

Form 4 (Age 13-14)

General Theme: The Ethics of Care

Module 1 (1st term) The Ethics of Self-Care

Module 2 (2nd term) The Ethics of Care for Others

Module 3 (3rd term) The Ethics of Dependence

General Introduction

The discussion of respect for self and others in Form 3, which includes the undertaking not to harm oneself or others, leads into the discussion of care as the ethical form respect for self and other takes when it translates into a personal outlook and a form of action. As with the theme of respect in Form 3, the general theme of care in Form 4 opens in Module 1 with the theme of the self's relation to itself in the form of self-care. It deals with the meaning and practice of self-care. At this stage the writing of the reflective journal is represented by the teacher as an aspect of self-care more than as an academic exercise, since self-reflection, the examined life, is intrinsic to self-care whether in its oral or written form – the practical purpose of writing a journal is thereby shown to the students.

Module 1 makes the general point that self-care requires minimally the undertaking to avoid self-harm, which is its negative condition, and maximally the perfectibilist undertaking to constantly improve oneself, to make something of one's life – but this is left for Module 2. It explores the general, multi-faceted, meaning of caring for oneself, one's self being a complex entity, and explores how self-care is connected with the pursuit of happiness, the meaning of which is also explored in this module – it suggests that happiness be regarded as a *eudaemonic* state acquired through a life of moderation. Module 2 distinguishes self-care from self-centred egoism; i.e.. it makes the point that caring for oneself implies caring for others because who we are depends on our relation with others, at the same time that it connects with Module 1 by representing self-care as a perfectibilist project. Module 2 also introduces the important notion of esteem, self-esteem and esteem of others, which is used to reinforce once more the case against bullying. Self-esteem is related with self-respect and with the sense of self which are explored within issues that are very immediate for the students; those of love and sexual pleasure. The third module, Module 3, then passes on to consider the form the ethics of care takes when what is at issue is relationships of dependence. Dependence is represented in this third module as intrinsic to the human condition while self-dependence is represented as desirable, something to be aimed at to the greatest degree possible by everyone. In this module different kinds of dependence are discussed, the notion of welfare rights, explored in Form 1 is brought into the discussion.

Module 1: The Ethics of Self-Care (1st Term)

Introduction

This module that introduces the programme for Form 4 is entered into through the extended discussion of harm already taken up in the Form 3 programme, more specifically of self-harm, the general object being to connect the ethics of respect explored in that programme with the ethics of care which is the general subject of the Form 4 programme. The general point followed in this module is that self-respect finds its expression in an ethics of care of oneself, which is itself defined in Aristotelian terms as the practical undertaking to live one's life in a manner that conforms with the virtue of moderation described by the principle of the golden mean.

The module begins by exploring the notion of care in its general sense in some depth, distinguishing in a preliminary way between care for oneself and care for others which will be the subject of Module 2 of this programme. The notion of care for the self is shown to be inconsistent with that of self-harm. On the other hand it is frequently tied in with that of happiness, one's happiness being commonly seen as the main reason why one should care for oneself. The notion of happiness is also subject in turn to deep exploration especially in its relation to pleasure. The utilitarian/hedonistic understanding of happiness as the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain is discussed. Then that of happiness defined as eudaemonia, in its Aristotelian; namely as an overall state of general well-being conforming with the virtue of moderation. Inevitably the discussion will need to take on the question of the part pleasure and pain respectively play in human life – how they are and can be valued in relation to happiness.

The final object of the discussions is not just to distinguish between the satisfaction of pleasure which may be strong and temporarily satisfying but transitory and the more profound understanding of happiness as defining one's general existence, but to enable the students to effect a responsible evaluation of the value of pleasure in their lives, to make the point that not all pleasure is good, that there is pleasure that is harmful for oneself, and therefore that should be avoided. To promote happiness as a eudaemonic state as morally worth pursuing because it includes a responsible attitude towards the pursuit and enjoyment of pleasure and helps us to put pain and suffering, which are our inevitable human lot, in their proper dimension. And to identify the responsible pursuit of happiness with self-care.

