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Theology, Crisis and Knowledge-Constitutive Interests, or Towards a Social Theoretical Interpretation of Theological Knowledge

The author provides a social theoretical interpretation of the theological crisis marked by the emergence of the theologies of liberation from the point of view of the theory of knowledge of the early Habermas as a tension between the practical interest of the historical-hermeneutic sciences and the emancipatory interest of the critically oriented sciences. Modern theologies have understood themselves within the limits of the historical-hermeneutic sciences to the extent that they have established theological knowledge through the interpretation of the meaning of transcendence. The theologies of liberation are not satisfied with the practical cognitive interest of the historical-hermeneutic sciences. Rather, they overcome the practical cognitive interest through an emancipatory cognitive interest that interlocks knowledge and interest. The theologies of liberation generate a theological knowledge that theoretically aims to grasp the invariance that exists between God-as-limit and the socio-historical conditions of misery, and praxeologically aims to overcome this invariance in the interest of liberation.

Key words: *crisis . critically oriented sciences · finitude · historical-hermeneutic sciences · interpretation . knowledge-constitutive interests · liberation · limit · social theory · theology · transcendence*

L'auteur propose une interprétation théorico-sociale de la crise de la théologie exprimée par l'émergence des théologies de la libération. Il se base sur la théorie de la connaissance telle qu'elle apparaît dans les premiers travaux de Habermas: propre aux sciences historico-herméneutiques et l'intérêt émancipateur poursuivi par les sciences critiques. Les théologies modernes ne se sont situées que dans une perspective herméneutique dans la mesure où elles ont élaboré la connaissance théologique sur l'interprétation de la signification de la transcendance. Les théologies de la libération, quant à elles, ne se satisfont pas de ce seul intérêt cognitif et pratique. Elles tentent, au contraire, de le dépasser dans une perspective cognitive émancipatrice qui mêle connaissance et intérêt. Les théologies de la libération produisent ainsi une connaissance qui vise théoriquement à saisir l'invariance qui existe entre Dieu-comme-limite et les conditions socio-historiques de la pauvreté. Praxéologiquement, elles cherchent à surmonter cette invariance dans une perspective de libération.

Mots-clés: *crise · finitude · intérêts de connaissance · interprétation · libération · limite · sciences critiques · sciences historico-herméneutiques · théologie · théorie sociale · transcendance*

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The problem of finitude is the horizon of modern theology. The theory of knowledge understands this horizon as the state of continuous interrogation regarding the ultimate foundations of theological knowledge. The theory of knowledge, in other words, grasps the problem of finitude as a problem of theology as *crisis* (Husserl, 1976: 7). It has been argued, moreover, that the level of a science is determined by its ability to generate and work through crises (Heidegger, 1986: 33). Yet the dissimulation of the theological crisis marked by the eruption of the Latin American theologies of liberation suggests that modern theology has failed to come to terms with itself as crisis, that it has failed to come to terms with the movement of the problem of knowledge. We propose here to rethink the theological crisis that was the emergence of the theologies of liberation from a social theoretical point of view. To rethink this theological crisis is to delve into the fundamental problems of knowledge, and it is to grapple with the trajectory of modern theology.

However, since an investigation into the conditions of crisis generates a problem of categorization, we will also need to develop a new way of understanding the trajectory of modern theology. The early Jürgen Habermas's idea of knowledge-constitutive interests provides us with a scheme for categorizing theology which is more consistent with the demands of the conditions of crisis. The idea of knowledge-constitutive interests allows us to reconceive the theologies of liberation as the most radical theological crisis of modern theology, grasping it as a tension between the practical interest of the historical-hermeneutical sciences and the emancipatory interest of the critically oriented sciences. But, before turning to Habermas, let us first orient ourselves by unraveling the horizon of modern theology—the problem of finitude—as a problem of theology as crisis.

The Problem of Finitude as a Problem of Crisis

Prior to the 19th century the finite was positively conceived in relation to the infinite, such that the limits of knowledge were also positively determined without circularity and redoubling (Foucault, 1966: 327–328). Philosophy and theology, and, later the science of nature presupposed and interlocked in this traditional onto-theological world-view. Philosophy and theology intersected at that point where metaphysics and natural theology interlocked as the ontological and/or cosmological arguments, and, as Deism, mediated the sciences of nature. Theology's point of departure and fundamental concepts were predetermined as a moment of this traditional onto-theological world-view. Finitude was not yet a problem for theology; it was simply the lack of the infinite as a limited positivity. Theological differences arose over ways of understanding the finite as a moment of the infinite.

However, there came a time when it was no longer legitimate to think of theology from the point of view of the infinite; no longer was theology situated inside the infinite. Rather, now finite theological knowledge was taken as point of departure; now theology, in its radical finitude, had to think its limit. The infinite was now that limit. The infinite, God, as an

onto-theological positivity had become the infinite-as-limit, God-as-limit. If the *locus classicus* of this inversion was Immanuel Kant's so-called "Copernican Revolution" in metaphysics (Kant, 1950: Bxvii), the first critique of the traditional onto-theological world-view had been marshaled by theology approximately 200 years before Kant. The leaders of the Reformation grounded themselves in a return to Augustinian Neo-Platonism. After the voluntaristic decoupling of theology and philosophy and the nominalistic critique of universals associated with John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, respectively, this return had but one objective: the annihilation of the Scholastic analogy of being. In the place of the analogy of being, the Reformers posited a radical incommensurability between God and the world.

