

Is philosophy "hot" (religious) or "cold" (contemplative)?

I should answer unhesitatingly that philosophy, being an activity on the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory, is not "hot," but "cold," not religious, but contemplative, or, as I would prefer to say, reflective. So, if D. Z. Phillips is right, I am insofar in agreement not only with him but also with Wittgenstein, for whom it is important that doing philosophy not be confused with, but distinguished from, being religious.

But does this mean, then, that philosophy has only one purely analytic, "descriptivist" function, as distinct from another properly existential, "prescriptivist" function—as Phillips at least appears to infer? Mulhall seems to me to argue convincingly that, insofar as philosophy of religion distinguishes, as it must, between "superstition," on the one hand, and "a more genuine religious attitude," on the other, it is inevitably functioning prescriptively, not merely descriptively. But I see nothing in allowing this that would warrant supposing that philosophy must therefore be "hot," rather than "cold"—whether or not Mulhall would agree with Phillips in supposing this.

Philosophy has an existential as well as an analytic function with respect to all answers to the existential question, expressed or implied, and religious and theological as well as philosophical. But because, or insofar as, it performs this function, not on the primary level of self-understanding and life-praxis, but on the secondary level of critical reflection and proper theory, philosophy itself is not religious, but rather reflective.

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