Ethics (Moral Philosophy) and the Nigerian Polytechnic Education System

Fr. Sylvester Enomah

**School of General Studies,
Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro, Nigeria**

ABSTRACT
Today, many polytechnic students lack moral responsibility thereby displaying inhuman personalities as they indulge in vicious and antisocial acts of corruption, exam malpractices, indecent dressing, cultism, *yahooism, vudism*, folly, insensitivity, prostitution, materialism, brutality, ferocity, and hooliganism. All these vices among polytechnic students is pre-empt their deficiency of values of patience, good reputation, chastity, life, integrity, sincerity, virginity, salvation; and also indication of their lack of possession of moral virtues of courage, prudence, wisdom, justice, and temperance which are acquired through the study of ethics or moral philosophy. The moral breakdown of morality among polytechnic students is predicated on lack of knowledge of moral principles, moral values, and moral virtues which are acquired through the study of Ethics or Moral Philosophy. The purpose of this paper is to educate polytechnic students on the values and importance of the study of Ethics or Moral Philosophy. The paper concludes that the study of Ethics will enable polytechnic students to discern what is valuable on campus, have sense of responsibility, and know the secrets of virtuous life, moral reorientation, and formation of character. It will also instil in the minds of polytechnic students the necessary moral values and moral virtues that will help them to be morally responsible both within and outside polytechnic institutions, and the moral reorientation and reformation of those who are morally deformed before their admission into the polytechnics. The methods adopted in this research include analysis, speculation, application, prescription, and logical reasoning. The paper recommends that Ethics or Moral Philosophy should be introduced in all polytechnic institutions in Nigeria, and made compulsory to all students, in Nigeria Polytechnics where Ethics already exists, it should be emphasized, and that Conferences on Ethics or Moral Philosophy should be organized in all Nigeria Polytechnics.
Keywords: Arête, Ethics, Values, Virtues, Morality, Obligation, Norm.

INTRODUCTION
The society is the mirror of its educational systems. Hence, one can validly infer that the moral degradation of almost all facets of the Nigerian society viz: political, economic, religious, judiciary, etc is a reflection of moral deficiency in the Nigerian educational systems. This is due to the fact that sensitive positions in any of the facet of the Nigerian society are occupied by products or graduates from the Nigerian educational institutions. The moral breakdown of morality in Nigerian educational institutions is predicated on lack of knowledge of moral principles, moral values, and moral virtues acquired through the study of Ethics or Moral Philosophy among polytechnic students. For example, many polytechnic students lack moral responsibility thereby displaying inhuman personalities and moral imperfection as they engage in amoral, immoral, vicious, and antisocial acts of corruption, exam malpractices, indecent dressing, cultism, *yahooism, vudism*, folly, insensitivity, prostitution, materialism, brutality, ferocity, and hooliganism. All these vices among polytechnic students predicated on the deficiency of values of patience, good reputation, chastity, life, integrity, sincerity, virginity, salvation; and the lack of possession of moral virtues of courage, prudence, wisdom, justice, and temperance which are acquired through the study of ethics or moral philosophy. The purpose of this paper is to educate polytechnic students on the

values and importance of the study of Ethics or Moral Philosophy. In order to achieve this, the paper executes a well defined outline which include definition of Ethics, Methods, Scope, and Sources of Ethics, Key Issues in Ethics, Criterion and Norm of Morality, Ultimate and Proximate Norm of Morality, The Proximate Norm of Morality, Objectively Good or Evil Acts, Ethics and Polytechnic Education, Conclusion, and Recommendations.