Grounded in the transcendentality of the *esse reale*, Scholasticism had developed a theology that aimed to express the being of things *sub ratione deitatis*, as a positive moment of the *Ens realissimum*. And it had grasped transcendence as a continuity; that is, the *Ens realissimum* transcended the world in and through that continuous region of being. Transcendence thus meant that the finite being of the world was the analog of the infinite being of God. By contrast, with the erosion of the positivity of the infinite, Reformation theology, in its radical finitude, could barely utter the words *sola fides* and *sola scriptura* at the infinite-as-limit, the radical otherworldly *Deus Absconditus*. Caught between Scholasticism and critique, Reformation theology grasped transcendence as a discontinuity, that is, the *Deus Absconditus* transcended the world as rupture, as being other-than-the-world. Transcendence thus meant the finite being of the world as the *kenosis* of the infinite mystery of the other-than-being, God.

This God/world dualism would put in question, for the first time, the self-understanding and fundamental concepts of a theology that had been safely ensconced in the positivity of the infinite; and it is in this sense that the Reformation paves the way to modern theology. But in order for modern theology to emerge, the negative gesture of the Reformation would have to become a positive problematic. Believing to have found in "reason" the power of regeneration, Kant would be the first to ground a system of knowledge in the idea of the infinite-as-limit as a positivity. This idea would provide the conditions of possibility not only for modern theology but for modern thought in general. Put more accurately, it would provide the conditions of possibility for the emergence of modern theology as a moment of modern thought. This is the radicalness of the "Copernican Revolution" in metaphysics.

It is with the Kantian inversion that there emerges the problem of a theological enterprise whose finitude has become a problem: the problem of a theological enterprise that, having gained consciousness of its own limits, and no longer safely grounded in the positivity of onto-theology, must now grapple with the epistemological problem of its self-understanding and the ontological problem of the categories of God and world. For Kant, the theological problem of the infinite-as-limit becomes but one aspect of the general problem of the limits of finitude. Indeed, Kant lays the ground for modern theology to the extent that he grasped the problem of thinking of the infinite not as the radical diremption of God and world, but as a particular aspect

of the general problem of the limits of human knowledge. These conditions generate the three problems that constitute and have driven modern theology: (1) the *problem of the limits of theological knowledge*; (2) the *problem of God-as-limit*; and (3) the *problem of transcendence*.

Although the problem of modern theology can be grasped as the problem of the limits of theological knowledge or as the problem of God-as-limit, it is most radically grasped as the problem of transcendence, for at the problem of transcendence the problem of the limits of theological knowledge and the problem of God-as-limit interlock. Transcendence is the fundamental category of modern theology. The problem of modern theology is the problem of transcendence, the problem of the transcendentality of transcendence, the problem of the limit, the theological limit. The radical meaning of the claim that modern theology begins with the Kantian inversion, that, after Kant, it is no longer legitimate to think of the finite from the point of view of the infinite, but rather now the finite must think the infinite is thus this. With the Kantian inversion, for the first time, the theological meaning of transcendence is made subordinate to the philosophical transcendental understood as critique; for the first time, the theological problem of the mediation of the finite and infinite is restricted by the demands of philosophy. Indeed, for the first time, the structure of transcendence is structured by critique.

The Kantian inversion, the subordination of transcendence to the conditions of critique is, from the point of view of the theory of knowledge, the initiation of the movement of theology as crisis, as perpetually struggling with the problem of the legitimation of both its point of departure and its fundamental concepts. But it is also correct to say that, as crisis, modern theology provides the conditions of possibility for particular theological crises, namely those events that destabilize the self-understanding and fundamental concepts of theology so as to generate a break with what we could call "normalized" theological science (Kuhn, 1996). But, in fact, these two perspectives interlock: theology as crisis advances only through the eruption of particular theological crises, and particular theological crises are possible only because of the general condition of a theology that exists in perpetual crisis. From here the advancement of modern theology can only be grasped from the vantage point of those particular theological crises that propel it. For, it is through those moments of instability, when self-understanding becomes schizophrenic and fundamental concepts grow out-of-joint, that things become lucid.

Each discontinuity, each paradigm shift, each theological crisis makes visible a particular segment of the movement of theology since the end of the 18th century. But the trajectory of modern theology in its entirety can only be properly grasped from the point of view, not necessarily of the most recent, but of the most radical theological crisis, the most radical rupture, the most radical questioning of point-of-departure and basic concepts. This theological crisis, we argue, is the eruption of the theologies of liberation. That the theologies of liberation represent the most radical crisis is clear to the extent that they generate a problem of the mediation of theo-

logical knowledge. Here the parallel between modern theology, modern physics, and social theory is instructive.

Since Kant inverted the field of Western thought at the end of the 18th century processes of inquiry have been driven by the epistemological problem of their self-understanding and the correlated ontological problem of their fundamental concepts, the epistemological problem of their proper point of departure and the correlated ontological problem of the constitution of their object of analysis. If, as the state of continuous interrogation regarding the ultimate foundations of knowledge, the trajectory of modern thought is a perpetual coming-to-terms with the conditions of crisis, it appears that this movement reaches a limit at that point where the epistemological and ontological interrogations interlock, at that point where the conditions of crisis generate the problem of the mediation of knowledge. Modern physics, social theory, and modern theology all exemplify the movement of knowledge under the conditions of crisis.

The movement of modern physics has been the dialectic between, on the one hand, the epistemological problem of the self-understanding of physics in the mode of the tension between pure mathematics and the mathematical interpretation of physical nature, and, on the other, the ontological problem of the very meaning of physical nature, for example of space, time, light, gravity, and motion. This dialectic has been driven by the problem of knowledge of physical reality—a problem that appears to have reached its limits when inquiries into physical nature became inquiries into the physical nature of light, as light is both a physical reality and the condition of possibility for a science of physical realities: as an electromagnetic and photonic phenomenon, light is a slice of nature, it is mind independent; but as luminosity, as visibility, light is what constitutes phenomenality; it is what makes possible the interpretation of physical nature. In this sense, it is mind-dependent. Thus, at the problem of light the epistemological and ontological interrogations that have driven modern physics interlock and generate the problem of how knowledge is mediated in the physical world. This problem of mediation is exemplified by the still unresolved antinomy between relativity and quantum mechanics, between Albert Einstein and Werner Heisenberg, between the macroscopic and the microscopic, between the idea of the ''cosmic measure'' and the principle of ''uncertainty'' (Zubiri, 1994: 291–353).

