MODULE 5

ETHICS AND WORLD VIEWS IN RELATION TO BIOTECHNOLOGY

Prof. Jerry O. Ugwuanyi / Dr. F. I. Akaneme

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Module 5 Unit 1: Overview of the subject of Ethics

Lecture 1: **Meanings of the following ethical concepts: ethics, bioethics, morality, values, principle, theories, right, justice, virtues, beneficence etc. (1 hour lecture/Discussion)**

Learning Outcomes

- Students are expected to understand the following terms and concepts:
    - Ethics; Bioethics; Morality; Values; Principles; Theories; Right; Justice; Beneficence; Etc.
    - Understand similarities and differences between terms
    - Understand rules and procedures for ethical decision making.
    - Implement class exercises to understand bioethics
    - Read summary of the philosophies of 3 great thinkers and discuss ethical

---

Final version, February 2017

Ethics:

"Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do" - Potter Stewart

At the best of times a concise definition of ethics is difficult to arrive at. An enquiry into the understanding of the term ethics by a population is likely to turn in responses such as:

"Ethics has to do with what my feelings tell me is right or wrong."

"Ethics has to do with my religious beliefs."

"Being ethical is doing what the law requires."

"Ethics consists of the standards of behaviour our society accepts."

"I don't know what the word means." Or

A lot more variants to these responses may be turned in depending on the education, outlook or sophistication of the sample population

So, the meaning of "ethics" is difficult to pin-point. In a similar way, ethical views are liable to shift and get shaky over time and with changes in circumstances.

In general, many people tend to equate ethics with their feelings. But being ethical is clearly not a matter of following one's feelings. A person following his or her feelings may recoil from doing what is right. In fact, feelings frequently deviate from what is ethical.

Nor should one identify ethics with religion. Most religions, of course, advocate high ethical standards. Yet if ethics were confined to religion, then ethics would apply only to religious people. But ethics applies as much to the behaviour of the atheist as to that of the devout religious person. Religion can set high ethical standards and can provide intense motivations for ethical behaviour. Ethics, however, cannot be confined to religion nor is it the same as religion. Besides, instances abound in history where religion in different societies condoned practices that today would be viewed as unethical.

Being ethical is also not the same as following the law. The law often incorporates ethical standards to which most citizens subscribe. But laws, like feelings, can deviate from what is ethical. For instance, prior to the proscription of slavery, it was legal. Similarly, prior to the collapse of apartheid, it was a legal form of government. Yet it is clear that both were clearly grotesque (other equally grotesque examples may include the killing of twins in the olden days in parts of Nigeria). While both systems were legal, they were clearly not ethical. In a way therefore, it may be argued that ethics is superior to both law and religion

Finally, being ethical is not the same as doing "whatever society accepts." In any society, most people accept standards that are, in fact, ethical. But standards of behaviour in society can deviate from what is ethical. An entire society can become ethically corrupt. This has been at the foundation of all recorded cases of genocide or ethnic cleansing or even cultural practices that today constitute ethically obnoxious practices. Nazi Germany is a good example of a morally corrupt society. Similarly, in many parts of the world, people do not also generally troop out to the streets to protest cases of corruption in government, yet this run contrary to accepted standards of ethical practice.

Moreover, if being ethical were doing "whatever society accepts," then to find out what is ethical, one would have to find out what society accepts. For instance, it is never going to be possible to determine what (every member of) society thinks about abortion! Neither would it be possible ask for conformity on the basis of "what society thinks". Further, the lack of social consensus on many issues makes it impossible to equate ethics with whatever society accepts. If being ethical were doing whatever society accepts, one would have to find an agreement on issues. This is technically impossible.

What, then, is ethics? Ethics is two things. First, ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues- more like a system of moral principles; social, religious or civil code of behaviour considered **correct** for a person, group or profession. Ethics deals strongly in the realm of **right or wrong**. Ethics, for example, refers to those standards that impose reasonable obligations to refrain from rape, stealing, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Ethical standards also include those that enjoin virtues of honesty, compassion, and loyalty. And, ethical standards include standards relating to rights, such as the right to life, the right to freedom from injury, and the right to privacy. Such standards are adequate standards of ethics because they are supported by consistent and well-founded reasons.

Secondly, ethics refers to the study and development of one's ethical standards. As mentioned above, feelings, laws, and social norms can deviate from what is ethical. So it is necessary to constantly examine one's standards to ensure that they are reasonable and well-founded. Ethics also means, then, the continuous effort of studying our own moral beliefs and our moral conduct, and striving to ensure that we, and the institutions we help to shape, live up to standards that are reasonable and solidly-based.

See more at:

A variety of dictionaries and encyclopaedias offer definitions or explanations of ethics that closely equate the above. Deriving from the foregoing therefore, ethical issues relating to different endeavours arise. For each, specific challenges may arise.

Subjectivism and Ethical Relativism (Taken from Issues in Bioethics: *A Brief History and Overview* by Gabriel Tordjman:
http://dc37.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/humanities/gabriel/BXH/Issues%20in%20BioethicsW13.pdf.)

Many people have noted how there is wide disagreement even among experts and philosophers on what is right on wrong on almost every important issue. They note how there are a multitude of theories and principles that often give entirely different answers to a moral problem. This is in especially sharp contrast to what we learn in science classes. After all there is no rival theory to the theory of gravity! Some are frustrated at this and conclude that there is no right and wrong in ethics. Many people believe that ethical or moral viewpoints are an entirely private or even largely **subjective** affair. Subjective, here, means true from the point of view of one person (the subject) rather than **objective** (valid independently of the viewpoint of one, many or even most persons). The assumption made here is that unlike, for example, physics or mathematics, there is "no right answer" thus there is no real possibility of arriving at objective ethical judgments. In this field ethics is really "all relative to the individual", a viewpoint called "**ethical relativism**". A similar view is **cultural relativism,** which claims that right or wrong depends entirely on the culture you are raised it.

