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OF LOVE, TRUTH, AND REASON:

CRITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGE OF JüRGEN HABERMAS

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ABSTRACT

Of Love, Truth, and Reason:
Critical Theology and the Challenge of Jürgen Habermas

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This dissertation responds to Jürgen Habermas's objections to the project of critical theology. Habermas contends that theology cannot be critical without abandoning the very basis which distinguishes its discipline: religious experience. According to Habermas, this basis means that religious truth remains bound to a "cognitive privilege." Thus, theological statements which intend a critical application to political society ultimately presuppose a supernatural justification for its recommendations. Such a justification, says Habermas, contradicts the conditions of "postmetaphysical thinking." This means that there can be no privileged access to truth. In a modern, secular, pluralist society, truth is to be defined by intersubjective processes of rational argumentation whereby one forwards accessible and cogent reasons for truth claims which are open to counter-argument and further criticism within a community of shared, public discourse.

This thesis contends that Habermas's critique promises to advance the conceptual configuration of a future critical theology. The problematic which emerges here is; if critical theology is to be both critical and theological, then it must; first, discover a way to rationally justify religious truth claims in the contemporary public sphere without

claiming an unassailable sanction for its judgments of political society and social critical theory; second, it must also confidently decipher its manifest singularity for political society as a public sphere and social critical theory as a public, rational discourse. In other words, if critical theology is to meet Habermas's challenge, then it must abandon all vestiges of a cognitive privilege; yet it must do so in such a way that it maintains itself as theology; as that discipline which articulates the religious contribution to the rational organization of a just society.

Toward that end, the dissertation argues for a critical theology which can elucidate the rationality of love as the basis for religious truth claims within the postmetaphysical situation. Via an analysis of Charles Davis's postorthodox critical theology; the young Hegel's theological writings; and Max Horkheimer's early critical theory, this work contends that the task of critical theology today is to elucidate the critical potential of love as the religious contribution to the formation of a compassionate society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction:

Contemporary Critical Theology and the

Postorthodox/Postmetaphysical/Post-Nietzschean Situation

> For whoever seeks to criticize must necessarily experiment. He must
> create conditions under which an object becomes visible anew ...
> *Theodor W. Adorno*

The following study is offered as a prolegomenon for a future critical theology of

society. This is to say, the work represents a first step into the much larger task of

deconstructing and reconstructing the interest, purpose, and goal of critical religious

thought. The recommendations contained in this volume intend, at most, to modestly

secure a conceptual (rather than a social or ecclesial) structure for further research on

this topic.

This conceptual focus emerges from investigating contemporary Christian theology

and social critical theory from within a religious studies programme. This setting

undoubtedly leaves its mark in ways that will satisfy neither the theologian, the critical

theorist, nor the determined scholar of the social scientific study of religion. My own

approach could perhaps be described as a critical religious philosophy that endeavours

to shed light on "normative" social issues and concerns from the committed perspective

of a particular religious tradition, namely, Christianity.[1] From the viewpoint of the theologian, this approach might seem impervious to the genuine concerns of the community of faith and the need to uphold the continuity of tradition. The critical theorist may likely suspect a sacrifice of the analytical intellect for the sake of orientation. And the social scientist of religion may spy a veritable theological agenda camouflaged as religious studies.

I can only personally respond by claiming that this eclectic strategy -- the convergence of theology, critical theory, and religious studies -- emerges from a desire to address and overcome the pathologies of modernity. The complex character of these pathologies demand, in turn, a complex methodology and analysis. On its own, theology -- and/or religious faith and tradition -- tends to be myopic or reactionary; on its own, critical theory tends to be instrumental; and on its own, the social scientific study of religion is both reactionary and instrumental insofar that it tends to devalue normative questions altogether for the sake of a mechanical collection and comparison of data. Admittedly, there is absolutely nothing wrong with developing the inner logics of each of these approaches or disciplines. However, when this development is

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Cf. Charles Davis, "The Reconvergence of Theology and Religious Studies," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 4, no. 3 (1974-75): 205-221; "Theology and Religious Studies," *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 2 (1981): 11-20. Also see the series of exchanges between Davis and Donald Wiebe: Charles Davis, "Wherein there is no Ecstasy," *Religious Studies/Sciences Religieuses* 13, no. 4 (1984): 393-400; and "The Immanence of Knowledge and the Ecstasy of Faith," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 15, no. 2 (1986): 191-196; Donald Wiebe, "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 13, no. 4 (1984): 401-422. For a critical review of this exchange see Lorne Dawson, "Neither Nerve nor Ecstasy: Comment on the Wiebe-Davis Exchange," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 15, no. 2 (1986): 145-152.

achieved by exclusion or compartmentalization, then we simply behold our own state of alienation.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I commence this enquiry *Of Love, Truth, and Reason: Critical Theology and the Challenge of Jürgen Habermas.*

1 *Introduction*

In the introduction to his book *What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today?*, author Charles Davis begins by taking up Terry Eagleton's description of "revolutionary literary criticism"[2] in order to delineate the emancipatory character of a genuine critical theology. In this context Davis writes that critical theology "must dismantle the ruling concepts of religion, reinserting religious texts into the whole field of cultural practices. It sh' uld articulate its cultural analyses with a consistent political intervention. It must engage with the language and the unconscious of religious texts, to reveal their role in the ideological construction of the subject. The texts are to be mobilized beyond straightforward and received interpretations for the transformation of the subject within a wider political context."[3] On its own, Davis's profile of critical theology is extremely complex and will demand our full attention in due course. However, what concerns me at this point is Davis's concluding remark: "Nevertheless" he says, "I recognize how much is still to be done before one can speak of a critical

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[2] Cf. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: Towards A Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), 98.

[3] Charles Davis, *What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today? Breaking the Liberal Conservative Deadlock* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 4.

theology in more than a pretentious way."[4]

How are we to assess this admission from Davis? Is the attempt to study and cultivate the possibilities of critical theology doomed from the outset? Davis seems to be suggesting that compared to other disciplines that define themselves as critical theory, a thorough critical theology does not yet exist. Yet how does this assertion measure up to the efforts of political and liberation theologians who have been striving for over two decades to positively appropriate elements of Marxist criticism so as to devise a public, critical theology with a practical intent? Furthermore, doesn't Davis's judgment contradict his own endeavour to develop the form and content of an authentic critical theology?

It may be possible to "more or less" agree with Davis's discriminating insight: "more" because many of the studies that present themselves as critical theology are, in the final analysis, apologetic theologies with a dogmatic intent; "less" because there are examples of theological and religious reflection which expose ideological distortions within religious traditions and undertake their reconstruction for the purpose of contributing to the history of human freedom and happiness rather than the history of human domination and repression.

For example, Marsha Hewitt addresses Davis's claim by declaring that much of feminist theology constitutes the very type of critical theology alluded to by Davis.[5]

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[4] Davis, *What is Living?*, 4.

[5] Marsha A. Hewitt, "Charles Davis and the 'Warm Current' of Critical Theology: A Feminist Critical Appreciation" in Marc P. Lalonde ed., *The Promise of Critical Theology: Essays in Honour of Charles Davis* (Waterloo, Onario: Wilfrid Laurier

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She writes that "Feminist critical theology is a form of feminist theory that seeks to mount a critique of women's oppression within the theological traditions of Christianity and its corresponding institutional structures."[6] This method, says Hewitt, "is transforming the nature of the theological enterprise, altering some of our most fundamental notions about Scripture as the locus of revelation."[7] By way of illustration, the author refers to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's venture to demythologize the androcentric codes and ideologies of the bible which "cannot claim to be the revelatory Word of God."[8]

In view of Davis's supposition then, Hewitt's response signals the need to clarify the nature and character of critical theology within the contemporary intellectual, social and cultural situation.[9] Without claiming too much (and hopefully avoiding all

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University Press, forthcoming), 108.

[6] Marsha Hewitt, "Women, Nature and Power: Emancipatory Themes in Critical Theory and Feminist Theology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 20, no.3 (1991): 267.

[7] Hewitt, "Women, Nature and Power," 274.

[8] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 32; cited in Hewitt, "Women, Nature and Power," 274.

[9] Of course the magnitude and consequence of feminist thought for the development of both critical theology and critical social theory is highly significant, and it is not the intention of this study to ignore that contribution. However, insofar that feminist theology and feminist critical theory are responding to an established body of literature, it strikes me as worthwhile exploring that literature on its own terms before wrestling with the specific problematic introduced by the feminist approach. Aside from the essays by Hewitt cited above see her article, "The Socialist Implications of Feminist Liberation Theology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 22, no.3 (1993): 323-335. For a general overview and assessment of feminist theology see Ann Loades, "Feminist Theology" in David F. Ford ed., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction*

"pretension"), the purpose of this study is to further this clarification by undertaking an immanent critique of the most promising models of critical theology in relation to ongoing developments in critical theory and philosophy.[10] Simply put, I intend to examine the self-definitions and justifications of critical theology, then to compare these with its final product. In this manner I hope to expose the *aporias*, contradictions, and paradoxes which mark the prevailing expressions of critical theology and to initiate a course for their displacement. It is a course which aspires to advance the theoretical structure of critical religious thought by engaging recent developments in critical theory. Hence, the present study is not only *about* critical theology but also a work *in* critical theology, and attempts to make a positive contribution to its maturation.

2 On Charles Davis, Jürgen Habermas, and John Milbank.

The need, or rather the *opportunity* to reconsider the theoretical structure of critical religious thought en erges when we compare the "postorthodox" reflections of Charles

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to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, vol. 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 235-252. For insight into the feminist contribution to critical theory see Selya Benhabib, *Critique Norma, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Selya Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell eds., *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[10] On the character of immanent philosophical critique in contrast especially to transcendental models of critique, see Charles Taylor and Alan Montefiore's introductory essay, "From an Analytic Perspective" in Garbis Kortian, *Metacritique: The Philosophical Argument of Jürgen Habermas, trans. by John Raffan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1-21.

Davis; the "postmetaphysical" investigations of Jürgen Habermas; and the "post-Nietzschean" reconstructions of John Milbank. The juxtaposition of their respective proposals, I believe, creates a unique conceptual horizon which throws into relief the most pressing issues, questions, and themes bearing down on critical theology today. It is in view of this horizon that I work out the overriding problematic of this study: namely, the endeavour to outline a future critical theology which can legitimately claim to be both critical *and* theological.

As will become immediately apparent to the reader, the ultimate aspirations of this study and its critical caste are deeply rooted in the work of Charles Davis. Now Professor *Emeritus* at Concordia University in Montréal, Davis's appropriation of Habermasian critical theory represents one of the most rigorous and articulate efforts in the English speaking world. This achievement is presented in his books, *Theology and Political Society*[11]; *What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today?*; and most recently, *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology.*[12] Together, these texts document what I have called elsewhere, a "postorthodox" critical theology.[13]

In brief, Davis argues that if contemporary theology aims toward the transformation of political society, then it must be a thoroughly public theology. Following Habermas

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[11] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

[12] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[13] See Marc P. Lalonde, "From Postmodernity to Postorthodoxy, Or Charles Davis and the Contemporary Context of Christian Theology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 22, no. 4 (1993): 437-449.

on this point, Davis discerns how a public theology with a practical intent (i.e., that which both begins and ends in praxis)[14] cannot take refuge in the authority of revelation or tradition, but must subject religious thought, practice, and language to ideology-critique. As Davis remarks in a discussion on the Bible; "Criticism recognizes no theological *apriori*. No authority can make a text other than it is, and the principles of criticism remain the same whether the text is sacred or profane."[15] To state the matter differently, Davis's analysis charts the end of orthodoxy as the epitome of the "theological *apriori*." While Davis is not the only critical religious thinker to assume this approach,[16] his is one of the most consistent and coherent examples, endeavouring as it does to balance his deconstruction of the Christian tradition and faith with an equally challenging reconstruction.

As alluded to above, the perspicacity of Davis's contribution has certainly been augmented by the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. Currently professor of Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, Germany, he is undoubtedly one of the most influential intellectuals to emerge in post-war Europe. To my mind, he is the most

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[14] See Joseph Kroger, "The Prophetic-Critical and Practical-Strategic Tasks of Theology: Habermas and Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 7.

[15] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 105.

[16] Cf. Afredo Fierro, *The Militant Gospel: A Critical Introduction to Political Theologies*, trans. by John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977). Also see Roberta Imboden, *From the Cross to the Kingdom: Sartrean Dialectics and Liberation Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

outstanding and profound philosopher and social critical theorist alive today.[17] Both

the breadth and depth of his erudition, and its challenge for those who venture to

appropriate his work, is captured in this quotation:

> "It is not altogether easy to assess the work of a scholar whose professional competence extends from the logic of science to the sociology of knowledge, by way of Marx, Hegel and the more recondite sources of the European metaphysical tradition ... [At] an age when most of his colleagues have painfully established a control over a corner of the field, he has made himself master of the whole, in depth and breadth alike. There is no corner cutting, no facile evasion of difficulties or spurious enunciation of conclusions unsupported by research: whether he is refuting Popper, dissecting the pragmatism of Charles Peirce, delving into the medieval antecedents of Schelling's metaphysics, or bringing Marxist sociology up to date, there is always the same uncanny mastery of sources, joined to an enviable talent for clarifying intricate logical puzzles. He seems to have been born with a faculty for digesting the toughest kind of material and then refashioning it into orderly wholes."[18]

Given this characterization, the main difficulty confronting any commentator is

which facet of Habermas's research programme to highlight and employ. There can

be no question in a study on critical theology of surveying and incorporating the

entirety of Habermas's contribution. Even a text as comprehensive as Thomas

McCarthy's *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*[19] makes no such claim. My

examination of Habermas is governed and shaped by the topics specific to the field of

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[17] For a first encounter with the thought and person of Habermas, see Peter Dews ed., *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas* (London: Verso, 1992).

[18] George Lichtheim, "From Historicism to Marxist Humanism" in *From Marx to Hegel* (New York, 1971), 175; cited in Richard J. Bernstein ed., "Introduction" in Richard J. Berstein ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 1.

[19] Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978. See especially the "Preface," ix-xiii.

critical religious thought. Yet even within these confines, the theologian can choose to address either Habermas's sociological or philosophical writings. Though this distinction may seem forced or artificial given the high degree of integration that Habermas achieves between these branches of his ongoing enquiries, I contend the differentiation is; i) justified by the dominant direction of Habermas's most recent work; ii) warranted by the theoretical and analytical obstacles which mark prevailing trends in critical theology.

First, since the publication of Habermas's two volume work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*,[20] his attention has largely centred on philosophical, ethical, and cultural issues. Of singular importance for my argument is Habermas's brilliant analysis of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*,[21] supplemented by subsequent manuscripts: *The New Conservatism*[22]; *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*[23]; *Postmetaphysical Thinking*[24]; and *Justification and Application*.[25] While

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[20] Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. 1; *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, vol. 2 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984; 1987).

[21] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

[22] Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

[23] Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

[24] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. by William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

Habermas's explanation of this shift from sociology to philosophy underscores its continuity, his remarks still furnish a sound basis for a more exclusive inspection of his philosophical deliberations.

In the opening pages of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, we learn that Habermas's analysis of Weberian rationalization in *The Theory of Communicative Action*,[26] exposes a fundamental problem with most theories of modernization. Basically, these theories tend to proceed as if the general, abstract processes of societal "modernization" comprise the meaning and content of "modernity" *in toto*. The result is that it "breaks the internal connections between modernity and the historical context of Western rationalism, so that processes of modernization can no longer be conceived of as rationalization, as the historical objectification of rational structures."[27] This confusion, says Habermas, detaches modernization from the normative content of cultural (i.e., "rational") modernity, thereby completely disregarding the need to critically evaluate such processes from within the historico-philosophical "project of modernity."[28] Thus, Habermas's ambition is to illuminate the true conceptual and philosophical horizon of *modernity* as the only appropriate ground for a social critical

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[25] Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. by Ciaran P. Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

[26] See the second chapter on "Max Weber's Theory of Rationalization" in Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 143-271.

[27] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 2.

[28] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 3.

theory with normative implications.[29] My claim is that this horizon can and deserves to be examined in its own right.

Second, it is precisely the nature and character of modernity which both permits and challenges the very existence of critical theology. On the one hand, critical theology is inconceivable without a substantive link to the history and development of modern critical philosophy and social theory from Kant onwards. On the other hand, it is evident from Habermas's interpretation that "critical theology" can only be an oxymoron. What Habermas calls, the "postmetaphysical" condition of contemporary thought, cannot accommodate a *critical* theology. Now, I hope to intimate throughout this study that Habermas's criticisms are both timely and profound. It is by working through Habermas's postmetaphysical objections rather than around them, that critical theology may yet discover a new configuration.

The need to cultivate this potential is, in many ways, provoked by the recent appearance of John Milbank's treatise, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason.*[30] Without a doubt, this young Cambridge University theologian has produced the most stimulating thesis on modern critical theology since the advent of political and liberation theology in the early 1960s. His work also represents the most sophisticated theological appropriation of postmodern philosophy to date. The fact that two academic theological journals have already devoted entire issues to Milbank's proposal seems to

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[29] See Thomas McCarthy's "Introduction" to *Philosophical Discourse, vii-xvii*, for a helpful and concise overview of Habermas's argument.

[30] Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

confirm this first assessment.[31] While I attend to his work only in the Conclusion to this study, Milbank's thesis is anticipated throughout my investigations of critical theology and theory, and deserves some comment here.[32]

In his self-described "post-Nietzschean" point of departure, Milbank intends to move beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion as the essential moment of an authentic critical theology. Relying on the postmodern critique of modern secular reason, Milbank proffers a rhetorical levelling of all truth claims. The result of this approach attests that "truth" is the consequence of an all encompassing "metanarrative" framework which structures perceptions of reality. Milbank therefore commends the Christian story of love, peace, and harmony as the supreme metanarrative foundation for *social critical theory*. Only in this way, says Milbank, can theology present itself as an effective critical theology.

It is in view of the distinctive proposals of Davis, Habermas, and Milbank that I hope to interpret a future direction for critical theology. To telescope its fundamental challenge and concern: if critical theology is to be both *critical* and *theological*, it must; i) discover a way to rationally justify religious truth claims in the contemporary public sphere without claiming an unassailable sanction or status for its judgments of

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[31] *New Blackfriars* 73 (June 1992); *Modern Theology* 8 (October 1992).

[32] It is my intention to tackle Milbank's thesis in full in my next work. Because his position is stated so strongly and adamantly; and due to his novel appropriation of both theology and postmodern philosophy, an adequate response to his overall argument demands an independent investigation. However, the present volume can be read as a prefatory study to this task insofar that it strives to establish a fundamental orientation toward critical theology and theory: one which may provide a suitable framework in which to draft an alternative to Milbank's proposal.

political society *and* social critical theory; ii) confidently decipher its manifest singularity for political society as a public sphere *and* social critical theory as a public, rational discourse. In other words, it is crucial to explain why one should undertake the study and practice of critical theology rather than critical theory alone; and to do so in explanatory terms common to critical theory rather than theology alone.

This problematic, of course, is not original to this study as is reflected in the following passage from Helmut Peukert:

> If theology does not again want to adopt the absolute standpoint of an observer outside of this [concrete historical] existence, then it must make explicit in what sense it can speak of the whole of history with the claim to universality. If theology is a discourse on God that is related to history, it does not seem possible that this universal claim could be surrendered. However, at the same time, theology has to establish that there is no innerworldly subject that could ascribe to itself an absolute knowledge of the totality of history for each point in its course or might possess an equivocal strategy for the realization for an already known meaning of history. The biblical discourse on God as the Lord and the eschatological judge retains its hermeneutical significance; we cannot speak at all adequately about God under the present conditions. The throne of history cannot be occupied by a mythical construct. Adequate discourse on God can only speak of the one who is to come, and at the same time, point to the transformation of the present conditions of speaking.[33]

Stated in the broadest possible terms, then, the issues at stake revolve around the possibility, ground, and scope of God-talk in a historico-cultural context in which not only God is dead, but so too is the Absolute subject, dialectical *Aufhebung*, and social revolution. Succinctly put: it is the quest for God's presence in history in the age of

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[33] Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, trans. by James Bohman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 10-11.

post Hegel mortuum.[34]

3 Political and Liberation Theology: Some Preliminary

Distinctions

In Davis's definition of critical theology which opens this chapter, there is an overt emphasis on consolidating a political hermeneutic and praxis for contemporary religious thought.   Does it thereby follow that the type of theological reflection known as "political theology" encompass critical theology as well?   Dorothee Sölle claims that political theology employs ideological criticism so as to free the gospel message, or *kerygma* from its intellectual, cultural, and societal distortions.   Political theology in this sense "becomes an instrument of self-criticism for theology..."[35] Similarly, Latin American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez insists that "Theology must be critical reflection on humankind, on basic human principles.   Only with this approach will theology be a serious discourse, aware of itself, in full possession of its conceptual elements."[36] In light of these statements, do both political and liberation theology qualify as forms of critical theology?   Are there any criteria for differentiating between political, liberation, and critical theology, or are they finally one and the same?

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[34] See Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 3-30.

[35] Dorothee Sölle, *Political Theology*, trans. by John Shelley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 63.

[36] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 9.

There is an indisputable measure of overlap amongst these different expressions of theological thought in terms of their historical development, method, and thematic content. Fierro contends, for instance, that this literature "possess[es] substantive continuity and homogeneity. My hypothesis has been verified to some extent" says Fierro, "by the very fact that it was possible to weave a continuous discourse linking liberation theology and revolutionary theology, Exodus theology and political eschatology ..."[37] This is to affirm that political, liberation, and critical theologies form a comprehensive field of study, and can be surveyed as such with benefit. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental differences between them, and it is important for this study to note the dissimilarities and variations. Again to cite Fierro: "While the basic unity of its discourse might not be called into question, these differences reveal that it might have many different levels of meaning."[38]

The foremost distinction to record is that between political and liberation theology. First, it indicates differences of a geopolitical nature: while political theology is predominately a Western-European phenomenon and is preoccupied with the socio-cultural conditions which define a capitalist, secular society, liberation theology emerges from Central and South America, and tends to focus upon the plight of the poor in their struggle to create an indigenous socialism. "In any case" notes Fierro, "the thematic preferences of theologians for different sociopolitical realities (liberation, revolution, social change, and so forth) lead us to their respective social situations,

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[37] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 305.

[38] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 306.

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within which they exercise their function."[39] The dominant theological effect of these

"respective social situations" is neatly summarized by Francis Fiorenza:

> In general the difference between political theology and liberation theology can be drawn fairly sharply. Political theology is a reaction to the consequences of the enlightenment and secularization as they have been spelled out in existential, personalist, and some strains of transcendental theology. It seeks to overcome the relegation of faith to the private individualistic sphere by elaborating a new hermeneutic of the relationship between theory and praxis. Its primary task is hermeneutical. Liberation theology arises as a response to the oppression and injustices within the Latin scene. It criticizes the theories of developmentalism and points out the inadequacies of the models of Catholic liberalism as well as the theology of social action or the lay apostolate. Its primary task involves the elucidation of the meaning of the symbols of Christian faith for the concrete situation and praxis in Latin America.[40]

Now, it would be erroneous to conclude from this contrast that liberation theology

is completely unconcerned with the Enlightenment, secularization and hermeneutics, and

that political theology pays no attention to the eliminatio of oppression and the

correlation of Christian symbols to social action. It will not do to assert with Rebecca

Chopp, for example, that liberation theology provides a "knowledge of God [which] is

not directly equitable, or commensurable with the modern theology of the First World

bourgeoisie,"[41] yet continue on to affirm that the liberationist "experience of and

reflection on God and the poor seek[ ] to guide the transformation of *all* human beings

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[39] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 216.

[40] Francis P. Fiorenza, "Political Theology and Liberation Theology: An Inquiry into Their Fundamental Meaning" in Thomas H. McFadden ed., *Liberation, Revolution and Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 5.

[41] Rebecca S. Chopp, "Latin American Liberation Theology" in Ford ed., *The Modern Theologians*, vol. 2, 173.

into new ways of being human ..."[42] In this way, Chopp promotes liberation theology

for positive appropriation from first world theologians while simultaneously deflecting

the credibility of a critical appropriation. For sure, there are immense differences in

the cultural, social, and political presuppositions at work in liberation and political

theology. But as Richard Bernstein argues, incommensurability does not necessarily

entail incomparability.[43] There are both positive and negative conclusions to be drawn

by comparing the methodological reflections of liberation theology in relation to those

advanced by political theology. Little is to be gained by a characterization of liberation

theology as a first order theological testimony of God's action in history, while political

theology is portrayed as a second or third order reflection which primarily gives voice

to the aridity of academic discourse and the imperialism of the first world. Dennis

McCann's opinion on this issue can stand for my own: "The new political theology,

obviously, is highly abstract, and immediately responsive to certain theoretical issues

currently debated among West German theologians and social philosophers. Despite

its abstract quality, it does speak to a real concern among sensitive social critics who

fear the consequences of the growing irrelevance of religious and moral beliefs to

politics."[44]

This statement returns me to highlight the relevance of Fiorenza's description for

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[42] Chopp, "Latin American Liberation Theology," 174. Italics mine.

[43] See Richard J. Bernstein, "Incommensurability and Otherness Revisited" in his book *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 57-78.

[44] Dennis P. McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 164.

the present discussion: its introductory comments on political theology. Fiorenza's précis suggests that political theology is a specifically modern development which emerges from a critique of theological existentialism. This at least is the point of departure for the architect of political theology, Johann Baptist Metz.[45] In brief, Metz holds that the existentialist claim to represent concrete human existence is rather spurious given its disregard for the pervasive political context of contemporary human life. As he says, "any existential and personal theology that claims to understand human existence, but not as a political problem in the widest sense, is an abstract theology in regard to the existential situation of the individual."[46] Though it is partially misleading to view political theology as constituting a complete break with its predecessor,[47] the individualistic and asocial conceptualization of the religious subject

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[45] See the early collection of essays by Metz in his book, *Theology of the World*, trans. by William Glen-Doepel (New York: Seabury, 1973), especially "The Church and the World in Light of a 'Political Theology,'" 107-130.

[46] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. by David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 62-63.

[47] Sölle's book *Political Theology*, for instance, represents "an attempt to work at such a programme [i.e., political theology], specifically in the form of a critical conversation with the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. ... More and more it appears to me that the move from existentialist theology to political theology is itself a consequence of the Bultmannian position." (2) Similarly, Fierro remarks in *Militant Gospel* that "The existentialist approach tends to de-emphasize or denigrate any political hermeneutics of the gospel, even though there is a clear and logical progression from existentialist humanism to politics." (41) For further insight into the relationship between existential theology and political theology, as well as for more general renditions of the historical development of political theology, see the first chapter in Fierro's *Militant Gospel* entitled, "From Anthropocentrism to Politics," 3-47. Also see the first chapter in Davis's *Theology and Political Society*, "From Orthodoxy to Politics," 1-27.

advanced by existential theology is thought to reduce the inescapable societal and historical dimensions of faith to a transcendental anthropology.[48] "A theology that regards transcending existence in its individualized decision as the only possible horizon of theological statements" writes Helmut Peukert, "is in danger of losing sight of concrete history and its future by exclusive concentration on the existential structure of existence. The radicalness of an existential theology fixated on the God-man relationship cannot perceive the fundamental societal conditionedness of existence. The decision of faith remains worldless; it becomes a private event in relation to society."[49] Or to rephrase Karl Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "Theologians have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

Peukert's critique of existential theology is inspired by and corresponds to Metz's consideration of the privatization of faith. "The categories most prominent in this theology" observes Metz, "are the categories of the intimate, the private, the apolitical sphere."[50] He identifies the Enlightenment separation of Church, State, and society as the root source of this predicament. Though Metz contends that the corollary distinction between private and public spheres is valuable, it does not seem to

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[48] See Metz, "The Church and the World in Light of a Political Theology," 108-109. For a specific consideration of the relationship between Metz and the transcendental theology of his teacher Karl Rahner, see Peter Mann's two part essay, "The Transcendental or the Political Kingdom: Reflections on a Theological Dispute," *New Blackfriars* 50 (1969): 805-812; 51 (1970): 4-16. Also see Roger Dick Johns, *Man in the World: The Theology of Johannes Baptist Metz* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1976), 61-84.

[49] Peukert, *Science*, 8-9.

[50] Metz, "Church and World in Light of a 'Political Theology,'" 109.

compensate for the cessation of Christianity's public status and role.[51] In its place arises "The way of life of the middle class citizen [which] is ultimately contained in the concept of the private. The middle class is no longer sustained by any all-embracing traditions, let alone religious traditions."[52] Insofar that religious traditions remain part of middle class private lives, they are reduced to a commodity functioning in a culture of exchange. Thus Metz concludes that "It is possible to make use of ... [religion] to satisfy cultural needs, but it is no longer necessary to have it in order to be a subject."[53]

It is for this reason that Metz intends to develop his political theology as a political theology of the subject.[54] As such, political theology is largely concerned to initiate a process of deprivatization: "*The deprivatization of theology is the primary task of political theology.*"[55] It endeavours to fulfil this demand by formulating a political hermeneutic of faith understood as the dialectic of theory and praxis acquired from the Marxist philosophical tradition. Thus, the ethicist Douglas Sturm can write that "At the heart of political theology, a Marxian notion of praxis is joined with a Christian doctrine of divine promise to formulate a new mode of thought as much concerned with

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[51] Metz, *Faith* 35.

[52] Metz, *Faith*, 35.

[53] Metz, *Faith*, 35.

[54] See Metz, *Faith*, 46-47; and 49-83.

[55] Metz, "The Church and World in Light of a 'Political Theology,'" 111.

radical political change as with a reconstruction of the theological task."[56] What this

"notion" entails is the recognition that theoretical activity begins in practical human

experience, and ends by contributing to the elucidation and cultivation of a humane

praxis.[57] As Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach states the matter;

> The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking
> is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove
> the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking
> in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that
> is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.[58]

What are the ramifications of this conception of praxis for theological thought? In

principle (though not necessarily "in practice") it means that the exposition of

theological truth *cannot* depend on divine revelation or the authority of tradition. Metz

concedes this fact when he writes that "'political' theology is not simply a theory of the

subsequent application of the Christian message, but a theory of the truth of that

message with a practical and critical intention for the modern world."[59] Theological

truth claims, if they are true at all, must be rooted in practical human experience.[60]

Davis therefore defines political theology as "theology mediated by the political. It is

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[56] Douglas Sturm, "Praxis and Promise: On the Ethics of Political Theology," *Ethics* 92 (July 1982): 733. Also see chapter three in Fierro's *Militant Gospel*, "The Era of Dialectical Thinking," where he states that "Political theology is the specific and proper form of theology in an epoch dominated by Marx." (103)

[57] See Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 82.

[58] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" in David McLellan ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 156.

[59] Metz, *Faith*, 89.

[60] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 91.

faith as articulated or brought to expression in and through political praxis."[61] In other words, political theology is the kind of theology produced when the practical human experience informing its theoretical discussion is political action.

Of course the question that arises here is; does this development constitute a "theology of politics"? That is, does political theology aim at the erection of a Christian society and/or state? Is it an endeavour to restore Christendom? This issue has dogged political theology since its inception,[62] though the vast majority of its practitioners judge any return to a "Constantinian" theology to be both preposterous and undesirable. For example, Fierro maintains that for political theology "there is no Christian order, no Christian politics. There is simply the public and critical praxis of Christians."[63] Along similar lines Sölle writes that "political theology is not an attempt to develop a concrete political programme from faith, nor is it another attempt of Social Gospel in which praxis simply swallows up theory. There are no specifically Christian solutions to world problems for which a political theology would have to develop the theory."[64] Yet in spite of these disclaimers we still encounter statements which profess that "Political theology ... is not part of theology, but theology in its entirety done politically."[65] What, then, is the meaning of the "political"?

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[61] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 3.

[62] See Helmut Peukert ed., *Diskussion zur "politischen Theologie"* (Mainz/Munich: Matthias-Grunewald Verlag/Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1969).

[63] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 75.

[64] Sölle, *Political Theology*, 58-59.

[65] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 3.

In general, the theological use of the term "political" signifies a rather broad

concern for the social, cultural, and political spheres of modern society. Unlike Max

Weber's definition of politics as "striving to share power or striving to influence the

distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state,"[66] political

theologians primarily focus upon the means through which modern society organizes

itself; how it structures its decision making processes; the kind of values and forms of

rationality enshrined within this organization and process; and the self-understanding

of the human subject as both the active agent and passive object of this dynamic

complex of factors. The Danish theologian Jens Glebe-Möller therefore contends that

"'Politics' is not a term that is restricted to professional or parliamentary politics

exclusively. Politics has to do with *discussions and decisions concerning how societies*

and individuals should organize their life."[67] The "political" is another way of

contemplating modern culture as a decidedly political or public culture concerned with

the evolution and/or devolution of contemporary society. It is not, as Metz says, a

"question, ... of how churches and political parties can cooperate more successfully in

individual areas within the existing structure of politics ..."[68] Rather, it represents a

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[66] Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation" in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills trans. and eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

[67] Jens Glebe-Möller, *A Political Dogmatic*, trans. by Thor Hall (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 9.

[68] Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. by Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 67.

concern for the very mettle of the s ial imagination,[69] and the potential contribution of religious faith to the formulation of a new vision of society:

> What we need in the long run is a new form of political life and new political structures. Only when that arrives will there be any humane cultures at all in the future. In this sense, "politics" is actually the new name for culture and in this sense, too, any theology which tries to reflect on the Christian tradition in the context of world problems and to bring about the process of transference between the kingdom of God and society is a "political theology."[70]

4 *Political Theology and the Public Sphere*

This delineation of the political field represents an Enlightenment elaboration of the meaning of politics. As the antecedent discussion of Metz affirmed, it is an elaboration made possible by the modern separation of church, state, and society.[71] What this division finally encourages is the creation of a civil society and public sphere which stand in critical opposition to the structures and functions of the state. This socio-historical exegesis is advanced, at least, in Jürgen Habermas's *Habilitationschrift* (the post-doctoral thesis required from German professors) and first book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois*

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[69] On this issue also see Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity: The Church for Others* (Montreal: CBC Enterprises, 1987), 64.

[70] Metz, *Faith*, 102.

[71] Also see Johann Baptist Metz, "'Politische Theologie' in der Diskussion," in *Diskussion zur "politischen Theologie"*, 269; cited in Johns, *Man in the World*, 121.

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Society.[72] A brief examination of its thesis is called for because it clarifies the conceptualization of political society which informs the project of political theology; and, more importantly, because it intimates a shift toward an explicit articulation of political theology as a critical theology.

Habermas's highly fascinating investigation of the political economy of 18th and 19th Century Western Europe, profiles the bourgeois model of public discourse as an unparalleled form of political participation. "The bourgeois public sphere" writes Habermas, "may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: *people's public use of their reason* (*öffentliches Räsonnement*)."[73] It is essential to stress that the bourgeois public sphere was not a prototype for contemporary lobbyists vying for political favours from the state. Instead this development comprises, as Craig Calhoun emphasizes, the institutionalization of "a practice of rational-critical discourse on political matters."[74] What, then, is demanded

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[72] Trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). German edition, *Strukturwandel der Offenlicheit* (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962).

[73] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 27. Italics mine.

[74] Craig Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere" in Craig Clahoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 9.

by the "people's public use of their reason"?

First, enshrined within the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere was a disregard of social status and tradition. In their place stood the presupposition of a common humanity. This feature goes hand in hand with a "parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy and in the end carry the day ..."[75] To employ Habermas's more recent formulation of this standard, "the unforced force of the better argument" settles the debate. Second, "discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned."[76] In other words, issues, themes, and other affairs of the people emerged as a "domain of 'common concern' which was the object of public critical attention ..."[77] Life, and the meaning of human existence, were thus opened up to a plurality of idioms and interpretations. This characteristic hints at the third principle requirement of inclusivity: "However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique ... The issues discussed became 'general' not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to *be able* to participate."[78]

Taken as a whole, this practice -- with its formal, procedural processes of argumentation as a means to structure social integration and organize common social

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[75] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36.

[76] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36.

[77] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36.

[78] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 37.

action -- is not only vital for *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, but for the totality of Habermas's ensuing sociological and philosophical studies of modernity. This claim is also advanced by Calhoun when he writes;

> The ideal of the public sphere calls for social integration to be based on rational-critical discourse. Integration, in other words, is to be based on communication rather than domination. "Communication" in this context means not merely sharing what people already think or know but also a process of potential transformation in which reason is advanced by debate itself. This goal cannot be realized by the denial of the implications of large-scale social organization, by imagining a public sphere occupied only by autonomous private individuals, with no large organizations and with no cleavages of interest inhibiting the identification of the general good, as liberal theory suggests. "Institutionalized in the mass democracy of the social welfare state, ... the idea of publicity ... is to today realizable only as a rationalization ... of the exercise of societal and political power under the mutual control of rival organizations themselves committed to publicity as regards both their internal structure and their interaction with one another and with the state."[79] The rationalization is limited, just as it was in the bourgeois public sphere of critical debate among private people, but it is rationalization nonetheless.[80]

It is this ideal, including its distortion and strict limitations within contemporary society, that informs the ambition of political theology. It is for this reason that Sölle can specify that the "guiding hermeneutical principle" of political theology "is the question of authentic life for all men. .... Only what is appropriated and mediated politically, only what is relevant to the life of everyone in society, can be regarded as understanding. This preunderstanding of a possible life for all men in society is criticized and transformed by its encounter with the message of the gospel."[81] Indeed,

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[79] Quoting Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 210.

[80] Calhoun, "Introduction," 29.

[81] Sölle, *Political Theology*, 60.

it is this public dimension of political theology that radically set it in contrast to its existentialist forerunner. Commenting on this theological shift, Fierro notes that "the jargon of existential ideology began to be muted around 1965, giving way to a new theological idiom associated with a theory that faith was to be viewed as public, political praxis designed to transform society."[82] Similarly, Metz writes that "the positive task of political theology ... is to determine anew the relation between religion and society, between church and societal 'publicness,' between eschatological faith and societal life ..."[83] This fundamental feature of political theology has presently come to a head via its appropriation of Habermas's critical theory. The result is an explicit "public theology." As Francis Schüssler Fiorenza relates, "A theology of the public realm is not merely the application of a theory to practice, with critical theory replacing traditional theory. Instead it is entering into the public arena of discussion and dialogue whereby theology is as much challenged as it challenges."[84]

Now, it is obvious from this succession of citations that the public focus of political theology involves two interconnected directives: first, a theology of the public realm is not only a corrective of modern theology, but is viewed as making a critical contribution to the numerous social and political problems facing the world today; second, this in turn promotes the modern relevance of religious faith, combatting its

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[82] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 13.

[83] Metz, "Church and World in Light of a 'Political Theology,'" 111. Also see Johns, *Man in the World*, 127.

[84] Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: A Critical Reception for a Practical Public Theology" in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 2.

marginalization within secular society.[85] However, in light of the nature and character

of the public sphere outlined by Habermas, is it tenable to say, as Matthew Lamb does,

that "Religious faith, as a knowledge born of love, is a constitutive element of truly

practical reason, that is, reason committed to expanding the effective freedom of human

beings"?[86] Is it legitimate to avow with Jürgen Moltmann that "The situation of the

crucified God makes it clear that human situations in where there is no freedom are

vicious circles which must be broken through because they can be broken through in

him"?[87] The issue at stake here is whether such exceptional religious statements either

offer or maintain meaning for a modern public characterized by a mutuality of persons

and arguments, the problematization of interpretation, and inclusivity. As Dennis

McCann and Charles Strain suggest, "the new practical theology has a promising future

only if it avoids any pretence of historical uniqueness, exclusive moral validity, and

religious absoluteness. By renouncing these distortions, it will assure a proper place

for religious vision in the larger world of public discourse."[88]

In view of this declaration, Douglas Sturm is one critic who insinuates that the

future of political theology may be short lived. In his review essay, "Praxis and

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[85] See Metz, "Church and World in Light of a 'Political Theology,'" 107.

[86] Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 17.

[87] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: SCM Press, 1974), 317-318.

[88] Dennis P. McCann and Charles R. Strain, *Polity and Praxis: A Program for American Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 3.

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Promise: On the Ethics of Political Theology," Sturm reproaches political theology for its exclusive focus on the Christian community; for an excessive reliance on technical theological themes and issues (e.g., ecclesiology, Christology, and eschatology); and for an esoteric language. "There is, to be sure," remarks Sturm, "nothing intrinsically wrong with these characteristics, but they have the unfortunate result of obscuring one of the basic intentions of political theology, namely, to present an understanding of the world that is of public significance."[89] In essence, Sturm faults political theology for *presuming* the validity of the Christian faith, and as such, for confusing dogmatic theology for public theology.

For Fierro, this presumption divulges an integral problem that is seldom dealt with in a candid or lucid fashion: namely, that "*political theology is not always sufficiently clear on the whole matter of the nature of its own logos.*"[90] In other words, political theology tends to dim or disregard the issue of rationally justifying the cognitive status of its theological and critical grounding, legitimation, and validation in relation to the modern context which it seeks to address.[91] This obscuration tends to permit the perpetuation of a traditional dogmatic theology in the guise of a "critical" theology. As Fierro says in regard to Liberation theology; "... the fact that under the rubric of liberation theology we find proposals that are very conservative in terms of theology, though progressive in social terms, tends to undermine the critical capacity of that

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[89] Sturm, "Praxis and Promise," 737.

[90] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 308. Italics mine.

[91] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 308.

theolo_y when taken in overall terms."[92]

Essentially, Fierro's comments accent the challenge of synthesizing or correlating theological truth claims with those of Marxist critical theory. For in the final analysis, professes Fierro, "current political theology is nothing else but the thoughts produced by faith on the humus of Marxism ..."[93] The problem with this production, however, is that it has failed to thoroughly survey the topography of the Marxist terrain while, nevertheless, ordaining it as hallowed ground. This approach has tended to assume, rather than to critically assess, a rudimentary compatibility between theological content and the method of critical theory. As Fierro explains the matter further; "The basic procedure, ... is clear enough. Certain propositions originating in historical-materialist thinking are granted immediate validity in theological thinking, little thought being given to the rupture that faith occasions between the one and the other."[94] Hence, until political theology adequately elucidates the content and scope of its own *logos* in relationship to its Marxist theoretical orientation, "then it must be said that the public, critical and practical idiom of theology is really navigating through a sea of

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[92] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 198. A similar claim against liberation theology is advanced in Alistair Kee's book, *Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), especially the whole of part three, "Beyond Liberation Theology," 255-283. For a rather negative review of Kee's work see Hugh Lacey, "Liberation Theology: Trends and Criticisms," *Cross Currents* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 130-134. For a more sympathetic yet critical presentation of liberation theology from a North American perspective see the collection of essays in Gregory Baum's work, *Theology and Society* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

[93] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 80.

[94] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 112.

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ambiguities."[95]

An analogous conclusion is reached by Dennis McCann in his study of *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict*. Though McCann's work is oriented toward defining a future model for practical theology adequate to the North American situation,[96] his approach clarifies the rudiments of the issue in question. McCann writes;

> If, as I have argued, liberation theology is plagued from the beginning by a crucial ambiguity, stemming primarily from an incompatibility between its *method* and its *content*, then its subsequent development since Gutierrez's Magna Charta may seem as transforming that ambiguity into a dilemma. The dilemma is that liberation theologians must choose between either the method or the content as outlined by Gutierrez. If they choose the method, then liberation theology becomes increasingly distant from the mainstream of Catholic life and thought; if they choose the content, then liberation theology becomes increasingly indistinguishable -- methodologically, if not thematically -- from the progressivism of Vatican II. In either case its distinctive program, the new way of "doing theology in a revolutionary situation," is sacrificed.[97]

Though I cannot possibly do justice to the complexity and critical rigor that substantiates McCann's claim, it should be explained that by "method" he is referring to the process of "consciencization" developed by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[98] Essentially, "consciencization" involves the critique of ideology from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Its aim is to overcome, in both

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[95] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 113.

[96] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 4.

[97] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 230. Italics mine.

[98] Trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1990).

thought and practice, limit-situations which impede the full realization of the human

subject in history. As McCann says, "The dialectical vision that grounds this theory

pictures the whole of history as a struggle for liberation."[99] By "content," McCann

is alluding to the idea of "evangelical consciencization" as presented in Gustavo

Gutierrez's foundational work, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and

Salvation*. Here the process of consciencization is viewed as contiguous with the

Gospel message of salvation from personal and social sin, and is symbolized by "Christ

the Liberator."[100] What McCann's analysis suggests, among other things, is that

consciencization ultimately undermines its attendant theological truth claims, while the

theological truth claims imposed upon consciencization foils its radical intentions: such

is, what we can call, the "correlationist dilemma."[101]

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[99] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 168.

[100] This phrase derives from Leonardo Boff's text, *Jesus Christ Liberator* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978). For Gutierrez's contribution to this notion see, *A Theology of Liberation*, 102-105.

[101] The use of this phrase is not meant to be strictly identified with Paul Tillich's "method of correlation" as presented in volume one of his *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 59-66. "Correlation" is used in the present text for descriptive and diagnostic purposes. Liberation and political theologies do not self-consciously employ Tillich's method. Nevertheless, there might exist an implicit point of contact that could be further explored in an illuminating fashion.
Tillich's explication of his method runs as follows: "In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions." (62)
Now, one can discern a certain compatibility between Tillich's method and that employed by liberation theology. In this case, Marxist theory raises the relevant political questions to which Christianity provides the socialist Christian answer. Yet what is perhaps more convincing in terms of this comparison, is that criticisms of Tillich's method parallel those of political and liberation theology. As David Kelsey

McCann asserts that the basis of Gutierrez's liberation theology is "the orthodox Catholic vision of the Incarnation."[102] The problem with this supposition is that it does not lend itself to the dialectical vision of history embodied by the method of consciencization: "No dialectical *tour de force*" says McCann, "can integrate the epiphany of the Absolute in time with the vision of history as an ongoing struggle of the oppresse~ to realize the untested feasibility of liberation. This is so because the Incarnation makes God the primary agent or 'Subject' in human history, while the dialectical vision makes 'it possible for men to enter the historical process as responsible Subjects.'"[103] In other words, either one chooses "Christ the Liberator" and abandons the Marxist paradigm for reading current history as salvation history; or one chooses the Marxist paradigm and abandons Christ the Liberator and the ontological transformation introduced by his historical life, death, and resurrection. Without the former, liberation theology cannot be considered to be theology; without the latter, it forfeits its radical politicization of the Gospel message, and ceases to be what we have all come to know as Liberation Theology.

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explains in his essay, "Paul Tillich" (in Ford ed., *The Modern Theologians, vol. I*); "Tillich's intent was to mediate between the faith and the culture. Controversy turned on whether such 'correlation' does not finally result in translating the content of Christian faith without remainder into the deepest
convictions of the secular culture it seeks to address." (149) This link, however, does not preclude Tillich's usefulness for the study and cultivation of critical theology. On this topic, see James W. Champion, "Tillich and the Frankfurt School: Parallels and Differences in Prophetic Criticism," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 69 (Winter 1986): 512-530.

[102] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 183.

[103] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 184.

Now, it is certainly not McCann's goal to suggest that the future direction of critical theology is limited to the above alternatives. His own recommendations urge the critical clarification of the "nature of religious transcendence, and its role in Christian social action."[104] Yet it is precisely this task of discerning the nature of God's presence in history which steers critical theology back toward the correlationist impasse: namely, to decide whether the *logos* of theology is God Incarnate; or whether it is some version of Marxist critical theory.

5 *From Political Theology to Critical Theology*

It is in light of these problems advanced by Fierro and McCann that the efficacy of an authentic critical theology comes to the fore. As Dermot Lane briefly defines it; "Critical theology, ... is concerned about putting its own house in order by examining the underlying presuppositions of theology and submitting these to an ideology-critique before turning to the needs of society."[105] In other words, critical theology does not presume the validity of Christian faith when examined within the context of a modern public sphere. In truth, this setting presages a critical appropriation of religious ideas, practices, symbols, and narratives insofar that the "people's public use of their reason" cannot accommodate the privilege of status or tradition. From the perspective of those who, like McCann and Strain, desire to "assure a proper place for religious vision in

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[104] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 4.

[105] Dermot A. Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process, and Salvation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 33.

the larger world of public discourse," this means recognizing and dealing with the fact

that the Christian religion, like all other finite human constructions, can be a carrier of

a deformed image of human existence; that its praxis will generate, as Joseph Kroger

puts it, "nonsense as well as meaning ..."[106] Few theologians have articulated this

necessary feature of public theology as forcefully or convincingly as Charles Davis:

"Critical theology acknowledges that the Christian tradition, like other traditions, is not

exclusively a source of truth and value, but a vehicle of untruth and false values, and

thus must be subject to a critique of ideology and critically appropriated, not simply

made one's own in an assimilative process of interpretation."[107] Only in this fashion

can the Christian religion and its theology free itself of inherited expressions of

domination and oppression, and as a consequence, augment human emancipation.

The understanding of critical theology promoted by Davis and others is, in many

respects, simply a logical repercussion of espousing the theory-praxis dialectic. This

is because "practice is no longer merely concerned with the change in individual

relationships in a fixed whole" as Peukert realizes; "... rather, it is concerned with the

change in the status of the evolution of the species, and thus with the constitutive

mechanisms of the existing society in all its dimensions."[108] In other words, the

modern human being is a self-constituting social animal who evolves in relation to a

social totality in constant historical formation. Social organization, the meaning of

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[106] Kroger, "Prophetic-Critical and Practical-Strategic Tasks of Theology," 11.

[107] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 25.

[108] Peukert, *Science*, 2.

history, and the self-understanding of the finite subject, are human constructions rather than embodiments or reflections of a static metaphysical realm. Fierro therefore proffers that only a theology which "refuses to see itself primarily as a religious fact is capable of adopting that basic reference to praxis ..."[109] In the final analysis though, all this is merely a reiteration of the fact that critical theology is *the* quintessential modern theology. This point is emphasized time and again by the critical theologians in a multitude of ways,[110] each corroborating Glebe-Möller's pithy maxim that there is no going "*behind the back* of modernity."[111] However for this study of critical theology, I mean something most specific. The following extract from Davis can be considered foundational:

> As used here the word [critical] does indeed mean that any worthwhile theology should question its assumptions and not be the parroting of an unexamined tradition. It implies, too, that reason in theology as elsewhere is critical as having a negative function in dissolving habitual but inadequate modes of thought and action. But something more precise than all this is intended. The phrase "critical theology" points to an attempt to link Christian theology to the tradition of criticism in Western culture, which goes back to the Enlightenment, passes through the critical philosophy of Kant, Fichte and Hegel to the Marxist critique of ideology and is represented most clearly today by the critical theory of society of the Frankfurt School.[112]

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[109] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 348.

[110] See for example Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 31; Peukert, *Science*, 155; Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 103; Metz, *Faith*, 24-25; Fiore\za, "Political Theology and Liberation Theology," 12; Paul Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory: The Discourse of the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 101-102.

[111] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 55.

[112] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 104.

In effect, critical theology is the critical theory of religion, faith, and theology in a *mutually* critical relation to the critical theory of society, praxis, and philosophy. However, rather than representing the need to "get its own house in order before turning to the needs of society" as Lane suggests, it indicates that these needs can only be met via a critical approach.

Naturally, not everyone will agree with this statement in its precise formulation, nor with its general orientation. In particular, one must be careful not to underestimate its radical challenge for more traditional theological methods. In the apprehensive words of Randy Maddox, "At times, this critical reflection has gone so far as to call into question all classical expressions of Christian tradition as fundamentally distorted."[113] Yet far from epitomizing a precritical reaction to the subversive character of critical religious thought, Maddox's position conveys a supposition which no "Christian" thinker can ignore: "For Christian theology, the definitive criterion of truth lies in the revelation of Jesus Christ. This revelation is not just a future ideal, but has taken historical expression. Thus any attempt to formulate a critical theory for reconstructing Christian tradition must find some way of grounding this theory in the historical revelation of Jesus Christ."[114]

The questions which thrust themselves upon us here are; is such a grounding at all possible? If not, what benefits or reasons commend the pursuit of critical *theology* as

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[113] Randy L. Maddox, "Contemporary Hermeneutic Philosophy and Theological Studies," *Religious Studies* 21 (1985): 528.

[114] Maddox, "Contemporary Hermeneutic Philosophy and Theological Studies," 529.

opposed to taking up the study of critical theory in itself? If it does seem possible, how does *critical* theology get around the unacceptablity of divine revelation and the authority of tradition for the modern public sphere? Of course it is legitimate to enquire into the possibility of establishing a middle ground between these extremes, but such a move is credible, I believe, only after the dilemma has been examined in full. When this is carried out, what one discovers is that critical theology, as the quintessential modern theology, not only challenges conventional styles of theological thought, but puts itself to the test within the same process. It does so because the condition of its possibility may also be the condition of its impossibility: namely, the public sphere.

