Environmental Studies strengthened the Environmental Ethics.

6. **Socio-economic Conditions** – Poverty, inequality, and wealth affect ethical choices.

   o *Example:* Child labour in India arises due to poverty, despite being ethically wrong.

7. **Conscience / Inner Voice** – Individual moral compass influences ethical judgment.

   o *Example:* Whistleblowers exposing scams despite risks (e.g., Satyendra Dubey in NHAI case).

8. **Time & Context (Situational Factors)** – Ethical standards evolve with society.

   o *Example:* Caste-based untouchability once accepted, now considered unethical and illegal.

9. **Professional Codes** – Occupations have ethical guidelines.

   o *Example:* Doctors following medical ethics (Hippocratic Oath).

10. **Leadership & Governance** – Leaders' values set ethical tone in society.

- *Example:* Clean governance initiatives like Assam's *Mission Sadbhavana* promoting ethical administration.

When an Action will be Ethical / Unethical

Criteria	Ethical Action	Unethical Action
Moral Principles	Conforms to honesty, fairness, compassion. *Example:* Returning a lost wallet.	Violates truth, fairness, honesty. *Example:* Insider trading in stock markets.
Impact on Society	Promotes common good, reduces harm. *Example:* *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* for public health.	Harms society for self-interest. *Example:* Hoarding oxygen cylinders during COVID-19.
Human Values	Upholds equality, dignity, non-violence. *Example:* Opposing caste-based discrimination.	Disrespects rights, dignity. *Example:* Workplace discrimination in recruitment.

Rights & Duties	Protects human rights, fulfills duty. *Example:* Doctor treating patients without bias.	Neglects duties, violates rights. *Example:* Doctor refusing emergency care for non-payment.
Integrity & Transparency	Ensures fairness, no hidden agenda. *Example:* Civil servant conducting impartial recruitment.	Corruption or misuse of power. *Example:* Bribery in govt. contracts.
Responsibility to Future	Sustainable, eco-friendly choices. *Example:* Promoting renewable energy.	Exploits resources irresponsibly. *Example:* Illegal logging in Assam forests.

Importance of Ethics for an Individual

1. **Moral Compass:** Guides in distinguishing right from wrong even in dilemmas. *Ex:* Refusing to pay bribe for a job.

2. **Character Building:** Cultivates honesty, integrity, and consistency in actions. *Ex:* Gandhiji's lifelong adherence to truth.

3. **Inner Peace & Happiness:** Ethical living reduces guilt, ensures mental well-being.

4. **Social Acceptance & Respect:** Ethical individuals gain credibility and respect. *Ex:* Mother Teresa's compassion for the poor.

5. **Long-term Success:** Integrity ensures sustained achievements, unlike shortcuts.

6. **Responsible Citizenship:** Promotes law-abiding behavior, civic responsibility.

7. **Harmonious Relationships:** Builds trust and empathy in family and society.

8. **Moral Courage:** Helps stand against injustice. *Ex:* Whistleblowers exposing corruption.

Importance of Ethics for a Civil Servant

1. **Public Trust & Legitimacy:** Ethical conduct builds credibility of government. *Ex:* T.N. Seshan's electoral reforms strengthened trust in EC.

2. **Impartiality & Fairness:** Prevents favoritism, ensures equal treatment. *Ex:* APSC merit-based recruitment.

3. **Accountability & Transparency:** Ensures responsible use of taxpayer money.

4. **Crisis Management:** Helps in ethical decision-making during disasters/emergencies.
   Ex: Choosing relief distribution fairly during floods in Assam.

5. **Preventing Corruption:** Ethics discourages abuse of power.

6. **Promoting Constitutional Values:** Justice, equality, secularism, liberty.
   Ex: Defending rights of minorities/tribals.

7. **Inclusive Development:** Ensures welfare of marginalized groups.
   Ex: Land rights protection for tribal communities.

8. **Policy-making with Human Face:** Moves beyond rules to compassion.
   Ex: IAS officer Armstrong Pame built a road in Manipur with community help.

9. **Long-term Governance Success:** Ethical administrators leave enduring reforms.
   Ex: S.R. Sankaran, known as "People's IAS Officer" for welfare initiatives.

10. **Resolves Ethical Dilemmas:** Balances law vs. conscience vs. duty.