The relativist viewpoint may contain some truth in that ethical viewpoints do contain a larger element of "subjectivity" than the natural sciences. It is also undeniably true that value systems change from one time period to another, from one culture to another and even from individual to individual within a given culture. So how can we justifiably claim that a particular ethical view is ever universally valid? In addition, we know how people often behave when they are convinced that their moral perspective is the only valid, objective one: they try to impose their views on others or even worse. Believing there is an objective truth in ethics thus seems intolerant to many people and that is why they favour relativism.

We can respond to this in a number of ways:

Firstly, the fact that moral judgments are often subjective to various degrees doesn't mean they are *completely and necessarily* always subjective. Some degree of objectivity is often possible and this can be evaluated by the factual support and logical consistency one provides for their moral judgments. In this way, moral judgments are like any good theory – the more facts and logic to support it, the better the theory or moral judgment. However, one needs to remember that there will often be *a degree* of uncertainty and possible bias that may make some moral judgments more *probabilistic* than *absolute*. We need always to maintain an open mind and be willing to change our conclusions – something that sounds a lot easier than it really is!

Secondly, the fact that value systems change from place to place, time to time and person to person proves just that: people's views do *in fact* differ. It doesn't prove that all of these viewpoints are *equally* valid (or equally invalid) and leaves untouched the possibility that there may be *one* or a few that are closer to the "objective truth" than others. The fact that some societies practiced or still practice slavery, for example, doesn't make that practice right or doesn't mean that we cannot judge it to be wrong. The mistake here is in not distinguishing between what people *actually or factually* think and do – a question of *descriptive ethics* – and what they *should* think and do – a question of *normative ethics*. From the viewpoint of normative ethics, just because people have differing moral values doesn't mean all these moral values are correct. And just because "everyone" believes something to be true, doesn't make it true. Again, to judge which, if any moral viewpoint is correct, we need to examine the reasons (facts and logic) behind it.

Thirdly, when we actually try to argue for ethical relativism, we are in fact claiming that it is the "best" or the most "truthful" viewpoint and this immediately involves us in a logical contradiction. We find ourselves arguing that *the best viewpoint is one that claims that there are no best viewpoints*. In this case it would be logically impossible to even argue for ethical relativism. A really committed ethical relativist might then maintain that logical consistency is itself not applicable to ethics because ethics are a matter of taste, like the fact that I like coffee in the morning while you prefer tea. On such matters, there is no debating of right and wrong, these are just personal preferences. That would mean, however, that we could not judge as wrong even things we "know" are wrong, like the killing of babies or other forms of murder. Clearly, there is something wrong with saying that murder is just someone's preference, like whether she likes coffee or tea.

This leads us to a final point: relativists tend to exaggerate differences and underplay similarities in our moral values that would strengthen the case for objectivity in ethics. The source of this objectivity comes from the fact that, as human beings, we have certain common characteristics, including similar bodies, a rational mind, feelings, language, social life, and a certain amount of **empathy** for our fellow human beings and other living creatures. These basic characteristics are common to most adult individuals in all societies in the world and are part of our human nature or human condition. The moral part of this common human nature may be called our **moral intuitions**, a kind of "moral common sense" 2 that we recognize immediately as a twinge of conscience whenever we know we have done something wrong. It is what makes us say that murder or killing of innocent life is wrong, despite the arguments of ethical relativism or subjectivism.

Moral intuitions may be a product of social and parental teaching or might even be built into us biologically, as some have claimed. Whatever their origins, they provide one source of moral guidance, though perhaps not always a clear, justifiable or reliable one. Some ethical theorists view our moral intuitions as one source (not the only source) for *particular* moral traditions, for example, Christianity, or Islam or Hinduism, etc. Moral intuitions may also be at the basis of **secular** (non-religious) or **philosophical ethics** as well, such as Kantian ethics and utilitarianism. In this sense, all religious and philosophical moral traditions are simply different ways different cultures have had of formulating, developing and expressing a common moral nature or our basic moral intuitions. In fact, as Kant showed, no society exists, or *can* exist, where killing, lying or stealing is accepted as the norm. The existence of moral intuitions and the fact that no society exists without moral systems based partly on them suggests that ethics are or can be objective, at least in some measure.

As such, we can argue, convince, defend and rationally discuss the merits of our ethical viewpoints and judgments, something we could not do if these were merely a matter of taste. But within this common basis for moral guidance, we recognize, of course, substantial differences between cultures and religions throughout the world and even some variations between individuals belonging to the same culture and religion. Because all moral systems in the world may be based, in part, on moral intuitions does not mean that all moral systems will be identical. It does mean, however, that there is a possibility of reaching at least partial agreement and objective understanding on what constitutes right and wrong action. Ethical relativism is thus wrong in denying that there is a common, objective basis to morality and

claiming that morality is just a matter of individual taste. Ethical relativism is thus an untenable and inadequate theory of ethics.

Bioethics

Ethical issues are seldom neat and tidy. These issues pose questions or dilemmas that have no clear-cut, easy answers. They involve questions about which even well-informed people who want only the best for themselves and others will often reasonably disagree. **<u>Bioethics</u>** <u>deal with the moral rights and wrongs (ethical issues) related to</u> **biological situations**. It arose over the last 30 plus years. Today, <u>bioethics seeks to explore ethical issues relating to or emerging from new situations and possibilities brought about by advances in biology and medicine (in all the ramifications).</u> **Traditionally**, bioethics was related to ethical issues in the practice of medicine as medical policy, medical practice and medical research (particularly human experimentation). With advancement in the fields of biology and medicine, bioethicists have been concerned with ethical questions that arise in the relationships among and related to all life sciences, biotechnology, medicine, politics, law etc. <u>Emerging fields and trends in biology and medicine, related to new possibilities that challenge orthodoxies have expanded, compounded and complicated the field and study or applications /decisions in bioethics. The term and study of bioethics arose out of concern for and anticipation of issues and controversies that may relate to scientific use and experimentation with plants and animals and new treatment and medical possibilities.</u>

