

Overview of "The Problem"

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

The religions of the world address life's big questions. Because these questions are often very broad and general, they are also approached from many angles. The discipline of philosophy, with its concern for these questions, has traditionally been aligned with religion and theology. This lesson looks at some common questions, concerns, how a few of the religions might be inclined to address them, and also how philosophy might serve as support. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Ontology](#)
2. [Suffering](#)
3. [Good and Evil](#)
4. [Ethical and Moral Codes of Conduct](#)

1. Ontology

In the seventh century of the Common Era, Saint John of Damascus is quoted and credited with saying, "philosophy is the handmaiden of theology." This is the idea that faith and reason are not incompatible, but they support each other. When religion is strong and vibrant in a culture, often philosophy lends itself to the tasks at hand. This quote from Saint John of Damascus was at a time when ontology, the study and the science of being, was one of the dominant preoccupations and concerns.

Ontology itself, because of what it is, has the power to reach every corner of existence. You could say that all serious questions about life and death, substance and essence, cause and effect, passive and active forces, et cetera, all reach into the life of every religion, religious topics in one way or another, and the lives of individuals.

2. Suffering

Life is suffering. This is the first Noble Truth of the Buddha. As Buddhism unfolded, it developed a spiritual, philosophical, and psychological doctrine for coming to terms with this fundamental aspect and truth of human

life. Buddhism teaches that suffering is caused by cravings and attachments that are guided by our desires and fears. These desires and fears are a result of ignorance as the way out of suffering.

Buddhism teaches the practitioner how to train his or her mind to see cravings, desires, and everything that takes the form of will, thought, and habit when they arise. It teaches us to accept them and simply let them go without grasping and clinging onto the security that our ignorance tells us they might provide.

The Eightfold Path is a guide for the practitioner to learn self-compassion, compassion for all beings, moral integrity and intention, and day-to-day consciousness about how one communicates with the world. Looking at these issues from a philosophical perspective, the discipline of applied ethics and cognitive behavioral therapy could be seen as direct support for the Buddhist.



A great book that integrates Western psychology and the Eastern religion of Buddhism is called *Going On Being*, by Mark Epstein. Check it out for further research. <https://worldcat.org/title/664233443>

3. Good and Evil

What about the question of evil? Buddhism considers evil to be related to this process of perpetual illusion that guides the unenlightened mind. If evil exists, if evil has a cause, it can be boiled down to suffering and the way suffering is approached, understood, and misunderstood. Western religions, on the other hand, working with philosophy also have a whole academic theological discipline related to it. It's called Theodicy.

Theodicy has to do with trying to reconcile the apparent reality of evil in the world with faith and belief in an all-powerful, all-beneficent creator. How can evil exist if the almighty is good? Why would God let this happen?

Certainly, the monotheistic traditions have stories of the fall of man. Christianity, for instance, tells of how man sinned by disobeying God and was cast out of paradise. There's a story in the Hebrew Bible about how evil came to be in the form of Satan. It began with Lucifer, who disobeyed God's orders and desired autonomy from God. Fatally unaware of his own pride, he was cast out of heaven and thrown down to Earth to suffer with his cohorts.

4. Ethical and Moral Codes of Conduct

Notions of good and bad or ethical and amoral conduct are not only a religiously guided issue. They are also issues that are the ground of civil life. Applied ethics looks at these issues as well. In bioethics, issues such as euthanasia might come up. This looks at the issues surrounding the moral justification for mercy killing. Someone might argue that this practice is itself an evil act. Philosophy and religion certainly could come together or be divided on issues such as this.

Considering questions about death and the afterlife, many religions have elaborate belief structures and practices to help deal with these challenges, such as various conceptions of heaven and hell. With this and the

other religious philosophical questions that you've looked at so far, the traditions include doctrinal codes that assist the believer in moving along in the right direction.

Following the doctrine and tradition, the practical life of the adherent is meant to serve as a way of piecing together responses and solutions to these existential, ontological, and spiritual conundrums. In Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, there is a return to the wheel of suffering until release is achieved through nirvana. All of these are additional doctrinal responses to the questions.



SUMMARY

Saint John of Damascus said that “philosophy is the handmaiden of religion.” This is the idea that life’s big questions are addressed from many different angles, and that philosophy and religion are often very compatible. This was at a time when **ontology** was a dominant concern. You looked at the idea of **suffering** in Buddhism, at **good and evil**, and at **ethical and moral codes of conduct**. The hope is that answers to the questions can be pieced together through the practical life of a believer or a practitioner. There are doctrinal responses, if not answers to these questions, which are built into the traditions naturally with philosophy’s helping hand.

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