Objectives:

- To consolidate the writing of the journal as self-reflective tool on moral matters that interest or affect their daily lives;
- To consolidate the students' skills and abilities to examine arguments and to write arguments of their own on selected topics or issues;
- To press home the importance of self-reflection, of living the examined life and exercising self-mastery as a necessary element of responsibility for oneself;

- To enable students to pass from reflecting on self-respect and respect for others to reflecting on how this respect is translated into care for self and for others generally then focussing on the self;
- To continue in this way to press home the importance of self-reflection, of living the examined life and exercising self-mastery as a necessary element of care for oneself and others;
- To continue to reinforce the idea of the self as an individual and social being and to continue a more detailed exploration of the relationship between the two;
- To strengthen the discussion of moral responsibility; what it means and the importance of responsible life-choices;
- To explore the notions of care, pleasure, pain, and happiness (understood as well-being) separately and together for a deeper understanding of these notions and their relations with each other;
- To promote the Aristotelian view of happiness as *eudaemonia* against competing hedonistic doctrines and to identify caring for oneself with a *eudaemonic* existence.

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 returns the students to the discussion in Form 3 of **harm**; of self-harm and of harming others, not simply in order to latch on to the earlier programme but also to make the point that to care for oneself cannot mean to harm oneself – that the obligation to care for oneself includes the obligation **not to harm oneself**. Accordingly, the first thing s/he needs to do is to revise through discussion with the students the elements of the discussion on harm in the Form 3 programme; the distinction between self-and other regarding acts, what self-harm is, what forms it takes, how it conflicts with self-respect, how it limits our freedom to act – we are not free to harm ourselves, and so on, before moving to the conclusion that harming oneself is the very contrary to caring for oneself which is what we are morally obliged to do as the first element of self-respect.
- (b) The connection between self-respect and self-care is made after this opening discussion – the object being to show that the obligation of self-respect is not limited to not harming oneself (which is only its negative side) but includes **caring for oneself** also, (which is its positive side). The first thing that is addressed through

discussion with the students is the **notion of care** itself. The teacher asks them each to write down five sentences including the word care and fields them to elicit some of the circumstances in which it is used, who or what it is used for, and its meaning. The points that must emerge is that the expression ‘care for’ signifies (i) a positive **feeling or sentiment**, a sense of sympathy and concern, of being interested in the well-being of others, feeling responsible for, moved by, others who mean something to you, experienced as a sense of attachment towards these others, whether they be persons, animals, objects, and even abstract things like causes, principles, projects, events, situations, and so on; (ii) a positive act or relationship which usually comes with the sentiment of care as taking caring of someone; like they take care of their siblings, pets etc. and like their parents, teachers take care of them. With the latter example the teacher introduces the relation of **dependence** which is often part of a care relationship.

- (c) This exposition of the concept is stopped here in order to focus on the theme of the module, self-care, which requires **both** a sentiment and acts of self-concern. Students are invited to a discussion about how they care for themselves in their everyday lives, and about what in their everyday lives they think they should care for; their health, their safety, their daily responsibilities, their appearance, etc. These are itemised and classified by the teacher under the different headings and their importance is discussed with the students. The teacher returns the students to the discussions on self-respect in Form 3, specifically to the discussion of self-harm and to the argument that self-harm is inconsistent with our recognition that **harming** others is wrong in principle [later, in Form 5, it will be argued that it can be justified in the form of self-defence] – for if we recognise the principle that respecting others means **minimally*** not harming them, we cannot consistently not extend that principle to ourselves. Then introduces a new concept into the discussion; that of **happiness**.
- (d) S/he asks the students to tell him/her first if they wish to be happy, then what they think happiness is, then what makes them happy, helping them with suggestions from the earlier list of what they think they should care for – again the teacher itemises the answers on the white board. A critical distinction s/he helps the students to form is between happiness and **pleasure** – one **feels** happy and one **experiences** pleasure; happiness is indeterminate, a sense, a general feeling, of well-being, pleasure is transitory, it endures only for a time. Though pleasure is often linked with the senses, with physical sensations, it can take other forms emotional and intellectual – the teacher gives some examples and invited the students to provide their own. Though pleasure is something people **desire** and though pleasures can **contribute** to personal happiness defined as **a general sense of contentedness or well-being**, not all the forms it take are positive; pleasures can be pursued and/or exercised in manners that are **harmful** to oneself and/or to others. This, the fact that they are so harmful, the teacher points out, renders them **morally objectionable**, and therefore to be avoided.
- (e) Happiness understood as a general sense of personal well-being or contentedness with one’s life can be a **temporary** state, an overall feeling of personal satisfaction induced by