The field of bioethics has addressed a broad range of biological inquiries and activities, ranging from debates over the **<u>boundaries of life (abortion, 'right to die'), surrogacy, organ donation and transplantation to the right to refuse medical care for religious or cultural reasons.</u>** The limits of bioethics appear elastic and apparently indeterminate with various bioethicists unable to agree the boundary. Often there are debates as to whether the field should concern itself with the ethical evaluation of all questions involving biology and medicine, or only a subset of these questions. Some bioethicists would narrow ethical evaluation only to the morality of medical treatments or innovations and specifically narrow it to matters relating to human treatment. Others would broaden the scope of ethical evaluation or enquiry to include the morality of all actions that might help or harm **organisms capable of feeling fear**. Others still expand it to matters relating to non-animal ecology **(inanimate environment?)**. With advancement in **biotechnology, issues that have come under the consideration of bioethics have expanded exponentially to include those**

related to genetics, cloning and stem cells, gene therapy, human genetics and manipulation and life in space. In addition bioethics also concern issues related to the basic biology of genetics, DNA and protein manipulation and modifications. **These developments have potential to affect the pace and direction of evolution**. The areas of concern can only be expected to increase with biological advances and possibilities that create new powers, new choices, and new dilemmas. Hence today there is even talk of **biotechnology ethics**. In a broad sense, bioethics has evolved to now concern itself with all actions that seek to influence life and living through the external manipulation of life forms and molecules. Bioethics is perhaps the most multidisciplinary area of ethical enquiry and has drawn scholars from all of the medical sciences, biology, philosophy and law amongst others.

Morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are good or right and those that are bad or wrong. Morality can be a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion or culture, or it can derive from a standard that a person believes should be universal. Morality may also be specifically synonymous with "goodness" or "rightness."
The term "morality" can be used either descriptively to refer to some codes of conduct put forward by a society or, some other group, such as a religion, or accepted by an individual for her own behaviour or normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons. What "morality" is taken to refer to plays a crucial, although often unacknowledged, role in formulating ethical theories.
For more on morality see: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/morality-definition/

Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. As such, values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong or what "ought" to be. "Equal rights for all", "Excellence deserves admiration", and "People should be treated with respect and dignity" are representative of values. Values tend to influence attitudes and behaviour. A personal **value** is an individual's absolute or relative and ethical value, the assumption of which can be the basis for ethical action. A value system is a set of consistent values and measures. A principle value is a foundation upon which other values and measures of integrity are based.

Some values are physiologically determined and are normally considered objective, such as a desire to avoid physical pain or to seek pleasure. Other values are considered subjective, vary across individuals and cultures, and are in many ways aligned with belief and belief systems. Types of values include ethical/moral values, doctrinal / ideological (religious, political)

values, social values, and aesthetic values. It is debated whether some values that are not clearly physiologically determined, such as altruism, are intrinsic, and whether some, such as acquisitiveness, should be classified as vices or virtues.

Principle is a law or rule that has to be, or usually is to be followed, or can be desirably followed, or is an inevitable consequence of something, such as the laws observed in nature or the way that a system is constructed. The principles of such a system are understood by its users as the essential characteristics of the system, or reflecting system's designed purpose, and the effective operation or use of which would be impossible if any one of the principles was to be ignored.

Theories

Right

Justice

Virtues

Beneficence

Framework guide to discussing bioethics and ethical dilemmas: summary of the philosophies of three great thinkers from this century.

GIANTS OF PHILOSOPHY

HERBERT MARCUSE (1898-1979)

USE TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION TO SATISFY THE REAL NEEDS OF PEOPLE, NOT TO SATISFY MATERIALISM

Marcuse thinks that the appropriate use of technological innovation can be the salvation of human kind. The true needs of people, Marcuse claims, (freedom, individual fulfilment, increased quality of life, a sense of caring and community and the appreciation of beauty) will never be fulfilled in a social order driven by materialism.

Marcuse claims that modern technology and capitalism have created a one-dimensional society, and a one-dimensional man. The tremendous rise in productivity through mass production has resulted in an increased standard of living for all classes of people. Technological progress made the working class wealthy, but most of the power remains in the hands of a few who desire even greater power and wealth.

Growth in a capitalist industrial society is based on consumption, planned obsolescence, and waste. Products are improved, or new ones created, which have the appearance of being more desirable than the ones they are intended to replace. The individual perceives a need to possess bigger and better cars, homes, appliances; all that industry produces. These needs are false needs, not true needs. True needs are those which are necessary for individual survival.

Concentration of economic power in the hands of a few results in control of advertising and the press which are used to create a desire for new or improved products. Materialism becomes a way of life as humans equate success and happiness with material possessions. People come to believe that happiness can only be obtained if they can fulfil the false needs advertising makes them feel they need. Conformity becomes the standard of individual action; people stop thinking for themselves and this prevents a better social order.

If control of technological innovation was in the hands of all, technology would be used to produce materials which would first meet the basic survival needs of all. Technology and innovation could then be directed to reducing labour requirements, increasing leisure, and providing an environment which would actually create individual freedom, the opportunity for self-development, and an increased quality of life. In short, humankind would direct the use of technology to the fulfilment of true needs, rather than false needs.

GIANTS OF PHILOSOPHY
ABRAHAM MASLOW (1908-1970)
WHY DO PEOPLE ACT THE WAY THEY DO?
Abraham Maslow believed that every person is born with a set of basic needs and wants which cause people to think, to act, and to respond as they do.
Maslow believed that there are five levels of human needs and that until you have fulfilled the needs at the lowest level, the needs at the next levels are either unknown or are ignored. The five levels are:
1. The first level begins with the things necessary for survival (food, water, air, sleep)
2. The second level deals with safety needs (the need for security, stability, protection from harm or injury, orderliness, law, freedom from fear and chaos.
3. The third level contains the need for love and the need to belong (warm affection with spouse, children, parents, and close friends as well as the need to feel a part of social groups and the need for acceptance and approval)

4. The fourth level may be called esteem needs (a desire for self-esteem based on achievement, mastery, competence, confidence, freedom, independence; the desire for prestige, status, and recognition)

5. The fifth and highest level of human needs Maslow labelled self-actualization needs (which includes the desire for self-fulfilment; to become what you potentially can be, being true to your essential nature).

