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Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective

Glossary

Common words

The following words appear in more than one component. They can have more specific meanings in relation to each religion.

Abortion

The deliberate termination of a pregnancy.

Absolute Pacifism

Belief that there should be no use of violence, including military force, under any circumstances.

Agnosticism

Belief that it is not possible to know whether God exists or not with any certainty.

Apocalyptic warfare (nuclear)

Warfare on such a large scale as to risk destruction of entire populations, civilisations or the human species as a whole; nuclear war can be described as apocalyptic.

Annulment

A way to end a marriage by showing that it was never legally valid.

Anthropic Principle

A term used to refer to the belief that the universe is structured perfectly to ensure that human life developed.

Atheism

Disbelief or lack of belief in God or gods.

Celibacy

Not getting married or having any sexual relations.

Charismatic

Lively, energetic worship and preaching.

Civil partnership

A legal union with rights similar to those of marriage. Originally for couples who were not able to legally marry, for example same sex couples.

Cohabitation

When a couple are living together and having a sexual relationship without being married.

Conditional pacifism

Belief that peace is the best option but that there are times when violence may be necessary when any alternatives would be worse than fighting.

Contraception

Methods to prevent pregnancy taking place from sex, such as the contraceptive pill and condoms, literally 'against conception'.

Conscience

An inner sense of knowing what is right and wrong, which helps guide people to be good in their lives.

Conventional warfare

Warfare using conventional or standard weaponry wielded by clearly defined armed forces using weapons that are not biological, chemical or nuclear.

Conversion

Changing from one religion to another or becoming a member of a religious community having previously had no religion.

Cosmological argument

An attempt to prove the existence of God through the fact that the universe exists.

Design argument

The argument for the existence of God from the observation that the natural world has an order and complexity that must have been designed for a purpose. William Paley explains the argument with the analogy of a watch.

Divorce

The legal ending of a marriage.

Ecstatic (religious experience)

A state of excitement and joy, involving an overwhelming experience of God.

Equality

Being equal in terms of status and rights.

Euthanasia

The deliberate act of ending someone's life to relieve them of suffering. From the Greek word euthanatos, which means 'easy death'.

Exclusivism

In the context of religion, it describes the position that only one set of religious beliefs and practices are, or can be, true and/or right.

Fidelity

Faithfulness to a person, usually refers to a spouse or sexual partner.

Forgiveness

Making a choice to let go of wrongs that have been done, a change in feelings and attitude overcoming negative feelings.

Genetic Manipulation

Using technology to alter DNA or other genetic material in order to create changes in the organism the genes belong to.

Humanism

A way of seeing and reacting to the world through human knowledge; science, logic and reason, and rejecting religion.

Humanity

A collective term for all humans, the human race.

Holy War

War in the name of religion, declared by a religious group or fought for a religious cause.

Inclusivism

Belief that although there is only one true religion, others contain aspects of the truth to a greater or lesser degree and so can help someone to move towards salvation or liberation.

Inter-faith dialogue

The communication, dialogue and cooperation between different faiths and religious groups. The aim is not to remove differences but to develop understanding, to promote tolerance and respect.

Intra-faith communication

Communication, dialogue and cooperation between different groups within the same religion, for example in Christianity between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Just War theory

The theory that it is justified to fight a war under certain criteria; that only certain actions should be taken within and after the war.

Marriage

A legally recognised relationship and commitment between two people, establishing rights and obligations.

Miracles

Strange, extraordinary and positive events, that cannot be explained by natural means.

Mystical

Mysterious and spiritual. Having a sense of awe and looking for the mysteries of faith.

Pacifism

Belief that peace is preferable to violence and war, and that any disputes should be settled by peaceful methods.

Pluralism

Belief that all religious positions and beliefs are of equal value and will eventually lead to salvation/liberation.

Proselytisation

The act of attempting to persuade someone to convert to your faith or religion.

Reconciliation

The restoring of relationships between former enemies, a creation of trust and understanding.

Revelation

Something that may be revealed directly to humans through a religious experience or indirectly through scripture or a religious service.

Secularisation

The process by which religious beliefs, practices and organisations become less important in society, and the influence of religion weakens.

Secularism

The principle that religion should not be part of the government or institutions of the state.

Social injustice

Not everyone getting the same opportunities through unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity.

Social justice

The fair treatment of people in society.

Technological Warfare (Drones and surgical strikes)

War that uses modern technology to achieve military aims, for example the use of drones to carry out unmanned attacks or surgical strikes.

Teleological argument

The argument for the existence of God based on the observation that the world was designed for a purpose. From the Greek telos meaning end or purpose.

Terrorism

The illegal use of violence to cause fear and intimidation for political aims. Usually carried out against civilians rather than military targets.

Visions

Seeing something supernatural, such as an angel or divine being. Like a mystical experience, visions can lead to people having more belief in God or the Divine.

Worship

An act of religious devotion to God or the Divine, showing reverence and adoration. Can take many forms and be done in private or public as part of a group.

Religion specific glossaries

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Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a Christian perspective

Anthropic Principle

A term used to refer to the way that the universe is structured perfectly to ensure that human life developed. First used by F.R. Tennant as evidence for the existence of a designer God.