Definition of Ethics
Etymologically, the term ethics is derived from the Greek word ethos, which means character cf Blackburn (1996 p126). Historically, ethics, the theory of moral good, is one the oldest fields in philosophy cf Buttler (1968 p29). Blackburn (1996 p.126) defines ethics as the study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning; good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality, choice. Ethics can be defined as the aspect of philosophy that deals with value of human conduct - good and bad behaviour, moral or immoral i.e. from the teleological perspective. According to Omoregbe (1993 p. 3-4), "Like philosophy itself, ethics has no univocal definition. It can be and has been defined in various ways. It can be defined as the branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human actions; or as the branch of philosophy which studies the norms of human behaviour". It can also be defined as the systematic study of the fundamental principles of the moral law; or as the normative science of human conduct cf Williams Lillie cited by Omoregbe (1993 p.4) . Isiramen in Isiramen and Oroka (1993 p.10) says that ethics deals with judgment of right and wrong or good and bad. However, she mentioned that the job of making judgments about right and wrong conduct is not restricted to the field of ethics cf Isiramen in Isiramn and Oroka (1993 p.10). for Kalusi (1996 p.15) "Ethics as a code or set of principles that bind a group of people together. For example, we talk of the Ethics of the teaching profession, or of the medical profession-what is meant is the code that regulates the behaviour and conduct of teachers and doctors". Kneller cited by Kalusi (1996 p.15-16) believes that ethics deals with the goodness and evil of human action and human institutions that can be ascertained by reason. Ethics' primary concepts include: good and bad, right and wrong, is and ought, obligation and duty. Ethical principles apply to the life of the individual and to his relationship with other members of society in order to be acceptable member of society cf Kalusi (1996 p.15-16). Isiramen in Isiramen and Oroka (1993 p.11) even mentioned that in its narrow conception ethics is concerned with the conduct of husbands, wives, mothers, citizens or simply human beings. In the same vein, Okpetu in Oroka, et al (1999 p.11) stated that ethical codes are also based on societal opinion, and as such they are not scientifically verifiable. Describing the nature of ethics, Ekarika (1986 p.17) says that "The field of enquiry which considers man's actions which are in conformity with the moral law is ETHICS – from ETHOS – custom, manner or way of doing things, hence conduct. It remains for Ethics to treat these problems that concern what is good and right; what is of right or wrong or good or bad conduct".

All the above definitions point to the fact that ethics is regarded as a science which deals with human conduct from the standpoint of 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', is or ought'.

Methods, and Scope, and Sources of Ethics
Like any other discipline or field of study, ethics has both methods and scope of investigation referred to as formal and material objects of study respectively.

Ethical methods: Ethical methods refer to the approaches or employed in the study of ethics. Ethics investigates or scrutinizes it subject matter from the approaches or dimensions of right or wrong, ought or ought not, good or bad with the instrumentality of the general philosophical methods of speculation, analysis, criticism, phenomenology, and as a normative science goes ahead to prescribe moral norms, standard or criteria for judging the moral status of any human act.

The Scope of Ethics: The scope of ethics refers to the subject matter or the outline or the area of coverage of ethics as a discipline. The subject matter of ethics is the conduct of man. In fact, the general scope of ethic is to outline the main facts of moral conduct of man, investigate their implications, examine the ground of the "oughtness" or necessity which underlies human acts and expound the standards, criteria, norms, and rules human conduct character must be conventional with, accepted, or conform with in order that they may be tagged or designated as right or good. As a science, ethic seeks to discover the truth about these things. It also lays the foundation of the art of right conduct by supplying the necessary

information for moral judgement, and deals with the inner lying or underlying truths and principles of the art of right conduct and their application to concrete situation of life.

Sources of Ethics: By sources of ethics is meant the bases of morality. They are the foundations upon which moral knowledge, awareness, or idea is derived or predicated. The sources of ethics identified by philosophers include natural law, religious laws, and laws of society cf Enomah (2016 pp75-76). Natural Law is a type of law that is innate in man. It is not taught but emanates naturally from man. For instance, the natural instinct to preserve life. From the natural law, man makes or derives other laws. The natural law is a source of ethics. Religious Laws are laws that come out of religion. For instance, Biblical Law of the Ten (10) Commandments and Koranic Laws. They are not natural laws, but they are derived from natural law. They are sources of ethics. Laws of Society are laws that come out of the customs, traditions, way of life and world views of people. For instance, national constitutions, customary laws, educational laws, civil laws, canon laws, etc are laws of society and they are sources of ethics.

Key Issues in Ethics
The key issues in ethics to be considered here include moral value, moral virtue, and moral duty. These key issues are regarded as such due to the indispensible role they play in stimulating, creating sustaining, reviving, enhancing, and promoting moral consciousness, goodness, and moral perfection in the society. They can also be referred to as moral ingredients or catalysts in the society. How the absence of these key issues in the society results to moral reckless and moral collapse of the society.