"What you can be, you must be."

Needs provide the motivation for human activity as well as explain our action. For example, if we are without food or water, we will be less concerned with our safety until we can provide for our hunger and thirst.

See also

http://oaks.nvg.org/abraham-maslow.html

http://www.maslow.com/

GIANTS OF PHILOSOPHY

JOHN RAWLS (1921 -)

THOSE WHO HAVE THE LEAST SHOULD BE GIVEN THE MOST HELP

John Rawls believes that every member of a society should enjoy equal liberties. He believes that a society can be just and fair only if all members enjoy equal freedom. At the very least, a just society must ensure that all of its members start out on equal footing. A good society should make sure that the least advantaged members receive the greatest benefits. The highest priority should be to serve the most disadvantaged member. The interests of the most advantaged member of society should be government's lowest priority.

In his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls allows inequalities to exist only if two conditions are met. First, the inequalities are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged member. An inequality is fair only if it can be shown to benefit those worst off. In other words, a policy which increases benefit to those most well off must likewise increase benefits to the least advantaged so that they are better off than under the previous system. Second, all members of society must have an opportunity to benefit from the inequalities. The social structure must allow all citizens the chance to join the ranks of the most advantaged.
Each of us has different ideas of justice based on self-interest. The poor view social welfare as the most just system, whereas the rich support a free market economy. To overcome self-interest, Rawls tries to determine what standards of fairness people would choose if they did

not know what their positions were in a society. Since each person has an equal chance of being one of society's least advantaged members, each person would accept a principle of justice which favours the least advantaged. The least advantaged live constantly on the edge of life and death. A social order which favoured the upper or middle class might devastate the poor. On the other hand, a social order which favoured the least advantaged would still provide a high standard of living to the most advantaged citizens.

Rawls believes that this "distributive justice" is a more important principle than freedom, equality, or prosperity. Please read details below:

http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/rawls.htm.

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/

Understanding Bioethics (Class Exercise)

A fair understanding of the subject of bioethics and its possible ramification may be attempted by way of class exercises and discussions. In these exercises, you will need to **look up some definitions**, to begin to **address some ethical issues in biology**, to **explore what the strategies are for facing the issues**, and finally to **engage in classroom discussion** of these issues. After completing this activity, you should have improved your understanding in the field of ethics, clarified some of your own ideas about what you believe, and listened to others as they, too, explore ethical reasoning and decision-making. Refer to knowledge gained from study of the summary of the philosophies Herbert Marcuse, Abraham Maslow and John Rawls in taking your positions

Objectives

When you have completed these exercises, you will be able to:

* identify some of the ethical problems inherent in biotechnology;

* assess the factual information available;

* consider who will be affected and in what ways;

* identify the options available to the decision maker;

* decide which values are at stake, such as freedom, truth-telling, fairness, respect, growth of scientific knowledge, the ecology, human and animal well-being;

* consider the **process** for bioethical decision-making: the law, the family, and society.

Procedure

The following is an outline of activities which will take more than one class period to accomplish. Some activities you will do on your own; many of the activities will be done in class and in cooperative-learning groups. Participation is the key to your success in these activities and to better learning.

As you proceed through the activities regarding bioethics, it is important to keep the following passage in mind:

"In bioethics the right answers are not in the back of the book; and, you won't have them all either, because there are sometimes no definitive right answers, only answers that are more or less reasonable, more or less defensible and justifiable in the light of reflection, analysis, and dialogue." (*from New Choices, New Responsibilities: Ethical Issues in the Life Sciences, The Hastings Center 1990*).

Use the dictionary to define the following words (#1-5) and then answer the questions (#5-7).

1. Ethics

2. Morals

3. Values

4. Bioethics

5. How are VALUES different from MORALS?

6. What is the difference between MORALS and ETHICS?

7. In your own words, what, then, is BIOETHICS?

(**It will help to also be conversant with the meaning of such related terms as principle, right, justice, virtue, beneficence etc.**)

In order to explore bioethical issues, we must open our minds to new ideas and learn to see connections between decisions, actions, and their consequences for the person, for others, and for society as a whole.

Some basic rules for discussion of philosophy or ethics are:

* IT IS NOT A COMPETITION;

* ALL IDEAS AND OPINIONS MUST BE PUT ON THE TABLE TO GET STARTED;

* THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH EXPRESSING AN IDEA WITH WHICH OTHERS WILL DISAGREE.

STRATEGIES FOR BIOETHICS

There are several steps in analyzing any bioethical issue:

* Identify the problem or problems - - What has to be decided? By Whom? What issues does it raise?

* Assess the facts relevant to the problem - - What is not known that should be known before a decision is made? Where can you find that information, and is that source reliable?

* Who will be affected by the decision, and in what ways - - Are they "innocent bystanders"? Do they understand the risks?

* What are the options? Are they narrow or forced? Is there any way to make it a "Win-Win" situation?

* What is the process? Is there a legal precedent? Do I need the cooperation of others? Is there "due process" and participation by all persons involved? (Due process: are all those who will be affected being given notice and opportunity for input?)

* What values are at stake - - freedom, honesty, respect, ecology, growth of scientific knowledge, human and animal well-being?

Practice of the Bioethics Decision-making Model in Classroom

Use the above six steps to practice the decision-making model. Fill in the steps below as you and your classmates choose a simple issue and apply the model to it.

(Class to decide issues of concern e.g., a researcher creating a bacteria that eats oil, or one that kills tomato pests or a couple deciding the gender of their next child, or deciding to donate organ of brain dead relation; or cloning / inserting a gene for a particular function in a different biological environment.)

1. What is the issue?

2. What has to be decided? By whom? What other issues does it raise?

3. What are the facts? What is not known? Is the information reliable?

4. Who will be affected? Are there "innocent bystanders"?

5. What are the options? Are they narrow or forced? Is it a "Win-Win" situation?

6. Is there legal precedent? Will others need to cooperate? Is there "due process"?

7. What values, if any, are at stake -- freedom, truth, respect, ecology, human or animal well-being, growth of scientific knowledge?