temporary pleasure, by the gratification of some **desire** whether negative or positive, or it can be a more **enduring**, overall, state of well-being, in the sense intended by Aristotle's concept of eudaemonia which does not exclude the experience of pain suffered occasionally or periodically – indeed pain and suffering are a part of our universal human condition and cannot be completely avoided or eliminated from one's life. This is a fact one needs to learn to accept for one's life to be happy, since being happy, as a general state of well-being, requires knowing how to cope with pain and suffering (understood as an **enduring** state of pain) and with adversity. Suffering is understood and dealt with differently in different cultures – the students are invited to discuss this point and to give their own explanations of pain and suffering and the role it plays in one's life

(f) The teacher makes the point that the state of contentedness or pleasure that proceeds from the temporary satisfaction of a desire, no matter how strong, may or may not contribute positively to a happy life – that not every satisfaction of a pleasure or desire is **good**, many are plainly bad. Whatever the immediate sense of satisfaction it provides it must contribute to one's general state of well-being, it cannot therefore constitute self-harm. The students are asked to discuss if one can be happy if one is **constantly** in pain or suffering. Then if they think that one's happiness should be the main aim of one's life – taken to mean that one's actions should be guided by this motive. The teacher makes the point that there are people who are happy in the sense of being content with their lives despite its poor quality, even despite constant and intense pain and suffering because they see their life, such as it is, as contributing to what they perceive as a **greater good or purpose**, religious (the will of God, for instance, or the dogmas of their religion) or secular (love of country, for instance, or the purposes of science), than their own personal happiness. That people may, in some circumstances, **intentionally** and deliberately sacrifice their personal happiness, even their lives, for the sake of what they perceive as a greater good or purpose, which good may be the happiness of another person or persons.

(g) These points are illustrated with narratives and examples, true and fictional. Having made them the teacher points out that though they may be capable of **heroism** or of **self-sacrifice**, most people desire a happy life and pursue it if they can, they prefer to avoid pain and seek out and pursue pleasure if and where they can have it or find it. And that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with pursuing one's happiness in this human way. But that being happy should **not be confused** with a painless existence or with the unrelenting pursuit of pleasure. The point is made that to be regarded **as a good** happiness understood in this way, as a state of well-being marked by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, must be lived and pursued **responsibly**. And that this, in turn, means (returning to the earlier point) **avoiding** self-harm and/or and harming others in the process. But this, avoiding self-harm and harming others, is only one aspect, what can be described as its **negative aspect** of a life of responsible happiness because it tells us what we are **not** to do. Its other complementary aspect, the positive condition of responsible happiness addressing the question what we **are** to do, points to an **ethics of care of the self** – which includes the negative

requirement of avoiding self-harm, and which Aristotle defines positively in terms of **the doctrine of the mean**, namely as the virtue of **moderation** or knowing how to avoid excess. This is the point where the teacher returns the students to the earlier part of the module and raises the question whether self-care is not, in fact, a moral duty we owe not just to ourselves but to our society.

Module 2: Caring for Others (2nd term)

Introduction

This module connects with and extends the discussions in Module 1 in that the question of care of oneself and what that means cannot be divorced from that of care for the other. The other is here shown to be, in a meaningful way, an extension of oneself just as one's self is an extension of the other. It presents the students with a positive, perfectibilist, representation of self-care (as self-improvement, as making something of oneself and of one's life) as against its minimalist representation as the avoidance of harm, particularly self-harm but also, now, of the other, explored in the previous module. It then makes the point that without knowing how to care for oneself one cannot know how to care others, while caring for the others (managing one's relationships with them in a morally responsible way through an ethics of care) is an intrinsic part of caring for oneself – thus distancing the ethics of self-care from the outlook of a self-centred egoism.

The module also introduces the notion of self-esteem into the consideration of an ethics of self-care; positive self-esteem being indispensable for both caring for oneself and caring for others. Self-esteem is connected with bullying in several ways; the bullied person's self-esteem is damaged by the experience of being bullied. Contrary from an ethics of care for the other the relationship is harmful for the bullied and can lead her/him to self-harm, while the bully in turn demonstrates low self-esteem (because her/his self-esteem requires a victim) and is her/himself also harmed in the relation of bullying, as one is in any damaged relationship. A sense of self-worth is identified with the possession of a high self-esteem, while the higher the self-esteem the higher the level of respect and care both for oneself and others.

Finally, the word love is used for that relationship that goes beyond the ordinary sense of care for self and others, though to love does denote to care for. This association with care is what distinguishes loving from merely seeking pleasure in an object (another person, animal or thing). The point is made pleasure does not depend on nor require a relationship of love, it can be experienced without love, in which case its value is purely one of self-gratification and the other is treated as an object for that purpose not as a person with his/her own rights and needs. The discussion focuses on sexual pleasure which is tied with attraction rather than love, though one can also love who one is attracted to. It moves from here to the discussion of

responsible sexual pleasure both from a legal and moral perspective. The discussion is used to make the distinction between legal and moral sanctions on sexual activity.

Objectives:

- To consolidate the writing of the journal as self-reflective tool on moral matters that interest or affect their daily lives or experiences;
- To consolidate the students' skills and abilities to examine arguments and to write arguments of their own on selected topics or issues;
- To continue in this way to press home the importance of self-reflection, of living the examined life and exercising self-mastery as a necessary element of responsibility for self and others;
- To enable students to pass from reflecting on self-respect and respect for others to reflecting on how this respect is translated into care for self and for others;
- To introduce the ethics of perfectibility (of self-improvement, of making something of one's life) as a more advanced understanding of care for oneself, to link it with self-esteem, and to tie care for oneself with caring for others;
- To explore the notion of self-esteem in general and to represent positive self-esteem as an indispensable ingredient both of care for oneself and for others;
- To strengthen still further the moral argument against bullying by representing it as the very contrary of our responsibility to care for the other, care for the others being presented as the positive form of respect;
- The presentation of love as the extra-ordinary dimension of the care for others, taking us beyond the latter in the sense of care and the exploration of the relationship of love with sexual pleasure;
- To help the students to understand the difference between the moral and the legal and to appreciate how they are brought together in different societies.

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 links this module with the conclusion of Module 1 by re-turning to the question of self-care and what it can mean. S/he suggests that it means something

more than not taking certain risks, protecting oneself from harm, and living moderately or prudently. That it includes an undertaking to continuous, **self-improvement**, or ethical perfectionism, which is an undertaking **to make something of one's life**, and is the contrary of an attitude of indifference, apathy, scepticism, despair, and so on, which are all negative attitudes. The undertaking to continuous self-improvement is presented to the students as the positive side of an ethics of self-care, and it includes moral self-improvement, striving to be good, among other factors of self-improvement, which is presented as the object of living the examined life, as Socrates taught us, and which requires the practice of the virtues as a way of life. The teacher discusses other things one needs to improve besides one's goodness; one's health, one's appearance, one's relations with one's friends, one's manners, one's performance at work, etc.

- (b) The next point the teacher makes is that an ethics of self-improvement can only follow one of **self-respect** – it is only possible for someone with **integrity** and **positive self-esteem**. S/he takes the students back in discussion to Module 2 Form 3 on self-respect for revision and for his/her platform to develop the present theme, to repeat the general point that self-respect is not egoistic, or narcissistic and self-centred, and nor is self-care. That self-care is not understood in either of these ways but is as much about care for others as care for oneself – indeed that **self-care is also about caring for others**. To take care of oneself is **not to be confused with being an egoist or self-centred** person. This is a crucial point to make and requires an extended discussion out of which the point should emerge that one cannot properly take care of others either if one doesn't **learn to take proper care of oneself**. Indeed that one must **first** learn to take proper care of oneself before one can take care of others – the point needs to be illustrated with examples.
- (c) The teacher concludes the discussion with the suggestion that self-care is a moral duty we owe both to oneself and others, and is a necessary condition for self-respect. Which is also put up for discussion. S/he returns to the notion of **positive self-esteem** mentioned earlier and described as essential to an ethic of self-improvement or perfection, and puts that up for discussion. First a discussion of **self-esteem**, what it means, and what happens when it is negative – what it results in for someone who suffers negative self-esteem. Next, how low or negative self-esteem is brought about, how one gets to have low self-esteem, which is, of course, linked with the perception of oneself as having little or no worth – in other words it originates in our perception of how other people, especially those who are important to us, regard us, which perception we receive and interpret in their words and actions. In other words our self-esteem is not a purely individual matter, it is formed socially in our relationships with others – and this cannot be otherwise.
- (d) The general point these discussions lead to is that care for others involves, among other things, showing them esteem, showing them one's appreciation for who they are and what they do. The teacher presents for general discussion the statement that among the greatest and most common kind of harm done to the self-esteem of a

person is the experience of being **bullied** by others. The teacher suggests that the effect of being bullied is to destroy the positive self-esteem of the victim, to render the victim's self-esteem low, thereby damaging his or her life, possibly for ever. Literature on bullying that supports this point with examples/narratives is introduced into the discussion by the teacher to make it more graphic. The teacher makes the point that low self-esteem, particularly through bullying, leads to a feeling of rejection, to producing victims and to self-harm. Indeed, that bullying others is the very contrary of caring for them, that it is immoral because it harms them seriously – it cannot therefore even be a part of a positive care for oneself, since bullies are themselves victims of a low self-esteem.

- (e) The teacher suggests that one positive way we care for others is (1) by not bullying them; (2) by protecting them from being bullied by others. A discussion of (2) follows. From it the teacher moves to another attitude towards others that is contrary to caring for them and that damages their self-esteem, this is **ignoring** them. What one has in mind here is not so much the general attitude and outlook on life of the self-centred egoist who ignores everyone, but being ignored specifically, selected and targeted for the purpose – being rendered an **outsider** where one wants to and should belong. Excluding or ignoring others, cutting them, and rendering them outsiders is sending them the signal that they are unworthy of care – that they are **worthless**. **Their sense of self-worth which is fundamental to their positive self-esteem is thereby destroyed.** Perhaps, the teacher suggests and puts to discussion, this is a worse kind of bullying than direct intimidation.
- (f) The next stage of this module, having discussed how one does **not** care for others, indeed does the contrary, is to discuss how care for others is shown. First, before how, the discussion turns to who or what we should care for – the students are invited to suggest, which suggestions are listed by the teacher who then identifies four broad categories of care; for persons, for animals and other living beings, for the natural environment, and for things (for the material environment). The students are reminded of the link between care and respect; that to care for something is to respect it, but it is also linked with the sentiment of **love**, defined as **extraordinary (in the sense of being beyond the ordinary) care** to distinguish it from the ordinary care we owe what we respect. The point is that we extend ordinary care or **respect** to everything that deserves it and we extend extraordinary care or **love** even to what may not deserve it; this is because love, unlike respect is *unconditional*. The next question to ask the students returning to the list is who and what they would describe as objects of respect and/or love.
- (g) The final stage is a discussion of **love**. The students are asked to describe what it is, what they think it is, in a free discussion – the teacher makes the point that in fact it can be of different kinds depending on its object, and that one can use the word 'love' figuratively, like, for instance, when one speaks of loving spaghetti, or loving fashion, or sport, or loving travelling. S/he distinguishes love from **like** which signifies a feeling of **attraction** towards something or someone – when speaking of loving

