

West African (Akan) Values: Akan Ethics

Philosophy 267
Spring 2012
T, Th 10:20-11:30
Comenius 411

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:15-8:45 a.m., 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m., and by appointment

Syllabus

Texts:

Curtis Keim, Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind, Second Edition
Kwame Gyekye, An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme
Kofi Asare Opuku, Hearing and Keeping Akan Proverbs (out of print – Xerox to be handed out)

Course Description:

Through study of philosophical texts, writings, proverbs, and other sources, we shall explore West African values. The foci will be both traditional and contemporary, primarily oriented toward the Akan people of what is now Ghana. Among the first nations to achieve political independence in the de-colonization movements, Ghana has kept traditional values alive, not in isolation from the rest of the world, but in active engagement with it. What do the values of the Akan have to teach us?

This course focuses on the Akan group, primarily on Akan people living in what is now Ghana. Through the texts, in addition to supplemental sources, such as audio recordings, we shall explore the history and traditions of the Akan over time. We shall focus on diversity among the Akan, such as gender, economic class, language, religion, age groups, and urban/rural differences.

This course involves an embedded emphasis on the ways this culture's worldview shapes its perceptions of and response to at least two major global issues. Specifically, we shall look at imperialism and de-colonization movements, as well as contemporary conflicts over culture and economic globalization, how values are maintained in the process of external and internal pressure. Throughout, we will attend to how diversity within West Africa and across the world impacts questions of values.

We seek the following learning outcomes:

1. Enhanced appreciation of the effect of cultural values (including our own) on the perceptions with which different peoples view the major issues of our time;
2. Increased awareness of the complexity of major global issues such as those examined in the course;
3. Improved understanding of the ways that power differences shape (a) peoples' understanding of the nature of, and (b) their assessment of the significance of, various global issues.

Each of these outcomes will be approached through studying Ghanaian thought on its own terms, including how Ghanaian philosophers think Akan values have often been misinterpreted through Eurocentric lenses. Approaching the “de-colonizing of the mind” as Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls it, African thinkers have richly addressed the challenges of self-determination in the face of global power imbalances. Particularly within Akan thought, much of the cultural

practices have emphasized oral traditions, rather than written thought. As such, they have often been neglected and remained invisible to others.

In studying Akan proverbs, this oral culture will be more available to us. Rather than simply through reading about African values, we will discuss the proverbs and stories as they actually are told.

In studying a bit of contemporary Ghanaian music, including “hip life,” we will break through the usual assumptions that African culture is either traditional or “Westernized,” discussing the ways that musicians integrate traditional values, languages, and themes, with the contemporary impact of music from elsewhere. In particular, there is a strong current of Ghanaian musicians and writers refusing to be caught in anyone’s narrow categories of what it is to be African.

This course fulfills the **Cultural Values and Global Issues** Learning in Common (LinC) requirement.

Course requirements (as percentage of final grade)

I.	A. Two Presentations (graded satisfactory or unsatisfactory)	5%
	B. Five Response Essays (graded satisfactory or unsatisfactory)	5%
	C. Worksheets, quizzes, collective work projects and other brief assignments (possibly including some on Blackboard) (some graded by letter or number, some simply for credit as satisfactory or unsatisfactory)	5%
	D. Engagement	<u>5%</u>
	Average grade on the above (I.A-I.C):	20%
II.	Examinations:	
	First Exam	20%
	Second Exam	20%
	Final Exam	20%
III.	Essay: One 5-6 Page Essay:	<u>20%</u>
		100%

Course Requirements Further Explained

I.A. Two individual presentations, of 5-10 minutes, on assigned class days should cover the main points of the readings for that day and offering your own responses to them. (5%)

I.B. Response Essays: Five 1-2 page response papers on the readings for the class meeting at which you hand it in. That is, the essay should be about your reaction to the readings, not a review or extension of the class discussion. Of the 24 or so class meetings, you need to hand in five response essays. These essays are for your benefit, to practice engaging critically with the readings; each will be graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. (5%)