Moral Value: This is a moral ingredient that spices up moral good moral acts among people. Value has been defined in various ways. Blackburn (1996 p.390) says "To acknowledge some feature of things as a value is to take it into account in decision-making, or in other words to be inclined to advance it as a consideration in influencing choice and guiding oneself and others". Value could subjective or objective. "Those who see value as 'subjective think of this in terms of a personal stance, occupied as a kind of choice, and immune to rational argument (although often, and curiously, deserving some kind of reverence and respect). Those who think of values as objective suppose that for some reason-requirements of rationality, human nature, God, or other authority-choice can be guided and corrected from some independent standpoint" cf Blackburn (1996 p. 390). Hornby (2005 p.1632) sees value as the quality of being useful or important. Values could be what one has already achieved and has to be protected jealously by moral uprightness or they could be what ones hopes or desires to achieve with moral uprightness as indispensable requirement to possess or attain them. Values are of various kinds, namely, reputation, marriage, education, appointment, honour, virginity, respect, salvation, family, etc. These various values achieved or to be achieved spurs up one to be moral conscious and perfect. They motivate one do good and avoid evil. Moral values could be acquired from infancy in which they are inculcated or drummed into them, or through assimilation and internalization in adulthood in which the values become part and parcel of us, and advancing rationale for accepting while some values are good or bad, or through natural argument i.e. as imbued in the nature of man, and man is expected to exhibit them in accordance with his human nature.

Moral Virtue: Moral virtue is another moral catalyst. A virtue is a trait of character that is to be admired: one rendering its possessor better, either morally, or intellectually, or in the conduct of specific affairs cf Blackburn (1996 p.39). Virtue is the power for moral action that enables man to act with ease and order in some area of his life. Virtues are the excellence of good qualities in man. The Greeks call it 'Arête' which means the goodness or excellence of a thing. The goodness or virtue of a person cf Blackburn (1996 p.23). The moral virtues include wisdom, prudence, justice, courage (fortitude), and temperance. If a man has the moral virtue of <u>temperance</u>, and sees food, he will behave well by not rushing at it and eat voraciously. To run away immediately at the sound of a gun is to lack the virtue of <u>courage</u> of <u>fortitude</u>. To do things wisely and accordingly is <u>prudence</u>, and acting according to<u> justice</u>, a sense of fairness. According to Aristotle cited by Blackburn (1996 p.23), the various virtues consist in knowing how to strike a man between opposing vices and defect. According to Aristotle cited by Enomah (2016 pp80-81) education and practice are needed to become virtuous. From the education perspective, to one must learn to live well, to be good one must understand what is morally, because ignorance of what is morally good

is the cause of moral failure. From the dimension of praxis, one can say categorically that knowing is not doing, one ought to know and practice goodness.

Moral Duty: Obligation is another motivator of moral goodness. Omoregbe (1993 p. 118) defined duty as what a person ought to do, what he is obliged to do. For Blackburn (1996 p.112), duty refers to "That which one must do, or that which can be required of one". The term carries implications of that which is owed (due) to other people or perhaps to oneself cf Blackburn (1996 p.112). The concept of duty implies and underscores the reality and necessity of division of labour. This why Omoeregbe (1993 p. 118) rightly says that "Men are by nature interdependent, they depend on one another for their survival and for their well-being. This is what is meant by the saying that man is a social animal. No man is an island, no man is self-sufficient, and no man can provide for himself all what he needs for his survival and self-development". Duty is term that is diversified and universally applies to all and sundry in the society. Hence we can talk of duty to family, duty to society, duty to kindred, duty to God, duty subjects, duty to leaders etc. Faithfulness to one's duty is a necessary catalyst to moral perfection among people in the society, while negligence to one's duty unequivocally leads to moral failure among people, and a total collapse of a society.

