

What are the data of theological reflection?

The data of theological reflection are all the thinking and speaking (or thinking, saying, and doing) about the meaning of ultimate reality for us whose claims to validity theological reflection has the task of critically validating. As such, these data comprise not only all religion, past and present, but also all of every other form of culture, past and present, which involves at least implicitly thinking and speaking about the meaning of ultimate reality for us. Thus the data of theological reflection are quite simply all that human beings have ever thought, said, or done, secular as well as religious.

This is true of theological reflection in all three senses of the words—metaphysical and philosophical as well as generic. It is true in the generic sense because it is true of the specific theological reflection anticipated by any specific religion. But it is just as true for both philosophical and metaphysical theological reflection, both of which critically reflect, in their different ways, on everything that human beings have thought, said, or done through all the forms of culture. Equally true of theological reflection in all senses of the words is that religion, past and present, provides its *privileged* data. This religion can do because its distinctiveness as a form of culture lies in making explicit the meaning of ultimate reality for us that all of the other primary forms of culture—the so-called secular ones—only imply.

But if religion for this reason properly provides the privileged data for theological reflection in all senses of the words, some specific religion provides, as it were, the *twice-privileged* data for the specific theological reflection anticipated by it, and thus for theological reflection in the generic sense. Of course, since there cannot be any privileged data with respect to *truth*, the data provided by religion generally as well as by any specific religion are privileged only with respect to determining the *truth-claims* that theological reflection is required to critically validate.

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