**The Nature of Morality**

**“Moral Principles”**

**Learning Objectives**

**Knowledge**

* **The meaning of “morality”**
* **The similarities and differences between “ethics” and “morality”**
* **The meaning of “moral principles” and “moral rules”**
* **Three theories concerning the origins and foundations of morality: Divine Command Theory, Natural Law Theory and Social Contract Theory**

**Skills**

* **Critical thinking skills**
* **Communication skills**

**Values and Attitudes**

* **Reason**
* **Common good**

Important notes:

1. This learning resource is prepared for teachers of Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies. Teachers are expected to make adaptation and enrichment according to the needs of their students. Moreover, after each learning activities, teachers should provide debriefing to students for their development of positive values and integrative application of generic skills.

2. The ERS curriculum is for S4-S6 SS students. This learning resource uses plain language as far as possible to explain theories of ethics, which, in some cases, are simplified to suit the learning needs of the students.

3. Cases, stories, movie plots, and classic moral dilemmas are included for the purpose of students’ reflection in the learning process. To illustrate moral dilemmas, some viewpoints in this material may seem exaggerated and critical. Teachers should always remind their students of the difference between these viewpoints and the reality in the present world. Judging the past with contemporary standard is not the intended perspective, rather, students should be guided to make contrast and holistic understanding of the relationship between these practices and their historic, cultural and social contexts.

4. The discussion questions, key points and knowledge content of the learning resource are suggestion in nature. Learning and teaching should not be limited to these suggestions. Teacher should use them flexibly for ongoing development of school-based resource according to the learning objectives of the curriculum.

**Suggested teaching period: 4 lessons**

**Teacher shall prepare:**

* Introductory Activity：Condemned to Hell
* Subject Knowledge Content of the (1) ：What is “Morality”?
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (2) ：Moral principles and moral rules
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (3) ：The origins and foundations of morality
* Case Study (1) **：**Modern slaves
* Case Study (2) ：The Ring of Gyges
* Case Study (3) ：Nude Beach
* **Worksheet (1)** ：**Is this a moral problem?**
* **Worksheet (2)** ：**Can this be applied universally**?

**Suggested teaching process:**

1. Teacher discusses “Introductory Activity：Condemned to Hell” with the students.

**This is the first lesson of “Normative Ethics“ module. Through the activity, students shall understand that we can have different moral judgements on the same story. Regardless of our judgement on whether the protagonist be condemned to hell or not, we are discussing issues of “ought”. Ethics, thus defined, is to explore “ought” questions.**

**2. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1) ：What is ‘morality’?”

Teacher may invite students to share examples concerning morality encountered in their daily lives. Then teacher may ask student to conclude the key points about morality:

* + Morality is to deal with the “ought” question, instead of the “is” question
  + Ethics（or philosophy of morality）is the study of moral concepts and the reasoning on moral principles and theories, with a specialized and systematic approach.
  + Morality concerns neither only with our personal preferences, nor only with how culture teaches us on actions and behaviors.
  + With the help of rationality, human can make better or worse judgements.
  + In this learning resource, “ethics” and “morality” are used interchangeably.

3. Students shall finish “**Worksheet (1)** ：**Is this a moral problem?” to consolidate their understanding of morality.**

**4. Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss “**Case Study (1) **：**Modern Slaves”

* **Explain that there are some basic principles that humans must follow when they get along with each other. These principles are “moral” if they concern questions of “ought”, i.e. “moral principle”. Moral principles are applied universally.**

**5. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (2) ：Moral Principles and Moral rules”. Teacher explains the differences between moral principles and moral rules. Teacher may ask student to conclude by stating the key points of the differences between moral principles and moral rules:

* **To live together, humans must work out some common norms. These norms can be divided into two categories: moral rules and moral principle.**
* **In the forms of traditions, religions and laws, moral rules guide and restraint our behaviour.**

**6.** Students shall finish “**Worksheet (2)** ：**Can this be applied universally**?**” to consolidate their understanding on the differences between moral principles and moral rules.**

**7. Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss “**Case Study (2) ：The Ring of Gyges”

* **This case help student reflect on the foundation of moral behaviour.**
* **Glaucon believes that humans are selfish: “just” or “good” behaviour is merely the result of fear of punishment. This view is similar to the Social Contract Theory, which also presumes that humans are selfish, and moral norms exist for the avoidance of conflicts.**
* **Socrates’ view is similar to that of the Natural Law Theory, which presumes that humans will act morally out of their human nature.**

