



Styles of Thought: Interpretation, Inquiry, and Imagination

David Weissman

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Differentiates inquiry from interpretation in order to secure a foundation for truth.

Every man and woman is located in two ways. One is stolidly physical: each human body has a unique address and trajectory. The other comes with beliefs that locate us by answering a salvo of questions: Who, what, and where am I? What are my relations to other people and things? Answers come with either of two emphases. Beliefs critical to practical life and science require that we engage familiar things or find our way in strange cities and streets. Such beliefs supply meaning and security. Ascribing significance to myself or my family, religion, or state, I tell a story that locates me within a world of purpose and value. Neighbors feel and valorize their lives as I do, so our story spreads to dominate a people or an era. One procedure—inquiry—favors reality testing and truth. The other—interpretation—uses meaning to appease vulnerability and glorify believers. Beliefs of these two kinds are sometimes joined, but they are often opposed and mutually hostile. Both philosophy and culture at large confuse these ways of thinking. Styles of Thought distinguishes and clarifies them.

David Weissman is Professor of Philosophy at City College of New York and the author of many books, including Lost Souls: The Philosophic Origins of a Cultural Dilemma and The Cage: Must, Should, and Ought from Is, both also published by SUNY Press.



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