

15 Juny 1979

NON-RELIGIOUS ETHICS SYLLABUS

SECONDARY SECTION

(including some guidelines)

(approved by the Board of Governors during its meeting on 22 and 23 May 1979)

TO BE INSERTED IN THE BROCHURE  
"TIMETABLES AND HARMONIZED PROGRAMMES"

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replaces page 77



## I. THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF ETHICS LESSONS

The ultimate purpose of ethics lessons is to teach pupils to choose a way of life free from dogma by means of a way of reflection based on the principle of liberty of thought.

Ethics lessons will lead pupils to a condition of personal freedom and of responsibility, which will allow them to make personal and responsible choices whenever this is required of them in individual or social situations. Viewed in this way, ethics lessons become training for decision-making.

Lessons will therefore be, at one and the same time, a method of approach to human questioning of their own position and a search for justifiable and lucid responses.

This search must take place with a rigorous respect for facts, which implies that all matters must be examined in a rational way. Every situation will be examined from the widest possible factual basis, and every dogmatic position will be set aside.

The critical approach to ethical questions suggests that a person must distance himself from the situations in which he is involved, and find suitable creative behaviour to take into account his own actual situation and historic and social reality. This step will always be taken in the consciousness of individual responsibility, and with respect for other people.

If ethics teaching is understood like this, it will lead to authenticity and commitment. Given that knowledge and values are relative, and given the constant arousal of the critical spirit and of creativity, this concept of moral philosophy being in movement can lead to understanding, to respect for others, to a dialogue making positive confrontation possible so that agreement or different solutions to the same problem can be found.

This forceful direction taken for ethics corresponds to the contemporary context in which development is accelerated. In our society, revisions of judgment and attitudes are often needed. However, moral philosophy in movement does not induce glibness or changeability. On the contrary, it requires that the individual be thoughtful and firm. When a person is called upon to turn his deepest hopes and carefully-constructed value system into concrete acts in a series of differing commitments, he will need to be rational and to exhibit continuity.

Pupils' attention will be drawn constantly to their personal responsibility for maintaining, refining, and creating values. With this aim, ethics lessons will supply a research technique which will enable pupils to find out what is and what may be, thus deciding on their own values by constant reference to concrete situations.

Teachers' attitudes will be based on the particular ends of non-religious ethics lessons, which means that they must pledge themselves to the spirit and objectives defined in this syllabus. The teacher himself will need to establish whether his philosophical ideas respond to this fundamental principle, in all freedom and honesty. It will not be enough to adapt the fundamental principles of the liberty of thought on a purely theoretical level; if the need arises, the teacher will not hesitate to take a position, to describe his own viewpoint, to formulate his own opinion.

This commitment will be made while respecting the liberty of his pupils, which means that it will be free from propaganda and will not attempt any conditioning. It will demonstrate concretely the value of a free opinion, worked out from objective study of questions and experience in a fully responsible way. The problem then is not one of limiting commitment, but of what meaning and form this may take.

While having a special tone of its own, ethics will reinforce the objectives of education in general, aiming at allowing each pupil to develop into an authentic human being, that is, a human being who finds out, who searches, who chooses, who develops his own values and who chooses constructive solutions in social, economic, and cultural situations.

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## II. THE SPIRIT, OBJECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS OF LESSONS

### 1) SPIRIT

Ethics should be taught in a forceful and open way, where the human being is seen as a permanent structure. An ethical approach is acquired by constant efforts for research and freedom. It is the lifestyle which man creates for or imposes upon himself, according to his own idea of what he is, of what he may become, of his relationship to the universe and the world and especially of the relationships he enjoys with his fellow human beings. Ethics, therefore, means one's general view of life as shown in one's attitudes and acts.

This general view is obviously formed gradually, according to the evolution of the individual. It develops by means of a range of successive choices made, when required, by the individual. It is like a training for commitment, made with more and more awareness, enriched by personal experience. It requires commitment through forming hypotheses which are tested by one's own experience and constantly developed.