**8. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (3) ：The origins and foundations of morality”**, focusing on the three theories concerning the origins and foundations of morality:** Divine Command Theory, Natural Law Theory, and Social Contract Theory. Teacher may then ask student to conclude by stating the key points of the theories:

* Divine Command Theory suggests that the commands of God(s) is the origin and foundation of morality. One of the challenges for the theory is that, it makes morality arbitrary.
* Natural Law Theory suggests that we can discover the moral norms in nature, especially from our human nature. This theory has influenced very much the modern theory of human rights. One of the challenges for the theory is that different cultures define “nature” differently.
* **Social Contract Theory** suggests **that humans establish norms that the members of the community have to observe. Individuals have to relinquish some personal freedom and interests, in exchange for shared peace and safety. Critics argue that Social Contract Theory understand morality purely in terms of exchange of interest, but failed to make sense of some profound moral relationships of human beings.**

**9. Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and ask them to discuss “**Case Study (3) ：Nude Beach”. After discussion, each group shall choose 1 student as representative to present the decision of their group.

1. Teachers should conclude with the following;

* This case illustrates that when discussing social issues, we tend to base our arguments on Natural Law Theory and **Social Contract Theory**.
* The discussion does not touch upon Divine Command Theory. Divine Command Theory is the major moral foundation within theistic religious groups. It is, however, hard to ground public discussion on Divine Command Theory in a secular society.

**Introductory Activity：Condemned to Hell**

In ancient India, there was a merchant. He wanted to transport 100 boxes of valuable goods by sea and sell them in another city. He brought along 9 subordinates and together they rented a cargo ship out to the sea. They also employed the owner of the ship and his 20 crew members for carrying the goods and taking care of their well-beings during the journey.

On the second night when they were out to the sea, the merchant walked pass the kitchen before dinner. He overheard the ship owner and his crew members planning to poison him and his subordinates over dinner. After killing them, the owner and his crews would take away his valuables.

On one hand, the merchant concerned much about his and his subordinates’ lives. On the other hand, the merchant was filled with compassion. He thought that if the ship owner was to be condemned to hell for killing 10 merchants, it would be a terrible suffering for the owner. In order to protect the people on the ship and to prevent the ship owner to commit murder, the merchant would rather be condemned to hell himself. He secretly swapped his dinner with the crew members. In the end, the evil ship owner and his crew members were dead, while the merchant and his subordinates arrived at the destination safely.

After several decades, the merchant was now 90 years old. He was sick at home. He knew that committing murder will be condemned to hell and so he was feeling very disturbed.

The story is adapted from *The Sūtra on Skill in Means*

Question for discussion:

Do you think the merchant should be condemned to hell? Why?

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1) ：What is “morality”?**

In our daily lives, we often encounter views such as: “we ‘should’ help the needy”, “we ‘should not’ harm the innocent”, or “human ‘should’ do good, but not evil” and so on. We should behave according to those we considered “good” and “right”, and should avoid those “bad” and “evil” behaviour.

Morality deals with the “ought” questions, instead of the “is” questions. That is to say, morality neither only describes human behaviour and qualities, nor only describes the way we nourish virtue. Instead, morality concerns the questions of how we should behave and the kind of virtue we should nourish. For example, when we are debating whether a murderer should be punished with death penalty, we should not only touch upon the question of “how to execute death penalty”, but, should also consider the question of “should the murderer be condemned with death penalty”, from the moral point of view. Consider another example: the act of lying. We should be concerned with the question of “should we tell lies?”, instead of those “is” questions such as “what is lying” or “strategies for telling lies successfully”. People may say: “humans are selfish”, “the world is not fair”. However, we still have to ask: “should humans be selfish?” and “should the world be unfair?”. The answers to these questions can shape our behaviour, culture as well as social institutions.

Ethics (or philosophy of morality) is the study of moral concepts and the reasoning of moral principles and theories, in a specialized and systematic approach. With the help of rationality, ethics explores our behaviour and ways of living, including questions such as what is the right action, what is good life, what are the virtuous qualities of human being, so on and so forth. Applied ethics as a branch of ethics attempts to deal with real-life disputes such as abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, freedom of speech, etc.

