

1. What is the inclusive object of one's self-understanding, or understanding of existence? (Otherwise put, what is ultimate reality, in the sense of everything that we are all finally obliged to take account of insofar as we exist humanly at all, whatever other things we may or may not have to take account of in each leading our own individual life?)

2. I am accustomed to answering this question by saying that the inclusive object of one's self-understanding, or understanding of existence, is the whole as inclusive of self and others. I am also inclined to think that this answer is authorized by our experience or self-understanding itself, insofar as we experience ourselves as making a difference not only to ourselves and others but also to the whole including us.

3. But as essential as such an experience may be to theistic religious experience, it is hardly essential to human experience, witness the nontheistic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. For them, the strictly ultimate reality that I call "the whole" makes a difference to us, but is not such that we make any difference to it—whether it be the One or whether it be emptiness.

4. With this (and perhaps other) consideration(s) in mind, it may be worth considering another way of analyzing the inclusive object of self-understanding, or ultimate reality, that does not beg the theistic question as my customary answer evidently does. In this way, one would distinguish between self, others, and the strictly transcendental properties that they and any even conceivable subject necessarily imply.