Social theory too, like modern physics, exemplifies the movement of knowledge under the conditions of crisis. Social theory has been driven by the dialectic between, on the one hand, the epistemological problem of its self-understanding in the mode of the tension between the nomological and historical-hermeneutic sciences of society, and, on the other, the ontological problem of the very meaning of the social world, for instance, of consciousness, action, culture, and system. This dialectic has been driven by the problem of knowledge of social reality. It is a problem that appears to have reached its limits when inquiries into the social world became inquiries into the socio-historical determinants of social theory, as now, under these conditions of redoubling, social theory becomes both a social reality and the conditions of possibility of interpreting social realities. As a socio-historical

empirical process, social theory is a slice of the social world, it is a mind-independent objectification. But as an epistemological process it is what constitutes sociality to the extent that it makes possible the interpretation of the social world, and in this sense it is mind-dependent. Indeed, at the problem of the socio-historical determinants of social theory, the epistemological and ontological interrogations that have driven this process of inquiry interlock and generate the problem of the mediation of knowledge of the social world. This problem of mediation is exemplified by the antinomy between modernism and post-modernism, between Jürgen Habermas (1987) and Pierre Bourdieu (1997), between the epistemological and empirical subject, between the "from above" of critical theory and the "from below" of the sociology of scholarly knowledge, between the ideas of "communicative action" and "scholastic epistemocentrism".

Theology, like modern physics and social theory, has been driven by the epistemological problem of its self-understanding and the ontological problem of its fundamental concepts, the epistemological problem of its proper point of departure and the correlated ontological problem of the constitution of its object of analysis. The movement of theology since the end of the 18th century can be described as a perpetual coming-to-terms with the primacy of transcendental reality, and it has generated a problem of the mediation of theological knowledge. This is precisely how, as I have intimated, the theory of knowledge understands the problem of finitude, the horizon of modern theology.

Modern theology, like modern physics and social theory, typifies the trajectory of knowledge under conditions of crisis. Modern theology has been driven by the dialectic between, on the one hand, the epistemological problem of the limits of theological knowledge in the mode of the tension between traditional onto-theology and critique, and, on the other, the ontological problem of the very meaning of God-as-limit. It is the problem of the relationship between God and world, being and time, Grace and free will, faith and reason, church and society, salvation history and secular history, for example. This dialectic has been driven by the perpetual problem of the knowledge of transcendental reality. It is a problem that appears to have reached its limits when the interpretation of the meaning of transcendence became an interest in the making of transcendence. For now transcendence was grasped not only through the category of praxis but through the category of poiesis as well. Indeed, now transcendence was grasped through the category of social labor understood as the interlocking of praxis and poiesis. Here the epistemological and ontological questions that have driven modern theology interlock at the problem of the mediation of transcendence. This problem of mediation is exemplified by the antinomy between the European and Anglo-American theologies and the Latin American theologies of liberation, between interpretation and transformation, between praxis and social labor.

Yet it has been the tragic legacy of the theologies of liberation that, since their inception in the late 1960s, they have been grossly misunderstood. Geopolitical clashes, economic constraints, ecclesial castigations, censorship, and vulgar polemics have all contributed to this misunderstanding. But the most

pernicious dynamic is still taking form today, namely, the postmodernist eclipse of the theologies of liberation. For now it is no longer a question of marginalizing, of pushing to the periphery and covering up, but rather of assimilating, perverting, and slowly eradicating. This problematic is manifesting itself through US Hispanic theology; this problem is US Hispanic theology understood as the mediation of the tension between the dominant and liberation theologies.

The dissimulation of this theological crisis that is the emergence of the Latin American theologies of liberation is, as we have already suggested, a symptom of a theology that has failed to come to terms with itself as crisis. The early Habermas's idea of knowledge-constitutive interests allows us to recast the trajectory of modern theology in a way that brings the eruption of the theologies of liberation to center stage.

Habermas's Idea of Knowledge-Constitutive Interests

The early Habermas argues that legitimate knowledge, that is, knowledge directed toward the realization of an emancipated society, is possible only through the resuscitation of a self-reflection that has been eclipsed by the illusion of pure theory which positivism and historicism share with traditional onto-theology. This illusion of an unchanging realm of being that is objectively accessible, perpetuated today through a scientistic-consciousness that holds sway under the socio-historical conditions of advanced-capitalist societies, makes invisible knowledge-constitutive interests. In what became the basis for his inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt (1965) which appears in the "Appendix" to the English translation of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas meticulously expounds his early intellectual program, taking as his point of departure the thesis: "There is a real connection between the positivistic self-understanding of the sciences and traditional ontology" (Habermas, 1972: 302). This positivistic attitude, Habermas suggests, has equally penetrated the empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and social sciences:

> The *empirical-analytic* sciences develop their theories in a self-understanding that automatically generates continuity with the beginnings of philosophical thought. For both are committed to a theoretical attitude that frees those who take it from dogmatic association with the natural interests of life and their irritating influence; and both share the cosmological intention of describing the universe theoretically in its law-like order, just as it is. In contrast, the *historical-hermeneutic* sciences, which are concerned with the sphere of transitory things and mere opinion, cannot be linked up so smoothly with this tradition – they have nothing to do with cosmology. But they, too, comprise a *scientistic consciousness*, based on the model of science. For even the symbolic meanings of tradition seem capable of being brought together in a cosmos of facts in ideal simultaneity. Much as the cultural sciences may comprehend their facts through understanding and little though they may be concerned with discovering general laws, they nevertheless share with the empirical-analytic sciences the methodological consciousness of describing a structured reality within the horizon of the theoretical attitude. Historicism has become the positivism of the cultural and social sciences Positivism has also permeated the self-understanding of the *social sciences*, whether they obey the methodological demands of an empirical-analytic behavioral science or orient themselves to the pattern of