Objectives

By using this model student will:

* practice a working model that has application for the issues you will face throughout your lifetime;

* learn the important elements needed for decision-making when looking at social and ethical issues;

* class may select an important and challenging scenario as template to practice decision making

(Note: there is not one correct answer to ethical questions; answers may vary because the issues may be stated in a variety of ways.)

Further Reading Materials and References:

http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/focusareas/medical/articles.html

http://www.scu.edu/ethics/articles/articles.cfm?fam=GENE

http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/focusareas/medical/conference/presentations/genetically-modified-foods.html

http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/submitted/schulman/tomatoes.html

---

Module 5: Unit 1: Lecture 2; (1 hour)
Distinction between related concepts (ethics & religion; ethics & law; relation with morality; how ethics covers all spheres of life, etc.)

Learning Outcomes

Students are expected to:
- Understand the distinction / relationship between:
  – Ethics and Religion
  – Ethics and Law
  – Ethics and Morality
  – Etc.,
- Be in a position to relate ethics with other related concepts defined in lecture 1
- Understand the centrality of ethics in deciding dilemmas encountered in life
- Understand how ethics covers all spheres of life and influence lifelong decisions
- Other related matters

a. Religion vs. Ethics

The link between religion and ethics seems obvious. Both have traditionally been intertwined. Religion, as a system of belief and practice, through the values they embody, often contribute in defining what may be considered right or wrong. Religion produces both formal and informal norms and provides people with a freedom/constraint duality by prescribing behaviours within some acceptable boundaries. Such norms, values, and beliefs are often codified into a religious code. In Christian religions, for instance, the Ten Commandments provide a broad basis of codified ethical rules that believing Christians must follow in order to actualize what they believe in (e.g., salvation). In turn, through daily exposure to norms, customs, laws, scripts, and practices, religions impart societal members with values that may eventually become taken for granted. Such values often provide guides for what are considered ethical behaviours for most of the world's religions. Furthermore, in societies where one or few religions are dominant, the overarching core values of these religions are likely to be mirrored in secular values of society (codified law or non-codified social norms), which regulate everyday activity and ethical behaviour. However, despite the above conceptual tie between religions and ethics, there are no empirical bases to believe that the relation go any further. For instance, there is as yet no proof that religious persons are necessarily more ethical than the non-religious persons. However, there can be no generalization either, because of the difficulty inherent in proper conceptualization of what constitutes being religious (e.g., affiliation to a religion or attendance to church?). Broadly speaking, although religion may imbue one with ethical values, the two are not the same and ethics would appear to be at a higher level than religion. (In addition whereas religion appears to be more personal, ethics often but not always impact other).

Refs and further reading

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-morality/

Parboteeah et al 2008. Ethics and Religion: An Empirical Test of a Multidimensional Model. Journal of Business Ethics 80:387–398

b. Ethics vs Law

There is a relation between law and ethics. In instances, law and ethics overlap; in the sense that what is perceived to be unethical may often also be illegal. This is basis of the pronouncement of Lord Coleridge (US Lord Chief Justice, 1893) '*It would not be correct to say that every moral obligation involves a legal duty; but every legal duty is founded on a*

moral obligation'. However, in other situations, law and ethics do not overlap- and may actually be far apart. In some cases what is deemed to be unethical will be legal (examples will be used based on environment) while in others what is illegal might be perceived as ethical. This operates in instances that what may be perceived as unethical to one person or a group may be perceived as ethical to another person or group

Law is a consistent set of rules that are published, accepted and generally enforced. Laws can set forth ways in which persons and entities are required to act in relation with others in society and they often set forth requirements to act in certain way or not to act in a certain way. Laws are generally universal in their nature and so are applicable to everyone with similar characteristics facing the same set of circumstances.

From birth people are instilled an awareness of what is right or wrong as a fundamental requirement for harmonious living in society. To achieve the goal of harmonious living we understand that we must do to other people what we expect them to do to us in return. For this, we try very hard to do what we feel and see as the right things to do in certain situations. This is the foundation of ethics. They are rules of conduct that shows how our society expects us to behave and are the guiding principles behind the creation of laws. Ethics attempts to define what is good for the individual and for the society. Ethics also seeks to establish a set of duties that persons owe to themselves and to one another. While ethics and morality are related; and mostly ethics derive from morality yet there is a difference between ethics and morality. Morality generally refers both to the standards of behaviour to which individuals are judged, as well as the standards of behaviour to which individuals, in general, are judged in relationships with others. To distinguish; ethics encompasses a system of belief that supports a **particular** view of morality (e,g., business ethics, medical ethics, environmental ethics etc.).

Based on society's ethics, laws are created and enforced by governments to mediate in our relationships with each other. Laws are made by governments in order to protect its citizens. While laws carry with them a punishment for violations, ethics does not. In ethics everything depends on the person's conscience and self-worth. For instance, driving carefully and within the speed limit because you don't want to hurt someone is ethical, but driving within speed limit because you see a police car behind you, suggests your fear of breaking the law and being punished for it. Ethics comes from within a person's moral sense and desire to preserve his self-respect. It is not as strict as laws. Laws are codifications of certain ethical values meant to help regulate society, and there often are punishments for breaking them. Ethics and

laws are therefore necessary to provide guidance and stability to people and society as a whole.

In summary:

1. Ethics are rules of conduct; Laws are rules developed by governments in order to provide balance in society and protection for citizens.

2. Ethics comes from people's awareness of what is right and wrong; Laws are enforced by governments to its people.

3. Ethics are moral codes which every person must conform to; Laws are codifications of ethics meant to regulate society.

4. Ethics does not carry any punishment to anyone who violates it; the law will punish anyone who happens to violate it.

5. Ethics comes from within a person's moral values; Laws are made with ethics as a guiding principle.

Ethics as the tread that runs through human endeavours

From the foregoing, it is clear that ethics is at the base of every sphere of human life and activities. This must be borne in mind in conceptualizing and relating to the practice of biotechnology and how that will affect society's response to the practice and application of biotechnology. This will become evident as we explore other aspects of this course.