Again, we need to return to Habermas's study in order to elucidate the significance and gravity of this point. After portraying the nature and character of "representative publicness" common to the Middle Ages (i.e., publicness as essentially a status attribute embodied by the lord, king, or bishop, etc.),[115] Habermas sketches the transition to the modern public sphere as follows:

> The major tendencies that prevailed by the end of the eighteenth century are well known. The feudal powers, the Church, the prince, and the nobility, who were carriers of the representative publicness, disintegrated in a process of polarization; in the end they split up into private elements, on the one hand, and public ones, on the other. The status of the Church changed as a result of the Reformation; the anchoring in divine authority that it represented -- that is, religion -- became a private matter. The so-called freedom of religion historically secured the first sphere of private autonomy; the Church itself continued to exist as one body among others under public law. The first visible mark of the analogous polarization of princely authority was the

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[115] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 5-12.

separation of the public budget from the territorial ruler's private holdings. The bureaucracy, the military (and to some extent also the administration of justice) became independent institutions of public authority separate from the progressively privatized sphere of the court. Out of the estates, finally, the elements of political prerogative developed into organs of public authority: partly into a parliament, and partly into judicial organs. Elements of occupational status group organization, ... developed into the sphere of "civil society" that as the genuine domain of private autonomy stood opposed to the state.[116]

Though it is beyond the scope of this introduction to either defend or criticize Habermas's explication in detail,[117] it is notable that the privatization of faith as well as the conception of political society essential to critical theology, share a common origin in the public sphere. It is at this juncture where modern theology may face its own unique encounter with the "dialectic of the theological Enlightenment."

I am of course alluding to the infamous thesis expounded by Frankfurt School theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their joint work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[118] In this "blackest" of books, as Habermas depicts it,[119] Horkheimer and Adorno appear to accede the triumph of instrumental reason over a substantive, emancipatory conception of rationality. "The dilemma that faced us in our work" they write, "proved to be ... the self-destruction of the Enlightenment. We are wholly convinced ... that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought.

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[116] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 11-12.

[117] For an in depth examination of *The Structural Transformation* from a variety of disciplines, see the critical essays assembled in Craig Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. I return to the theme of the "public sphere" in chapter two.

[118] Trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1990).

[119] Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno" in *Philosophical Discourse*, 106.

Nevertheless, we believe that we have just as clearly recognized that the notion of this very way of thinking, ... already contains the seed of the reversal" of enlightenment into undifferentiated mythic consciousness.[120]

In an analogous though inverse fashion, it seems that the public sphere frees theology to become critical of theology, yet restrains it from becoming a theology that is critical. Should the critical religious thinker therefore concede the triumph of the public sphere? Or should s/he work through the immense challenge presented by the public sphere by positively appropriating the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas? Horkheimer and Adorno respond to the dialectic of enlightenment by locating a deflated emancipatory interest in artistic truth,[121] and in the hope for absolute justice expressed as "the longing for the wholly other."[122] Should contemporary theology respond to the theological dialectic of enlightenment by assuming an aesthetic framework for its articulation of religious truth, and in this way, allow for a more traditional, recognizable form of the "longing for God" to prevail? Or, should it accept the normative strictures of Habermas's "theory of communicative action"[123] in order to redeem religious truth claims in the "larger world of public discourse"?

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[120] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xiii.

[121] See Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by C. Lenhardt (London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

[122] See Max Horkheimer, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen: Ein Interview mit Kommentor von Helmut Gumnoir* (Hamburg: Furche, 1975).

[123] For a more in depth analysis of the theory of communicative action and reason, see Chapter Three below.

6 Outline of Chapters

It is within this maelstrom of questions and issues that the ruling problematic of the present work becomes eminently pronounced. Namely, if critical theology is be both *critical* and *theological*, it must; i) discover a way to rationally justify religious truth claims in the contemporary public sphere without claiming an unassailable sanction or status for its insights concerning political society *and* social critical theory; ii) yet confidently decipher its manifest singularity for political society as a public sphere *and* social critical theory as a public, rational discourse.

My point of entry into this problematic is detailed in **Chapter Two**, "On Critical Theology, Or Beyond Religious Orthodoxy: From J.B. Metz to Charles Davis." This exposition outlines and contrasts two models of critical religious thought in relation to the challenges and demands of modernity as interpreted by contemporary theology. The first model is identified with the contributions of J.B. Metz and his student Helmut Peukert; the second model emerges from the work of Charles Davis.

In brief, I argue that the critical theology advanced by Metz and Peukert tends to maximize the *aporias* of modernity and modern theory in order to re-present religious orthodoxy as *the* saving knowledge; as *the* way to set aright the pathologies of modern life and thought. However, if the task of a modern critical theology is to rationally justify religious truth claims in the public sphere, then the orthodox strategy advanced by Metz and Peukert fails to measure up. Theology cannot be deemed critical by default, I suggest, but must engage in a thorough critical examination of its basic theological foundations.

This conclusion leads to an in depth exploration and critique of Charles Davis's postorthodox alternative. As alluded to earlier in this chapter, Davis's position is based on a radical distinction between a transcendent faith as absolute, and human knowledge, beliefs, and actions as restricted and transitory. However, when the absoluteness of faith is presented as an orthodoxy; that is, when the absoluteness of faith is identified with a human expression about this absoluteness, we witness a grievous misappropriation of faith's certitude for a mode of thought that simply cannot justify such a claim without doing violence to the claim itself. In view of this hypothesis, the principal task of th' postorthodox critical theologian is to lay bare the finite distortions of faith's transcendence; to engage ideology-critique of the positivity of religious knowledge, doctrine, dogma, and praxis. This negative process does not, according to Davis, represent the workings of an extraneous attitude or method. Rather it constitutes faith's critical activity: the critique of orthodoxy is faith's transcendence. Or to put it in terms common to philosophical idealism, the critique of religious orthodoxy -- or any other finite human construction of the absolute -- is faith returning to itself as absolute.

While I contend that critical religious thought cannot abandon the postorthodox site, Davis's emphasis on the subversive quality of faith seems predisposed to undervalue the human moment in the divine-human encounter. As a result, religious claims to truth are robbed of any real cognitive weight. However, if the assertions and insights of critical religious thought are to be given a sustained consideration under conditions specified within the modern public sphere, then the potential for a "faith-filled"

knowledge, so to speak, has to be secured. However, can this end be achieved without relinquishing the postorthodox stance? Doesn't the articulation of a positive religious knowledge necessarily lead back to orthodoxy?

In response to this dilemma, I pick up on Davis's affirmation of love as the positive moment in his negative description of faith. It is this phenomenon, I want to argue, which provides a more specific focus for the critical activity of faith. By applying itself to the clarification of human love, critical theology positively limits the scope of its operation, avoiding claims to absolute knowledge. Nonetheless, its public responsibility is to explain, in a clear and understandable fashion, the critical, rational, and religious import of love for the just organization of society.

In many ways, these first recommendations anticipate the content of **Chapter Three**, "The End of Critical Theology?: The Postmetaphysical Objections of Jürgen Habermas." Here I endeavour to unpack the meaning and challenge embodied in Habermas's landmark response to critical theology, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World."[124] In this piece, Habermas asserts that theology cannot be critical without abandoning the religious experiences which establish the uniqueness of its "truth claim." This claim, says Habermas, is based upon a cognitive privilege. That is, religious claims to validity are established in relation to an extraordinary truth (e.g., mystical experience, revelation, and the authority of tradition). It is this reference to the extraordinary or the supernatural which contradicts the

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[124] In Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 226-250.

postmetaphysical condition of contemporary thought. This condition refers to the collapse of metaphysics, philosophical idealism, or the philosophy of consciousness at the hands of modern developments in science, culture, and society. What we gain here, says Habermas, is the division of "Reason" into distinct rationality complexes with their own independent inner logics and formal-world concepts. It is this advancement which makes any totalized approach or explanation of reality anathema to modern life and critical rationality. Thus, as long as theological thought remains at all bound to the extraordinary; to the supernatural; indeed, to the traditional idea of God, it cannot reasonably _ fy itself as an authentic critical discipline.

However, when one probes more deeply into the sources of Habermas's postmetaphysical thinking, it is soon apparent that his own *intersubjective* alternative to the philosophy of consciousness is rooted in the theological writings of the young Hegel on love. As Habermas presents this material, Hegel is exploring the reconciling power of a religious "love" and "life" as a possible way to overcome, what he perceived to be, the *diremption* of modernity. In general, this phrase connotes the effects of the Cartesian philosophical tradition which portrays the whole of reality in dualistic terms: subject and object; mind and body; reason and sense; the individual and the collective, and so forth. Hegel -- like the romantic and expressivist writers of the day -- viewed these divisions as a sign of the alienation of the human being from the true self; from the affections; from nature; from Being. In order to counteract this "dialectic of enlightenment," the young Hegel extols the reconciling power of *religious love.*

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It is within this power that Habermas first glimpses the intersubjective response to the diremption of modernity. This is to say, Hegel articulates a notion of human interaction that is not solely based on the violence implicit to the subject-object split. However, Habermas concludes that love cannot sustain this intersubjective moment. With this judgment, he simply confirms Hegel's own final assessment. Indeed, unlike his romantic counterparts, Hegel was unwilling to relinquish the modern principle of subjectivity with its emphasis on rational self-reflection. Any resolution to the diremption of modernity would have to integrate the fundamental characteristics associated with the autonomous modern individual. In view of this requirement, love failed to measure up. Its basic nature, he determined, excludes the objectification of thinking as a matter of course. It was this limit which steered the young Hegel toward the Absolute Subject and Knowledge in order to redress the diremption of modernity. What, then, steers Habermas toward his intersubjective theory of communicative action and reason?

In order to answer this question in full, one has to aver to other sources besides Hegel. However, it is at least clear that Habermas transfers the intersubjective dynamic of love to a philosophy of language. One issue that emerges here is; need the critical religious thinker accept the conclusions of either Hegel or Habermas on this score? Might it not be possible to re-examine the young Hegel's theological contributions so as to discern an alternative way to maintain love's intersubjective action? With this concern in mind, I return to the young Hegel's manuscripts. While this exposition confirms the incapacity to accommodate rationality and reflection, I contend that

Hegel's intersubjective concept of love situates it as an appropriate theme for contemporary discursive thought. However, in order to cultivate this potential, we, like Habermas, must pursue options unexplored by Hegel.

The option which is crucial for the argument in this text is examined in **Chapter Four**, "Horkheimer's Early Critical Theory: The Open-Ended Dialectic and the Rationality of Love." The point of departure for this examination is a differentiation between the various phases of Frankfurt School critical theory. Following the analysis of Helmut Dubiel, one can discern three major stages. The first phase is represented by the materialist essays of the young Horkheimer; the second phase is contained in his programmatic essay "Traditional and Critical Theory"; the third phase commences with the contribution of Adorno to the Institute for Social Research. At this point, Adorno's "negative dialectics" constitutes the core of a critique of instrumental reason. While this critique establishes the Frankurt School's prominence, it also accounts for its "philosophy of despair." However, the issue I want to highlight here is the significant differences that exist between the various phases in the development of critical theory, and between the critical theorists themselves. In view of this approach to understanding the history of critical theory, the contributions of the early Horkheimer gain a new integrity.

Given the problematic which informs the present study, the young Horkheimer's effort to envision truth as an "open-ended dialectic," and his attempt to reinterpret Kant's moral sentiment as a "rational love," appears to supply the precise conceptual constructs needed to overcome the impasses which conclude the examinations of Davis,

Habermas, and Hegel. To begin with, the open-ended dialectical conception of truth holds firm to the finite character of all truth claims yet contends that this limitation in no way impedes its critical value or force. Similarly, Horkheimer's understanding of the moral sentiment as a rational love affords a novel way to establish this theme not only as part and parcel of the philosophical discourse of modernity, but as a legitimate topic within critical theory itself. In effect, the material of the young Horkheimer seems to provide a critical method and justification for a postorthodox critical theology capable of deciphering and expressing the public value of a religious truth rooted in a rational love.

However, our examination of this issue cannot end here. Despite the fact that Horkheimer seems to offer the open-ended dialectic in tandem with his exegesis of rational love, he ultimately resists their merger and formal analysis. Even though I argue that it is precisely their synthesis which can solve some of the conceptual dilemmas encountered in this phase of critical theory, numerous issues and questions remain problematic.

It is in the **Conclusion**, "Of Love, Truth, and Reason," that I further explore these outstanding obstacles. Yet in order to get at their challenge, it is necessary to radically question my own recommendations for critical theology. This tactic is largely motivated by a final critique of Habermas's concern to complete the project of modernity. What this project demands may only discover its proper resolution via the very thing that Habermas claims to overcome: namely, the philosophy of consciousness. The question then arises whether contemporary critical religious thought

should align itself in any way with modern values, ideas, or methods. Obviously, my comprehension of a genuine critical theology as a rational construct concerned to articulate and justify its truth claims in the public sphere is equally put in doubt. This leads to an examination of John Milbank's post-Nietzschean proposal as one postmodern alternative. But rather than settling all the issues at stake here, Milbank's thesis compels us to take up again some of the initial positions of this study with renewed conviction.

CHAPTER TWO

On Critical Theology, Or Beyond Religious Orthodoxy:

From J. B. Metz to Charles Davis

1 *Introduction*

According to Helmut Thielicke, the main task of the modern theologian is to "set forth a truly credible faith for contemporary Christianity. Every serious theological programme must aim at this."[1] As straightforward and obvious as Thielicke's statement may seem, its accomplishment is quite another matter. To begin with, what constitutes a "credible faith" is as complex and ambiguous as contemporaneity itself. Modern society, culture, and politics are hardly monolithic, and the student's methodological approach is a key factor to penetrating genuine insight.[2] In the case of critical theology, the task is further complicated by the fact that modern social theory tends to deny the validity of religious truth and experience. While this objection has been vigorously advanced by Jürgen Habermas, his basic approach is not uncommon. As David Ford remarks, the omnipresent modern "themes of suspicion, doubt, and radical critique" eventuates an "unprecedentedly devastating, sophisticated and widely

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[1] Helmut Thielicke, *Modern Faith and Thought*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 40.

[2] See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. by David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 4. Also see Paul Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory: The Discourse of the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 99.

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disseminated dismissal of both Christianity and theology."[3]

Yet in spite of, or perhaps, because of these weighty theoretical and socio-cultural challenges, the discipline of theology has persevered in order to produce distinct forms of modern religious thought. As Langdon Gilkey explains it, the advent of modernity can be envisioned as a "continental shift."[4] Such a shift, he suggests, entails an elemental change in the entire social, cultural, historical, material, and conceptual structures which define a particular civilization. Here everything is substantively affected and radically redirected, including, of course, theology. Gilkey therefore recounts how modernity

> has helped to encourage a wide variety of different *theological* paradigms. Because of the immense luring and challenging power of this culture, most of these theological paradigms concerned the ...tions of theology to this new "secular" culture: there were rationalistic pro-Enlightenment or accommodation paradigms, anti- or transcendent orthodox, reformative or transformative models, progressivist models, dialectical models, and -- in our own day -- revolutionary. Some of these welcomed the new cultural epoch, some resisted it, some criticized and sought to refashion it -- all assumed its powerful all engrossing presence, and the necessity for a vital theology to be clear and unambiguous about its own relation to this now established culture and about its creative tasks *within* that culture.[5]

Aside from accentuating the heterogeneity of modern theology, Gilkey's description manages to highlight its scarlet thread: that it is *from within* modernity that theology

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[3] David F. Ford, "Introduction to Modern Christian Theology" in David F. Ford ed., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1 (Oxfoia: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 7.

[4] Langdon Gilkey, "The Paradigm Shift in Theology" in Hans Küng and David Tracy eds., *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, trans. by Margaret Köhl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 368.

[5] Gilkey, "Paradigm Change in Theology," 369.

must situate its explication of religious faith and life. And it must do so. Because if the God of the past is to be the God of the future then he must also be the God of the present or he is no God at all, and the question of faith can finally be settled as the future of an illusion.[6]

Given this imperative, contemporary religious thought has to confront a number of highly disturbing topics: the horror of the Holocaust; the death and destruction of two world wars; ecological disaster; staggering third world poverty and debt; and the steady escalation of arms expenditures. How can the modern theologian locate the divine in proximity to such events? What are the ramifications for modern religious thought and the critical assessment of modernity as a whole? Does modern culture still retain its "immense luring and challenging power" for theology? If not, how does one envision its "creative task within that culture?"

The answer to these and other concerns, I believe, receives an indispensable formulation within the project of *critical theology*. As I indicated in the previous chapter, critical theology is theology in dialogue with the Marxist philosophical tradition in general, and with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas in particular. It is this methodological coalition which signifies the uniqueness of

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[6] Here I am generalizing the thesis and analysis found in Emil Fackenheim's insightful work, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: Harper TorchBooks, 1970), 31. Also see Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982); Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

critical theology within the recent history of modern religious thought.[7] Its distinctive contribution is substantiated by an analysis of the pathologies which mark the evolution of modernity *and* r gion. As such, its approach forebodes the end of "innocent critique" and "pure theory."[8] That is, *after* critical theory, neither science nor theology can present themselves as *sui generis* intellectual formulae deemed free of all harmful presupposition or self-serving political interest. Critical theology must acknowledge a dialectic of Enlightenment[9] as well as a dialectic of religion:[10] for both phenomena generate problems that are not necessarily resolved by a further application of their constitutive principles. The task of the critical theologian, then, is to engage a comprehensive critical theory which can empower a critical though receptive modification of religious faith and tradition in view of current social and religious problems. Or as Paul Lakeland has neatly put it; "The ensuing theology must be at home in a critically appropriated modernity, must be an expression of the lifeworld of twentieth-century Christianity, ... and must proclaim a message of

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[7] Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3. Also see Alfredo Fierro, *The Militant Gospel: A Critical Introduction to Political Theologies*, trans. by John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 108.

[8] Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 30.

[9] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum Press, 1990).

[10] Rudolf J. Siebert, "From Conservative to Critical Political Theology" in A. James Riemer ed., *The Influence of the Frankfurt School on Contemporary Theology: Critical Theory and the Future of Religion* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1992), 176.

emancipation, *within* the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions of (post)modernity. This is a tall order, but anything less will be either outdated, irrelevant, incoherent, or oppressive."[11]

In this chapter I argue that most expressions of critical theology ultimately fall "short" of this "tall order." This judgment holds true especially for the work of J.B. Metz and Helmut Peukert. Rather than devising a circumscribed though vital religious contribution to present-day social or critical-theoretic problems, these theologians tend to *exploit* the despondency and discrepancy of modernity so as to advance an orthodox Christian faith as the saving knowledge: *as the enlightenment of the Enlightenment.* However, theology cannot be ordained critical or emancipatory by default. The aporias of the project of modernity -- which are *not* to be underestimated -- do not automatically furnish a justification for the cogency of the Christian faith. Even if one suspects that modernity has failed to live up to its promises, its critique of religion, like its critique of political oppression, may still be hailed as one of its vital and irrevocable successes. The challenge of modernity and its emancipatory interest remain in force. The critical significance of theology must still be clearly demonstrated in relation to the public sphere as opposed to being merely proclaimed to a secular constituency. Only in this way can critical theology avoid transgressing the logic of its critical theory.

In view of this, I admit, sceptical thesis, one might be tempted to confirm Marx's comment that "This lack of thoroughness is not accidental, for the *critical* theologian

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[11] Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory*, 102.

remains a *theologian.*"[12] However, the efforts of Charles Davis suggest that this is

not always the case. For him, critical theology as modern theology entails the critique

of religious orthodoxy. Insofar that orthodoxy intends the inviolability of religious

truths, symbols, narratives, or doctrines, then it qualifies as neither modern nor critical.

It cannot be modern because, as Davis surmises, modernity means to "ground culture

upon the present. .... Unlike modernity, dogmatism grounds itself upon the past as

normative."[13] Nor can it be critical, and for the same reason: to take up the

perspective of critical theory means to accept the idea that the ever changing present

has critical priority over the past. For this reason, critical theory "has correctly been

called a science without 'orthodoxy.'"[14] It logically follows, then, that a thorough and

coherent theological appropriation of critical theory precipitates a *postorthodox*

theology: "anything less would be either outdated, irrelevant, incoherent, or

oppressive."[15]

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[12] Karl Marx, "*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*" in Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man: With a Translation from Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts by T.B. Bottomore* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1961), 91.

[13] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 29. The issue of modernity's normativity receives a much more sustained discussion in my examination of Habermas and Jens Glebe-Möller in Chapter Three. For a more critical appraisal of this topic, see the Conclusion to this study.

[14] Edward Schillibeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism*, trans. by N.D. Smith (New York: Seabury, 1974), 123. For a critique of Schillibeeckx's presentation of critical theory see Francis Fiorenza, "Critical Social Theory and Christology," *The Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Convention* 30 (1975): 90.

[15] Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory*, 102.

Yet as I indicated in Chapter One, Davis's postorthodox position appears to achieve its goal by dissociating the concept of faith from that of knowledge. Insofar that a faith-filled knowledge is represented as an orthodoxy, the postorthodox critique strikes me as entirely correct: critical theology would be remiss to fall behind its reasoning. However, insofar that its critique tends to marginalize the possibility of a faith-filled knowledge altogether, then it cannot adequately address the fundamental problematic which directs this study: namely, if theology as theology is to deliver a critical message with public import, then it cannot evade making a truth claim of some cognitive weight. In the words of Helmut Peukert, "Theology, if it does not want to abandon itself, obviously cannot renounce making a claim to truth."[16]

At this juncture we are left wondering: does the articulation of a faith-filled knowledge have to ally itself with a roundabout defense of religious orthodoxy? Similarly, does the critique of orthodoxy have to forego the possibility of rationally justifying a faith-filled knowledge?

In response to this dilemma, the preceding chapter begins by exploring "The Modernity of a Public Critical Theology" (section 2). My purpose here is twofold: first, to illustrate the degree to which contemporary versions of critical theology profess an acceptance of modernity; second, that this endorsement entails a definite configuration and orientation for the project of critical theology. The profound challenge and intricacy of this project is exhibited by a critical review of J. B. Metz and

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[16] Helmut Peukert, "Enlightenment and Theology as Unfinished Projects" in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 55.

Helmut Peukert in "Critical Theology I: The Triumph of Religious Orthodoxy" (section 3). In this section I argue that the exemplary efforts of Metz and Peukert do not achieve a genuine critical theology, but mostly seek to justify religious orthodoxy as the saving knowledge of an exhausted modern life and thought. However, rather than advancing a public justification for this proposal, it dictates from the start the nature and character of the analyses as well as its basic conclusions. It is in view of these shortcomings that I move on to consider Charles Davis's work in "Critical Theology II: The Critique of Religious Orthodoxy" (section 4). Here it is made clear that a thorough critical theology must be a self-critical theology. At the same time though, Davis's model appears not only to mark the end of religious orthodoxy, but gestures toward the termination of critical theology no matter how it might be envisioned. This dilemma, I contend, is inextricably bound to Davis's conceptualization of religious faith. By exposing its *aporias*, I intend a new understanding of critical theology which, nevertheless, maintains the fundamental thrust of Davis's postorthodox stance.

2 The Modernity of a Public Critical Theology

It should hopefully be clear by now that critical theology intends an analysis of society for the benefit of the public at large. Put simply, its conclusions are advanced as serious recommendations even for those outside of the Christian faith. Yet far from promoting an evangelical agenda, critical theology is presented as a dialogical theology

engaged in an unimpeded conversation with a multitude of other voices and positions.[17]

For example, Metz argues that critical theology aspires to actualize a dialectical pluralism in which "any given theological position must strive to appropriate precisely those elements which other positions see as lacking or neglected in it, and vice versa."[18] As a decidedly collaborative effort,[19] critical theology labours to communicate its insights and commentaries in a clear, accessible, and non-dogmatic fashion.[20] Only in this way can it legitimately demonstrate the critical character and function of a contemporary religious faith. "Public theology, at its best," writes David Tracy, "has shown how to employ critically the symbolic resources of the traditions and the cultural situation for the public realm."[21] In keeping with this interpretation, Davis contends that modern faith discovers its social and political bearing as the

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[17] Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: A Critical Reception for a Practical Public Theology" in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza eds. *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 5; Joseph Kroger, "Prophetic-Critical and Practical Strategic Tasks of Theology: Habermas and Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 8.

[18] Metz, *Faith*, 119.

[19] Lamb, *Solidarity*, 21-22.

[20] Peukert, "Enlightenment and Theology," 45. Also see Charles Davis, *What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today? Breaking the Conservative-Liberal Deadlock* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 121-122.

[21] David Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm" in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 27.

transcendent factor necessary for ongoing social and theological critique.[22] This is to say, faith augments the distance necessary to discriminate between competing finite truths and moral insights. Lamb accentuates the offensive thrust of this conviction by insisting that critical theology illustrates "how religious scriptures and traditional doctrines do not merely reflect the societies or cultures of their origin but actually criticize the plausibility structures of those societies and cultures."[23] In brief, these theologians declare that a critical moment with public significance attends religious faith; and that theological thought is capable of expressing this moment in relation to the pathologies of modernity. It is this claim, says Fierro, which substantiates "the most important and original feature of the most recent theology ..."[24]

As the context and framework for the vindication of religious ideas and commitments, the public sphere already implies a particular paradigm of rationality. Thus Tracy, following the work of Jürgen Habermas, stresses that "A public realm, by definition, is dependent on a shared concept of reason. ... A public realm is that shared rational space where all participants, whatever their other particular differences, can meet to discuss any claim that is rationally redeemable. Any strictly relativist reading of the nature of reason cannot inform a public realm as public."[25] This

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[22] Charles Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46. Also see Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 51-74; and Davis, *What is Living?*, 71.

[23] Lamb, *Solidarity*, 54.

[24] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 25.

[25] Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory," 19.

conceptualization demands two intricate moves on the part of contemporary Christian thought.

First, critical theology as a public theology must expel the prejudice of religious authority and tradition in favour of a common humanity engaged in critical argument as a form of non-violent public discourse. A bona fide public theology is required to "surrender the idea that theology represents a privileged cultural and linguistic form of life."[26] That is, it must abandon all reliance on the supremacy of revelation.[27] As Dennis McCann and Charles Strain bluntly put it, "the new practical theology has a promising future only if it avoids any pretence of historical uniqueness, exclusive moral validity, and religious absoluteness."[28]

Second, and following from the first manoeuvre, critical theology as a public theology is required to submit all explicit and implicit truth claims to the ordeal of public argument.[29] The truth and validity of its faith-filled analyses necessarily mandates such a procedure if its social relevance as well as the legitimacy of its recommendations for political society are to be secured in a non-violent and non-dogmatic way. While the openness and flexibility of the public sphere encourages, in principle, extensive discussion of various social concerns including religious ones, this

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[26] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction," 5.

[27] See Davis, *What is Living?*, 99.

[28] Dennis P. McCann and Charles R. Strain, *Polity and Praxis: A Program for American Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 3.

[29] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction," 6; and Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory," 26.

feature also compels that the theologian provide solid reasons for his or her interpretation when asked to do so. Insofar that theology advances the emancipatory significance of religious life and thought, "it must make its case through rational arguments refined in a crucible of critical but committed reflection and addressed to all who participate in that public arena."[30] Consequently, religious beliefs will be challenged.[31] It is here that the total critical cast of public theology comes to light. As Davis relates;

> Political theology must become critical theology, in order to be a public theology, operative within the public sphere. *That indeed implies that moral and religious assertions are always open to counter arguments and revisions.* Theology, however, does not become political by using social and political issues as material with which to exercise and articulate an utterly private, incommunicable and therefore socially impotent, existential conviction. It does so by entering and submitting itself to public discussion.[32]

The above deliberation is perhaps a more involved way to indicate that critical theology is an *essential* modern theology. "There is no good theological reason," Tracy insists, "why publicness ... should be ignored by any form of theology. .... In the modern period, theology has become a critical mode of enquiry willing to give reasons for *any* of its claims."[33] Thus, if we are looking for a form of theological reflection which most accurately embodies the fundamental traits of the modern "continental

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[30] McCann and Strain, *Polity and Praxis*, 14. Also see Jens Glebe-Möller, *A Political Dogmatic*, trans. by Thor Hall (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 132.

[31] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 36.

[32] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 178. Italics mine.

[33] Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory," 26. Italics mine.

shift," then we need look no further. The very phrase "critical theology" says it all since "Its critique of society belongs itself to *its* modernity."[34] To be modern is to engage in the public exercise of critical rationality, and to accept responsibili y for its proper application across the board. If the public concerns of religious faith are to merit a broad and sustained consideration, then contemporary theology has a crucial role to fulfil by rationally explicating the modernity of religious life and thought. Critical theology must attend the emancipatory interest of modernity; indeed, it must strive "to utilize [its] accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life -- this is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life."[35]

That a "specialized *religious* culture" may, in fact, contribute to the "enrichment and rational organization of everyday social life" constitutes an important claim of Gregory Baum's book, *Religion and Alienation*.[36] In this text, Baum outlines the emergence of a modern, "transformist faith" which accentuates the historical, intellectual, and spiritual processes of social and individual conversion. According to the author, this transformist faith receives its first articulation in the theological writings of the young Hegel which intend to surpass the extrinsic approach to the divine-human relationship. This latter pattern of theological thought is predisposed to depict God as residing totally beyond the world, accessible only through objective structures such as

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[34] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 31. Italics mine.

[35] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity -- An Incomplete Project" in Hal Foster ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 9.

[36] Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

Biblical Revelation or Church law and ritual. In contrast to this, Hegel advances an immanent discernment of God's dynamic presence in human history and life. What theology learns here is that "The infinite is immanent in the finite, not by absorbing or destroying it but by assuring and protecting its finitude and existence." Baum continues on to say that "The infinite grounds the finite, and defines its ultimate future. The mode of God's immanence is therefore not identity but transcendence."[37] In other words, the immanent method perceives the divine as transcendent presence, mediated by human action and thought: "... the divine mystery manifests itself only in and through human action and becomes available to the mind only as people reflect on what they are doing."[38]

It is interesting to note[39] that Baum also refers to this development as "The Blondelian Shift."[40] "Against the extrinsicist trend in Catholic theology," writes Baum, "Blondel insisted that the only message modern man can accept is a truth that has an intrinsic relationship to life, a truth that answers man's questions or corresponds in some way to their experience of reality. A message that comes to man wholly from the outside, without an inner relationship to his life, must appear to him as irrelevant,

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[37] Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 9.

[38] Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 9.

[39] In John Milbank's study, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), the author also relies on the contributions of Blondel, but contra-Baum, as part of a postmodern critique of political and liberation theology. See chapter eight in Milbank's work, "Founding the Supernatural: Political and Liberation Theology in the Context of Modern Catholic Thought," 206-255.

[40] Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: Crossroad, 1970), 1-36.

unworthy of attention, and unassimilable by the mind."[41]

The elemental dimension of the finite life which Blondel explores is human action. As Baum describes it, truth attends human action. That is, implicit to action are the values, insights, and convictions which mirror the human being's comprehension of reality.[42] For Blondel, a phenomenological study of human action discloses a developmental expansion of the human will which reaches out toward ever wider experiences and understandings of life and love. Eventually, the person finds her or himself on the brink of a fundamental option for the divine life and love. If this option is affirmed, one's "life becomes, in the language of the theologian, supernatural. Here man has opened himself to, and relies on, divine grace."[43] Thus, through a second order, rational reflection upon human action, Blondel circumscribes the conceptual horizon through which to discern and thematize the genesis of faith in God. Baum therefore considers Blondel to be one of the foremost shapers of the modern theological project and its quest for contemporary relevance.[44] For Blondel realized that the credibility of faith "cannot be maintained if [one] must engage in intellectual repression in order to believe."[45]

Yet whether we consider this shift to immanence from a Hegelian or Blondelian

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[41] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 4.

[42] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 14-15.

[43] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 18.

[44] Baum, *Man Becoming*, 8-9.

[45] Thielicke, *Modern Faith and Thought*, 8.

perspective, the principal point which shines through Baum's enquiry is that this modern development in theological method constitutes a *progression* in our understanding of the meaning and spirit of the gospel. In reference to Richard Niebuhr's fivefold typology of *Christ and Culture*,[46] Baum contends that "the full-blown spirituality of *Christ, Transformer of Culture*, [i.e., Niebuhr's fifth type of Christ-culture relation] exists in the Christian church only after the Enlightenment."[47] And like the young Hegel's theology and Blondel's philosophy of action, "Christ, transformer of culture" embodies an immanent view of the divine. That "God is present in the remaking of the world"[48] says Baum, signifies that the overall Christian "understanding of the gospel has been transformed."[49]

However one may judge the specifics of Baum's presentation, the above excursus serves to punctuate *the degree to which modernity envelops* -- indeed, has enveloped for quite some time now -- *the conceptual horizon of a creative, reconstructive, critical religious thinking*. It is absolutely vital to this study not to lose sight of this feature of critical theology for numerous reasons. Without going into great detail at this point, it should be kept in mind that:

First, the modernity of critical theology is a crucial element for drafting an appropriate response to Habermas's postmetaphysical objections. This is not to suggest

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[46] New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951.

[47] Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 179.

[48] Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 180.

[49] Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 182.

that contemporary theology should adopt the presuppositions of Habermas's challenge. Rather, it is simply to acknowledge that a convincing reply will have to insist on a fundamental link with the emancipatory values that have been clarified during the modern era; or that critical theology is capable of articulating its principal insights in view of the conceptual horizon of modernity. This need not mean, though, that theology is thereby obliged to *complete* the project of modernity: that remains an open question for now.[50]

Second, the modernity of critical theology is also thrown into question today via the challenge of postmodern philosophy in general, and by Milbank's post-Nietzschean proposal in particular.[51] For its part, postmodern philosophy condemns modern reason as an exercise in "power/knowledge." This is to say, that modern reason works to repress particularity, otherness, and difference for the sake of securing a stable socio-political and cultural homogeneity.[52] In Milbank's case, the religious thinker is exhorted to base her or his activity upon a cultural-linguistic model of narrative knowledge in order to radically differentiate the Christian lifeworld from modern

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[50] See my comments on this issue in the Conclusion to this study.

[51] For other postmodern theological proposals see Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Kevin Hart, *Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[52] See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). For an overview of French postmodernism see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. by L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

secular culture and thought.[53] While there are some important differences between the postmodern critique and the one advanced by Milbank,[54] both scenarios come together to censure the very heart of modernity: namely, its notion of rationality. As Tracy rightly perceives; "In these now familiar debates, ... both the concept of rationality and the concept of modernity are at stake -- and indeed, at stake together."[55]

Finally, and of more immediate concern, the version most likely to fulfil this constructive role is postorthodox critical theology. Its relevance to this matter is disclosed via its opposition to those theologies promoting the virtues of religious orthodoxy. Not entirely unrelated to Milbank's position, there is an inclination within the orthodox stance to magnify the exhaustion of modernity. Gilkey's estimation is typical: "... secular culture is now in more travail; more uncertain; self doubting, anxious about guilt and its own mortality, than the religious and theological inheritance which only yesterday it so sharply challenged -- and this is a totally new situation."[56] While the current situation may very well yield a new set of circumstances in which to carry out the theological task, it is not at all clear that this predicament heralds the

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[53] Along side Milbank's specific postmodern recommendations appear other examples of this approach which do not necessarily identify themselves as postmodern. See for instance Hans Frei's analysis of recent theological trends in *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Here Frei examines a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion (e.g., D.Z. Philips) which stresses that "Christian theology is strictly the grammar of faith, a procedure in self-description for which there is no external correlative." (4) See especially pages 46-55.

[54] See Romand Coles, "Storied Others and Possibilities of *Caritas*: Milbank and Neo-Nietzschean Ethics," *Modern Theology* 8 (October 1992): 331-351.

[55] Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory," 21.

[56] Gilkey, "Paradigm Change in Theology," 375.

justification of religious orthodoxy. Therefore, I will now turn to this "new theological situation" and its critique.

3 *Critical Theology I: The Triumph of Religious Orthodoxy*

At the beginning of her book on political theology, Dorothee Sölle asks; "Is not the whole of theology 'Lord-Lord-talk,' which is precisely a way of avoiding the will of God? In spite of its sincere efforts to be more worldly," she continues, "does not theology remain locked in its ivory tower of Lord-Lord-talk?"[57] To move beyond such "talk" is, of course, the express goal of political and critical theology.[58] As Francis Fiorenza summarizes; "The positive task of political theology, ... is to determine anew the relation between religion and society, specifically under the conditions of modern society."[59] For these religious thinkers, then, theology must be at home in the modern world because "The world is, after all, the place of revelation."[60]

To a great extent, this trust in an ongoing revelation of the divine -- "specifically under the conditions of modern society" -- comprises both the passion and frustration

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[57] Dorothee Sölle, *Political Theology*, trans. by John Shelley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 1-2.

[58] Hence the title of Johann Baptist Metz's early work, *Theology of the World*, trans. by William Glen-Doepel (New York: Seabury, 1973).

[59] Francis Fiorenza, "Political Theology and Liberation Theology: An Inquiry into their Meaning" in Thomas M. McFadden ed., *Liberation, Revolution, and Freedom* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 12.

[60] Lakeland, *Theology and Critical Theory*, 96.

exhibited in the works of Metz and others. For example, Metz's small book of political-pastoral essays *The Emergent Church* vigorously pleads for a radical *metanoia* of the first world churches in the face of the massive poverty and suffering assumed by third world peoples. "The struggle of the poor and oppressed people there" urges Metz, "must be matched here by a struggle and resistance against ourselves, against the ingrained ideals of always having to increase our influence. ... A conversion ... is demanded of us, not by some abstract progress of humanity but by the church as a eucharistic community and a sign of messianic hope."[61] What this and other similar passages indicate is that the reconstruction of theology is not the most pressing issue facing the Christian community as Christian.[62] It is a question, rather, of addressing an all too evident crisis of socio-religious praxis. As Dermot Lane laments, "in proportion to the massive theoretical gains 'on paper' and 'in the books' of the Churches, the overall effect on the ground in real life and in social practice is disturbingly scant."[63] As understood by these writers, then, part of the mandate of contemporary religious thought is to convince those Christians undisposed to social action to carry out their lives in accord with the gospel imperatives as interpreted by critical theology. "After all," says Metz, "the human being ... whose heart is to be

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[61] Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. by Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 12.

[62] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 336-337.

[63] Dermot A. Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 7. Also see Gregory Baum, "Good-bye to the *Ecumenist*," *The Ecumenist* 29 (Spring 1991): 1-3.

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changed here, is not a being outside history and society. It is therefore not inappropriate ... for a theologian to speak about the political significance of the 'conversion of hearts' ... and to seek to indicate that such a conversion means ... a departure from the privileged situation of our first world ..."[64]

With this task and goal in view, the theological attraction to critical theory receives its most immediate explication. Critical theory assists theology by exposing the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions which both affect and summon "the conversion of hearts." Robert Wuthnow observes;

> The attractions of critical theory are many. It poses the important question of how the conditions under which we live -- the conditions of an international capitalist system that has become an ever-expanding totality based on technical reason -- are shaping our very capacity to think and to make wise choices about our collective destiny. At a time when many other strands of social theory appear to be caught up in the narrow servicing of this totality, the attractions of a theoretical approach that promises fresh insights, ... are indeed great. Little wonder, then, that scholars and social activists alike -- with concerns as different as analytic philosophy and environmental politics, ... feminism and public theology -- have gravitated toward the weighty texts of Habermas and others of the Frankfurt School.[65]

Of course in a very general sort of way, Wuthnow's statement is accurate enough. But on closer inspection, the theoretical relation between theology and critical theory suggests that there is, on the contrary, a great deal to wonder about.

To begin with, the literature examined in this section involves two generations of

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[64] Metz, *Emergent Church*, 72.

[65] Robert Wuthnow, "Rationality and the Limits of Rational Theory: A Sociological Critique" in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 206.

critical theologians relying on two generations and versions of critical theory. On the one hand, we have Metz utilizing the critical theory expounded in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Its analysis of modern reason as instrumental and the modern subject as technocratic functions as the negative foil for Metz's positive theological alternative: that is, his "political theology of the subject." On the other hand, there is Metz's former student Peukert, employing the critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno's former student, Habermas. And as Habermas attempts to offer a communicatively grounded conception of modern reason which may surmount the dialectic of Enlightenment, so Peukert endeavours to formulate a communicatively grounded theology which, in contrast to Metz, does not stand against or outside modernity but squarely within it. For this reason Peukert affirms that "the predominant Enlightenment conception of rationality ... rais[es] at least two decisive positive demands for theological method: that ... its discourse must be universally communicable and must be related to practice."[66] Only in this way, thinks Peukert, can present-day theology critically address the modern experience.

At first glance, then, Peukert's prototype for a fundamental critical theology of communicative action promises a substantial modification of Metz's original project by vowing to carve out a place for theological thought within the most recent explications of scientific rationality. Without denying this shift in purpose and method, I argue that Peukert's version of critical theology is, nevertheless, contiguous with Metz's. It is so

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[66] James Bohman, "Translator's Introduction" in Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, trans. by James Bohman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), xi.

because both theologians ultimately conceive an orthodox interpretation of Christian faith as the remedy to contemporary social and theoretical problems. In each case, the truth of Christianity remains *essentially* unscathed by the negativities of modernity and the history of religion alike. *What this "triumph of religious orthodoxy" suggests, is that there may be more to the development of critical theology than a change in critical theory.* However, before the significance of this matter can be sufficiently probed, we must first consider the efforts of Metz and Peukert in more depth.

As I have already intimated, the key theme which animates much of Metz's work is the critique of modernity appropriated from Horkheimer and Adorno's classic text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this study, the authors propose that the more humankind "comes of age" (Kant), the more archaic it becomes. "In the most general sense of progressive thought," they write, "the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."[67] This is to say, the more human reason endeavours to enlighten and free humankind from mythic consciousness and its submission to nature and fate, the more it exponentially enslaves humankind to the same. The fundamental point of overlap is the fear of nature as the unknown, non-identical other which must be subdued in order to neutralize its threat to self-preservation. In the modern age, this fear takes the express form of an instrumental or technocratic rationality which strives to dominate the non-identical in whatever form it presents itself.[68] Thus, modern

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[67] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3.

[68] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3-42.

rational "Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles ..."[69] The result? Auschwitz, Hiroshima, mutually assured destruction, toxic waste.

While I examine Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis at greater length in another chapter,[70] the above synopsis serves to indicate why Metz urges contemporary theology to renounce the so-called "triumph of Enlightenment over the Christian Church"[71] as the normative context for constructive theological thought. Though this context has dominated modern liberal secular th. /logy, it has patently failed to resolve the modern crisis of faith. That is, it has proven unable to genuinely relieve the crises of privatization, tradition, authority, and metaphysical reason.[72] Given this contradiction, Metz submits that the source of these crises lies not so much on the side of faith, but elsewhere. Specifically, Metz singles out

> the breakthrough at all levels of the new man or middle-class citizen ... This new man emerged in the Enlightenment. He is the subject in the subject. He is concealed behind the rational, autonomous man who has come of age in the modern era. He is finally also the creator of that form of religion which is used, as it were, to decorate the scene, freely and in private, for the middle-class festivals ... [73]

Stated more directly, the "new man" for Metz is the instrumental, technocratic subject of the dialectic of Enlightenment. He is the controlling subject; the subject who is totally oriented by the exchange culture of capitalism; the subject who deems value

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[69] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4.

[70] See Chapter Four.

[71] Metz, *Faith*, 26.

[72] Metz, *Faith*, 32-48.

[73] Metz, *Faith*, 33.

on that and only that which can be used for satisfying his own selfish ends; the dominating subject; the self-absorbed subject; the Cartesian subject; the rational modern subject; the good, law-abiding middle-class citizen. This negative characterization inspires Metz to conclude that

> the identity of the modern man is extremely fragile. Fitted into complex structures of contemporary society which function almost without reference to the subjects of that society, he is in constant danger of losing his face and his name (in the biblical sense) more and more. His dreams and imaginings are less and less frequently creative, but are, on the contrary, levelled down more and more. In the name of evolution and technical progress, he is increasingly subject to a process of back-breeding to the state of a very adaptable animal or a quietly functioning machine.[74]

It is in view of this discussion that Metz finally asks; "Is it the religious subject who is particularly required here?"[75] The fact that the crises of religion and the crises of subjectivity seem to go hand in hand strongly suggests to Metz that the answer demands a resounding "yes!"[76] Metz proffers that the "atrophy" of human subjectivity evinced by the technocratic subject is inextricably bound to the crises of religious faith. The emergence of the "enlightened" individual and society not only provides a causal explanation for the crises of faith, but the crises of faith motions toward a causal explanation for the unabated horrors of technocracy. It comes as no surprise, then, that Metz believes Christianity has a much better chance to surmount its crises than does the Enlightenment. It does so because the crises of Enlightenment result from its dialectic

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[74] Metz, *Faith*, 72.

[75] Metz, *Faith*, 70.

[76] Metz, *Faith*, 69; *Emergent Church*, 42-44.

and cannot be resolved by the further application of its constitutive principles. Such an exercise would simply worsen the situation. However, the same cannot be said of religion and theology. *For the crises of faith, according to Metz, do not arise from the strict adherence to its foundational creeds, but rather from the abandonment of these tenets in favour of modern secular culture.*

It is for this reason that Metz begins his major treatise on critical theology by professing that "the widely discussed crisis of identity in Christianity is not primarily a crisis of Christian message, but rather a crisis of its subjects and institutions. These are too remote from the undeniably practical implications of the message and so tend to destroy its power."[77] In other words, the central problem with contemporary Christianity is that it is not quite Christian enough. But once it sees through to the dialectic of Enlightenment, it can forget about creating an "Enlightenment theology," and focus instead upon creating a theology which can "enlighten the Enlightenment."

Toward that end, Metz endeavours to demonstrate that the religious subject is also a practically grounded and politically oriented subject. The author argues that the idea of God at work in the history of biblical religions is a practical one. Both the Hebrew and Christian testaments document "the dramatic way in which men were constituted as subjects through their relationship with God."[78] Whether one considers the divine summons for the Jewish people to free themselves from slavery; the foundation of Israel as a covenantal nation; or the call to imitate Christ, the point is that the practical

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[77] Metz, *Faith*, ix-x.

[78] Metz, *Faith*, 61.

subject is created in solidarity with God and with other human beings. These two features are inseparable: "... the struggle for God and the struggle to enable all men to be free subjects," writes Metz, "does not operate in the opposite direction, but proportionally in the same direction."[79] Contra Feuerbach, faith in God is not an epiphenomena of the already formed, isolated subject who projects a human ideal as divine.[80] Rather, religious life and thought produce the necessary conditions for the very possibility of the practical subject itself.

This practical structure to the idea of God and its relation to the formation of the subject, Metz claims, "is the reason why the concept of God is basically narrative and memorative."[81] Indeed, narrative and memory are identified as "categories of salvation." They are so because both function to establish and secure the identity of the subject within the "historical struggles and dangers in which men experience themselves and are constituted as subjects."[82] Metz thinks this insight can be clearly illustrated in a negative way. When one examines official histories of conquest and victory, for example, the vanquished are refused mention; their memory repressed. In contrast to this, victims retain identity and the potential to resist oppression by recounting the history of suffering which attends the injustice of their marginalization. In this way, memory and narrative serve the active historical process of social

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[79] Metz, *Faith*, 62.

[80] Metz, *Faith*, 60-61.

[81] Metz, *Faith*, 51.

[82] Metz, *Faith*, 66.

liberation.[83]

However, not just any memorative or narrative identity will satisfy the pursuit of freedom.[84] For his part, Metz singles out "the dangerous memory of the freedom of Jesus Christ."[85] Here, faithful memory to the loving life, passionate death, and liberating resurrection of the Christ constitutes a subversive tradition within the context of modern social systems. It does so because the memory in question is imbued by the proleptic experience and knowledge of the divine promise for a qualitatively different future. "This memory breaks through the grip of prevailing consciousness," says Metz, reclaiming "unresolved conflicts that have been thrust into the background and unfulfilled hopes. It maintains earlier experiences in contrast to the prevailing insights and in this way makes the present unsafe."[86] A memorative and narrative identity with Jesus Christ allows one to transcend the immediacy of the present as what is necessarily the case in this world. Alternative "worlds" or scenarios exist, and the one revealed by Jesus stands against human suffering, oppression, and social injustice. From the perspective of those interested in sustaining such a status-quo, the memory of Jesus Christ cannot help but be a dangerous one. Thus, the essential criterion of an "authentic Christianity is the liberating and redeeming danger with which it introduces the remembered freedom of Jesus into modern society and the forms of consciousness

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[83] Metz, *Faith*, 67.

[84] Metz, *Faith*, 71-72.

[85] Metz, *Faith*, 88.

[86] Metz, *Faith*, 200.

and praxis in that society."[87]

The principal vehicle for this introduction is formally defined by Metz as "orthopraxis." Orthopraxis, according to the author, is the "price of orthodoxy."[88] This is to say, that an authentic Christianity demands the radical imitation of Christ; demands the primacy of praxis;[89] demands, in short, "orthopraxis." As Metz elaborates;

> The faith of Christians is a praxis in history and society that is to be understood as hope in solidarity in the God of Jesus as a God of the living and the dead who calls men to be subjects in his presence. Christians justify themselves in this essentially apocalyptical praxis (of imitation) in their historical struggle for their fellow men. They stand up for all men in their attempt to become subjects in solidarity with each other. In this praxis, they resist the danger both of a creeping evolutionary disintegration of the history of men as subjects and of increasing negation of the individual in view of a new, post-middle-class image of man.[90]

In effect, Christian praxis not only has a very specific content,[91] but necessarily so because it is *this* content which permits the creation of the practical subject and the critique of existing society.

With this last point we have secured the contours of Metz's political theology of the subject. The practical structure of the idea of God as the basis for the creation and cultivation of the emancipatory subject; the concomitant salvific categories of memory

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[87] Metz, *Faith*, 90.

[88] Metz, *Faith*, 141.

[89] Metz, *Faith*, 50-60.

[90] Metz, *Faith*, 73.

[91] See Metz, *Faith*, 56-58 for more details.

and narrative; the subversive, though saving tradition of Jesus Christ; and the imitation of Christ as orthopraxis, converge to suggest that "Practical fundamental theology does not appeal primarily to an understanding of theory and criticism which is valid outside the sphere of theology and according to which all pure theories are seen within a wider context of *communication and action*, with the result that they cannot be critical without reference to praxis. On the contrary, practical fundamental theology is based on the practical structure underlying the logos of Christian theo-logy."[92] Metz therefore holds that critical theology as critical is complete in itself as theological. No extra-theological point of reference is needed to either justify or redeem its particular claim to truth. What is needed is a theology which can "evoke and describe a praxis which will resist all evolutionary attempts at reconstruction and any attempt to do away with religious practice as an *independent entity* ..."[93] In view of this criterion, Metz argues that

> The critical interest of this theology, ... must always be governed by the conviction that the symbols, stories and collective memories of the people in the Church are absolutely necessary to any theology that wishes to avoid losing its foundation. *Its critical attitude, in other words, should not lead to direct criticism of the symbolic world of the people.* It ought, on the contrary, to lead to making the people more and more the subject of their own symbolic world. If it did this, these symbols would no longer be signs of alienation.[94]

With this passage, the intent of Metz's treatise is utterly apparent. Critical theology

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[92] Metz, *Faith*, 51. Italics mine. The reference here to Habermas is obvious.

[93] Metz, *Faith*, 7. Italics mine.

[94] Metz, *Faith*, 150. Italics mine.

is permitted, indeed, required to criticize the Enlightenment and modernity, but it is literally forbidden to subject the Christian message and language to a modern critique. To suggest that the contemporary disaffection with the Christian tradition is resolved by "making the people more and more the subject of their own symbolic world" not only assumes that this symbolic world bears no responsibility for this alienation in the first place, but discourages its investigation by prohibiting the "critical attitude" from engaging in "direct criticism of the symbolic world of the people." What distinguishes Metz's project from the promotion of a flagrant ideology at this point is not at all clear. What does seem clear is that Metz attempts to oppose the totalizing tendencies[95] of the modern (technocratic) subject, society, and theory -- tendencies which explain away or remain closed to the critical significance of religion, faith, and theology -- with an equally totalizing theology which explains away or remains closed to the critical significance of modernity.

To begin with, a basic supposition of Metz's argument demands one accept the dialectic of Enlightenment as the definitive explication of modern rationality in its totality. As we will see when we come to examine the contribution of Habermas and others, such a proposition is -- not without irony -- "one dimensional."[96] It is perhaps for this reason that numerous commentators point out that Metz's analysis of society

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[95] Metz, *Faith*, 6.

[96] See Herbert Marcuse's explication of the dialectic of Enlightenment in *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

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is far too general and simplistic.[97] Yet even if it were entirely adequate, "Need one

point out, in the interests in sound logic, that a shared opposition to a third term does

not establish identity or analogy between the first two terms?"[98] In other words, the

fact that Metz is able to cultivate a theological opposition to the Enlightenment does not

mean that his theology constitutes a critical theology equal to the critical theory of

Horkheimer and Adorno. While the Frankfurt theorists struggle to expose and explain

the deep philosophical ambiguities which inform critical theory, Metz attributes the

ambiguities of Christian theology to the influence of the tech ocratic subject. But if it

is true, as Metz claims, that religious faith generates subjectivity in itself, then surely

one must enquire whether the Christian message positively supports the emergence and

practice of the technocratic subject. At the very least, shouldn't "Metz's critique of the

bourgeois religious subject entail a reinterpretation of the message which that subject

proclaims?"[99] The fact that he avoids this question suggests that the concern to

"expose 'pure' Christianity for what it really is -- an attempt to protect Christian

teaching from the practical demands made by radical Christianity,"[100] is more an

endeavour to transpose one understanding of "purity" for another.

This feature of Metz's approach is highly evident in his notion of "orthopraxis."

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[97] See Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 12; McCann and Strain, *Polity and Praxis*, 9-10; Siebert, "From Conservative to Critical Political Theology," 206-207.

[98] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 374.

[99] Charles Strain, "Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*," *Religious Studies Review* 7 (January 1981): 29.

[100] Metz, *Faith*, ix.