> normative-analytic sciences, based on presuppositions about maxims of action. In this field of inquiry, which is so close to practice, the concept of value-freedom (or ethical neutrality) has simply reaffirmed the ethos that modern science owes to the beginnings of theoretical thought in Greek philosophy: psychologically an unconditional commitment to theory and epistemologically the severance of knowledge from interest. This is represented in logic by the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive statements, which makes grammatically obligatory the filtering out of merely emotive from cognitive contents. (Habermas, 1972: 303–304)

"Traditional ontology" whose genesis can be traced back to the philosophy of the Classical Greeks, assumes a timeless and unchanging realm of Being accessible through the contemplative attitude of *theoria*. The positivistic attitude of the modern sciences, Habermas argues, is similar to onto-theology in that it borrows from it two elements: "the methodological meaning of the theoretical attitude and the basic ontological assumption of a structure of the world independent of the knower". Yet, at the same time, by abandoning "the connection of *theoria* and *kosmos*, of *mimesis* and *bios theoretikos*" that was assumed by traditional ontology, the modern sciences destroy the classical claim of the efficacy of *theoria* vis-à-vis the orientation of human action. Thus, "[w]hat was once supposed to comprise the practical efficacy of theory has now fallen prey to methodological prohibitions" (Habermas, 1972: 304).

For Habermas, this connection between the positivistic diremption of the relationship between knowledge and interests and onto-theology is epitomized by Husserl's phenomenological critique of the reification of scientific knowledge to the extent that Husserl, despite his conscious attempt, could not overcome positivism. Through the strategy of phenomenologically uncovering the pre-scientific interests that all sciences have invested in the life-world, Husserl unmasks the "objectivist illusion" of those sciences that claim to generate knowledge through the grasping of facts that exist independent of the knower. Up to this point the phenomenological critique of reification is valuable to the extent that it brings to consciousness the pre-scientific interests of all scientific knowledge. Yet Husserl, Habermas argues, is unable to break with the horizon of traditional ontology because he assumes that by uncovering the relationship between science and interests, transcendental phenomenology is itself free of such interests. Thus, while successfully unmasking the positivism of the nomological sciences, Husserl falls captive to the positivistic attitude of the historical-hermeneutic sciences – that is, in short, he falls captive to historicism (Habermas, 1972: 306).

In marshaling this critique of the Husserlian phenomenological critique of reification, Habermas draws on Max Horkheimer's classic distinction between "traditional" and "critical" theory. For Horkheimer (1972) "traditional theory" presupposes the diremption of the scientific enterprise and the social totality, of the "scholar", and the "citizen", a diremption that is sociohistorically correlated and reinforced by the differentiation of Western, industrialized societies, and, in particular, the development of an autonomous sphere of science, research, and the like. "Critical theory", by contrast, overcomes this diremption by reflectively grasping the dialectical relationship between the scientific enterprise and the social totality. Thus, Habermas categorizes as "traditional theory" both the modern sciences (including Husserl's

transcendental phenomenology) and traditional ontology to the extent that their positivist gaze prevents them from reflecting on the knowledge constituting activity of the knowing subject. At the same time, he categorizes as "critical theory" his own theory of knowledge which he philosophically derives from the Hegelian and Marxian critiques of the Kantian epistemology. Habermas dialectically brings together the Hegelian notion of phenomenological experience with the Marxian notion of a natural history of the species as mediated through the synthetic activity of social labor, with the aim of developing a social theoretically oriented epistemology that functions now philosophically as the ground of the critique of ideology, and now scientifically as the ground of a critical human science. This social theoretically oriented theory of knowledge leads to the idea of *knowledge-constitutive interests* as the transcendental condition to which all scientific processes of inquiry are subject (Habermas, 1972: 7–63).

This idea of knowledge-constitutive interests "reveals three categories of processes of inquiry for which a specific connection between logical-methodological rules and knowledge-constitutive interests can be demonstrated": the approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a *technical* cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a *practical* one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the *emancipatory* cognitive interest that, as we saw, was at the root of traditional theories (Habermas, 1972: 308). The methodological framework of the *empirical-analytical sciences* reduces the meaning of reality to statements established through correlation between observable events and a set of initial conditions of predictability. This is positivism, that is, the objectivist illusion of empiricism which reduces reality to the technical exploitability of nature.

> Taken together . . . the logical structure of admissible systems of propositions and the type of conditions for corroboration suggest that theories of the empirical sciences disclose reality subject to the constitutive interest in the possible securing and expansion, through information, of feedback-monitored action. This is the cognitive interest in technical control over objectified processes. (Habermas, 1972: 309)

The *historic-hermeneutic sciences* are driven by a practical cognitive interest and not a technical one: They take as their frame of reference the practical interest of achieving an inter-subjective, mutual understanding. This mutual understanding of the historical-hermeneutic sciences is achieved, however, through a common tradition, and not a formalized language of the empirical-analytical sciences. But the rules of hermeneutics that regulate these sciences have often been dogmatically posited as universal; this is historicism, the positivism of the hermeneutical sciences:

> Historicism has taken the understanding of meaning, in which mental facts are supposed to be given in direct evidence, and grafted onto it the objectivist illusion of pure theory. It appears as though the interpreter transposes himself into the horizon of the world or language from which a text derives its meaning. But here, too, the facts are first constituted in relation to the standards that establish them. Just as positivist self-understanding does not take into account explicitly the connection between measurement operations and

> feedback control, so it eliminates from consideration the interpreter's pre-understanding. (Habermas, 1972: 309)

Both the empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic sciences must bracket the relationship between knowledge and interest if they are to secure their respective theoretical frameworks and logico-methodological procedures for achieving knowledge. By contrast, Habermas's third category, the *critically oriented sciences*, explicitly aims to establish the connection between knowledge and interest. These sciences are not satisfied by the theoretic grasping of technically or hermeneutically mediated facts. Instead, they aim to "determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed" (Habermas, 1972: 310). The critically oriented sciences have an emancipatory cognitive interest grounded in self-reflection; they aim to bring to consciousness distortions and compulsions which remain repressed. Psychoanalysis is an example of the critically oriented sciences. Indeed, Sigmund Freud developed a science that was not satisfied with the interpretation of pathological states but rather aimed at overcoming them through language (Habermas, 1972: 216–217).