Argument from the evidence of design and purpose

The argument for the existence of God from the observation that the natural world has an order and complexity that must have been designed for a purpose. William Paley explains the argument with the analogy of a watch.

Conversion

The process of changing something, referring to changing someone from a non-Christian to a Christian.

Judgement

The act of evaluating actions, rewarding good and punishing wrong, Christians believe that God will pass judgement on their lives.

Soul-making

The concept that through making moral decisions a person's soul is able to develop. Term used by John Hick who suggested that evil and suffering allow people to learn and act in a way to please God, so that they can develop into God's likeness.

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Islam Beliefs Teachings and Practices

Allah

The word for God in Arabic, used by Muslims worldwide to refer to the one, unseen God of Islam, who has no partners or images.

Khalifa

Humans as stewards of the earth and carers of the environment. Khalifa also means Caliphs, leaders who came after Muhammad.

Lesser Jihad

The struggle against opponents of Islam, which can be by peaceful or sometimes non-peaceful action, under certain conditions.

Reversion

According to Islam, all people are born as Muslims. When adults of other or non-religious background choose Islam, they are said to revert to being Muslim.

Testing

Muslims feel they are being tested by God. They will be judged by God in the afterlife according to their actions and intentions.

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Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a Jewish perspective

Genesis

The first book in the Bible, telling the story of Creation, Noah and The Patriarchs.

G-d

The supreme being who created the universe and who made a covenant with the Jewish people.

Melchemet Mitzvah

The Jewish belief in 'necessary' or Holy War.

Reshut

A discretionary war started for a justifiable political reason.

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Religion, Philosophy and Ethics in the Modern World from a Buddhist Perspective

Ahimsa

Non-harming or non-violence; one of the Five Precepts that is usually understood to mean not killing or hurting other living things.

Cetana

Can be translated as 'intention', 'motivation' or 'volition'; it is the mental function which moves the mind towards a specific goal or aim.

Dependent origination

Buddhist doctrine of causality – everything in existence is caused by something else. Most sources identify twelve links in the chain of dependent origination and properly understanding the chain is an important contributor to achieving enlightenment.

Detachment

Also called non-attachment; describes the state of overcoming the desire for things, states and specific outcomes.

Five Precepts

Five core moral principles in Buddhist teachings; to refrain from: killing, stealing, excessive sensual pleasure, wrong speaking, taking intoxicants.

Kamma

Deliberate actions/choices driven by intentions that will lead to future consequences.

Noble silence

The choice by the Buddha not to answer certain questions about the nature of reality on the basis that they did not contribute to the dhamma.

Skilful action

An action that produces positive karmic consequences.

Taking the refuges

Focussing on the Buddha, the dhamma (his teachings) and the sangha (the community of Buddhists) in order to overcome suffering.

Ultimate reality

The supreme or final truth about the nature of reality; some Buddhists consider nibbana to be the ultimate reality, other Buddhists believe it is the Buddha-nature and some reject the concept altogether, believing existence is empty of any essential element.

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Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a Hindu perspective

Aum

Sometimes spelt 'Om' or 'Ohm' In its written form this is the symbol that often represents Hinduism. As a sound it has mystical significance, being used in many mantras. It is often said to represent the sound of the universe.

Brahman

The divine power of the universe. Brahman is understood in different ways in different branches of Hinduism but is most usually understood as the ground of being, without form or gender and encompassing all that is.

Brahmanda

'Brahma-anda'. The egg of Brahma. This is the cosmic egg from which the universe emerges in some Hindu accounts. It also gives its name to a scripture, The Brahmanda Purana, which deals with the creation of the universe among other topics.

Dharma

This is a difficult word to translate into English. It can mean duty, righteousness, and religion- or all these things. It generally refers to the way the universe 'ought' to be. Sanatana Dharma (eternal dharma) is sometimes used to refer to Hinduism. Individuals might have different dharma (duties) depending on who they are and the stage they are at in life.

Dharma yudh/yuddha

Warfare that is 'dharmic' or in accordance with dharma. Dharma yudh follows a set of mostly scriptural rules ensuring it is fought for a just cause and that equal fights equal. The land and non-combatants are protected.

Murti puja

Worship of a deity through the use of an image (murti) which may be a picture, a sculpture or occasionally an abstract form such as a Shiva lingam.

Saguna

Having gunas - here meaning attributes or characteristics. It is used to describe one understanding of Brahman. Saguna Brahman has attributes and can be worshipped in the form of a particular deity or Ishvara.

Samsara

Literally 'wandering'. Samsara refers to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth from which Hindus seek liberation.

Svadharmā

This is a branch of dharma that is concerned with the dharma of an individual Hindu, and which may differ from that of another. It depends on a number of factors including the gender, ashrama, and varna of the individual as well as their personal circumstances and conscience.

Trimurti/Tri Murti

'Three Images', the collective term for the Three main gods of Hinduism, who are sometimes taken to represent the creative (Brahma), preserving (Vishnu) and destructive (Shiva) aspects of the Divine.

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