spaghetti, etc., one is expressing a strong degree of like (since liking something is a matter of degree). In other words, **like is different from love** – the degree of liking something or someone is linked with the amount or quality of **pleasure** one achieves from it – pleasure itself being something derived from different things, experienced in different ways and to different degrees. The point is to distinguish **pleasure from love** also; not everything one loves gives one pleasure, and one does not love everything that gives one pleasure. The teacher introduces examples to illustrate these distinctions in a manner that helps the students perceive them throughout.

- (h) The discussion focus on **sexual pleasure**, which is, of course, a very important question for the students at this stage of their lives, and its relation with love. The teacher makes the point that sexual pleasure is tied to **attraction** for the other both in its contemplation (as fantasy or desire) and in its gratification, it does not necessarily require partners (in the case of masturbation), and it is gratified differently according with one's sexuality (hetero or homo). It follows that, apart from the different forms it make take and its different object, sexual attraction is **not** love, nor is it necessarily tied with love. The teacher needs to make the point here that different cultures, religious and secular, have different beliefs and attitudes on these matters; on what sexual practices are legitimate and permitted or otherwise, and they are **legislated** for differently in different societies. Maltese law, akin to the law in other Western societies tends to be permissive of sexual practices between consenting **adults** (i.e. where there is no force or violence committed against an unwilling other as in acts of rape), but this is not the case in other, culturally different, societies; especially societies where the state is not secular (i.e. where there is no distinction between law and religion). On the other hand, at the **moral** level, there are still in Malta different opinions on such things as pre-marital sex, contraception, masturbation, homosexual sexual practices, and so on. The teacher asks for an open discussion of these issues.

Module 3: The ethics of dependence (3rd term)

Introduction

This module opens by picking up from the last part of Module 2 which was about the relation between love and sexual gratification, from the point that the relation is defined and understood differently by different moral cultures and communities, and from the point that it can be approached from two perspectives legal and moral that are kept separated in some societies and integrated in others such that what is deemed immoral is also made illegal. Module 2 marks a further development in the level of moral debate with the teacher deliberately introducing the different considerations explored in earlier modules into the debate; of rights, consequence, duties and obligations, respect for self and for others and so on, and insisting on their use. Two discussions of this sort are engaged with; on responsible sex and the limits of sexual freedom which includes discussion of the legal protection of the

sexual abuse of minors, in the early part of the Module, and on the obligation to speak for the voiceless, vulnerable other, at the end.

The notion of vulnerability introduced in the first discussion is specifically discussed as a general human condition and linked with dependence – in the sense that it is vulnerability that occasions dependence. Dependence is discussed in its most general sense to include different relations with others induced by vulnerability beginning with all of us with childhood and including different disabilities people are subsequently vulnerable to through their lives some of which may be temporary or permanent. One point made is that dependence is a part of our human condition since no human being is or can be entirely self-sufficient, and that human relationships include relationships of dependence. Another point is that relationships of dependence can change and even be reversed, sometimes suddenly through misfortune so that one who cares for another today may find oneself dependent on them in turn tomorrow through a change of circumstance in people's lives – this fact brings into play the principle of reciprocity. And another that dependence creates rights for some and responsibilities for others who are morally obliged to care for them.

In the last part a distinction is drawn between permanent or chronic disability which creates a condition of permanent dependence and the temporary disability that can arise from illness or misfortune. The point made is that ideally people should be as self-dependent as possible and should be helped to win back their self-dependence when this is temporarily lost. The teacher uses the discussion to introduce the students to the notion of the welfare state based on rights and obligations of mutual solidarity, on the ethics of giving and receiving. The discussion of dependence and solidarity is carried on with reference to the voiceless; to those members of society, the natural environment, irregular migrants, future generations who are unable for different reasons to speak for themselves. The question discussed is whether caring for them includes a moral obligation to speak for them, to give them voice?