This concept of ethics calls for :

- a knowledge of facts, which must be as accurate as possible;
- a critical understanding of their consequences;
- a choice of solutions;
- decision-making power.

## 2) OBJECTIVES

The aim of teaching ethics is to make pupils accustomed, gradually, to defining their own behaviour in situations which become increasingly complex, delicate and difficult. They learn to choose solutions which are in accordance with their own personality and the society in which they live. It is desirable, therefore, that pupils feel able to speak of their experiences and difficulties in total freedom and honesty. Reciprocal respect in a confidential atmosphere will encourage each person to develop an increased awareness of himself and others. In this way, ethics lessons will act as an effective instrument in reaching emotional maturity.

A child should be able to discover and create values by expressing his own feelings, emotions and impulses. Ethics lessons will enable such expression to take place. Here, the teacher will encourage exchanges of opinion on topics such as friendship, feelings arising from boy/girl relationships, children/parent relationships and teacher/pupil relationships, one's image of other people and attitudes towards death and one's own destiny. The teacher will take care to refrain from making any criticisms and interpretations of emotions expressed which may be seen as indicating blame. The essential thing is to encourage young people to understand the reasons for their behaviour. Behaviour, therefore, is seen as a sign, symptom or call.

Emotional maturity is vitally important. It presupposes two things :

- that one rids oneself of the need for protection,
- that one admits certain values.

These two points are linked to the development of one's sense of responsibility and to the attainment of personal freedom. A two-fold consciousness raising is involved here :

- consciousness raising of one's self, resulting in the need for self-realization;
- consciousness raising with regard to one's place in society, resulting in the desire or realisation of cooperation.



It follows, therefore, that ethics lessons at all study levels must be based on three main objectives :

1) - To educate pupils in discovering their place in society.

To discover one's place in society means, first of all, that one should become aware not only of one's own motivations but also of other people's whichever they are; it also means that, when confronted with any situation, one should compare oneself with what is and what is going on around; it also means that one should always re-examine one's own position, adjusting it if necessary.

2) - To guide them in their search for personal freedom.

Personal freedom means the individual's right not only to hold values knowingly and freely, but also to alter these values or create new ones.

3) - To encourage social commitment.

Social commitment means active and forceful participation by the individual in group activities. This presupposes the willingness not only to assume responsibilities but also to resist social pressures which would cause alienation.

Such a commitment means that when social problems are being solved, everyone should have his say. Solutions found will only be provisional, of course, and always liable to criticism.

### 3) IMPLICATIONS

By following these three objectives in a systematic manner, ethics lessons can provide pupils with the means for developing their personality. This calls for : objectivity, open-mindedness, understanding.

1) Objectivity means the ability to abstract oneself from one's own personal situation.

2) Open-mindedness means the readiness to revise one's own knowledge or value systems.

3) Understanding means an acceptance of the relativity of knowledge and values. This means, particularly where ethics is concerned, the principle of the plurality of values. The development of a person is the result of a long and gradual learning process which does not take place automatically. This learning process has no character of necessity. It is possible that there are moments of standstill and even regression in this development. The attitude of adults towards the pupil is very important here. Ethics, therefore, seems more of a problem of attitudes towards and contact with the pupil than a teaching problem as such.

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### III. NOTES ON THE APPROACH

#### 1) PRINCIPLES

##### 1) TO EDUCATE

An ethics teacher does not teach a subject : he educates. Essentially, this means helping pupils to learn how to use freedom in awareness and with reason (ability to criticize, personal freedom, responsibility, initiative, decision-making capacity).

##### 2) TO TRAIN BY INFORMING

Training without knowledge is impossible. Choices, decision and action are only possible when strengthened and clarified by relevant information. Pupils must acquire, rather than receive, the essential elements of knowledge. Information techniques must therefore be used.