Criterion and Norm of Morality

According to Celestine Bittle cited by Enomah (2016 pp 85), morality is that attribute or property of the human act in virtue of which it is said to be morally good or morally evil. The factors which make for the morality of am act are called moral determinants. They include the object, circumstances and the end or purpose of the agent, and of the act. Since the moral character of these determinants is not self-evident, it is, therefore, pertinent to look at the problem of the norm and criterion of morality.

The two terms criterion and norm of morality are not identical in spite of their similarity. Blackburn (1996 p.88) sees a criterion as a "(i) A sufficient condition of something else. (ii) A condition that may not be sufficient for another, but can be seen a priori to provide good evidence for it". Generally, a criterion is a standard of judgement by which principles, facts, statements and conducts are tested so as to make correct judgement concerning them. In the field of ethics, a moral criterion is the yardstick used to determine the morality of individual acts so as to form correct judgment concerning them.

For Blackburn (1996 p.265), "A norm is a rule for behaviour, or a definite pattern of behaviour, departure from which renders a person liable to some kind of censure. In this sense there are grammatical norms, and norms of etiquette, as well as moral norms. Indeed, almost all aspects of human behaviour will be to some extent norm-governed". In general, philosophers refer to a norm as an authoritative standard which serves as a pattern or model to which things of similar nature most conform, an in ethics, for them, the norm of morality is an objective standard or rule or principle, which determines the morality of acts. Any human act that conforms to it would be regarded as morally good act while anyone that deviates from it would be morally evil. A norm is characteristically objective because it pertains to the object of the act irrespective of or prior to any judgement. This entails comparing individual acts to the norm of morality before judgments are made. Qualifications of norm of morality identified by philosophers include un-changeability, universality, accessibility, applicability to all conditions of life, and single standard.

Ultimate and Proximate Norm of Morality

A norm is an authoritative standard to which every acts of man must conform in order to be morally good. Any act performed by man is aimed at realizing his ultimate subjective and objective end, and he avoids acts which frustrate the realization of this end. The former is morally good while the latter is morally evil. Man has the moral obligation to perform good acts and avoid evil acts. Without a norm moral judgements would be subjective and may be imprecise. This would result to chaos, conflict and mayhem. But what is the objective norm of morality with which the individual moral acts must conform in order that man can correctly judge whether they are morally good or evil? The objective norm of morality consists in the ultimate objective and subjective end of man's existence and human acts which is God's glory and man's final beatitude. Any act that conforms to this norm is morally good and whatever act that is ad variant with it is morally evil. God's glory is the ultimate end of all creatures including man and his acts, because, his (God's) attributes and nature are infinitely perfect. God' nature is thus the ultimate norm or standard of morality. Cardinal Mercier (1952 p. 217) has this in mind when he postulate that "The object in which

our nature finds its absolute rest is none other than God Himself, the Uncreated Good. For an object can be the adequate cause of man's happiness only on condition that it realizes the whole perfection of which man is naturally capable; and only in God this condition verified"

The Proximate Norm of Morality

God's nature as the ultimate norm of morality cannot be used as an immediate norm in the many problems of everyday life. This is because we do not have a perfect knowledge of God's nature and attributes. The ultimate norm cannot serve as practical norm of morality to judge concrete individual acts. It is inaccessible, vague and most people do not have adequate idea of the true God. Therefore, there must be an immediate and proximate norm which can serve as a standard of assessment and as the nexus between individual human acts and the ultimate norm of morality. The proximate norm of morality is the nature of the whole man. All finite beings owe their existence to God either directly or indirectly. Creation is a manifestation of God's goodness; hence all of creation is good. This is why philosophers say that every being is ontologically good. The proximate norm of morality must be an authoritative standard with which the human acts must immediately conform in order that they may at the same time conform to the ultimate norm. Man's nature is thus the proximate norm of morality. The reverse is the case for morally evil acts. It must be noted that the nature of the whole man is the norm of morality and not a part of it. Cardinal Mercier (1952 p. 216) sees man's nature as the proximate norm of morality when he says "It is clear that the end of man gives full satisfaction to his natural tendency; it is the complete good which excludes evil under all its forms and fulfils all the aspirations of human nature; and is the definition of happiness- '*Beatitudo, cum sit perfectum bonum, omne malum excludit desiderium implet*'".