I.C. Worksheets, quizzes, collective group work (generally in class) and other brief assignments (possibly including some on Blackboard) (some graded by letter or number, some simply for credit as satisfactory or unsatisfactory) (5%)

I.D. Engagement (5%)

II. Exams: Three Exams (60% total): For the final exam, most of the material will be drawn from the last series of readings, and the remainder will come from those covered earlier in the term. Each of these three exams will involve a combination of paragraph and essay writing with shorter answer type questions (e.g., true/false, one sentence answers, etc.) (20% each = 60%)

III. Essay (20%): 5-6 double-spaced pages on topic selected from those I distribute, or your own proposed topic with my written approval. In the essay, you will demonstrate your grasp of the course materials and go beyond them to develop your own positions and arguments. These essays will not necessarily be research papers involving outside research and sources beyond the books for the course. Rather, they may simply involve working the texts for class and responding to them critically, showing how and why you agree or disagree with the author's central argument on a topic. (20%)

Note: 5% may not see like much, say on a presentation one would rather not do or would do an unsatisfactory job on, but skipping it would give you a 0 as 5% of your final grade bringing an 80 down to a 75 or 76 for the course grade

Coursework: *Before* each class meeting, read and reflect upon everything that we are covering in class. Fair warning: there is no way to master the material except by doing lots of reading, discussing, and reflecting upon the material.

Seeing Me: If you have any trouble with any of the material, please bring it up in class, email me, or come see me. Don't wait. Come to my office hours. If you cannot make these, let me know and we can set up another time to meet. You can be sure that others are having similar difficulties or questions. Try to identify what your specific difficulties are, e.g., motivation, interest, reading comprehension, note-taking, writing, quiz and test-taking skills, philosophical reasoning. I can best help you get on track by seeing where in particular you have gone wrong. If you need to get something to me, leave it at my office.

Learning Services: If you know or suspect you might be in need of Learning Services assistance, in anything from study skills or time management to possible disability issues, please contact Learning Services as soon as possible. This is particularly urgent if you know or suspect you might need accommodations to negotiate disability issues with the class. The office would simply contact me about the accommodation requested; they respect privacy.

Responsibilities of each class member:

- 1) Come to class prepared, having done the readings and any assignments before class, having carefully and reflected upon them, with notes jotted down for questions, comments, and clarifications.
- 2) Participate fully in class, giving full attention to whomever is speaking, refraining from side talking.
- 3) Contribute to an atmosphere of learning, being focused and respectful of the ideas at stake, of the course materials, and of each other.
- 4) Regular participation in presentations, discussions, group work, etc.
- 5) Honest self-assessment on these criteria. (I may periodically ask you assess yourselves on these criteria.)

Grading and Academic Integrity:

Grading and academic integrity policies for this course are in accordance with Moravian College standards, as expressed in the Catalog (p. 43). Please note the following about grading.

Grading scheme: 97-100=A+ 93-96.9=A 90-92.9=A- 87-89.9=B+ 83-86.9=B 80-82.9=B- 77-79.9=C+ 73-76.9=C 70-72.9=C- 67-69.9=D+ 63-66.9=D 60-62.9=D- 0-59.9=F

A (4.00 points) and A- (3.67): “These grades indicate achievement of the highest caliber. They involve expectations of independent work, original thinking, and the ability to acquire and effectively use knowledge.”

B+ (3.33), B (3.00), and B- (2.67): “These grades indicate higher than average achievement. Evidence of independent work and original thinking is expected.”

C+ (2.33), C (2.00), and C- (1.67): “These grades are given when the student has devoted a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention to the work of the course, and has satisfied the following criteria: familiarity with the content of the course, familiarity with the methods of study of the course, and active participation in the work of the class.”