Modern theology has no right to exempt itself from the constraints established by the Habermasian theory of knowledge. It lost this right at the end of the 18th century. Thus, it too is bound to the transcendental conditions of knowledge-constitutive interests. Indeed, the failure of theology to reflectively grasp its own knowledge-constitutive interests is but a reflection of its failure to grasp its own limits—a reflection of the extent to which it is still caught in the illusion of pure theory, now as traditional onto-theology, now as the positivistic attitude.

Theology and Knowledge-Constitutive Interests

The claim that theology is bound to the transcendental conditions of knowledge-constitutive interests is a way of framing and gaining critical leverage on the problem of modern theology. We may recall that the problem of modern theology is the problem of theology as crisis. It is the problem of a theology that—no longer safely ensconced in the positivity of onto-theology—must now perpetually grapple with the dialectical problem of its own limits and the problem of God-as-limit. These are two problems that interlock at the problem of transcendence, meaning the problem of the mediation of the finite and infinite, and the problem of the mediation of the problem of epistemology and the problem of ontology. Indeed, the problem of transcendence is the theological moment of the problem of knowledge; it is the problem of theological knowledge. Now, the Habermasian perspective says that theology always negotiates the problem of transcendence subject to the conditions of knowledge-constitutive interests. It suggests that theology—like all processes of inquiry—is bound to the relationship between knowledge and interests by the mere fact that it is an intellectual moment

of the social history of the species as this history takes form through social labor. In other words, the Habermasian perspective suggests that the problem of transcendence is itself mediated, and this mediation is determined by the transcendental conditions of knowledge-constitutive interests.

This is the social theoretical interpretation of the problem of finitude. It comes forth when the trajectory of modern theology is grasped in light of the movement of the problem of knowledge. In the final analysis, finitude does not imply that theology must come to terms with the relative knowledge generated by the spontaneous activity of consciousness, nor that it must be receptive to the totality of being, nor that it must grasp itself as a moment in the movement of becoming, nor even that it must be open to the interpellation of alterity. Rather, the problem of finitude ultimately implies that theology is subject to the transcendental conditions of knowledge constitutive interests, meaning subject to either a *technical*, *practical*, or *emancipatory cognitive-interest*. Thus, theology is either an empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic or critically oriented science. To deny that theology is bound to the transcendental conditions of knowledge-constitutive interests is to deny the movement of the problem of knowledge. That would be to slip back to traditional onto-theology and into the illusion of pure theory. Indeed, as a process of inquiry mediated by a socio-historically situated epistemological subject, theology cannot escape the limits of its knowledge-constitutive interests.

Vis-à-vis the Habermasian theory of knowledge, two postures are possible for modern theology. It can either (1) reflectively grasp its knowledge-constitutive interests and attempt to overcome them, or (2) it can evade its knowledge-constitutive interests by (a) regressing back to onto-theology, or (b) by failing to break with the positivistic attitude. If both forms of evasion have the same result, namely, the eclipse of knowledge-constitutive interests, they differ à propos the fundamental problematic of modern theology. Whereas the regression back to onto-theology is a *meta*-attempt at dissolving the problem of modern theology all together, the positivistic attitude is the failure of a theological enterprise that, while accepting that it has to grapple with the epistemological problem of its self-understanding and the ontological problem of its fundamental concepts, it has in fact failed to come to terms with its knowledge-constitutive interests. It is then still laboring under the "illusion of pure theory", whether this "illusion" has been generated within the limits of the paradigm of consciousness or through language has pushed beyond them. Because our investigations are into the fundamental problematic of modern theology, I have no intention of engaging those theologies that attempt to dissolve our problematic through a reactionary strategy of circumvention. I am referring to those theological traditions that have historically been referred to as *Neo-orthodox*. But a few words on Neo-orthodoxy before moving on.

Neo-orthodoxy attempts to overcome the problem of modern theology, by way of meta-critique, but fails to realize that this meta-critique is itself grounded in the fundamental problematic of modern theology, and thus represents the most heinous contradiction—a contradiction that holds sway

only to the extent that modern theology regresses back to onto-theology. Consider, for instance, Karl Barth and John Milbank.

As is well known, Barth grounds his theology in the repudiation of the "bourgeois-Protestant synthesis" that he traced back to Friedrich Schleiermacher. The epistemological side of the repudiation of "liberal theology" becomes for Barth the epistemological program of the autonomous grounding of theology, a project he elucidates at the outset of the *Prolegomenon* to the *Church Dogmatics* (Barth, 1953: 5–6). But Barth's contradiction is clear: a theology that reflectively grasps itself as a "scientific enterprise", as a limited human product, bound by a precise logical framework, and the like, is a theology that has already accepted the modern, post-Kantian, theory of knowledge. But, in addition to this, Barth errs when he assumes that the sciences "justify" their proper logical-methodological framework; here he falls captive to the positivistic self-understanding of the sciences that, during his time, had led to the reification of the nomological sciences. It is clear from the Habermasian theory of knowledge that legitimate sciences, legitimate processes of inquiry, do not ground themselves, but rather are grounded through the process of coming-to-terms with their limits. It is ironical indeed that Barth adopts as a model the positivistic understanding of science.