Objectively Good or Evil Acts

From the discussion on the ultimate and proximate norm of morality, some basic questions may arise: are acts good or evil because we judge them to be so, or are they good or evil in themselves? Acts which are objectively good or evil are those which are good or evil in their very nature irrespective of any command or prohibition by an authority, prior to, and independent of our judgement. In other words, some acts are objectively good or evil. The reason why some acts are objectively good or evil is the ultimate end of man and all creatures. God created all finite beings to advance his glory. Good acts are those that promote the glory of God while evil acts are those that thwart his glory. Many of man's acts are typically "human" because he is a rational creature who has an intellect and freedom to make choice between what is good and evil. Human acts are those with the mental power and autonomy. Man not only has the ability to imitate God's perfection in all his goodwill, kindness, faithfulness, etc although he ought to. Hence, it is a moral responsibility on man. In summary, human acts which conform to man's ultimate subjective and objective end are objectively, ontologically, and are by their very nature morally good while the contrary is the case for acts that are morally evil.

Ethics and Polytechnic Education

From the foregoing discussion on the nature of ethics, the values of ethics to polytechnic education in Nigeria can be derived.

Discernment of what is Valuable on Campus: A lot of perform poorly in examinations and academics generally, while some others are expelled, rusticated, or suspended because they do not know why they are on campus. They do not know or understand what is valuable to them as students in the course of their studentship or in their educational career on campus. They have crises of values. They fail to discern that as students what is most valuable to them are whatever is, pertains to, and relates to their educational career or study. What is of value to students on campus include attendance at lectures, studying their books, carrying out research in the library, embarking on recommended excursions, writing tests and examination, attendance at recommended extra mural activities, and attending tutorials. However, a lot of polytechnic students relegate these valuable academic and educational exercises and activities to background and place priority on clubbing, join secret cults, engage in prostitution, embank travels, fashion parade, engage in incompatible businesses, attendance and carrying out unnecessary fellowships, etc which are valueless, ad variant, and inimical to their academic and educational excellence and success. The study of ethics helps students to know what is of utmost value and priority to their educational career

in order to refocus and redirect their attention on what is necessary to them as students. This enables them to excel in all academic activities and exercises on campus. Other virtues such as diligence, sincerity, honesty, trust worthiness, hard work, discipline, self control, chastity, prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude, wisdom, courage, good name, excellent reputation, virginity, salvation, etc which boost ones personality and help to attain enviable academic and education heights are also imparted to polytechnic students on campus.

Sense of Responsibility: One of goals of polytechnic education is prepare students to take up positions of responsibility in the society. Polytechnic education prepares students to be responsible citizens, and one of the ingredients of responsibility is moral rectitude or excellence. One cannot attain expected moral perfection without acquiring the basic or rudiments of moral principles, norm, and criteria, which are studied in ethics. Due to lack of knowledge of students in ethical principles, they engage varied kinds of unethical and anti-social activities leading to untimely death of students, disruption of academic calendar, and students' unrest on campus. In addition, students do not have sense of duty and responsibility towards daily academic functions. For instance, many students come late to lectures, make noise during lecture, do not pay their school fees even when they have it, do not come to lectures regularly, do not write tests and examinations, do not submit their practical manuals on time, do not pay necessary dues, etc. This negligence and lack of sense of duty and responsibility among students adversely affect their academic performances and also cripples other spheres of life of the polytechnic institutions; it also makes them to be unpatriotic. The knowledge of ethics enables students to know the importance of moral duty and responsibility in areas of punctuality, leadership qualities, faithfulness, and commitment in their lives and the well being of the entire society they are expected to serve after their graduation.

Secrets of Virtuous Life: The secret and road map to virtuous life is virtue. In order to live a virtuous life one must know and practice excellent virtues. Charity begins from home. For students to be virtuous in the society after their graduation, they must begin to live virtuous lives as students in the polytechnic. A critical look examination of life of students on campus reveals that many of them are not virtuous. In other words, they do not exhibit the virtues of prudence as they are not moderate in the use of their resources, time, and energy; they do not practice the virtue of temperance as they quickly rush at new fashions, events and social activities; they lack the virtue of courage as they are easily intimidated by lecturers, cultists, and educational challenges; they lack the virtue of justice as they are oppressive and unfair in their dealings with their fellow students; they display lack the virtue of wisdom by the way they make rash decisions and do things foolishly and indecisively. No doubt the entire society would be infected and chaotic if these kinds of students with vicious lives graduate and plunged into the society.