Further Reading

Tarantino, J.A. and Hynes, K.A. (2012). Truth in Ethics: Law v. Ethics. AP&S Ethics Seminar

Unit 1: Lectures 3 & 4 (2 hours)
Ethical theories or sources of ethical standards (as tools to evaluate ethical arguments about biotechnology)

At the end of the lecture students are expected to understand
- three leading ethical theories:
    - Consequentialism (Mill's Utilitarianism)
    - Deontology (Kantian ethics)
    - Virtue ethics (Aristotle's Moral theory)
- African Moral Theory & environmental ethics
- Understand how these ethical theories can serve as bases to evaluate ethical arguments related to biotechnology and take decisions accordingly (on application & adoption of biotechnology)

Lectures 3 & 4: Ethical theories or sources of ethical standards (as tools to evaluate ethical arguments about biotechnology) (2 hours (Lectures and Discussion))

    i. Consequentialism (Mill's Utilitarianism)

    ii. Deontology (Kantian Ethics)

    iii. Virtue (Aristotle's Moral Theory)

   iv. African Moral Theory including environmental ethics

The ethics of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behaviour that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness. The ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the moral thinkers of the society.

In the main, the relationships between moral theories and African moral theory may be captured in the following table

	Consequentialism	Deontology	Virtue Theory
example	Mill's utilitarianism	Kantian ethics	Aristotle's moral theory
abstract description	An action is right if it promotes the best consequences.	An action is right if it is in accordance with a moral rule or principle.	An action is right if it is what a virtuous agent would do in the circumstances.
more	The best	A moral rule is	A virtuous agent is one who acts

| concrete specification | consequences are those in which happiness is maximized. | one that is required by rationality. | virtuously, that is, one who has and exercises the virtues. A virtue is a character trait a human being needs to flourish or live well. |

Classification of Ethical Theories
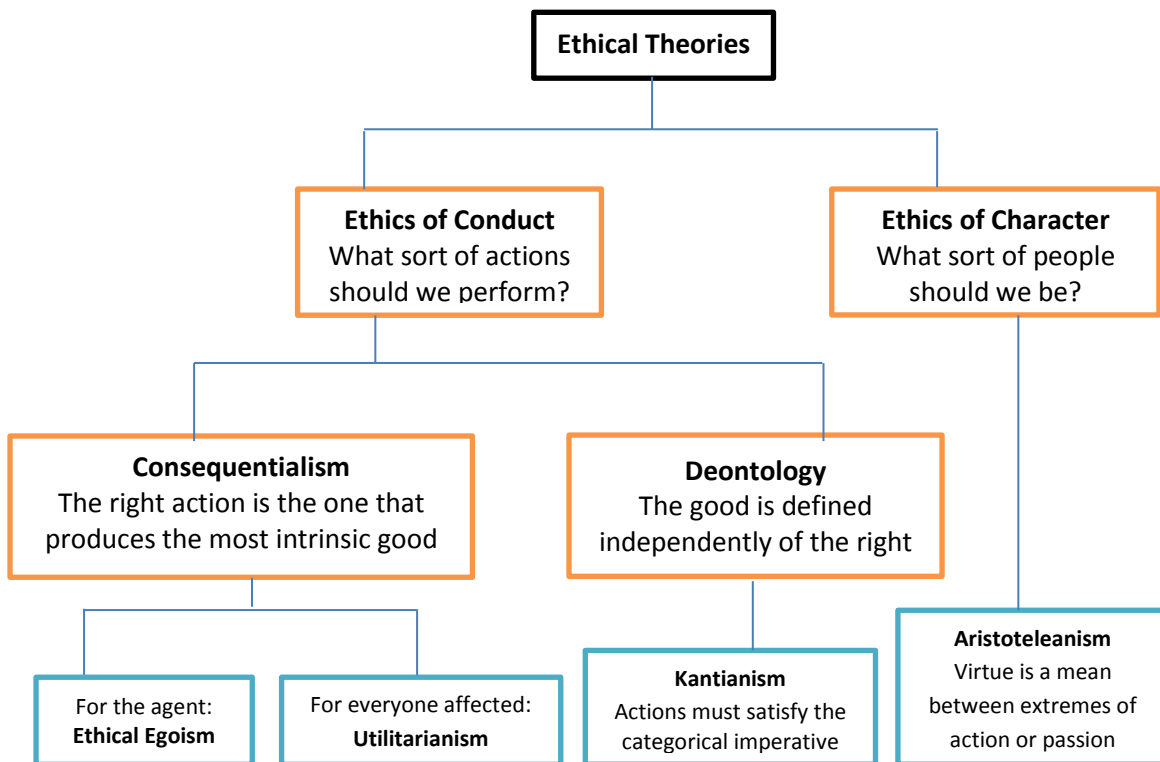
ere are some suggestions about how some of the chief ethical theories would address various issues. This is all pretty tentative, in part because different ethical theories tend to focus on different issues, so it's not always easy to determine how one theory would address the issues that are the chief concern of another theory. Also, many of the categories in the table are not strictly parts of the moral theories, but rather views on other topics (such as personal identity or the nature of rationality) which seem to mesh well with a particular ethical theory.