##### 3) TO ACT

Lessons must not remain on the level of principles alone, but should enable principles to be tested by facts. Pupils should be encouraged to act and should therefore be confronted with real problems since ethics means action.

This approach, therefore, will determine the concept of teaching ethics and the teacher's own role. It also determines the way the syllabus is applied, teaching progression and methods for pupil evaluation.

## 2) THE CONCEPT BEHIND ETHICS LESSONS

### 1) THE AIM: PROBLEMS

Lessons should examine problems which are concrete, current, personal and, if possible, familiar to the pupils themselves. These problems should enable pupils to become aware of the need to refer to values. In this way they will come across the idea of duty not by a process which refers to an unchangeable order, but by an effort of going beyond, i.e. transcendence, as part of open ethics.

### 2) MEANS: INFORMATION

The enormous importance of information is shown by the necessity of acquiring and analysing information required for understanding situations.

- Direct information: observation of real life by guided visits and all kinds of investigations.
- Indirect information: facing situations and problems through written, visual and audio material.

### 3) ACTION: PARTICIPATION

ETHICS MEANS ACTION.

Pupils should become accustomed to active methods, including joint management of lessons, seen as an activity deriving from and developing the lesson itself.

Joint management is possible in the following areas:

- Preparation of lessons
- Information:
  - (a) researching written documents and such like (surveys, interviews, investigations, reports...).
  - (b) collection, critical analysis and selection of information.
  - (c) presentation of information (albums, files, wall-charts, exhibitions...).



- Teaching progression in lessons;
- Practical ways of applying lessons;  
"Ethics in action" in three distinct areas - school, extra-curricular and home activities, such as :
  - (a) discussion and decision groups (debates, "Pupils' Council", ...),
  - (b) activity group (socio-cultural collective activities, philanthropical activities, ...),
  - (c) Ethics club.

In this way, ethics lessons become a living experience which combines information with dialogue and action.



### 3) ROLE OF THE ETHICS TEACHER

The role of the ethics teacher is:

#### 1) TO GIVE GUIDANCE IN RESEARCH

Pupils must be trained in joint research of information for classification, analysis and selection.

It might be useful to use the explanatory method. This will be considered one kind of information system among others to be used.

#### 2) TO GIVE PRACTICE IN SOLVING PROBLEMS

This means teaching pupils

- to state problems clearly;
- to find solutions based on ideas which are void of prejudices, untruths and passion;
- to bear whatever consequences follow their choices;
- to think truthfully when facing present-day realities.

#### 3) TO ENCOURAGE ACTION

In addition to encouraging pupils to adhere intellectually to their principles and rules, the teacher should encourage them to act. When confronted with facts, pupils will learn to integrate their principles with their behaviour.

#### 4) TO ACT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN ETHICS

In order to encourage pupils to act according to their ethics, the teacher must also act according to his own. This requires an attitude which is appropriate to his own teaching, an attitude of research, self-questioning, commitment and acceptance of confrontation and change. Seen in this way, ethics lessons will be the reflection of the teacher's own ethical existence. For pupils, these lessons will present the opportunity for an enriching human contact as well as the intellectual contact with values.

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#### IV. SYLLABUS FOR THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