More recently, Milbank has pursued an analogous program: the overcoming of the logic of a "secular reason" in Catholic theology, he argues, is exemplified by the German and Latin American versions of Catholic integralism as they fall captive to the "naturalization of the supernatural" (Milbank, 1990: 207). Against this trend, Milbank argues that theology must assert its autonomy vis-à-vis social theory; this is, the project he terms a "postmodern" Augustinian "Christian sociology" (Milbank, 1990: 380). But, once again, as with Barth, Milbank's contradiction is clear. A theology that claims to be "sociological" and "postmodern" is a theology that has already grounded itself in modern epistemology and existential ontology to the extent that both "sociology" and "post-modernity" emerged after the Kantian inversion.

But this systematic failure on the part of Neo-orthodoxy to come-to-terms with the problem of finitude, with the limits of its knowledge, can also be teased out dialectically by considering its antithesis, the secularization perspective. Like Neo-orthodoxy, the theories of secularization fail to come to terms with the knowledge-constituting activity of the epistemological subject and thus are unable to grasp their own socio-historical conditions of possibility, nor are they able to grasp the limits and meaning of the knowledge they generate. Niklas Luhmann's attempt to provide a systems theoretical explanation of the function and substance of religion and theology exemplifies the social scientific reduction of religious and theological knowledge.

For Luhmann, religion is ultimately a problem of systemic complexity. Theodicy provides meaning and order to questions that transcend the boundaries of the system. He specifically understands theology to be the reflective moment of the religious system—the systemic religious consciousness. From

here, the development of theological dogmatics is the result of the increasing complexity of religion. In the final analysis, however, Luhmann reduces the meaning of religious and theological knowledge to an aspect of the cybernetic problem of the self-referentiality of the social totality (Luhmann, 1984).

Indeed, the evasion of the problem of knowledge-constitutive interests reveals itself as the antinomy between Neo-orthodoxy and secularization, that is as the antinomy between an onto-theologized theological *logos* and the scientistic consciousness. But this antinomy is quickly liquidated when approached from the social theoretically oriented theory of knowledge we have elucidated, for both the theological subsumption of science and the scientific subsumption of theology are possible only to the extent that the synthetic activity of the epistemological subject is eclipsed. Both Neo-orthodoxy and secularization fail to come to terms with the limits of their logical-methodological framework, the limits of their knowledge-constitutive interests: Barth and Milbank remain stuck in the morass of onto-theology and Luhmann in the illusion of a pure epistemology (i.e. self-referentiality). Barth and Milbank reduce religion to theology and Luhmann reduces religion and theology to the teleology of scientific-technical progress in the form of the problem of complexity. Both Neo-orthodoxy and secularization fail to accept the fact that theology and social theory are processes of inquiry that are mediated by the synthetic activity of the epistemological subject in the context of the history of the human species as it takes form through social labor.

Putting aside Neo-orthodoxy and its meta-attempt to circumvent the fundamental problematic of modern theology, I argue that the trajectory of modern theology can be gleaned through the three categories of processes of inquiry of the Habermasian theory of knowledge. Modern theology has for the most part understood itself within the limits of the *historical*-hermeneutic sciences to the extent that they have established theological knowledge through the *interpretation* of the meaning of the transcendence—a theological knowledge that is possible only within the horizon of an intersubjectivity between the self-understanding of theology and God-as-limit. In so far as modern theology has posited this intersubjectivity as the very conditions of possibility for interpreting the meaning of transcendence, it has labored under a constitutive interest in the maintenance of the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding. That is, it has been subject to a *practical cognitive interest*. And when theology has understood itself within these limits it has cautiously borrowed from the *empirical-analytic social sciences* to engage the problems of religion and modernity. This was the case in the post-war era in Western Europe and the United States, for example, when pastoral theology appropriated the sociology of religion to address the challenges of secularization, urbanization in particular.

In the late 1960s, theology, for the first time, understood itself as a *critically oriented science*. This is the radicalness of the Latin American theologies of liberation. They are not satisfied with the practical cognitive interest of the historical-hermeneutic sciences, they are not satisfied with the interpretation of the meaning of transcendence that is grasped through the restricted

category of intersubjectivity. Rather, the theologies of liberation sublate the practical and technical cognitive interests in an *emancipatory cognitive interest* that methodically interlocks knowledge and interest. The theologies of liberation generate a theological knowledge that is "interested" in its own liberation through the liberation of socio-historical misery. That is, in other words, they generate a theological knowledge that theoretically aims to grasp the invariance that exists between the Kingdom and the socio-historical conditions of misery, and praxeologically aims to overcome this invariance through a transformative-making.

Thus, the claim we made at the outset—that the theologies of liberation mark the most radical theological crisis of modern theology—finds its justification in the social theoretical idea of knowledge constitutive interests. In this idea we can also gain insight into those vulgar misunderstandings à propos this theological crisis. The emancipatory-cognitive interest of the theologies of liberation have been misunderstood by the dominant theologies as a technical cognitive interest grounded in a vulgar materialism. Indeed, the dominant theologies have accused the theologies of liberation of reducing theology to an empirical-analytic science and of falling captive to the most dogmatic forms of dialectical and historical materialism. This, accusation is illegitimate and false. Illegitimate because, in marshaling this critique, the dominant theologies overstep the boundaries of their logical-methodological framework; it is rather the theologies of liberation that, through self-reflection, have achieved the right to critique. False, because it is the dominant theologies that are reductionistic: they reduce theology to a science of interpretation.

