

View Of Good And Evil

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The category of good and evil concerns how people identify what ought to be done, what ought to be avoided, and what kind of person they should become. Religious traditions frequently address these questions through commandments, stories, virtues, rituals, communities, and ideas about human purpose. Yet religion is not reducible to a list of “dos and don’ts.” It also interprets suffering, responsibility, repentance, forgiveness, justice, and the possibility that people can change. Studying good and evil across religions requires care because the same tradition may contain different schools of interpretation, and a practice that appears simple from the outside may have a complex theological meaning. My Christian perspective shapes the way I understand moral responsibility, especially the obligation to care for people in need. At the same time, comparison with other traditions helps me distinguish shared ethical concerns from beliefs and practices that are specific to one community (Ricoeur, 1967; *The Holy Bible*; *The Qur’an*, 2004; *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008; Keown, 2005).

What Is Compelling?

The category is compelling because moral judgment affects ordinary life. People decide whether to tell the truth, keep a promise, forgive an offense, share resources, resist injustice, or remain silent. Religion gives these choices a larger frame by connecting them to God, ultimate reality, karma, liberation, covenant, community, or the formation of character. Good and evil are therefore not merely abstract ideas. They shape family life, law, charity, worship, politics, and personal conscience. The category is also difficult because people can sincerely disagree about what goodness requires. A rule may appear clear, yet its application can involve competing duties. Telling the truth is valuable, but disclosing information may endanger someone. Obedience can sustain community, but it can also protect unjust authority. The study of religion becomes meaningful when it examines these tensions rather than assuming that moral questions always have effortless answers (Ricoeur, 1967; Martin & Olson, 2015).

Good, Evil, and Human Agency

Most religious systems treat human beings as morally responsible in some form, but they explain agency differently. Christianity teaches that people can choose, sin, repent, receive grace, and grow in virtue. Islam emphasizes accountability before God, intention, justice, mercy, and conduct consistent with revelation. Hindu traditions discuss *dharma*, karma, duty, devotion, knowledge, and liberation in diverse ways. Buddhism analyzes suffering, craving, intention, compassion, and the ethical consequences of action without grounding morality in a creator deity. Judaism connects ethical life with covenant, law, justice, memory, and communal responsibility. These differences should not

be erased. Nevertheless, each tradition asks how intention, action, habit, and community shape the moral life (*The Holy Bible*; *The Qur'an*, 2004; *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008; Keown, 2005).

The Problem of Evil

The phrase “good and evil” also raises the problem of suffering. If God is good and powerful, why do innocent people suffer? Christian thinkers have offered different responses. Augustine argued that evil is not an independent substance created by God but a privation or corruption of good. Human freedom helps explain moral evil, though it does not answer every question about disease, disaster, or animal suffering. Other theologians emphasize that faith does not provide a complete intellectual explanation but calls believers to compassion and resistance against suffering. The Book of Job warns against assuming that suffering is always a punishment for personal wrongdoing. A responsible religious view should therefore avoid blaming victims or treating prosperity as proof of virtue (Augustine, 1998; Ricoeur, 1967; *The Holy Bible*).

Virtue, Rules, and Consequences

Moral traditions evaluate action through several approaches. Rules identify duties and prohibitions. Virtue ethics focuses on character traits such as courage, honesty, generosity, patience, and justice. Consequential reasoning asks how actions affect others. Religious ethics often combines these approaches. A prohibition against theft protects property and trust, but the virtue of generosity also asks how wealth should be used. A rule against lying establishes a duty, while wisdom is needed in situations involving danger or confidentiality. Ritual disciplines can cultivate habits, and narratives can show how moral choices unfold. This combination makes religious ethics more than obedience to isolated commands (Martin & Olson, 2015; Keown, 2005).

Importance of Studying Religion

Studying religion helps people understand how communities interpret life, death, suffering, family, authority, nature, and moral obligation. It also helps explain literature, art, law, history, and political movements. Religious literacy is especially important in diverse societies because stereotypes can create hostility. Knowing that a tradition contains internal debate prevents the observer from treating all followers as identical. Study should not be confused with uncritical acceptance. A person can examine a belief respectfully while questioning its interpretation or social consequences. Religious traditions have inspired charity, abolition, nonviolence, and human-rights movements, but religious language has also been used to justify conquest, discrimination, and coercion. Critical study asks how texts and institutions are interpreted and who benefits from those interpretations (Ricoeur, 1967).