Ethics assumes that humans may make better or worse decisions with the help of rationality. Morality neither concerns only our personal preferences, nor only with how culture teaches us to act and behave.

“Ethics” and “Morality”: what are their differences?

Theorists of ethic tend to use the two concepts “ethics” and “morality” interchangeably. In other words, in some sense, they have the same meaning. This learning resource follows this understanding.

Even so, the branches of applied ethics are normally named with “ethics”, such as “media ethics”, “environmental ethics”, “business ethics”, “medical ethics”, etc.

**Worksheet (1)** ：**Is this a moral problem?**

Can you distinguish which is a moral question, which is not?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Is it a moral problem? |
| 1. Is this bottle of beer cheap? |  yes  no |
| 1. Should we drive after drinking beer? |  yes  no |
| 1. Isn’t the world not fair? |  yes  no |
| 1. Should we let the poor go hungry? |  yes  no |
| 1. Shouldn’t we stop using plastic bags? |  yes  no |
| 1. What causes global warming? |  yes  no |
| 1. I am not sure if my family likes this food or not. Should I buy it? |  yes  no |
| 1. Can I conceal the truth, so as not to make her feel sad? |  yes  no |

（suggested answer）

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Is it a moral problem? |
| 1. Is this bottle of beer cheap? |  yes 🗹 no |
| 1. Should we drive after drinking beer? | 🗹 yes  no |
| 1. Isn’t the world not fair? |  yes 🗹 no |
| 1. Should we let the poor go hungry? | 🗹 yes  no |
| 1. Shouldn’t we stop using plastic bags? | 🗹 yes  no |
| 1. What causes global warming? |  yes 🗹 no |
| 1. I am not sure if my family likes this food or not. Should I buy it? |  yes 🗹 no [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| 1. Can I conceal the truth, so as not to make her feel sad? | 🗹 yes  no [[2]](#footnote-2) |

**Case Study (1) ：Modern Slaves**

In the modern world, some people are still being treated as slaves. The following story is told by Seba, a young girl from République du Mali, a West African country.

I was raised by my grandmother in Mali. When I was still a little girl, a woman my family knew came and asked if she could take me to Paris to care for her children. She told my grandmother that she would put me in school and that I would learn French. But when I arrived at Paris, I was not sent to school, I had to work every day. In their house, I did all the work; I cleaned the house, cooked the meals, cared for the children, and washed and fed the baby. Every day I started working before 7 A.M. and finished about 11 P.M.; I never had a day off. My mistress did nothing; she slept late and then watched television or went out.

One day I told her that I wanted to go to school. She replied that she had not brought me to France to go to school but to take care of her children. I was so tired and run-down. I had problems with my teeth; sometimes my cheek would swell and the pain would be terrible. Sometimes I had stomachaches, but when I was ill I still had to work. Sometimes when I was in pain I would cry, but my mistress would shout at me.

She often beat me. She would slap me all the time. She beat me with the broom, with kitchen tools, or whipped me with an electric cable. Sometimes I would bleed; I still have marks on my body.

Once in 1992 I was late going to get the children from school; my mistress and her husband were furious with me and beat and then threw me out on the street. I had nowhere to go; I didn't understand anything, and I wandered on the streets. After some time her husband found me and took me back to their house. There they stripped me naked, tied my hands behind my back, and began to whip me with a wire attached to a broomstick. I was bleeding a lot and screaming, but they continued to beat me. Then they humiliated my body, afterward, I lost consciousness.

Source: Bales, Kevin. *Disposable People*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Questions for discussion:

1. Should the couple treat Seba in this way? Why?
2. What are the most basic moral principles should humans uphold as they live together? Name three.
3. Which moral principles regarding humans living together did the couple violate?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

In this case, the couple violated the following moral principles:

* Respect the freedom of others
* Not to harm others
* Not to inflict unnecessary pain on others (Some pains are necessary, when, for example, doctor operates on patient. However, what is to be counted as necessary pain should not be decided arbitrarily by the person who inflicts pain on others. Instead, it should be justified by reason. Also, the sufferer may have a say.)
* Not to exploit others, such as, taking away one’s education right, reasonable payment on work, cheating. (Using the ideas of Kant: we should not treat people as a means, we should treat people as an end.
* To be discussed in greater details in the section “Deontology”.)

