

## Form 3 (Age 12-13)

### Theme: Respect for Self and Others

#### General Introduction

The general theme addressed in Form 3 is that of respect – for self and for others. At this stage the Ethics Programme of self-understanding begun in Year 1 Primary begins to reach full circle as it returns to where the Primary Programme started; creating an awareness and understanding of one's identity as an individual and social being (one made in one's relations with others). The Primary Programme concerns itself with helping students to a **descriptive** self-understanding and with socializing them into key cross-cultural values, attitudes, and virtues, or qualities of character, that are recognised and encouraged by Maltese society. With the completion of Secondary Programme A, the Ethics Programme has produced a student who is morally sensitive, appreciative of the value of moral reflection, equipped with the basic tools of moral reflection, able to see the value of moral practices, highly sensitive to ethical matters and issues and able to articulate them with a fuller understanding of the moral language in which they are couched which is the language of our contemporary pluralistic, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic society, and with a good knowledge of the different ethical perspectives at work within that society.

The Form 3 programme on self-respect and respect for others takes the Ethics Programme to a further level of reflective thought while focusing on the notion of respect which is a key element of ethical formation and social concern, crucial to the ethical quality of individual and social life in a morally civilised society. Without self-respect there is no self-esteem (which is the key to so many other qualities required to being able to speak, to exercise one's right of voice, and to live happily). And without respect for others, more especially different others, there is no tolerance of required for peaceful and harmonious co-existence with them, never mind solidarity. Consideration of the subject of respect for others therefore returns the discussion to the notion of community, where the **truth** of the community (the conventional moral understanding and wisdom of the community based on its beliefs, norms of behaviour, and values, on the virtues it promotes) exists, in contemporary pluralistic and multi-cultural societies, in tension (or even conflict) with the individualism promoted by these societies, the demand for individual freedom in moral judgement and in the making of the self as it grows older.

'Who am I?' is now presented to the students not as a descriptive but as a normative question – a question which requires reflection on oneself as a self with values, on who one is as a self who exists in ethical relationships with others, and on what are the influences that form who one is. This is the main thrust of the Form 3 programme and the reflective journal is now a tool to help them answer these questions for themselves. Apart from the writing of the journal, students are presented with very short extracts by the teacher and asked to comment on the validity of the arguments and their **acceptability** as moral statements. The latter is shown to be a very different criterion of approval since one is asked to approve the viewpoint or perspective, the moral language from which they are made; rights, consequences, motives,

duties, etc. Students learn to distinguish truth which is factual (i.e. evidence-based, like scientific truth) from **opinion** which is not so based (which is subjective), and which may therefore be acceptable to some but contested by others. And to distinguish between opinion which is **reasoned**, supported with fact and argument, and **gratuitous** or unsupported opinion – with the object of encouraging the first. Students already know (from the earlier Ethics Programme [find]) that difference of opinion stems from the different perspectives, religious or secular, from which an argument is made or a point of view expressed, that these perspectives are ultimately cultural. This are returned to this knowledge offered to them as an explanation for serious, sometimes fundamental, lack of agreement on serious moral matters that inevitably exists in multi-cultural and pluralistic (pluralism being respect for difference) societies.

There is a potentially tricky ethical problem for the teacher her/himself for the journal now requires some self-disclosure on the students' part. Not being a private diary it will be read by the teacher and included in the students' portfolio – this needs to be made very clear to the students and to their parents, and complete confidentiality and anonymity must be guaranteed throughout.

## Module 1: Self and Others

### Introduction

The general theme of respect for self and others requires the students to be returned to the question 'What makes me me? Who is the I who makes me me? the question of self-identity which takes them back to the first sets of modules of the Primary Ethics programme where their journey into the Ethics Programme started. The object of the modules was to arouse the children's **self-awareness** and their sensitivity towards the significant others in their lives through **self-description**. Now they are able to take the question of self-identity deeper and to a more abstract and sophisticated level of reasoning and self-reflection required by leading an examined life which is presented to them as an ideal to achieve, and which presents the self as an ethical being. The module returns the students to the notion of the **self** - what it means and what are its ingredients – more specifically what it means to be a **human** self. It begins with the reminder, once more, that the human self is always a **social** self.

This point of departure connects with the distinction with which the last module in the Form 2 programme was concluded and which raised issues of conformity with the conventions of community and the meaning of individual freedom. The tension between freedom and conformity requires a closer look at the notion of community, within which one's identity is first formed, and a distinction between strong, self-enclosed, communities and weaker, open, communities that are tolerant of internal difference and to other communities. In other words, it returns students to earlier discussions of **tolerance**. The self is again represented, as in the Primary programme, as both unique and social, and these characterisations of the self are now taken into analysis. The fact that the self is in some respect or other, and to different degrees in different moral cultures, self-making is shown to point to the obligation to be self-

responsible. This self-responsibility is shown to be connected with self-knowledge and eventually to self-mastery – both important notions are explored further through historic or legendary figures in the different religious and secular tradition, for the latter most appropriately Socrates.