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##### I. FROM CONSCIOUSNESS OF OTHERS TO CONSCIOUSNESS OF ONESELF

###### A. Feeling interdependence : opening up

1. Family and myself
2. Others and myself
3. The environment and myself

###### B. Wanting to be interdependent : joining in

1. Myself and family
2. Myself and others
3. Myself and the world outside

##### II. FROM CONSCIOUSNESS OF ONESELF TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT

###### A. Affectivity

1. Discovery of oneself
2. Approaching others

###### B. Personality

1. Biological and social facts
2. Building one's identity

###### C. Responsibility

1. From dependence to fellowship
2. From responsibility to action : commitment

###### D. Intellectual honesty through liberty of thought

1. Finding out and thinking things over
2. Opening up to ideas of other people

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION\*

1. FROM CONSCIOUSNESS OF OTHERS TO CONSCIOUSNESS OF ONESELF

A. Feeling interdependence : opening up

1. The family and myself :
  - At home, I have a room or a corner of my own.
  - My parents mend my toys.
  - I need pocket money.
  - My parents do not notice that I am growing up, that my tastes are changing.
  - We have all we need.
  - The family house, an inn ?
  - A roof and clothes, are these enough ?
  - At home, I like discussing things.
  - I like Sundays - everyone's at home.
  - I found a purse in the street; Mother said that I must give it back.
  - Yesterday in the bus, I saw Father giving up his seat.
  - When I'm older I'd like to be like Father/Mother.
2. Others and myself :
  - Fellows - rivals or friends ?
  - What do you expect of those who teach you ?
  - Are school trips meant for having fun ?
  - There are only spoilt kids at the European Schools.
  - It's still hard for Europeans to get on well together.
  - Three or four choices for what we study next year.
  - Last week, I went camping with my friends.
  - We've got new neighbours, so I'll make some new friends.
  - Does it matter who I hang around with ?
  - Tourism - does it help international understanding ?
  - How do most children of my age live in Bengal, the Andes or Central Africa ?
3. The environment and myself :
  - Living in the country, within everybody's reach ?
  - Open air life : happiness, myth or slavery ?
  - Can I see something which is good somewhere else ?
  - Does the motorway serve or hinder man ?
  - The city, where life will be good ...
  - Concrete or nature ?
  - An industrial zone : jobs or pollution ?

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\* The themes for discussion which make up the syllabus are only to be used as a guide. They are not divided into years, and the list is not exhaustive.

The teacher can choose from among the themes according to the level of his pupils and the questions which interest them.



B. Wanting to be interdependent : joining in

1. Myself and the family

- : - My baby brother has arrived, I will let him share my room.
- I have seen a photo of my grandmother when she was young - I look like her.
- My little sister comes from Vietnam.
- I've got problems - who can I talk to?
- I don't like being a boy/ a girl.
- Having a sister or brother - advantage or disadvantage?
- It's time for my serial.
- My brother's crying, what can I do?
- Mother/Father comes home from work late.
- Mother's lost her job.
- It's not going well at home at the moment.
- I don't help to lay the table very often.
- Father's reading his paper, Mother's preparing the meal.
- We kids, we've also got our rights.
- Stick up for our parents? How far?
- My parents entertain a lot.

2. Myself and others

- : - Cleaning women are there for that!
- Join the school choir? No thanks.
- I'm a member of... why?
- The class has decided to help an orphanage but how?
- This year, the class has decided to...
- My theatre group? Packed up because of absences.
- A magazine about ethics lessons? I don't have any ideas.
- Joining in? O.K. as long as it's in school time.
- Winning the game or just playing it?
- I've spent an hour with a sick friend.
- Taking care of a lonely old person?
- On the way to school I passed a mother with a handicapped child. Everyone was staring at them.
- My friend's in trouble. Now's the time to show my friendship.
- My personal problems are my own business.
- Father has to pay his National Health contributions, but he's never ill.
- Why was there a strike today?
- Being oneself : with or against the others?
- A committee for the district? Why not?
- Why have trades unions?
- Big apartment blocks: community life or ghetto?
- Interdependence of the assembly line or of the workers?
- Salaries.

- One bomber = 50 000 tractors.
- Appartment to rent - no foreigners.
- Chauvinism is not dead.
- We're not safe any more with all these foreigners around.
- What are the barriers that separate men?
- There aren't enough people who speak your language - better learn mine.