The Significance of Good and Evil Across Religions

Good and evil are significant across religions because they connect belief with conduct. Christianity's command to love God and neighbor places moral relationship at the center of faith. Jesus' teachings on mercy, reconciliation, and care for vulnerable people challenge believers to go beyond formal compliance. Islam emphasizes justice, charity, care for relatives and neighbors, and accountability for intention as well as action. The Qur'an commands justice even when judgment conflicts with personal interest. Jewish ethics includes obligations toward the stranger, the poor, the widow, and the orphan, grounded partly in collective memory of oppression. Buddhist ethics encourages non-harm, compassion, generosity, and awareness of how craving and hatred create suffering. Hindu traditions offer multiple accounts of duty and virtue, often asking how action can be performed responsibly without selfish attachment (*The Holy Bible*; *The Qur'an*, 2004; *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008; Keown, 2005).

Christian Understanding of Good and Evil

From my Christian perspective, goodness is not simply social approval. It is connected with love of God and neighbor, justice, humility, mercy, truth, and faithfulness. Evil includes deliberate harm, exploitation, indifference, and the misuse of power. Christianity also recognizes that moral failure is not limited to obvious crimes. Pride, greed, resentment, and neglect can damage relationships even when they remain hidden. The tradition's emphasis on repentance is important because it does not define a person only by the worst action. Repentance involves acknowledgment, changed conduct, restitution where possible, and acceptance of grace. Forgiveness should not be confused with excusing abuse or denying justice. A victim is not morally required to remain in danger, and institutions should be held accountable (*The Holy Bible*; Augustine, 1998).

Islamic Perspectives

Islamic ethics connects goodness with submission to God, justice, mercy, intention, and responsible action. The Qur'an repeatedly links worship with care for others, including charity to people in need. The concepts of lawful and unlawful conduct provide guidance, but Islamic moral reasoning also includes context, intention, public welfare, and different schools of jurisprudence. It is too simple to describe every prohibited practice as "evil" in an identical sense. Dietary rules, for example, help structure religious discipline and identity; they are not necessarily judgments that people outside the tradition are morally corrupt. Muslims also distinguish human error from deliberate wrongdoing and emphasize God's mercy and the possibility of repentance (*The Qur'an*, 2004).

Hindu Traditions

Hindu traditions are diverse and should not be summarized as one uniform system. The concept of *dharma* can refer to moral order, duty, law, and conduct appropriate to a person's situation. Karma connects intentional action with consequences, while paths of devotion, knowledge, and disciplined action offer different approaches to liberation. The *Bhagavad Gita* explores a moral crisis in which Arjuna must confront conflict between family attachment and duty. Its discussion shows that moral life can involve tragic choices rather than simple labels. Respect for cows has important religious and cultural meanings in many Hindu communities, but practices and interpretations vary. The ethical significance lies in broader ideas about life, non-harm, purity, duty, and devotion rather than in a stereotype about one food (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008).

Buddhist Perspectives

Buddhist ethics focuses on reducing suffering by transforming intention, perception, and action. The Five Precepts encourage restraint from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants that cloud awareness. These are training principles rather than commandments from a creator God. Actions shaped by greed, hatred, and delusion are considered unwholesome because they generate suffering, while compassion, generosity, and wisdom support liberation. Buddhism therefore treats good and evil partly as patterns of mind and behavior. Moral development requires attention to how actions arise, not merely whether a person outwardly follows a rule (Keown, 2005).

Judaism and Covenant Responsibility

Jewish ethics is grounded in covenant, Torah, interpretation, communal memory, and the pursuit of justice. Commandments structure worship and daily life, while prophetic traditions criticize exploitation, corruption, and neglect of vulnerable people. Debate is a central feature of Jewish interpretation; moral reasoning develops through engagement with texts and earlier authorities. Dietary laws, Sabbath observance, charity, and legal responsibility have meanings within this covenantal framework. They should not be evaluated merely as arbitrary restrictions. Jewish moral thought also stresses repair of the world, responsibility for others, and the importance of action (*The Holy Bible*).