That the emergence of the critically oriented theological sciences of liberation represents the most radical theological crisis of modern theology is evident from the fact that they push beyond the historical-hermeneutic reduction of those three problems that, as we argued earlier, have constituted and driven modern theology, namely, the problem of the limits of theological knowledge, the problem of God-as-limit, and the problem of transcendence. The historical-hermeneutic theological sciences epistemologically reduce the theological enterprise to a science of interpretation. They do so whether the problem of the limits of interpretation has been understood more specifically as the Kantian problem of the historical or speculative consciousness (Schleiermacher, 1994; Maréchal, 1947), the Heideggerian problem of the anthropological or cultural aperture to being (Rahner, 1967; Tillich, 1970), the Hegelian problem of what-is-not-yet (Moltmann, 1970; Metz, 1979), or the postmodern problem of difference (Tracy, 1981; Kaufman, 1993). The historical-hermeneutic theological sciences ontologically reduce God-as-limit to ideation, whether this ideation is grasped specifically as an ideal, being, hope, or Other. And they reduce the fundamental mediating problem of transcendence to praxis (i.e. interaction), whether this praxis has been grasped as what asymptotically correlates the infinite and the finite, the ecstatic presence of the totality of being, the actualization of eschatological hope, or the anagogical rupture of the Other.

Against the epistemological reduction, the theologies of liberation grasp the theological enterprise as a critically oriented science of transformation

understood specifically as the problem of liberation, the problem of making "better" history. Against the ontological reduction, the theologies of liberation grasp God-as-limit as a physical reality, that is as the Kingdom understood as the aperture of historical reality. And against the reduction of transcendence to praxis, the theologies of liberation now grasp transcendence through social labor (i.e. the dialectic of praxis and poiesis) as a transformative-making, as the making of the Kingdom in and through historical reality (Boff, 1990; Gebara, 1999). Table 1 summarizes the central elements of this theological crisis.

The Problem of Categorization

The magnitude and depth of the theological crisis that is the emergence of the theologies of liberation can be gauged in terms of the degree to which it generates a problem of categorization. The eruption of the theologies of liberation destabilizes the traditional ways of understanding the movement of modern theology. This crisis cuts across denominational distinctions such as, for instance, Catholic and Protestant theology. It shatters those disciplinary boundaries that have separated theology, philosophy, and science. And it undermines the difference between the theory of knowledge and the sociology of knowledge. It is not that these traditional ways of categorizing theology are rendered defunct; rather, they are now made subordinate to the distinction between the practical cognitive interest of the historical-hermeneutic sciences and the emancipatory cognitive interest of the critically-oriented theological sciences of liberation. Indeed, theology as a historical-hermeneutic science and theology as a critically-oriented science—these are the categories that emerge as primordial when the trajectory of modern theology is understood from the point of view of the eruption of the Latin American theologies of liberation.

The denominational distinction between Catholic and Protestant theology can be understood, from a historically oriented epistemological perspective, as the tension between theology as a *speculative science* and theology as a *positive science*, between *Neo-Scholasticism* and the *historical interpretation of the Christian life*. While both modern Protestant and Catholic theologies emerged in and through the coming-to-terms with the Kantian inversion, and while their first expressions were situated within the limits of the transcendental consciousness, Protestant theology came to terms with Kant through the Neo-Kantian problem of history (Schleiermacher, 1994), and Catholicism came to terms with Kant through the Fichtean radicalization of transcendental idealism (Maréchal, 1947).

The point of view of knowledge-constitutive interests makes the denominational distinction between Neo-Scholasticism and the historical interpretation of the Christian life subordinate to the logical-methodological distinction between theology as a historical-hermeneutic science and theology as a critically oriented science. What now becomes germane is not whether theology is a speculative or positive science, but rather whether it is driven by a practical or emancipatory cognitive interest. It becomes

TABLE 1
Elements of a theological crisis

	Knowledge-constitutive interest	Horizon	The problem of the limits of theological knowledge		The problem of God-as-limit		The problem of transcendence	
The historical-hermeneutic theological sciences	Practical cognitive interest	Consciousness (Kant)	Historical/speculative consciousness (Schleiermacher and Maréchal)	Science of interpretation	Ideal	Ideation	Asymptotic correlate	Interaction (Praxis)
		Time (Heidegger)	Anthropological/ cultural aperture to being (Rahner and Tillich)		Being		Ecstatic presence	
		Becoming (Bloch)	What-is-not-yet (Moltmann and Metz)		Hope		Sublation	
		Language (Gadamer)	Difference (Tracy and Kaufman)		Other		Anagogical rupture	
The critically oriented theological sciences of liberation	Emancipatory cognitive interest	Historical reality (Ellacuría)	Liberation (Boff and Gebara)	Science of transformation	Kingdom	Physical reality	Transformative-making	Social Labor (praxis and poiesis)

evident, moreover, that, from this perspective of knowledge-constitutive interests, the epistemological relevance of the Catholic–Protestant distinction, that is, the distinction between theology understood as a speculative or as a positive science, can only exist within the limits of theology understood as a historical-hermeneutic science. Indeed, theology as a critically oriented science pushes beyond the epistemological relevance of denominational categories. That this is the case is clear from the fact that liberation theology cuts across denominations, that is, it is not a denomination-specific phenomenon.

The disciplinary distinction between theology, philosophy, and science is rooted in the difference between theology and religion. Historically, this difference took form in and through what, from one side, appears as the development of the conditions of critique, that is, the shift from the transcendentality of being to the transcendentality of consciousness, and, from another, appears as the process of secularization. It could be said that the conditions of critique crystallize with Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in metaphysics and the process of secularization crystallizes with the idea of "social physics" (Comte, 1852), although critique and secularization are dialectically related, and thus it is only for analytical purposes that we separate them here. Indeed, separating them makes it easier to discern the two moments of the tension between theology and religion, namely, the tension between, on the one hand, *theology* and the *philosophy of religion*, and, on the other, *theology* and the *scientific study of religion*.