3. Myself and the world outside :
- What can you yourself do about the destruction of nature.
  - Hunting and fishing - murderous sports or necessity?
  - You take care of a ladybird, but would you step on a spider?
  - Camping - holidays for all at last.
  - Leisure activities - another side of life?
  - Pedestrian precinct - luxury or necessity?
  - The town and the district - everyone's business?
  - Change life? all alone?
  - All it needs is....
  - That ought to be forbidden.
  - They ought to make a law against...
  - All the same, there are principles which should be respected and which we should be forced to respect.
  - In my country, they don't do that.
  - Full time work, part-time work, or work as you please?
  - Aren't there any underdeveloped regions in Europe?
  - Working for Europe... what does that mean?
  - There are an awful lot of dictatorships in the world.
  - Why is there underdevelopment.
  - When you give money to charity, are you trying to buy a good conscience?
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- Noise, too, is pollution.
  - The air in my district is unbreathable at certain times of day.
  - Are we poisoning this planet?
  - Have plastics changed our lives?
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## II. FROM CONSCIOUSNESS OF ONESELF TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT

### A. Affectivity

1. Discovery of oneself :
- I feel quite different from other people.
  - They tell me I should have been born a boy(girl).
  - I don't have any real friends.
  - I'm never going to get married.
  - I'd like to be (wouldn't like to be) like my father (my mother).
  - Sometimes I feel like smashing everything up.
  - When I get told off, I feel paralysed.
  - I'm frightened of saying something stupid.
  - They don't accept what I say, so I shut up.
  - If people knew what I was really thinking sometimes, they'd hate me.
  - If I knew I'd die tomorrow, what would I do today?
  - What's the good of living?
  - I often feel really mad, without knowing why.
  - I couldn't stop myself from doing that.
  - Sometimes, I've really felt proud of myself.
  - I never thought I'd be able to do that and yet I managed it.
  - I'm bored at school.
  - I always get bad marks, I'll never make it.
  - One day I was really scared.
  - Sometimes I feel really good.
  - Sex, we can't talk about things like that.

2. Approaching others :
- Boys only think about fighting.
  - We don't get on in our class.
  - Girls only think about clothes.
  - Why don't the boys and girls in our class ever play together?
  - Peter can't help telling lies.
  - People are always finding fault with me.
  - Our parents can't stand us quarrelling, but it doesn't worry us.
  - I don't get on well with my brother.
  - My parents are always quarrelling.
  - My father always agrees with me, but my mother never.
  - Paul's a boaster.
  - I like my teacher a lot, because he wears nice clothes.
  - I prefer women teachers, they're kinder.
  - Why isn't kissing allowed at school?
  - Mother doesn't like me going to the cinema with a boy.
  - All teachers think about is punishment.

## B. Personality

### 1. Biological and social facts

Can we blame our faults on heredity?

I can't help it ... it's my nerves!

If I'd been born somewhere else, would I have been different?

There are some qualities which are intolerable...

Sex information... you'll know about that later.

I have my period... I'm not doing gym.

I have my period... is that a reason for not doing what I usually do?

Puberty : an illness? - Puberty, a hurdle to get over?

Communal changing rooms at the swimming pool: is that indecent?

Is being naked indecent?

Is masturbating something to be ashamed of?

Do the washing up, your brother's studying!

I, a boy, make my bed and polish my shoes?

My brother can go out, but I can't.

She goes out every Sunday, she'll come to no good!

Keep quiet, your father's tired.

She gets paid less. Of course, she's a woman.

Why should she study when she'll probably get married.

I never get punished, my exercise book's perfect... I'm a good pupil.

Why graffiti?

I'm not like anyone else.

Do you receive your personality or do you develop it?

Are you always in control of your reactions?

I like people to admire me.

It's my own hair anyway.

I hate the taste of sweet things with savoury.

She isn't doing anything, she's reading.

Are proverbs popular wisdom?

Without my good luck charm, I feel naked!

Who tells you that the devil doesn't exist?

Isn't Hiroshima what science produces?

In my days, my father says...

At home, we don't argue.

Boys, girls : equals or superiors?