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (2) ：Moral Principles and Moral Rules**

When encountering choices concerning our behaviour and ways of life, we have our personal preferences and principles. However, people usually differ in these preferences and principles. In order to get along with each other, and to deal with differences and to avoid conflicts, it is necessary to work out some common norms. These norms can be divided into two categories: moral rules and moral principles.

Moral rules guide and regulate our behaviour. The starting point to understand moral rules is behavioural norms. Every society has its norms to regulate behaviour. These norms expect people to behave in certain ways in particular situations. Society regulates its members through custom, religion and law.

Based on tradition, custom regulates the outer forms of our behaviour. For example, we greet each other when we meet. The ways to greet, however, differ from culture to culture. It can be nodding, waving hands, shaking hands, or kissing. If we do not act according to these norms, we may be regarded as impolite, or that ominous consequences may happen as a result.

Religious rules are based on the revelation of God(s) or follows religious tradition and authority. Religious norms are only applicable to believers. Prominent examples of religious norms are: Buddhist vegetarianism, Islamic Halal, Islamic ṣalāh, or weekly worship of Christians.

Law regulates the behaviour of civilians. It maintains social order, solves conflicts and promotes the wellbeing of the community. Law, custom and religion have different ways of handling for violations of norms, for instance, by public opinions and conscience in the areas of custom and religion while by force and power in the legal domain.

When certain social norms are perceived as right or wrong intuitionally, they are taken as moral norms. For example, in Hong Kong, people believe that it is wrong to stay nude in local beaches, or it is wrong to break promise for no justified reason. Married people should give red packets to the unmarried during the Chinese New Year Festival, etc. When someone asks us why we would follow these norms, we may say it is because of tradition and authority, or even say it is because everyone is doing so.

Moral principles are principles based on reason and rationality. They guide us on what we should do, what qualities we should nourish, and what kind of lives we should look for. Moreover, the application of moral principles should not be limited to a specific society or culture. Instead, they can be **applied universally. For example, when we say “we must keep our promise”, it is not because of Hong Kong tradition, nor because of the punishment by law. Instead, it is because we know that if we want the society to function smoothly, we have to comply with this norm. Thus, “keep the promise” is a moral principle. Other important examples of moral principles are: “not to harm others”, “not to deceive others”, “do whatever to bring happiness to others”, “only act according to principles that can be applied universally”, etc.**

**However, we have to note that although moral rules are applied to specific culture, religion, or society, the decision of whether to comply with these norms or not” is related to the moral principle of “respect others”. For example, what to wear in a specific occasion is an issue of moral rule. However, attending a wedding in pajamas will be considered violating the moral principle of “respect others”.**

**Modern society treasures critical thinking but not blind obedience of authority. Moreover, moral rules are applicable only to specific cultures, religions and societies. In a multi-cultural world with frequent interactions, some moral rules may become obsolete and need to be amended or even discarded. Moral principles can help us to judge if certain moral rules are reasonable and give us supports in our amendment of moral rules in new situations.**

**Worksheet (2)** ：**Can this be applied universally**?

Moral principles are applied universally, while moral rules are not. Can you tell which of the following questions are moral rules and which are moral principles? (note：violating moral rules may touch upon the moral principle “respect others”, however, we can set aside this problem in this exercise.）

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Moral principle／Moral rules／Both |
| 1. Do not lie |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Do not interrupt others’ speech |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Help the needy |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Obey God(s) |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Be a vegetarian |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Do not hurt others |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Obey the traffic rules |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Be fair |  Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |

（suggested answer）

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Questions | Moral principle／Moral rules／Both |
| 1. No lying |  Moral principle   Moral rules  🗹 Both |
| 1. Do not interrupt others’ speech |  Moral principle  🗹 Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Help the needy | 🗹 Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Obey God(s) |  Moral principle   Moral rules  🗹 Both |
| 1. Be a vegetarian |  Moral principle  🗹 Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Do not hurt others | 🗹 Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Obey the traffic rules |  Moral principle  🗹 Moral rules   Both |
| 1. Be fair | 🗹 Moral principle   Moral rules   Both |

**Case Study (2) ：The Ring of Gyges**

Once, Glaucon was debating with Socrates on why human being act morally. Glaucon told the following story:

“Gyges was a poor but honest shepherd. One day when he was grazing, a violent storm and earthquake slammed into his way. The earth cracked. Gyges went into the crack and found a corpse with a golden ring. He grabbed the ring and left. Later, he found out that whoever put on this golden ring would gain the power of invisibility. With the help of the ring, Gyges seduced the queen, killed the king, and finally he took over the throne.