Moral Reorientation and Formation of Character: There is need for ethical or moral reorientation and formation of conscience of students on campus in order for them to practice virtuous lives within and beyond the campus. This need arises as some students are already morally deformed and bankrupt before they are admitted into polytechnic institutions either as a result of their morally poor family background or as a result of their morally poor primary and secondary educational background. These set of students can corrupt, contaminate, and pollute their fellow students by luring and injecting them with immoral and amoral venoms. The study of ethics will help to morally reform, re-orientate, and redirect the conscience of these amorally infected students towards moral perfection and practice of virtuous life within and outside the polytechnic environment

CONCLUSION

As a moral being, the moral life of man defines his true nature - humanity. The more morally responsible man is, the more he becomes truly human, and the more perfect he becomes. But the less morally responsible a man is the more inhuman and morally imperfect he becomes. Many polytechnic students lack moral responsibility thereby display inhumanity and moral imperfection because they indulge in amoral, immoral, and antisocial acts of corruption, exam malpractice, indecent dressing, cultism, *yahooism, vudism*, folly, prostitution, materialism, and hooliganism. All these vices are predicated on the deficiency or lack of the knowledge of values of patience, good reputation, chastity, virginity, salvation; and the lack of possession of moral virtues of courage, prudence, wisdom, justice, and temperance which

are acquired through moral the study of ethics or moral philosophy. The study of Ethics will enable polytechnic students to discern what is valuable on campus, have sense of responsibility, and know the secrets of virtuous life, moral reorientation, and formation of character. It will also instil in the minds of polytechnic students the necessary moral values and moral virtues that will help them to be morally responsible both within and outside polytechnic institutions, and the moral reorientation and reformation of those who are morally deformed before their admission into the polytechnics.

RECOMMENDATIONS
As a result of the importance of the study of ethics or moral philosophy to polytechnic students, the paper makes the following recommendations.
1. Ethics or Moral Philosophy should be introduced into all polytechnic institutions in Nigeria, and made compulsory to all students.
2. In Nigeria Polytechnics where Ethics already exists, it should be emphasized.
3. Conferences on Ethics or Moral Philosophy should be organized in all Nigeria Polytechnic

REFERENCES
Aristotle cited by Enomah, S. (201 6). *The Rudiments of Ethics (Moral Philosophy)*. Ughelli: Kanbit Publishers.

Blackburn, S (1996). *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press

Butler, J.D. (1968). *Four Philosophies and their Practice in Education and Religion*, Third Edition. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

Cardinal Mercier (1953). *A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Celstine Bittle cited by Enomah, S. (201 6). *The Rudiments of Ethics (Moral Philosophy)* Ughelli: Kanbit Publishers.

Ekarika, J. P. (1986). *Introduction to Philosophy: Preliminary Notions in Logic; Metaphysics and Theory of knowledge,* 2nd Ed, Vol. 1. Venice, Italy: Stamplato Uniongrafica.

Enomah, S. (201 6). *The Rudiments of Ethics (Moral Philosophy)*. Ughelli: Kanbit Publishers.

Hornby (2005 ed) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* 7th Edition. Oxford: University Press

Isiramen, C.O. "The Nature of Philosophy" in Oroka, O and Isiramen, C.O (1993). *Invitation to Logic.* Warri: Bonaventure Publishers.

Kalusi, J. I. (1996). *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education. Warri*: Coewa Publishers

Kneller cited by Kalusi, J. I. (1996). *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education. Warri*: COEWA Publishers

Okpetu, S.A. "The Nature of Philosophy" in Oroka (1999 ed) Philosophy and Logic for Beginners. Warri: Jenique International Limited.

Omoregbe, I.O. (1993). *Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited.

Williams Lillie cited by Omoregbe, I.O. (1993). *Ethics: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited.