

ETHICS

SEC SYLLABUS (2021)

SEC 40

SYLLABUS

Introduction

The primary aim of the Ethics programme is that of a moral education; that is, socializing students into the contemporary moral culture of our society, teaching them to think and deal reflectively with moral matters, to understand the moral issues they will encounter in their daily lives as adult members of Maltese society and of the world human community, to exercise practical wisdom in articulating their moral judgement, to understand and tolerate cultures, life-styles, outlooks, and life choices different from their own, to offer solidarity to those in their community and elsewhere who suffer injustice, to commit themselves to the peaceful resolution of moral conflict where this occurs, and to respect and support human rights, social justice, and democratic practice.

While the priority of this general purpose must never be lost by the teachers of the Ethics Syllabus, the existence of an examination at the end of it has pedagogical implications related to the mode of teaching and assessment that cannot be ignored.

In Forms 1 and 2 the students learn to evaluate arguments for their validity or otherwise, and are taught the difference between validity as a property of arguments and the truth as a property of statements that make them up. In Forms 3 to 5 they are introduced to the criteria of:

- (a) the acceptability or otherwise of the statements in an argument as distinct from their truth - this is where they learn that evaluation becomes more subjective, since acceptability is subjective;
- (b) the approach or perspective (of rights, consequences, duty, truth, correspondence with virtue) from which the argument is entered which is also subjective. The students learn to write their own reflective commentaries on articles, opinion columns or blogs, stories, and other texts, taken from the print, social media, on topics and issues related to the themes addressed in the programme.

The subject matter of the programme has three thematic areas:

1. the first focuses on different ethically relevant aspects of respect;
2. the second of care, in both cases of self and others;
3. the third focuses in a general way on the question of the value of life.

Classroom sessions are set aside throughout the programme to teach the students to discuss and evaluate arguments related with the themes in the modules selected and presented by, and with the teacher. The students are invited to reflect further on and respond to these arguments and the topics or issues discussed in the classroom sessions at home, making written arguments on, or counter-arguments to, them or some aspect of them on their own.

Scheme of Assessment

The examination consists of:

- **Paper 1: Coursework** (60% of the total marks; comprising 4 assignments of equal weighting i.e. 15% each)
- **Paper 2: Written Examination paper** (40% of the total marks). There will be two versions of Paper 2 – Paper 2A and Paper 2B.

Paper 1: Coursework (60% of the total marks)

The coursework consists of four assignments which can be rather practical in nature, such as presentations, a research project, a journal, a class debate, writing a blog or a letter/email to the Editor. These assignments will be set and marked by the teacher, who will choose the best method of assessment according to the topic being assessed. They can be set as individual tasks or a task to be done in a group (e.g. a group presentation). It is to be noted that these practical assignments are also the same ones that are required for the school assessment coursework.

It is suggested that:

- the first two coursework assignments are carried out during Form 3;
- The third and fourth coursework assignments are carried out during Form 4.

Each practical assignment is marked out of 100 marks, but will carry 15% of the total mark. The average mark of these four assignments will contribute to 60% of the total marks of the examination. The assignments will be based on modules 1, 2, 4 and 5 separately (i.e. not more than one assignment on each Module), and they will be presented for moderation, together with the mark, in a portfolio (the four combined coursework assignments) by the date established by the MATSEC Board. The portfolio should contain all the written material generated by the assignments, as well as other documentation or evidence to show how the assignment was carried out (e.g. presentation slides, photos of students engaged in debate, etc.). Candidates may be called for a short interview in relation to the project.

Candidates may present work in either Maltese or English.

Criteria for Coursework

Each coursework assignment is marked out of hundred marks (100) and carries 15% of the global mark. A Marking Scheme to be used by teachers/tutors for assessment of the coursework is available in Appendix A. Each assignment should be accompanied by the appropriate Marking Grid available on the MATSEC website duly filled in and signed by the teacher/tutor to substantiate the mark awarded.

Private Candidates:

1. The candidates are to follow the same syllabus as full time school candidates;
2. The candidate is also to identify a person knowledgeable in the subject to act as a tutor who will monitor his/her participation in the coursework;

3. The MATSEC Ethics Examiners' Panel will mark the assignments of private candidates. The Examiners' Panel has the right to liaise with the tutor of the candidate if it is deemed to be required;
4. Private candidates may be called for an interview about their coursework;
5. The candidate must fill in the coursework authenticity form and submit it, signed by him/herself and the tutor, along with the coursework.

Paper 2: Written Examination Paper

The controlled component of the assessment will consist of a paper of two hours' duration which will carry 40% of the final mark. The paper will be set in both Maltese and English. Candidates must choose to answer either in Maltese or in English. There will be two versions of the written paper: Paper 2A and Paper 2B. Candidates are required to indicate on the registration form which paper they wish to sit for. No change in the choice of paper will be allowed after the registration period.

The written paper will contain questions demanding an evaluative approach to the subject matter, covering all Modules. Here the candidates will be expected not only to show their knowledge and understanding of the topics dealt with, but also the ability to evaluate and apply what has been learnt from Ethics, to the daily lives of people. Paper 2A comprises more demanding questions than those in Paper 2B. Questions in Paper 2A will require answers of a more argumentative and analytical nature.

Both Paper 2A and Paper 2B will have two sections: Section A and Section B.

Results

Candidates sitting for Paper A may qualify for a grade within the range 1 to 5 (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5); the results of candidates who do not obtain a Grade 5 shall remain Unclassified (U).

Candidates sitting for Paper B may qualify for a grade not higher than 4 (i.e. grades 4, 5, 6, 7); the results of candidates who do not obtain at least a Grade 7 shall remain Unclassified (U).

Important Conditions

Candidates can only qualify for Grades 1 to 5 if they satisfy the examiners in both papers.

The Syllabus

Module 1: Self and Others

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 students should be 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 deals with the notion of the self – more specifically what it means to be a human self. It begins with the reminder that the human self is always a social self.

This point of departure raises 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 leads students to discussions of tolerance. The self is represented as both unique and social, and these characterisations of the self are 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 introduce the students to self-reflective expression on moral matters through writing or otherwise (examples could include: blogs, photography, journal, essays, letters/email to the editor and so on);
- 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 discuss 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.

Module 2 Respect for Self (Self-respect)

This module is about responsible self-respect, which contrasts with irresponsible self-abuse. Self-respect is linked with a self which, while it is aware of itself, is sensitive to others, while self-abuse is linked with a self which is obsessively self-referential and narcissist. It explores the notion of harm to a much greater depth 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 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 consolidate the self-reflective expression on moral matters that interest or affect their daily lives or experiences. This could be done through writing or otherwise, for example, blogs, photography, journal, essays, letters/email to the editor and so on;

To exercise students in the evaluation and writing of arguments on selected topics or issues;

To 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 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 distinguish 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.

Module 3 Respect for Others

This module links with the discussion of self-respect and making responsible life choices and with the distinction between making positive life-choices and negative, by first exploring the notion of making something of one's life, then analysing the reasons behind what could lead one to waste one's life or make negative life-choices; and 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 also becomes a question of justice, since moral blindness blinds us to justice.

The idea that justice as fairness requires equality of consideration and that all should be regarded equally. However, 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 consolidate the self-reflective expression on moral matters that interest or affect their daily lives or experiences. This could be done through writing or otherwise, for example, blogs, photography, journal, essays, letters/email to the editor and so on;

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 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.

Module 4: The Ethics of Self-Care

This module is entered into through the extended discussion of harm already taken up in the previous modules, more specifically of self-harm, the general object being to connect the ethics of respect explored in that programme with the ethics of care. 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 5. 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 sense; 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 objective of the discussions is 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. Also, the discussion should also 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, and that there is pleasure that is harmful for oneself, and therefore should be avoided. Promoting happiness as a eudaemonic state is seen 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. Finally, the discussion will help students to identify the responsible pursuit of happiness with self-care.

Objectives

To consolidate the self-reflective expression on moral matters that interest or affect their daily lives or experiences. This could be done through writing or otherwise, for example, blogs, photography, journal, essays, letters/email to the editor and so on;

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 the 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 *eudaimonia* against competing hedonistic doctrines and to identify caring for oneself with a *eudaemonic* existence.

Module 5: The Ethics of Care for Others

This module connects with and extends the discussions about care of oneself which 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 for 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

