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All axial religions are *formally* the same in locating *the* human problem in our inauthentic self-understanding, or self-*mis*understanding. But whether, or to what extent, they are also *materially* the same in what they take our authentic self-understanding to be remains a question. How is this question to be answered?

If the understandings of existence expressed by two different axial religions are really materially the same, then their necessary presuppositions and implications, moral as well as metaphysical, must also be materially the same. Contrariwise, if the metaphysical or moral presuppositions and implications of the two religions are not only verbally or conceptually, but also really, different materially, then their understandings of existence cannot really be materially the same.

It is clear, then, how the question left open by the formal similarity of axial religions is to be answered. Different religions are to be interpreted so as to disclose their material understandings of human existence; and then the necessary presuppositions and implications of these understandings, metaphysical and moral, are to be explicated and compared so as to determine whether they are really materially different or rather the same. In other words, the procedures for answering this question are, up to a point, exactly the same as those for critically validating the claims of the religions to be true. They are the same, namely, except for the final step of verifying the truth of the necessary presuppositions and implications of the religions, metaphysical and moral, so as thereby to critically validate their own truth in the only way in which it can be validated.

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