

Overview of Morality & Ethics

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

What are your first associations with religion? Church? God? Meditation? The unknown? Beauty? Peace? Groups of people in fancy clothing? Whatever it is, notions of right and wrong are bound to appear. In this lesson, you will get an overview of religion in relation to these grand categories of right and wrong, morality, ethics, et cetera. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Source of Value Construction](#)
2. [Traditions of the East and West](#)

1. Source of Value Construction

All religions have value structures and frameworks for guiding adherence. For some people, religion can be a confusing path, whether it's a spiritual journey or not. Regardless of that, religions almost always offer a system of values to help practitioners make decisions about what is right and wrong.

These value judgments are often different from one religion to another. Sometimes there are even differences within a particular religion. Values and perspectives on what's permissible and what's not also tend to change through the course of history.

IN CONTEXT

Think of a religion. Anyone you want. The probability is that the religion you just thought of has had changes in its attitudes and values on the subject of war. Throughout history, religious communities usually evolve with the times and the current context. Ideals also shift because of values' continued reflection by theologians, religious authorities, and the community. This means—for nearly any given religion—values regarding war have changed.



THINK ABOUT IT

Depending on the religion, there are different authoritative structures, references, and figures to lend guidance and support regarding the guidelines for behavior and decision-making about right and wrong.

2. Traditions of the East and West

In the monotheistic religions of the West—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—ideas of right and wrong are generally found in sacred texts. Sometimes these ideas are transmitted in the form of stories that teach **morality**, rules of conduct, and laws.

There are usually religious leaders who work to interpret material for the laypeople. This supports the structure of the belief system. These leaders often work on interpreting the sacred text for a changing cultural context and a changing social climate. As an example, women in the priesthood might come to mind.



DID YOU KNOW

There are many settings where this guidance might be offered: a Christian sermon as part of a religious service, an academic lecture, books, a meeting of Christian clerics or Muslim mujtahids.

If you look into any of the Eastern religions, such as Buddhism or Hinduism, you'll see that tradition plays a much stronger role in guiding and informing the ethical and moral conduct of the adherent. Like with Western traditions, sacred texts are the primary source and religious leaders are responsible for guiding and interpreting tradition.

However, the Eastern religions don't follow one god in the way that the monotheistic religions do. The rules, laws, moral structure, and code of ethics are more generally dispersed throughout the traditions. In some cases, it is dispersed among several different gods and the stories of their lives. It's a much more woven tapestry of moral behavior and **ethics**. The differences between Western and Eastern religions have more to do with form and emphasis.



TERMS TO KNOW

Morality

A code of behavior or conduct generally stemming in whole or in part from divinely inspired religious beliefs.

Ethics

A code of behavior or conduct generally inspired in whole or in part by non-religious, often philosophical, teachings.



SUMMARY

Religion is a **source of value construction**. All religions have values and guidelines for what is right and what is wrong to help the adherent or the practitioner. These values vary from one religion to another, and they are also likely to change in some way through the course of history. While **traditions of the East and West** are similar in that they have these values outlined in sacred texts that are interpreted by religious leaders, there are differences. This is partly due to Eastern religions not being monotheistic.

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