In principle, Metz claims that orthopraxis is an expression of the primacy of praxis over theory. But "If one consistently holds to the theory-practice dialectic," writes Davis, "the practice that fundamentally has to mediate Christian faith cannot itself already be specifically Christian as a product of Christian faith."[101] For Davis, the primacy of praxis means that *human* praxis in general, and not religious praxis in particular, forms the rudimentary setting for theological construction. Along similar lines, Fierro writes that "If theology is in a logical and consistent relationship with praxis, then it is theology *from within* praxis not a theology *about* praxis; it is born from its own critical self-awareness in action. Hence, political theology is a discourse arising out of the general praxis of human emancipation in which Christians participate."[102] In effect, both Davis and Fierro suggest that theological insights culled from human praxis are both grounded in and limited by this broader contextualization. For sure, the nature and character of "human" praxis must be subjected to a wide ranging social critical theory, but its bottom line holds true for theology as for any another discipline. Even if human praxis discloses religious dimensions deemed essential to social action, the "religious" must still be oriented by the "human" and not the other way around. "For tradition to work in a practical fashion is not the same as for practice to mediate tradition."[103] To suggest the opposite -- that human praxis receive its normative configuration from a religious tradition -- is to conceive that particular tradition as an

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[101] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 6.

[102] Fierro, *Militant Gospel*, 313-314.

[103] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 8.

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apriori, total explication of human life. In many ways, that is what Metz's orthopraxis seeks to accomplish. As Davis interprets it; "Here, on the one hand, practice leads to doctrine or theory, but, on the other hand, it is not a question of mediating doctrinal insights, but of drawing the populace into a pre-existing doctrinal structure, namely orthodoxy."[104]

Davis's critique of orthopraxis is perhaps another way to underscore Metz's refutation of all extra-theological justifications and/or explanations of religious faith and theology. He strives, in fact, to reject any conception of praxis or reason which lies outside of the "practical structure underlying the logos of Christian theo-logy."[105] By exposing the serious problems which accompany the dialectic of Enlightenment, the author appears to rationally justify this rejection via critical theory. However, his use of critical theory serves more to delineate a socio-cultural situation in which there can be no genuine rational adjudication of the Christian logos. Indeed, how can there be when the contemporary human being is "increasingly subject to a process of back-breeding to the state of a very adaptable animal or a quietly functioning machine"?[106] In response to this predicament, Metz does not search out alternative paradigms of rationality or social interaction but commends a total theological explanation of reality which he believes capable of counter-acting the total anti-religious exegesis advanced by the "new man." Yet by envisioning the problem as a contest between mutually

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[104] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 9. Also see McCann and Strain, *Polity and Praxis*, 10-11; 39-45.

[105] Metz, *Faith*, 51.

[106] Metz, *Faith*, 72.

opposed totalities, Metz inevitably capitulates to the instrumental ethos by conceiving a theology engaged in a power struggle over public authority. As a result, anything which appears to challenge the independent completeness or orthodoxy of theology is denounced as technocratic or viewed as an attempt to marginalize theology's public claim to validity.[107] The possibility that such challenges may constitute legitimate criticisms is not thoroughly considered. This "fear" of the theological "non-identical,"[108] then, implies that Metz does not achieve a full-fledged critical theology aware of its inherent limitations and deformations. What he realizes instead is a dogmatic theology which brooks no compromise.

In light of the above exposition, those predisposed to affirm Metz's position may be inspired to ask; doesn't the limitation of religious praxis and reason by so-called "human" praxis and reason equally represent a dogmatic tradition which brooks no compromise? In other words, what argument can possibly justify in a rational, unambiguous fashion the presupposition that reality is first and foremost "human" and only secondarily religious? Why is it any less critical to insist, for example, that the human situation is primarily oriented by a "supernatural" element rather than a purely "natural" one? And why is it legitimate to demand that theologians be open to extra-theological explanations of religion, faith, and theology, while it is deemed illegitimate to require the same of secular disciplines?

In many ways, it is the last question which animates Helmut Peukert's influential

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[107] See Metz, *Faith*, 6.

[108] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 16.

study, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology*. In this text, Peukert claims that the theory of communicative action as developed by Habermas demands a theological moment if this theory is to maintain its rational integrity. However in contrast to his teacher Metz, Peukert does not pursue this argument by insinuating the illegitimacy and meaninglessness of communicative action in order to negatively justify a theological alternative. Rather, he endeavours to positively show that the authenticity and profundity of communicative action compels a theological foundation lest its significance be lost. This foundation, moreover, is not imposed from the outside, as it were, but exposed from within the theory of communicative action itself. As Peukert asserts; "It is my view that a certain convergence can be established between contemporary reflection on the fundamental principles of theology on the one side and the results of research into the theory of science on the other. It seems to me that the point of convergence lies in a theory of communicative action."[109]

As Habermas defines it in his essay, "What is Universal Pragmatics?" communicative action is action aimed at reaching understanding.[110] "The goal of coming to an understanding [*Verständigung*]" Habermas writes, "is to bring about an agreement [*Einverständnis*] that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another."[111] At

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[109] Peukert, *Science*, xxiii.

[110] Jürgen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 1-5.

[111] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 3.

the centre of this mode of social interaction is what Habermas here calls "universal pragmatics." It represents the analytic task of reconstructing the universal validity basis of speech. This effort results in Habermas's theory of communicative competence which outlines the implicit knowledge demanded of any individual who learns how to communicate. As Habermas asserts, "the thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated [or redeemed: *einlösen*]."[112] These validity claims are; i) propositional truth; ii) normative rightness; iii) truthfulness or sincerity. "The validity of propositional content depends, ... on whether the proposition stated represents a fact ...; the validity of an intention [i.e., truthfulness] depends on whether it corresponds to what is actually intended by the speaker; and the validity of the utterance performed depends on whether his action conforms to a recognized normative background."[113] When these validity claims are repressed or distorted, we have an instance of unsuccessful communication. However, this judgment is made possible by the universality of these claims which all speakers employ within every speech situation.[114]

In effect, Habermas's theory of communicative action serves to establish a non-violent, non-instrumental procedure for justifying and coordinating interpersonal relations based on a rational consensus derived from a free, unforced, open speech

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[112] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 2.

[113] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 28.

[114] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 14.

situation. This consensus is ultimately attained by complying with the implicit universal validity claims of communicative competence. The structure of communicative action and its rationality, then, advances an intersubjective paradigm and framework for the development of social critical theory. Its configuration accents the primacy of our interactive partners for the creation of a reflective self-understanding and identity which anticipates an egalitarian form of social solidarity.

For Peukert, the outstanding contribution of Habermas's theory of communicative action is its penetrating analysis of identity formation and preservation under modern conditions of life and thought.[115] In stark contrast to the isolated, domineering, technocratic subject expounded by Horkheimer and Adorno, Habermas's version champions a core identity structure which necessitates the recognition and acceptance of the non-identical other while sanctioning an equality of rights and obligations rooted in the communicative experience.[116] This formulation, of course, also contradicts Metz's assessment of the modern subject, and Peukert's appropriation of the Habermasian model not only permits but compels him to redress Metz's problematic from within the theory of communicative action. Peukert therefore sets about to "show that the thesis of the egalitarian and solidaristic basic structure of communicative action is at the same time the central thesis of the whole of theology."[117]

In view of this directive, Peukert's proposal for the development of critical theology

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[115] Peukert, *Science*, 172-175.

[116] Peukert, *Science*, 181.

[117] Peukert, *Science*, 171.

does not seek to maximize the obvious failures of modernity but aspires to build upon

its most exemplary accomplishments as interpreted by Habermas. Indeed, Peukert

argues that the

> structure of communicative action formulates the utmost ideal achievable
> in modern times. It is the binding anticipation of a humanity in
> communicative practice that, in conflict with nature and in ever further
> pursued reflection on its situation and its possibilities, grasps that in its
> free historical movement it projects for itself at every moment that
> horizon within which all questions must be decided. In reflection on the
> historical movement proper to it, humanity becomes aware of itself as
> summoned to freedom, to determine itself in mutually claimed and
> proffered freedom. Freedom in universal solidarity, to be realized in
> history, seems to designate the utmost limit of the thinkable.[118]

In spite of this emphatic endorsement, Peukert does not wish to adopt Habermas's

notion of communicative action *in toto*. Rather, his goal is to push this theory toward

the outermost edge of its conceptual horizon. That edge, according to Peukert, is

marked off by the death of the innocent other. The author claims that if communicative

action actually authenticates the normative core of the human identity in society and

history, then this theory must somehow be extended to include those persons whose

previous existence contributed to the formation and substance of this identity. If such

solidarity is deemed impossible, then the identity formed in its crucible would prove to

be a deception. As Peukert elaborates;

> The questions that result from the logic of unfolding these problems are
> whether the communicative action of free subjects in solidarity does not
> ultimately refer back to an absolute freedom and whether death, the
> experience of the guilt of oneself and others, and finally the experience
> that in history the innocent are annihilated do not contradict the core
> structure of egalitarian and solidaristic action, thus bringing the actor

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[118] Peukert, *Science*, 202.

himself into a destructive, despairing self-contradiction. This then becomes the occasion to rethink the entire approach to the theory of action.[119]

Peukert's re-conceptualization commences with an effort to demonstrate that communicative action points beyond itself to a reality that saves the other and the self in death: namely, God. Toward this end, he advances two interconnected theses. First, he intends to show that the "Judeo-Christian" tradition already attends the *aporia* experienced at the limits of communicative action; second, that all future fundamental theology must be cultivated as a theory of communicative action. "This theology is fundamental" writes Peukert, "in the sense that it denotes the *originary access to the reality intended in theology*, it assigns the basic structure of this reality and possible experiences and action in light of it ... and it elucidates the possibility of the reflective theoretical presentation of this reality in terms of these modes of access and basic structures."[120] In other words, Peukert is claiming that theology and, *mutatis mutandis*, religious faith, always have been embedded in communicative action because it designates the primary locus for the divine-human encounter. The *theory* of communicative action is therefore surely advantageous since it facilitates the theological re-thematization of its original experience and value according to the legitimate criteria of contemporary reason and science. At the same time, Peukert's thesis implies that contemporary reason and science also restore themselves by heeding the theological moment which can mend the theoretical gap effected by the death of the innocent other

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[119] Peukert, *Science*, 171-172. Also see page 202.

[120] Peukert, *Science*, 215. Italics mine.

in history. In short, Peukert sets out to prove that "Both projects, theology as well as Enlightenment, need to enter into public conversation with each other to continue. This is clear for the project of theology insofar that it makes a claim to speak in a way that is understandable and reasonable to all. ... But my thesis is that the Enlightenment also handicaps itself if it does not face the challenge of the religious traditions of humanity and their reflective formulations in theologies in which the basic human condition has been reflected upon in a radical way."[121]

The radical reflection on the human condition found within the Christian tradition, according to the author, is grounded in the historically experienced and realized freedom communicated by Jesus of Nazareth.[122] Indeed, we can understand "communicated" literally in this instance. As Peukert interprets it, Jesus conveyed his message about God's freedom, grace, and love by enacting it as parable. The intention of the parable is to surprise the listener by undermining her or his implicit expectations for the narrative.[123] Thus, the average listener in Jesus' day assumed the prodigal son would be chastised, not praised; they anticipated fair and equitable payment for those who worked all day in the vineyard rather than equal remuneration even for those hired at twilight, and so forth. The parabolic speech situation can be understood as a distinct mode of human interaction which endeavours to impart a particular experience and insight. Specifically, it intends a subversive encounter in order to generate fresh ideas

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[121] Peukert, "Enlightenment and Theology," 45.

[122] Peukert, *Science*, 235.

[123] See John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Allen, TX: Argus, 1975).

and new ways of acting in response to familiar predicaments. The parabolic speech situation sabotages pre-established perceptions of reality so as to assert and insert God's transcendence into the finite human life. Peukert concludes from this that "The determination of the reality of God is bound to a specific mode of communicative practice and occurs in action directed towards others. With his existence and his actions," continues the author, "Jesus asserts God as the saving reality for others."[124]

It is at this juncture that Peukert asks; what happens when the person "asserting God as the saving reality for others" dies himself? What on earth can that saving reality mean if it fails to rescue its supreme communicator? Do Jesus' efforts to actualize God's freedom, grace, and love become so many empty gestures? Doesn't the entirety of his communicative identity end in a massive self-contradiction with his death on the cross?[125] Peukert answers by observing that "The Gospels and the entire Christian proclamation are unequivocal about these questions. They profess that God resurrected Jesus from the dead and showed him to be saved, living, and not annihilated."[126] In effect, the communicative structure of Jesus' identity and the reality witnessed by his communicative actions are "redeemed" through the resurrection. They are so because the resurrection verifies that the communicative reality which saves in life is real because it saves this life in death. Peukert therefore

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[124] Peukert, *Science*, 225. On this topic also see Edmund Arens, "Jesus' Communicative Actions: The Basis for Christian Faith Praxis, Witnessing, and Confessing," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3 (1985): 67-85.

[125] Peukert, *Science*, 225.

[126] Peukert, *Science*, 226.

declares that the resurrection comprises the *"normative core of communicative action."*[127] Without the resurrection, communicative action must break down. For this reason, the life story of Jesus has enduring significance.[128] It proves that an unimpeded, open, egalitarian, universal solidarity between the living and the dead is sustainable because "He" lives on in faith. As the author explains;

> Faith is itself a practice that, as a practice, asserts God for others in communicative action and attempts to confirm this assertion in action. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is faith as communicative action factually anticipating salvation for others and thus one's own existence. As practical solidarity with others, it signifies the assertion of the reality of God for them and for one's own existence.[129]

In view of the above exegesis, Peukert claims that contemporary theology -- of whatever kind -- must be developed as a theory of communicative action.[130] Again, the implication is that this theory empowers the retrieval of an original divine-human experience which grounds faith and its reflective formulation in theology. At the same time, this theological reclamation urges the theory of communicative action to recognize that its basic *aporia* is surmounted by the resurrection. The theory of communicative action therefore needs a theological foundation; needs to be supplemented by the Christian faith if it is to maintain its rational coherence as theory. As Thomas McCarthy condenses Peukert's case; "Without a rational faith in God and immortality to supply a background of hope to practical reason, moral-political practice in solidarity

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[127] Peukert, *Science*, 227. Italics mine.

[128] Peukert, *Science*, 237.

[129] Peukert, *Science*, 226.

[130] Peukert, *Science*, 215.

with the victims of history makes no sense; it can only lead to despair. How convincing is this argument?"[131]

Well according to McCarthy's analysis, not very. As he sees it, Peukert's critique of communicative action represents a species of the Kantian postulate argument for moral reason and action. In the postmetaphysical and post-cosmological situation outlined in Kant's critique of pure reason, finite, naturally selfish human beings cannot fulfil the universal moral imperative to pursue the highest good for all unless they "postulate the existence of an infinite moral being who has the power to produce the necessary harmony between the two orders,"[132] that is, between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. In Peukert's discussion, an analogous approach is assumed. Here the universal solidarity demanded by a theory of communicative action is thought to disintegrate lest it postulate the resurrection. For "Communicative action in universal solidarity with the innocent victims of history" writes McCarthy, "makes sense only if this end is attainable, and it is attainable only on the assumption of a Lord of History who will somehow redeem past suffering."[133]

Yet as McCarthy is quick to point out, even if it is true that the theory of communicative action needs the resurrection in order to avoid despair, "need and

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[131] Thomas McCarthy, "Critical Theory and Political Theology: The Postulates of Communicative Reason" in his text, *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 211.

[132] McCarthy, "Critical Theory and Political Theology," 204.

[133] McCarthy, "Critical Theory and Political Theology," 213.

despair are not forms of logical validity."[134] Just because an argument or judgment appears to yield a despairing conclusion does not mean that it is false. While this despair may be too much for Peukert to abide, it may not be so for others. And even if it were, there is nothing absolutely certain about Peukert's position which could censure the quest for alternative, non-theological ways to explain or account for this facet of communicative action. However, Peukert does not consider the legitimacy of this option "but rests content, more or less, with having exhibited the worm at the heart of the apple of perfect justice and with developing its theological implications."[135]

Peukert's easy satisfaction here flies in the face of his avowal that theology must answer to the predominant Enlightenment conception of rationality by producing a discourse that is universally communicable and related to practice.[136] In other words, Peukert promises to produce a public theology which expels the prejudice of religious authority and tradition in favour of a common humanity engaged in critical argument; and to submit all explicit and implicit truth claims to the ordeal of public justification. In point of fact, the author actually subjects these criteria to a form of theological black mail. Peukert's position basically proffers; either publicly attest to the fact that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is universally true, or concede the irrationality and critical impotence of communicative action. While this synopsis may seem cavalier, the diagnosis is accurate. Peukert's ultimate ambition is to prove, in an indirect way, the

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[134] McCarthy, "Critical Theory and Political Theology," 208.

[135] McCarthy, "Critical Theory and Political Theology," 212.

[136] Bohman, "Translator's Introduction," xi.

(modern) "truth" of the resurrection. However, no genuine proof is provided (perhaps cannot be provided?) since the author does not adequately illustrate exactly what it is about communicative action which can generate -- not simply religious faith, but a specific Christian faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[137] The idea that "The performance of one's own existence in communicative action is then factually the assertion, in this action itself, of a reality that does not simply allow others to become an already superseded fact of the past,"[138] is not sufficiently demonstrated or established in a way that either empirically or communicatively requires the resurrection as a condition of its possibility. That there is "a reality that does not simply allow others to become an already superseded fact of the past" is an ontological claim which presupposes the full authoritative weight of the Christian tradition and revelation. In short, the structure of Peukert's argument implies that if the truth of communicative action can be shown to *totally* depend upon the resurrection, then the resurrection must be, in turn, *totally* true.

This yearning for totality; this endeavour to provide an explication of religious faith and theology which is absolutely comprehensive in relation to modern life and thought, is the dominant quality which binds Peukert's version of critical theology with that of his teacher Metz. Both theologians presuppose that exposing the deficiencies of modern life and/or theory significantly deflates its challenge for religion, faith, and theology.

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[137] See Werner G. Jeanrond's review of Peukert's book in *The Journal of Religion* 61 (1981): 438-440.

[138] Peukert, *Science*, 234.

With this challenge thrown into doubt, the way is cleared for a re-presentation of traditional orthodox Christian doctrine as "critical": that is, as either opposed to or capable of mastering the dilemmas of modernity. However, neither thinker seriously contemplates the prospect that these defects may intensify rather than diminish the crisis of theology and faith. This omission is explained by Dennis McCann as part and parcel of an ineffectual encounter with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Habermas. As he puts it;

> Any theological conversation with [Habermas], ... must begin with a willingness to be equally honest in discussing the claims of one's own religious tradition. It cannot proceed on a business-as-usual basis, as if a raid on the Frankfurt School could be carried off as one more successful exercise in "spoiling the Egyptians." Alas, Metz and Peukert -- for all their originality -- have not succeeded in getting beyond this traditional ploy. Instead of engaging in rigorous criticism of theology's foundations, for the most part they have staged thematic confrontations designed to provide an opening for more kerygmatic preaching.[139]

While we may object along with Gary Simpson that Peukert's extensive review of communicative action hardly constitutes a "raid,"[140] it certainly "approximates piracy more than it does trade."[141] In any event, Peukert, like Metz, fails to submit either

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[139] Dennis P. McCann, "Habermas and the Theologians," *Religious Studies Review* 7, no. 1 (January 1981): 20.

[140] See Gary M. Simpson, "Theologia Crucis and the Forensically Fraught World: Engaging Helmut Peukert and Jürgen Habermas" in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, 195, end note no. 2. For Simpson's basically "Moltmannian" alternative to Peukert's proposal, also see his essay, "Religious Life and the Communicative Imagination of Jürgen Habermas," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1988): 93-105.

[141] Paul Lakeland, "Habermas and the Theologians Again," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (April 1989): 108. It should be noted, however, that Lakeland appears to exempt Peukert form this general assessment of the theological appropriation of

theology, faith, or tradition to an in depth critique. It therefore comes as no surprise -
· parabolic speech situation to the contrary -- that Peukert discovers the risen Christ at
the centre of the reality disclosed within communicative action. For the truth of Christ
for Peukert "the theologian," precedes the truth of communicative action for Peukert
"the critical theorist," and the two never really meet on even ground. As such, nothing
is allowed to count against the reality and truth of the resurrection. It is for this reason
that McCarthy concludes his examination by observing that "Religious *experience* and
religious *tradition* remain key ingredients in [Peukert's] account of faith, which is thus
not presented as susceptible of purely argumentative reconstruction."[142]

With McCarthy's statement, though, the religious thinker cannot help but pause to
wonder; how in the world is it possible to provide an account of faith which can forego
religious experience and tradition as integral components of its public justification?
Does McCarthy's critique not presuppose that truth is a product of the disembodied
mind? Would it be reasonable to demand from McCarthy, for instance, that he provide
an account of the value of social criticism which avoids conferring with the tradition
of critical theory and the social, political and cultural experiences which impact upon
its particular formation? In short, do we not meet here, once again, a basic
confrontation between a total religious bearing on reality and a total secular one?

Perhaps David Tracy has hit the nail on the head when he writes that "the basic
character of religious [truth] claims (namely, to speak validly of the 'whole' of reality)

Habermas's critical theory.

[142] McCarthy, "Critical Theory and Political Theology," 215.

renders them exceptionally difficult to analyze in modern critical terms."[143]

However, is it not also possible that the attempt "to speak validly about the 'whole' of reality" is simply uncritical? Is this not one important conclusion to be culled from Metz and Peukert's effort to justify religious orthodoxy? Does the creation of a legitimate critical theology, therefore, begin with a critique of religious orthodoxy? Is this the definitive way to present an account of faith which is "susceptible to argumentative reconstruction?"

It is with these questions in mind that I come to examine the grounds for Charles Davis's postorthodox alternative.

4 Critical Theology II: The Critique of Religious Orthodoxy

The second model of critical theology to be examined begins in earnest with the work of Charles Davis, and can be described as a critical *postorthodox* theology. To some extent, Davis's efforts have persevered on the edges of mainstream theological discourse. The reasons for this partial marginalization, I believe, point toward the early context in which he first articulated his critical approach: namely, his denunciation of the Catholic Church and doctrine in *A Question of Conscience*.[144] In this text, Davis explains why as a prominent British theologian he felt compelled to leave both the Church and the priesthood at the height of the Second Vatican Council in 1966. Though it is beyond the purpose of this chapter to examine Davis's arguments on this

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[143] Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory," 36.

[144] New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

topic, it is interesting to register the focus and style of his original objections. Thus, in Davis's press release we read;

> "For me Christian commitment is inseparable from concern for truth and concern for people. I do not find either of these represented by the official Church. There is concern for authority at the expense of truth, and I am constantly saddened by instances of the damage done to persons by workings of an impersonal and unfree system. Further, I do not think that the claim the Church makes as an institution rests upon any adequate biblical and historical basis. The Church in its existing form seems to me to be a pseudo-political structure from the past. It is now breaking up, and some other form of Christian presence in the world is under formation."[145]

The key ideas expressed in this passage provide a first glimpse at Davis's mature position: the priority of truth over authority; the danger of impersonal systems for the integrity of the lifeworld; the imperative for historical criticism over against an ahistorical biblicism and doctrine; and on the need for institutional and ideological critique in general, all point toward the articulation of a critical postorthodox theology. As Dennis McCann has noted of *A Question of Conscience*, "Davis was doing *critical reflection on praxis* before there was a methodological vocabulary to define this approach. His resolute attention to the realities of Catholic practice, and its structural features forced him to critical reflection."[146] It is not merely coincidental, therefore, that Gregory Baum's book-length rebuttle of Davis's dissention avers to Metz's emerging political theology as a post-councillor development which adequately

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[145] Davis, *Question of Conscience*, 7.

[146] Dennis P. McCann, "The Path Marked Out by Charles Davis's Critique of Political Theology" in Marc P. Lalonde ed., *The Promise of Critical Theology: Essays in Honour of Charles Davis* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, forthcoming), 121.

addresses Davis's criticisms from within the Church rather than outside it.[147] However, doesn't this equally allude to the possibility that Davis's approach entails not only a serious critique of the Church, but a *competing form of critical theology* as well?

Though Davis's "official" entry into the folds of critical theology situates him among the "second generation" via his appropriation of Habermas's material (which, of course, is descriptively true at the chronological level), I think it is more insightful and expedient to view Davis's contribution as an original expression of critical theology which competes with Metz and his followers. The chief difference lies in Davis's critique of religious orthodoxy. It is this activity which epitomizes Davis's version of critical theology and, I will argue, of all real critical theology. It is also this approach which divides Davis's strategy from that of John Milbank. However, as I have already indicated at different points in this study, Davis's effort is not without its own particular problems. But it is only by facing the dilemmas raised within the most promising models of critical theology that genuine advance can be achieved.

As noted in our review of Metz's work, Davis contends that the primacy of praxis advocated by critical theory is incompatible with any notion of religious orthodoxy. Such primacy implies that cultural phenomena -- of whatever kind -- are the products of human action and inevitably share the limitations and deformations which attend all finite forms of social intercourse.[148] Religious orthodoxy, however, conceives

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[147] Gregory Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 100-101.

[148] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 129-130.

doctrine as an absolute norm which confers primacy to theory.[149] As Davis elaborates;

> Religion when maintained as an orthodoxy claims a permanent self-identity, remaining unscathed by social and practical changes. It invokes some purely theoretical centre of reference to serve in an abstract way as a norm of identity. There are indeed conflicting orthodoxies, but the differences are conceived as basically theoretical. The presupposition of orthodoxy is the contemplative conception of knowledge, according to which knowledge is the result of the disinterested viewing of reality by individuals. Orthodoxy is that contemplative conception applied to religious truth.[150]

In effect, orthodoxy presumes that knowledge is foundational for religious faith. To possess this knowledge -- in this case, knowledge of God and salvation -- is ... control the key which unlocks the truth and meaning of reality in its totality. Historical and social change are therefore witnessed, either passively or aggressively, as corresponding to or deviating from an ontological constant. Whether one is examining the dialectic of enlightenment or the theory of communicative action, its value and worth is discerned in relation to, or bent to conform with, the theoretical structure implicit to orthodoxy which cannot relinquish its total grasp of the situation without forsaking itself. Religious orthodoxy, so understood, comprises a form of identity thinking: it labours to subdue difference, contradiction, and anomaly.

Davis further explains the development of religious orthodoxy as an effort to conceptualize the mythic or narrative configuration which shapes the initial expression

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[149] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 2.

[150] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 130. Also see Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 90-91.

of the Christian faith. In its early formation, the Christian tradition functions as a cosmology which provides "a comprehensive account of the order of the world, of society and nature and the destiny of the individual."[151] As a total world view, its portrayal of reality is implicitly accepted as unalterable thus furnishing a fundamental backdrop for the propagation of knowledge, communication, and interaction. For its part, orthodoxy draws upon the form of human intelligence at work within this paradigm. It is apprehended as *faith seeking understanding*," that is, "as the analysis, formulation, and defense of elements of myth as doctrines. Thus the mythical mode of interpretation of Christianity corresponds to the doctrinal or dogmatic mode of interpretation."[152]

This doctrinal exegesis obtains its ideal idiom as an "ontotheology." As Davis clarifies, "Ontotheology is the attempt to translate the content of the Christian myth into the theoretical concepts and statements of metaphysical philosophy."[153] The problem with this translation, however, is its bid to claim the certitude appropriate to myth (i.e., the trust which emerges when narrative comprises the integral framework for practical experience) for a genre which, in principle, does not allow for such an existential conviction. This is to say, that theoretical knowledge is, of its very nature, provisional and limited.[154] In reference to Habermas's theory of communicative competence,

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[151] Davis, *What is Living?*, 25.

[152] Davis, *What is Living?*, 30.

[153] Davis, *What is Living?*, 60.

[154] Davis, *What is Living?*, 109.

Davis writes that "as soon as one clearly distinguishes the cognitive from the normative and expressive, one has to recognize that human knowledge is limited and fragmentary, changing and relative. Comprehensive explanations remain largely hypothetical."[155] In view of this diagnosis, both ontotheology and orthodoxy are remnants of a superseded plausibility structure. The effort to maintain that structure in the face of its demise represents a "lust for certitude"[156] rather than an attempt to nourish the faith. Indeed, the misappropriation of narrative certitude displaces the experiential basis for its surety with the pseudo-certitude of dogma which frustrates the dynamic practice of faith.[157] Thus, "in religion direct attempts to achieve certitude are self-defeating. ⁻ach system of faith ... become[s] closed in on itself by efforts to keep its adherents in absolute certitude. Such self-enclosure violates the nature of religious faith, which implies a self-transcending openness to total reality."[158]

As the above analysis suggests, Davis holds that there is a certitude appropriate to faith. However, in direct contrast to orthodoxy and ontotheology, this certitude remains "unsought,"[159] the blessing of a free gift of love rather than the assurance of a forced conclusion. Davis writes;

> The absoluteness of faith is the absoluteness of total demand and total

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[155] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 27.

[156] See Charles Davis, *Temptations of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 1-27.

[157] Davis, *What is Living?*, 71.

[158] Davis, *Temptations*, 15. .

[159] Davis, *Temptations*, 24.

response in an experience of unrestricted love in relation to hidden transcendence or mystery. Faith is the drive toward transcendence, the thrust of human beings out of and beyond themselves, out of and beyond all the limited orders and human certainties under which they live, in an attempt to open themselves to the totality of existence and reach unlimited reality and ultimate value. It is a total response to the felt reality of a total demand. That absoluteness should not be confused with a certitude of beliefs.[160]

This quotation unveils the crux of Davis's postorthodox position: namely, the fundamental distinction between faith and belief. Religious belief systems, like human knowledge in general, "are the changing limited culturally particular manifestation of religious faith."[161] As such, they are, in principle, always subject to error and in need of constant criticism.[162] Faith, on the other hand, is absolute transcendence. As a human phenomenon it is, nevertheless, more than human. Faith represents a complete, utterly self-effacing openness to Reality as Unlimited and Infinite. "As an orientation," asserts the author, "it has a term, 'The Transcendent,' but no object, because the Transcendent remains unknown. The term of the response of faith is mystery, because we have no proper knowledge of the Transcendent. We cannot," he continues, "grasp the Transcendent as an object; we can merely indicate the Infinite, the Unlimited, through symbols."[163] In short, faith for Davis is mystical not mythical. And as mystical, it tends to nullify any particular claim to religious knowledge which declares more than is warranted by an ineffable experience of the

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[160] Davis, *What is Living?*, 67.

[161] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 35.

[162] Davis, *What is Living?*, 67.

[163] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 35.

divine.[164] Yet it is this negation which aligns faith with modern critical rationality. "Both are opposed in principle to orthodoxy," claims Davis, "each demanding in its own way that one see for oneself."[165]

This last statement hints at the potential contribution of an authentic religious faith to critical theory. First, as absolute transcendence and openness to Reality, faith can be counted as among the sources of human freedom and emancipation.[166] Second, Davis also contends that faith is, not without some irony, the very foundation of the critical activity itself. The transcendence of faith keeps the argument open, resisting any finite explication as complete or final. "Religious faith, by pushing us towards the Transcendent," Davis explains, "relativizes every existing order. In so far as any existing social order absolutizes itself, religious faith becomes subversive and revolutionary in the usual political sense."[167] It is for this reason that Davis defines critical theology as the emancipatory critique of religious traditions;[168] as a critical, though, faith-filled examination of religious systems of belief:

> Faith, together with theology, cannot be genuinely a protest against the social order unless it acknowledges that it itself and its own past history as the product of alienated society must be submitted to criticism and revolutionary transformation. It cannot place itself apart and, prior to

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[164] Davis, *What is Living?*, 51.

[165] Davis, *What is Living?*, 53.

[166] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 131.

[167] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 37.

[168] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 83.

criticism, claim an unchanging self-identity.[169]

> In other words, critical theology is conceived as the critique of theology. Through a critique of existing theology, the unmasking of its ideological distortions, the possibility of its future development may be revealed.[170]

In essence, then, Davis proposes in no uncertain terms the very thing which McCann accused Metz and Peukert of evading: that critical theology should engage in a rigorous criticism of theology's foundations as opposed to staging thematic confrontations designed to promote more kerygmatic preaching. Along these lines it is interesting to note that, in stark contrast to Metz and Peukert, nowhere does Davis's argument for critical theology hinge upon a detailed exegesis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no talk of "the dangerous memories of Christ" nor of the "communicative structure of the resurrection," only the open transcendence of faith available, in principle, to all. Davis's theology really appears to expel the prejudice of religious authority and revelation in favour of a common humanity engaged in critical argument. It genuinely seems to avoid "any pretence of historical uniqueness, exclusive moral validity, and religious absoluteness"[171] in favour of submitting all explicit and implicit theological truth claims to the ordeal of public argument.[172] Davis's critical theology as a postorthodox theology appears to

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[169] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 78.

[170] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 85.

[171] McCann and *Polity and Praxis*, 3.

[172] Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction," 6; and Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory," 26.

constitute an authentic modern public theology. In this way, the author hopes to call "attention to the need to free the project of modernity from the pathology of modernity."[173]

However, need one commit to the project of critical theology -- even as it is defined by Davis -- in order to free the project of modernity from its distortions? I think it can be cogently argued that Habermas has gone a long way toward this end without adopting or adapting a theological moment.[174] And since the efforts of Metz and Peukert demonstrate that a "theological enlightenment of the enlightenment" tends to procure another way to exonerate religious orthodoxy, then to take up the tasks of critical theology rather than communicating one's faith as critical theory seems futile. Though Davis doesn't quite say this, he comes very close when he writes that

> if the mediation of faith through *praxis* is consistently accepted, that means the destruction of theology in the current sense of the articulation of the immanent self-understanding of faith. Theology loses its boundaries as an independent discipline, because the only appropriate context for the conscious articulation of *praxis* is a theory of the development of society in its total reality. Included within such a comprehensive theory would be a critique of theological consciousness, replacing theology as a separate science.[175]

Davis's recommendation thematizes a basic tenant advanced by modern secular theory: namely, that theology as a "science" should be repudiated. Yet this is equally explained as an effect of faith. Again in reference to Habermas's analysis of

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[173] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 38.

[174] For an opposing view see Rudolf J. Siebert, "Habermas's Critical Theory: Theological Dimension," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 3 (Winter 1985): 21-39.

[175] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 91.

"Universal Pragmatics" Davis writes;

> I have not marked out a distinct cultural sphere for religious faith and experience. The first mistake of those who identify religion with inwardness is to suppose, in analysing modern culture, that religion should be marked off as constituting a distinct realm of meaning or practice. To suppose so is in effect to deny that religious reality transcends all human meanings and each and every human world. Transcendence does not form a realm of meaning or cultural world, along side the other three, but is the Unlimited that lies beyond, while underpinning and penetrating the three worlds and any other that human culture should distinguish.[176]

Thus we might suggest that theology "loses its boundaries as an independent discipline" in accord with the unsettling, that is, subversive character of religious faith. Nevertheless, Davis's proposal here is not entirely indeterminate. The idea of a transcendent "underpinning," for instance, means that faith lends itself to mediation by the three cultural spheres which produce, in turn, distinct embodiments of the one transcending faith. Davis maintains that "Faith is never a naked adherence to the transcendent. Faith meets the presence of the transcendence through one or other of the cultural forms"[177] available to finite human beings. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that "the relativity of these media does not mean that they are dispensable or replaceable features of faith. They share in the absoluteness of faith, in so far as they are at a particular time and place the indispensable, irreplaceable form of faith."[178] Yet this indispensability does not preclude its critical examination. If anything, its "share in the absoluteness of faith" entails such criticism as an intrinsic obligation.

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[176] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 51.

[177] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 58.

[178] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 57.

In keeping with this approach, Davis argues that some forms of cultural mediation are more appropriate than others for this particular time and place." Specifically, the author affirms that the primary task of religious people today is to "relate religion to the normative sphere of social and political action."[179] Davis takes this route because, among other things, the "total demand and total response" of religious faith in an experience of unrestricted love demands social action; demands that Christians shepherd the transcendence of faith into society, releasing its emancipatory force for the benefit of human rationality and action. As Davis elaborates;

> Quite aside from any reference to the Marxist view of the primacy of practice, there is a particular, religious reason for refusing to give Christian religion a theoretical centre of reference or, ... a foundation in theory. It is that Christian practice is a response to the reality of a transcendent gift; it is the living out of the concrete experience of transcendent reality. Hence, Christian practice does not conform to any scale of values or set of criteria, worked out within a purely human frame of reference. In that sense it is subversive of all the orders devised by human beings for their security and prosperity; ... Christians do not suppose -- or, at least, in my opinion should not suppose -- that the human situation can be significantly improved by the development of natural human capacities or by the exercise of ordinary human abilities. Christian practice is indeed a transformative principle in the world -- not, however, as an achievement of human morality but as a free gift of God's love, shifting human action on to a higher level beyond mere morality.[180]

The vital issue this passage raises and which compresses much of the above presentation, is whether the critical theologian need disparage the potential for the "development of natural human capacities" as a consequence of religious faith. If the

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[179] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 55.

[180] Davis, *What is Living?*, 78.

difference of religious faith is to underline the fact that human beings cannot, in the end, make a difference, then it seems doubtful that Davis can evade Habermas's indictment that theology, religion, and faith can, at most, serve to "normalize our intercourse with the extra-ordinary."[181] True, an emphasis on the subversive quality of transcendence both accents the gratuity of grace and belies the human hunger for false absolutes. However, its overemphasis seems to uphold a false absolute because inordinately disproportionate to the legitimate human struggle to gain some sense of peace. It is at this juncture, then, where we have to ask some serious questions of Davis's conception of faith. Specifically, does his idea of faith as a "total demand and total response" not function in an analogous fashion as the yearning for totality evident within religious orthodoxy and ontotheology?

I think that it does. Consider Davis's charge that a transcendent faith grounds the critical intention. As he says, "Human rationality, when taken beyond the efficient adaptation of means to ends, is a more fragile and exclusive achievement than we often realize. Paradoxically, it requires religious faith for its survival."[182] This line of argument is, certainly, reminiscent of Peukert's. But rather than postulating a particular religious doctrine as the supreme corrective, Davis tenders faith as the necessary condition for the possibility of critical theory. In other words, insofar that criticism is genuine, it participates in a religious faith understood as "the drive toward

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Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. by William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 51.

[182] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 37.

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transcendence, the thrust of human beings out of and beyond themselves, out of and beyond all the limited orders and human certainties under which they live." This approach intimates that critical theory forfeits itself lest it concede an essential faith-filled moment to its operation.

Thus, rather than encountering a doctrinal blackmail, we witness here the blackmail of a subversive faith. For what can count against Davis's conception of faith? It seems to me very little. This feature of Davis's proposal resides in his refusal to ascribe faith a positive content. For if a critical faith is ultimately grounded in an experience which resists rational identification and explication, that is, resists making a cognitive claim to truth, then how does one differentiate an authentic manifestation of faith from an unauthentic one? Or to put it another way, how does one discriminate its critical expression in variance to its uncritical formulation?

Davis's response to this question is to contrast the negativity of faith with the negativity of nihilism. "What distinguishes the negative experience of faith from the unfaith of nihilism" he writes, "is precisely the refusal of closure, the willingness to accept a world without boundaries, even though on the cognitive level that demands the surrender of a stable truth, a fixed centre, a final meaning of our religious texts and our human existence."[183] This dissimilarity implies that a negative critical faith, unlike nihilism, includes a positive factor which inspires trust. This is asserted despite the fact that such positivity does not permit an exact definition beyond observing the "positive

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[183] Davis, *What is Living?*, 76. Also see *Religion and the Making of Society*, 153-169.

nothingness"[184] of the faith-experience. The illocutionary force of this qualitative distinction, therefore, resides in the experience itself and in the sincerity of the claimant. However, what if someone professes a negative experience of faith but concludes that it leads to closure rather than openness? How could one prove him or her mistaken, or illustrate that the experience in question is really nihilistic? I think that a convincing response would have to allude to the particularity of religious tradition; to its positive claims about reality, God and humankind; and to its concern for the religious truth of things. Short of this or some similar interpretation, the public relevance of a critical faith would be evident only to those initiated in the unutterable ways of the Transcendent. To the rest it would remain nihilistic, or at best privatisitc.

To some extent, I think Davis has come to recognize the need for critical theology to push beyond the negativity of transcendence. This acknowledgement has been brought on by the challenge of John Milbank's work.[185] Davis's constructive response to Milbank can be discerned within the pages of his essay "Revelation, Historical Continuity and the Rationality of Tradition."[186] Here the author endeavours to outline the nature, character, and uniqueness of the Christian revelation, and how it can be comprehended as rational. Without undertaking a prolonged examination of this thesis, it is evident that Davis both confirms the fundamental drift of his previous work

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[184] Davis, *Temptations*, 21.

[185] See especially Davis's comments in, "Introduction: From the Secular to the Supernatural" in *Religion and the Making of Society*, 1-18.

[186] In *Religion and the Making of Society*, 96-111. This essay appears for the first time in this text.

while modifying its overemphasis on the subversive quality of faith. Thus, he reaffirms in this context that "The *message* of revelation is a *praxis*, an ethical way of life, a way of being and acting." However, Davis departs from the iconoclastic motif by arguing that the Christian revelation "may be partially articulated in propositions. It may stimulate theoretical reflection. But it is essentially the establishment of a practical way of life."[187]

Of course, what interests me is the assertion that this practical way of life may be "partially articulated in propositions." In support of this hypothesis, Davis picks up on the efforts of Alasdair MacIntyre to define a notion of rationality peculiar to tradition.[188] As Davis interprets it, the rationality of tradition is the rationality of argument itself. All traditions entail a conflict of interpretations which become a constitutive part of that tradition over the course of its development. As such, a religious tradition can be understood as "the narrative of an argument. .... To belong to a tradition is to enter into an argument and to make the continuous argument intelligible by narrative."[189] This striving for narrative intelligibility represents the creative, reconstructive dynamic available within tradition. It is demonstrated by the tradition's capacity to respond to new experiences and challenges brought on by social, cultural, and political change "The tradition avoids repudiation and remains worthy

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[187] Davis, "Revelation," 99.

[188] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), especially Chapter 18, "The Rationality of Traditions," 349-369.

[189] Davis, "Revelation," 108.

of rational assent" Davis infers, "as long as it can find within itself the resources to meet new situations and questions with sufficient inventiveness for the reformulation and re-evaluation of its authoritative texts and beliefs."[190]

However, in an utterly surprising move Davis ventures to identify the rationality of tradition as an orthodoxy. As he explains;

> Orthodoxy may be conceived as the continuously reconstructed narrative. It is, however, the narrative of an argument. The attempt to make it a body of unchanging interpretations to be accepted without question is to block its transmission into new historical and cultural situations and eventually to kill it. All belong to the tradition who are willing to enter into the argument. Those who refuse the argument that continually reconstitutes the tradition put themselves outside the tradition, ... On the other hand, groups outside the mainstream who are still arguing represent elements that have not yet been adequately accounted for in the present narrative of the tradition and are rightly calling for a further reconstruction of the narrative and its argument.[191]

Similar to Georg Luckács's re-definition of Marxist orthodoxy,[192] Davis distinguishes religious orthodoxy as a particular kind of approach, procedure, or attitude rather than understanding it as a fixed doctrinal system meant to convey a collection of unalterable truths. As such, the author aspires to articulate a notion of orthodoxy which eludes the temptation to "claim a permanent self-identity, remaining unscathed by social and practical changes."[193] However, does it make any sense to refer to this alternative

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[190] Davis, "Revelation," 109.

[191] Davis, "Revelation," 110.

[192] See Georg Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?" in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 1-26.

[193] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 130.

as an orthodoxy? I do not think that it does.

Davis's re-conceptualization of religious orthodoxy still verifies the disparity between faith and belief which grounds his postorthodox position. In this case it shows up as the distinction between a dynamic religious tradition envisioned as an open, imaginative, self-critical argument, and an inert traditionalism portrayed as a closed, prosaic, uncritical dogmatism. What is new is a more pronounced effort to elucidate the idea that the "relativity of [a tradition's] media does not mean that they are dispensable or replaceable features of faith. They share in the absoluteness of faith, in so far as they are at a particular time and place the indispensable, irreplaceable form of faith."[194] In this way, Davis circumscribes the negativity of faith with the positivity of a narrative structure which establishes the integrity of tradition as an unobstructed debate -- that is, as an appropriate vehicle for a modern, public, critical faith. Thus, it is absolutely clear that this framework does not grant the content of tradition a pre-critical function or a pre-modern status. What it accomplishes is a procedure through which to envisage the Christian tradition as a postorthodox tradition which, nevertheless, remains essentially Christian.

Still, I am left somewhat bewildered by Davis's reconsideration of religious orthodoxy. Nowhere in the article does the author explicitly review or confront his previous critique. Does this lacuna tacitly acknowledge that some comprehension of right belief is necessary for the ongoing existence of a religious tradition? Does Davis now have to reconsider his critique of Metz's notion of orthopraxis? Or is it possible

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[194] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 57.

that the certitude appropriate even to a critical subversive faith can never quite escape the "temptations of religion"?

5 *Conclusion*

On the whole I believe that Davis's re-evaluation of tradition labours to revise his original refusal to accredit faith a positive content. For if a critical faith is irrevocably confined to an encounter which defies reasonable paraphrase or resists making a cognitive claim to truth, then it becomes exceedingly difficult to signify its value and purpose within the "development of society in its total reality." This insight also holds true for critical theology. *In order for theology to be critical and not simply self-critical to the point of its own elimination, the nature and character of religious faith as critical activity must be granted a specific religious focus of application and discernment.* It must be given the cognitive range to justify rationally its unique competence as theology so that its propositional content (however qualified) can be said to represent a fact, *though not all the facts*, about what is the case in this world.[195] By *positively limiting* critical theology in this way, it attains a new analytical function without claiming "a permanent self-identity which remains unscathed by social and practical changes." The distinctive relativity of critical theology means that it cannot vacate its postorthodox site. Therefore, a return to either Metz or Peukert is ruled out. As effectively incomplete, so to speak, it cannot rationally claim the wherewithal to evoke "some purely theoretical centre of reference to serve in an abstract speculative

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[195] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 28.

way as a norm of identity." However, it does risk its truth-basis by moving beyond the idea that "We cannot grasp the Transcendent as object." Naturally, what counts as "objectivity" in this case cannot be restricted to empirical observation and measurement. Still the mien of mystery which beckons transcendence need not be so mysterious. By probing the potential of a more emphatic stance, critical theology, as the reflective formulation of religious faith, may be better able to "utilize [its] accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life -- that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life."[196]

The pertinence of this demarcation for critical theology is, in an important way, already adumbrated in Davis's exposition. Despite his reluctance to justify a cognitive mediation of religious faith,[197] Davis doesn't entirely avoid it either. To begin with, his assertion that "the Transcendent remains unknown" logically implies that enough is known to at least assert that the Transcendent remains hidden. For otherwise, how can Davis be so sure that faith "has a term, the 'Transcendent,' but no object?" In other words, the certitude of the negative still requires the illocutionary force of a truth claim about what is the case -- with faith -- in this world. However, there is more. Recall that Davis classifies the encounter with the Transcendent as "an experience of unrestricted love." Is this love not one way to identity the object of Transcendence as it relates to finite human life and knowledge? Does the experience of unrestricted love in relation to a hidden transcendence depend in any way on the types, conditions, and

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[196] Habermas, "Modernity -- An Incomplete Project," 9.

[197] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 54-56.

experiences of human love?

Without necessarily equating divine love and human love, nor repudiating its fundamental gratuitous quality, I think it can be argued that critical theology may discover its speciality, and hence its critical claim to public truth and validity, by elucidating how religious faith stands for and cultivates the critical implications of human love in relation to the rational organization of society. This characterization is made both possible and real by illuminating the ways in which God's love is mediated and therefore truly glimpsed in and through love in all its various manifestations and levels of intensity. Of course as an historical phenomenon, love in its various cultural expressions demands critical analysis and discrimination. Here the task is to outline a methodological approach which can confirm the "rationality" of love while sustaining the critical, reconstructive thrust of the postorthodox position. In effect, I am proposing that the postorthodox perspective must rot only be applied to religious beliefs, but must also push into the very heart of faith. A postorthodox faith will have to circumscribe its absoluteness for the sake of its inclusivity, risking both positivity and specification for the sake of human freedom and happiness.

However, will this approach to critical theology and religious faith be able to withstand the postmetaphysical objections of Jürgen Habermas?

CHAPTER THREE

The End of Critical Theology?

The Postmetaphysical Objections of Jürgen Habermas

1 *Introduction*

In his excursus on "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality,"[1] author Max Horkheimer declares that the bleak tomes bequeathed by de Sade and Nietzsche are to be appreciated for having "trumpeted far and wide the impossibility of deriving from reason any fundamental argument against murder ..."[2] Of course Horkheimer avers to these thinkers in order to "illuminate" the intrinsic brutality of *modern, "enlightened" reason.* "Unlike its apologists," observes Horkheimer, "the black writers of the bourgeoisie have not ... postulated that formalistic reason is more closely allied to morality than to immorality. Whereas the optimistic writers merely disavowed and denied in order to protect the indissoluble union of reason and ... domination, the dark chroniclers mercilessly declared the shocking truth"[3] -- namely, that the Enlightenment is ultimately driven by a despotic "will-to-power."

For Jürgen Habermas, however, the only thing "shocking" about Horkheimer's claim is its tacit avowal that "to seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God

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[1] In Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1990), 81-119.

[2] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 118.

[3] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 117-118.

is a futile undertaking."[4] Habermas interjects; "I have to admit that this statement [of Horkheimer's] irritates me now no less then it did almost four decades ago when I first read it. ... The idea that it is vain to strive for unconditional meaning without God betrays not just a metaphysical need; the remark in itself is an instance of the metaphysics that not only philosophers but even theologians themselves today must learn to do without."[5] Contra-Horkheimer, then, Habermas strongly exhorts that some notion of "unconditional meaning" can be established without the aid of a metaphysical framework or the boon of religious conjecture. Indeed, problems arising from the search for meaning can no longer be resolved by classical metaphysics or traditional religious worldviews. Their holistic assumptions and totalistic aspirations are, according to Habermas, anathema to the conceptual horizon and socio-cultural configuration which marks "the project of modernity." Herein lie the fundamental suppositions of Habermas's theory of communicative action: that questions surrounding substantial issues of truth, morality, and meaning should *now* be decided by differentiated, communicative processes of discursive interaction which endeavour to achieve a mutual understanding by all and for all concerned. It is within this -- let me concede -- most difficult complex of ideas and hypotheses that we encounter the logic of Habermas's "postmetaphysical objections" to critical theology.

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[4] Jürgen Habermas, "To Seek to Salvage an Unconditional Meaning Without God is a Futile Undertaking: Reflections on a Remark by Max Horkheimer" in *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. by Ciaran P. Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 133-146.

[5] Habermas, "To Seek to Salvage," 134.

As early as 1971, Habermas argued that "Postmetaphysical thought does not dispute determinate theological affirmations; instead it asserts their meaninglessness."[6] Hardly an attitude open to the possibilities of counter-argument, Habermas's account of religion and theology at this time seems mired by the very positivism and scientism that his work has always sought to discredit.[7] In marked contrast to this biased stance, Habermas's most recent response to the theological enterprise[8] freely acknowledges an inevitable affinity. As he says, for anyone schooled in the tradition of German Idealism -- as was Habermas[9] -- "there is excluded from the start an approach that would merely objectify Jewish and Christian traditions ..."[10] Consequently, Habermas's present deliberations constitute a sensitive yet highly penetrating rejoinder to the theological appropriation of his work; one which, I believe, compels the pursuit of new motifs, themes, and hypotheses for critical religious thought in view of the postmetaphysical problematic.

As briefly outlined in Chapter One of this study, Habermas insists that theology

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[6] Jürgen Habermas, "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose?" in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. by Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 12.

[7] See Dennis P. McCann's original review of this issue in, "Habermas and the Theologians," *Religious Studies Review* 7 (1981): 14-21.

[8] Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World" in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 226-250.

[9] For insight into Habermas's educational background see the interview, "A Philosophical-Political Profile" in Peter Dews ed., *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas* (London: Verso, 1986), 147-185.

[10] Habermas, "Transcendence," 227.

cannot be counted as a critical discipline lest it forsake the unique religious experiences which ground its peculiar claim to "truth." This claim, asserts Habermas, is based on a privileged access to truth which cannot but contradict the postmetaphysical conditions of contemporary thought. These conditions, as we will shortly see, demand that all truth claims be intersubjectively validated through open-ended, public argumentation: such are the basic requirements of "communicative rationality." But Habermas warns that for theology to accept this criterion as its own is to surrender the very *logos* of the *theos* it purportedly represents. The decisive point advanced by Habermas is that theology (of whatever kind) cannot repudiate its "extraordinary"[11] character and intention without annulling itself. In short, theology cannot "utilize [its] accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life -- this is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life."[12]

In this chapter, I propose to take up Habermas's challenge to critical theology by, first, unpacking the many theoretical presuppositions which undergird his postmetaphysical objections to critical theology. This requires some explication of Habermas's theory of communicative action and reason, and of course, illuminating what he means by "postmetaphysical thinking." This will demand that I shift back and forth from recounting his specific objections to more in depth investigations of the philosophical suppositions which stand behind his learned response (section 2). This

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[11] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. by William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). 51.

[12] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity -- An Incomplete Project" in Hal Foster ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 9.

basic exposition is followed by a study of Jens Glebe-Möller's text *A Political Dogmatic*.[13] For Habermas, at least, Glebe-Möller's work represents the only possible way for theology to assume a rational, critical formulation: namely, as a "methodical atheism." What my examination suggests, however, is that the critical import of *A Political Dogmatic* derives solely from Habermas's theory of communicative action, leaving "theology" without any voice or value of its own (section 3). This conclusion compels the critical religious thinker to search out a distinct theological issue or theme which can be legitimately situated in view of the conceptual horizon of modernity. Toward that end, I take up Habermas's presentation of the young Hegel which locates the emergence of an intersubjective resolution to the diremption of modernity within his early theological writings. What is significant about these manuscripts is their focus upon the intersubjectivity of love (section 4). However, rather than supposing that these theological reflections are no longer relevant, as does Habermas, I undertake an examination of the young Hegel on love in order to discern its potential for the development of critical theology especially as elaborated in the previous chapter (section 5).

2 *Habermas's Postmetaphysical Objections*

Few scholars are as receptive to genuine dialogue and its predilection for mutual critique than Jürgen Habermas. This has been demonstrated time and again within the

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[13] Trans. by Thor Hall (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

many theoretical and political "debates" taken up by Habermas throughout his

career.[14] In each case -- whether he is dealing with the hermeneutics of Gadamer, the

systems theory of Luhmann, the poststructuralist insights of Derrida and Foucault, or

calling to task no less an imposing figure than Martin Heidegger[15] -- Habermas's

ongoing theoretical formation always seems substantively enriched by these types of

confrontation. Whether this also holds true for his dispute with critical theology,

though, remains uncertain. But whatever the case may be, it is my hope that the

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[14] For an examination of Habermas's work from this point of view see Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[15] Habermas's first publication was a review of Martin Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, composed of lectures delivered in 1935 but only published after the Second World War in 1953 (Habermas's review is reproduced in *Philosophisch-politische Profile* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987], 65-72). In his review, Habermas's takes great exception to the fact that the infamous German philosopher is absolutely silent over his participation in the Nazi effort, and how this association may impact upon the meaning and significance of his philosophy as a whole. This comment leads me to briefly gesture toward the fascinating relationship that seems to exist between Heidegger's work and the development of both modern and postmodern critical theory. Here, I think, resides a most interesting topic for further research which I hope to address at another time in detail. For whatever differences may separate the first generation Frankfurt School critical theorists (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse), from the second generation represented foremost by Habermas, they seem to share a rather severe critique of Heidegger's ontology. While Marcuse studied under Heidegger and was certainly influenced by him, it is interesting to note that Marcuse's admission to the Institute for Social Research was occasioned by a noticeable shift away from the Heideggerian approach. For further insight into this issue see Habermas's essays on Heidegger in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), and *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians Debate*, trans by. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). Also see Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. by Knut Tarnoski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northern University Press, 1973). On the relationship between Heidegger and Marcuse see Thomas McCarthy, "Heidegger and Critical Theory: The First Encounter" in *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 83-96.

ensuing reflections might go some way toward clarifying the critical-theoretical potential glimpsed within this most provocative *tête à tête*.

Habermas's response to critical theology commences by acknowledging the integrity of its effort to construct a modern religious understanding of the world which accents a transformative socio-religious praxis. In specific reference to the subversive activities of the Confessing Church in Germany during the grim days of the Nazi regime, Habermas writes that "Against a background of a praxis that all would respect, we encounter a critical theology that interprets the self-understanding of this praxis in such a way that it helps express our best moral intentions without tearing down the bridges to secular languages and cultures."[16] It is just this methodological ideal, says Habermas, which adjures the theological appropriation of secular social science, though one circumscribed by the prospect of reciprocal critique: "These methods have the goal of placing in a relation of mutual critique interpretations of modernity proceeding from philosophical and socio-theoretical approaches with theological interpretations of the Christian tradition. Thus," Habermas continues, "their goal is to bring these interpretations into a relation where arguments are used."[17] Such an aspiration on the part of critical theology is, on this reading, absolutely crucial. For it strongly implies the assumption of a communicative notion of rationality. With this tangible intersection between critical theology and theory confirmed, Habermas begins to ply his trade.

As briefly alluded to in the second chapter, communicative action is action which

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[16] Habermas, "Transcendence," 228.

[17] Habermas, "Transcendence," 230.

aims toward reaching a consensus or mutual understanding (Verständigung)[18] about something in the objective world; about a moral action or rule; or about the intention of the speaker.[19] Each of these "pragmatic" orientations toward reality and other persons is constituted by a "speech immanent obligation" to a corresponding validity claim.[20] This is to say, that within each and every speech act the speaker implicitly, sometimes explicitly, raises *at least* one claim to validity for her or his *statement* in relation to truth (i.e., statements dealing with objective facts about the world); in relation to normative rightness (i.e., statements concerned with ethical actions or moral norms); or in relation to sincerity and truthfulness (i.e., statements which pertain to the speaker's intention or the disclosure of his or her subjective state). It is by referring to these ever present though context-transcending (i.e., formal-universal) validity claims that competent adult speakers are able to reach mutual understanding in a non-violent, non-strategic fashion -- that is, by simply talking things through in a rational way. Thus, Habermas feels that he can confidently assert that "Reaching understanding is the

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[18] As Maeve Cooke explains in her book *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), "*Verständigung* refers both to linguistic understanding and to the process of reaching agreement, thus extending across a spectrum of meanings ranging from comprehension to consensus." (9)

[19] See Jürgen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 1-68.

[20] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 63-65.

inherent telos of human speech."[21]

For sure, Habermas realizes that reaching understanding within the often oppressive, distorted, and chaotic interactions of day to day life within late capitalist society is seldom so fair, rational, or orderly. As one time assistant to Adorno, Habermas is thoroughly versed in the ways of instrumental reason. Nevertheless, his goal is to illustrate that instrumental reason is but one of reason's configurations rather than its normative core or metaphysical destiny.[22] It is therefore vital that Habermas be able to show that the validity basis of speech also grounds social critique and self-criticism. In other words, it must not only provide for the possibility of consensus, but for "dis-census" as well.

To begin with, Habermas notes that "Validity claims are in principle open to criticism because they are based on formal world-concepts. They presuppose a world that is identical for *all possible* observers, or a world intersubjectively shared *by members*, and they do so in an abstract form freed of all specific content. Such claims call for the rational response of a partner in communication."[23] Stated somewhat differently, we can say that the internal presence of formal-universal validity claims -- claims which substantiate a common, linguistically structured world -- also entail the

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[21] Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. 1 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 287.

[22] On this dimension of Habermas's overall proposal see the excellent introductory essay by Richard J. Berstein ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 1-32.

[23] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 50.

pressure of a standard which assumes that every statement is subject to validity related criticism.[24] So Habermas writes that "communicative action presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be *accepted or contested*."[25] At its most rudimentary level, then, communicative action involves the possibility of either taking up a "Yes" position toward a raised validity claim, or countering with a "No" position. The former response indicates that the conditions for understanding have been met; the latter insinuates the need for further discussion and clarification before any kind of agreement can be legitimately secured.[26] Thus, the validity basis of speech contains the promise of mutual understanding *and* the likelihood of mutual critique.[27] Together, they constitute Habermas's chief alternative to the malevolence of instrumental reason: namely, *communicative rationality*.

"Communicative rationality, ... or the rationality of understanding oriented action," writes Jane Braaten, "is an ability to produce rationally motivating justifications for validity claims."[28] What this suggests is that the mere raising of validity claims carries with it the strong connotation that these claims can be *discursively redeeme*

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[24] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 9; 18.

[25] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 99. Italics mine.

[26] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 11; 38. Also see Cooke, *Language and Reason*, 11-12.

[27] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 119.

[28] Jane Braaten, *Habermas's Critical Theory of Society* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 13.

with cogen* (i.e., understandable or communicable) reasons if so asked.[29] "This means" says Maeve Cooke, "that communicative action is conceptually tied to processes of argumentation."[30] To raise a validity claim is *ipso facto* to mark its potential for rational justification through argumentation: such is the fundamental meaning of communicative rationality. In Habermas's own words;

> The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based *in the end* on reasons. And the rationality of those who participate in this communicative practice is determined by whether, if necessary, they could, *under suitable circumstances*, provide reasons for their expressions. Thus the rationality proper to the communicative practice of everyday life points to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal that makes it possible to continue communicative action with other means when disagreements can no longer be repaired with everyday routines and yet are not to be settled by the direct or strategic use of force.[31]

It is in view of these notions of communicative action and reason that Habermas wonders what feature, if any, distinguishes theological discourse from the "inherent telos of human speech?" For if critical theology consistently accepts the idea that "the practice of everyday life points to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal," then it too is bound to the validity basis of speech. If this indeed is the case, as the critical theologians declare on behalf of at least modern theology, then "what then still constitutes the distinctiveness of theological discourse?"[32] Or stated from Habermas's

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[29] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 25; Cooke, *Language and Reason*, 58; Braaten, *Habermas's Critical Theory*, 22.

[30] Cooke, *Language and Reason*, 29.

[31] Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 17-18.

[32] Habermas, "Transcendence," 231.

viewpoint; "What separates the internal perspective of theology from the external perspective of those who enter into dialogue with it?"[33] If not the processes of argumentation, Habermas infers, then it must be the very reference of theological discourse itself: namely, God, Jesus Christ, Ultimate Reality, Unlimited Reality, the supernatural, or any other cognate expression one may wish to choose. The uniqueness of theological talk; that which "separates the internal perspective of theology from the external perspective of those who enter into dialogue with it," resides, according to Habermas, in its peculiar truth claim about God. However, it is precisely this claim which eliminates the real possibility of discursively justifying the truth claims of theological discourse within an open, public argument.

As already mentioned, the validity claim to truth consists of making a statement about what is true in relation to the objective world. It is a matter of asserting a propositional statement about what is or is not the case in this world.[34] The essential point to underscore here is the primacy granted to the act of *declaring* something to be true: that it is precisely "p" which is true or not true in this world of intersubjectively verifiable facts.[35] "Claims to truth," writes Habermas, "... have no ... intrinsic link to entities; they are inherently related only to the constative [i.e., propositional] speech acts by which we refer to entities when we use fact-stating locutions to represent states

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[33] Habermas, "Transcendence," 231.

[34] On the structure of propositional sentences see Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 36.

[35] See Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 300.

of affairs."[36] In other words, *propositional* truth claims do not "have an existence independent of speech acts ..."[37] Even if one should happen to advance a truth claim which, in reality, is genuinely true but somehow eludes intersubjective confirmation, then the claim is still false because it remains "unjustified."[38] Thus, statements of truth are not at all bound to factual experience.

Another way of explaining Habermas's conception of truth is to say that its claim to validity cannot be authenticated on the basis of experiential certitude alone. As the author clarifies;

> Validity claims are distinguished from experiences of certainty by virtue of their intersubjectivity; one cannot meaningfully assert that a statement is true only for a certain individual. .... Of course several subjects can share the certainty that they have the same perception; but in that case they must say so, i.e., make the same assertion. I register a validity claim as something intersubjectively testable; a certainty I can utter as something subjective, ... I *make* a validity claim; I *have* a certainty.[39]

In short, by asserting a "state of affairs" one does not assert an experience.[40] Although we may have experiences which appear to disclose profound "truths" about the world, the nature, character, and scope of their profundity depends on its

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[36] Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 61.

[37] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 60.

[38] McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Habermas*, 300.

[39] Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien" in H. Fahrenbach ed., *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion: Festschrift für W. Schulz* (Pfullingen, 1973), 223; cited in McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Habermas*, 301.

[40] McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Habermas*, 301-302.

intersubjective corroboration. Only if a truth claim can survive the rigours of communicative reason are we justified in affirming its truth as a public fact worthy of further attention.

Herein lies the central dilemma for theological statements of truth. For if asserting a state of affairs cannot be equated with asserting an experience, then "religious discourses would lose their identity" says Habermas, "if they were to open themselves up to a type of interpretation which no longer allows the religious experiences to be valid *as* religious."[41] In other words, theological truth claims remain bound to the certitude of unique religious experiences which are given expression within particularistic, first order religious discourses.[42] For theology to become a critical discipline in the communicative sense of the term; that is, a discipline capable of providing cogent arguments which could warrant intersubjective validation, theology would have to abdicate the very thing which grounds its integrity as theology: namely, its experience of the divine reality.[43] It would have to desert this foundation because "Under conditions of *postmetaphysical thinking*," charges Habermas, "whoever puts forth a truth claim today must, ... translate experiences that have their home in religious discourse into the language of a scientific expert culture ..."[44]

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[41] Habermas, "Transcendence," 234.

[42] Habermas, "Transcendence," 233.

[43] Hence, it is far from insignificant that Peukert endeavours, as we saw in the last chapter, to designate communicative action as the originary experience of the divine reality.

[44] Habermas, "Transcendence," 234. Italics mine.

What exactly does Habermas mean by all this?

Postmetaphysical thinking, he maintains, is the result of a radical shift in theoretical paradigms. The postmetaphysical paradigm comes about as the result of various *modern* developments in society, culture, and knowledge which compel the differentiation of "Reason" into distinct rationality complexes. Each complex, in turn, is further cultivated by an "expert culture," or specific scientific discipline, which produces a formal-world concept corresponding to its particular focus and/or logic.[45] It is this wide-ranging though fundamental development which encourages the dissolution of all unitary worldviews such as those represented by classical metaphysics and traditional religions.

By "metaphysics" Habermas intends the tradition of philosophical idealism which extends from Plato to Hegel,[46] or from Iona to Jena as Franz Rosenzweig neatly put it. Its perennial quandary is the relation of the "Many" (i.e., appearance and contingency) to the "One" (i.e., Being and essence). "Metaphysics believes" says Habermas, "that everything can be traced back to one."[47] As such, it represents the quest to articulate a First Philosophy, or a philosophy of origins (*Ursprungsphilosophie*). Here "True knowledge relates to what is purely universal, immutable, and necessary. It does not matter whether this is conceived according to

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[45] See especially Habermas's chapter on Max Weber, "Max Weber's Theory of Rationalization" in *Reason and Rationalization*, 143-271. Also see *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 17.

[46] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 29.

[47] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 115.

the mathematical model as intuition and anamnesis or according to the logical model of thoughtfulness and discourse -- *the structures of beings themselves are what is layed hold of in knowledge.*"[48]

As the last statement indirectly insinuates, Habermas's account of metaphysical thought is meant to point up its mythological nucleus. Metaphysics is a philosophy of origins and represents the conceptualization of sacred myths which narrate the beginnings of "Being and Time." However, with the transformation effected by metaphysical thought, the "beginnings" recapitulated in myth "are removed from the dimension of space and time and abstracted into something first which, as the infinite, stands over and against the world of the finite and forms its basis."[49] In other words, the shift from *mythos* to *logos* marks the transition from a "narrative knowledge," so to speak, to a mentalism which attains its meridian point in the philosophy of consciousness.[50] Reality in its totality is divided up and categorized according to the subject-object split with the Subject taking on the role of the "first" and the "infinite," standing over-against the world as its supreme foundation.

Still the mythical moment of metaphysics is never entirely banished.[51] Habermas intimates that metaphysics remains bound to myth insofar that it seeks to locate the

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[48] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 13. Italics mine.

[49] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 30.

[50] Cf. my examination of Davis's critique of "ontotheology" in the last chapter as part of his general critique of religious orthodoxy.

[51] Here Habermas seems to be providing his own twist to the thesis expounded in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For further analysis of this thesis see the next chapter.

(ultimate) ground of the finite, the particular, and the individual. In this way, we can say that the metaphysical perspective merely postpones a more direct exploration of the concrete world. As the author writes, "from its inception idealism deceived itself about the fact that the Ideas or *formae rerum* had themselves always contained and merely duplicated what they were supposed to exclude as matter and as nonbeing *per se* -- namely the material content of those empirical individuals from which the Ideas had been read off through comparative abstraction."[52]

This tension between the ideal and the real within the history of metaphysics begins to manifest itself most clearly with the advent of philosophical nominalism and empiricism. In these traditions, metaphysics is dogged by the constant reminder of the contingent and conventional character of all thought and language.[53] In the face of such challenges, says Habermas, metaphysics takes its last great stand as a philosophy of the Subject, or a philosophy of consciousness modeled after a productive notion of reason.

Commencing with Descartes's *Meditations* and culminating in Hegel's *Logic*, the philosophy of consciousness personifies "the structure of a self-relating, knowing subject, which bends back upon itself as object, in order to grasp itself as if in a mirror image -- literally in a 'speculative' way."[54] Thus reality is explained *as* self-

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[52] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 31. Also see pages 118-124.

[53] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 31.

[54] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 18. Also see Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. by John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press,

consciousness, whereby Mind, Spirit, or Reason (i.e., *Geist*) dynamically manufactures all finite representations of truth. "Whether reason is now approached in *foundationalist* terms as a subjectivity that makes possible the world as a whole, or whether it is conceived *dialectically* as a spirit that recovers itself in a procession through nature and history, in either case reason is active as a simultaneously totalizing and self-referential reflection."[55]

This totalizing, self-referential philosophy; this archetype of Self which contains the "All" in itself, starts to unravel with the maturation of modernity. As Habermas states the matter, "Reason has [now] split into three moments -- modern science, positive law and post-traditional ethics, and autonomous art and art criticism -- but philosophy had precious little to do with this disjunction."[56] In other words, a new model of reason comes into being: one which is essentially modern insofar that its internal differentiation is intrinsically related to the socio-cultural and political-economic changes effected by modernity.[57] Yet if one were to identify an attribute which could

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1973), 144. For further insight into this issue also consult Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 357-394.

[55] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 32. For another presentation of Habermas's explication of metaphysical thought, see Mark Hunyadi, "Une Morale Post-Métaphysique: Introduction à la Théorie Morale de Jürgen Habermas," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 122 (1990): 467-483.

[56] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 17.

[57] In Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, the author writes; "With the modern empirical sciences, autonomous arts, and theories of morality and law grounded on principles, cultural spheres of value took shape which made possible learning processes in accord with the respective inner logics of theoretical, aesthetic, and moral-practical problems." (1)

symbolize modern reason as a whole, then it would have to be its integral *proceduralism*.

Of course this designation is not at all arbitrary. As we attend the details of the following passage for instance, it becomes clear that the notion of procedural reason goes straight to the heart of Habermas's objections to critical theology as well as adumbrating the enormity of his claim for communicative rationality within the history of reason itself. Habermas writes;

> Totalizing thinking that aims at the one and the whole was rendered dubious by a *new type of procedural rationality*, which has asserted itself since the seventeenth century through the empirical methods of the natural sciences, and since the eighteenth century through formalism in moral and legal theory as well as in the institutions of the constitutional state. The philosophy of nature and theories of natural law were confronted with a new species of requirements for justification. These requirements shattered *the cognitive privilege of philosophy*.[58]

The main issue to focus on for now concerns the procedural subversion of the so-called "cognitive privilege" of philosophical idealism. Naturally this privilege radically contradicts the "new species of requirements for justification," and so Habermas contends that it can no longer hold its own in the postmetaphysical situation. But its displacement is hardly accidental.

The cognitive privilege of philosophical idealism is rooted in "a strong concept of theory." As Habermas explains, the strong concept of theory, like metaphysics itself, harkens back to its derivation from sacred myth as discussed above. What this heritage confers to the strong concept of theory as well as to metaphysics, *is a religious notion*

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[58] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 33.

of salvation. Salvation, so Habermas intimates, denotes the elimination, or at least the

suspension of normal everyday finite life. As he elaborates;

> Each of the great world religions stakes out a privileged and particularly
> demanding path to the attainment of individual salvation -- e.g., the way
> of salvation of the wondering Buddhist monk or that of the Christian
> eremite. Philosophy recommends as its path to salvation the life
> dedicated to contemplation -- the *bios theoretikos*. It stands at the
> pinnacle of ancient forms of life, ... Theory itself is affected by being
> embedded in an exemplary form of life. For the few, it offers a
> privileged access to truth, while for the many the path of theoretical
> knowledge remains closed. Theory demands a renunciation of the
> natural attitude toward the world and promises contact with the
> extraordinary.[59]

With this passage, we are now in a position to summarize Habermas's

postmetaphysical objections against theology. To maintain a cognitive privilege for

either philosophy or science is to uphold a strong concept of theory. To endorse a

strong concept of theory is to accept and advance a religious notion of supernatural

salvation. To see theory as offering salvation is to be bound to sacred myth. And for

thought to be constrained by sacred myth is, in the final analysis, to do "theo-logy."

Here, then, stands the core of Habermas's postmetaphysical objection to critical

theology. Theology cannot be critical, indeed cannot be modern, because it represents

the conceptualization of a privileged insight or claim about how to achieve salvation

from the toil and trouble of everyday life. For sure, Habermas admits such aspirations

may indeed have a place within the human life. At the very least, theology, faith, and

religious praxis may help to normalize the human "intercourse with the

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[59] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 32.

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extraordinary."[60] However, the extraordinary cannot -- in fact *must not* provide the framework for contemporary scientific critical theory. Salvation has no real claim in the present, and it certainly has no role to play within the advance of modern knowledge and its learning processes. Such an attitude will do only if one believes that "to seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God is a futile undertaking." Such is not Habermas's way.

However, his way is, in many respects, still "incredible." By this I mean to say that Habermas's claim on behalf of communicative rationality is immense. It is obvious that procedural rationality -- that is, the rationality of modernity itself, demands new ways to vindicate truth: procedures which subvert the cognitive privilege of philosophical idealism and theology. On the other side of this subversion stands communicative rationality. It represents the definitive version of modern reason which finally supersedes all versions and vestiges of metaphysical thinking. The emphasis on formal procedures of critical argumentation is plainly tailored to meet the "new species of requirement for justification" referred to above. "In *procedural terms*," Habermas remarks, "arguments are processes of reaching understanding that are ordered in such a way that proponents and opponents, ... can test validity claims that have become problematic."[61] Thus "Justification not Salvation!" is Habermas's clarion call. Theoretical justification today is rooted within the internal differentiation of Reason into

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[60] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 51.

[61] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 87.

rationality complexes. It points toward "a weak concept of theory,"[62] that is, a notion of theory which is based on empirical investigations with its processes of trial and error; of intersubjective validation of objective facts (e.g., the possibility of repeating scientific experiments within a community of scientists in order to confirm or disconfirm results); of insights gathered and interrelated from all the assorted logics which define modern knowledge; of the "cooperative search for truth."[63]

In any event, as long as theology remains bound to the extraordinary, it can have no substantial part to play in this joint exploration of truth and reason. However, if a genuine critical religious thought should make the break, might the situation and status of theology be altered in Habermas's estimation? What kind of theology would it be? It is these questions that I would like to take up next.

3 *Normativity and the De-personalization of God*

For Habermas, there seems to be only one way theology can free itself from its commerce with the extraordinary: namely, *methodical atheism*. One of the first, if not the most consistent champions of this approach was Hegel. His effort to appropriate the content Christianity so as to address the problems of contemporary life and thought, concluded with the sublimation of theology into philosophy as its preeminent expression.[64] Here "Philosophy salvages the *content* of faith ... by destroying the

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[62] Cf. Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 408, note no. 28.

[63] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 88-89; 198.

[64] Habermas, "Transcendence," 232.

religious *form*."[65] In other words, the traditional depiction of God fades away into abstract notions of the "Absolute": The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob become First Principle.[66] While Hegel contends that philosophy has no content other than religion, it is also the case that its transformation into conceptual knowledge means that "nothing is [any longer] justified by faith."[67] Thus, Habermas underscores the fact that methodical atheism "leads to a programme of demythologization that is tantamount to an experiment. Without reservation" he continues, "it is left to the realization of this programme to see whether the theological (not just a history of religions) interpretation of the religious discourses by virtue of its argumentation alone permits a joining of scientific discussion in such a manner that the religious language game remains in tact, or collapses."[68] In effect, the challenge for the development of a genuine critical theology for Habermas depends on whether it can appropriate religious truth claims for the purposes of entering into a discursive argument and, in so doing, maintain the capacity to cite "religious experiences *as* religious."[69]

One theologian who seems to have taken up this challenge in earnest is, according

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[65] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 36.

[66] Habermas, "Transcendence," 232.

[67] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Christian Religion, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Part III. The Revelatory, Consummate, Absolute Religion* (Missoula, MT: 1979), 295; cited in Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 36. On this issue also see Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 189-190; and Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 44-45.

[68] Habermas, "Transcendence," 235.

[69] Habermas, "Transcendence," 234. Also see *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 14-15.

to Habermas, Jens Glebe-Möller. In his text *A Political Dogmatic,* Glebe-Möller argues that under conditions specified by modern consciousness and society, the idea of a personal, saving God is untenable and, ultimately, unnecessary. As the author puts it:

> Can we in modernity imagine a God who will bring about his kingdom, and to whom we are to relate in an attitude of total obedience? Can we, in fact, contemplate a personified divine power at all? In my view the answer is no. The thought of a personified divine power necessarily involves heteronomy, and this is an idea that goes directly against the modern concept of human autonomy. ˙ political dogmatic in the modern context must therefore be atheistic.[70]

For H̲ ̱ ̱mas, Glebe-Möller's atheistic reinterpretation of the Christian tradition, ritual practice, community, and doctrine "opens up the Bible in a fascinating (for me, also convincing) way, even in those passages that have become foreign to modern ears."[71] Why, then, does Habermas find Glebe-Möller's account "convincing" while the efforts of David Tracy, Helmut Peukert, Matthew Lamb, and Charles Davis remain, somehow, beside the point?

A Political Dogmatic intends to provide a contemporary rendition of what Glebe-Möller calls Christian "faith-truths."[72] By this he understands a reconstruction of Christian dogma, or faith-teachings, so that they will "be in harmony with the contemporary conditions for knowledge and truth ..."[73] This is to say, that a political

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[70] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic,* 102.

[71] Habermas, "Transcendence," 235.

[72] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic,* 3.

[73] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic,* 3.

dogmatic endeavours to fulfil "the demand that Christian faith-truths be presented in a way responsive to the reality-consciousness of the time."[74] As a result, the demonstration of Christian dogma must be modified from generation to generation. But "not only does the mode of presentation change," says the author, "so does the content of dogmatics."[75] It is for this reason that Glebe-Möller entitles his book "a *political dogmatic.*"

Following the author's own explication of this caption, he first insists that dogma must always be understood in its plural sense as "dogmatics," or as faith-teachings In this way, the plurality and plasticity of the Christian tradition can be kept in full view. Such plurality, however, should not be allowed to eclipse the central task of dogmatics itself: namely, the presentation of what is thought to be essential to the contemporary meaning and purpose of the Christian faith. Taking these two facets together, Glebe-Möller defines dogmatics as "a reflective presentation of that which at a given point in time must be considered an essential part of the Christian faith and life, theory and practice."[76]

The second key term, "political," follows from the very intent of dogmatics: namely, that which is considered an essential part of the Christian faith at a given point in time. The "consideration" that Glebe-Möller refers to here is the discipline of political theology. According to the author, this theology makes clear that the theory

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[74] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 5.

[75] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 6.

[76] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 8-9.

and practice of Christianity "cannot avoid relating itself to the phenomena and developments in contemporary society or in the world generally."[77] Indeed, the political -- understood as "discussions and decisions concerning how societies and individuals should organize their life"[78] -- is, on this reading, absolutely fundamental to any sound comprehension of modernity. Glebe-Möller therefore concludes this line of thought by writing that "if, as I have claimed, there is to be a presentation of the central aspects of Christian theory and practice in harmony with the thought-forms of the modern age, dogmatics must be political."[79]

Given this exposition of the meaning and task of the text, what are the factors which lead Glebe-Möller to proclaim an atheistic conception of God? Does this feature of his proposal truly dispense with the extraordinary? If so, can it be considered a genuine expression of critical theory? And if a genuine expression, from whence its normative force as theology?

Relying mostly on Peter Berger's analysis of modernity[80] (a somewhat strange choice of theorists given his familiarity and use of Habermas's work),[81] Glebe-Möller argues that the chief principle of modern consciousness is the notion of autonomy. As he says, "Autonomy, self-determination, is ... a phenomenon of modernity and a

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[77] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 9.

[78] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 9.

[79] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 9.

[80] See Glebe-Mö'ler, *Political Dogmatic*, 15-27.

[81] Cf. Paul Lakeland, "Habermas and the Theologians Again," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (April 1989): 108.

characteristic of modern consciousness. The opposite to autonomy, heteronomy (other-determination), is unacceptable for modern consciousness."[82] Closely associated with this principle is the issue of human liberty and emancipation: "... an essential aspect of autonomy is liberty · freedom to determine for oneself how one's life is to be formed, and freedom to arrange the institutions of society accordingly."[83]

Now, while there is hardly anything radical about Glebe-Möller's account of modern consciousness and life, he nevertheless takes its defining characteristics most seriously when he infers that the complex of personal theism as conveyed by the Christian tradition down through the ages, runs counter to most, if not all modern sensibilities. This is because the personal conception of the divine is first formulated from within an agrarian society and remains relevant to its characteristic features and modes of thought.[84] The essential trait of the agrarian worldview is its dualism: the division of the cosmos into a world beyond populated by the gods, or a single god; and the immediate human world which remains inextricably bound to the "other" dimension.[85] "As long as humanity was dependent on nature and tied in with its rhythm," notes Glebe-Möller, "it was meaningful to imagine that in the last instance we are dependent on a divine power ... But in and with the fact that industrialized humanity sets itself over against the rhythm of nature ... all talk about a determinate

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[82] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 25.

[83] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 25.

[84] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 28-43.

[85] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 34.

divine power loses its plausibility. Dualism goes down the drain. ... There is no longer any world 'beyond' the world."[86]

It is in light of this supposition that Glebe-Möller advances his main thesis. For once the dualistic world view "goes down the drain," so too does any credible depiction of a personal God with his or her own free agency. Thus,

> if there is no world beyond this one, the concept of a God who shall see to it that sinners are punished and the good are rewarded is ... superfluous. The traditional personal God whom we know from the monotheistic religions of agrarian societies becomes pure and simple metaphor. And the ultimate consequence of this is that modern religion becomes atheistic.[87]

At this juncture of the presentation, one may be inclined to conclude that the "religious language game" most certainly disintegrates here. It is not that Glebe-Möller claims a more primordial or essential experience of the divine to which the "religious language game" remains derivative. No, it is rather that the "game" itself seems quite beside the point. What, then, is the point, purpose, and meaning of Christianity? How can any reference to "God" be at all significant or legitimate?

Glebe-Möller recognizes that an atheistic interpretation of Christianity appears to rob its God-concept of all normativity.[88] That is, it seems to undermine all religious claims to truth thereby drastically marginalizing its import for human existence. The author responds by noting that his atheistic approach "does not mean that there is no

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[86] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 37. Or as Charles Taylor puts it in his *Hegel* book; "... the modern subject is self-defining, where on previous view the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order." (6)

[87] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 42.

[88] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 108.

thinking about God or that the thought of God is emptied of all content."[89] However, if traditional notions of a transcendent God no longer fit the bill, as it were, then from where does one gain the content or orientation for thinking about this atheistic "God?"

In answer to this question, Glebe-Möller avers to Habermas's theory of communicative action and reason. What this theory provides the author is a human locus for an experience of -- not the divine, but a specific form of "human/humane" transcendence. As he puts it;

> To speak of transcendence within the conditions of modernity can only mean that human existence cannot be exhaustively explicated with reference to what can be immediately seen, touched, manipulated -- that is, cannot be explicated in empirical, statistical, or for that matter, rational categories alone. Jürgen Habermas's phrase "a power-free [literally, *magtfri*] communication" ... can in this context be taken as a reference to such transcendence -- *or as a theology without reference to divine powers.*[90]

In effect, Glebe-Möller seems to hold that substantiating the possibility of transcendence within modernity is, in the face of scientific positivism, the most that a religious thinker can hope for. Evidently, it suffices to illustrate that human life cannot be definitively explained by empirical methods. However, rather than seeing this hiatus as an opportunity to declare the legitimacy of a traditional Christian interpretation of reality, Glebe-Möller seizes upon Habermas's communication theory as a point of departure for a "theology without reference to divine powers." This is to say, the author affirms the emancipatory interest evinced in communicative action as the only

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[89] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 102.

[90] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 38. Italics mine.

credible ground for a theology "in harmony" with the thought forms of modernity. In this way, Glebe-Möller eliminates the major impediment to theological discourse as outlined by Habermas, namely, its reference. But what kind of "theology" results from such a stance? How can it be anything but a religious gloss upon communicative action?

Before taking up these questions, there are a couple of issues I would like to address: issues which overlap with my own ideas concerning the future of critical theology as alluded to in the last chapter. First, it is noteworthy that Glebe-Möller refuses to see the negative boundary or limit of modern positivism as an opportunity to ordain the feasibility of a Christian explication of reality. He sidesteps the apologetic temptation to argue that since the Christian truth cannot be conclusively disproved, it remains basically intact. Thus, Glebe-Möller does not tread the path hewed out by Metz and Peukert: he resists exploiting the despondency and discrepancy of modernity as a way to proclaim the critical potential of theology -- by default. To this extent, we can classify Glebe-Möller as a postorthodox theologian. Second, recall that I ended my examination of Metz, Peukert, and Davis by declaring that in order for theology to be critical, the nature and character of religious faith as critical activity must be granted a specific focus of application and discernment. As if in response to this criterion, Glebe-Möller looks to a human phenomenon, communication, in order to specify what is the case -- with faith -- in this world. Yet in spite of these substantial points of contact between Glebe-Möller's proposal and my own reflections, I would like to clearly indicate where the fundamental contrasts reside: dissimilarities which, as we

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will see, orientate the ensuing examination of Habermas's postmetaphysical recommendations in the remaining sections of this chapter.

The principal disparities come to the fore once we follow through on the questions: what kind of "theology" results from Glebe-Möller's atheistic stance? And how can it be anything but a religious gloss upon communicative action?

From the perspective of this study, it is significant that Glebe-Möller's rejoinder to these queries can be ascertained in his discussion of Peukert's thesis. Focusing on the claim that the resurrection of Jesus only makes sense if the practice of communicative action factually anticipates the *saving* reality of God,[91] Glebe-Möller remarks that "God has once more become a normative concept."[92] While this statement comes as a surprise, it appears that for Glebe-Möller, at least, to exhibit how a Christian faith-truth is actually made manifest in human practice; or to signify how the resurrection of Jesus makes sense as a form of life -- and only as a form of life "in this world" -- is to reveal how a political dogmatics "no longer consists of dogmas or doctrines concerning a theistic, transcendent God."[93] What it does consist of, however, are norms relevant to communicative action. That is, traditional Christian prescriptions dealing with God, Jesus, and the church as a whole, are transformed into norms of communicative action itself: norms which "should be acceptable to everyone

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[91] Helmut Peukert, *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*, trans. by James Bohman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 226.

[92] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 111.

[93] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 111.

who enters into a dominance-free discussion and that ... can be the basis for a critique of all other particular or oppressive norms."[94]

All in all, then, the normative validity and cognitive weight of religious faith derive from the theory of communicative action. For religious faith is not merely substantiated by the theory of communicative action; rather at its best, religious faith can be read as a vital expression of communicative action. In this manner, Glebe-Möller ultimately advances the converse of Peukert's proposal. Whereas Peukert insists that *the* saving reality founds the coherency and rational integrity of communicative action, Glebe-Möller locates the coherency and rational integrity of the saving reality within communicative action. Such is "a theology without reference to divine powers." Glebe-Möller therefore provides a religious justification of an extant social critical theory. He embellishes this theory with religious stories, rituals, symbols, and faith-truths so as to bask in the glow of its legitimacy. As for theology itself, well, *c'est la vie*.

It is interesting to note that despite his affirmation of Glebe-Möller's work, Habermas still recognizes its severe limitations from the point of view of the religious. At the close of his brief exposition of *A Political Dogmatic*, Habermas exclaims; "But I ask myself *who* recognizes himself or herself in [Glebe-Möller's] interpretation?"[95] In other words, Habermas resolves that methodical atheism demolishes the religious language game. We should, however, remain somewhat suspicious of Habermas's

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[94] Glebe-Möller, *Political Dogmatic*, 111.

[95] Habermas, "Transcendence," 235.

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response. The connotation here is that theology is ineradicably moored within the supernatural; and it is therefore incapable of articulating its critical import for the public sphere through genuine argument.

Thus, is the theologian's only alternative the one outlined by Glebe-Möller? Are there no specific features of contemporary theological discourse and reflection which can be legitimately claimed as valid within the conceptual horizon of modernity, yet which remain legitimate theological concerns?

At the close of the last chapter, I indicated that the contribution of critical theology to the project of enlightenment may consist in discerning the critical significance of human love as a crucial factor in the rational organization of society. Extrapolating on Davis's exposition of religious faith, I suggested that critical theology may determine its speciality, and its critical claim to public truth and validity, by clarifying the manner in which religious faith represents and enhances the critical effects of human love. Thus similar to Glebe-Möller's proposal, I contend that the normativity and validity of religious claims to truth and legitimacy within modernity, depend upon a cautious identification of the divine reality. But contra-Glebe-Möller, my approach is not so much to append this identification to Habermas's theory of communicative action. Rather, I hope to show in the next two sections (and in the following chapter as well), that within the postmetaphysical situation, the phenomenon of human love can rightfully claim a (critical) place within the conceptual horizon of modernity. It is in this fashion that contemporary theological thought can begin to reconstruct itself in view of Habermas's erudite challenge.

4 Habermas's Reading of the Young Hegel, Or Modernity Revisited

In the first pages of Habermas's masterful text *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, we discover that his examination of Weberian rationalization[96] discloses an elemental difficulty with most theories of modernization. As Habermas reports, these theories proceed as if the general, abstract processes of *modernization* can be identified with the content of *modernity* in its entirety. The difficulty with such an approach is that it "breaks the internal connections between modernity and the historical context of Western rationalism, so that processes of modernization can no longer be conceived of as rationalization, as the historical objectification of rational structures."[97] This disorientation, Habermas notes, uncouples modernization from the normative content of cultural modernity thereby negating the need to critically assess such processes from within the historico-philosophical project of modernity. In order to put this project back on the right track, as it were, Habermas returns to the quintessential philosopher of modern times, Hegel. "Hegel was the first philosopher to develop a clear concept of modernity. We have to go back to him if we want to understand the internal relationship between modernity and rationality ..."[98]

What, exactly, does this internal relationship entail?

As Habermas presents it, there are two interrelated key factors which situate

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[96] In Habermas, *Reason and Rationalization*, 143-271.

[97] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 2.

[98] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 4.

Hegel's overriding problematic. First, the modern attitude toward time; and second, the autonomy and freedom of the individual, or the principle of subjectivity.

The modern attitude toward time, Habermas contends, accentuates the novelty and difference of the modern period as a unique quality in itself: as *that* which is always on the cutting edge of the present. This attitude is further marked by an undeviating orientation toward an open future waiting to be shaped by the talents of productive reason. Thus an unrivalled esteem of creativity, invention, and progress in both knowledge and culture, comes to figure highly during the modern era. "A present that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period" writes Habermas, "has to recapitulate the break brought about with the past as a *continuous renewal.*"[99] In other words, the self-understanding of modernity spotlights an interminable dynamism of thought and life, or a never ending movement of progress and growth. With its back turned against the past, its heightened awareness of perpetual improvement issues a negative prescription which occurs in the form of a dilemma: namely, how to ground the character, meaning, and purpose of modernity out of itself without annulling its modern essence.

The crux of this dilemma comes to the fore and is played out in the territory of the Subject. Indeed, the link between modern time-consciousness and its *normative* vision of the human being is fundamental to this whole affair.[100] As Charles Taylor summarizes this insight; "... self-presence is now to be aware of what we are and what

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[99] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 16.

[100] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 41.

we are doing in abstraction from the world we observe and judge."[101]   This

characterization neatly hones in on Hegel's *principle of subjectivity*.   Habermas

reiterates this principle as follows: the structure of human subjectivity for Hegel is

primarily distinguished by freedom *and* reflection.[102]   More specifically, it includes

four main features: i) individualism; ii) the right to criticism; iii) autonomy of action

and responsibility; iv) and finally, philosophical idealism itself.   In many ways, the

fourth attribute assumes the entire principle.   For philosophical idealism represents the

active endeavour to grasp in thought the self-consciousness of the age in such a way

that it regenerates its very essence.[103]   In Taylor's words; "It is integral to spirit as

reason that it come to a full rational understanding of itself."[104]   Parallel to the central

dilemma of modernity, then, springs the Idealist bid to ground the Self in a reflective

relation to Self.

In sum, the modern era is characterized by a desire for complete originality and

constant creativity.   Its self-understanding and identity must be rooted in itself as the

"new."   Consequently, it cannot gain its overall bearing from past forms of life: "...

Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation

from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of*

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[101] Taylor, *Hegel*, 7.

[102] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 16.

[103] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 17.

[104] Taylor, *Hegel*, 49.

itself."[105] This predicament goes hand in hand with the human being's perception of a radical *freedom from*; of the autonomy and liberty of self-determination. In philosophy, this structure of subjectivity is mastered, as we have already stated, by the "self-relating, knowing subject, which bends back on itself as object, in order to grasp itself as in a mirror image -- literally in a 'speculative' way."[106]

Now according to Habermas, Hegel was the first thinker to comprehend such "speculation" as a grave philosophical, cultural, and social problem.[107] Specifically, Hegel felt that the rigid distinction between subject and object (especially as articulated by Kant), while allowing for abstract awareness and self-reflection, compris s an unacceptable *diremption* of the human being and life when apprehended as a totality. What this subjective idealism "ignores [is] the need for unification that emerges with the separation evoked by the principle of subjectivity."[108] As Taylor corroborates, the sense of freedom that comes with the differentiation in reason and the principle of subjectivity "was won by objectifying nature, and even our own nature in so far as we are objects for ourselves. It was won" he continues, "at the expense of a rift between the subject who knows and wills, and the given: things as they are in nature."[109]

The "rift" Taylor is pointing to here originates in the "dialectic of enlightenment."

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[105] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 7.

[106] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 18.

[107] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 16.

[108] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 19.

[109] Taylor, *Hegel*, 22.

While the principle of modern subjectivity and its time-consciousness promises the rational organization of society and nature as well as the freedom for self-determination, the predominant abstract quality of these developments winds up reifying the self, other human beings, and external nature. The self-awareness so cherished by the modern mind-set accrues when we abstract ourselves from a straightforward identity with the "other," whether envisaged as nature, person, or God. In this fashion, the human person gains a distinct sense of his or her radical autonomy and freedom. However, such "Radical freedom seemed only possible at the cost of a diremption with nature" observes Taylor, "a division within myself between reason and sensibility ..."[110] As a result, "The radically free subject was thrown back on himself, and it seemed on his individual self, in opposition to nature and external authority and on a decision in *which others could have no share*."[111] The modern individual, then, is the isolated subject set over and against the otherness of the object. The dialectic which ensues terminates in a hostile antithesis: the constant to and fro of a negating subjectivity which imposes its absolute power upon a resisting object. This relationship regulates a form of interaction guided by the violence of appropriation, domination, and subjugation: the very genius of subject-centred reason and the controlling subject.

As both Habermas and Taylor see it, Hegel was fully aware of this negative dialectic. Via his critique of subjective idealism as conveyed in the work of Kant and Fichte, Hegel recognized that the principle of subjectivity proves too narrow a concept

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[110] Taylor, *Hegel*, 33.

[111] Taylor, *Hegel*, 32. Italics mine.

to overcome the diremption of modernity.[112] Nevertheless, the modern problematic remains in force for Hegel, for he was hardly prepared to cede the postulates of freedom and reflection. Thus as Habermas surmises;

> The question now is whether one can obtain from subjectivity and self-consciousness criteria that are taken from the modern world and are at the same time fit for orientating oneself within it -- and this also means fit for the critique of modernity that is at variance with itself. How can an intrinsic ideal form be constructed from the spirit of modernity, one that neither just imitates the historical forms of modernity nor is imposed upon them from the outside?[113]

Habermas argues next that Hegel provides an ultimate and a penultimate response to this problematic. The ultimate reply constitutes the philosophical programme of the "mature" Hegel, and takes the form of the Absolute Subject; the penultimate explanation is evinced in the manuscripts of the "young" Hegel, and advance an *intersubjective* resolution to the dialectic of enlightenment. Based on our earlier presentation of Habern as's theory of communicative action and reason, it is immediately obvious which response he will find conclusive. Nevertheless, the remainder of this section attends to Habermas's analysis of these two Hegelian alternatives: an analysis which will lead us directly back to the theological issues at stake in this chapter.

"If modernity is to ground itself," Habermas begins, "Hegel has to develop the critical concept of modernity through a dialectic residing in the principle of

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[112] See Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 32-33.

[113] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 20.

Enlightenment itself."[114] The dialectic which underpins Hegel's ultimate answer to this philosophical task represents a synthesis of the philosophy of reflection in Kant and Fichte, and the philosophy of the Absolute worked out by Schelling. Of course it is beyond the scope of this chapter to review the details of this convergence of thinkers and ideas. The important point is that Hegel's philosophical struggle is inextricably bound to the presuppositions of German Idealism. As Habermas explains, "philosophy *had* to understand itself as the place where reason, as the absolute power of unification, entered upon the scene."[115] Such factors in the history of philosophy (especially for Hegel) obliged his response to seize upon a philosophy of the Absolute Subject. Only through some notion of the Absolute, Hegel concluded, could philosophy resume its business of unifying the diremption of modernity and neutralizing the dialectic of enlightenment.[116] To quote Habermas again:

> If the true [modern] identity is in turn supposed to be developed from the approach of the philosophy of reflection, reason does have to be thought of as the relation-to-itself of a subject, but now as a reflection that does not merely impose itself upon another as the absolute power of subjectivity; rather, it finds its existence and movement in nothing else but resisting all absolutizing, that is, in doing away again with every positive element that it brings forth. In place of the abstract antithesis of finite and infinite, therefore, Hegel puts the absolute self-relation of a subject that attains self-consciousness from its own substance _nd has its unity within itself as the difference between the finite and the infinite. As against Hölderlin and Schelling, this absolute subject should not precede the world process either as being or as intellectual intuition; rather, it constitutes itself only in the process of the relation of finite and infinite to one another and, hence, in the consuming activity of coming-

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[114] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 21.

[115] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 32. Italics mine.

[116] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 21.

to-self. The absolute comes to be neither as substance nor as subject; it is apprehended only as the mediating process of a relation-to-self that produces itself free from conditions. This figure of thought, peculiar to Hegel, uses the means of the philosophy of the subject for the purpose of overcoming subject-centred reason.[117]

What this long passage primarily concerns is the evolution of Hegel's dialectic in relation to the modern problematic. As we have seen, the goal of Hegel's philosophy is to reconcile the diremption of modernity without sacrificing the fundamental conceptions of freedom and reflection, that is, the principle of subjectivity. Stated differently, his task is to reconcile subject and object in a non-violent fashion without repudiating the virtues of self-reflection; and without succumbing to the reflective desiccation of the self, the other, and the world. Hegel's mature resolution to this difficulty is to envision a subjectivity writ large; a kind of cosmic subject or Spirit, as it were, which contains the subject-object relation within itself.[118] In this way, Hegel can propose that the reflective appropriation of the object by the subject doesn't represent the absolute power of an imposing subjectivity; rather, it constitutes the active *re*appropriation of Subjectivity itself by itself. The subject-object split is but one moment within the Absolute Subject's self-unfolding. The object does not represent an impenetrable other, for it is but a shard of alienated subjectivity. And the subject does not represent a totally isolated being, for it is the essential conduit for the Absolute's self-return to self. Thus do we come upon the central idealist thesis as the solution to the diremption of modernity: the ultimate identity of thought and Being.

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[117] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 33-34.

[118] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 303.

While Habermas admits that the notion of the absolute is rooted in the modern self-understanding, he concludes that it resolves the diremption of modernity only "too well." As he says, "reason has now taken over the place of fate and knows that every event of essential significance has *already* been decided. Thus, Hegel's philosophy satisfies the need of modernity for self-grounding only at the cost of devaluing present-day reality and blunting critique."[119] This is to say, that since each "independent" object ultimately re-presents an alienated piece of the Subject, otherness and individuality forfeit their uniqueness and autonomy. The particular becomes a mere pawn in the unfolding of the Absolute Subject. Resultant of t'iis forced reconciliation is the numbing of genuine critique. Because tne Absolute removes all distance between the ideal and the real, the objective given is perceived as the actualization of the true. Thus for the mature Hegel, at least,

> Philosophy cannot instruct the world how it ought to be; only reality as it is reflected in its concepts. It is no longer aimed critically against reality, but against obscure abstractions shoved between subjective consciousness and an objective reason. After the spirit ... found a way out of the aporias of modernity and not only entered into reality but became objective in it, Hegel sees philosophy absolved of the task of confronting with its concept the decadent existence of social and political life. This *blunting of critique* corresponds to a *devaluation of actuality*, from which the servants of philosophy turn away. Modernity as brought to its concept permits a stoic retreat from it.[120]

It is at this point where Habermas turns his attention toward the contributions of the young Hegel. For it is in this body of literature that Habermas perceives Hegel's

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[119] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 42.

[120] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 43.

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intersubjective resolution to the diremption of modernity: a resolution which, according to Habermas, gestures toward his own theory of communicative action and reason. Now, what is surprising about this admission is that the literature in question constitutes Hegel's theological and philosophical reflections on love. Given Habermas's postmetaphysical objections to critical theology, we have to wonder if this deference to the young Hegel doesn't some how qualify his critique of the theological enterprise. For if it is at all true that "With [his] concept of the absolute, Hegel regresses back behind the intuitions of his youthful period,"[121] then are we justified in claiming these intuitions as religious, and therefore, part of a genuine *theological discourse of modernity*? Before examining the content of Hegel's theological work (see section 5), I want to review Habermas's presentation of the young Hegel's penultimate response to the diremption of modernity.

Habermas commences his exposition of the young Hegel's writings by insisting on their own unique contribution to the history of philosophy. Unfortunately, Habermas declares, these writings are usually analyzed as prefatory studies for the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. In contrast to this typical approach, Habermas proposes to examine this material for its own merits.[122]

What features of Hegel's early work establish their import and significance for Habermas?

Habermas holds that Hegel's theory of "spirit" at this stage of his development, is

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[121] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 21.

[122] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 142.

not based upon the paradigm of absolute self-reflection.[123]   "Spirit is the

communication of individuals [*Einzelner*] in the medium of the universal," writes

Habermas, "which is related to the speaking individuals as the grammar of a language

is, and to acting individuals as is a system of recognized norms."[124]   In other words,

the young Hegel's notion of "spirit" foreshadows a conception of communicative action

in which identity and self-understanding are formed in the context of human interaction:

it underscores "the intersubjectivity of spirit ..."[125]   As Habermas elaborates:

> Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness passes over the relation of solitary
> reflection in favour of the complementary relationship between
> individuals who know each other. The experience of self-consciousness
> is no longer considered the original one. Rather, for Hegel it results
> from the experience of interaction, in which I learn to see myself
> through the eyes of other subjects. ... Self-consciousness is formed only
> on the basis of mutual recognition; it must be tied to my being mirrored
> in the consciousness of another subject.[126]

Habermas therefore claims that the early Hegel undertakes his exposition of modernity

and subjectivity in view of a reconciling power of reason or spirit "that cannot be

derived without any discontinuity from subjectivity."[127]   From whence, then, does it

derive?

Well according to Habermas, it obtains from a presupposed conception of social

relations based upon the young Hegel's idealization of the primitive Christian

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[123] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 143.

[124] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 146.

[125] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 144.

[126] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 144-145.

[127] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 27.

community and the ancient Greek polis. What these idealizations project is a vision of community as an ethical totality; that is, as a society rooted in the conditions of symmetry and reciprocity which undergirds intersubjective action.[128] Habermas comments here are most revealing;

> Against authoritarian embodiments of subject-centred reason, *Hegel summons the unifying power of an intersubjectivity that appears under the titles of "love" and "life."* The place of the reflective relationship between subject and object is taken by (in the broadest sense) communicative mediation of subjects. The living spirit is the medium that founds a communality of the sort that one subject can know itself to be one with another subject while still remaining itself.[129]

In effect, Habermas clearly discerns in the distinct theological ideas of "love" and "life" the intersubjective moment which gestures toward the communicative overcoming of the diremption of modernity and the dialectic of enlightenment. Indeed, Habermas asserts that if Hegel had remained with this particular set of ideas and intuitions, he might have discovered "a communicative-theoretic retrieval and transformation of the reflective concept of reason developed in the philosophy of the subject."[130]

However, Hegel could not pursue this path, says Habermas, because of the basic religious roots which mould this conceptualization of intersubjectivity. Since Hegel had based his comprehension of the ethical totality on a past way of life, he concluded its uselessness for the dilemma of modernity. As initially envisioned, the notion of an ethical totality was developed "along the guidelines of a popular religion in which

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[128] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 28-30; *Theory and Practice*, 148-152; 180-181.

[129] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 30. Italics mine.

[130] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 30.

communicative reason assumed the idealized form of historical communities, ... *As popular religion,*" continues Habermas, "it is bound up with the ideal features of these classical epochs, not only by way of illustration, but *indissolubly.*"[131] As a result, Hegel had to abandon the traces of communicative reason and action espied during this period of his development. For he soon recognized that "the ethical quality of the polis and of primitive Christianity, however powerfully interpreted, could no longer supply the criterion for what was to be demanded of a modernity divided within itself."[132]

In light of the impossibility of following up a religious version of intersubjectivity, and in view of the exhaustion of the philosophy of consciousness[133] as spelled out by the postmetaphysical situation, the immense scope of Habermas's claim for communicative action and reason comes into view once again. For only with the shift from the philosophy of the subject to the theory of communicative action, "does the critique of domineering thought of subject-centred reason emerge in a *determinate* form -- namely, as a critique of Western 'logocentrism,'..."[134] Thus, rather than promising a *rapprochement* with critical theology, Habermas's rejection would seem to be complete. As long as theory tries to address the pathologies of modernity, the religious option remains a dead end because no less than *its* determinate negation resides in Habermas's work. The religious thinker can remain isolated within the extraordinary,

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[131] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 30.

[132] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 31.

[133] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 296.

[134] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 310.

or s/he can take up the theory of communicative action: there is, it seems, no middle position.

However, given that the primary insight to both the dilemma of modernity and its appropriate resolution emerge in the theological writings of the young Hegel, might there not be more to his "intuitions" than a presentiment of communicative action? Can the religious thinker not re-examine what Hegel has to say about "life" and "love" in order to elucidate the religious character or moment within the intersubjective negation of logocentric reason? This is exactly what I propose to do within the remainder of this chapter. It is within the ensuing analysis that my fundamental critique of Habermas's postmetaphysical objections to critical theology begins to take shape, though these criticisms will come to a head only at the very end of this study. In the mean time, the young Hegel's theological deliberations will present us with additional challenges and problems for the future development of critical theology.

5 *The Young Hegel On Love*

If we take up Robert Williams's reading of the history of German Idealism, it comes as no surprise that Habermas is able to discern the traces of an intersubjective paradigm within the Hegelian corpus. Williams argues that Hegel (along with Fichte) implants the intersubjective model into the history of philosophy, initiating its "massive transformation ... into social and historical modes of thought."[135] As Williams

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[135] Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 6.

understands it, German Idealism represents a response to Kant's three critiques as "a crisis of foundations, the recognition of the absence of unproblematic first principles and criteria."[136] Or in other words, post-Kantian philosophy is, as a matter of course, a form of postmetaphysical thinking. Thus in contrast to Habermas, Williams holds that the intersubjective characteristics first glimpsed in the theological writings of the young Hegel continue apace within his mature system under the category of "recognition." "If, as Hegel claims, spirit (*Geist*) has its existential-phenomenological genesis in intersubjective recognition (*Anerkennung*), then is not spirit a fundamentally intersubjective and social concept?"[137] While it is beyond my present purpose to test the veracity of Williams's thesis, his analysis intimates that the intersubjective moment of Hegel's work is not necessarily bound to his final assessment of the Christian religion as Habermas charges.[138] This factor encourages the religious thinker, at least, to probe the writings of the young Hegel in order to clarify the different ways he may situate or nuance his comprehension of intersubjectivity.

The literature to be scrutinized in this section includes Hegel's full-length

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[136] Williams, *Recognition*, 6.

[137] Williams, *Recognition*, xiv.

[138] While Williams is well aware of contemporary objections to philosophical idealism, especially as represented by Hegel (*Recognition*, 1-23); and in spite of the fact that *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is listed in his bibliography, nowhere does Williams wrestle with Habermas's particular critique of the mature Hegel. Given that Williams is making some rather strong claims on behalf of the intersubjective paradigm for Hegel's ongoing work, I fail to see how an in depth encounter with the Habermasian thesis can be avoided.

manuscript *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*,[139] and a short fragment called "Love."[140] Both pieces were composed in Frankfurt during the years 1797 to 1800.[141] What follows here cannot in any way be construed as an exhaustive explication of this material. Nor do I make any special claims on behalf of my interpretation in relation to Hegelian scholarship. I am primarily concerned to draft a theological response to Habermas rather than to the "young" or the "old" Hegel. A good part of my hesitation here also stems from the sheer difficulty of these manuscripts, for "their opacity and confusion is astonishing."[142] As Georg Lukács elaborates, "Hegel's terminology was never so fluid and confused as in this period. He takes up concepts, experiments with them, modifies them and drops them again."[143] The enigmatic character of these early writings can be partially explained by the fact that this material comprises Hegel's unpublished personal notes.[144] To this extent, the manuscripts should be viewed as a kind of "thought experiment" through which the

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[139] In T.M. Knox ed., *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings by Friedrich Hegel*, trans. by T.M. Knox (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1948), 182-301.

[140] In Knox, *On Christianity*, 302-308.

[141] For insight into Hegel's life, times, and development see Franz Wiedmann, *Hegel: An Illustrated Biography*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Pegasus, 1968).

[142] Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans by Rodeny Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), 101.

[143] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 110.

[144] Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology*, trans. by J.R. Stephenson (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 108.

young Hegel is just beginning to articulate the concepts, method, and system which will form the foundation of his later work.[145] Ideas culled from these reflections, then, may be appropriated as grist for other types of "thought experiment" which do not necessarily imply strict continuity with Hegel's perspective. It is with these qualifications in mind that I propose to examine the intersubjective significance of Hegel's conception of love.

During the Frankfurt period, Hegel is preoccupied with an examination of the person, character, and actions of Jesus, as well as the virtues of the early Christian community. For Hans Küng, at least, Hegel's "interpretation of Jesus and primitive Christianity was undoubtedly the most profound ventured by Idealist philosophy up to that time."[146] Richard Kroner suggests much the same,[147] while also remarking that "it is of profound significance that [Hegel] discovered his own [mystical] soul by discovering the soul of Jesus."[148] What this soul gave birth to, according to Hegel, was a pure religion of "spirit"; a humane, this-worldly religion of "love" rather than a "gloomy religion of the cross ..."[149]

It is in view of sentiments such as these that Lukács argues that *The Spirit of Christianity* and the fragment on "Love" witness Hegel's endeavour to reconcile himself

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[145] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 106; Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 97-98.

[146] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 112.

[147] Richard Kroner. "Introduction: Hegel's Philosophical Development" in Knox, *On Christianity*, 10.

[148] Kroner, "Introduction," 9. Cf. Taylor, *Hegel*, 52.

[149] Kroner, "Introduction," 4.

to faith,[150] constituting "a great debate with Christianity."[151] But what exactly is Hegel debating? What is his overriding problematic? According to Lukács, Hegel's principal query reads; "... is the solution to the problems of life put forward by Jesus and His church correct and is it still viable for the modern world?"[152] It seems to me that Hegel pursues two different answers to this question. The first concerns the potential of the Christian church and religion to create a new kind of society; one which objectively actualizes the wholeness of loving relationships within its social and political structures. It is this response which Habermas features in his examination and which, as he pointed out, Hegel ultimately decides against. The second response, I believe, is closely bound to the issue of intersubjectivity itself. Aside from the socio-political promises of primitive Christianity, Hegel was also intent on elucidating the philosophical ramifications of love as they impact upon the meaning and character of rational thought and reflection. While his focus upon the early Christian community was meant to redress the reification of society, his investigation of love was meant to challenge the reification of thought. It is for this reason that Lukás can also decipher Hegel's problematic as whether it is possible to objectively actualize subjective love in a non-objectivist way.[153] In other words, can love overcome the lifeless abstractions

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[150] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 122.

[151] Lukás, *Young Hegel*, 179.

[152] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 179. The influence of Lukács on Habermas's interpretation is most obvious here.

[153] See Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 180.

version of the young Hegel's problematic that I am mostly concerned with.

In *The Spirit of Christianity*, Hegel sets about answering the above problematic by radically contrasting the religion of Jesus against the religion of the Jews. Hence, we encounter that most ignoble yet perennial tradition in the history of Christian thought which plays off the pure Christian religion of the "spirit" against the impure Jewish religion of the "flesh"; the gospel of "free love" versus the "yoke of the law," etc. For the young Hegel at any rate, the Jewish faith as presented in the Old Testament constitutes a model of the human being's alienation from the true God; from the true spirit; from true love and wholeness. As he says, the Jews "had committed all harmony among men, all love, spirit, and life, to an alien object; they had alienated from themselves all the genii in which men are united; they had put nature in the hands of an alien being. What held them together was chains, laws given by the superior power [i.e., the wholly other God]."[154]

Küng summarizes Hegel's approach and attitude here as follows: "Hegel's antipathy to Judaism is of a 'philosophical' kind: in the spirit of Judaism he perceives the anti-ideal of the unity and wholeness of man and humanity for which he longed. In the division and alienation of the Jew ... Hegel was increasingly wont to see the division of man in general: nature stripped of its mystery, domination and servitude in the political sphere, the objectivization of God."[155] By suggesting that Hegel's anti-Judaism is of a "philosophical kind" (rather than a Christian kind?), Küng is

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[154] Hegel, *Spirit*, 240.

[155] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 115.

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pointing to the idea that Hegel's appraisal of Jewish "legalism" is largely motivated by his developing critique of religious "positivity," and Kant's moral philosophy.[156]

Positivity for Hegel denotes the uncritical acceptance of the given as true. In many ways, it represents another means by which to discuss the evils of heteronomy: that which is postulated, posited, or commanded of the individual without her or his consent. "A religion becomes positive" writes Williams, "when it shifts the evidentiary basis of belief from faith's reality-apprehension to theological authorities."[157] In Hegel's own words; "... a positive religion is a contranatural or supernatural one, containing concepts and information transcending understanding and reason and requiring feelings and actions which would not come naturally to men: the feelings are forcibly and mechanically stimulated, the actions are done to order or from obedience without any spontaneous interest."[158]

It is in similar fashion that Hegel criticizes Kant's moral doctrine as condensed in the Categorical Imperative: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[159] For Hegel, this rule is positive insofar that it demands a rigid separation between the "natural," so-called selfish inclinations of the human being, and the imposed moral duty to which the person

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[156] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 113.

[157] Williams, *Recognition*, 75.

[158] Freidrich Hegel, *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*, in Knox, *On Christianity*, 167.

[159] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Lewis White Beck (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1959), 39.

must submit. While the Kantian doctrine was thought to represent the highest expression of autonomy, Hegel contends that it is little better than positive religion: "...the difference is not that [religious adherents] make themselves slaves, while the [Kantian] is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself yet at the same time is his own slave."[160] In effect, Hegel holds that Kantian moral philosophy serves to internalize the diremption of humankind as represented by positive religion. The alienation of the human being from the wholeness of life is postulated as the ground of autonomy and right action. For Hegel, nothing could be more wrong.

It is in this context that Hegel circumscribes the meaning and message of Jesus. As Küng notes, "Jesus' ethic of love is distinct from Kant's rigorism; and it is distinct from his formalism in not confronting man with abstract universality but setting him in the midst of concrete life."[161] As Hegel sees it, Jesus realizes both the Jewish and Kantian law by mending the divided life, returning it to its "original integrity":[162] and the vehicle of this return is love. "More powerful than the Categorical Imperative is the spiritual inclination which conforms freely and instinctively to the law. This inclination is called love."[163]

What, then, is the precise nature of love according to Hegel?

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[160] Hegel, *Spirit*, 211.

[161] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 118.

[162] Kroner, "Introduction," 11.

[163] Kroner, "Introduction," 11. Also see Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 186-187; and Hegel, *Spirit*, 213, 225, and 239.

Love for one's nearest neighbours" he writes, "is philanthropy toward those with whom each one of us comes into contact. A thought cannot be loved. Of course 'love cannot be commanded'; of course it is 'pathological, an inclination' [Kant]; but it detracts nothing from its greatness, it does not degrade it, that its essence is not domination of something alien to it."[164] Love, as such, stands opposed to abstract thought. This opposition is manifest in the emotional character of love; an embodied relation with another which resists the domination of subjectivism itself: this is love's "greatness."

"But this does not mean that [love] is something subordinate to duty and right; on the contrary, it is rather love's triumph over these that it ..rds it over nothing, is without hostile power over another. 'Love has conquered' does not mean the same as 'duty has conquered,' i.e., subdued its enemies; it means that love has overcome hostility."[165] Love surpasses the imposition of duty and right; it overcomes the internalization of diremption. It does so because love does not thrive on the opposition between subject and object, "us" or "them." There is no room for tribalism here. Love needs no enemies to survive. It breaks the never ending cycle of vengeance because love reconciles the sinner and embraces the enemy: it is a source of true emancipation.[166]

"'Love thy neighbour as thyself' does not mean to love him as much as yourself,

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[164] Hegel, *Spirit*, 246-247.

[165] Hegel, *Spirit*, 247.

[166] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 121.

for self-love is a word without meaning. It means 'love him as the man whom thou art,' i.e., love is a sensing of a life similar to one's own ... Only through love is the might of objectivity broken, for love upsets its whole sphere. ... Love alone has no limits. What it has not united with itself is not objective to it; love has overlooked it or not yet developed it ..."[167] Ultimately, there is nothing that exists outside the harmony of love. Objectivity signifies unreconciled love, or that which has yet to be returned to love; to be returned home. To "Love thy neighbour as thyself" means to be joined equally to the other in reciprocity: the identity of subjects in a larger phenomenon that occurs to them beyond subjective or objective manipulation. It is not narcissism projected upon the other in order to make him or her lovable. The beloved is simply the person under the sign of life: for "in love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self."[168] Thus,

> genuine love excludes all opposition. It is not the understanding, whose relations always leave the manifold of related terms as a manifold and whose unity is always a unity of opposites [left as opposites]. It is not reason either, because reason sharply opposes its determining power to what is determined. Love neither restricts or is restricted; it is not finite at all.[169]

With this last statement, we come upon the specifically religious character of Hegel's reflections on love. As he says, "God is love, love is God, there is no Divinity

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[167] Hegel, *Spirit*, 247. Italics mine.

[168] Hegel, "Love," 305.

[169] Hegel, "Love," 304.

other than love."[170] Yet it is also here that we encounter Hegel's endeavour to step beyond the philosophy of consciousness. As Williams's reads it, Hegel's conception of love is decidedly intersubjective: "Hegel's claim is that the inner relation of the self to itself is more than simple or immediate self-relation; rather it is mediated by the other. ... In other words, "continues Williams, "*the self depends on the other for overcoming its internal diremption ...*"[171] Though one can certainly perceive intimations of Hegel's mature understanding of *Geist* and its dialectic ("in love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self"), it is also evident that "In the course of his investigations of these concepts [i.e., life and love] Hegel stumbles on the idea that existence is independent of consciousness ..."[172] That is, the young Hegel is not fully advancing the idealist thesis of the identity of thought and being. The difficulty with this "idea," however, is that consciousness appears to be equated with reification itself. There is no room left for reflective thought or rational understanding. Both are declared to be anathema to the power that reconciles. As Kroner perceives, "Love outshines speculation, which, after all, must be based on reflection, and therefore in distractions and separations."[173] Or as Hegel puts it, "only the feeling for the whole, love, can stand in the way of the *diremption* of the man's essence."[174]

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[170] Hegel in H. Nohl, *Theologische Jugendschriften, nach den Handschriften der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin* (Tübingen 1907); cited in Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 124.

[171] Williams, *Recognition*, 78. Italics mine.

[172] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 126.

[173] Kroner, "Introduction," 17.

[174] Hegel, *Spirit*, 217.

This degradation of rationality and objectivity is, in part, an effect of Hegel's expressivist leanings at the time. Both *The Spirit of Christianity* and the fragment on "Love" were animated by the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) movement which came to life in Germany during the 1770s. It constituted a "revolution in German literature and criticism which was decisive for the future of German culture."[175] *Sturm und Drang* primarily focused on and inspired an "anthropology of expression" which placed special emphasis on language and art as vehicles for the self-realization of the inner essence of the human being. Charles Taylor explains;

> The expressivist view bitterly reproached the Enlightenment thinkers for having dissected man and hence distorted the true image of human life in objectifying human nature; they divided soul from body, reason from feeling, reason from imagination, thought from senses, desire from calculation, and so on. All these dichotomies distorted the true nature of man which had rather to be seen as a single stream of life, or on a model of a work of art, in which no part could be defined in abstraction from reality. But they were more than that, they were mutilations of man. ... Because man is a self-expressive being, and he realizes himself in part through the definitive shape he gives his feelings and aspirations in expressions of art and language, such a false view is an obstacle to human fulfilment.[176]

This "passionate demand for unity and wholeness"[177] had a huge influence on Hegel, predisposing him to struggle against all expressions of intellectual, cultural, and social fragmentation. His quest is nothing less than the oneness of humankind, nature, and

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[175] Taylor, *Hegel*, 13. Also see Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 111.

[176] Taylor, *Hegel*, 23. Also see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[177] Taylor, *Hegel*, 23.

God.[178] As Hegel says, "Boldness and confidence of decision about fullness of life, about abundance of love, arise from the feeling of the man who bears in himself the whole of human nature."[179]

Nevertheless, it is apparent that even in the theological writings Hegel is struggling with this expressivist heritage.[180] If we recall Habermas's investigation of Hegel's conception of modernity, it is impossible to exclude a self-reflective or rational dimension. And if it is true as Lukács claims that the great debate occurring within these manuscripts revolves about the modern import of Jesus' ethic of love and the promise of primitive Christianity, then the negative opposition between love and reflection is bound to show up as the residue of positivity which Hegel cannot abide. It is for this reason, says Lukács, that Hegel pins his hopes on the Christian religion as the means to actualize the nonobjective objectivization of love in history.[181] Religion, as such, constitutes the reflective dimension of love demanded by the modern problematic. As Küng corroborates; "In the province of religion we have, simultaneously with love, reflection, that is, the consciousness of the connection of all life in love. Love, which must not be a mere blurring, melting, unity, is strengthened by reflection ..."[182]

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[178] Küng, Incarnation of God, 115; Taylor, *Hegel*, 24; Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 149.

[179] Hegel, *Spirit*, 240.

[180] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 118-119.

[181] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 121.

[182] Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 123.

Yet, it is precisely at this juncture where Hegel's love-filled solution to the diremption of modernity begins to unravel. His ensuing investigation of Christianity decrees its contemporary irrelevance. As a result, love loses its concrete embodiment. However, this conclusion says as much about love as it does about Christianity. Ultimately, Hegel decides that love cannot transcend its subjectivity to include a non-reified conception of objective reflection.[183] "In the moments of happy love" writes Hegel, "there is no room for objectivity; yet every reflection annuls love, restores objectivity again, and with objectivity we are once more on the territory of restrictions."[184] In other words, since genuine love excludes reflection by nature, it is easily negated by thought. Thus, rather than overcoming the antithesis of subject and object, love paradoxically augments it. As long as love lacks a reflexive dimension, the most it can accomplish is a fleeting sense of unification. As Lukács explains, "the absence of reflection is precisely the weak point of love which in consequence can always be destroyed by reflection, since love merely evaded instead of integrating it."[185] And it is precisely the "weak point of love" that steers Hegel toward the Absolute Subject and the dialectic of Enlightenment.

6 Conclusion

I began this chapter by examining Habermas's postmetaphysical objections to

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[183] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 121; 187.

[184] Hegel, *Spirit*, 253.

[185] Lukács, *Young Hegel*, 188. Also see Williams, *Recognition*, 80-81.

critical theology. There it is discovered that theology cannot be critical unless it foregoes the religious experiences which ground its unique claim to truth: that is, unless it ceases to be the *logos* of the *theos*. My review of Glebe-Möller's methodical atheism seemed to confirm Habermas's main point insofar that the normative weight of Glebe-Möller's "theological" insights derived from Habermas's theory of communicative action. As a result, it seemed imperative to identify some religious issue, theme, or idea which can be legitimately situated within the conceptual horizon of modernity. Toward that end, I enquired next into Habermas's presentation of the young Hegel. Here one learns that the intersubjective moment which propels thought beyond the philosophy of consciousness and the dialectic of Enlightenment is first glimpsed in the theological writings of the young Hegel on love. And while Hegel abandons this moment in light of the so-called failure of the Christian religion, it equally seems worthwhile to re-examine the young Hegel's reflections in order to see if they might substantiate the phenomenon of love as a legitimate modern religious issue with critical import.

However as the analysis in the final section suggests, the theme of love also fails to sustain itself as an integral dimension of the modern problematic faced by Hegel. In this case, the difficulty is love's failure to integrate the objectivity of reflective thought as part of its intersubjective dialectic. Hegel gradually recognized that if modernity is to ground itself out of itself, then its principle of unification could not dispense with a reflexive dimension: anything less would be pre-modern and beside the point. In view of love's *aporia*, Hegel begins his trek toward the Absolute Subject which Habermas

has shown to be incapable of solving the diremption of modernity.

Nevertheless, Habermas still capitalizes on the intersubjective dynamic of love by transforming it into a theory of communication. Now we can better understand why Habermas strives so hard to establish the validity basis of speech along with its inherent obligation for rational argument. For here, claims Habermas, is a model of intersubjectivity which incarnates the ever elusive nonobjective objectivity longed for by the young Hegel. And it does so in an essentially modern way by coordinating *and* maintaining the differentiation of reason into distinct complexes of rationality made possible by the evolution of modernity. Thus, the theory of communicative action and reason overcomes the subject-object split in an objective way; in a determinate way. Hence the enormity of Habermas's proposal.

Without necessarily dismissing the validity and cogency of Habermas's reconstruction of intersubjectivity at the level of language, his approach assumes, as does Hegel's, that love is either irrational, or at best, a-rational. For his part, Habermas doesn't even consider the possibility of examining the rational potential of love. Granted, this is not at all an obvious issue to raise since love is typically thought of as either beyond or below formal analysis. However, in the context of the argument presented in this chapter, I think there are two reasons which compel such an examination: reasons which may substantiate love as an appropriate theme to be pursued by a modern, postorthodox critical theology. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that these reasons also serve to mark the critical limitations of Habermas's theory of communicative action and reason, and his objections to critical theology.

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The first reason -- which I will address more fully in the conclusion to this study -- concerns whether communicative action and reason genuinely overcome the diremption of modernity as Habermas claims. Specifically, I would like to ask if the promise of intersubjectivity as first glimpsed in love can be so easily transferred to language without remainder. For sure, Habermas's interpretation of communication goes a long way toward elucidating its emancipatory significance. However, from whence does its emancipatory force derive? According to Habermas, it stems from modernity itself. This response goes hand in hand with his concern to settle, once and for all, the dilemma of modernity first spelled out by Hegel: namely, the *need* for modernity to normatively ground itself out of itself. Yet, how and why is this need essentially related to the emancipatory character of intersubjectivity? What if, for instance, the modern dilemma proves to be not only unresolvable by an intersubjective communications paradigm, but undermines that paradigm altogether? Does one then dispense with the provocative insights tied to intersubjectivity whether envisioned at the level of language or love? *In other words, it may be that the modern dilemma can only be coherently dealt with by a philosophy of consciousness.* If so, its traces are bound to show up in Habermas's proposal. It may therefore prove necessary to distinguish between an intersubjective response to the diremption of modernity; the emancipatory sources or roots of intersubjectivity; and finally, whether the endeavour to satisfy the need of modernity can ever escape the dialectic of Enlightenment.

The second reason simply contends that since the decisive intersubjective moment of Hegel's writings -- decisive for Habermas is the point -- emerges as the wholeness

of love faces the diremption of modernity, then it follows that love may very well be an elemental aspect of this entire problematic. If so, then this theme can be legitimately situated within the conceptual horizon of modernity, and deemed an appropriate topic for critical theological discourse. In view of Hegel's negative conclusion on love, however, the critical theologian must address the issue of love's objectivity, reflexivity, and potential for critique. Only if love can be conceived to entail such a dimension can it assume the emancipatory interest expressed by the Enlightenment. I take up this challenge in the next chapter by examining the contribution of Max Horkheimer to the development of critical theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

Horkheimer's Early Critical Theory:

The Open-ended Dialectic and the Rationality of Love

1 *Introduction*

When Habermas first read Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's classic text *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,[1] he was immediately enthralled by its unique socio-critical intent. As he relates; "What fascinated me right away with [Horkheimer and Adorno] was that they weren't engaged in a reception of Marx, ... they were utilizing him. ... Here were people who weren't writing a historical work on Aristotle, Kant, or Hegel; they were working out a theory of the dialectical development of present-day society, ... That was a tremendous thing for me."[2] Indeed, Habermas was part of a generation of post-war students anxious to reappropriate the sources of genuine philosophical and social critique suppressed or forgotten during the Nazi era. Under these conditions, the penetrating analyses of the Frankfurt School could not but impress.

However, Habermas's first impressions soon turned into a quest to surmount what he and others perceived to be the pessimistic and despairing thesis advanced in *Dialectic*

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[1] Trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1990).

[2] Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, Peter Dews ed., (London: Verso, 1986), 81. For an early assessment of Habermas's response to some of the members of the Frankfurt School, see the essays in his *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. by Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

of Enlightenment: namely, the domination of instrumental rationality over the substantive conception of reason as *Vernunft*. "Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty" observe Horkheimer and Adorno, "Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."[3] For Habermas, such a totalized critique of the Enlightenment (from "these two men of the Enlightenment")[4] comprises an extreme confusion of instrumental rationality with modern rationality as a whole, eclipsing the critical value of communicative reason.[5] "As a result," writes Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno "could locate the spontaneity that was not yet in the grips of the reifying force of systemic rationalization only in irrational powers -- in ... the mimetic power of art and *love*."[6]

In view of this critique, one encounters yet another reason why Habermas is not too eager to plumb the depths of the young Hegel's understanding of love. For to affirm love as an appropriate response to the diremption of modernity is to *surrender* reason to the dialectic of enlightenment. But with this resignation, says Habermas, there is

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[3] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3. It should be noted at this point that when the authors are discussing the "*Enlightenment*," they intend the tradition of philosophical thought which begins with Descartes and finds its consummation in German Idealism, especially Hegel. When Horkheimer and Adorno refer to "*enlightenment*," on the other hand, they are concerned with a philosophy of history which charts the primordial processes of civilization as the rise, triumph, and domination of the isolated ego over external and internal, human and nonhuman nature.

[4] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 121.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, vol. 2 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 333.

[6] Habermas, *Lifeworld and System*, 333. Italics mine.

scarcely "any prospect for an escape from the myth of purposive rationality that has

turned into objective violence."[7] He therefore argues that *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

not only underestimates the emancipatory content of modernity,[8] but endangers the

project of enlightenment itself.[9]

This subversive feature of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has not escaped the notice of

Habermas's "postmodern" opponents. Specifically, it is Adorno's contribution to

critical theory which has garnered the lion's share of attention. As Axel Honneth

reports;

> It is not so much Horkheimer's programmatic writings ... as Adorno's
> contributions to a negativistic social philosophy that now stand at the
> centre of the renewed interest in critical theory. ... At the centre of this
> surprising return to Adorno is apparently the conviction that his critical
> conception of the nonidentical provides the best means for
> comprehending the conditions for a noninstrumental relation to inner and
> outer nature. For this reason, too, in the more recent literature precisely
> those portions of his writings from which philosophical formulations of
> an aesthetic concept of rationality can be derived acquire a privileged
> status.[10]

This focus on Adorno's "aestheticization of critical theory," of course, finds a

special point of contact with a good deal of postmodern philosophy and literary

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[7] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 114.

[8] Habermas, *Philosophical discourse*, 113.

[9] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 114.

[10] Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. by Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), xix.

criticism.[11] As Peter U. Hohendahl[12] indicates, Adorno's accomplishment has proved to be one way to challenge Habermas's objections to postmodern philosophy played out in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. To quote Hohendahl:

> The deliberate attempt to stress the difference between Adorno's thought and the conceptual apparatus of Marxist theory characterizes the poststructuralist approach to Adorno. This strategy could be directed against other members of the Frankfurt School ... or at the post-Adornoian turn of Critical Theory in the work of Jürgen Habermas .... In this configuration Adorno is perceived as a rigorous antimetaphysical thinker who struggles against any form of (Hegelian) synthesis, someone who seeks out ruptures and breaks, and consistently attacks the traditional epistemological preference for identity. Thus, the work of Heidegger, Lacan, and Derrida form a new context for the interpretation of Adorno.[13]

From the perspective of this study, the emerging postmodern fascination with Adorno and *Dialectic of Enlightenment* presents itself as at least one way for the critical religious thinker to resist Habermas's postmetaphysical objections [14] However, given my critique of Metz's use of this material, I am inclined to search out another route. This does not mean we need abandon early critical theory though. As the above

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[11] On the central significance of the aesthetic for postmodern thinkers see Allan Megill's impressive study, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), especially pages 1-25.

[12] See his essay "Adorno Criticism Today," *New German Critique*, no. 56 (Spring-Summer 1992): 3-15.

[13] Hohendahl, "Adorno Criticism Today," 6.

[14] Cf. Marc P. Lalonde, "Power/Knowledge and Liberation: Foucault as a Parabolic Thinker," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61 (Spring 1993): 81-100. Also see Matthew Lamb, "Communicative Praxis and Theology: Beyond Modern Nihilism and Dogmatism" in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 92-118.

discussion insinuates, there are some essential differences between Horkheimer and Adorno as critical theorists; differences which correspond to different phases in the development of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School itself.

This remark brings me to explicate the more exact issues at stake in this chapter. It is crucial to the proceeding argument to distinguish the *various types* of critical theory expounded by Horkheimer and Adorno.[15] What this contrast reveals is that the version of critical theory hammered out by Horkheimer during the 1930s *cannot* be equated with either the thesis or tone of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Instead, the young Horkheimer attempts to formulate an "open-ended dialectic,"[16] rooted in a rational-moral capacity for love and compassion for the oppressed members of capitalist society.

From the point of view of the present study, then, Horkheimer's contribution is crucial. It constitutes nothing less than an attempt to clarify the rational and critical

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[15] The other member of the Frankfurt School who made an early and significant contribution to the design of critical theory is Herbert Marcuse. See his book, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Great Britain: The Penguin Press, 1968). Though I will not be attending to Marcuse's work in that area, this is not to suggest that he, Horkheimer, and Adorno held identical versions of critical theory. For example, in David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), the author -- I think rightly -- contends that "the work of the Institute's members did not always form a series of tightly woven, complementary projects." (15) He goes on to say that "Despite a certain unity of purpose, there are major differences between the members of the Institute of Social Research and Habermas and his associates, as there are between most of the individuals within each camp." (15) It should be noted, however, that this conviction stands in contrast to Martin Jay's research in *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973). I comment further on this difference of opinion below in the text.

[16] In Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, the author refers to it as an "*unabgeschlossene Dialektik,*" that is an "unconcluding" dialectic. (178)

potential of love from within a critical theory of society. However, if this potential is to be cultivated by contemporary critical religious thought, it is vital to differentiate Horkheimer's open-ended dialectic and his reflections on love from the model of critical theory conveyed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

This chapter on "Horkheimer's Early Critical Theory" begins with an account of "The History and Study of the Frankfurt School" (section 2). My reflections here centre upon the Hegelian-Marxist heritage which informs Frankfurt School critical theory. Though this contribution can hardly be equated to a history of ideas, my intent is to briefly show that the ideas of critical theory do have a history. Similarly, current research on the Frankfurt School also has a history, so to speak, and I address some of its peculiar problems in order to establish a schema through which to differentiate and assess the development in the critical theory through the years. This is followed by separate examinations of these phases of development. "Critical Theory" (section 3) undertakes an analysis of Horkheimer's programmatic text, "Traditional and Critical Theory." At this juncture, I also introduce the work of Axel Honneth whose penetrating critique of Horkheimer's version of critical theory is indispensable for anyone aspiring to retrieve his genius for constructive purposes. Next is a consideration of "The Critique of Instrumental Reason" (section 4). Here I focus on the main thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The goal of this discussion is to illustrate that this text constitutes an exercise in "negative dialectics." Negative dialectics refers to Adorno's philosophical method and style, and it is his contribution which constitutes a fundamental shift away from Horkheimer's theoretical position. After a brief

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"Excursus: Contra-Honneth" (section 5), I take up the task of reconstructing

Horkheimer's "Materialism" (section 6).

2 The History and Study of the Frankfurt School

The "Frankfurt School" is the popular name given to a group of Hegelian-Marxist

social philosophers and scientists associated with the *Institut für Sozialforschung*,

established in Frankfurt am Main, Germany in 1923. In 1931, the Institute came under

the directorship of Max Horkheimer, who envisioned the "ultimate aim" of the Institute

to encompass "the philosophical interpretation of the vicissitudes of human fate -- the

fate of humans not as mere individuals, however, but as members of a community. It

is thus above all" he continues, "concerned with phenomena that can only be

understood in the context of human social life: with the state, law, economy, religion -

- in short, with the entire material and intellectual culture of humanity."[17] Toward

this end, Horkheimer was able to enlist the talents of Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm,

Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Leo Lowenthal, to name only the better known

members.[18]

With the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws in 1933, the members of the Institute

were forced to flee Nazi Germany via Geneva to New York City. Here it became

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[17] Max Horkheimer, "The Present Task of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research" in Max Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. by G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 1.

[18] For a comprehensive selection of writings from the Frankfurt School throughout its history, see Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982).

know as the Institute for Social Research, and was affiliated with Columbia University.

It was during their American exile (1933-1949, with Adorno formally joining the Institute in 1938) that Horkheimer and Adorno jointly wrote the School's most famous work, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, published in 1947. In 1950, Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt in order to re-establish the Institute there, though many of the members, like Marcuse and Lowenthal, chose to remain in the United States. However, with the retirement of Horkheimer in 1958, and the death of Adorno in 1969, the Institute for Social Research essentially came to an end.[19]

While it is beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter to provide anything like a comprehensive history of the Frankfurt School, a brief consideration of some the sources which animate its theoretical position is indispensable. In particular, attention must be given to the import of the Hegelian-Marxist interpretation of critical theory that emerged in Germany during the 1920s with the near simultaneous publication (1923) of Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*,[20] and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*.[21] Though the Frankfurt School is distinguished by its wide ranging appropriation of non-Marxist thinkers such as Kant, Nietzsche, Weber, and Freud (to name but a few), this very openness is rooted in the

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[19] The two most important historical studies of the Frankfurt School are Jay's *Dialectical Imagination*, and Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. by Benjamin Gregg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

[20] Trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

[21] Trans. by Fred Halliday (London: NLB, 1970).

Hegelian-Marxism of Lukács and Korsch.[22] Since critics agree that their influence was formative for the critical theory,[23] it is prudent to delve into this body of literature so as to sketch the conceptual framework which guides the labours of Horkheimer and Adorno.

The work of Lukács and Korsch can be seen as reacting to, what Korsch called, "The crisis of Marxist theory ..."[24] That crisis -- at least as far as Lukács and Korsch were concerned -- consisted in objectivist, "orthodox" interpretations of Marx advanced by the reigning Socialist and Communist parties in Germany at the time. As Douglas Kellner describes it;

> Orthodox Marxism ... tended toward a reductionistic "economism," ...
> This version of Marxism was deterministic in two dimensions: the
> economic base determined the superstructure, and the laws of history,
> rooted in the economy, determined the trajectory of all social life. This
> "orthodox Marxism" was also scientistic, ... and tended to be dogmatic
> as it congealed into a rigid system of categories, laws, and positions.[25]

However, the hub of the crisis resided in the contradiction between the certitude of

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[22] Leszek Kolakowski, *The Breakdown*, vol., 3 of *Main Currents of Marxism*, trans. by P.S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 341.

[23] See Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, 20; Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 10. In Douglas Kellner's review essay, "The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*," *New German Critique*, no. 4 (Winter 1975), the author chastises Jay for neglecting to underscore and illuminate the impact of Lukács and Korsch on the Institute. As Kellner expresses his objection; "Jay's failure to trace more clearly the influence of Korsch and Lukács on the School makes it difficult to discern the Marxism characteristic of critical social theory." (135) For further comments on Kellner's reaction to Jay's text, see below.

[24] Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 48.

[25] Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 11.

orthodox predictions for the inevitable triumph of socialism, and the apparent non-revolutionary character of the concrete social situation. The failure of orthodox Marxism to openly address this predicament, according to Korsch, encouraged "all kinds of attempts at *reform*, which fundamentally remain[ed] within the limits of the bourgeois society and the bourgeois state ..."[26] In other words, orthodox Marxism had abandoned Marx's revolutionary theory in favour of compromise with the status-quo. This resignation, however, was not without its real causes.[27] Since "Political events and revolutionary practice had not coincided with the expectations derived from the Marxist theory of the day," observes David Held, "The following question became urgent: How could the relationship between theory and practice now be conceived?"[28] It is this problematic which fuelled the analyses in *History and Class Consciousness* and *Marxism and Philosophy*, and their unique response became part of the heritage of the Frankfurt School.

The exceptional turn that Marxist theory takes in 1923 entails the cultivation of the Hegelian substructure of Marx's dialectical materialism. While orthodox Marxists tended to believe that "'the rejection of all philosophical fantasies'... was 'the precondition for the masters' (Marx and Engels) immortal accomplishments,'"[29] Korsch and Lukács argued that a philosophical approach permits one to perceive and

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[26] Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 57.

[27] See Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 58.

[28] Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, 20.

[29] Korsch quoting Franz Mehring, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 31.

explicate how conscious, deliberate human action can be directed at changing society and history.[30] As Lukács put it; "To posit oneself, to produce and reproduce oneself - - that is *reality*. .... The deep affinities between historical materialism and Hegel's philosophy are clearly manifested here, for both conceive of theory as the *self-knowledge of reality*."[31] Likewise, Korsch proclaimed that "the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels is by its very nature a philosophy through and through, ... It is a revolutionary philosophy whose task it is to participate in the revolutionary struggles waged in all spheres of society against the whole of the existing order, by fighting in one specific area -- philosophy."[32] The result of these deliberations was a critical philosophy of praxis.[33] Paul Breines recapitulates this point as follows:

> Luckács and Korsch focused on the moment of consciousness and theory in revolution. .... [This] focus ... was based on their contention that Marxism since Marx had repressed and forgotten its own origins in "bourgeois idealist," that is, Hegelian philosophy. Marx's materialist critique of Hegel, in their view, consisted in the transformation of the Hegelian dialectic of consciousness and being from the level of a movement of ideas to the level of a movement of concrete social relations among men. "Materialism," according to Lukács and Korsch, is not revolutionary in so far as it asserts the primacy of matter over mind, "objective conditions" over human consciousness but, in sharp contrast, in so far as it places the concept of *Praxis*, the dialectical unity

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[30] Paul Breines, "Praxis and its Theorists: The Impact of Lukács and Korsch in the 1920s," *Telos*, no. 11 (Spring 1972): 67-68. Also see Kolakowski, *The Breakdown*, 274.

[31] Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?" in *History and Class Consciousness*, 16-17.

[32] Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 67-68.

[33] Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 11.

of consciousness and being, theory and practice at the centre of theory.[34]

With this emphasis on praxis as the *raison d'être* of critical theory, both Lukács and Korsch make clear that its purpose is to dispel the misconception of societal life as a fixed, unhistorical, natural or metaphysical fact.[35] More to the point, its aim is to demonstrate on behalf of the afflicted proletariat that *capitalist society* is not a fixed, unhistorical, natural or metaphysical fact, but subject to historical change via rational human intervention.[36] In this fashion, the theorist cultivates the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat as the subject *and* object of history: as the social agent whose human needs ground the emancipatory interest of humankind in its *totality* (and here we can understand totality in its normative sense as "a desirable goal that is yet to be achieved").[37]

Of course, what holds true for society also pertains to its theoretical expressions. In this sense, one of the inherent qualities of critical theory as critical, is a self-reflexive moment. Fred Halliday submits that this idea establishes the distinctive contribution of Korsch, for he "made a novel and highly controversial attempt to apply Marx's materialist method to the history of Marxist theory itself."[38] A similar attempt

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[34] Breines, "Praxis and Its Theorists," 67.

[35] Lukács, "Class Consciousness," 47.

[36] Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?", 19.

[37] Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 23.

[38] Fred Halliday, "Karl Korsch: An Introduction" in Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 13.

can be attributed to Lukács's redefinition of Marxist orthodoxy: "Orthodox Marxism,"

he says, " ... does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marxist

investigations. It is not the 'belief' in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a 'sacred'

book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to [the dialectical] *method*."[39]

Or to quote Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach:

> The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach
> included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the
> form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human
> activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to
> materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism --
> which of course does not know real, sensuous activity as such.
> Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought
> objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective
> activity. ... Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary,"
> of "practical-critical," activity.[40]

Though both Korsch and Lukács seemed to have grasped this significance, it

became questionable whether Korsch was willing to maintain this expression of critical

theory, and evident that Lukács declined to do so. Soon after the publication of their

respective works, Korsch and Lukács were severely criticized by the Communist Party

(of which they were official members) for being "idealist innovators," and misguided

"professors" -- definite terms of abuse among communists at the time. Confronted with

the threat of expulsion from the Party, Lukács publicly denounced his text as

excessively idealist and non-Leninist, while Korsch left only to be drawn toward a more

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[39] Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?", 1. Also see Kolakowski, *The Breakdown*, 264.

[40] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in David McLellan ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 156.

positive version of Marxist theory himself.[41]

In light of these developments, the responsibility of maintaining the "significance of 'revolutionary' and 'practical-critical' activity" was shouldered by the Frankfurt School. "Hence, the historical role carried out by the Institute for Social Research was to preserve Marxist theory from degenerating into a stale orthodoxy, ..."[42] Some commentators have concluded, though, that the Frankfurt School carried out this task only too well. The basis for this verdict concerns the School's theoretical distance from, if not abandonment of, the revolutionary proletariat. According to Leszek Kolakowski, the principles of critical theory are "those of Lukács's Marxism, but without the proletariat."[43] He therefore concludes that it is a truncated form of Marxism at best.[44] Tom Bottomore also cites this feature of critical theory as a most conspicuous deviation from classical Marxism. He writes that "The Frankfurt School conception of the decline or disappearance of the working class as a political force seems to be based mainly upon a Utopian and millennial idea of 'revolution' which is by no means the only -- or most Marxist way -- of conceiving the process of social revolution ..."[45] For Bottomore, this problem is simply the result of a more

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[41] See Breine's "Praxis and Its Theorists," for an excellent account of the official reaction to Korsch and Lukács, as well as for the details concerning their different responses to this reaction.

[42] Kellner, "The Frankfurt School Revisited," 142.

[43] Kolakowski, *The Breakdown*, 355.

[44] Kolakowski, *The Breakdown*, 357.

[45] Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School* (Sussex: Elis Horwood, 1984), 74.

fundamental difficulty with the School: namely, its lack of adequate historical and empirical social research.[46]

Though neither Kolakowski nor Bottomore can be classified as sympathetic students of the Frankfurt School, the core of their critique surfaces even among those who consider themselves to be advocates of the critical theory. In this case though, the issue over theoretical continuity/discontinuity with the Marxist tradition is extensively complicated by a concern for the continuity/discontinuity of the development of critical theory itself. How a critic assesses the latter, can often depend a great deal on her or his opinion of the former.

This point can be demonstrated by comparing and contrasting two reviews of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*, by Douglas Kellner and Russell Jacoby. While Jay's text is generally recognized as making an extremely valuable contribution to the knowledge and study of the Frankfurt School,[47] the critics agree that *The Dialectical Imagination* is decidedly anti-Marxist. Kellner writes that "the whole book is deceptive and disappointing. It is deceptive because it fails to explicate the radical Marxist programme implicit in the Institute's work in the 1930s ... It is disappointing because it fails ... to discuss the later transformation [i.e., in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*] in which many of its earlier positions were sacrificed."[48] An

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[46] Bottomore, *Frankfurt School*, 71-81.

[47] See Kellner, "The Frankfurt School Revisited," 131. Also see Kellner and Roderick, "Recent Literature on Critical Theory," 141.

[48] Kellner, "The Frankfurt School Revisited," 131-132.

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analogous evaluation of Jay's presentation is delivered by Jacoby. He suggests that Jay "seeks, at first to belittle the relationship of Marxism to the 'critical theory' of the Frankfurt School, and secondly, to declare them utterly separate; he wants to make the Frankfurt School safe for democrats and historians by attesting it free of Marxism."[49] For both Kellner and Jacoby, the chosen title of Jay's work convey's the point: the dialectical "imagination" hardly connotes offensive revolutionary criticism.[50] Without disputing the validity of these criticisms,[51] the point of their divergence is equally illuminating: namely, over the nature and status of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

As already intimated, Kellner feels that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* itutes a radical shift away from the School's Marxist origins. Yet, he faults Jay not only for ignoring this point of rupture, but for basing his normative interpretation of the critical theory in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Jay ... reads the standpoint of the late Frankfurt School ... into the earlier, more radical phase of the Institute's history. The ambivalence toward Marxism of those members who had in fact abandoned Marxism

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[49] Russell Jacoby, "Marxism and the Critical School," *Theory and Society* 1 (1974): 232.

[50] Kellner, "The Frankfurt School Revisited," 144; Jacoby, "Marxism and the Critical School," 236.

[51] Both Kellner and Jacoby forward convincing arguments against Jay. Their criticisms have been confirmed for me in reading Jay's essay, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Marxist Humanism," *Social Research* 39, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 285-305. While it may be that the Frankfurt School -- and in this article Jay is primarily dealing with the contributions of Horkheimer and Adorno -- may not be classified as a strict adherents to Marxist Humanism, this does not mean that they weren't humane Marxists.

leads Jay to distort the story of the origin of critical theory ..."[52] In contrast to this, Jacoby charges Jay for portraying a radical shift where. in fact, one doesn't exist. In response to Jay's claim that the Frankfurt School's "long march away from orthodox Marxism"[53] culminates in Horkheimer and Adorno's fixation with the domination of nature rather than class conflict, Jacoby answers that "This is wrong, all wrong. ... the theme of the domination of nature [in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*] does not dislodge class conflict" but is perfectly in keeping with dialectical and historical materialism.[54] Thus Jacoby, like Kellner's "Jay," also stresses the continuity of critical theory. However, its progression is secured by the Marxist character of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, not its "long march away from orthodox Marxism."

I must admit, I find it difficult to sort out the "truth" of these and other matters. It is quite probable that the source of this confusion resides in the work of the Frankfurt School itself.[55] It is for this reason that Helmut Dubiel's text *Theory and Politics:*

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[52] Kellner, "Frankfurt School Revisited," 132. For Kellner's view of the Critical Theory of the 1940s, see page 147.

[53] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 256.

[54] Jacoby, "Marxism and the Critical School," 233.

[55] Probable, but not certain. Part of the problem with secondary studies of the Frankfurt School is that one is not simply dealing with the chronicle of an institution, but with a tradition, a legacy -- a way of life and thought. This conviction seems to be grounded in the experience and structure of the School itself. As Jay reports in *The Dialectical Imagination*;

> It had been the intent of the founding members [of the Institute] to create a community of scholars whose solidarity would serve as a microcosmic foretaste of the brotherly society of the future. The *Zeitschrift*, ... helped cement the sense of group identity; and the common experience of forced exile and regrouping added considerable to this feeling. Within the Institut

Studies in the Development of Critical Theory represents a lucid addition to studies of the Institute for Social Research. Dubiel's work is unencumbered by the need to either prove or discredit the Marxist integrity of the Frankfurt School. His point of departure is to trace the course of critical theory's development between 1930 and 1945. He accomplishes this systematically by isolating the major themes and issues which preoccupied the School during this period of time (e.g., the labour movement; the subject and addressee of critical theory; relation to Marxism; the School's utopian vision, etc.), and discerning the overriding theoretical position toward each of these concerns.[56] The author submits that the theoretical development of critical theory can be divided into three main phases: *Materialism* (1930-1937); *Critical Theory* (1937-

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itself, a still smaller group had coalesced around Horkheimer, consisting of [Fred] Pollock, Lowenthal, Adorno, Marcuse, and Fromm. It is really their work, ... that formed the core of the Institut's achievement.(31)

It has been pointed out by Kellner and Roderick, however, that Jay's account is not entirely free of hagiolatry, eschewing genuine critical analysis for a "presentation of critical theory as a treasure house of personalities ..." ("Recent Literature on Critical Theory," 141) Yet, comments like these are, in part, motivated by a growing concern among students of critical theory that it is time for them to stop studying it and to start doing it themselves (see Kellner and Roderick, "Recent Literature on Critical Theory," 170). This summons seems to be rooted in the fearful possibility that "Classical critical theory appears to be irrevocably becoming an object of mere historical interest. .... Critical theory also seems to be history in the indirect sense of being less and less intellectually and politically virulent. Publicly placing oneself in its tradition is no longer an unequivocal sign of radical dissent. The establishment has learned to accommodate critical theory ..." (Helmut Dubiel, "Domination or Emancipation?: The Debate Over the Heritage of Critical Theory" in Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer eds., *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, trans. by Barbara Fultner [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992], 3).

[56] See Dubiel, "Methodological Procedure" in *Theory and Politics*, 3-10.

1940); and *Critique of Instrumental Rationality* (1940-1945).[57] Dubiel writes that

> It is not our intention to reify into static blocks these artificially differentiated stages of development, as if none of these stages were further developed within itself, as if the caesuras, which we make for heuristic purposes, represented actual breaks in the theory's continuity. Rather, our procedure may be compared to usual method of longitudinal studies, in which synchronistic cross sections are made at significant points in a process of development.[58]

The distinct benefit of Dubiel's work is that it allows one to clearly identify the differences among the various phases of critical theory without either exaggerating or underestimating their importance; or overlooking points of contact or significant divergences. In short, it compels a more *differentiated* approach to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. As Kellner and Roderick emphasize, Dubiel's study means that "Anyone writing on critical theory today must recognize the *heterogeneity* of critical theory and be clear about differences between various critical theorists ..."[59] In keeping with these methodological advancements, the present chapter will proceed by examining the three stages of critical theory as outlined by Dubiel. However, since the utmost concern of this analysis is to suggest that the Materialist phase of critical theory cannot be equated with the Critique of Instrumental Rationality in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the examination unfolds as follows: section 3) Critical Theory; 4) Critique of Instrumental Rationality; 5) Excursus: Contra-Honneth; 6) Materialism.

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[57] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 10.

[58] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 10.

[59] Kellner and Roderick, "Recent Literature on Critical Theory," 166.

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3 Critical Theory (Second Phase)

Max Horkheimer's essay "Traditional and Critical Theory"[60] (1937), is usually cited as the foremost expression of the Frankfurt School's theoretical position of the 1930s, if not for the School *in toto*.[61] The fundamental idea which figures Horkheimer's programmatic concerns is the dialectical relationship between scientific theory, including critical theory, and the concrete social conditions which support and influence theoretical construction. One of his objectives is therefore to portray theory in connection to the practical and political interests which inform the dominant social environment:[62] that is, to profile the link between theory and social praxis. As the author says, the "influence of social development on the structure of the [critical] theory is part of the theory's doctrinal content. Thus new contents are not just mechanically added to already existing parts. .... The logical difficulties which understanding meets in every thought that attempts to reflect a living totality are due chiefly to this fact."[63] It is in view of this claim that the essay promises to rationally differentiate between traditional and critical theory. However, it is also this claim which discloses a few of those "logical difficulties" that one encounters in this phase of the critical theory.

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[60] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell and Others (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 188-243.

[61] Kolakowski, The *Breakdown*, 352; Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 5; Bottomore, *Frankfurt School*, 16.

[62] Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 45; Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 5; Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 55.

[63] Horkheimer, "Tradition and Critical Theory," 238.

The essay begins with an analysis of traditional theory. "Traditional" theory is Horkheimer's name for modern scientific theory which originates within the Cartesian philosophical tradition. At a most basic level of understanding, traditional theory is "stored up knowledge, put in a form that makes it useful for the closest possible description of facts."[64] At a more involved level, traditional theory is an expression of instrumental rationality modelled after mathematical knowledge, and inextricably bound to the development of industrial technology.[65] At a logical, or epistemological level, Horkheimer defines traditional theory as follows:

> There is always, on the one hand, the conceptually formulated knowledge and, on the other, the facts to be subsumed under it. Such a subsumption or establishing of a relation between the simple perception or verification of a fact and the conceptual structure of our knowing is called theoretical explanation.[66]

What Horkheimer is referring to in this passage is the rigid separation of subject and object which forms the nucleus of Cartesian dualism. In other words, he is dealing with the philosophy of consciousness. First, there is the disengaged, autonomous and isolated subject whose identity is secured in self-reflective thought -- the "*cogito ergo sum*." The Cartesian mode of thought, writes Horkheimer, "is essentially abstract, and its principle is an individuality which inflatedly believes itself to be the ground of this world without qualification, an individuality separated off from events."[67] Second,

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[64] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 188.

[65] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 190-194.

[66] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 193.

[67] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 210.

this ahistorical contemplative observer encounters the external world of objects as the regular, unchangeable natural element to be conceptually classified and materially manipulated. It is this approach to reality which stands behind scientific claims to value-neutrality and the strict objectivity of facts:[68] a procedure which privileges the quest for "pure knowledge" over and against a rationally informed human praxis.[69] The ultimate result is therefore a paralysis of social praxis and the arrest of practical knowledge:

> If scholars do not merely think about such a dualism but really take it seriously, they cannot act independently. In keeping with their own way of thinking, they can put into practice only what the closed causal system of reality determines them to do, or they count only as individual units in a statistic for which the individual unit really has no significance. As rational beings they are helpless and isolated.[70]

In order to eradicate this paralysis and arrest, Horkheimer's counter-proposal commences by arguing that the whole of reality -- subject-object and theory -- is always already the outcome of sedimented and ongoing social activities.[71] In the case of traditional theory, it is the capitalist exchange economy which shapes its abstruse productions, objectives, and goals:

> The manipulation of physical nature and of specific economic and social mechanisms demand alike the amassing of a body of knowledge such as is supplied in an ordered set of hypotheses. The technological advances of the bourgeois period are inseparably linked to this function of the pursuit of science. On the one hand, it made the facts fruitful for the

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[68] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 208-209.

[69] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 81.

[70] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 231.

[71] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 200.

kind of scientific knowledge that would have practical application in the circumstances, and, on the other, it made possible the application of knowledge already possessed. Beyond doubt, such work is a moment in the continuous transformation and development of the material foundations of that society. But the conception of theory was absolutized, as though it were grounded in the inner nature of knowledge ... and thus it became a reified, ideological category.[72]

Succinctly put, traditional theory is primarily based upon, and serves the needs of the capitalist economy: it cannot be explained apart from this interrelationship. The abstract and quantitative knowledge churned out by traditional theory, corresponds to the abstract and quantitative character of the capitalist market system.[73] As such, scientific productivity, like its economic counterpart, depends upon a specific social division of labour in which, to quote the young Marx, "alienation appears not only in the result [of labour], but also in the *process*, of *production*, within *productive activity* itself."[74] In keeping with the dominate traits which govern this labour, then, Horkheimer insists that the social function of scientific theory is necessarily obscured. For the various social connections, links, and mediation which make scientific production at all possible are concealed by a division of labour which, in turn, sustains the chimera of an objective, value-neutral scientific method, undertaken by an

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[72] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 194.

[73] Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 45.

[74] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" in Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man: With a Translation from Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts by T.B. Bottomore* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), 98. For a reading of the Frankfurt School's reception of the *Manuscripts*, see Herbert Marcuse, "The Foundation of Historical Materialism" in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, trans. by Joris de Bres (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).

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autonomous, contemplative, isolated subject.[75] In contradistinction to this illusion, Horkheimer maintains that

> The scholar and his science are incorporated into the apparatus of society; his achievements are a factor in the conservation and continuous renewal of the existing state of affairs, no matter what fine names he gives to what he does. His knowledge and results, it is expected, will correspond to their proper "concept," that is they must constitute theory in the sense described above. In the social division of labour the savant's role is to integrate facts into conceptual frameworks and to keep the latter up-to-date so that he himself and all who use them may be masters of the widest possible range of facts.[76]

It is at this point where one perceives the first hints of Horkheimer's critical theory *ex negativo*, as it were. *Unlike* traditional theory, critical theory does not perpetuate the Cartesian dualism between subject and object, but explores their co-determinacy.[77] Unlike traditional theory, critical theory does not hold to the immutability of facts, but perceives such facts as part of a total social process.[78] *Unlike* traditional theory, critical theory does not hypostasize knowledge over action, but holds to the potential for a rationally informed collective social praxis.[79] Unlike traditional theory, Critical theory does not absolutize any scientific model or logical structure, but is innately aware of the limitations of all theoretical constructs.[80] *Unlike* traditional theory,

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[75] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 197.

[76] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 196.

[77] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 58-59.

[78] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 56-57.

[79] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 81.

[80] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 58.

critical theory does not reproduce existing society unawares, or uncritically, but endeavours to transform it.[81] In brief, critical theory attempts to overcome "the one-sidedness that necessarily arises when limited intellectual processes are detached from their matrix in the total activity of society."[82]

What, then, does it take to surpass one dimensional theory? It is in response to this question that one can begin to fill out the positive articulation of critical theory.

Horkheimer begins his account by circumscribing both its object and aim, as well as its social foundation:

> ... there is a human activity which has society itself for its object. The aim of this activity is not simply to eliminate one or another abuse, ... Although it itself emerges from the social structure, its purpose is not ... the better functioning of any element in the structure. On the contrary, it is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing. ... But the *critical attitude* of which we are speaking is wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct ... which society ... provides each of its members. The separation of individual and society ... is relativized in critical theory. The latter considers the overall framework which is conditioned by the ... (... extant division of labour and the class distinctions) to be a function which originates in human action and therefore is a possible object of planful decision and rational determination of goals.[83]

The object of critical theory is society in its totality; the aim, the rational organization of social human life; its social foundation, *a critical activity that emerges from society itself.* Thus, the key to comprehending critical theory as described in this

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[81] Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 46; Kellner, "Frankfurt School Revisited," 140-141.

[82] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 199.

[83] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 206-207. Italics mine.

essay, is to trace what Horkheimer means by critical activity, and to discern its concrete social basis.

To begin with, Horkheimer states that "What is needed" to surpass one dimensional traditional theory, "is a radical reconsideration, not of the scientist alone, but of the knowing individual as such."[84] By this Horkheimer means a radical reconsideration of the subject - object relation. In direct contrast to the Cartesian dualism of traditional theory, Horkheimer posits a constitutive co-determinacy or mutual interpenetration of subject and object, individual and society, universal and particular, concept and fact, reason and reality, theory and praxis, etc., for critical theory. He expresses this insight in the following way: "The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity ..."[85] In other words, "objective" reality always already bears the trace of subjectivity: its very constitution as knowledge is determined, in part, by the knowing subject. We can call this the "subjectivity of the object." Similarly, our "subjective" reality is informed by objectivity: its self-knowledge is infused with objective reality, understood in its widest sense as social and historical activity. We can refer to this as the "objectivity of the subject." For example,

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[84] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 199.

[85] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 200. It should be noted that Horkheimer is relying directly upon Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Here Marx writes that "The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous human history." (134)

Horkheimer submits that within this framework "the proposition that tools are prolongations of human organs can be inverted to state that the organs are also prolongations of the tools."[86] Thus subject and object are co-determined within the stasis and dynamic of enveloping social practices. "In the course of it," Horkheimer observes, "both the social structure as a whole and the relation of the theoretician to society are altered, that is *both the subject and the role of thought are changed.*"[87]

It is at this juncture when we can begin to zero in on the exact intention of the phrase, "critical activity." Given the co-determinacy of subject and object outlined above, it can be suggested that critical thinking is an activity which, as thinking, takes up society within itself. It does so because concrete thinking is always the thought of particular, finite, historical, socially situated individuals, not the pseudo-activity of the disembodied mind.[88] Specifically, we can say that taking up society as the object of *critical thought*, as opposed to traditional thought, "objectively" contributes toward changing the actual existing society. Kolakowski therefore suggests that critical theory believes itself to be "a form of social behaviour ..."[89] As Horkheimer alludes in reference to economic critique:

> A consciously critical attitude, ... is part of the development of society: the construing of the cource of history as the necessary product of an economic mechanism simultaneously contains both a protest against this order of things, a protest generated by the order itself, and the idea of

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[86] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 201.

[87] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 211.

[88] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 211.

[89] Kolakowski, The *Breakdown*, 353.

self-determination of the human race, that is the idea of a state of affairs in which man's actions no longer flow from a mechanism but from his own decision. The judgment passed on the necessity inherent in the previous course of events implies here a struggle to change it from a blind to a meaningful necessity. If we think of the object of the theory in separation from the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism or conformism. Every part of the [critical] theory presupposes the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it along lines determined by the theory itself.[90]

The issue that arises next is, who are the agents of such critical activity, and what grounds their theoretical critique? In answer to the first part of the question, the agents are subjects who adopt the critical attitude.[91] Critical theory, says Horkheimer, "springs in general from a difference not so much of objects as of subjects. For men of the critical mind, the facts as they emerge from the work of society, are not extrinsic in the same degree as they are for the savant ..."[92] The critical theorist, this "man of the critical mind," lives in constant tension with the existing society; refusing to provide succour for the status-quo, nor receiving any in return.[93] Yet he endures this marginalization in the knowledge that things can, indeed, be changed for the better.[94]

But what is the basis, or social process, which justifies this judgment? The proletariat? No. Horkheimer's statement on this issue is absolutely clear: "... the

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[90] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 229.

[91] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 207-208.

[92] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 209.

[93] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 218-219.

[94] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 227.

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proletariat is, in this society, no guarantee of correct knowledge."[95] He continues on to say that "If critical theory consisted essentially in formulations of the feelings and ideas of one class at any given moment, it would not be structurally different from the special branches of science,"[96] that is, traditional theory. Still, Horkheimer identifies a "dynamic unity" between the critical thinker and the "oppressed class" because they ultimately share the same object: human emancipation.[97] However, there is something more subtly intimated here: *moral feeling*. "The goal at which ... [critical theory] aims, namely the rational state of society, is forced upon him by present distress. The theory which projects such a solution to the distress does not labour in the service of an existing reality but only gives voice to the mystery of that reality."[98]

At this point we can surmise that critical theory is critical thinking: critical thinking undertaken in view of the co-determination of subject and object within society and history. Critical theory also stands permanently opposed to the concrete conditions of capitalist society, and enacts this opposition by endeavouring to foster the rational organization of society in moral and social solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Though far from guaranteeing any kind of successful resolution to the plight of the disadvantaged, the first movements toward authentic reconciliation can at least begin in critical theory. Thus, Horkheimer ends his essay by pleading that "The future of

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[95] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 213.

[96] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 214.

[97] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 215.

[98] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 216-217.

humanity depends upon the existence today of the critical attitude ..."[99]

For Axel Honneth, this justification of critical theory is insufficient. In his book *The Critique of Power*, the author suggests that Horkheimer's essay advances two incompatible explanations of critical theory which, in turn, reveal the principle options for its development at that time.

First, Honneth contends that Horkheimer grounds critical theory in the immanent social processes of labour which point toward its rational and meaningful organization. As Horkheimer exhorts, "Human production also always has an element of planning to it. To the extent that the facts which the individual and his theory encounter are socially produced, there must be rationality in them, even if in a restricted sense."[100] For Honneth this approach indicates that Horkheimer

> treats the civilizing process of history as the process of a progressive perfection of the human domination of nature. The species is separated from the enjoyment of its power only as a result of its own lack of historical understanding. It is this interpretation of the contradiction between productive forces and productive relations that now governs Horkheimer's attempt to provide a foundation for a critical theory of society: The productive forces are seen as an emancipatory potential whose unplanned organization in capitalism is regarded only as the expression of human self-deception.[101]

Honneth insists that this presentation of critical theory is based in an implied philosophy of history, rather than a sound sociological argument. This philosophy assumes that historical progress toward social emancipation has indeed been achieved

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[99] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 242.

[100] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 200.

[101] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 9.

by the appropriation and use of nature.[102] All that is missing from this process for Horkheimer, is the critical recognition that traditional theory (which is partly responsible for this progress to date) has got "stuck," as it were, in a model of appropriation which is no longer emancipatory but oppressive. The heir to traditional theory, then, is critical theory because it appreciates the co-determination of social processes and theory construction which, if informed by critical thought, can impel the human species toward the next level of social evolution, that is, the rationally planned society.

Honneth is quick to point out, however, that this philosophy of history is a remnant of "species idealism"[103] which cannot concretely overcome the element of instrumental rationality identified within Horkheimer's critique of traditional theory. This tension in Horkheimer's argument is evident when he writes that the modern capitalist economy "finally hinders further development and drives humanity into a new barbarism."[104] But if this is indeed the case, then what concrete social feature witnesses the potential for transcending this new barbarism? What allows for the critique of existing society?[105] Since Horkheimer has revoked the revolutionary status of the proletariat, he must somehow locate within the actual social processes of capitalist society an emancipatory force. But this is exactly what Horkheimer fails to

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[102] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 7-8.

[103] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 8.

[104] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 227.

[105] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 10-12.

do, and he supplements this "sociological deficit,"[106] as Honneth terms it, with a

philosophy of history which foreordains the emancipation of humankind through the

appropriation of nature.

It is in view of this impasse that Horkheimer, as Honneth understands it, introduces

a second version of critical theory based on "critical activity":

> In this version, critical theory is not an immanent component of the
> developmental process of human labour but a theoretical expression of
> a prescientific "critical activity." This type of activity is not
> "pragmatic," like the activity of labour contained in the process of the
> self-preservation of society, but is critically related, in a distanced way,
> to the whole context of social life ...[107]

What Honneth seizes upon here is Horkheimer's attempt to shift the ground and

justification of critical theory toward "prescientific life experiences": that is, toward

human experiences that somehow resist the drive toward the complete

instrumentalization of social life and reason. For Horkheimer, such prescientific

experiences are embodied by those socially marginalized "men of the critical mind."

Honneth, for his part, claims this alteration evinces an acknowledgment of ongoing

social struggles between groups and classes (e.g., the poor, and the critical theorists

themselves) over the interpretation of human needs and goals. It is a move which

opens up a dialogical moment in Horkheimer's critical theory, but one that remains

unthematized until Habermas's theory of communicative action (a conclusion which

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[106] The title of the chapter on Horkheimer is, "Horkheimer's Original Idea: The Sociological Deficit of Critical Theory," 5-31.

[107] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 12.

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orientates Honneth's argument from the start).[108] But since Horkheimer is unable to abandon the Marxist paradigm of labour as the vehicle for emancipatory social action, the philosophy of history presumed throughout "Traditional and Critical Theory" eventually overwhelms the course of Horkheimer's theoretical production. However, it is the negative strain of this philosophy which wins the day: namely, the thrust toward the "new barbarism."

After 1937, Horkheimer forsakes the aspiration to enlighten traditional theory, and avers instead to the "dialectic of enlightenment." It is therefore to the Critique of Instrumental Reason that we now turn.

4 The Critique of Instrumental Reason (Third Phase)

Dialectic of Enlightenment, notes G. Frederick Hunter, "has come to be regarded, with some justification, as the major work of Frankfurt critical theory as a whole."[109] Whether one agrees with this assessment or not, it cannot be doubted (as our earlier discussion of Jay's work illustrates) that this text still occasions debate and controversy. While remaining a relatively obscure publication in 1947, it rose to prominence during the 1960s as a notable text of the New Left in both Europe and America, striking a definite chord with the counter-cultural *Zeitgeist*. And though the *élan vital* of the '60s has since vanished, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* lives on in a generation of students now

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[108] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, xiii-xviii; 13-17.

[109] G. Frederick Hunter, "Introduction" in *Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, ix.

tenured professors, giving contemporary witness to Theodor Adorno's oft quoted

phrase: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to

realize it was missed."[110]

As I have already intimated, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is an analysis of how the

"fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."[111] The implication is that the

harder humankind tries to augment enlightenment and the calm of "civilization," the

more mythic and "barbaric" it becomes. Or as Adorno put it in *Negative Dialectics*:

"No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading

from the slingshot to the megaton bomb."[112] Such sweeping portraits of universal

human *devolution* hints at one of the reasons why *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is often

described as a philosophy of despair.[113] Though some commentators, like Susan

Buck-Morss, hold the contrary opinion,[114] others contend that *Dialectic of*

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[110] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1973), 3.

[111] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3.

[112] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 320.

[113] See Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 83-87; Kellner, "Frankfurt School Revisited," 146-147; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 266; and Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 16-17.

[114] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977). The author insists that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* "was a *critical negation* of that rationalist, idealist, progressive view of history ... This critique was made *for the sake of the Enlightenment* and the rationality it promised." (61) Indeed, one reads in Horkheimer and Adorno's "Introduction" to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that the "critique of enlightenment is intended to prepare the way for a positive notion of enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination." (xvi) Also see pages ix-x; xiii; and xv.

Enlightenment completely inverts the more hopeful attitudes expressed in the early phases of critical theory.[115] What these different assessments compel, then, is a more focused consideration of this apparent shift.

In Dubiel's analysis, the author underscores the transformative effect exerted by events like Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, Stalinist Russia, the political integration of the proletariat, and the gloomy experience of exile itself[116] as underlying factors in the articulation of *Dialectic*.[117] Given these circumstances, it is not surprising -- to evoke Habermas's phrase again -- that it is the "blackest of books."[118] Without denying these historical pressures, the alterations to critical theory at this time permit a more limited explanation: namely, Adorno's joining the Institute in 1938. While Horkheimer's work certainly undergoes revision during this period,[119] *the same*

Gillian Rose makes the same claim on behalf of Adorno's independent work in, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 25-26.

[115] As Jay relates in *Dialectical Imagination*, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* constitutes "so radical and sweeping a critique of Western society and thought that anything that followed could be only in the nature of a further clarification." (256) Also see Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity*, 83; Dubiel, *Theory and Society*, 93; Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 37; and Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 242.

[116] Kellner, in *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, suggests that the critical theory of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* could be aptly labelled, "exile theory." (80-81)

[117] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 69-97.

[118] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 106.

[119] Cf. Horkheimer's essays published in 1941, "The End of Reason" in Arato and Gebhardt eds., *Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 26-48; and "Art and Mass Culture," *Critical Theory*, 273-290.

cannot be said of Adorno's Analysts concur that from his 1931 essay "The Actuality of Philosophy,"[120] to the publication of *Negative Dialectics* in 1966, Adorno's manuscripts maintain a remarkable methodological and thematic consistency.[121] It has also been noted time and again that Adorno's input at the Institute had a commanding effect on both the direction and content of the critical theory.[122] Thus, the modifications to critical theory enacted by *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be partially explained as Adorno's distinct contribution. It is for this reason that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be considered an exercise in *negative dialectics*, and it is this line of interpretation that my examination intends to follow.[123]

Enlightenment, for Horkheimer and Adorno, consists in the reconciliation of the human mind with the mundane world in all its plainness -- a clear and transparent world. Yet the result of this drive for rational clarity and identity has, according to the authors, culminated in the total authority of instrumental rationality. Here "the human

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[120] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos*, no. 31 (Spring 1977): 120-133.

[121] On this issue see Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, xii; 21; 52; 69 ff; Jay, *Adorno*, 57; Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 36.

[122] This is intimated by Horkheimer himself in the preface to his book of lectures (delivered in 1944 at Columbia University), *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury, 1947), vii. On this point see Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 21; 101-102; Buck-Morss, *Origins of Negative Dialectics*, 59-60; 66-67; Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 36-37. For Horkheimer's influence on Adorno, see Jay, *Adorno*, 35.

[123] As Buck-Morss asserts in, *Origins of Negative Dialectics*; "Dialektik der Aufklärung was in a sense a preliminary study for Negative Dialektik, as a comprehensive analysis of the history of the Enlightenment and how it had run amok; one had to know what had gone wrong with reason in order to redeem it." (237, note no. 39)

mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles ..."[124] The ultimate result is a violent, though rational domination of nature and the self: "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. That is the only aim."[125]

However, this "aim"; this *Sapere Aude!* without limitations, unwittingly retains the compulsion of the mythic mind to control, manipulate, and dominate the unknown contingencies of the lived life. It does so because enlightenment and myth share the same primordial point of origin: namely, the fear of nature as the non-identical "other" which threatens self-preservation. "Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course of demythologization, of enlightenment ... Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical. ... Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear."[126] Thus, enlightenment is myth and myth is enlightenment. As Horkheimer and Adorno explain further:

> The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, that the Enlightenment upholds against the mythic imagination, is the principle of myth itself. That arid wisdom that holds there is nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played, and all the great thoughts have already been thought, and

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[124] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4. The parallel here to Michel Foucault's thesis concerning power/knowledge is obvious. See especially *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

[125] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4.

[126] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 16.

because all possible discoveries can be construed in advance and all men are decided on adaptation as the means to self-preservation -- that dry sagacity merely reproduces that fantastic wisdom which it supposedly rejects: the sanction of fate that in retribution relentlessly remakes what has already been.[127]

How do the critical theorists respond to this vicious circle? *Negative Dialectics*.

Negative dialectics denotes an unrelenting process of determinate negation which, as Horkheimer and Adorno expound, "rejects the defective ideas of the absolute, ..."[128] Determinate negation entails a subversion of the intellectual equation of subject and object; concept and object; reason and reality, etc. The result is an "atonal philosophy,"[129] or as Adorno envisions it, a "logic of disintegration."[130] Buck-Morss explains;

> As with Hegel, contradiction, with negation as its logical principle, gave this thinking its dynamic structure and provided the motor force for critical reflection. But whereas Hegel saw negativity, the movement of the concept toward its "other," as merely a moment in a larger process toward systematic completion, Adorno saw no possibility of an argument coming to rest in unequivocal synthesis. He made negativity the hallmark of his dialectical thought precisely because he believed Hegel

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[127] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 12.

[128] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 24.

[129] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 71. This term alludes to the composer Arnold Schönberg's overturning of classical tonality, where "'each chord has its own fundamental, independent of context. ... The speed at which one key passes to another and the complexity of each chord do not leave the ear enough time to take in different keys and their relationships. Since there is nc continuity in establishing a given key, apparent atonality results.'" (Paul Collaer, *A History of Modern Music* [New York: The World Publishing Company, 1961], 68-69; cited in Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 14.) In Vienna, Adorno studied musical composition under Schönberg's follower, Alban Berg. It should also be remembered that at least half of Adorno's voluminous writings were devoted to music, art, and literature.

[130] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 144-146.

to have been wrong: reason and reality did not coincide.[131]

Negative dialectics stands against the Hegelian dialectical synthesis, that is, against the Subject as the unity of the universal and the particular (i.e., against the union of union and non-union).[132] Horkheimer and Adorno decode it by stressing that "the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: the ideal is the system from which all and everything follows."[133] However, the anti-systematic[134] force of negative dialectics resists this type of rational identity thinking. Identity thinking presupposes that the concept is identical, or adequate to the object, admitting neither *aporia* nor contradiction.[135] In its most rudimentary form, it can be expressed as A = A: what is other is not *essentially* different but *essentially* the same.[136] For Hegel, says Adorno, "the inclusion of all nonidentical and objective things in a subjectivity expanded and exalted into an absolute spirit was to effect the reconcilement."[137] But there can be no such reconciliation for negative dialectics,[138]

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[131] Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 63.

[132] See Rose, *Melancholy Science*, 55. Also see Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983), 121-168.

[133] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 7.

[134] Rose, *Melancholy Science*, 12.

[135] See Rose, *Melancholy Science*, 46.

[136] As Horkheimer and Adorno put it in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; "... for enlightenment the process is decided from the start." (24)

[137] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 141-142.

[138] Jay, *Adorno*, 15.

only the tireless refutation of the pretence to sublimation. To quote Buck-Morss again;

> Adorno affirmed neither concept nor reality in itself. Instead, he posited each in critical reference to its other. Put another way, each was affirmed only in its *nonidentity* to the other. Indeed, the "principle of nonidentity," ... became the foundation of his philosophy, that is, of "negative dialectics."[139]

What is the result of this mutual negation? It seems to me that the task of negative dialectics is to affirm neither "this" nor "that." For example, Adorno proclaims that "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage." Yet he continues on to say that "the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be."[140] Primacy here is given to the object,[141] that is, to Auschwitz. While the Idealist asserts the creative Subject remains unscathed by the Holocaust (because it is this Subject who bestows meaning upon meaningless objects),[142] Adorno and Horkheimer insist this is impossible. The objectivity of Auschwitz cannot be sublimated: "The self-satisfaction of knowing in advance and the transfiguration of negativity into redemption are untrue forms of resistance against deception."[143] Nevertheless, to relinquish the promise of culture in light of Auschwitz, is to surrender its concept to Auschwitz. In this way, barbarism becomes the promise itself.

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[139] Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 63.

[140] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 367.

[141] See Theodor W. Adorno, "Subject and Object" (1969) in *Essential Frankfurt Reader*, 497-511. Also see Jay, *Adorno*, 62-63; and Rose, *Melancholy Science*, 11-12.

[142] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 10.

[143] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 24.

How, then, does one escape this predicament? You don't: human thought, at least

in the 20th Century West, can find no middle ground, no harmonious moment which

can deliver it beyond the pale of radical self-contradiction. The *critical truth* of the

matter dwells somewhere in the hiatus of mutual negation:[144] for if negative dialectics

confirms neither "this" nor "that," then it gestures toward the need for something

entirely new. Thus for Adorno and Horkheimer, negative dialectics strives "'to see the

new in the old instead of simply the old in the new.'"[145]

The only glimmer of true enlightenment that Horkheimer and Adorno allow is the

modern work of art. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* art becomes the sole vehicle of

human emancipation. "With the progress of enlightenment," they write, "only authentic

works of art were able to avoid the mere imitation of that which already is."[146] As

such, art sustains an autonomous notion of an enchanted world; of a subject genuinely

free from the drive to brandish power and influence over the nonidentical. And as "an

expression of totality art lays claim to the dignity of the absolute. This sometimes

causes philosophy to allow it the precedence to conceptual knowledge."[147]

This development, usually cited as the "aestheticization of critical theory,"[148]

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[144] Jay, *Adorno*, 61-62.

[145] Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Frankfurt: 1971), 47; cited in Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 69. The same statement appears in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 27.

[146] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 18.

[147] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 19.

[148] See Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, 77-109.

encourages one to ponder whether the "task of cognition ... is the determinate negation of *each* im-mediacy."[149] Is there no truth to affirm except that of negation? What is not clear to me at least, is how either the concept or the object gain their substratum of integrity or reality. That is, how is it possible for the object to negate the concept, or the concept to negate the object (assuming of course that such negation is the negation of something identifiable or real), if concept and object appear from the start to be inadequate to themselves and each other? Without presupposing at least a modicum of rational identity thinking, how is it possible for contradictory thought to pierce through a contradictory reality, even if it is only to draw attention to the contradictions?

According to Paul Piccone, Adorno's version of critical theory ends up losing "precisely that nonidentity which it sought to preserve. Instead, it embalmed and reified it within an increasingly rigid and objectivistic reproduction of the given that has already been frozen by the all-pervasiveness of the concept."[150] Similarly, Helmut Dubiel suggests that negative dialectics represents the "self-hypothesization" of a theory that "can now be only self-referential."[151] These are rather serious charges given that the main goal of Adorno's negative dialects, according to Buck-Morss, is the

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[149] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 27.

[150] Paul Piccone, "General Introduction" in Arato and Gebhardt eds., *Essential Frankfurt Reader*, xvii.

[151] Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 86.

"'explosion of reification.'"[152] Yet she confirms these problems to a certain extent when she writes that "If Horkheimer's thinking described a dialectical pattern, Adorno's thinking *was* that pattern."[153] Gillian Rose verifies this as well; "The question of communicating his ideas becomes the question of what the reader should experience when confronting the text ..."[154] And what should the reader experience? That "Truth is objective, not plausible."[155]

At the same time, the comments by Buck-Morss and Rose presage another interpretation. Namely, Adorno didn't aspire to create discursive treaties. Rather, he sought to create works of critical aesthetic reason in motion. Reading Adorno's books, essays, and aphorisms is to be an experience of an "authentic work of art which avoids the mere imitation of that which already is." However, if critical aesthetic reason genuinely exists; and if it seems constructive to argue with Adorno and Horkheimer that philosophy should "allow it the precedence to conceptual knowledge"; it nevertheless remains highly debatable whether this aesthetic knowledge be modelled on Adorno's negative dialectics.

5 *Excursus: Contra-Honneth*

If it seems problematic at this stage to follow through on Adorno's aestheticization

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[152] Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 36. The author cites Adorno's "The Actuality of Philosophy."

[153] Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 185.

[154] Rose, *Melancholy Science*, 12.

[155] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 41.

of critical theory, then what are the options? Can one only "progress" toward Habermas's theory of communicative action and beyond?

This issue brings us back to a consideration of Honneth's critique of Horkheimer's "Traditional and Critical Theory." Recall that Honneth reproves Horkheimer -- not for relinquishing a theoretical reliance on the proletariat or labour -- but for failing to thoroughly embed the notion of "critical activity" in prescientific experience where Honneth believes it belongs. This recommendation assumes the value of Habermas's notion of "reconstructive science." It is by examining Habermas's ideas on this issue that we can redress Honneth's critique for the purposes of discovering an alternative interpretation.

According to Habermas, reconstructive science entails the rational explication of the rules and structures which ultimately shape the intuitive knowledge of "species" competencies. "Reconstructive proposals are directed to domains of pretheoretical *knowledge*, that is, not to any implicit opinion, but to a proven intuitive foreknowledge."[156] *Habermas is therefore affirming the rational potential of a human domain usually classified as below the level of formal analysis.* However in this case, says Habermas, formal analysis must be understood in a special way: "The *tolerant* sense in which I understand formal analysis can best be characterized through the methodological attitude we adopt in the rational reconstruction of concepts, criteria, rules, and schemata. Thus we speak of the explication of meanings and concepts, of

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[155] Jürgen Habermas, "What is Universal Pragmatics?" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 14.

the analysis of presuppositions and rules."[157]

To clarify this point further, Haberma.. contrasts the fundamental experiences which differentiate the reconstructive sciences from the empirical-analytic or nomological sciences. The latter, he suggests, are grounded on sensory experience oriented by the objective observation of facts and events. As such, the observer is essentially disengaged and alone. In the former case, reconstructive sciences are established in communicative experiences which strive to achieve an interpretive understanding. This involves actual participation in an intersubjective process of symbolically mediated action. The element of this contrast which Habermas underscores is "the difference in level between perceptible reality and the understandable meaning of a symbolic formation. Sensory experience is related to sectors of reality immediately, communicative experience only mediately ..."[158]

What is important to grasp here is that the mediated character of the communicative experience inevitably leads to the need for a reconstructive approach. This need arises when an obscure meaning content of a communicative experience (whether it be of a book, a work of art, a gesture or saying, etc.) cannot be clarified through a straightforward semantic analysis.[159] When this occurs, the interpreter

> exchanges the attitude of understanding content ... for an attitude in which he directs himself to the generative structures of the expressions themselves. The interpreter then attempts to explicate the meaning of the symbolic formation in terms of the rules according to which the

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[157] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 8. Italics mine.

[158] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 9.

[159] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 11-12.

author must have brought it forth. .... [Here] the interpreter tries not only to *apply* his intuitive knowledge but to *reconstruct* it. He then turns away from the surface structure of the symbolic formation ... He attempts instead to peer ... into the symbolic formation to discover the rules according to which the latter was produced ... The object of understanding is no longer the content of a symbolic expression or what specific authors meant by it in specific situations but the intuitive rule consciousness that a competent speaker has of his own language.[160]

What Habermas is recounting is the shift from communicative "*know-how*" to "*know-that*," or the movement from pretheoretical knowledge to the explicit level of theoretical knowledge.[161] It is the task of the reconstructive sciences to make implicit knowledge explicit by uncovering the "rule consciousness" which governs the reproduction of the competence in question. It therefore leads, says Habermas, "to the operation of conceptual explication."[162] This insight, of course, is absolutely crucial. It asserts that *theoretical production* concerned with the generation of human meaning in an interactive, symbolically mediated social context, is structurally rooted in those very same intersubjective processes of "everyday knowledge."[163]

To resume the analysis of Honneth's critique, it is Horkheimer's failure to root his critical theory in the intersubjective processes of "everyday knowledge" which forms

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[160] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 12.

[161] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 12-13.

[162] Habermas "Universal Pragmatics," 13.

[163] Habermas, "Universal Pragmatics," 16. For expositions of Habermas's consideration of reconstructive science, see Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 276-279; Stephen K. White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 129-131; David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 19-23.

the basis of his objection. As he puts it;

> Horkheimer did not further clarify the specific structure of social practice characterized by the phrase "critical activity." To be sure, the idea of a dialogically mediated application of critical social theory opens up the insight into the interpretive dependence upon social experiences. But Horkheimer does not make use of this for a conceptually broadened demarcation of the category of "critical activity" in contrast to the category of "social labour." ... at the level of his basic assumptions concerning the philosophy of history, Horkheimer omitted completely the dimension of a critique of everyday life in which theory is known to be located since that theory participates in the cooperative process of an interpretation of the present in the interest of overcoming suffered injustice.[164]

Honneth suggests, then, that Horkheimer glimpses the communicative or dialogical experience that lies behind critical activity. This is insinuated when Horkheimer declares that "the self-knowledge of present-day man is not a mathematical knowledge of nature which claims to be the eternal Logos, but a critical theory of society as it is, a theory dominated by a concern for reasonable conditions of life."[165] Yet in spite of this intuition, Horkheimer's philosophy of history, with its consecration of labour as the overriding form of emancipatory social action, eclipses the reconstructive task demanded by the "everyday" self-knowledge which preserves the thought of critical activity. Rather than cultivating the transition from this critical "know-how" to a critical "know-that," Horkheimer's critical theory suffers the fate of the dialectic of enlightenment: "The consequence of Horkheimer's argument is that theory can only yield a technical knowledge that ... does not permit a critique of ... [the] present mode

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[164] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 17.

[165] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 198-199.

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of [social] organization. The scientific perfection of the domination of nature does not by itself lead to the 'rational decision' that ... breaks through human self-deception."[166]

Thus, Honneth's argument against Horkheimer is, in part, a circuitous way to sanction Habermas's theoretical response to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Honneth confesses as much in his "Afterword to the Second German Edition,"[167] noting that Habermas's action theory is presupposed from the start. In this manner his investigation proceeds "in the same way that every Hegelian history of theory attempts to succeed: by showing at the end of my critical reconstruction that I have argumentatively justified the theoretical premises I had presupposed from the outset."[168] Honneth's admission, however, is urged by criticisms against his deliberations on Adorno, not Horkheimer.[169] Indeed, Horkheimer's contribution is not even an issue. Nevertheless, his work is obviously of some importance since Honneth endeavours to root his concern for social struggle within Horkheimer's programmatic essay.

Of course in the process, Honneth is sure to make clear that one can only move beyond "Traditional and Critical Theory," certainly not behind it. He argues that

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[166] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 12.

[167] This appears right after the "Author's Preface" in the English translation of *Critique of Power*, xiii-xxxii.

[168] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, xv.

[169] See Honneth's discussion and response to these criticisms, *Critique of Power*, xviii-xxii.

Horkheimer's early essays accentuate the historical development of the forces of production as the sure road to social emancipation.[170] In support of this claim, Honneth quotes the 1932 essay, "History and Psychology": "If, however, history is divided according to the various modes in which the life process of human society takes place, then economic rather than psychological categories are historically fundamental."[171] The point that Honneth wants to drive home is that Horkheimer's stress on "economic categories" advances an unabashed affirmation of the domination of nature as the only model of social action.[172] Thus, the early essays cannot be accredited for generating the later concern for critical activity, but rather, begets its Achilles heel: the dialectic of enlightenment itself.

Honneth's characterization of Horkheimer's Materialist essays is certainly accurate, but only up to a point. Hence in "History and Psychology" we also read that "The replacement of inferior modes of production by ones more differentiated and better adapted to the needs of the people as a whole represents, ... the skeleton of history that interests us. *That insight is the summary expression for human activity.*"[173] Such passages litter the young Horkheimer's work. Similarly, one already finds intimations

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[170] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 19-20.

[171] Max Horkheimer, "History and Psychology" in *Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, 118. Unfortunately, I cannot delve into the role and status of psychology within the critical theory without deviating from my main argument. For further insight into this dimension of the Frankfurt School see Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 86-112; and Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, 111-147.

[172] Honneth, *Critique of Power*, 19-20; 28-29.

[173] Horkheimer, "History and Psychology," 119. Italics mine.

of the dialectic of enlightenment in this literature. In the article "On the Problem of Truth" (1935), for example, Horkheimer states that the "social totality to which the liberal, democratic, and progressive tendencies of the dominant culture belong[s] also contain[s] from its beginning their opposite compulsion, chance and the rule of primal nature. By the systems own dynamic, this eventually threatens to wipe out of all its positive characteristics."[174] These are common themes in the Materialist phase of the critical theory, and Honneth's examination charts their dubious repercussions.

Nevertheless, Honneth is, perhaps, a touch eager to authenticate his own agenda and tends to depict the development of critical theory a little too neatly.[175] While this bias is hardly cause to refute the central thrust of his criticisms, Honneth's assessment of early critical theory is still one-sided and misleading.

First, it is one-sided because Honneth fails to adequately portray the plasticity and nuance which attends Horkheimer's species of dialectical historical materialism. Without denying the theoretical dilemmas precipitated by the narrow focus on social labour, it is integral to note that for Horkheimer; i) materialism is not an ersatz metaphysics, but decidedly postmetaphysical; ii) in contrast to rational and ethical formalism, materialism is concerned with the impact of the total historical process upon subject-object relations and their conceptualization in and through time; iii) finally, and

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[174] Max Horkheimer, "On the Problem of Truth" in *Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, 178. Also in the same volume see, "Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History" (1930), 316; "Materialism and Morality" (1933), 38.

[175] James Schmit make the same critique of Honneth in his essay, "Offensive Critical Theory?: Reply to Honneth," *Telos*, no. 39 (Spring 1979): 62-70.

perhaps most importantly, materialism asserts that current social problems and contradictions can only be corrected through social change, not theoretical deliberation. As Horkheimer insists, "contemporary materialism does not build up supratemporal concepts and abstract from the differences introduced by time. Even the possibility of establishing human traits by considering man in his past history does not lead to a hypostatization of these traits as suprahistorical factors. Society, *on which man's existence partially depends*, is a totality which cannot be compared to anything else and is continuously restructuring itself."[176]

Second, Honneth's evaluation is misleading because Horkheimer's methodology yields a tension and variance analogous to Honneth's interpretation of "critical activity." In this case, Horkheimer seeks to specify the qualities of truth and morality appropriate to a dialectical historical materialism that intends social transformation. What this discussion virtually signifies is that dialectical truth, as an open-ended dialectic, is empowered by an unrestricted human love for those suffering under the constraints of a capitalist economy and society. However, whereas the Horkheimer of "Traditional and Critical Theory" fails to extensively probe the link between critical theory and social struggle as an alternative mode of social action, the young Horkheimer openly insists that the prescientific status of moral sensibility remain theoretically mute. To put it in reconstructive terms, Horkheimer argues that any attempt to translate the "know-how" of human love into the "know-that" of theory, undermines both dialectical

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[176] Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics" (1933) in *Critical Theory*, 25. Italics mine.

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materialism and prophetic qualities of human love. By highlighting the essays "On the Problem of Truth" and "Materialism and Morality" (1933), I intend to demonstrate that Horkheimer's refusal to explain rationally the relationship between unrestricted human love and the open-ended dialectic is not entirely rooted in his historical materialism, but in fact contradicts its open-ended dialectic. As a result, Horkheimer cannot justify the very issue and concern which later proves to be problematic for the development of critical theory: the rational justification for a compassionate society.

6 Materialism (First Phase)

Both "On the Problem of Truth," and "Materialism and Morality" begin, in typical Horkheimerian fashion, with a critique of the Cartesian dualism which substantiates Kantian philosophy. The static, subject-object split ensconced by the *cogito ergo sum* results in a divided explanation of both truth and morality respectively.

In the former case, an idealist explication of conceptual, *apriori* truth stands in immediate contrast to an empirical scepticism which proclaims the uncertainty of all sensory experience of the objective world. "Analysis carried through to the end and sceptical distrust of all theory on the one hand and readiness to believe naively in detached fixed principles on the other," writes Horkheimer, "these are characteristics of the bourgeois mind. It appears in its most highly developed form in Kant's philosophy."[177]

Similarly, idealist moral philosophers strive to ordain a specific way of acting as

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[177] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 180.

permanently correct. "They therefore make a claim to unconditional validity."[178] Yet

this certainty tends to an ahistorical, ethical formalism which "does not take sides," and

"prescribes no position," while insisting that "the capacity for moral value judgments

is ... an essential characteristic of human nature ... equal [in] rank with ... theoretical

knowledge."[179] This contrast, again, shows up conspicuously in Kant's moral

philosophy. Here it takes the form of the Categorical Imperative: "Act only according

to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal

law."[180] In other words, one's proper moral duty is discernable only to the extent

that one renounce acting out of personal concern. If this concern were the norm for

ethical decision making, then the chaos of mere decisionism would rule the day. Thus

for Kant, as Horkheimer put it, "Individuals are supposed to liberate themselves from

their interests."[181]

In effect, Horkheimer is outlining what Foucault called "the blackmail of

Enlightenment:"[182] that is, the extremity of either/or. In regard to truth, either one

affirms it as Absolute and certain, or as a meaningless relativism. Likewise with

morality: either one chooses Unconditional moral duty, or mere personal decisionism.

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[178] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 16.

[179] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 17.

[180] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Lewis White Beck (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1959), 39.

[181] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 18.

[182] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in Paul Rabinow ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 42.

According to Horkheimer, the deck has been stacked to favour the Absolute and the Unconditional. It has so because the Idealist position is viewed as the eminent field of rational analysis, investigation, and public argumentation; while the determinate and the personal are dismissed as irrational, private, emotional, and -- to recall our earlier discussion of reconstructive science -- below the level of formal analysis. Thus, rational philosophical analysis absents its "intellectual energies from general cultural and social questions, ... placing ... actual historical interests and struggles in a parenthesis," [183] while for the moral agent "actual reasons for action remain obscure. The agent knows neither why the universal should stand above the particular, nor how to correctly reconcile the two in any given instance. The imperative, ... leaves the individual with a certain uneasiness and unclarity."[184] What both of these statements convey is the overall detriment to social action effected by the rational neglect of the particular and the individual. This is to say, that the determinate and personal dimensions vital to the creation of a meaningful society has suffered from a dearth of rational meditation.

Horkheimer explains this predicament in relation to the structure and character of the capitalist society. Both the uncertainty of conditional knowledge and the sense of moral disorientation serve to establish a perception of helplessness and vulnerability. The disquieting rumination that "Each is left to care for himself as best as he can"[185]

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[183] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 181.

[184] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 18-19.

[185] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 19.

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functions to uphold the principle of self-preservation and economic competition. At the same time, the anxiety of the determinate and the individual is contained by the ahistorical, disinterested, rigid character of Absolute Truth and Unconditional morality, fostering a reconciliation with the status-quo as metaphysics, fact, or providence. "This seemingly necessary dependence, which increasingly bears fruit in disruptive tensions and crises, general misery and decline, becomes for the greatest part of humanity an incomprehensible fate."[186]

It is at this juncture in his deliberations where Horkheimer asks; is there only this either/or? Must we capitulate to the blackmail of the Enlightenment? In response to this question, Horkheimer identifies two points of resistance within the Idealist camp: Hegel's notion of dialectical negation; and Kant's reflections on the irrationality of "natural" interest.

First, Hegel's notion of determinate negation accords the conditional and the finite a degree of rational significance. As the dialectic of the Absolute Spirit unfolds within history, the negation of its determinate embodiments does not entirely cancel its particularity, but sublimates it within the next higher stage of the dialectical progression. As Horkheimer elaborates:

> ... the negation has not simply rejected the original insight but has deepened and defined it. Hegel does not end up with the bare assurance that all definite knowledge is transitory and unreal, that what we know is appearance in contrast to an unknowable thing in itself [i.e, Kant] or an intuitively perceived essence [i.e., *Lebensphilosophie*]. If for Hegel the true is the whole, the whole is not something distinct from the parts

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[186] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 182. Also see "Materialism and Morality," 20; and "Materialism and Metaphysics," 12-13.

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in its determinate structure, but is the entire pattern of thought which at a given time embraces in itself all limited conceptions in the consciousness of their limitations.[187]

Nonetheless, Hegel's dialectical negation succumbs to the Idealist and dogmatic cast of his philosophical system. The very ability to apprehend the totality of determinate relations within consciousness itself necessarily implies the relativity of the particular to an Absolute which brooks no compromise or contradiction. Since every finite incongruity attains its intellectual reconciliation in the infinity of the Absolute, that is in Hegel's system, all that genuinely matters here is the Absolute.[188] Historical struggles and deviations do not represent the conflicts of actual human beings interacting in society and history, but the play of the Absolute in time. "According to Hegel himself, the doctrine of an absolute self-contained truth has the purpose of harmonizing in a higher spiritual region the 'opposition and contradictions' not resolved in the world. ... He opposes this peace and satisfaction ... to the active attitude which tries to overcome the incompleteness of existing conditions 'in some other way.'"[189] Thus, for Horkheimer, Hegel's philosophy ultimately defends the continued existence of the status-quo.

The second point of resistance which Horkheimer features is Kant's distinction between a true and genuine rational morality, "the moral sentiment," and "natural" human interest as a potentially critical distinction. While Horkheimer ultimately

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[187] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 184.

[188] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 185-186. Also see, "Bourgeois Philosophy of History," 362-363.

[189] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 186.

considers this division a distortion of actual human action, Kant's distinction "contains the truth that the mode of action informed by the natural law of economic advantage is not necessarily the rational mode."[190] In other words, Kant's demand that individuals should liberate themselves from irrational personal interests subverts the reigning utilitarian identification between these interests and material gain or self-satisfaction. However, there is more to Horkheimer's claim than that. In "History and Psychology," for instance, he contends that "Modern psychology has long since identified the error of asserting that the human instinct for self-preservation is 'natural,' .. ' man beings may, ... experience a sort of happiness in the solidarity with like-minded souls that makes it possible for them to assume the risk of suffering and death. ... Nonegoistic instinctual impulses have existed during all periods, and are not factually denied by any serious psychology ..."[191] At least as far as Horkheimer is concerned, then, Kant's insight into the rationality of the moral sentiment finds its proper articulation in the science of psychology.

However, as it is, Kant's Categorical Imperative, like Hegel's Absolute, stands opposed to real, concrete social change. Even if everyone acted in direct compliance to the Categorical Imperative, says Horkheimer, "this would prevent neither the chaos nor the misery engendered thereby. The formal directive to be true to oneself and to have a will without contradiction fails to provide a guiding rule that could remove the basis of moral uneasiness. Is there no misdeed that has been committed at one time or

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[190] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 21.

[191] Horkheimer, "History and Psychology," 123.

other in all good conscience?"[192]

In opposition to the Idealist defects of Hegel's dialectic and Kant's Categorical Imperative, Horkheimer, of course, refers to the virtues of dialectical historical materialism. "In materialist theory," he observes, "the main point is not to maintain concepts unchanged but to improve the lot of humanity."[193] It is this goal which shapes the conceptual horizon of Horkheimer's early critical theory. *Its cognitive pillar and motor force is the idea of nonidentity*: "Materialism, ... maintains the irreducible tension between concept and object and thus has a critical weapon of defense against the infinity of the mind."[194] Nonidentity for Horkheimer is a form of ideology critique which demands that the resolution to social contradiction be carried out via actual social transformation, rather than mere theory. Because "It understands itself as the theoretical aspect of efforts to abolish existing misery,"[195] dialectical historical materialism is not an end in itself. Unlike Hegel, it does not hypostasize its theory as a complete system; and unlike Kant, it does not view its insights, methods, or recommendations as unconditionally true for eternity. "When dialectic is freed of its connection with the exaggerated concept of isolated thought, ... the theory defined by it necessarily loses the metaphysical character of final validity, ... and becomes an

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[192] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 23-24.

[193] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 37.

[194] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics," 28.

[195] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 32.

element, ... intertwined in the fate of human beings."[196]

However, with this emphasis on the nonidentity of dialectical historical materialism, what justifies its critical operation? On what basis does it advance its evaluations, assessments and judgments? Is it not merely another exercise in negative dialectics? Like Horkheimer's critique of Hegel profiled above, negative dialectics also annuls the pretence to dialectical synthesis. It comparably insists as well that theoretical consonance does not resolve social dissonance. If negative dialectics designates a process of unending determinate negation which "rejects the defective ideas of the absolute,"[197] what factor distinguishes Horkheimer's appeal to nonidentity from Adorno's "logic of disintegration"[198]?

Horkheimer's notion of dialectical historical materialism does not intend to move from the "blackmail of Enlightenment" to the "blackmail of the counter-Enlightenment." To switch from either/or to neither/nor, for Horkheimer, does not appear to augment that "theoretical aspect of efforts to abolish existing misery." As he describes it, "the style of presentation should be characterized more by 'as well as' than by 'either-or.'"[199] It is for this reason that Horkheimer explains the dialectic as an *open-ended dialectic*. In principle, the open-ended dialectic is characterized by the fact that history

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[196] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 191.

[197] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 24.

[198] See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 144-146.

[199] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 204. Also see Max Horkheimer, "The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy" in *Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, 236.

is not yet finished. It takes its stand upon an ever shifting finite, conditional

knowledge, located within ongoing historical events and human struggles which can and

do transfigure (sometimes positively, sometimes negatively) subject-object relations,

theoretical methods, philosophical concepts, basic human insights, social and political

relations. Nevertheless, Horkheimer asserts;

> But by ceasing to be a closed system, *dialectic does not lose the stamp of truth*. In fact, the disclosure of conditional and one-sided aspects of others' thought and of one's own constitutes an important part of the intellectual process. Hegel and his materialist followers were correct in always stressing that this critical and relativizing characteristic is a necessary part of cognition. *But being certain of one's own conviction and acting upon it do not require the assertion that concept and object are now one, and thought can rest*. To the degree that the knowledge gained from the perception and inference, methodical enquiry and historical events, daily work and political struggle, meets the test of the available means of cognition, it is truth. .... *Only when measured against an extraterrestrial, unchanging existence does human truth appear to be of an inferior quality*.[200]

Not only is Horkheimer unwilling to dismiss finite knowledge as an

inconsequential relativism, he also insists that it is equally "absolute." That is, the

time-bound, finite nature of all truth does not mean that it necessarily fails to be true,

absolutely, *for now*. The discovery and cultivation of truth, Horkheimer believes,

requires that people take this truth seriously, pressing it against the strictures of reality

in order to develop and improve it. Horkheimer writes that "The process of cognition

includes real historical will and action just as much as it does learning from experience

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[200] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 191-192. Italics mine. Also see, "Bourgeois Philosophy of History," 362; "Rationalism Debate," 219; 238-240.

and intellectual comprehension. The latter cannot progress without the former."[201] In other words, the praxis of truth and the truth of praxis are inextricable bound.[202]

At this point in our exposition of the open-ended dialectic, there arises a certain difficulty with Horkheimer's formulation. How do we discriminate between the multiplicity of finite truths to be acted upon as absolute? Horkheimer's stipulation that the truth is disclosed by the "available means of cognition" doesn't really move beyond the "uneasiness" of which he accused Kant. Or to rephrase Horkheimer's charge; "Is there no untruth that has been accepted at one time or other after satisfying the available means of cognition?" How, then, does the open-ended dialectic justify its procedure and results as true? On what basis does it provide a critique of existing society? As Martin Jay frames this dilemma; "Dialectics was superb at attacking other systems' pretensions to truth, but when it came to articulating the ground of its own assumptions and values, it fared less well. ... Critical Theory had a basically insubstantial concept of reason and truth, rooted in social conditions and yet outside them, connected with praxis yet keeping its distance from it."[203]

In many ways, this problematic points back again to Axel Honneth's critique of "Traditional and Critical Theory." Now we can say that Horkheimer's weak conception of reason compels him to presume a forceful philosophy of history which anticipates the emancipation of humankind through social labour. However, given the

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[201] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 193.

[202] Horkheimer. "Problem of Truth," 200.

[203] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 63. Also see Kołakowski, *The Breakdown*, 355-356.

contradictions that arise with this narrow perception of human interaction, critical theory is left hanging without an identifiable, concrete social position. For this reason Honneth argues that the development of critical theory depends on its grounding in the pretheoretical experience of social struggle.

Within this first phase of critical theory, Horkheimer appears to make the same "mistake" when he writes that "In the future society toward which moral consciousness aspires, the life of the whole and of the individuals alike is produced not merely as a natural effect but as the consequence of rational designs that take account of the happiness of individuals in equal measure."[204] However, in partial contrast to the role fulfilled by a philosophy of history centred on labour, his deliberation on the "happy society" makes clear that it functions as a vision of the social Good. The author contends that "What people do is at least as important as how they do it .... It is not consciousness of duty, ... *as such*, but consciousness of duty, ... *for what* which will decide the fate of humanity in the face of the prevailing order."[205] This refinement of Horkheimer's stance implies that the capacity to discriminate between the validity and value of competing finite truths without presupposing an Absolute Idealism or rigid theory of rational identity, is associated with a vision of the Good to which people can aspire.

However, is Horkheimer's vision of the social Good indicative of a simple

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[204] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 29.

[205] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 24.

"utopian" approach?[206] As Herbert Schnädelbach has noted, "whoever believes that it suffices to anticipate utopia in order to be ethical reduces ethics to the philosophy of history."[207] If this reduction proves to be accurate for the young Horkheimer, then Honneth's critique is irrevocable. In order to explore this issue further, then, it is necessary to enquire whether the theoretical tie between the open-ended dialectic and a vision of the Good uncovers a form of social action based in a pretheoretical, communicative experience. Or to state the matter in terms of reconstructive science; does the correlation between "know-that," and what we can perhaps call *"know-what"* (i.e., a vision of the Good), gesture toward a more penetrating justification of critical theory as "know-how"?[208]

To begin this reconstruction of the open-ended dialect, we return to Horkheimer's consideration of Kant's moral philosophy. While Horkheimer deplores the disinterested

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[206] For comments on the nature and role of utopia within the first phase of Critical Theory see Dubiel, *Theory and Politics*, 37-38.

[207] Herbert Schnädelbach, "Max Horkheimer and the Moral Philosophy of German Idealism," *Telos*, no. 66 (Winter 1985-86): 92.

[208] An obvious first response to this issue is to identify the proletariat as the pretheoretical locus for the link between the open-ended dialectic and Horkheimer's vision of the Good. On the one hand, Horkheimer's confidence in the revolutionary status of the proletariat is much stronger in the first phase of Critical Theory than in the ensuing stages. As Horkheimer notes in his 1968 "Preface" to *Critical Theory*; "The idea that in the early thirties the united workers, along with the intelligentsia, could bar the way to National Socialism was not mere wishful thinking." (v) On the other hand, Dubiel reports in *Theory and Politics* that the Institute's theoretical relationship to the proletariat had been tenuous from the start.(101) Yet whatever the case may be, this debatable point should not deter an examination of Horkheimer's early contributions from a contemporary vantage point. It is in this sense that I take up the task of isolating a potential, if problematic connection between the open-ended dialectic and Horkheimer's comments on moral sentiment as a link between theoretical and pretheoretical knowledge respectively.

quality of the Categorical Imperative, he nevertheless lauds the idea that genuine *rational* morality negates, or is *nonidentical* to, the natural morality of pure self-interest. It is this negation which hints at its rational intention. However, rather than maintaining the dispassionate, disembodied, Idealist character of the moral sentiment as formulated by Kant, Horkheimer attempts to identify its *determinate negation*. He does so by situating the moral sentiment within the finite phenomena of human love. As Horkheimer explains it;

> Moral sentiment has something to do with love, for 'love, reverence, yearning for perfection, longing, all these things are inherent in an end.' However, this love has nothing to do with the person as economic subject or as an item in the property of the one who loves, but rather as a potential member of a happy humanity. It is not directed at the role and standing of a particular individual in civil life, but at its neediness and powers which point toward the future. Unless the aim of a future happy life for all, which admittedly arises not on the basis of a revelation but out of the privation of the present, is included in the description of this love, it proves impossible to define. To all, inasmuch as they are, after all, human beings, it wishes the free development of their creative powers. To love it appears as if all living beings have a claim to happiness, ...[209]

There are a number of notable features in this passage which deserve further comment.

First, the moral sentiment entails love for an Other as an end in itself, never as a means to an end. It is a decidedly non-utilitarian, non-possessive love, opposing both economic egoism and the reification of life. As such, it seems to denote an intersubjective, communicative-type experience. Second, the loveability of the beloved transcends social convention and, instead, is marked by an open participation in a

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[209] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 34. Also see, "Rationalism Debate," 261.

universal community of human fulfilment. Indeed, removed from this communal embodiment, love defies definition. It therefore appears to rely on a normative backgrou￼ knowledge shared by a particular community. Third, the very stirring of a future happiness is born from love itself; born from a compassion and solidarity for those who suffer. In this fashion, its scope of application may affirm a certain universality. Finally, love is active, and it strives to augment the free development of human creativity, an ingredient which can lend itself to symbolic mediation.

The question arises, of course, whether this is mere "sentimental" gibberish. This conclusion might be warranted if Horkheimer left his description of the moral sentiment as is. However, he continues on to register the ways in which its dynamic is visible within social interaction.

First, the moral sentiment is evident as compassion for those who suffer from political and economic forces which seem beyond their control. "We view human beings not as subjects of their fate," writes Horkheimer, "but rather as objects of a blind occurrence of nature, to which the response of the moral sentiment is compassion."[210] While this statement may seem to convey a degree of moral or intellectual élitism, such a charge presumes a narcissistic motivation for social critique which is one way to deflect its sting. But note that Horkheimer accents compassion not judgment. His comment rather suggests that social compassion, as *social* and not only individual, requires intellectual and analytical mediation. Whether we agree or not with Horkheimer's particular analysis is secondary for now. What matters is that social

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[210] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 36.

compassion contributes to, and in turn is nurtured by, the interest which propels social enquiry.

The other domain in which the moral sentiment is conspicuous is politics. A concern for the well-being and happiness of the general public, says Horkheimer, has always been identified by moral philosophy as the "proper aim" of the moral sentiment.[211] In a passage which brings the work of Habermas to mind, Horkheimer contends that the ideals of Freedom, Equality, and Justice "are nothing but the isolated traits of the rational society, *as they are anticipated in morality as a necessary goal.* Politics in accord with this goal therefore must not abandon these demands, but realize them ..."[212] In effect, Horkheimer is arguing that the conditions for a rational society entail, not merely an affinity to, but a tangible intersection with the moral sentiment. Though the content of concepts like Freedom, Equality, and Justice are historically conditioned, it would seem the shape and active force of their idea is carried by, what seems entirely appropriate to call, *actions of rational love.*

Love can be considered rational in the context of Horkheimer's discussion because the moral sentiment constitutes an integral dimension of the rational society. However, love is not rational simply because its qualities happen to correspond to an intellectual explication of a rational society. Rather, it is rational because the form of social organization through which love lives and can be experienced and understood as love, is the rational society. Likewise, the rational society can be considered rational to the

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[211] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 36-37.

[212] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 37. Italics mine.

degree that it supports the Other as an end in itself; that it endeavours to sustain non-utilitarian, non-possessive modes of social interaction (of various kinds, including economic interaction and relations of production); that its social structures and institutions embody the principle of open, universal participation; that its ongoing decisions be oriented by a future happiness for all.

At this juncture we can ask; is Horkheimer probing into the generation of human meaning in an interactive, symbolically mediated social context, structurally rooted in the moral sentiment? Is it possible to draw the conclusion that rational love (know-how) and the rational society (know-what), obtain a rational-critical idiom from the open-ended dialectic (know-that)? Clearly, the author motions toward the need for such an idiom when he writes that "In the prevailing social conditions, ... compassion and politics, the two forms in which moral sentiment finds expression today, can only rarely be brought together into a rational relationship with each other."[213] Elsewhere, Horkheimer insinuates that this need can in fact be met by materialist theory:

> By unmasking the metaphysical idols which have long constituted a centre piece of its theory, materialism directed the human capacity for love away from the products of fantasy, away from mere symbols and reflections, and toward real living beings. For many of them, a greater composure may emerge not only from their solidarity with one another but from a clarity of consciousness. The simple establishment of commonality in suffering and the description of oppressive relations, which tend to be hidden from the light of consciousness by ideological apparatus, can be liberating.[214]

Yet in spite of this affirmative impression, Horkheimer adamantly refuses to

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[213] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 44.

[214] Horkheimer, "Rationalism Debate," 261.

provide a theoretical justification of the moral sentiment. He says quite clearly that

"Logic ... remains silent and grants no preeminence to moral conviction. ... Morality does not admit any grounding -- neither by means of intuition nor of argument."[215]

Herbert Schnädelbach's analysis of Horkheimer's position cites numerous reasons which explain this refusal to provide a theoretical vindication of the moral sentiment. First, Horkheimer's materialist social philosophy as a philosophy with practical intent, cannot articulate a separate theory of praxis without nullifying its fundamental premises. Second, as a materialist, Horkheimer interprets moral problems as social problems to be overcome via social and political action not theory. Third, and following from the second point, Horkheimer opposes theoretical, or Idealist ethics, because it reduces the social content of moral problems to questions of normative foundations.[216] Finally, Horkheimer held that a theoretical justification of ethics would undermine the unique integrity of the moral sentiment. As Schnädelbach surmises;

> Ultimate justifications of action are not just illusory, but ideological as well; they amount to "mystification" because they seek to postpone recognition of the validity of the urges toward protest and the hope for improvement until such a time as their rationalization has been successfully completed -- and that is never the case. For Horkheimer, morality only occurs where men profess their commitment to feelings of "indignation, compassion, love and solidarity," and indeed precisely when there are no adequate rational grounds to feel this way.[217]

This passage helps me to formulate some of the main problems with Horkheimer's

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[215] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 33. Also see, "Materialism and Metaphysics," 18-19.

[216] Schnädelbach, "Horkheimer and Philosophy," 82-83.

[217] Schnädelbach, "Horkheimer and Philosophy," 90.

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stance. On the one hand, the structure of Horkheimer's counter-argument indicates that it is entirely possible to produce theoretical justifications against providing theoretical justifications for the moral sentiment without committing a performative contradiction.[218] The assumed difference is that his brand of reasoned justification cannot be equated with an Idealist, or Ultimate justification. Yet why doesn't this logic, the logic of the open-ended dialectic, extend to a theoretical justification of the moral sentiment? Is it not possible to articulate a conditioned justification of the moral sentiment which retains "the stamp of truth?" On the other hand, to hold that the rationality of the moral sentiment is required especially when there is no "rational" basis for doing so, divulges Horkheimer's implicit, though negative dependence on the authority of instrumental reason. It is this authority which partially explains his reluctance to articulate the theoretical import of the moral sentiment. Yet doesn't this aversion confirm the normative *aporia* of the open-ended dialectic?

7 *Conclusion*

Horkheimer states time and again that critical theory is to facilitate the emancipation of humankind. The goal of emancipation, moreover, is not arbitrary but integral to the moral sentiment as rational, finite human love. He has identified the open-ended dialectic as the form of theory best suited to help bring this goal to fruition. Given these factors, it seems viable to bridge the *aporia* of the open-ended dialectic with the communicative experience implied in the moral sentiment understood as rational human

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[218] See Schnädelbach, "Horkheimer and Philosophy," 89.

love.

The open-ended dialectic affirms that finite, conditional, human knowledge, "does not lose the stamp of truth." The charge of relativism is ultimately an empty one for Horkheimer since it depends on a prior acceptance of Absolute Idealism. "Only when measured against an extraterrestrial, unchanging existence does human truth appear to be of an inferior quality."[219] However, this insight by itself does not evade the need to justify and discriminate between the multiplicity of finite truths regardless of how they are determined. As both Jay and Honneth indicate, Horkheimer's articulation of critical theory fails to clearly establish the extra-philosophical basis for such critical discernment.

Yet Horkheimer, protestations to the contrary, doesn't avoid this task altogether. This is most noticeable in his claim that a rational society represents the very goal of the moral sentiment. This conviction signifies that the power to differentiate between the merit of rival truths is affiliated with the moral sentiment. But the absolutely essential point is that this affiliation is not an arbitrary one. The character of the moral sentiment as rational love implies the creation of a rational society. Similarly, Horkheimer's formulation of the open-ended dialectic -- with its postmetaphysical point of departure; its adamant opposition to theoretical finality and self-hypostasization; its acceptance of scientific falliblism; its acknowledgement and cultivation of the relationship between knowledge and particular human interests -- are qualities which betoken the non-utilitarian, non-possessive, universal openness of rational love.

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[219] Horkheimer, "Problem of Truth," 192.

These features of critical theory are, in many ways, unique to Horkheimer's work from beginning to end. We can therefore read in his 1941 essay, "The End of Reason": "Love is the irreconcilable foe of the prevailing [instrumental] rationality, for lovers preserve and protect neither themselves nor the collectivity."[220] Is it possible that critical theology can align itself with Horkheimer's open-ended dialectic and interpretation of the moral sentiment in order to meet the challenges which currently face it? What will such an alliance demand of critical theology? These are just some of the issues which will preoccupy us in the conclusion to this text.

[220] Horkheimer, "End of Reason," 43.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion:

Of Love, Truth, and Reason

1 *Introduction*

In an insightful effort to lay bare the current *Stimmung* ("mood") of critical philosophy and theory, Richard Berstein concludes that "We need to maintain a vigilant *double* attitude where we are at once aware of the need for affirmation and that any affirmation can be called into question."[1] In many ways, this "double attitude" has informed this study from the start. It shows up, first of all, in the endeavour to balance the discriminating questions of critical theory with an affirmation of the critical potential of contemporary religious thought. For if critical theology is to be both critical *and* theological, then it is absolutely vital to explain why one should pursue the study and practice of critical theology rather than critical theory alone; and to do so in ter...s common to critical theory rather than critical theology alone. Thus, the dominant task of this work has been; i) to discover a way to rationally justify religious truth claims in the contemporary public sphere without claiming an unassailable sanction or status for theology's judgments of political society and critical theory; ii) yet to confidently decipher theology's manifest singularity for political society as a public sphere and critical theory as a public, rational discourse.

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[1] Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 318.

In response to this challenge, I have been exploring the plausibility of *a*) a postorthodox critical religious thinking *b*) which adopts an open-ended dialectic *c*) in order to positively illuminate and rationally elucidate the critical character of an intersubjective love in view of *d*) the conceptual horizon of modernity. In other words, I have *affirmed* Davis's postorthodox stance while *questioning* his emphasis on the subversive quality of faith and its absolute transcendence; I have *affirmed* the cogency of Habermas's postmetaphysical critique of the "strong concept of theory" while *questioning* his conclusions about the young Hegel; and I have *affirmed* the young Horkheimer's open-ended dialectical comprehension of truth and the moral sentiment while *questioning* his reluctance to articulate the rationality of love itself.

Where, then, has this "double attitude" lead this investigation? What are its problems and limitations? There are, I believe, at least three interrelated objections that immediately come to mind.

First, I think it can be said that this study does not fully develop the meaning of love which is insinuated throughout the preceding analysis. Aside from a few brief expositions (on the young Hegel and Horkheimer), I have not adequately defined the phenomenon of love nor explained how it can sustain all the claims advanced on its behalf. Second, this work does not sufficiently determine how and in what way human love constitutes the site of the divine occurrence. For even if one were to admit everything I have professed in the name of love, why should it be deemed religious? Furthermore, if this assertion did prove credible, then how can it evade the Feuerbachian challenge: namely, that religious ideas about "God" ultimately represent

the projection of human ideals as absolute? And with this criticism, one is compelled to ask why should theology be judged the discipline best suited to explore the rationality of love rather than, say, psychology? Finally, it has not likely esc ped the reader's notice that all the major thinkers examined in this work -- Davis, Habermas, Hegel, and Horkheimer -- refuse, on critical-theoretic grounds, to undertake a formal analysis of love. Why, then, have I pursued the issue?

While I hope to alleviate some of the force of these objections in the remaining pages, I'm sure my response will not quell even the most reasonable of doubts. In partial defense of this treatise, though, I would say that its main assignment has been to establish the issue of love as a topic for further investigation within the field of critical theology. In other words, before an in depth explication of love could be part of the agenda, love as a topic worthy of critical attention has to be put on the agenda in the first place. Toward that end, I have found it necessary to lay hold of the conceptual apparatus which inform critical theology and theory so as to classify love's rational value and role therein. True, there may be better or easier ways of achieving this goal. Nevertheless, I hope my approach at least demonstrates that the hesitations toward love expressed by Davis, Habermas, Hegel, and Horkheimer, need not be ours.

If this conclusion seems at all credible, then I can venture a more specific, if limited examination of the religious moment of human love in the closing pages of this study. But before attempting this sketch, I would like to enquire further into "Critical Theology, Theory, and the Dilemma of Modernity." (section 2) Here I reconsider some of the theoretical problem which attend a postorthodox critical theology which

adopts the open-ended dialectic in order to explicate the socio-critical rationality of love in view of the conceptual horizon of modernity. The problems we encounter here lead us to question radically the underlying presuppositions which seem to constitute "Habermas's Idealism." (section 3) When Habermas's position is pressed against the limits of the "modern dilemma," then an inescapable correlation seems to emerge between the "project of modernity" and the philosophy of consciousness. With this insight in view, the critical task shifts considerably. It is this turn which compels an initial inspection of John Milbank's post-Nietzschean proposal. His effort to move "Beyond Secular Reason" (section 4), however, fails to convince. In the final analysis, it suggests that a future critical theology should neither endeavour to complete the project of modernity, nor attempt to go beyond it. Rather, it might be best to simply leave it behind.

2 Critical Theology, Theory, and the Dilemma of Modernity

"Critical thought, as a *differentiating* way of thinking that opposes all *dogmatism*, is not only the opposite of *affirmation*, but also of *negation*."[2] This insight by Herbert Schnädelbach neatly encompasses the main conclusion of my examination of critical theology: one which clearly emerges in the dialogue with Charles Davis. While Davis's version of critical theology certainly illuminates that "a differentiating way of

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[2] Herbert Schnädelbach, "The Transformation of Critical Theory" in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas eds., *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's "The Theory of Communicative Action"*, trans. by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 20-21. Italics mine.

[religious] thinking opposes all dogmatism," it neglects to sufficiently demonstrate that such thinking "is not only the opposite of affirmation, but also of negation." It is this critical qualification which drives my revisions of Davis's postorthodox position.

In contrast to the contributions of Metz and Peukert -- indeed, in contrast with most expressions of critical theology to date -- Davis perceives that a consistent and coherent critical religious thinking cannot abide an orthodox foundation. When religious orthodoxy is thought to embody an ontological "Truth" which brooks no compromise; a "Truth" which tends to duck the pressure and challenge of modernity, then it obviously cannot accommodate a "differentiating way of thinking." This is not to deny the evidence of doctrinal development.[3] But it does contend that such development is governed by a deeper logic which "claims a permanent self-identity, remaining unscathed by social and practical changes."[4]

Davis captures the essence of this deeper logic under the caption, "the lust for certitude."[5] This phrase, I think, is entirely appropriate. To insist upon the elemental permanency of a particular truth claim under conditions which can no longer support its plausibility, is to do so for reasons other than the defense of truth. The condition sought here rather, is the security of certitude; and to pursue its comfort in the face of contradiction can only be described as a "lust": the lust of the possessive individual;

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[3] Cf. Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 189-190.

[4] Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 130.

[5] Charles Davis, *Temptations of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 1-27.

the lust of the controlling subject; the lust of instrumental reason. Thus, when Berstein's examination of the likes of Habermas, Rorty, Levinas, Foucault and Derrida ends by proclaiming that "We have to learn to exorcize the quest for certainty and certitude,"[6] then we are merely at the spot where Davis begins. As such, the religious thinker who endeavours to work with or build upon Davis's postorthodox critical theology is already on the cutting edge of contemporary thought.

Now, for those of you more familiar with the "theological discourse of modernity," it may seem that many of the issues championed by Davis have already been dealt with, more or less, by protestant thinkers like Paul Tillich. Indeed, Tillich's articulation of the "Protestant principle"[7] could be interpreted as an example of the so-called postorthodox stance. Or perhaps one could argue that the force of Davis's position can only be felt by a Catholic audience, recognizing that his critique of "religious orthodoxy" is ultimately a critique of "Roman Catholic orthodoxy." While there may be a great deal that the critical theologian can learn from Tillich; and while acknowledging that Davis's debate with Roman Catholicism retains at least a subterranean influence even in his later works, to characterize his contribution in this

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[6] Bernstein, *New Constellation*, 319.

[7] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957). As the author defines it; "So we stand again before the question: How can a faith which has doubt as an element within itself be united with creedal statements of the community of faith? The answer can only be that creedal expressions of ultimate concern of the community must include their own criticism. It must become obvious in all of them -- be they liturgical, doctrinal or ethical expressions ... -- that they are not ultimate. Rather, their function is to point to the ultimate which is beyond all of them. This is what I call the 'Protestant principle,' the critical element in the expression of the community of faith ..." (29)

fashion is both inaccurate and misleading. At best, such an interpretation reveals a lack of understanding in regard to the transfiguration of the theological enterprise when envisioned as a critical theory; at worst, it would constitute an effort to evade the immense challenge advanced in Davis's work. For his postorthodox critical theology is also *post-ontological*; and as post-ontological, it promotes a theological configuration which contests the work of Tillich just as much as it does Karl Rahner's.[8] Thus as far as the theological discourse of modernity is concerned, Davis deserves his own chapter.[9]

This latter claim is perhaps made clear by comparing and contrasting Davis's critique of religious orthodoxy and ontotheology, with Habermas's critique of metaphysics and the philosophy of consciousness.

As already explained, Davis contends that "Ontotheology is the attempt to translate the content of the Christian myth into the theoretical concepts and statements of metaphysical philosophy."[10] The main difficulty with this venture, says Davis, is its

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[8] Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Great Britain: Collins, 1952); and Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978). For Charles Davis's critique of Rahner's conception of transcendental revelation see *What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today? Breaking the Liberal-Conservative Deadlock* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 57-59.

[9] It is for this reason that I judge Davis's recent attempt to redefine religious orthodox to constitute a highly debatable shift. Cf. his essay, "Revelation, Historical Continuity and the Rationality of Tradition" in *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 96-111.

[10] Davis, *What is Living?*, 60.

aspiration to claim the certitude to myth for a mode of thought which cannot legitimately accommodate such convictions: namely, theoretical thought. As such, ontotheology, like religious orthodoxy, represents a distortion of the original Christian story which cannot generate theoretical knowledge. Along similar lines of thought, Habermas's critique of metaphysics also capitalizes on the questionable shift from *mythos* to *logos*. In this case, metaphysics comprises the effort to conceptualize the sacred "knowledge" of myth. The result is a First philosophy, or a philosophy of origins which advances a cognitive privilege which the modern theoretical process cannot incorporate without surrendering its scientific status.[11] In effect, Davis's postorthodoxy and Habermas's postmetaphysics represent a critique of knowledge patterned after the certitude of myth. Or in other words, each thinker is responding to the dialectic of enlightenment.

Recall that Horkheimer and Adorno profess that enlightenment is myth and myth is enlightenment.[12] This is to say, that the figure of enlightenment mirrors the essential patterns and structures of mythical thought despite its claim to have progressed far beyond these rudimentary beginnings. It is for this reason that Davis can describe the Age of Enlightenment in the same terms he uses to level religious orthodoxy:

> The Enlightenment *logos* was an attempt to satisfy a lust for certitude. From Descartes onwards nothingless than demonstrated truth deserved the epithet "rational." Paradoxically enough, this desire for absolute

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[11] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. by William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 29-31.

[12] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Continuum Press, 1990), xvi.

certitude was a confusion of reason and myth. ... The desire for absolute certitude wants to make the transition from mythos to logos without surrendering the warm certitude of myth.[13]

This refusal to relinquish "the warm certitude of myth" echoes in Habermas's charge that metaphysics, despite efforts to the contrary, could not elude its mythical point of departure. As the author notes, metaphysics simply "deceived itself about the fact that the ideas ... had themselves always contained and merely duplicated what they were supposed to exclude as matter and as nonbeing ..."[14]

This convergence of postorthodoxy and postmetaphysics in relation to the dialectic of enlightenment is perhaps one reason why both positions issue in a denunciation of subject-centred reason. This clarifies Davis's assertion that "The presupposition of orthodoxy is the contemplative conception of knowledge, according to which knowledge is the result of the disinterested viewing of reality by individuals."[15] In a more emphatic way, Habermas contends that metaphysics represents the dawn of the philosophy of consciousness whereby reality is divided up according to the subject-object split with the (infinite) Subject assuming the function of an origin which stands over against the (finite) world as its ultimate ground.[16] In short, both orthodoxy and metaphysics represent the boon of the isolated, monological subject. That is, they

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[13] Charles Davis, "Theology for Tomorrow" in Marc P. Lalonde ed., *The Promise of Critical Theology: Essays in Honour of Charles Davis* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, forthcoming), 3-4.

[14] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 31.

[15] Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, 130.

[16] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 30.

subsume the oppressive "structure of a self-relating, knowing subject, which bends back upon itself as object, in order to grasp itself as if in a mirror image -- literally in a 'speculative' way."[17]

The question that presents itself at this point is; does Davis's postorthodoxy converge entirely with Habermas's conception of postmetaphysical reason? Does Davis fully abandon the "strong concept of theory"? In other words, does he rid his work of the notion of *supernatural salvation*?

Here we remember that the essential challenge of Habermas's postmetaphysical objection to critical theology stems from the modern differentiation of Reason into distinct rationality complexes. This division and its ensuing proceduralism automatically entails a critique of the strong concept of theory and its cognitive privilege. This privilege, in turn derives from the conceptualization of sacred myth, resulting in the effort to devise a First philosophy. Whether conceived as classical metaphysics or as theology, First philosophy ultimately represents a concern for supernatural salvation from the everyday world. Under conditions of postmetaphysical thought, however, the supreme issue has to be emancipation *in* this world, and not salvation *from* this world. As long as theological thought remains at all linked to an offer of salvation, then its claim to truth remains bound to a strong concept of theory and its cognitive privilege: that is, metaphysics. Critical theology as theology, then, cannot be a critical discipline; cannot be modern; cannot augment or rationally

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[17] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 18.

contribute to emancipation in this world.

Does Davis's postorthodoxy embrace Habermas's critique? Does this explain why, for instance, Davis recommends "the destruction of theology in the current sense of the immanent self-understanding of faith"?[18]

In response to this question, the answer has to be "not entirely." On the one hand, Davis contends that an authentic religious faith definitely does not eliminate the existential anxieties and moral-conceptual ambiguities which mark the finite existence.[19] On the other hand, his conceptualization of faith as absolute transcendence entails a soteriology of its own. Thus;

> The absoluteness of faith is the absoluteness of total demand and total response in an experience of *unrestricted love* in relation to hidden transcendence or mystery. Faith is the drive toward transcendence, the thrust of human beings out of and beyond themselves, ... in an attempt to open themselves to the totality of existence and reach unlimited reality and ultimate value.[20]

It is at this juncture where I depart from the trajectory of Davis's project; and yet, it is also the moment where I discover the principle for a reconstructive point of departure.

Davis's description of faith as absolute; as a dialectic of "total demand and total response"; as that which aspires to "unlimited reality and value" etc., are terms which seem to require "a renunciation of the natural attitude toward the world and [which]

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[18] Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society*, 91.

[19] Davis, *What is Living?*, 68.

[20] Davis, *What is Living?*, 67. Italics mine.

promise[] contact with the extraordinary."[21] This feature of Habermas's protest leads

me to question Davis's portrayal of religious faith as a "yearning for totality" which

devalues the human measure of the divine-human encounter. For if it is true "that the

human situation can[not] be significantly improved by the development of natural

human capacities,"[22] then the cogent justification of faith and its import for the rational

organization of society, are significantly marginalized. In order to move beyond this

limitation; and in order to respond to Habermas's postmetaphysical critique, it is

necessary to outline how religious faith intersects with the finite human life in a

positive, identifiable, and accessible fashion. This should be accomplished in such a

way that this bond can be seen to encourage the emancipatory interest which has come

to a head within the modern era, *though without abandoning the postorthodox site.*

Such is the challenge I set for this work at the end of the second chapter "On Critical

Theology." It is for this reason I circumscribed critical religious thought as follows:

in order for theology to be critical and not just self-critical to the point of its own

elimination, the constitution of religious faith as critical activity must be granted a

specific religious focus of application and discernment. It must be given the cognitive

range to justify rationally its unique competence as theology so that its propositional

content (however qualified) can be said to represent a fact, though not all the facts,

about what is the case in this world.

Yet despite this critique, Davis's designation of faith as a response to "unrestricted

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[21] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 32.

[22] Davis, *What is Living?*, 78.

love" supplies the fulcrum for the reconfiguration of critical theology. Here I propose that the phenomenon of human love is *one* way to identify the object of transcendence as it relates to everyday life and knowledge. This is to say, that the theological examination of human love should constitute its specific focus within the postmetaphysical situation, elucidating how religious faith stands for and cultivates the critical implications of this love in relation to the public sphere. In this fashion, one positively limits critical theology in a way that lends it cognitive weight while, at the same time, avoiding that "yearning for totality" which dogs the work of Metz, Peukert, and Davis. In other words, via love, critical theology may be able to take its place as a distinct rationality complex within the conceptual horizon of modernity.

These recommendations lead me toward an examination of the young Hegel on love. The enquiry into his early theological writings is meant to establish the theme of love as part and parcel of the philosophical discourse of modernity. Whatever the particular defects of Hegel's discourse; and despite the fact that he abandons the reconciling notion of love in view of its indeterminacy, it remains true that the intersubjective response to the diremption of modernity is made manifest precisely in love's dynamic. However, rather than surrendering this insight to Habermas's interpretation, I undertake its rethematization with the aid of Horkheimer's open-ended dialectic and his deliberations on the moral sentiment.

Horkheimer's early version of critical theory supplies the key ingredients for pressing beyond the obstacles encountered in Hegel's discussion. His description of an open-ended dialectical truth sidesteps the detrimental conclusions of a negative dialectics

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while maintaining the non-identity or contingent character of truth as the motor of its critical function. To devalue such a limited notion of truth, says Horkheimer, only makes sense when "measured against an *extraterrestrial*, unchanging existence ..."[23] In other words, to dismiss the profundity and insight of finite human truth is to accept a strong concept of theory and its cognitive privilege. However, for Horkheimer the historical materialist, such contact with the "extraordinary" falls below the bar of genuine critical thought. The op- ended dialectic is therefore a postmetaphysical construct trying to establish the force and legitimacy of truth without the benefit of a supernatural foundation.

However, it is precisely at this point that Horkheimer cannot explain how to critically differentiate between competing finite truths. As Axel Honneth's examination suggests, the critical theorists either adopts a Marxist view of historical progress in order to make up for this conceptual gap (as Horkheimer does in "Traditional and Critical Theory"), or one endeavours to build upon those dialogical moments of "critical activity" which conclude in a theory of communicative action.[24] But in contrast to both Honneth and Habermas, I elect to pursue Horkheimer's reconsideration of Kant's moral sentiment as rational love. Here, Horkheimer seizes upon the idea that a genuine rational morality entails the transcendence of pure self-interest. It is this

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[23] Max Horkheimer, "On the Problem of Truth" in *Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences: Selected Early Writings*, trans. by G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 192. Italics mine.

[24] Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. by Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 5-31.

hypothesis which permits Horkheimer to rationally criticize the competitive, self-serving, instrumental character of the capitalist ethos as both immoral and irrational. Yet, rather than remaining content with the idealist framework of Kant's dualistic formulation, Horkheimer transfers the rational operation of the moral sentiment to the phenomenon of human love.[25] Thus do we encounter the potential for a "rational" love mediated and fulfilled in social compassion and the rational (i.e., love-directed) organization of society.

Nevertheless, Horkheimer is reluctant to join the notion of rational love with the open-ended dialectic. He is so because "Morality does not admit of any grounding neither by means of intuition nor of argument."[26] However, given the *aporia* of the open-ended dialectic, I suggested that it is exactly their merger which can solve the inability to differentiate between rival finite truths. Similarly, by appending love to the open-ended dialectic, its rationality is provided a formal expression capable of critical-theoretic elaboration.

I am now in a position to lay out in a succinct fashion the figure of critical theology which presents itself after working through the contributions of Davis; the challenge of Habermas; the intersubjective insights of Hegel; and the critical theory of Horkheimer. Critical theology represents a specific form of critical religious thinking which is given a formal-theoretical expression as an open-ended dialectic infused by a rational love.

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[25] See Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality" in *Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, 34.

[26] Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 33.

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As an open-ended dialectical theology, or as a postorthodox theology, it does not seek an exposition of religious truths as conveyed by doctrine or dogma. Rather, in accord with the postmetaphysical situation, it labours to articulate -- in an accessible and understandable way -- the socio-critical implications of love for the rational organization of society; for a vision of the social good; and for the general emancipation of humankind. Finally, this critical theology is a public theology developed in view of the conceptual horizon of modernity so as to address the pathologies of modernity from a distinctive religious point of view. The terms of its address, moreover, are not only familiar to theological thought, but also critical theory.

However, one significant term missing from this definition is "salvation." What I am suggesting is that critical theology is not so much (if at all) concerned with salvation, whether envisioned at the individual or the social level. Instead, it is preoccupied with emancipation as it has become clarified within the project of modernity. This admission raises enumerable problems. Nevertheless, I hope to show that these problems are not mine alone.

Obviously, to deny that salvation constitutes an appropriate theme for critical theology places this proposal not only on the edges of extant critical theological thought, but beyond the *logos* of the *theos* altogether (or so it seems). However, if I continue to insist on doing "theology" rather than accepting the obvious, how could any version of critical theology I produce avoid the predicament encountered in Glebe-Möller's work? That is, how could these recommendations refrain from concocting a religious gloss on Habermas's postmetaphysical thinking? As my critique of Glebe-

Möller's work asserts, his effort to create a "theology without reference to divine powers"[27] results not in a theology of communicative action (Peukert), but in an interpretation of communicative action as theology. Thus, the normative weight of Glebe-Möller's "political dogmatic" ultimately derives its bite from Habermas's theory of communicative action. How could my proposal fair any better?

While the recommendations of this study do not exactly duplicate Glebe-Möller's analysis, I nevertheless try to work out the normative validity of critical theology in close association with the conceptual horizon of modernity. As a result, the theological reflections contained in this work appear to merge, as a matter of course, with the dilemma of modernity: namely, the need to "*create its .ormativity out of itself.*"[28] Why else have I focused so intently upon the theological potential of finite human love? Why else have I criticized Davis's transcendent portrayal of faith? Why else does Horkheimer's reconstruction of Kant's *dirempted* moral sentiment fit so neatly into this whole problematic?

Perhaps we need to insist with Metz on a fundamental difference between "redemption and emancipation."[29] While he is careful not to suggest that the history of redemption remains unrelated to the history of emancipation, he still contends that "Emancipation is not simply the immanence of redemption, nor is redemption just the

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[27] Jens Glebe-Möller, *A Political Dogmatic*, trans by Thor Hall (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 38.

[28] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 7.

[29] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Fundamental Practical Theology*, trans. by Davis Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980), 119-135.

transcendence of emancipation ..."[30] Yet Metz's final instruction on this issue ultimately hinges on equating the history of modernity with the dialectic of enlightenment. As he says, "the course of recent history has increasingly shown inherent contradictions within the process of universal human self-liberation. It has become apparent that the history of revolution has degenerated into new histories of violence and repression, that within emancipative societies new histories of suffering emerge ..."[31] In view of this progressive dehumanization, Metz concludes that the so-called "history of human freedom" must be understood as a "history of guilt and suffering"[32]: it is this trope which furnishes the apologetic aperture. "A history of emancipation without a history of redemption" writes the author, "is unmasked as an abstract history of success, triumph or victory."[33] Thus, we encounter once again Metz's endeavour to provide a theological enlightenment of the Enlightenment.[34]

Despite these difficulties with Metz's presentation, the issue is one that cannot be easily dismissed. Even Dennis McCann -- who is mostly critical of Metz's work -- holds that the effort to differentiate between emancipation and redemption is the

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[30] Metz, *Faith*, 122.

[31] Metz, *Faith*, 121.

[32] Metz, *Faith*, 127.

[33] Metz, *Faith*, 125.

[34] For further insight into the relation between emancipation and redemption see Dennis P. McCann and Charles R. Strain, *Polity and Praxis: A Programme for American Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 93-144.

"proper" approach.[35] However, it is also McCann who illustrates that this "proper" approach exposes the fundamental *aporia* of a practical theology which refuses to criticize its religious foundations. In reference to Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* McCann notes that its recommendations "are rooted in ... the orthodox Catholic vision of the Incarnation."[36] Yet it is precisely this "rootedness" which cannot accommodate a dialectical method: "No dialectical *tour de force* can integrate the epiphany of the Absolute in time with the vision of history as an ongoing struggle of the oppressed. ... This is so because the Incarnation makes God the primary agent or 'Subject' in human history, while the dialectical vision makes 'it possible for men to enter into the historical process as responsible subjects.'"[37] In other words, McCann's critique represents a variation of Habermas's postmetaphysical objection. But what this objection makes clear, and what McCann fails to perceive, is that the development of a full fledged dialectical critical theology has to deconstruct the distinction between redemption and emancipation. True, its message cannot be that "Emancipation is simply the immanence of redemption." More to the point, it is that emancipation is all we have. Thus, it is not enough to rethink "the nature of religious transcendence and its role in Christian social action."[38] This alternative is but one step away from an

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[35] Dennis P. McCann, "Habermas and the Theologians," *Religious Studies Review* 7, no. 1 (January 1981): 20.

[36] Dennis P. McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 183.

[37] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 184.

[38] McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 4.

"orthodox Catholic vision of the Incarnation."[39]

If we are to think our way through these impasses without either accepting the impossibility of critical theology as a forgone conclusion; or without resuscitating religious orthodoxy in however qualified a form, then it strikes me that the fundamental question for the development of a religious thinking that is both critical and theological is this; to what degree is "Critical thought, as a differentiating way of thinking that opposes all dogmatism,"[40] bound to the dilemma of modernity? To what extent does the critical attitude depend upon finding a solution to modernity's need for self-grounding? For as long as this dilemma constitutes the only "legitimate" way to address the pathologies of modernity, then *any* form of thinking, or *any* proffered response which contains the slightest hint of "other-directedness" *will be deemed uncritical*. Granted, critical thinking as well as critical theology receive their essential form and impetus in the modern period as expressions of its emancipatory interest. However, is the fate of this interest subject to reconciling modernity to itself?

I do not think that it is. In fact, it may be this dilemma which fuels the dialectic of enlightenment, blocking the full maturation of the critical attitude. This is because the dilemma of modernity can only be, it seems, dealt with in terms of the philosophy of consciousness. As such, its determinate negation will necessarily take the form of the idealist thesis: namely, the identity of thought and being. This was true of Hegel

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[39] This is Alistair Kee's major conclusion in *Marxism and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 281-283.

[40] Schnädelbach, "Transformation of Critical Theory," 20-21.

and, as we will see, it is also true of Habermas.

3 Habermas's Idealism

"The systematic claim that Habermas has made throughout his later work" writes David Rasmussen, "is that he has freed his overall project from reliance upon epistemology and foundationalism -- the preoccupation of the so-called philosophers of the subject."[41] This claim attains its consummate expression as a theory of communicative action and reason, where, as we noted, "Reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech."[42] After our review of Habermas's critique of the philosophy of consciousness and his conceptualization of postmetaphysical thinking, we can render the latter assertion in the following way: reaching understanding is a matter of achieving consensus between divided social actors. Their coalition can be established objectively and reflectively, that is "inherently," via the validity basis of speech. It is in reference to validity claims that both agreement and disagreement can be rationally dealt with, circumventing the need for strategic or violent action. However, this advance is made possible only with the evolution of modernity which initiates the sectioning of Reason into distinct rationality complexes with their own inner logics and formal-world concepts (i.e., the three validity claims). While this division of Reason

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[41] David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 7, footnote no. 16.

[42] Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. 1 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 287.

gives rise to the diremption of modernity, its supersession is immanent once language rather than self-consciousness mediates interaction, socialization, learning processes, and self-understanding. In effect, it is the *modern* validity basis of speech which provides the normative content of modernity. It is a basis which represents "an intrinsic ideal form ... constructed from the spirit of modernity, one that neither just imitates the historical forms of modernity nor is imposed upon [it] from the outside."[43]

However, why should the linguistic solution to the diremption of modernity be granted *primacy* over self-consciousness? Because, Habermas contends, it is through communicative interaction that self-consciousness comes to be in the *first* place. This is to say, the subject of self-consciousness is always already formed in dialogue with others; is always already an "inter-subject." Self-consciousness *originates* in communicative reason which derives from the validity basis of speech gained from the evolution of modernity. In effect,

> the overall strategy adopted by Habermas is to retrieve the project of modernity through a highly specialized form of the philosophy of language, a form which presumably will do precisely what could not be done in the older context of the philosophy of consciousness. However, ... can the philosophy of language be tailored to the project of modernity, without resorting to the old dilemmas of the philosophy of consciousness?[44]

In response to Rasmussen, we have to answer in the negative. As long as the dilemma of modernity is envisioned as the need to ground itself out of itself then it

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[43] Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 20. Also see Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, 62.

[44] Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, 17.

would seem to follow that its objective resolution already has to be a part of that which it overcomes. Thus, if communicative reason is that which surpasses subject-centred reason, then it already has to be interior to the subject. According to Joel Whitebook, at least, this is exactly what Habermas suggests. As the author argues, Habermas "tries to assimilate as much of inner nature as possible to the category of the linguistic *by constructing it as protolinguistic*. ... Habermas wants to argue that, as inner nature is susceptible of socialization, i.e., 'linguisticalization,' it must in some sense already be protolinguistic ..."[45] In effect, Habermas transfers the role of the Subject within the idealist philosophical tradition to his explication of language and communication. As a result, he cannot bypass the idealist thesis which shows up here as the identity of language and reality. If this charge has any plausibility, then the negative traces of the controlling subject should be evident in Habermas's exposition on language. Where do these traces manifest themselves? In his consideration of literature, poetry, and evaluative language.

In his essay "Philosophy and Science as Literature?",[46] Habermas takes critical aim at the postmodern effort to level the difference between these traditional genres.[47] For the radical contextualist thesis holds that each genre constitutes a narrative, a story,

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[45] Joel Whitebook, "Reason and Happiness: Some Psychoanalytic Themes in Critical Theory" in Richard J. Bernstein ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 156. Italics mine.

[46] In *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 205-227.

[47] Also see Habermas's critique of Derrida's deconstructionist thesis, "Excursus on Leveling [sic] the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature" in *Philosophical Discourse*, 185-210.

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a fiction about "what is the case in this world," none of which has ontological priority over the other. While Habermas admits that the postmodernist position is inspired by a desire to overcome subject-centred reason,[48] he contends it goes too far. For "this movement of thought has made transcendental subjectivity disappear *without a trace*, and indeed in such a way that one also loses sight of the system of world relations, speaker perspectives, and validity claims that is inherent in linguistic communication itself."[49] Thus, Habermas's principal objection concerns the suspension of the binding or illocutionary force of language and communication. "Literature does not invite the reader to take a position of the same kind that everyday communication invites from those who are acting."[50] This is to say, that "Literary speech acts are ... illocutionarily *disempowered*."[51] As a result, literature, *like theology*, can have no real critical function. Indeed, Habermas dismisses the contextualist thesis on the grounds that it desires to overextend the "aesthetic experience"; that is, to totalize "world-disclosing [language], or the linguistic innovation that allows us to see with other eyes what happens in the world ..."[52] Or in words familiar to us already, it aspires "to totalize the contact with the *extraordinary*, to absorb the everyday."[53]

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[48] Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", 207-210.

[49] Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", 210.

[50] Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", 223.

[51] Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", 223.

[52] Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", 216.

[53] Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?", 216. Italics mine.

The cardinal point of this discussion is not to take up the postmodern explication of language as an alternative to Habermas's work. Rather, it simply serves to punctuate the fact that evaluative, innovative, world-disclosing language is deemed uncritical and irrational because such linguistic formulations elude the controlling grasp of the (inter)subject.

If the postmodern position seems too extreme, then let us turn to the objections voiced by Charles Taylor. Certainly no friend of the radical contextualist,[54] Taylor nevertheless charges that Habermas's theory of communicative action is "impaired by a severe weakness. ... The central problem, ... is that the concept of reaching rational understanding is developed using a merely formal ethics of rationality."[55] The main difficulty with such formalism, says Taylor, is that it is vulnerable to "radical questions of justification."[56] For instance, in reference to the validity claims advanced in Hab mas's universal pragmatics, Taylor wonders what precisely motivates the agent to take any of these claims seriously. Why should a validity claim be one that a person cannot deny? Even if it seems possible to hold that "Reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech," why should the individual strive to fulfil this end?[57]

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[54] Cf. Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in David Couzens Hoy ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 69-102. Also see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), especially Part I, "Identity and the Good," 3-107.

[55] Charles Taylor, "Language and Society" in Honneth and Joas eds., *Communicative Action*, 29-30.

[56] Taylor, "Language and Society," 30.

[57] Taylor, "Language and Society," 30.

Taylor elaborates;

> Attempts at justification, such as are derived from the structure of the situation of speech by a discursive ethics, do not suffice in the case of such radical questions. The fact that I should argue 'vith the aim of achieving domination-free understanding may admittedly be structurally implied by the logic of discourse. If, in other words, I attempt to assert my own interest irrespective of all the objections other participants to the conversation raise, then I certainly violate the logic of the discourse. *But why should I not do this?* Why should I not attempt to reach my desired goal at the cost of being slightly inconsistent?[58]

What is required to adequately respond to such radical questions of justification, thinks Taylor, is something which Habermas's validity based notion of language cannot accommodate: namely, substantive articulations or narratives about the good life. In order to achieve such a "strong evaluation," the speaker must make use of evaluative, innovative, world-disclosing xpressions. Only in this way can one *envision* what should be considered of the utmost significance and importance for a society. Thus, critical understanding gains an orientation beyond mere proceduralism: "If we wish to remove the friction in the common properties of the 'We' by means of an overarching background consensus, then we must try to articulate what in our form of life is both good and has proved itself in intersubjective terms."[59] In effect, Taylor does not object to the particular emancipatory values advanced in Habermas's universal pragmatics. What he does take issue with is the notion that these values are posited purely within our speech situations as such. Without the supposition of a substantialist ethic or characterization of the good, we risk distorting the nature and meaning of

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[58] Taylor, "Language and Society," 31. Italics mine.

[59] Taylor, "Language and Society," 34.

practical reason.[60]

The implication of Taylor's critique dovetails with the postmodern position insofar that an aesthetic rationality is viewed as a legitimate, even necessary conception of reason which can resist the technocratic logic which undergirds the dialectic of enlightenment. The fact that Habermas purposely devalues and marginalizes the critical potential of any substantivist position which avails itself of evaluative language can be seen as an effect of the idealist supposition which orientates his overall proposal. As Rasmussen observes, Habermas's "preference for a kind of argument which places logic over rhetoric, the rationalistic over the metaphorical, could be read by some as the very attempt to resurrect ... subject-centred philosophy ..."[61]

What the above criticisms of Habermas's theory of communicative action suggests, is that contemporary critical philosophy, theory, and theology leave the dilemma of modernity behind. For it does not seem to be resolvable without lapsing (back?) into the philosophy of consciousness. And if the emancipatory moment of intersubjectivity is not to be lost (whether envisioned on the level of language or love), then clearly we have to discover a way to justify its significance. This suggestion raises all kinds of difficult questions; questions which do not spare my own recommendations for critical theology. I have endeavoured to justify the public, critical potential of a rational love in relation to the conceptual horizon of modernity. I have also affirmed the postmetaphysical thesis and its critique of the strong concept of theory. In the process,

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[60] Taylor, "Language and Society," 34.

[61] Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, 110.

then, do I merely substitute love for language and thereby set in motion yet another cycle of the dialectic of enlightenment? Can the theme of love depart from the dilemma of modernity?

How one responds to these questions, I believe, depends on how we *envision* what we can call in the context of this argument, the "postmodern problematic." Does this problematic suspend, for instance, the emancipatory interest or attitude which has reached us through the philosophical discourse of modernity? Does it dismiss the effort to associate claims to truth, normative rightness, or truthfulness with language, love, reason, or God? Does it do away with the requirement to argue our positions and recommendations in a fashion which maintains "a vigilant *double* attitude where we are at once aware of the need for affirmation and that any affirmation can be called into question"?[62] Is it at all concerned with the wish to "exorcize the quest for certainty and certitude"?[63]

One theological thinker who has begun to deal with these and other issues in a most provocative manner is John Milbank. By examining his quest to move "beyond secular reason," we may gain our own particular foothold within the "postmodern problematic" outlined above.

4 Beyond Secular Reason

In many respects, what I have referred to as a "postmodern problematic" is for

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[62] Bernstein, *New Constellation*, 318.

[63] Bernstein, *New Constellation*, 319.

Milbank a "post-Nietzschean opportunity." In his treatise *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*,[64] Milbank proposes that critical theory *after* Nietzsche means that what counts as "true," "real," or "absolute" for a particular culture depends upon a speculative process which generates the idiom for legitimizing the meaning and function of these concepts. The resultant relativism of this contextualist position and the radical contingency of "truth," however, does not undermine its critical capacity for Milbank. But rather than intimating a point of contact with Horkheimer's more cautious open-ended dialectic, say, Milbank champions a contingent "truth" *run wild*. Via an historicist deconstruction of the secular social sciences and humanities, Milbank contends that "truth" is the consequence of an all encompassing "metanarrative" framework that structures our perceptions of reality. The result of this process is, as Foucault calls it, a "regime of truth"; a comprehension of truth which is not "discovered" but purposely generated by the power complexes and institutions of a particular society and culture: that is, "power/knowledge."[65] And such regimes just don't fall out of the clear blue sky, as it were: *they are imagined.*

What is post-Nietzschean about this insight?

To begin with, Milbank radicalizes Nietzschean suspicion, arguing for a "meta-suspicion"[66] which seriously doubts the credibility of suspicion; a radical turning of

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[64] Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

[65] See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, 1972-1977, edited by Colin Gorden (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

[66] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 102.

suspicion against itself, as it were. Milbank points out that with this radical turn, the presupposition of a normativity, or the existence of a normative ground which permits the reduction of something "contingent" to something *deemed* universal is no longer credible. There is no neutral high-ground exposed by suspicion which can explain the whole of human existence within the terms of a particular reduction. What is exposed, though, is the persistence of an *assertion* that there *is* such a transcendent basis, which is another issue altogether. But it is an issue, says Milbank, that any critical social theory cannot dismiss.

The persistence of an assertion that something is indefatigably real and absolute in the absence of complete objectivity -- what does this amount to? Milbank writes;

> ... the question has now arisen for social theory as to whether Nietzschean suspicion is the final and truly non-metaphysical mode of secular reason, or else itself embodies an ontology of power and conflict which is simply another *mythos*, a kind of reinvented paganism. *To pass critically beyond Nietzsche is to pass into a recognition of the necessity and yet the ungrounded character of some sort of metanarrative, some privileged transcendent factor ...* [67]

In effect, our post-Nietzschean situation does not provoke a passionate defense of Truth or Objectivity. Instead it councils the acceptance of the *metanarrative function* which orients and, ultimately, substantiates the cultural formation of what is "true" and "objective." What matters here is not the susceptibility to positive proof or negative exception; but rather the very process of positing a "privileged transcendent factor." Though such privilege is ungrounded -- indeed, ungroundable -- this does *not* mean we

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[67] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2. Italics mine.

can dispense with a comprehensive organizational logic.[68] What the "ungrounded character" of metanarrative does mean is that such stories are exactly that: narratives we articulate about the ultimate nature, purpose, and meaning of reality. Thus, no matter how much we may desire to move beyond "the strong concept of theory" and its "cognitive privilege," it cannot be done.

Yet, given all of the above, Milbank still asserts that metanarrative is hardly an ethereal, arbitrary fiction that -- sooner or later -- must degenerate into a power-struggle for the control of world-view. To assume that this is the case is "merely to subscribe to a particular encoding of reality";[69] one that conceives its ultimate nature as violent and chaotic. How we "narrate" the contrasts of metanarratives will itself illuminate a great deal about the metanarrative we already endorse. This, at least, is Milbank's conclusion after examining the metanarrative that substantiates modern secular reason.

By applying a strict historicism[70] to the development of the social sciences and its attendant practices, Milbank intends to demonstrate that its metanarrative is ultimately based on an ontology of violence and chaos. As he says, "Modern thought and politics (most clearly articulated by Nietzsche) assumes that there is *only* this chaos, which cannot be tamed by an opposing transcendent principle, but can be immanently controlled by subjecting it to rules and giving irresistible power to those rules in the

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[68] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.

[69] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5.

[70] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3; 5.

form of market economies and sovereign politics."[71]

This passage certainly gives one cause for thought. For the author is suggesting that how we encode our reality concretely effects the kind of reality we get. In the case of modernity, "Secular 'scientific' understanding," proffers Milbank, "was, from the outset, only the self-knowledge of the self-construction of the secular as power,"[72] and our theoretical and practical expressions reflect this fact. Hence, we submit to a socio-cultural formation that instills power and domination as the credible and legitimate way to live out our lives.

The principal insight that Milbank would like us to grasp is that secularism is not the result of an inevitable unfolding of, or progression toward, the "natural" destiny of humankind. Nor is it the logical emergence of a modern, differentiated consciousness over against a pre-modern, undifferentiated consciousness. Neither is it the disenchantment of a magical, religious world view by the scientific processes of rationalization. These explanations, like all others, are constructed narratives that have, so to speak, imagined themselves into existence. There is nothing necessary about the development of secularism whatsoever. It simply represents the end product of a particular social imagination. And as the antimonies of the above scenarios imply, it is a social imagination constituted in part by the rejection of religion.

Such a rejection, however, only indicates the broad outlines of the secular metanarrative. What a genealogy of the social sciences underscores is that "secular

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[71] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5.

[72] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 10.

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discourse ... is actually constituted by 'heresy' in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more 'neo-pagan' than simply anti-religious."[73]

This claim involves numerous ramifications. First, there is the suggestion that secularism is itself a religion. This idea arises in light of the metanarrative function which implores "belief in" rather than demonstrating conclusive truths. Second, given secularism's ontology of violence, it is not that surprising to discover that its approach to other metanarratives is triumphant. Third, the triumphalism in question is related specifically to an "orthodox" conception of the Christian religion. Though Milbank's understanding of "orthodoxy" is not entirely clear, he seems to be referring to a complex which entrenches a high christology, a universal ecclesiology, and tradition as the rule of faith. Fourth, and most importantly, Milbank's claim appears to go straight to the heart of contemporary critical theology. Since this theology gains its basic theoretical orientation from the secular social sciences, they are, according to Milbank,[74] surrendering theology's claim to be *the* meta-discourse that should (by ontological rights) position all other discourses. But because modern theology embraces the social sciences as normative for its perception of reality, the secular metanarrative supplants the Christian ontology thereby determining its meaning and relevancy. The result of this trade-off not only silences the true Christian gospel in the face of a burgeoning secular nihilism, but enlists Christian theology to further secular interests. This has been accomplished via theology's acquiescence to the privatization of faith.

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[73] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3.

[74] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 206-255.

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For when theology agrees that there is a peculiar, private, and mostly personal sacred realm neatly separated from a common, public, secular realm, then the latter has free reign to inform the basic character of society. Thus Milbank asserts that there arises a "perceived need to discover precisely how to fulfil Christian precepts about charity and freedom in contemporary society in an uncontroversial manner, involving cooperation with the majority of non-Christian fellow citizens. Purportedly scientific diagnoses and recommendation fulfil precisely this role."[75]

What, then, is the "controversial" response to this situation? It is to make Christian theology the "Queen of the sciences"[76] once again. However, the re-establishment of the Christian meta-discourse will succeed only to the extent that theology attempts to offer the "ultimate social science"[77]: an ultimacy which is grounded in the very uniqueness of the Christian ontology. And in Milbank's *opinion* it is this ontology, in fact the only ontology, which can provide a real alternative to secularism. Why Christianity? Milbank writes;

> Christianity ... recognizes no original violence. It construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any totalizing reason. Peace no longer depends upon the reduction to the self-identical, but is the *sociality* of harmonious difference. Violence, by contrast, is always a secondary willed intrusion upon the possible infinite order (which is actual for God). Such a Christian logic is *not* deconstructible by modern secular reason; rather, it is Christianity which exposes the non-necessity of supposing, like the Nietzscheans, that difference, non-totalization and indeterminacy of meaning necessarily imply arbitrariness and violence. ... Christianity,

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[75] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2.