### 2. Building one's identity

Growing up for what purpose?

What's it mean to be an adult?

I didn't dare check the change the grocer gave me.

I don't dare to refuse when people ask me.

Do you need courage to start all over again every day?

I smoke, it calms me down and settles me.

Man - body, mind, feelings, is that all?

Admitting that you've been wrong : strength or weakness?



## C. Responsibility

### 1. From dependence to fellowship

Do we really have any choice?  
You have to go to the country to relax...  
Acting on impulse...  
Being second... being first... being last...  
The TV's broken - I'm bored.  
Living for a day without a radio...  
A roof, bread and clothes : is that enough?  
He's fantastic - he can really dance well.  
You don't choose your own family.  
English breakfasts, continental breakfasts...  
The cinema's sold out every day, it must be a good film!  
I'm in love, so everything's fine, it's great...  
Hairspray, deodorant, makeup, rinses : could I give them up?  
I smoke - it gives me style.  
Being up-to-date - stickers?  
Living : eating, drinking, sleeping, having fun!  
My museum, my art gallery, it's.....  
It's in fashion, so I wear (do) it.  
There are no pictures, so it doesn't interest me.  
Advertising - a good servant, a bad master ?  
That's not for the workers!  
Shop assistant : a nice job, because you can always dress up well.  
Heroes, idols, stars, and me?  
One ball, 22 players, 10 000 spectators : and how many sportsmen?  
TV - culture or degradation?  
Is novelty always something to be prized?  
There's only one way of teaching grammar...  
The teacher said so....  
The teacher's always right, he grew up before we did.  
News broadcasts - really impartial?

What's the good? It won't change anything!  
Do what others have done, or find your own solution?  
If I succeed - touch wood!  
I will never know....  
My horoscope 's good : what luck, I've got a test today!  
Everybody can't be.....  
It's always the same people who are exploited.  
"Hit parade", "Nineteen", "Nova" - at last, magazines that understand young people!  
A rule which was imposed or chosen?  
An interesting, pleasant ethics lesson, the teacher's problem or the pupil's business?  
Sympathy with our classmates - how far should it go?

### 2. From responsibility to action : commitment.

Do you need courage to start all over again every day?  
From now on.....  
Responsible, OK, but for what?  
It's not my fault. I didn't have time...  
If only I'd know ..  
I'm in charge of the library - I've gone and lost the key.  
Belong to a club, why?  
An ethics club, why?  
To be a person or to have personality?

Orderliness, obedience or joining?  
Obeying - does it mean giving up?  
You choose, therefore you exclude...  
Doubt - a sign of uncertainty or proof that you're thoughtful?  
Truth can find and build itself.  
Loneliness, a silent punishment?  
The most to blame : indifference or cowardliness?



D. Intellectual honesty through liberty of thought

1. Finding out and thinking things over

- It's true, I saw it on the TV !
- Television news, a flood of pictures or a means of knowing the world?
- Your newspaper : information or conditioning?
- Is there such a thing as an honest newspaper?
- Different ways of reporting an event (on TV, in newspapers with different tendencies, in a book).
- Election results according to different papers.
- An event as witnessed by different people.
- Strip cartoons, simple stories or a way of viewing the world?
- I don't know, I wouldn't like to say...
- There is a problem, but I don't have enough of the facts to be able to decide about it.
- Analysis of some prejudices.
- A critical spirit, yes; a contradictory spirit, no.
- Dogma, what's that?
- Weighting up the different aspects of a problem.

2. Opening up to ideas of other people

- Does forging your own opinion mean rejecting the ideas of others?
  - What's true for you may not necessarily be so for your neighbour.
  - Admitting that you were wrong : strength or weakness?
  - My parents aren't wrong all the time.
  - Discussing things with someone old : a boring moment?
  - The workman and the intellectual, two really different men?
  - Asian or African behaviour, forget about it!
  - Will learning ethics make me change at all?
-