The tension between theology and the philosophy of religion can be traced to the tension between *revelation* and *reason*, between the given-ness of an *infinite* that transcends toward the finite and the given-ness of a *finite* that transcends toward the infinite-as-limit. This tension emerges in and through the voluntaristic annihilation of the Scholastic analogy of being. For it is the flattening out of the infinitude of being to the finiteness of existence that makes possible the tension between natural theology and metaphysics. The movement of modern theology can be understood as different ways of negotiating this tension between revelation and reason as the problem of onto-theology.

The tension between theology and the scientific study of religion can be traced to the difference between *faith* and *science*, the distinction between the internalization and externalization of a relationship with the infinite as the *positum* of faith, and the systematic reflection on this *positum*. The tension between faith and science emerges in and through the process of rationalization. For it is this process that makes possible the tension between the explanation of regions of "this world" and the interpretation of the meaning of the totality of this world vis-à-vis the "otherworldly" (Weber, 1978). Modern theology has been, on the one hand, the struggle against the reduction of faith by the nomological sciences, that is the struggle against "secularization", and, on the other, the appropriation of the interpretative power of the hermeneutical sciences, that is the coming-to-terms with the horizon of history.

The disciplinary boundaries separating theology, philosophy, and science, it is true, have always been problematic for modern theology. And yet,

despite the problem of overlapping boundaries, modern theology has, for the most part, found these disciplinary categories useful. This is to say that it has for the most part accepted the traditional ways of understanding the distinction between reason and revelation, faith and science. But the eruption of the theologies of liberation radically destabilizes the disciplinary boundaries separating theology, philosophy, and science. This destabilization has taken form in and through the problem of the liberationist turn to Marx.

The liberationist turn to Marx has traditionally been understood as the problem of the application of a "Marxian analysis" to theological reflection. But this idea of a "Marxian analysis" that exists beyond the limits of theology dissimulates the more radical task that has always been at play in this move, namely, the task of grounding theology on a social theoretically oriented theory of knowledge rooted in Marx. It has been the traditional way of understanding the relationship between theology, philosophy, and science that has prevented modern theology from getting to the heart of the matter: understanding these disciplinary distinctions within the limits of the historical-hermeneutic horizon, modern theology has reduced the liberationist problem of a Marxian theory of knowledge (a fundamental internal problem for theology) to the problem of theology's appropriation of a "Marxian analysis" that, philosophically, is a vulgar (dialectical and historical) materialism, and, scientifically, is a narrowly defined (i.e. economistic) nomological social science. From here the radicalness of the crisis marked by the theologies of liberation stems from the idea of a social theoretically oriented theory of knowledge rooted in Marx to the extent that this theory of knowledge reveals the limits of the interpretative interest, and thus destabilizes the traditional way of conceptualizing the disciplinary distinctions between theology, philosophy, and science.

This is precisely why it is more appropriate, from the point of view of the theologies of liberation, to think of theology, philosophy, and science as processes of inquiry—that is, systems of theories and practices, or, in a word, sciences—that are subject not to the logic of traditional distinction between revelation and reason, faith and science, but rather to the logic of the self-formative process of the human species, that is to the logic of knowledge-constitutive interests. Now, from this perspective, processes of inquiry are categorized, not as philosophy, theology or science, but rather as either historical-hermeneutic or critically oriented sciences depending on whether they are driven by a practical or an emancipatory cognitive interest.

The difference between a theory of knowledge and a sociology of knowledge is rooted in the distinction between the *epistemological subject* and the *empirical subject* with epistemological interests (Bourdieu, 1984). With the exception of the theologies of liberation, modern theology has come to terms with the problem of theological knowledge within the limits of a theory of knowledge that, abstracting out the empirical fact that theology is the product of a specific social practice that takes place in a particular social realm (i.e. the academic field), treats theology, the theologian, or the community of theologians as an epistemological subject. The Neo-Kantian theologies (e.g. Ernst Troeltsch and H. Richard Niebuhr) understood the relationship between the epistemological and empirical subject

"dualistically", although, in the final analysis, they gave pride of place to the epistemological side in the name of a philosophy of values. But, in its eagerness to engage the Heideggerian horizon, modern theology (e.g. Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Rahner, and Paul Tillich) would foreclose the problem of the empirical subject to the extent that the subsumption of space under time which, in the name of the radicalization of hermeneutics, drove Heidegger's existential analytics of *Dasein* implied, from the point of view of the problem of knowledge, the subsumption of the empirical subject under the epistemological subject. With the exception of the theologies of liberation, modern theology has not been able to escape from the limits of the Heideggerian horizon of temporality. Indeed, the reduction of space to time has manifested itself, for example, in political theology's conception of utopia (e.g. Jürgen Moltmann and J.B. Metz) as well as in the restricted hermeneutic conception of language that grounds the theologies of conversation (e.g. David Tracy and Gordon Kaufman).

The radicalness of the eruption of the theologies of liberation can be understood as a resurrection of the problem of the empirical subject. The theologies of liberation subordinate the epistemological subject under the empirical subject. They understand the problem of a Marxian theory of knowledge specifically as a problem of a sociology of theological knowledge that attempts to overcome "scholastic epistemocentrism" (Bourdieu, 1997). Indeed, the radicalness of the theologies of liberation stems from the attempt to push beyond the horizon of temporality. The theologies of liberation understand themselves in spatio-temporal terms. They grasp themselves not only as a system of thought but also as a social movement. They understand themselves as the theologies of the "periphery".

The subordination of the denominational distinction between Catholic and Protestant theology, the disciplinary distinction between theology, philosophy, and science, and the distinction between a theory and sociology of theological knowledge to the logical-methodological distinction between the historical-hermeneutic theological sciences and the critically oriented theological sciences is not arbitrary. Rather, as we suggested at the outset, it stems from the premise that this categorizing scheme is more consistent with the demands of the conditions of crisis. But this categorizing scheme is only possible after the eruption of the theologies of liberation. Indeed, it is only possible from the point of view of the critically oriented theological sciences of liberation.

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