Noticing the View of Good and Evil in My Life

As a Christian, I have especially noticed the moral danger of ignoring people who need help. The parable of the Good Samaritan challenges the idea that responsibility extends only to members of one's own group. Assistance may involve money, time, listening, advocacy, or practical care. Yet helping should respect the other person's dignity. It is not good to assume that I understand

someone's needs without listening, nor should charity become a way of displaying moral superiority. Sometimes the better action is to support systems that allow people to exercise their own agency. This reflection has changed my understanding of goodness from occasional generosity to sustained responsibility (*The Holy Bible*; Martin & Olson, 2015).

Food Practices and Moral Meaning

The original reflection compared Catholic abstinence from meat during Lent, Muslim avoidance of pork, and Hindu respect for cows. These examples remain useful when described accurately. Catholics in many jurisdictions abstain from meat on specified days, particularly Ash Wednesday and Fridays during Lent, as a discipline of penance; rules vary by age, location, and health. Muslims avoid pork because it is prohibited in Islamic law, but eating it accidentally or under necessity is treated differently from deliberate violation. Many Hindus avoid beef and regard cows with special respect, yet Hindu communities are not uniform. These practices shape religious identity, but they should not be used to rank traditions or reduce morality to diet. Their meaning comes from obedience, discipline, community, memory, and reverence (*The Holy Bible*; *The Qur'an*, 2004; *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008).

Shared Ethical Concerns and Real Differences

Religions share concerns about harm, honesty, generosity, and self-control, but apparent similarities may rest on different foundations. Christian love, Buddhist compassion, Islamic charity, Jewish justice, and Hindu *ahimsa* can encourage care while emerging from distinct theological and philosophical systems. Comparison should neither exaggerate conflict nor claim that all religions teach exactly the same thing. Genuine dialogue begins when differences are understood rather than erased. People can cooperate on shared problems such as poverty or violence while retaining different beliefs about God, salvation, revelation, or liberation (*The Holy Bible*; *The Qur'an*, 2004; *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008; Keown, 2005).

When Religion Is Used to Justify Harm

Religious language can be manipulated to defend prejudice, authoritarianism, or violence. A leader may present personal interest as divine command, or a community may label outsiders as evil to avoid examining its own wrongdoing. The category of evil is especially dangerous when applied to whole populations. It can remove empathy and make punishment appear limitless. Religious ethics should therefore include humility, interpretation, accountability, and protection of conscience. Criticism of harmful practice is necessary, but criticism should focus on actions and institutions rather than dehumanizing people (Ricoeur, 1967).

Personal Moral Formation

The study of good and evil matters because moral life is formed through repeated habits. A person does not become honest through one truthful statement or generous through one donation. Communities, families, schools, and religious practices shape what people notice and how they respond. Prayer, fasting, confession, study, service, and worship can cultivate character when they are joined with reflection. They can also become empty performances if they are disconnected from justice and compassion. Personal faith should therefore be evaluated partly by the way it changes relationships and responsibilities (Martin & Olson, 2015; *The Holy Bible*).

Conclusion

The view of good and evil is compelling because it connects religious belief with human action. It helps people examine intention, character, duty, consequences, suffering, and responsibility. Across Christianity, Islam, Hindu traditions, Buddhism, and Judaism, moral guidance takes different forms, yet each tradition asks how people should live and respond to others. My Christian perspective emphasizes love, mercy, justice, repentance, and care for those in need. Comparative study deepens this perspective by showing both shared concerns and genuine differences. The category must be used carefully: labeling whole groups as evil can produce harm, while reducing religion to rules ignores its deeper work of moral formation. Studying good and evil should lead not only to judgment of others but also to honest examination of one's own conduct (Augustine, 1998; Keown, 2005; Martin & Olson, 2015; Ricoeur, 1967; *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2008; *The Holy Bible*; *The Qur'an*, 2004).

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