### **Objectives:**

- To re-introduce the journal as self-reflective writing on moral matters;
- To introduce students to the distinction between belief supported by opinion, and truth or fact supported by evidence (science), and between supported and gratuitous opinion;
- To teach students to write arguments of their own on selected topics or issues;
- To reinforce the idea of the self as an individual and social being – to begin a more detailed exploration of the relationship between the two;
- To explore the tension between demands of the community and individual freedom in the making of the self;
- To enter into a deep analysis of the meaning of community, its relation with truth, and to distinguish different kinds of community; closed and open;
- To explore these different kinds of communities, the amount of uniformity they imply and the issues of difference and tolerance they raise;
- To pursue the discussion of tolerance as a characteristic of open communities;
- To enable a more sophisticated discussion of the question ‘Who am I?’ – to make it a question of self-reflection;
- To introduce students to the importance of self-reflection, of living the examined life, and ultimately of self-mastery;
- To strengthen the discussion of moral responsibility; what it means and the importance of responsible life-choices;
- To discuss influence and the place of role-models in our lives and the difference between good and bad role-models.

### **Teaching Strategy:**

Tools: Narrative, exposition, analysis, discussion, exploration, comparison.

Resources required: Stories, narrative, videos, documentaries, docudramas, current affairs stories, others.

## Content and Method

- (a) The teacher enters the subject of this module by returning the students to the point made in the last Module for Form 2 that Malta is a Western country with a long Christian tradition which, however, like other European countries, tends towards social plurality, the growth of an increasingly individualistic culture, and a consequent loosening of community bonds. That non-Western countries continue to be communitarian and strongly traditional, and that the other key religion in this part of the world is Islam. That the potential conflict between moral **conformity** and **freedom** is therefore more likely to be experienced in societies with an individualistic culture than in traditional society. The teacher uses this difference to make the point that the community is valued differently in the different socio-cultural and political realities, and that the very meaning of community and of individual freedom varies between different societies. In the Western reality communities tend to be weaker and individualism stronger and the situation tends to be the contrary in non-Western societies. S/he resists any suggestions to discuss the respective merits or demerits of the two kinds of societies, insisting that in the Maltese context the question is not to judge or choose between them, but of the co-existence of different communities, Christian, Moslem, and others in a society of communities, and the form it should take.
- (b) With this introduction the teacher invites discussion on the notion of community; what a community is and what being a community means? What is its value? and what is lost to human life without it? Beginning with the first, the teacher needs to extract from the discussion or add to it that being a member of a community means: (1) being united with others with whom one shares fundamental beliefs, purposes, and allegiances, with whom one values a form of life, a way of living together, in common; (2) that communities are something one is born into or enters into through choice or circumstance; (3) that one is always effectively a member of different communities, from the most immediate such as ones' family and class-room one shares with relatives and friends, to the less like the school and the neighbourhood (which are communities of communities) one shares with friends and acquaintances, to the broader society (which embraces all the different communities) which one shares with acquaintances and strangers; (4) that not every group of people is a community; sharing the same geographical space (live in the same place) does not make a community, communities are people who share **common purposes** who **communicate** together and share a moral and political language, and who **recognise the authority** of a common set of rules and norms of behaviour.
- (c) Students are invited to describe the communities they belong to and to discuss the value of the community in people's lives in general, and in their lives in particular. The teacher helps the discussion to highlight the value of communities namely; the sense of unity they bring to their members, the sense of identity and common purpose, of security and reassurance, of solidarity. Examples are given through true or fictional stories. The point is made that in return for what the community gives us in terms of a

sense of identity, security, and solidarity we are in turn obliged to contribute to its flourishing, to its civil and moral progress and well-being. The students are returned to the reality of Maltese society as a multicultural and pluralistic one where diverse ethnic, religious, and moral communities live together and individuality is strong – which, therefore, requires strong mutual tolerance of difference among its members. The students are asked to discuss whether they think that community brings benefits only, whether some aspects of it may not be negative – for example, at the same time that they **include** some people, those who are their members, they **exclude** others, those who are non-members – they also therefore divide people towards whom they can be intolerant.

- (d) The teacher here needs to take the notion of community, and that of tolerance with it, further to establish that communities can be distinguished according to the degree of **internal** dissent or difference they allow or otherwise, and according to their willingness or otherwise to communicate or speak with communities other than their own. This distinction leads us to classify certain communities as **closed** and others as **open**. The first are usually **intolerant** both of internal dissent and of other communities and ways of life, and their outlook is described as **fundamentalist** in this sense. The second are internally **tolerant** of dissent and difference and willing to speak with other communities different from their own, and their outlook is described as **liberal** in this sense. The students are reminded of the discussion of tolerance in Module 3 of Form 2 and asked: (a) discuss the two kinds of communities from that perspective looking critically at both (b) to say which kind should be encouraged in a pluralistic, democratic, multi-cultural society as the Maltese aspires to be; (c) to discuss whether such a society is possible. The teacher makes the point that there is no tolerance without **understanding** the other, and that such understanding begins with oneself.
- (e) Understanding oneself **as an individual self** requires returning to the question ‘Who am I?’ with which the students started this journey of ethical education. Now analysis replaces description and it requires the teacher to put together a map of the human **self** with the class as a gendered, sexual, emotional, reflective, desiring, sensitive, active, instinctive, habitual, communicating, etc., being. In short, a **complex** and **multi-faceted** being, **one** which is **unique** to itself, and that this is true of each of us no matter who we are. The teacher makes the point that our uniqueness makes us different from others in some sense, but that the human self is **social** made in and through its relationships with others with whom it shares numerous **similarities** which can be identified as: (i) **biological** and **genetic**, i.e. **natural**, inherited from one’s family at birth through one’s parents, and (ii) **cultural** and **social**; i.e. learnt from others, from one’s family, one’s friends, the communities one belongs to (since one invariably belongs to different communities, among them the school and classroom), and the wider society through the process of socialization. We are not born with the ability to distinguish right from wrong, we learn it from others and our parents are our

first teachers in this respect, followed by others; our first moral beliefs, in short, and many of our later ones, are the fruit of our socialization.

- (f) The teacher needs to return to the words **culture** and **socialization** at this point to remind the students of their meaning; that the first refers to the beliefs (which may or may not be religious in our society), values, norms of behaviour (what it deems to be acceptable behaviour or otherwise), world-view, life-style, aspirations, and so of a community, while the second refers to the process by which the culture of a community or society is learnt. S/he will make the point that, in this sense, who we are as social beings is largely independent of our will or choice. S/he will also remind the students that factually humanity expresses itself through a variety of cultures all sharing similarities, but all different from each other in various ways; some examples of European, North African, Asian, etc. cultures are introduced to the students for comparison. The question put to the students for discussion at this stage is how they think such diversity should be regarded. Do they think cultural difference a good thing, or do they wish everybody was the same, in which case, how – like them? And what about the other ‘thems’, other points of view, what should we do about them? More than being tolerant of those who are different shouldn’t we perhaps celebrate living in a multi-cultural society as an **enrichment** of our lives, our humanity rather than a misfortune? The students are asked to discuss this statement also.
- (g) The teacher makes the point that, in any case, none of us **chooses** to be who we are, our self, our sex, colour or ethnicity, the family/community we are born with, etc., any more than we choose how tall we are, our colour of eyes, etc., but that while the self is largely **inherited** how it experiences the world is necessarily **unique** to itself. S/he makes the point that the self is **capable of change**, it **has a will** and the **power to reflect** on its condition. Without these it would have no **freedom to act** and could not even, therefore, be held morally/ethically responsible for its actions. Indeed these, the power to reflect and to act are **the elements of moral responsibility**, without them there is no moral responsibility. We do not hold animals and humans who (for some reason or other) lack them, **morally** responsible for their actions nor judge them as good or bad. We regard their behaviour instead as **amoral** (a word to be distinguished from **immoral**) – as having no moral significance or meaning. In short, the human self, the teacher summarizes, is inherited but also necessarily **made**, and making oneself is a moral task and a responsibility that grows with age as one grows older and more independent of one’s parents and needs to make one’s life choices. Adulthood is a process of growing into freedom **and** growing into responsibility. We are not free to make bad or **irresponsible** choices; true freedom is freedom used **responsibly**. The students are presented with this last statement and asked to discuss what it means; they are presented with examples and situations, stories and anecdotes real or fictional where choices responsible and irresponsible are made and asked to distinguish and discuss them.
- (h) The teacher makes the point that responsible choice requires **reflection**, a certain kind of thought. Every day we reflect on many different things; on our appearance, on our

actions, on their immediate effect and possible consequences, on our motives for doing or wanting to do something, on the way we are living and on our relations with others, and so on. We call such reflection on ourselves **self-reflection**. Self-reflection is thinking about oneself, literally examining one's life; oneself and one's relationship with others with whom one lives and shares one's life; friends, family, communities, even strangers. Self-reflection, or **self-examination**, is a search for **self-knowledge** or self-understanding which is, in turn, necessary for **self-mastery**. Self-mastery, being in control of one's life and actions is presented to the students as something they should aim for; it is required both to avoid self-harm and to avoid harming others affected by one's actions or behaviour, and avoiding harming oneself and others is **the first object of morality**.

- (i) The students are introduced to the historical figure of **Socrates**, the philosopher who spoke of and lived an **examined life**. They are asked to research the figure of Socrates which is then discussed in the classroom to bring out the qualities of his character, or virtues; his love for truth, his fearlessness, honesty, and so on. They are then asked to identify other figures alive or dead who they admire in sports, culture, music and art, entertainment, politics, the media, and who they regard as **role models**. A discussion on the qualities of a role model follows and on how role models affect our lives. The teacher makes the general point that one should choose one's role models well, the way one chooses one's friends; that we should hold up as our role models only those who can influence our lives positively. And warns against turning role models into **icons** or objects of veneration who can do no wrong by pointing to the fact of human fallibility.

## **Module 2: Self-respect**

### **Introduction**

This module is about responsible self-respect which it contrasts with irresponsible self-abuse, linking the first with that of a self which, while it is aware of itself is sensitive to others and the second with a self which is obsessively self-referential and narcissist. It explores the notion of harm to a much greater depth than hitherto and does the same with the notion of self-regarding acts. The ultimate aim is to show that extreme narcissism, an unhealthy self-obsession, leads to moral insensitivity towards others and can take the form of various kinds of self-harm. The possibility of unwanted self-harm which can result from self-exposure/disclosure on the social media is amply discussed with the students as part of a broader discussion of the voyeuristic/narcissistic culture of the social media as a whole. The issues of intimacy and personal privacy, and their values are brought into the discussion of the dangers of self-exposure identified in it. The discussion also includes the issue of pornography and, also specifically, cyber-bullying, both dangerous realities of our times.

The module also explores other forms of self-harm that may appear to be more private and self-concerning or socially irrelevant, that may be both physical and mental and, usually, are both at the same time; these include addictions and obsessional forms of behaviour of different sorts. It asks whether the limits of freedom are transgressed by acts of self-harm, and draws the distinction, once more, between a responsible and irresponsible use of one's freedom. Finally, within the general issue of whether it is morally acceptable for us to expose ourselves to harm, it raises the question about different kinds of risk-taking with the intention of distinguishing those kinds that are responsible and legitimate from those that aren't and that shouldn't be practised.

### **Objectives:**

- To refine the journal as self-reflective writing on moral matters;
- To exercise students in the evaluation and writing of arguments on selected topics or issues;
- To further explore the limits of self-regarding actions and to introduce the notion of side-effects as a limitation;
- To explore the distinction between a healthy self-regard and a self-regard which is the contrary; obsessive, narcissistic, and morally unhealthy;
- To further explore the meaning of harm and particularly of self-harm, to introduce and discuss some practices of self-harm from the perspective of freedom and from a moral perspective;
- To consider the practices of self-exposure/disclosure on the social media as possible practices of self-harm, and to discuss cyber-bullying in general as a moral issue;
- To discuss the distinction between responsible and praiseworthy and irresponsible or capricious risk-taking;
- To introduce the distinction between the egoistic or self-seeking, and the altruistic or generous;
- To introduce the notion of physical and mental/emotional integrity as a moral duty one owes oneself.

### **Teaching Strategy:**

Tools: Narrative, exposition, analysis, discussion, exploration, comparison.

Resources required: Stories, narrative, videos, documentaries, docudramas, current affairs stories, others.

### Content and Method

- (a) The teacher distinguishes a kind of self-knowledge which is valuable and includes consideration of one's relations with others, from a kind of self-examination which is **narcissistic** to the point of being self-absorbed. The myth of Narcissus, adaptations from it or stories on the theme of narcissism, are narrated orally or visually through film and discussed with the students. The object of the narratives is to explore the danger of becoming self-obsessed to the extent of losing contact with others and living in a self-enclosed world out of touch with reality and, more importantly with other people, including relatives and friends, towards whom one becomes insensitive. What the teacher wants the discussion to bring out is that though some degree of narcissism or self-love is natural and good – that there is no harm in wanting to look and feel good, take care of one's appearance, follow fashions, and so on – even because it is required by **self-care** or **self-improvement** it can, when it is **obsessive**, turn into nearly total indifference towards everything and everyone else. That self-obsession is therefore neither a healthy nor a responsible relationship either with oneself or with others.
- (b) The teacher focuses on the notion of **obsessive behaviour**, what it means and how it shows itself, at this point using the narratives in (a) and bringing in other examples to link it directly with **moral insensitivity**; with being insensitive to the harm one causes through one's actions or permits to be caused. S/he needs to make the point that self-obsession can manifest itself in being excessively **private and reclusive** or the contrary being excessively **public and showing off**. Taking up the latter for the moment, s/he makes the point that today's world, dominated as it is by television and by the social media, encourages intimate **self-disclosure/exposure**. It encourages making oneself visible to others (possibly also to anonymous strangers) by sending out personal images or information about oneself, often of an intimate nature. The students are invited to discuss, relating the question to their own beliefs and experiences with the social media and with what they have met with or heard from others: (a) why they think that people expose themselves in these ways and to what benefit to themselves, if any; (b) what, if anything, they think could be socially valuable in the practice of this kind of self-exposure. The object of the free discussion is: (a) to sensitize the students to the dangers of this behaviour, of putting images and information about themselves on the Internet referring to examples and narratives taken from real life; (b) to use these examples to introduce them to the fact that media use should be subject to the same ethical constraints of daily life – that there is an ethical and unethical use of the social media.
- (c) The teacher relates the practice of self-exposure which the media encourages through television shows, Internet and the social media, to the practice of pornography which they also make easily available. The availability of pornography is discussed, and the question of censorship, the extent to which the media should be unregulated, raised. The teacher links pornography with the exploitation of vulnerable people including children – child pornography being a growing phenomenon. This leads the class into the more general, and controversial, discussion whether there are moral limits to self-

exposure that should not be crossed, and if so what these limits are. The teacher will use this question: (a) to make the point that it will have different answers depending on one's personal moral beliefs; (b) that the limits of self-exposure are set differently by different culture and in different societies which condition these beliefs; and (c) nevertheless, to discuss and explore the notion and value of **intimacy** as a dimension of personal and private life, to highlight the notion of an **intimate** as against a **public** self, a realm of personal integrity one should seek to conserve and defend against unwanted invasion by others.

- (d) The teacher uses these rather in-depth discussions of self-disclosure/exposure via the social media, its permissible limits also: (a) to sensitize the students to the dangers, moral and other, it can expose one to, the vulnerability to ridicule, exploitation and abuse, the danger to reputation, to being bullied and black-mailed by others, to falling victim to unknown or unexpected predators (especially with regards to the young and vulnerable), and (b) to make the point that one should be very careful about what about one's intimate self to disclose/expose and to whom. The point to be made using fictional and real-life examples is that self-disclosure/exposure can be a form of **self-harm**, albeit unwitting. This general discussion is then narrowed to focus on the well-known phenomenon of **cyber-bullying**, a particular risk young people expose themselves to all the time today, the forms it takes, why it happens, what causes it, and how it is harmful for its victims. Narratives of cyber-bullying should be discussed in a manner that illustrates this harm, thereby showing that it is ethically wrong. The teacher proposes an undertaking to support each other and friends we know who are bullied in this way.
- (e) From here the teacher takes the analysis and discussion of self-harm in another direction. What if, s/he asks, instead of harming oneself through acts of public self-disclosure/exposure one harms oneself privately, secretly, away from the eyes of others. Is it all right to harm oneself in private because it is **oneself** one harms and one does it **privately**, not therefore affecting or influencing others in any way? Acts of private self-harm, s/he points out, appear to be entirely **self-regarding** – nobody's business? But are we morally free to harm ourselves – are we doing anything morally wrong? The teacher allows a free discussion of this question. S/he then invites the students to a deeper examination of the concepts of **harm** and of an act being **self-regarding**, beginning with the notion of harm. This should lead them to understand harm to signify the existence of **serious** physical and/or mental damage done either to **oneself**, through acts of self-harm, and/or to **others**, and that it can be of **different kinds not always obvious**. The students are taken carefully through this account especially the ways harm can be physical (where it is, more often than not, visible) **and** psychological (where, though real, it can be, and often is, invisible, examples being anxiety, unbearable stress, depression, and so on). The teacher makes the point: (a) that not everything that hurts or disturbs is harmful, and that we reserve the word harm for **very serious** hurts; (b) that there are **different degrees** of harm ranging from the potentially fatal to less dramatic kinds like eating unhealthily, smoking, and so on;

(c) and it can be **immediate** and **instant** (from an over-dose or accident, or a beating), or **remote** and **cumulative** like smoking and drug-taking.

- (f) Having clarified the notion of harm the teacher turns the focus onto the notion of a private and **self-regarding** act which s/he also examines carefully with the class. S/he reminds the students that what may appear to be a self-regarding act at first glance, may not turn out to be so on closer examination. This is because nearly all of our acts have **side-effects** of some sort which may not appear evident to us at first and which only come to light with examination. S/he explains this notion of side-effects which s/he describes as consequences (intended or otherwise) of acts we perform for oneself and/or for others, that can be immediate or long term, and that could affect those who we do not want to harm or hurt in any way, including those closest and dearest to us. S/he invites a **brief and limited** discussion on suicide as what could appear to be a good example of an entirely self-regarding and private act in order to highlight its social consequences.
- (g) Following which s/he asks the students for other examples of private **self-harm** they know of and returns them to the general question: ‘Are we morally free to harm ourselves?’. S/he suggests considering the contrary; that we have a moral duty **not** to harm ourselves, to respect the **integrity** both of our mind and body (the teacher needs to explain this term), and that there is no true freedom without this respect for one’s own integrity. On the other hand, s/he suggests, certain kinds of self-harm have become common, even socially fashionable with some young people, these include smoking, excessive drinking and other addictive habits like drug taking, obsessive gambling, and permissive sex – some of which will have been given as examples by the students themselves. These are discussed with the students as examples of long-term self-harm with side-effects, with consequences (often immediate) not just for oneself but for others also; one’s family, friends, one’s community, and society in general.
- (h) The teacher relates the question of self-harm to the question of how we use our freedom. S/he reminds the students that there are **good and bad uses** we can make of our freedom, and that some ways of acting freely are not just hurtful or harmful for oneself and others but are counter-productive because in the long-term they actually lead to the **surrender** of our freedom as we lose control and become **slaves** to the addiction or other compulsive/obsessive kind of harm we subject ourselves to. S/he takes the students into other areas of self-harm that can appear to be more self-regarding than addiction, like anorexic or bulimic behaviour, or self-laceration. The point being that it is a contradiction to use the **argument of freedom** (something we should value) to justify the **surrender of freedom**, to justify making ourselves slaves to a harmful habit. To become a slave, to surrender one’s will to an obsession or an addiction, is to reduce oneself to the moral status of an object; this includes such narcissistic self-obsession as bulimic, anorexic behaviour, and self-laceration. It is, the teacher leads the students to conclude, not just the surrender of true freedom but the very contrary of self-respect and requires external help; the help of others.

- (i) The notion of **self-respect** others is elaborated a bit by the teacher to make the point that **minimally** it requires us to not knowingly or willingly harm ourselves, and **maximally** to make something of ourselves, of our lives, something that is valuable for ourselves and for others. Then s/he returns to the matter of self-harm by asking if it is always wrong to put one's life or limb at risk? S/he makes the point that there are people (eg. soldiers, fire-men, policemen, medics, people who practice sports) who regularly risk life and limb. Even ordinary people are praised for it, for their **bravery**, their sense of **self-sacrifice**, when they risk their lives to save others. The students are invited to tell stories of their own of this happening. Then to discuss the question why we praise these people for taking risks while we disapprove of others for their drug addiction and so on? Through the discussion the teacher takes the students to the difference between risks that have an **altruistic motive** and contribute to some **good** or that are **socially required** and which are therefore praiseworthy for these reasons, and risks that are just **self-indulgent, harmful** and capricious, and which should be discouraged. S/he also makes the point that with the first kind **self-harm is not the intention** for the act, on the contrary all efforts are made not to expose oneself to unnecessary harm, while with the latter the self-harm is either **deliberate** or the result of **irresponsible** acts. S/he includes among the latter the acts of individuals who, responding to a dare or peer-pressure, or out of a sense of adventure, needlessly and capriciously expose themselves to risks like jumping into the sea blindly from high places (a practice which has grown common in Malta), rolling down steep slopes in a barrel (a practice reported some years ago), driving dangerously from bravado, and so on. This, s/he points out, is irresponsible behaviour and usually unlawful.

### **Module 3: Respect for Others**

#### **Introduction**

This module takes off from the previous one and concludes the three modules for this Form. It immediately links with the earlier discussion of self-respect and making responsible life choices and with the earlier distinction between making positive life-choices and negative, exploring the first, and the notion of making something of one's life, first. Then entering the question what could occasion wasting one's life or making negative life-choices; of what contributes towards living a self-centred, impoverished, and morally blind life. The point is made that moral blindness usually leads to unfairness in one's dealings with others, and therefore becomes a question of justice also, since what moral blindness blinds us to is precisely justice.

From there the module moves on to the idea that justice as fairness requires equality of consideration, that all should be regarded equally. But equality of consideration is shown to be vulnerable to our human instinct to privilege those who are near and dear to us, our relatives and friends, over others. Is this privileging morally right or just, and if so why? This

is one of the most complex ethical issues and it can become very difficult, even insoluble, or take the form of a moral dilemma, when it comes to life and death choices. It is shown to lead to the question whether who the other is, and numbers, are relevant considerations for deciding them. Finally, the question whether equality of consideration is relevant when it comes to choosing between humans and animals, and why?

### **Objectives:**

- To further refine the journal as self-reflective writing on moral matters;
- To further exercise students in the evaluation and writing of arguments on selected topics or issues;
- To introduce the notion of making something of oneself, of living a positive fulfilled life as against a negative and empty one;
- To continue to explore the meaning of freedom together with that of responsibility in order to co-ordinate the two ideas; freedom with responsibility;
- To re-present self-centred egoism described in the previous module as a form of moral blindness;
- To further explore the idea of justice together with that of equality of consideration, and to equate the absence of the latter with ethical insensitivity;
- To introduce the students to and get them to engage with difficult and complex moral situations that will exercise their thinking;
- To emphasize the value of moral reasoning as indispensable for responsible moral choice;
- To extend the notion of moral responsibility to the animal realm; to the question whether we have the same moral responsibilities towards animals as towards humans.

### **Teaching Strategy:**

Tools: Narrative, exposition, analysis, discussion, exploration, comparison.

Resources required: Stories, narrative, videos, documentaries, docudramas, current affairs stories, others.

### **Content and Method:**

- (a) The teacher reminds the students of the previous module and proposes a definition of **self-respect** as making **responsible** choices for how we live – s/he reminds them of the example of irresponsible choices identified in the module. S/he also reminds them of the difference between making **something** of oneself, of one's life, and making **nothing** of it, or **wasting** it. S/he asks the students to discuss whether we have a **right** to waste our lives: (1) by discussing where such a right could come from; (2) by

leading them to explore what wasting one's life would mean using examples (showing a general indifference about things, total lack of ambition to improve oneself, being slave to an addiction, hating or wanting to harm oneself, being generally aimless or lacking direction, harbouring a senseless rebellion against authority, and so on). The teacher summarizes the discussion by pointing out that these are all of them examples of negativity, of a negative attitude to life. S/he points out that even if we have the right to be free to live negatively in this way, it is always restricted, like all rights by the rights of others not to be harmed, and that we would have no right to any support (from our relations, friends, or society in general) to so live it.

- (b) Next the students are invited to discuss what the **causes** of this negativity could be – and what could be done about it both if we find it in ourselves and/or are tempted to it, and if we meet with it in others, in our friends, relatives, and so on. The teacher introduces narratives (visual/written), true and/or fictional, of young people who live or have lived wasted lives in the discussion to render it more vivid. The students are then returned to the general discussion of the **right to be free** and to make one's own life in more depth. They are returned to the previous module where they discussed the question of self-regarding acts and the conclusion that there are **moral** restrictions on how one treats oneself similarly to how one treat **others**; that ethically one is not free to do what one wishes with and to oneself. That besides the limitations on the notion of the self-regarding due to the point made that as social beings we are individuals **with others** and that what we do needs to be considered in terms of its side-effects, our negativity towards life and the world will negatively influence others when our moral duty is to influence the moral behaviour of others **positively** and to help them to flourish. A free discussion follows on how this positive influence is possible.
- (c) The notion of being self-centred or egoistic is returned to from the previous modules in order to reinforce two points: (i) that it is an impoverished life since it renders us **blind** to others who may need our help and understanding, or it may lead us to offer it for the wrong motives; and (ii) that a society of self-centred people is an impoverished society also; one devoid of sentiments of empathy and/or solidarity. The teacher who makes these points will point out that saying that the self is social not solitary means that, whether we like it or not we as selves are part of and belong to a web of relations of different kinds that includes our relatives, friends, acquaintances, and also strangers; this web of relations is one of mutual and reciprocal benefits **and** burdens or obligations we recognise in common. The self-centred egoist recognises only the benefits and neglects the burdens or obligations – this is why s/he is morally impoverished. The class is introduced to narratives showing how one can be blind to the needs of others, to their rights, needs, concerns, even sufferings, and consequently the hurt and harm such self-centredness causes them – the students are lead to identify and recognise this hurt and harm in the discussion/s that follow/s the story or stories.
- (d) Taking a different angle into the same stories the teacher leads the students to recognise the one-sided egoistic relations depicted in them, the deliberate or ignorant blindness to the needs of others, as not just morally insensitive but **unfair also**,

though it may well be that they will have recognised this unfairness (the unfairness of always taking and never giving anything back) themselves. Hence the issue of **fairness** is brought to bear on egoistic behaviour to supplement the charge that such behaviour is morally insensitive with the charge that it is also **unjust**. In the process the teacher makes the further point that fairness is a necessary condition of **justice**, a point they will be helped to appreciate by referring them to their own perception of an injustice performed against them when they feel that they have been treated unfairly – they may be allowed to relate their own narratives of such occasions. The principle is established through the discussion of the subject that fairness, and therefore justice, on an ethical level (it is assumed that the political issue is taken up in citizenship education as an issue of political justice), requires **equality of consideration**, and that ego-centric, or self-centred behaviour, violates this principle because it is completely inconsiderate of their needs, and therefore unjust, towards others.

- (e) The teacher proceeds by looking a little bit more closely at the connection of self-centredness with **ethical insensitivity** illustrated in the stories told with the discussion. The teacher, returning the students to a metaphor already used earlier describes this insensitivity as a kind of **blindness**, of moral blindness. The students are asked to identify or to tell stories or anecdotes of their own, and to discuss other kinds of insensitivity or moral blindness they know of. The teacher makes the point that such insensitivity is not always immediately evident, that its victims are not always identifiable others, sometimes it affects society as a whole or sectors of it; the poor, needy, disenfranchised, and so on, and could therefore, because it is not easily visible, seem abstract though its effects are not. Examples are acts of vandalism on public property, harmful negligence of the the natural environment, avoiding paying one's dues, one's taxes etc. These are all represented as instances of insensitivity that take the form of blindness towards one's social obligations and which the students are asked to discuss but which are taken no further at this stage to be returned to in a later discussion of solidarity.
- (f) The teacher invites discussion on three questions: what it **means** to respect in the sense of considering others, what it **is** in others we should respect, and **who** are the others we should respect and show consideration for, taken in the reverse order and beginning with the last question: who should we respect and show consideration for? The question is put to the students; predictably the list will include relatives, friends, teachers and other authorities – and strangers, and if so why? The next question is **how**, how this respect and consideration is shown, what it means to respect others, which will quickly merge into the question whether there are not some others, relatives and friends for instance, we should respect differently from others, strangers, for instance – to whom we should give **more** respect and consideration – i.e. that respect is a matter of degree. The discussion is illustrated with examples. The teacher helps it with two points: (i) that showing respect and consideration has to do with how one **treats** oneself (in the case of self-respect) and/or others; (ii) that with others there is what can be described as an instinctive human tendency to treat them differently

according to whom they are. But is this right **morally or ethically**? Doesn't justice or fairness demand that we treat everyone **the same**? The students are asked to discuss this question generally and freely at first.

- (g) Then the teacher brings some examples where individuals are faced in dramatic situations with choosing between saving the life of a relative or friend and saving that of a stranger into the discussion. For example: two people are caught in a burning house and you can save only one of them you cannot save them both, and one is a relative or friend, or someone you know, who should you choose? Then, supposing there are more than two people in the house, three or four, and you have to choose between saving your friend or relative and saving the other two or three. Who should you choose; your friend/relative who is one or the other two or three? Again the students are invited to discuss – what consideration wins here, one's relationship to the people involved or the numbers? Suppose that one of those two or three others is a child, or someone who is very important to the community, an eminent surgeon who saves many lives or a leader in the community – should age or importance influence your decision? Suppose all three or four people are strangers and you have to choose between saving one or more of them? None of these is an easy question if it is followed, as it should be, with a **why**?
- (h) The teacher summarizes the questions: In such situations should who or what the person is matter? Should numbers matter? And in both cases, why? S/he makes the point that the object of the discussion was not to arrive at final answers, which are never possible, but to show the complexity of **moral** situations we could face and the difficulties with deciding what is the **right** thing to do. The teacher finds other examples of difficult cases and/or situations, **dilemmas** of this kind (possibly using videos or docudramas), to discuss in order to illustrate this point that moral decisions are rarely easy, that they can be very difficult, and may seem impossible to resolve. Moral reasoning is important in these cases because only through such reasoning can the complexity of a situation be recognised and known, and can we be sensitized at least to the alternatives that face us.
- (i) The question that follows is whether we should not extend this respect, the right to equality of consideration for others, beyond human persons to the animal kingdom also. The teacher reminds the students through various examples describing the behaviour of different animals, primates and others, dolphins for instance, of the closeness, the **similarities**, that exist between the human and the animal, of the fact that we give animals rights. S/he reminds the students that the **minimal** of showing respect towards something or somebody, human, animal, and even material, is not to harm it unnecessarily – though the limits of the necessary is subject to argument and controversial. The question is whether this respect for animals should be the same as respect for human beings or different – Why yes if one thinks it should be, and no if one thinks it shouldn't? What happens if a decision must be made between saving a human life and an animal? How should we decide? The answer seems easy, again until the question **why** we prefer the lives of humans is asked. The difficulties appear

because there is no reason except that they are human – but this is not a reason unless one wants to ascribe greater worth to the human **as such** (by virtue of being human) than to the animal. But why do we want to do so? And if the animal involved is our pet, a companion we love dearly as a friend? What if it comes to deciding between one's pet's life and that of a stranger, what does one do?