	Consequentialism	Deontology	Virtue Ethics
Example	**Utilitarianism**	**Kantianism**	**Aristotelianism**
Model of practical reasoning	Means-ends reasoning: how do I get what I want/ what's good?	How do I determine what's rational?	What habits should I develop?
Personal identity (what is essential to the self?)	Will & reason + desires	Will & reason (desires are thought of as outside forces with the potential to thwart rationality)	Will & reason + desires + character traits
Rationality	Getting what you want	Doing what reason requires (at a minimum, not having inconsistent or self-contradictory policies)	Having the kinds of desires which reason determines are best
Central question	What ought I to do? (act orientation)	What ought I to do? (act orientation)	What's the best sort of person to be? (agent orientation)
Primary object of evaluation	Consequences (states of affairs)	Acts	People (agents)
The good	**Basic Notion.** (for most consequentialists, maximum happiness or something similar)	Right action itself (? or possibly states of affairs brought about by right action? or states of affairs in which people who act rightly are rewarded?)	Whatever results from the actions of good people? happiness? acquisition of goods internal to practices?
The right	actions that maximize the good	**BASIC NOTION**	The sort of thing a virtuous person would do in the situation

Virtue	being disposed to maximize utility (for simple versions of consequentialism, there will be just one big virtue; more complex versions might have many)	Positive attitude toward doing one's moral duty (?)	**BASIC NOTION** (but may be analyzed, e.g. as those dispositions necessary for the attainment of happiness)

Consequentialism (Mill's Utilitarianism)

Consequentialism, as its name suggests, is the view that normative properties depend only on consequences. This general approach can be applied at different levels to different normative properties of different kinds of things, but the most prominent example is consequentialism about the moral rightness of acts, which holds that whether an act is morally right depends only on the consequences of that act or of something related to that act, such as the motive behind the act or a general rule requiring acts of the same kind. Consequentialists hold that choices—acts and/or intentions—are to be morally assessed solely by the states of affairs they bring about. Consequentialists thus must specify initially the states of affairs that are intrinsically valuable—often called, collectively, "the Good." They then are in a position to assert that whatever choices increase the Good, that is, bring about more of it, are the choices that it is morally right to make and to execute. (The Good in that sense is said to be prior to "the Right.").

The paradigm case of consequentialism is utilitarianism, whose classic proponents were Jeremy Bentham (1789), John Stuart Mill (1861), and Henry Sidgwick (1907). Classic utilitarians held hedonistic act consequentialism. *Act consequentialism* is the claim that an act is morally right if and only if that act maximizes the good, that is, if and only if the total amount of good for all minus the total amount of bad for all is greater than this net amount for any incompatible act available to the agent on that occasion. *Hedonism* then claims that pleasure is the only intrinsic good and that pain is the only intrinsic bad. Together these claims imply that an act is morally right if and only if that act causes "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," as the common slogan says. Utilitarian ethicists make ethical decisions guided by a central question:

"What effect will my doing this act in this situation have on the general balance of good over evil?"

Classic utilitarianism is consequentialist and denies that moral rightness depends directly on anything other than consequences, such as whether the agent promised in the past to do the act now. Of course, the fact that the agent promised to do the act might indirectly affect the act's consequences if breaking the promise will make other people unhappy. Nonetheless, according to classic utilitarianism, what makes it morally wrong to break the promise is its future effects on those other people rather than the fact that the agent promised in the past. Since classic utilitarianism reduces all morally relevant factors to consequences, it might appear simple. However, classic utilitarianism is actually a complex combination of many distinct claims, including the following claims about the moral rightness of acts:

Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on *consequences* (as opposed to the circumstances or the intrinsic nature of the act or anything that happens before the act).

Actual Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the *actual* consequences (as opposed to foreseen, foreseeable, intended, or likely consequences).

Direct Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the consequences of *that act itself* (as opposed to the consequences of the agent's motive, of a rule or practice that covers other acts of the same kind, and so on).

Evaluative Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on the *value* of the consequences (as opposed to non-evaluative features of the consequences).

Hedonism = the value of the consequences depends only on the *pleasures* and *pains* in the consequences (as opposed to other goods, such as freedom, knowledge, life, and so on).

Maximizing Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on which consequences are *best* (as opposed to merely satisfactory or an improvement over the status quo).

Aggregative Consequentialism = which consequences are best is some function of the values of *parts* of those consequences (as opposed to rankings of whole worlds or sets of consequences).

Total Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on the *total* net good in the consequences (as opposed to the average net good per person).

Universal Consequentialism = moral rightness depends on the consequences for *all* people or sentient beings (as opposed to only the individual agent, members of the individual's society, present people, or any other limited group).

Equal Consideration = in determining moral rightness, benefits to one person matter *just as much* as similar benefits to any other person (= all who count count equally).

Agent-neutrality = whether some consequences are better than others does not depend on whether the consequences are evaluated from the perspective of the agent (as opposed to an observer).

These claims could be clarified, supplemented, and subdivided further. What matters here is just that most pairs of these claims are logically independent, so a moral theorist could consistently accept some of them without accepting others. Yet classic utilitarians accepted them all.

A challenge of consequentialism is its insistence on the greater good of the most irrespective of the possible damage to the least. For instance, it seemingly demands (and thus, of course, permits) that in certain circumstances innocents be killed, beaten, lied to, or deprived of material goods to produce greater benefits for others. Consequences -and only consequences- can conceivably justify *any* kind of act, for it does not matter how harmful it is to some so long as it is more beneficial to others. Extreme illustrations of what may be considered the over-permissiveness of consequentialism may be as follows: A surgeon has five patients dying of organ failure and one healthy patient whose organs can save the five. In the right circumstances, surgeon will be permitted (and indeed required) by consequentialism to kill the healthy patient to obtain his organs, assuming there **are no relevant consequences other** than the saving of the five and the death of the one. Likewise, consequentialism will permit that a fat man be pushed in front of a runaway trolley if his being crushed by the trolley will halt its advance towards five workers trapped on the track.

Deontology (Kantian Ethics)

The word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (*deon*) and science (or study) of (*logos*). In contemporary moral philosophy, deontology is one of those kinds of normative theories regarding which choices are morally required, forbidden, or permitted. In other words, deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories), in contrast to (aretaic [virtue] theories) that - fundamentally, at least -guide and assess what kind of person (in terms of character traits) we are and should be. And within that domain, deontologists -those who subscribe to deontological theories of morality- stand in opposition to *consequentialists*.

Deontological theories judge the morality of choices by criteria different from the states of affairs those choices bring about. The most familiar forms of deontology, and also the forms presenting the greatest contrast to consequentialism, hold that some choices cannot be

justified by their effects—that no matter how morally good their consequences, some choices are morally forbidden. On such familiar deontological accounts of morality, agents cannot make certain wrongful choices even if by doing so the number of those exact kinds of wrongful choices will be minimized (because other agents will be prevented from engaging in similar wrongful choices). For such deontologists, what makes a choice right is its conformity with a moral norm. Such norms are to be simply obeyed by each moral agent; such norm-keepings are not to be maximized by each agent. In this sense, for such deontologists, the Right is said to have priority over the Good. If an act is not in accord with the Right, it may not be undertaken, no matter the Good that it might produce (including even a Good consisting of acts in accordance with the Right).