Objectives:

- To consolidate the writing of the journal as a self-reflective tool on moral matters that interest or affect their daily lives or experiences;
- To consolidate the students' skills and abilities to examine arguments and to write arguments of their own on selected topics or issues;
- To introduce the students to a deeper level of debate by encouraging them to bring into it the different considerations, of rights, obligations, consequences, etc. explored in earlier modules in a systematic way;
- To help them debate the issue of the relationship between love and sexual pleasure and to promote and discuss the notion of responsible sex;
- To introduce and discuss the notions of vulnerability and dependence as notions that fall into the debate of care of oneself and others;

- To introduce the students to the principle of reciprocity, the ethics of giving and receiving, which arises from the relations of mutual dependence that mark our human condition;
- To introduce and discuss the notion of welfare rights as rights of dependence arising from the claims of solidarity and the political form it takes in the welfare state;
- To introduce other relations of dependence, to link dependence with lack of voice, and to raise the question whether there is a moral responsibility to speak for the voiceless.

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 returns the students to the open discussion that concluded Module 3 and asks the students to identify the key considerations with which that discussion should have been approached; which include consideration of the rights of the parties engaged or involved in the acts discussed, the consequences for those involved and possibly others besides, the sanctions imposed and freedoms permitted by one's moral culture, and so on. S/he needs to bring the students to an agreement that whatever one's views on the matter, we can only approve of **responsible** sexual choices – since this is a moral obligation which has its roots in the principles of self-respect and respect for others. This, in turn, leads to a discussion of **responsible sex and sexual freedom** in general, and its identification by law to consenting adults which in Malta means 18 years – the students are asked whether they regard this limitation and the protection the law extends to minors as reasonable. The teacher explains that the law seeks to protect minors with the assumption that they lack the knowledge, the maturity, to make responsible choices for themselves, and are vulnerable especially to the possibility of being sexually exploited by older people. S/he uses the discussion to outline the different dangers that exist in today's world, the reports in the media of child abuse, where children are **victims** – the teacher makes the point that to be made a victim is to be denied one's rights, especially the right to be valued as a person and treated with respect.
- (b) With this discussion exhausted the teacher fixes on this notion of **vulnerability** which signifies exposure to dangerous outcomes of different kinds – s/he asks the students to identify other ways in which people can be vulnerable, other aspects of vulnerability in people's lives. S/he begins with very young children who are the most vulnerable people, and asks the students to tell him/her where this vulnerability comes from,

namely from their helplessness which renders them **dependent** on others, on their parents and family in this case. The teacher points out that we continue to be dependent on our parents throughout our childhood in various ways; indeed even beyond, and for quite a long time. The students are asked to discuss their present dependence on their parents as adolescents, and how it varies from when they were children – the point is made that their growing independence arises from their decreasing vulnerability to the things that threatened their existence and the **quality of their lives** in their childhood.

- (c) The students are asked to discuss this question of **vulnerability** as it is related to dependence more generally; how are people made vulnerable besides through their childhood helplessness, what kinds of dependence are implied by their vulnerability, and what are people in general vulnerable to? Among the last are ignorance or lack of knowledge, deceit of different kinds, inexperience, immaturity, but also disability (physical and/or mental), poverty, old age, and so on. With the first and second it could be the all-round dependence of childhood but it could also be different kinds of disability, including some conditions that accompany old age, it could be simple economic dependence such as that of young people who are not yet economically independent on their parents and on the state, and it could be the lack of knowledge and instruction that makes one dependent on teachers, books, and other media. These elements of vulnerability and dependence are all teased out by the teacher and dealt with systematically through discussion with the students.
- (d) The teacher points out that dependence is a relationship, between the dependent person and the person or entity on whom or which one is dependent. Ours, like most other societies, recognise that that relationship is one of rights and duties or responsibilities – the kind of **dependence rights** that come into play here are **welfare rights**, and the kinds of duties or obligations that pertain to them are those of **provision** –welfare rights are rights to be provided with what one needs in order to survive and live with dignity in one's society. Welfare rights differ according to the extent and level of dependence and/or vulnerability of the person or class of persons concerned. The teacher returns the students to the discussion of moral rights in Form 1 and re-negotiates with them the central points about the nature of rights and obligations explored in that programme. At this point the teacher needs to re-enforce the point, using examples for the purpose of illustration, that dependence is a key element of our human condition – that nobody is ever entirely independent of everybody else, nobody is **completely self-sufficient** for as long as one lives with others or in a society, though some are, for the reasons mentioned earlier, more dependent, more vulnerable than others. Following this s/he asks the students to consider that as human beings we are **all born vulnerable** and dependent on others, on our parents and family for care. But later in life the condition may be reversed – those who we were dependent on in our childhood, our parents and family, may themselves, if they are disabled by old age and rendered helpless, become dependent on us. Here the moral principle of reciprocity (that what we have received in care

from others in our need we should return to them if the roles are reversed) is brought to the attention of the students and discussed.

- (e) The question is next put by the teacher whether this **principle of reciprocity** applies only to relationships of this kind, between generations in the same family, or whether it has a broader application. In other words does it extend to caring for other dependent, helpless or vulnerable, members of one's society? And if so on what does it rest? The first question is presented to the students for open discussion, the second is addressed and argued out by the teacher, then also opened for discussion. The teacher returns to the point of **mutual dependence**, or interdependence, made earlier that nobody is ever completely self-sufficient, that everyone is always vulnerable to misfortune or change of fortune in different ways, and is always in different ways dependent on others, often to the extent and in manners one may not recognise, and that each of us is vulnerable to disability or misfortune. This means that relationships of dependence are **always** liable to be reversed, often in unforeseeable ways (through sudden illness, accident, sudden decline in fortune, etc.), with me requiring your help or protection today and you mine tomorrow. Here we have an argument for solidarity based not simply on altruism, on sentiment, or on right, but on utility also since the argument from reciprocity is that it makes for the general well-being of society or the common good.
- (f) The discussion is elaborated with the distinction between those who are permanently dependent on others by virtue of permanent or chronic disability (i.e. by birth or as a medical condition), and those who are only temporarily dependent (through some setback in their lives) and whose situation is potentially only temporary or remediable. The question is put to the students whether they think that both these kinds should be accorded the same rights, should be eligible to the same kind of care and/or assistance. What the teacher on her/his part suggests is that those who are only temporarily dependent should be cared for and assisted to become **self-dependent** to a degree that will enable them to manage their lives, and that this is the only moral obligation society owes them. Others may chronically only be capable of a degree of self-dependence, or may be incapable of any degree of it at all; with the former the obligation owed to them is to enable their self-dependence to the degree possible and to support their remaining dependence, with the latter to support their permanent, chronic dependence. These suggestions are discussed, after which the teacher takes the discussion to the **welfare state** which is based on the principle of **solidarity** and which is based on reciprocal relations of **giving** and **receiving** the ethics of which are opened to discussion.
- (g) Finally the teacher extends the debate about rights and dependence to the plight of refugees who leave their country, their society, for different reason to seek protection, a better future, in another – specifically in Malta about the irregular immigrants who arrive from Africa and elsewhere on our shores in the totally vulnerable position of those who have nothing. The teacher relates vulnerability with the absence of voice – those who have no voice are especially vulnerable, they depend on others who have to

speak for them. Is there a moral obligation to speak for others, to defend their rights and safeguard their interests? After discussing the question with respect to the irregular immigrants the teacher extends the question to other vulnerable individuals or groups in society in general and, indeed, in other parts of the world, the voiceless poor and disabled. Then to the natural environment which includes wild animals who have no voice and cannot speak for itself either. Finally, to voiceless young and to future generations who have a stake in the world they will inherit.