Suppose now that there were two such magic rings, and the just put on one of them and the unjust the other. No man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice. No man would keep his hands off what was not his own when he could safely take what he liked out of the market, or go into houses and lie with any one at his pleasure, or kill or release from prison whom he would, and in all respects be like a god among men.

Then the actions of the just would be as the actions of the unjust; they would both come at last to the same point. And this we may truly affirm to be a great proof that a man is just, not willingly or because he thinks that justice is any good to him individually, but of necessity, for wherever anyone thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust. For all men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable to the individual than justice.

Glaucon believes that people do acts of justice just because they are afraid of punishments. Socrates refutes by saying that humans acts justly because they love justice and the consequences brought forth by doing so. He points out that those who use the magic ring to gain benefits for themselves are but slaves of their desires. Those who do not use the magic ring for satisfying their desires but rather control themselves with reasons can gain a more permanent happiness.

Source: Plato, *The Republic*

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you think Glaucon’s view is realistic?
2. Morality concerns the question of “ought”. Whose view is moral, Socrates’ or Glaucon’s?
3. Do you think Socrates’ view is reasonable? Why?

Socrates did not teach in a formal way. He loved inviting people to think by asking them questions which he might not have answers. He often chatted with people in the market or on the street. He would start with topics of everyday life, asking people to explore deeper and step out from their usual ways of thinking. He did so in the hope of helping people to deepen their self-understanding. Socrates did not author any book. His philosophy was recorded in the form of dialogues, recorded by his students Plato and Xenophanes.

Reference:

Christopher Phillips, Socrates Café: A Fresh Taste of Philosophy (James Clarke & Co., 2002), 17.

Thomas C. Brickhouse, Nicholas D. Smith, Plato's Socrates (Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.



Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*，oil paint，129.5 cm × 196.2 cm，1787，Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The man with his finger pointing upward is Socrates. It is believed that Socrates was condemned to death with the crime “impiety” and “corruption of the young”. Socrates accepted the charges. The painting illustrates the moment he was going to drink the poison, without any fear.

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (3) ：The origins and foundations of morality**

Where do our moral norms come from? Why should we comply with them? Below are three theories trying to explain the origin and foundation of morality.

The Divine Command Theory

Theistic religions such as Christianity and Islam claim that the standards of right and wrong, good and bad come from God. In other words, God’s decree is the origin and foundation of morality. The “Ten Commandments”in *the* *Bible* is a prominent example. The commandments such as “You shall not steal”, “You shall not murder”, “Honor your parents” are said to be promulgated by God through Moses. Generally, the Divine Command Theory is accepted by the believers.

A major difficulty of the Divine Command Theory is that, by establishing morality on the will of God, it makes morality arbitrary. Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, once critically questioned that “Is what is moral commanded by god(s) because it is moral, or is it moral because it is commanded by god(s)?” Plato doubted that if it is the former case, our moral standards would change when God changes His mind. Our moral standards will then lose its objectivity. Lying, betraying, harming others could become morally right only if God will them to be so.

The Natural Law Theory

According to the Natural Law Theory, we can discover moral standards from nature itself, especially from human nature. Aristotle, student of Plato, believed an act is right or wrong depends on whether the action fits or violates human nature. Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas furthered that the Law of Nature is outside the revelation of God. Human beings could reach this Law through reason only. Aristotle, Aquinas, together with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that reason is the most treasurable human quality. Reason controls desires and engenders moral acts, and thus helps humans be distinct from other creatures.

Other cultures also have theories similar to the western Natural Law Theory. For example, ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius believed that moral behaviour originated from the human moral heart. He explained:

“If men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favor of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing. From this case, we may perceive that the feeling of commiseration is essential to man, that the feeling of shame and dislike is essential to man, that the feeling of modesty and complaisance is essential to man, and that the feeling of approving and disapproving is essential to man.”

Mencius, *Gong Sun Chou* I

According to Mencius, the feeling of commiseration is from human nature, it can be conceived as the natural law of morality that can be found in human nature.