Analogously, deontologists typically supplement non-consequentialist obligations with non-consequentialist permissions. That is, certain actions can be right even though not maximizing of good consequences, for the rightness of such actions consists in their instantiating certain norms (here, of permission and not of obligation). Such actions are permitted, not just in the weak sense that there is no obligation not to do them, but also in the strong sense that one is permitted to do them even though they are productive of less good consequences than their alternatives. Such strongly permitted actions include actions one is obligated to do, but (importantly) also included are actions one is not obligated to do. It is this last feature of such actions that warrants their separate mention for deontologists.

Agent-Centered Deontological Theories (Explain who an agent is as basis for further discussion)

According to agent-centered theories, we each have both permissions and obligations that give us agent-relative reasons for action. An agent-relative reason is an objective reason, just as are agent neutral reasons; neither is to be confused with the subjective reasons that form the nerve of psychological explanations of human action. An agent-relative reason is so-called because it is a reason relative to the agent whose reason it is; it need not (although it may) constitute a reason for anyone else. Thus, an agent-relative *obligation* is an obligation for a particular agent to take or refrain from taking some action; and because it is agent-relative, the obligation does not necessarily give anyone else a reason to support that action. Each parent, for example, is commonly thought to have such special obligations to his/her child, obligations not shared by anyone else. Likewise, an agent-relative *permission* is a permission for some agent to do some act even though others may not be permitted to aid that

agent in the doing of his permitted action. Each parent, to revert to the same example, is commonly thought to be permitted (at the least) to save his own child even at the cost of not saving two other children to whom he has no special relation. Agent-centered theories and the agent-relative reasons on which they are based not only enjoin each of us to do or not to do certain things; they also instruct me to treat *my* friends, *my* family, *my* promisees in certain ways because they are *mine*, even if by neglecting them I could do more for others' friends, families, and promisees.

At the heart of agent-centered theories (with their agent-relative reasons) is the idea of agency. The moral plausibility of agent-centered theories is rooted here. The idea is that morality is intensely personal, in the sense that we are each enjoined to keep our own moral house in order. Our categorical obligations are not to focus on how our actions cause or enable other agents to do evil; the focus of our categorical obligations is to keep our own agency free of moral taint.

Patient-Centered Deontological Theories (Explain who a patient is as basis for further discussion)

A second group of deontological moral theories can be classified, as *patient*-centered, as distinguished from the *agent*-centered version. These theories are rights-based rather than duty-based; and some versions purport to be quite agent-neutral in the reasons they give moral agents.

All patient-centered deontological theories are properly characterized as theories premised on people's rights. An illustrative version posits, as its core right, the right against being used only as means for producing good consequences without one's consent. Such a core right is not to be confused with more discrete rights, such as the right against being killed, or being killed intentionally. It is a right against being used by another for the user's or others' benefit. More specifically, this version of patient-centered deontological theories proscribes the *using* of another's body, labour, and talent without the latter's consent.

Virtue (Aristotelian) Ethics

Virtue ethics is currently one of three major approaches in normative ethics. It may, initially, be identified as the one that emphasizes the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to the approach which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). Suppose it is obvious that someone in need should be helped, a utilitarian will point to the fact that the consequences of doing so will

maximize well-being, a deontologist to the fact that, in doing so the agent will be acting in accordance with a moral rule such as "Do unto others as you would be done by" and a virtue ethicist to the fact that helping the person would be charitable or benevolent.

Three of virtue ethics' central concepts are *virtue, practical wisdom* and *eudaimonia* .

African Ethics

The ethics of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behaviour that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness. The ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the moral thinkers of the society.

African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undoubtedly evolved ethical systems -ethical values, principles, rules- intended to guide social and moral behaviour.

African morality is founded on humanism, the doctrine that considers human interests and welfare as basic to the thought and action of the people. It is this doctrine as understood in African moral thought that has given rise to the communitarian ethos of the African society. For, ensuring the welfare and interests of each member of society can hardly be accomplished outside the communitarian society. The communitarian ethos is also borne of beliefs about the natural sociality of the human being, expressed, for instance, in the Akan maxim, previously referred to, that says that "when a human being descends from the heavens, he descends into a human town". Social or community life is, thus, not optional to the human being. Social life, which follows upon our natural sociality, implicates the individual in a web of moral obligations, commitments, and duties to be fulfilled in pursuit of the common good or the general welfare.

Thus, African humanitarian ethics spawns social morality, the morality of the common good, and the morality of duty that is so comprehensive as to bring within its compass what are referred to as moral ideals (such as love, virtue, compassion), which are considered supererogatory in Western ethics. But central or basic to the African morality is character, for the success of the moral life is held to be a function of the quality of an individual's personal life. A moral conception of personhood is held in African ethics, the conception that there are certain basic moral norms and ideals to which the conduct of the individual human being, if

27

he is a person, ought to conform. The recognition in the African ethical traditions of all human beings as brothers by reason of our common humanity is indeed a lofty moral ideal that must be cherished and made a vital or robust feature of global ethics in our contemporary world. It is a bulwark against developing bigoted attitudes toward peoples of different cultures or skin colours who are, also, members of the universal human family called race

Additional Resources; further reading and References

http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/intro/ethical_theories.html

http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-ethics/

Bewaji, John A. I., 2004. "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture," in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 396–403

- Ebijuwa, T., 1996. "Conscience, Morality and Social Responsibility in an African Culture," *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 9 (2): pp. 89–100.

  Gbadegesin, Segun, 1991. *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*, New York: Peter Lang.

- Menkiti, Ifeanyi A., 1984. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," in Richard A. Wright (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, 3rd edition, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

  Gyekye, Kwame, "African Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/african-ethics/