D+ (1.33), D (1.00), and D- (0.67): “These grades indicate unsatisfactory work, below the standard expected by the College. They indicate work which in one or more important aspects falls below the average expected of students for graduation. The work is, however, sufficient to be credited for graduation, if balanced by superior work in other courses.”

F (0.00): “This indicates failure.”

Moravian College standards on academic integrity and plagiarism are available in *Academic Honesty at Moravian College*, available from the Office of the Dean of the College (in Colonial Hall, first floor). Plagiarism is very serious, resulting in automatic failure on the relevant assignment, even if the action is unintentional, such as the failure to cite the source of paraphrased ideas. We will discuss these issues on particular assignments, such as essays.

For this course, the following pointers may be helpful. Follow instructions on graded assignments, doing your own work unless the assignment is explicitly given as a group project or as allowing for open-book work. In doing essays, be sure to give references and credit for any ideas which are not entirely your own. That is, when quoting or paraphrasing or even referring to the idea(s) of another, cite the source. If you are not sure whether a reference is required, give a reference anyway. If in doubt, err on the side of overly generous reference giving, and consult with the professor for guidance.

In addition, borderline grades *may* swing up or down (say, from a C- to a C, if the numerical grade is just on the line between those), depending upon a student’s course contribution.

Missed presentations, exams, quizzes, and other assignments are only eligible for make-up in cases of emergency circumstances, at the professor’s discretion. Contact the professor immediately in such a case. In the interests of fairness, documentation may be required.

This syllabus may be revised with the notice of the professor.

Course Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1/16	TH	Keim, <u>Mistaking Africa</u> , (MA), xi, xii, "Changing Our Mind About Africa," 3-14, "How We Learn," 15-34
1/21	T	MA, Part II: Evolutionism -- "The Origins of the Darkest Africa," 35-48 "Our Living Ancestors: 20 th Century Evolutionism," 49-62
1/23	TH	MA, "Real Africa, Wise Africa," 63-82 MA, "We Should Help Them," 83-104
1/28	T	MA, Part III: Further Misperceptions -- "Cannibalism: No Accounting for Taste," 105-112 MA, "Africans Live in Tribes, Don't They?" 113-128
1/30	TH	MA, "Safari: Beyond Our Wildest Dreams," 129-146 MA, "Africa in Images," 147-168
2/4	T	MA, "Race and Culture: The Same and the Other," 169-178 MA, "From Imagination to Dialogue," 179-187, "Learning More," 189-193.
2/6	TH	Further Discussion, Review
2/11	T	Exam #1
2/13	TH	Kwame Gyekye, <u>An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme</u> , (Akan), ix-xlii
2/18	T	<u>Akan</u> , 1-12

2/20	TH	<u>Akan</u> , 13-43	_____
2/25	T	<u>Akan</u> , 44-67	_____
2/27	TH	<u>Akan</u> , 68-103	_____
3/4	T	Spring Recess, No Class	
3/6	TH	Spring Recess, No Class	
3/11	T	<u>Akan</u> , 104-128	_____
3/13	TH	<u>Akan</u> , 129-153	_____
3/18	T	<u>Akan</u> , 154-186	_____
3/20	TH	<u>Akan</u> , 187-212	_____
3/25	T	Further discussion of <u>Akan</u> (entire)	
3/27	TH	Review	
4/1	T	Exam #2	
4/3	TH	Kofi Asare Opuku, <u>Hearing and Keeping Akan Proverbs</u> , (henceforth called <u>Proverbs</u>), ix-xxii, 1-25	_____
4/8	T	<u>Proverbs</u> , 25-45	_____
4/10	TH	<u>Proverbs</u> , 45-66	_____
4/15	T	Essay Due <u>Proverbs</u> , 66-85	_____
4/17	TH	<u>Proverbs</u> , 85-113	_____
4/22	T	<u>Proverbs</u> , 113-131	_____
4/24	TH	Review	
5/2	Friday, at 8:30AM	Final Exam	