The idea of *karma* in Buddhist tradition is another example of natural law theory. Human behaviour creates *karma*, which is a special kind of casual relationship. Good acts tend to create pleasant results, and evil acts tend to create unpleasant results. If humans want to achieve happiness and to stay off from suffering, they have to act according to the Law of Karma.

The Natural Law Theory

This theory has influenced deeply the modern theory of human rights. The preface of the *United States Declaration of Independence* thus said:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Human rights are inborn, which is part of the human nature created by the Creator. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* also says:

“Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

It claims that dignity and human rights are shared by every human being.

Critics of Natural Law Theory, however, argue that what the content of nature is not self-evident. Cultures differ in the understanding of the content of human nature. For example, some cultures may conceive patriarchy as part of the law of nature, leaving the idea of “equality of all” aside.

**The Social Contract Theory**

According to Social Contract Theory, morality arises too from human nature. However, the social contract theories regard human nature as self-interested. According to the 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, it is human nature to pursue one’s own interests. Long ago in the natural environment, humans competed with each other for their own interests, in the state of “all against all”. In this natural state, there were only wars, there could be no room for technology, trade, knowledge, or culture. Life was without much hope. Human later understood that in order to achieve peace, they have to come up with certain social contract. The goal of social contract was to achieve common peace and wellbeing by setting up common norms for the society. Thus, by relinquishing certain individual liberty and interest, the common wellbeing could be protected. People then agreed to elect and give power to a ruler. The empowered ruler was to enforce the social contract, making sure that everyone complies with it. The rules of the social contract then became moral norms.

Social Contract Theory connects morality with self-interests and sees moral institutions as the result of rational calculating. Critics argue that this kind of instrumental understanding of morality **fails to make sense of some profound moral relationships of human beings**, such as caring, love, and compassion.

**Case Study (3) ：Nude Beach**

In Europe, there are beaches limited to pro-nudists. They are commonly known as “nude beach”, which means that people swimming in that beach cannot wear any clothing. Below are the opinions of pro-nudists and anti-nudists on the proposal of a nude beach in Hong Kong.

|  |
| --- |
| Pro-nudists think that:  Nudity can promote harmony between oneself and the nature. While getting rid of all artificial things, one can interact with others in the most primitive way, breaking away from the bondage of conventional codes. This can enhance the understanding of all men being equal. Therefore, collective nudity can prompt our respect for ourselves, respect for others and respect for the environment. Moreover, the anti-nudist can choose not to go to the beach. |

|  |
| --- |
| Anti-nudists think that:  Our Chinese culture emphasizes the sense of “shame”. Humans are different from animals. Nudity in the public is against the heavenly way and human morality, it could also invoke lustful feeling. Apart from cultural and ethical stance, nudity is embarrassing, whether it is looking at the naked body of oneself or others. We were taught to put on clothes since young. And everybody shares the same feeling. I think the government should at least consult the citizens, seek consent from the public, amend the laws, before permitting a nude beach. |

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the opinions of pro-nudists and anti-nudists towards nude beach?

2. What kind of fundamental beliefs and assumptions are their values based on?

3. Do you think there is a difference in moral position and justification towards “nude beach” between the Western people and the Chinese? Why?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

* Both pro and anti-nudity include some ideas of the Natural Law Theory (pro: nudity is the nature of human; anti: nudity is against the heavenly way)
* Anti-nudists ground their reasons on Social Contract Theory (seeking public opinion and approval)
* Pro-nudists, in some weaker sense, also argue in the name of Social Contract Theory (“the anti-nudist can choose not to go to the beach”, which means nude beach can be a certain kind of common contract and agreement.)

Other references for writing this session:

MacKinnon, Fiala, and Fiala, Andrew. “Ethics and Ethical Reasoning,” Ethics: Theory and contemporary issues (8th ed.) Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017. 1-19pp.

Panza, Christopher., Adam. Potthast. “Approaching Ethics: What Is It and Why Should You Care?,” Ethics for Dummies. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010. 9-18pp.

Pojman, Louis P. “What Is Ethics?,” Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong. 7th ed. Cengage Advantage Books. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2012. 1-13pp.

1. Although the word “should” is used, the question concerns personal preference, which does not have universal implication. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Concealing the truth is related to lying, and honesty and lying are issues that transcend personal preference and culture. Thus, concealing the truth is a moral question. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)