[76] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380.

[77] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 6.

by contrast, is the coding of transcendental difference as peace.[78]

What I would like to propose for the remainder of this section, is to unpack the essential points of the above passage as they relate to the author's conception of metanarrative in general, and this Christian metanarrative in particular. Though this analysis will have to forgo a detailed examination of Milbank's deconstruction of the social sciences (which would demand a book in itself), my main concern will be to assess Milbank's Christian alternative. In other words, if we grant for now the postmodern exposure of the secular ontology of violence, does Milbank's narrative ontology of Christian peace and harmony represent the only alternative? The only religious alternative? The only Christian alternative to secularism? If not, to what degree does the author critically pass beyond Nietzsche? What, in fact, does it then take to establish a genuine post-Nietzschean religious reflection?

The key to comprehending Milbank's post-Nietzschean social theology is, I believe, his "linguistic idealism"[79] as it relates to the cultural function of metanarrative. To a certain extent, we have already been introduced to this position: namely, critical social theory after Nietzsche must acknowledge that our socio-cultural reality gains its shape and meaning from the kinds of stories we tell ourselves about its ultimate nature. No story in itself possesses a transcendent grounding beyond that which the narrative may institute. Thus the transcendent "ground" is really a *transcendent factor*[80] of the

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[78] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5-6.

[79] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5.

[80] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2.

metanarrative function. As a "narrative factor" rather than say, an "epistemological ground,"[81] the transcendent cannot be ensconced within a neutral, objective framework that pretends to be universally applicable. In place of this, one finds a particular narrative tradition with a specific ontology which moves beyond a regulative metaphysic toward a constitutive metaphysic.[82] Only in this fashion, thinks Milbank, can we arrive at a definite rational content for the Absolute: a content deemed "necessary for the slightest cultural decision."[83]

However, is the move from one particular ontology, or "constitutive metaphysic" to another simply a question of free choice? That is, how are we to judge between, and assess the value of, the meta-narrative alternatives? Is there not in fact the need for a "meta-hermeneutical" position that can transcend the particular narrative traditions *as* traditions in order to provide a systematic analysis of the virtue and vice of each ontology? How, in short, are we to *know* if we are subject to a distortative metanarrative or a truly emancipatory one? Surely to assert that one's preferred metanarrative is founded upon a reality of peace and harmony does not mean that this is actually the case? Or does it?[84]

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[81] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 275.

[82] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 298.

[83] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3.

[84] Here I am thinking of the famous Gadamer-Habermas debate where Habermas (in Josef Bleicher ed., "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980]) takes issue with Gadamer's traditionalism. Specifically, Habermas objects to its ontological basis which seems to undermine our reflective capacity to recognize and explain the systematic distortions that obscure our everyday

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The latter question is a difficult one to respond to. According to Milbank's position, to advocate a meta-hermeneutic that can systematically analyze traditions according to the categories of distortion/emancipation, or false consciousness/critical consciousness, etc., is simply to change the subject. This is to say, that the latter categories of differentiation are themselves rooted in a secular rationality that -- whatever its modifications -- presupposes a Kantian epistemology. The difficulty that Milbank has with this presupposition is well expressed by Hamann and Herder's linguistic critique of Kant. What these expressivist thinkers establish is a "meta-critique" that does not further Kant's project but undercuts its very possibility. It does so by pointing toward a more secure critical foundation: namely, language. As Milbank explains it;

> If it is true that we only think in language, then it is simply not possible to investigate our thinking instrument -- to say what it can or cannot think in advance of its deployment. We can *only* know our thinking capacity to the extent that we have thoughts, use words, and this

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communications. Habermas concludes that there is "no general criterion available to us" in Gadamer's hermeneutics "which would allow us to determine when we are subject to the false consciousness of a pseudo-normal understanding and consider something as a difficulty that can be resolved by hermeneutical means when, in fact, it requires systematic explanation." (191). In light of Milbank's affirmation of Gadamer's project (*Theology and Social Theory*, 308), the question of a "meta-hermeneutical" position is most relevant. For further insight into the Gadamer-Habermas debate see Rudiger Bubner, "Theory and Practice in the Light of the Hermeneutic-Criticist Controversy, " *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1975): 337-352; Alan R. How, "Dialogue as Productive Limitation in Social Theory: The Habermas-Gadamer Debate," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 11 (May 1980): 131-143; Dieter Misgeld. "Discourse and Conversation: The Theory of Communicative Competence and
Hermeneutics in the Light of the Debate Between :: _ermas and Gadamer," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 4 (1977): 321-344; Paul Ricoeur, "Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue," *Philosophy Today* 17 (1973): 153-165.

means to the extent that we assume we have some conception of what 'things' and objective realities are. Hence it is not possible to separate out within language the 'categories' -- whether of 'reason', the 'understanding' or 'the imagination' -- by which things are thought, from 'intuitions' or the empirical contents of thought themselves.[85]

The operative phrase in the above extract is, I think, that "We can only *know* our thinking capacity to the extent that we have thoughts, use words, and this means to the extent that we *assume* we have some conception of what 'things' and *objective realities* are." Now, Milbank is not suddenly flip-flopping by affirming a strict belief in neutral, non-linguistic realities. However, what he is suggesting is that our language can exist as language only if we "assume" that there exists an "objective" reference. Whether this is actually the case or no is ultimately beside the point. The main thing he wishes us to recognize is that our knowledge is always already embedded in language; always already a *narrative knowledge*. This does not mean, he insists, that we are trapped within a world of pure fabrication and illusion. Rather it means that we can never get behind our narrative knowledge to discover some non-linguistic foundation. That

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[85] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 151. Hamann and Herder's insights here represent a linguistic version of Hegel's critique of Kant's epistemology. However, Milbank does not affirm Hegel's contribution here for the following reasons: "In Hamann and Herder's 'expressivism' (as earlier in Vico) one can locate something like a critique of secular modernity, which is yet itself modern, because it recognizes the creative power of language and tries to deal with this by reinterpreting revelation as our participation in the divine creative power of expression. However, this expressivist philosophy does not, like Hegel later on, regard secular enlightenment as a dialectically necessary phase of human becoming. Rather, it appeals ... to a different, 'counter' modernity, a phantom Christian modernity which has never been." (150) For more insight into Milbank's understanding of Hegel see chapter 6, "For and Against Hegel," 147-176.

endeavour, in fact, is the illusion.[86]

Narrative knowledge for Milbank is really the only mode of explaining and understanding history, culture, social phenomena, other persons, or ourselves for that matter.[87] This is because narrative, as story and plot, is that which reiterates an *already encoded* sequence of events, action, causes, and effects. It is this pre-coding, or this ever present encoding, that gives definition to such happenings as occurrences. The living context of reality, that is its socio-cultural and political embodiment, does not confront us as an amorphous mass of raw presence later to be translated into an ordered narrative that intends a specific reference. Instead, reality is already informed by *formal structures of articulation*. That is to say, that human experience as experience is circumscribed by conventional frameworks (i.e., pre-ordered ways of behaving, speaking, acting, and reading) that generate sense insofar that we perceive

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[86] This conclusion is well illustrated in Milbank's critique of Paul Ricoeur's *verstehen* hermeneutics (*Theology and Social Theory*, 263-268). As Milbank reads it, this hermeneutics establishes the Cartesian subject. And with this comes the breakdown of reality into distinct and separate units such as subject/object, understanding/explanation, sense/reference, presence/absence, speech/writing, etc. The problem is that the *aporias* of these Cartesian antimonies are bridged by the subjective, intentional self. Thus the hermeneutical operation "depend[s] upon the assumption of an essential ontological identity between the object studied and the person studying ..." (264) This "assumption," however, is hardly self-evident to Milbank but based upon a secular narrative about the self. That is to say, meaning is that which is generated and created by the subjective self, projected on to objects in reality, thereby defining the meaning of reality. Truth is therefore a question of correspondence between subject and object. *Aporias* in these correspondences represent alienated meanings and truths that are overcome via a process of self-identical appropriation. Such an appropriation for Milbank simply manifests the secular ontology of violence because the sovereign self is to take control and possess reality by reducing it to the constructed categories of the self.

[87] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 267.

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the formal structures inherent within each situation. And we can perceive them because we are educated to do so, taught to live by their rules. In return, we are given a sense of orientation, coherence, and direction. These formal structures, of course, are hardly monolithic, fixed, or unambiguous. It is for this reason that the assertion and perception of meaning is always a questionable activity. Nevertheless, such ordered and ordering frameworks do exist and they are considered vital for the creation of human knowledge and culture.[88]

In effect, narrative and our knowledge of reality share a common structure which we could refer to as our "narrative reality," or "the reality of narration," or even "a narrative realism." The point is that knowledge and narrative are so inextricably bound to each other that their common structure really amounts to a *mutual structuring* in perpetual movement. In fact the very "explanation" of their relationship accentuates this insight: namely, it is a relationship that cannot be "proven" *per se* only narrated. Truth is not constituted by correspondence between subject and object. Rather, it represents the circulation of meaning shared through a process of participation. Meaning is shared to the degree that we *re-narrate* the meta-stories which inform our perception of reality and its truth. By repeating our founding narratives, we in turn extend the scope of its allotment, expanding the range of the formal structures which encode reality. But since the process of extension and sharing is a dynamic one, it *adds* to the truth of the metanarrative by augmenting its sphere of participation, and so on. To state the matter somewhat differently, it seems that the repetition of our

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[88] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 263-268.

metanarratives does *not* lead to a perfect correspondence between a separate but stable narrative and a separate but stable reality. It is not a strict macro-micro relationship. More, it is like a macro-micro analogical webbing,[89] whereby the macro structure orientates the micro in such a way that the latter actively feeds back into the former but in a fashion *unanticipated* by the macro structure. In this way, the micro structure adds to the macro status without ever overcoming it, and vice versa.

In many ways, Milbank's exposition of narrative knowledge foreshadows his Christian ontology which we will take up shortly. However, we gain a first glimpse of its scope and intention by simply considering the ramifications of narrative knowledge for religion and theology in a general way. For instance, if we cannot limit narrative by drawing boundaries that are meant to categorize its proper sphere of function in relation to a non-linguistic reality, then what we know or what we can claim to be true, will depend upon the kinds of stories and languages available to us. And if the history of our narrative tradition includes a discourse about the infinite, about the divine; and if that discourse includes a reference to an actually existing, objective reality as part of its idiom, then there is no critical reflection which can absolutely or scientifically "disprove" its truth or legitimacy. To attempt to do so merely posits the claims of one narrative against another. "For no expressive understanding of the finite world" writes Milbank, "can really claim a legal 'title deed' such that one can see it as an instant of bringing a particular fact under the judgment of a stable and universal conceptual framework. And in that case," he continues, "it becomes impossible to

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[89] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 289; 304-306.

demonstrate that the 'understanding,' or human discursive thought, is clearly limited to judgment of the finite and must not trespass beyond these bounds."[90]

Naturally, Milbank has every intention of trespassing beyond these bounds toward a metanarrative about God's relation to the world and humankind. However, that which allows one to "effect" the trespass also "affects" the relationship. As the author remarks; "the relationship of God to the world becomes ... a rhetorical one, and *ceaves to be anything to do with 'truth'* or, in other words with the relation of reality and appearance."[91] Knowing God, being intimately related to God, forming communities dedicated to God, etc., are not relationships objectively established by a caring though radically different ontological power. Rather, such relationships are cu ted through our narratives which describe, speculate, assert, and affirm the value of these kinds of relations. Thus the "reality" will "appear," if you will, to the degree that human beings place themselves and are subsequently placed by a particular metanarrative about the divine Being.

Now, I do not want to exaggerate, or worse, distort Milbank's claims for narrative knowledge. It would be wrong to foster the impression that because our knowledge is received and conveyed as narrative that the "realness" of our lives in rendered "unreal." For example, the idea that the "Secular 'scientific' understanding of society was from the outset, only the self-knowledge of the self-construction of the secular as power"[92]

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[90] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 151.

[91] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 430.

[92] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 10.

does not lessen any the impact of secularism upon those caught in its narratological webbing. The dialectic of enlightenment is not a phantom threat after all. Still, such "realness" does not do away with the need to clarify the latitude and altitude of human knowledge. In this regard, Milbank is suggesting that the modes of perceiving and conceiving truth, objectivity, reality, God, etc. cannot be bypassed. One must therefore account for these modes as an intrinsic dimension of the subject matter that one is dealing with. This can prove confusing at times because the analysis of the modes must double back upon the analysis itself, which seems to get one nowhere. This apparent contradiction can be neutralized somewhat by underscoring the critical moment in the mode itself. This Milbank has attempted to do by including Hamann and Herder's "metacritical" analysis of Kant as part of the exposition. Whether this critical moment as employed by Milbank proves to be ultimately satisfying in the end is another matter. But whatever the case may be, I feel it essential to indicate here the importance of Milbank's insistence upon narrative knowledge.

To help me do this, I would like to refer to Charles Taylor's masterful study, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Indeed, there are so many striking points of contact between Milbank and Taylor's works that an in depth comparison would prove to be a most fruitful exercise.[93] However, I plan to confine my remarks to Taylor's notion of, what he calls the principle of "our best account," or the "B.A. principle" for short.

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[93] For example, see Taylor's *Sources of the Self* where he argues for the necessity of ontology as "Inescapable Frameworks," (3-24), as well as affirming "The Expressivist Turn" (368-390).

Taylor's book is essentially an exploration of the modern identity crisis. Modern subjects, for the most part, do not know who they are, or who they are supposed to be. And what's worse, they have been deprived, says Taylor, of the means through which to make such a discovery. This deprivation has been carried out in numerous ways. But one of the most decisive factors has been the modern-secular degradation of moral and religious language. Such language -- much like morality and religion itself -- is viewed as a superfluous addendum to a normative secular reality. However, Taylor contends that the latter attitude, stance, or framework leaves the modern person grappling with a huge vacuum in her or his life. As we noted earlier of Taylor's critique of Habermas, the expression of substantial meaning, the kind of meaning that can provide orientation, a hierarchy of goods, indeed a very vision of "the Good," cannot be achieved without the kinds of languages *felt* to be necessary for the articulation of such guiding framewcrks.

Given this point, Taylor goes on to advocate "the BA principle." In the author's own words;

> What we need to *explain* is people living their lives; the terms in which they cannot avoid living them cannot be removed from the explanandum, unless we can propose other terms in which they could live them more clairvoyantly. We cannot just leap outside of these terms altogether, on the grounds that their logic doesn't fit some model of 'science' and that we know a priori that human beings must be explicable in this 'science.' ... The terms we select have to make sense across the whole range of both explanatory and life uses.[94] The terms indispensable for the latter

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[94] Earlier on the same page in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor writes that "What is preposterous is the suggestion that we ought to disregard altogether the terms that can figure in the non-explanatory contexts of living for the purposes of our explanatory theory." (58)

are part of the story that makes best sense of us, unless and until we can replace them with more clairvoyant substitutes. The result of this search of clairvoyance yields the best account we can give at any given time, and no epistemological or metaphysical considerations of a more general kind about science or nature can justify setting this aside. The best account in the above sense is trumps.[95]

What I want to do now is to outline what Milbank believes to be "trumps" for the Christian "explanandum." After this we will be in a better position to ascertain whether it represents the "best account we can give at any given time," or if it demands the search for "a more clairvoyant substitute."

"In my view," states Milbank, "a true Christian metanarrative realism must attempt to retrieve and elaborate the account of history given by Augustine in the *Civitas Dei*. For one can only stick fast by the principle of 'intratextuality' -- the idea that theology is an explication of the developing and rationally unfounded Christian cultural code ..."[96] What is this account of history -- or perhaps more accurately, an account of the historical -- that so attracts the author? It strikes me that Milbank is intent upon outlining an ultimate vision of the ideal, fully realized Christian community. A community, moreover, that cannot be created according to the dictates of secular social formation, but one that plays out the "rationally unfounded Christian cultural code" until it reaches the meridian point of a comprehensive Christian ethos.

The ethos that Milbank accentuates is situated in "the other city"; that city *other than* the secular city: the *Civitas Dei*. It is a virtuous Christian society that actualizes a

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[95] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 58.

[96] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 389.

profound compassion and charity for "the other." Its reality principle is relational; that

is, a reality of rightly ordered and situated relationships.[97] The result is a harmonious

peace between difference and unity: a harmonious peace rooted in the difference and

unity of the Trinitarian God. As Milbank describes it;

> ... Christians worship the one true God who originates all finite reality in an act of peaceful donation, willing a *new fellowship* with himself and amongst the beings he has created. In "the heavenly city," beyond the possibility of alteration, the angels and saints abide in such a fellowship; *their virtue is not the virtue of resistance and domination, but simply of remaining in a state of self-forgetting conviviality*. Here there is nothing but "the vision of peace," a condition that originally pertained also for the temporal creation, before the sinful assertion of pride and domination introduced a pervasive presence of conflict leading to death in both society and nature. But God and the heavenly Jerusalem our "true mother" reach down in compassion for the salvation of the world *Salvation from sin must mean "liberation" from political, economical and psychic dominium, and therefore from all structures belonging to the seculum*, or temporal interval between the fall and the final return of Christ. *This salvation takes the form of a different inauguration of a different kind of community*. Whereas the *civitas terrena* inherits its power from the conqueror of a fraternal rival, the "city of God on pilgrimage through this world" founds itself not in a succession of power, but upon the memory of the murdered brother, Abel slain by Cain. The city of God is in fact a paradox, "a nomad city" ... for it does not have a site, or walls or gates. It is not like Rome, an *asylum* constituted by the "protection" afforded by a dominating class over a dominated, in the face of an external enemy. This form of refuge is, in fact, but a dim archetype of the *real refuge provided by the Church, which is the forgiveness of sins* ... [T]he Church provides a genuine peace by its memory of all the victims, its equal concern for all its citizens, and its self-exposed offering of *reconciliation* to enemies. The peace within the city walls opposing the "chaos" without, is, in fact, no peace at all compared with *a peace coterminous with all Being whatsoever*. Space is revolutionized: it can no longer be defended, and even the barbarians can only respect the sanctuary of the Basilica.[98]

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[97] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 428.

[98] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 391-192. Italics mine.

I have extracted this long passage not only because (from a certain perspective) it represents a moving expression of eschatological hope, but also because it conveys the substance and contours of the Christian ethos perceived by Milbank in "the other city." The ethos is a saving one, for the "new fellowship" must embody salvation from sin in *all* of its manifestations. The praxis of this "different community" is the unlimited offer of forgiveness, which promises a "reconciliation" that culminates in "a peace coterminous with all Being whatsoever." The other city is in the city inaugurated for the other: a city whose inhabitants strive for "a state of self-forgetting conviviality" while never forgetting the plight of the victim, the poor, the underprivileged, the marginalized. It is a city of "beautiful losers" (Leonard Cohen) we might say; beautiful, because each non-identical difference adds to the harmonious whole differently, which *is* the differential peace of God.

This last statement, as you may have well sensed, introduces us to the specific ontology that speaks through the narrative of the *Civitas Dei*. Essentially, this ontology represents the efforts of Augustine and Dionysius to "christianize" neo-Platonism. The fundamental neo-Platonic insight that attracts these theologians is the *participatory relationship* between Being, and an infinite. overarching Oneness which nevertheless lies beyond the particular differentiations of Being. The difficulty with this ontology, however, is the apparent abyss between relations of Being on the one hand, and the unitary relation of Being to the One, on the other. When we try to think through this abyss, the differential relations seem to undo the unitary relation thus constantly posing

a threat to the very ontology itself.[99]

In response to this threat, Augustine and Dionysius -- especially within their Trinitarian theology[100] -- expand the notion of an infinite Oneness by, as Milbank observes, "situating the infinite emanation of difference within the Godhead itself ..."[101] Difference, therefore, is made intrinsic to the source of unity, rather than defining it in contrast to an underlying unitary substance. Thus, the unitary relation of Being to the One is basically apprehended within the differential relations of Being itself.

Another way of explaining this relationship is to considerate it as a whole-part relation, but one of a special sort. Rather than imagining the meaning and purpose of the part on the basis of an identity with the whole (so that the part is but a reflection of the whole in miniature), Milbank suggests (following Augustine's *De Musica*) that the whole be envisioned as the emanation of an infinite series, whereby the discrete units of the series articulates the infinity of the whole by its very discreteness and particularity. The part, in turn, is given its meaning by participating in the series of infinite emanations which stress the open-ended positioning of the part (hence its unique and unpredictable contribution to the infinite expansion) rather than a reducible (because a closed) identity. In effect, the part, by being an essential moment in the articulation of the infinite, includes the whole within its orbit of activity, but it can never be totally

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[99] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 427.

[100] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 424.

[101] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 428.

eclipsed by the whole. It can be so because the whole is *not a hypostatic reality*[102] but a perception (i.e., a narrative, or story) of an unknowable quantum because radically unquantifiable. The whole as infinite series is inexhaustible and therefore beyond all particular limitations.[103]

However, the whole is not beyond particular expressions. Or as Milbank may well have put it, the discrete particulars give voice and thereby add to a specific emplotment that forms the story of the infinite in tension with the finite. And the story that best describes this process of the divine unfolding is, for Milbank, the Christian *mythos*:

> The God who is, who includes difference, and yet is unified, is not a God sifted out as "truth," but a God who speaks in the harmonious happening of Being. ... [T]his is affirmed by Augustine in the *Confessions*, where the God of Moses who defines himself as the God who is (est), the "ontological" God, is also ... the God who announces himself; while, inversely, the historical God who declares "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" is also the ontological God, the God of what positively occurs ... Narrative and ontology reinforce each other in an ontology of difference, because God must be known *both* as the "speaking" of created difference, *and* as an inexhaustible plentitude of otherness. This ontological background, or "setting," finally steps into the foreground when the heir of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob himself announces "I am before the creation of the world." Then the positive given event becomes itself inexhaustible, itself the setting of past and future lives.[104]

The "heir" of course, is also the "heir-apparent" and his name is Jesus the Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, that particular created difference is at the same time the perfect expression of the ontological God and the God of history. Christ therefore concretely

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[102] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 428.

[103] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 404-406.

[104] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 430.

manifests to the world the difference of infinity and the infinite as difference, marking an historical and ontological *shibbolith* in the course of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the *final* intonation of the ontological "melody" that reverberates throughout the divine "score" composed and performed by God. It is a score and performance that intends to express the loving and charitable difference of the forgiveness of sins; a difference which offers the peace of reconciliation *with and between God and humankind*. In this way, human beings return to God that which emanates from God. But it is a form of return, thinks Milbank, that is only possible after the Incarnation. As the author remarks, "the point of the incarnation ... [is] to communicate to human beings the idiom, the logos of an adequate return, so that this could be made universally. For until there is a universal return," asserts Milbank, "then surely God must continue to suffer the 'contradiction' of a loss of his glory, an alienation of his participated being."[105]

It is at this juncture that the Church, its theology and praxis, forms an intrinsic part of the Christian metanarrative. Here a comprehensive ecclesiology becomes the agent, as it were, of the universal return communicated by the incarnation. The task of "the people of God" then, is to truly (i.e., historically[106]) actualize the Christian cultural code[107] by forming *sittlich* communities[108] that embody the salvation that has opened

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[105] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 397-398.

[106] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380.

[107] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 389.

[108] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 415-417.

out through the forgiveness of sins.[109] But in order for this to happen; in order for it to express the intentions of "the God of what positively *occurs*,"[110] the story of the Church must circulate through, and ever towards, the story of the Christ. Thus the task of theology is "to tell again the Christian *mythos*, pronounce again the Christian *logos*, and call again for Christian *praxis* ..."[111] What this means is that theology and the Church need only embrace the Christian metanarrative as absolute.[112] "Not to embrace such a 'metanarrative,' or to ascribe to it a merely partial interpretative power," writes Milbank, "would undo the logic of the incarnation."[113] And if the logic of the incarnation were to be radically doubted, what would be left of Christianity? Whence its uniqueness? For what could possibly justify this religious tradition if not the meta-justification already entrenched within the historical tradition itself?

In the preceding paragraphs, I have tried to provide a succinct summary of Milbank's basic thesis while giving special attention to his conceptualization of metanarrative and its place within Christian faith. I have also attempted to underscore Milbank's contention that the metanarrative function cannot be judged according to the categories of "reality" and "appearance." Finally, I have endeavoured to explain why,

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[109] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 392.

[110] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 430.

[111] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 381.

[112] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 268.

[113] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 246.

at least as far as Milbank is concerned, this contention does not imply that "reality," "truth," and "objectivity," are complete and total fictions which we can do away with. What Milbank seeks to illustrate is that if one cannot get behind language and its traditions of articulation, then these traditions must constitute our point of departure for any analysis of "reality," any assertion of "truth," and any critique that aims at "objectivity."

Given this supposition, human knowledge is always already a narrative knowledge in terms of its creation, explication, application, and growth. Yet in order for these latter activities to be at all operative, our narrative knowledge must be rooted in one particular narrative.[114] Only in this fashion do we have access to a specific content and organizational logic that can create a meaningful life. Outside of such particularity, one is left with an empty, secular universalism that pretends to transcend the pitfalls of particularity (such as ethnocentricism and theocracy), but in fact advances its own particular agenda based on an ontology of violence. Thus we cannot escape the need for particularity or its meta-claim.

However, for anyone at all sensitive to the pluralistic character of contemporary society and culture numerous questions arise in view of this *particularistic-turn*: specifically, which particularity, or which metanarrative are we to live by? And even if this issue could be decided, what is to be its scope of relevance? A small community? A federation of small communities? The whole church? The Catholic

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[114] It is at this point when Milbank parts company with the "formalistic" aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics (*Theology and Social Theory*, 417).

Church? Western society? Or the whole of humankind?

Of course, Milbank's book is precisely a "gutsy" attempt to answer these kinds of questions. It is courageous because Milbank takes on, quite brilliantly, the whole theoretical and ontological orientation of contemporary Christian life and thought in order to lay bare the depths of their secular distortion. In some ways, he is a present-day Kierkegaard offering a severe corrective to what he perceives to be a despicable situation. As such, one can appreciate Milbank's endeavour to clearly spell-out the virtues of particularity in a way that goes beyond the superficiality of a knee-jerk response. However, it is a response that does not seem to evade the excessiveness of the reactionary.

The excessiveness of Milbank's proposal, I believe, hinges upon the inexplicable finality of the meta-claim that governs the vitality and purpose of the Christian narrative. As Milbank states the matter;

> The real implication is this: one simply cannot exhibit in what its "meta" character consists, without already carrying out this interpretation, this regulation, to the widest possible extent. ... For the Christological-ecclesial narrative arises, in the first place, not simply as an "identification" of the divine, but also as a "reading" and a critique-through-practice of all historical human community up to that point. Initially, it defines itself as both in continuity and discontinuity with the community of Israel; iater on it defines itself as in still greater discontinuity with the "political" societies of the antique world. This account of history and critique of human society is in no sense an appendage to Christianity -- on the contrary, it belongs to its very "essence."[115]

In other words, if a metanarrative is to be at all "meta," it cannot be judged but can

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[115] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

only exercise itself as that which passes final judgment on the whole of human history. Milbank acknowledges that this is a "gigantic claim," but it is one absolutely "integral to the Christian Church"[116] which, says the author, came into historical existence by a "particular theoretical perspective on history ... [that] interprets and 'locates' all other history."[117]

The apparent immodesty of Milbank's "meta assertion," however, is not so easy for the Christian adherent to refute. This is because the author constructs what seems to be a staunch "logical" argument whose point of entry immediately presses one to accept its ultimate conclusion. As I see it, Milbank first posits the post-Nietzschean demand for *mythos* (i.e., narrative knowledge as the locus for all substantial meaning). But *mythos* can only be true locus if it includes a meta-claim that can function as an absolute organizational logic. Second, if the Christian religion is to be the antidote to secular nihilism or the dialectic of enlightenment, then its modern-liberal theological articulation will fail to meet this challenge. It will fail because contemporary Christian thought abandoned long ago the Christian metanarrative for its secular rival. Third, it therefore follows that figures such as Augustine must provide the needed orientation and perspective. It is here that Milbank retrieves Augustine's unique reiteration of the Christian *mythos* and metaphysic as the most appropriate articulation of a genuine Christian ethos. Fourth, that ethos proves to be inextricably bound to an essential part of the Christian metanarrative insofar that it historically extends the formal structures

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[116] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388.

[117] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 246.

of the Christian story that already encodes the reality of the ecclesiology itself. Thus, one is given the impression that with the acceptance of the first post-Nietzschean move, the others must follow as a matter of course.

Now I suppose there is a temptation here to reject Milbank's argument as tautological. But to do so would be, from Milbank's point of view, to change to subject once again. For given the presupposition of narrative knowledge, all *argumentation* becomes a rhetorical exercise in persuasion where the goal is to "out-narrate"[118] the other. Thus, one can only work from the inside-out, as it were, from some "transcendent factor"[119] posited by a particular narrative construction of reality. Here it is a question of instilling the "truth" rather than "proving" it. That is why Milbank is unable to offer any determinant explanation for the "meta-character" of the Christian *mythos*: it just is, and you either run with it or you don't, *c'est tout*.

Milbank's rhetorical approach may be acceptable to a certain degree given that he is addressing a Christian audience. But even in this case there exists an unconvincing imbalance between the socio-cultural context of the problematic and the idealism of the linguistic resolution. On the one hand, the point of entry into Milbank's rhetoric is extremely broad, based as it is upon the contemporary experience of, and familiarity with so-called modern secular nihilism. This situation is one common factor that gives import and urgency to the whole of Milbank's project. On the other hand, his solution to the postmodern dilemma is extremely narrow, focusing as it does upon Christian

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[118] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380.

[119] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2.

orthodoxy as the most convincing metanarrative alternative. The cogency of this alternative is supported, in part, by the secularist hostility to Christian orthodoxy identified in the very first paragraph of Milbank's book.[120] But this negativity is not enough by itself to positively explain (which all particularistic accounts must accomplish) why an orthodox embodiment of the Christian faith represents the only "real" option in the face of secular nihilism. To do this Milbank devises what could be called, "a metanarrative circle" (as opposed to a hermeneutical circle) *whose presupposition seems to prohibit the possibility of radically questioning its circularity without dissolving the profundity of narrative knowledge altogether.* Hence, if narrative knowledge constitutes the most adequate and perceptive response to the threat of meaninglessness, then it cannot forgo the meta-claim and the consequences of its proper exercise.

The problem with the above construction, however, is that the metanarrative circle only gains its theoretical significance in relation to our post-Nietzschean situation. But if this is the case, how can one justify the narrative closure to objections based upon contemporary experience, knowledge, and criticism? The fact that the latter are couched in a completely different metanarrative deemed incommensurable with the Christian story will not suffice. For why doesn't incommensurality work both ways? Well Milbank knows full well that it does since it constitutes an important dimension of his overall argument. So, are we to surmise that Milbank is only addressing the converted? *Not quite.* The fact of the matter is, that the critical and innovative edge

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[120] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1.

of Milbank's proposal assumes the existence of *narrative knowledges* within each human subject and community. And there is no reason that I can see why one must close themself off to the various challenges and insights that can accrue from such a *narrative plurality*, unless Milbank can clearly "exhibit in what [the Christian] 'meta' character consists."[121] Of course Milbank cannot do this without referring to something like Revelation as an Objectively Real occurrence quite aside from its narrative embodiment. So, if we are to open the doors to the importance and function of narrative knowledge, then let us open them all the way. When this is done, then the pseudo-certitude of the Christian meta-claim could only be maintained as counter-intuitive. And if this step were taken, then nihilism might not so much be banished as embraced by faith itself.

The point that needs to be made at this juncture, I think, is that Milbank's theology does *not* critically pass beyond Nietzsche. Instead, Milbank turns Nietzsche inside-out, so to speak, fulfilling the Nietzschean conditions for the possibility of "truth" but in a way that subverts the conclusions reached by Nietzsche himself. Thus, Milbank can literally affirm Nietzsche's insight that "it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests -- even we ... godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine."[122] In other

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[121] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

[122] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 283.

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words, "truth" is a matter for metaphysical belief, mythology, grammar.[123] It is partly for this reason that Milbank urges the theological positioning of the social sciences rather than the reverse. However, the issue that Nietzsche accentuates here is quite different: "-- But what if this [metaphysical faith] should become more and more incredible, if nothing should *prove* to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie? -"[124] Milbank's response to this question is the metanarrative circle. But in light of my critique of this construct, can one affirm the Nietzschean conditions for the possibility of "truth" without also leaving some room for a Nietzschean contribution to its content? Nietzsche did not seem to think this was possible:

> What is a *belief?* How does it originate? Every belief is a considering-something-true.
>
> The most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that *every* belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world.* Thus: a *perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us (in so far as we continually *need* a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world).
>
> -- That it is the measure of strength to what extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely *apparent* character, the necessity of lies.
>
> To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be *a divine way of thinking.*[125]

I have no intention of pushing the analogy with Nietzsche any further, since I feel

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[123] See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954).

[124] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 283.

[125] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 14-15.

the point has been made. But this doesn't settle the matter. For the other half of Milbank's claim to critically pass beyond Nietzsche concerns the capacity of the Christian story to communicate, in a unique way, a differential peace and harmony that transcends the secular ontology of violence and its "will-to-power." Thus even if the metanarrative circle proves to be problematic, one must still struggle with the substance of the Christian alternative as articulated by Milbank. The difference now being, of course, that we need not confine the scope of our critical reflections because of the metanarrative function. Instead, we are free to assess the Christian meta-claim from the perspectives provided by our narrative knowledges.

In this case, I genuinely affirm Milbank's effort to move beyond a static epistemology and a regulatory metaphysic toward a vibrant and living Christian ethos that embraces the love of God as its foundation rather than omniscience or omnipotence. Similarly, I find his suggestion that liberation is achieved by joining a unique historical community to represent an interesting clarification of the implicit goals of much of contemporary critical theology. At the same time though, my mind keeps harkening back to that "gigantic claim"[126] to "interpret and 'locate' all other history"[127] which Milbank perceives as "integral to the Christian Church."[128] *But what Milbank fails to see, and what our narrative knowledges allow us to see, is that the "gigantic claim" undermines the potential for discussing a Christian self-*

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[126] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388.

[127] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 246.

[128] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388.

understanding and narrative thematized as "foundational love."

As it presently stands, I contend that Milbank's articulation of the Christian metanarrative constitutes a complex reiteration of Christian supersessionism and triumphalism whose meta-exercise has had disastrous historical results. These disasters, moreover, cannot be shrugged off as the infection of the genuine Christian gospel with pagan, neo-pagan, or secular influences as Milbank is want to do at such critical junctures.[129] No, the particular problem I am thinking of reaches straight into the heart of the "Christological-ecclesial narrative"[130]: *namely, the anti-Judaic tradition.*

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[129] For example, in *Theology and Social Theory* Milbank says the following about the Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality as articulated by Saint Paul: "St Paul, in line with the Hebrew scriptures, had stressed that the sacredness of marriage consists in its mutuality but, under stoic influence, procreation became the only good of marriage until ... the twentieth century. The confessional manuals in this area, which focus never on mutuality, but always on one's attitudes to the fulfilling of duties and the legal satisfaction of one's spouse's physical desires, seem to reflect pagan downgrading of the marital relationship and obsessive preoccupation with male 'control' of sexuality, rather than the Biblical outlook ... But for all that, ... a sexually 'other-regarding' ethic is logically implied by Christianity, and if this was held back, it was held back by a pagan and especially stoic reside." (293) This discussion is offered in light of the author's affirmation of historicism. As the conclusion to his commentary on Christian marriage reflects, Milbank regards the pagan and stoic influences on the Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality to be a distortion of the "essential" Christian view. But how can such an influence be considered a distortion or obstacle when *Christians* embraced the pagan and stoic virtues as their own, in both thought and practice? Later on in the text, Milbank argues against George Linbeck's view of doctrine saying that "'Rules' are, in effect, speculative interpretations of the implicit assumptions of the narrative, and the articulation of these assumptions will necessarily engage with the conceptual resources available at a particular historical time, which then became an *inescapable part of the Christian inheritance*, not a mere husk to be easily discarded, as Lindbeck implies." (385, italics mine) Well, if the latter is true, then it also applies to the pagan and stoic influences on Paul's views of marriage and sex.

[130] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

According to the research of Rosemary Ruether, an anti-Judaic bias has been a fundamental part of the Christian metanarrative from the very beginning, from the "Easter Faith."[131] Succinctly stated, the Jewish rejection of Jesus' messiahship encouraged an abhorring polemic against Jews, depicting them as "blind," "immoral," "agents of the devil," and therefore doomed to a life of exile and constant misery. This polemic, however, cannot be explained or dismissed as a "sour grapes" reaction to the rejection as such. After all, rejected messiahs were nothing new for the Jewish people. No, the polemic arises because Jesus' messiahship was made the basis for a supersessionary covenantal principle.[132] As a result, the anti-Judaic attitude found within the New Testament, the teaching of the Church Fathers, and (we might say) throughout the "unfounded Christian cultural code,"[133] functioned as the "left hand of Christology."[134] This is to say, that the truth of the Christ is, in part,

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[131] Rosemary Ruether, "The Faith and Fratricide Discussion: Old Problems and New Dimensions" in Alan Davies ed., *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 237.

[132] Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Antisemitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 56.

[133] Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide*, 183-225. Also see her essay, "Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations" in Abraham J. Peck ed., *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust* (Philadelphia:
Fortress Press, 1982), 25-38. Here Ruether observes that the hatred of the Jews "was not only inculcated by Christian preaching and exegesis. It became incorporated into the structure of canon law and also the civil law formed under the Christian Roman emperors, such as the Codes of Theodosius (A.D. 428) and of Justinian (sixth century). These anti-Judaic laws of the church and the Christian empire laid the basis for the debasement of the civic and personal status of the Jew in Christian society that lasted until the emancipation in the nineteenth century. These laws were, in part, revived in the Nazi Nuremberg Laws of 1933." (?5)

[134] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*.

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demonstrated by the "abject" nature of those who rejected him. "In effect," writes Ruether, "Christian theology set out to demonstrate the rejected status of the Jewish people and the spiritual blindness of its exegesis and piety in order to vindicate the correctness of its own exegesis and its claim to be the rightful heir of Israel's election."[135]

Now Milbank may view such a consequence as simply the result of one *mythos* confronting another. In the New Testament at least, one could suggest that the polemic against, say, Pharasaic Judaism, is really an in-house squabble that cannot avoid a "clash of rhetorics."[136] For when we are dealing with a narrative knowledge, then all one can do is to try to "out-narrate" the other[137]; try to "persuade"[138] the other that you have the best metanarrative. Moreover, such persuasive argumentation for Milbank cannot be equated with a violent act. It cannot be because the very terms one can use to discriminate between violence/peace, coercion/harmony, truth/falsehood, etc. are constituted and made available to us only through a commitment to one particular narrative.[139] To argue that persuasion itself is coercive and manipulative is to opt for a "narrative" of "Objectivity" over and against a narrative knowledge as such. It is this persuasive dynamic of narrative knowledge which helps explain the "excessive" claims

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[135] Ruether, "Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations," 26.

[136] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 347.

[137] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 330.

[138] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 430.

[139] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 398.

made on behalf of Jesus in the New Testament. As Milbank remarks, the "dazzling effect of Jesus upon his followers caused them to use divine metaphors with regard to him, which both 'reflected' Jesus (and in a real sense *were* the presence of Jesus) and also, in a certain, not-really-to-be-regretted fashion, obscured him in favour of an 'idea.'"[140]

But if this is the case, then it must also be acknowledged that the "idea" which compels the Christian *mythos* to persuasive opposition is intertwined with a *particular* hatred at the first order level of the Christian narrative. And the fact that this hatred continues to be expressed throughout the centuries within the second order levels of the Christian story, suggests that the anti-Judaic sentiment involves much more than a "clash of rhetorics" or an endeavour to "out-narrate" the other: it also involves the Christological formulation. Thus, if one proposes that the exercise of the Christian metanarrative entails the *unquestionable* capacity to "read, criticize, [and] say what is going on in other human societies,"[141] then I think there is just cause to "regret the idea" itself.

The latter sentiment, at least, is one shared by the Jewish people. Because of the "idea" they have been subjected to real suffering, torture, and murder at the instigation of the Christian metanarrative, and at the hands of Christians.[142] In fact, some

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[140] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 384.

[141] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388.

[142] See Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uuniversity Press, 1980).

Christian and Jewish scholars, Ruether among them, hold that the Christian metanarrative played a necessary role in the events that lead to the Holocaust.[143] Though this argument is difficult to maintain as a strong thesis,[144] it nevertheless represents a proposal that Christians *should* engage and struggle with if their faith is to be based upon the idea of the foundational love of God. Unfortunately, I cannot go into all the reasons at this time why I feel this is such an important issue. However, enough has been said in order to explore the challenge of the anti-Judaic tradition for Milbank's post-Nietzschean Christian vision.

The most obvious problem that comes to the fore here is that Milbank's reading of the Christian story highlights only the "right hand" of Christology, ignoring the significance of the left hand altogether. However, if the anti-Judaic aspect of Christology is considered (if only partially), then one cannot assert with total confidence

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[143] The Jewish and Christian theological literature on this topic is very extensive. Of tremendous importance to me has been the work of Emil Fackenheim, especially his books *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), and *To Mend the World: Foundations for Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982). Alongside Fackenheim I am quick to add Arthur A. Cohen's dense book, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Besides Rosemary Ruether's work already cited, important Christian contributions to this field of study include A. Roy and Alice L. Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey into Day: Life and Faith After the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1982); A. Roy Eckardt, *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1986); John T. Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

[144] See, for instance, Yosef Hayem Yerushalami's rejection of Ruether's formulation of this thesis in Eva Fleischner ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: KTAV, 1977), 97-107. As for the impact of modernity on the Holocaust, see Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

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that the "non-antagonistic, peaceful mode of life of the city of God is grounded in a particular, historical and 'mythical' narrative, and an ontology which explicates the beliefs implicitly in the narrative."[145] Or, if the city of God is to be grounded in the Christian story as constructed by Milbank, then it is not self-evident that such a city will come to manifest peace, harmony, unlimited love and charity in the face of the other. For if the metanarrative cannot really accept the particular Jewish other, then the Christian stance toward otherness and violence has to be seriously queried. To strongly contend that "Christianity ... recognizes no original violence"[146] cannot be claimed absolutely on the basis of its metanarrative. Though it may be possible to articulate a Christian ontology that moves toward such a recognition, it will depend on the development of a critical ontology -- critical of certain themes and narrative structures as they have been passed on within the history of the Christian tradition.

But hasn't Milbank already addressed these problems through Augustine and Dionysius's reworking of neo-Platonism? For here the central issue is precisely the non-totalitarian reconciliation of difference and unity in a way that does not reduce otherness to the self-identical. In fact, the ontology insists upon the necessity of the irreducible difference of otherness, or the distinctive uniqueness of the particular, which only as difference can contribute to the unfolding expression of the infinite within time. Furthermore, this ontology receives concrete embodiment in the praxis of radical forgiveness within an open community that welcomes difference as that which can add

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[145] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 390.

[146] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5.

to the depth of liberation. It is for these reasons that Milbank writes that the "metanarrative is *not* just the story of Jesus, it is the continuing story of the Church, already realized in a finally exemplary way by Christ, yet still to be realized universally, in harmony with Christ, and yet differently, by all generations of Christians."[147] It follows from this that "tradition must also be radically open-ended"[148] if it is to be the vehicle for the unique and hence unanticipated contribution of the particular to the infinite series. Thus, what is all the fuss about? Am I not simply failing to understand the genius of the Christian story and ontology?

An assessment of Milbank's ontological reflections, however, cannot evade the import of the "gigantic claim." I suppose if we were willing to ignore it, we could speculate that the contribution of the particular to the infinite series is a formulation that could also hold true for each religious tradition. For if the unfolding of the infinite in history is really unpredictable because of the uniqueness of the particular, then maybe religious pluralism constitutes part of the inexhaustibility of the infinite, at least from a Christian point of view. Milbank even seems to hint as much when he remarks that the "reconciliation of virtue with difference implies a harmonic pattern in the happening of difference, a 'tradition' whose norms are only seen in the course of its unfolding. But a tradition (is Christianity the *only* tradition in this sense?) automatically *consists* in the imagination of a reality in which traditioned processes themselves participate. The thought of God as infinite Being, as difference in harmony, is this speculative

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[147] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

[148] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 416.

imagining."[149]   This statement appears to leave some room for considering the validity of other religious traditions, for reasons of charity if nothing else. It is at this point, perhaps, where we glimpse the critical potential of Milbank's ontology. For if the ongoing Christian tradition is to be enacted "differently by all generations of Christians," and if this difference results in "traditioned norms" that strive to reflect a genuinely "harmonic pattern," then what is there to prevent the current generation of Christians from articulating a new type of "traditioned norm" that can adequately address problems such as the anti-Judaic attitude?

Unfortunately, this cannot be the scenario that comes into being given Milbank's insistence on the metanarrative capacity to criticize, locate, and ultimately, to pass moral judgment on all other human communities. If this capacity were weakened in any way, then the unique logic of the incarnation, and the very idiom of the Christian ethos, would be lost. Consequently, Milbank's ontological speculation primarily serves and justifies a Christian salvation history. Here the unpredictable contribution of the particular to the infinite series explains the Christian innovation and intervention into history in relation to Judaism, and now secularism. Therefore, the praxis of forgiveness and the historical creation of a new saving fellowship that is forever striving to actualize that peaceful "city of otherness" is a way for Milbank to state, in postmodern terms, the next phase of *Heilsgeschichte*. The present Christian generation is free to embrace Christian orthodoxy in a postmodern context, and thus, "differently." *But they are not free to embrace a different Christianity: a Christianity that could*

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[149] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 430.

critically reject the finality of its supersessionary covenantal principle.

The question that presents itself at this juncture is; on what *basis* does one *ground* a genuine critical theology? Could it be that the very issue of grounding is part of the problem itself? This strikes me as one possible conclusion to draw from the above analysis of Milbank's proposal. His post-Nietzschean perspective turns out to be instructive insofar that the notion of a groundless metanarrative ground radically throws into relief the incapacitation of the critical attitude when it is tied to the ideal of a self-generating normativity. When this concept is perceived as the goal, then the transcendence required for authentic criticism is lost, and the potential for violence is given free reign. This insight, of course, takes us back to our criticisms of Habermas's work. In many ways, Milbank simply takes up the modern dilemma in a post-Nietzschean framework. What that framework reveals is not a postmodern overcoming of the dialectic of enlightenment, but rather a dialectic of enlightenment without restraint. In effect, Milbank's thesis demonstrates the logical outcome of situating critical thought and theology within a modernity radicalized. If it fails to convince, which I think is the case, then it suggests that the very ideal of self-grounding -- whether conceptualized as the validity basis of speech or as metanarrative -- should be left behind altogether.

But left behind for what?

5 Conclusion

What the preceding criticisms of Habermas and Milbank compel, I believe, is a

search for a rigorous, non-ontological justification of religious truth claims. A future critical theology has to think about doing without *grounding* of any type: whether conceived as the validity basis of speech, or a rhetorically based metanarrative. To move beyond the terms and thought processes of foundationalism is more difficult than we realize. It may require exactly what Habermas disdains, and what Milbank shackles to the metanarrative function: namely evaluative, innovative, world-disclosing tropes. This prescription, however, does not do away with the need to cogently argue for the ideas or experiences which make manifest this "new species of justification." That is, it should not set itself against the task of cultivating an expanded and expanding notion of communicative rationality as an open, pluralistic dialogue. This dialogue does not so much aspire to establish a narrow validity basis of speech, but rather intends to contribute to our "best account" of the good life and society. The goal, then, is to thematize "that" which plausibly warrants the critical, public import of religious truth claims without the assistance of "Being" in any of its guises.

What, then, does it rely on?

It is at this juncture that I tackle the promised, if much delayed, exposition on love. For it is this phenomenon I want to advance as the non-ontological crosspiece · which bears the religious claim to truth. For love is not so much "ground" as it is an "*active concern for the life and growth of that which we love.*"[150] As I see it, then, the main task of these final pages is to highlight the non-foundationalist facets of love which, at the same time, accent its religious character or quality. In this fashion, I hope to

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[150] Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Bantam Books, 1956), 22.

intimate the thematic focus of a postorthodox critical theology which adopts the open-enued dialectic from within the postmetaphysical situation. However, I must stress the term "intimate." What follows hardly constitutes a systematic treatment of this issue. The literature on love is immense and I do not even pretend to scratch its surface. Truth to tell, I have neither enough energy nor time to undertake such an analysis here. Nevertheless, given the sources I have consulted and found illuminating (limited though they may be), I feel I can gesture toward the "hea.t" of the matter, indicating at least one possible line for further research.

While glancing through the text of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*,[151] I came across a passage that had a most familiar ring. It reads;

> Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metaphysical fact of love, but they do not constitute it; and the feelings that accompany it can be very different. Jesus' feeling for the possessed man is very different from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is one. *Feelings one "has"; love occurs.*[152]

Now, if the reader can bracket Buber's description of love as a "metaphysical fact" for a moment, one gains a most fascinating point of contact with Habermas's discussion of truth. Recall that Habermas defines the validity claim to truth in opposition to experiential certitude. As he put it, "I *make* a validity claim; I *have* a certainty."[153]

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[151] Trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

[152] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66. Italics mine.

[153] Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien" in H. Fahrenbach ed., *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion: Festschrift für W. Schulz* (Pfullingen, 1973), 223; cited in Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 301.

In other words, what counts as true can only be decided by submitting fact-stating locutions to the demands of communicative action and reason. The validity, or objectivity of a truth claim is made intersubjective, so to speak. Such is the basis for the "cooperative search for truth." In contrast, "truth" claims based on the certitude of experience cannot transcend mere subjectivity. As a result, they are possessed not shared; manipulated not openly debated or criticized.

Returning to the passage from Buber, one immediately registers an analogous discrimination between love and feelings. In this case, feelings are something one possesses. They are both private and manipulable. Love, on the other hand, transcends the effects of mere subjectivity as *happening*; as intersubjective *event*. As Buber elaborates; "Love is responsibility of an I for a You: in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling -- the equality of all lovers, from the smallest to the greatest ..."[154] Thus, love, like the validity claim to truth, receives its objectivity only in response to another. Love is the ability to respond to the other -- indeed, any other -- as beloved: herein lies the "cooperative search for love."

However, unlike Habermas, Buber is not suggesting that one makes or produces love out of something within the self. Love is not the manifestation of a capacity that is always already a part of our inner nature. It does not represent an implicit or intuitive "know how" awaiting its explication as a "know that." Rather, love is *radically* intersubjective. It arises out of encounter, seizing all those involved. As

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[154] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

individuals, we do not have love, but if we are fortunate enough we can "dwell"[155]

in it together. In short, love's objectivity does not precede it as latent potential; rather,

it proceeds as love's actualization.

The main intent of Buber's analysis, I believe, is to highlight the distinctive features

of *active love*. As Erich Fromm depicts it; "Love is an activity, not a passive affect;

it is a 'standing in,' not a 'falling for.' In the most general way," he continues, "the

active character of love can be described by stating that love is primarily *giving*, not

receiving."[156] Fromm's portrayal also turns on the difference between love as a

private possession and love as an event. He further distinguishes this contrast as

immature and mature love. As he summarizes this insight;

> Infantile love follows the principle: "*I love because I am loved.*"
> Mature love follows the principle: "*I am loved because I love.*"
> Immature love says: "*I love you because I need you.*" Mature love
> says: "*I need you because I love you*"[157]

If what I have produced here so far on the meaning of love seems all too

individualistic, then it should be remembered that, according to Fromm, mature love

discovers its quintessential experience and expression as brotherly love and as social

compassion. Fromm states it this way; "... love of the helpless one, love of the poor

and the stranger, are the beginning of brotherly love. .... *Only in the love of those who*

do not serve a purpose, love begins to unfold."[158] In effect, mature love is articulated

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[155] Buber, *I and Thou*, 66.

[156] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 18.

[157] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 40.

[158] Fromm, *Art of Loving*, 40. Italics mine.

as compassionate care and *responsibility* for the poor and oppressed. Here we come upon the unique religious dynamic of a socially committed love: namely, its *gratuity*. Active love is free love: a gift. As gratuitous, it is, in principle, *unrestricted*. How are we to comprehend such a quality? How is it at all possible for the limited, finite human being to love in an unrestricted way?

We can gain some real insight into this dilemma, I think, by attending to the words of the fictional priest Zossima in Fyodor Dostoevsky's great work, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Here we learn that

> active love means hard work and tenacity, and for some people it is, perhaps, a whole science. But I predict that at the very moment when you will realize with horror that, far from getting nearer to your goal [of loving your neighbours], you are, in spite of all your efforts, actually further away from it than ever, I predict at that very moment you will suddenly attain your goal and will behold clearly the miraculous power of the Lord ...[159]

How are we to interpret this passage?

Zossima seems to be suggesting that the closer one comes to actualizing the ideal of a mature brotherly and sisterly love, the more it seems impossible. The more one responds to those in need, the more one becomes painfully aware of how many people are in need of help, care, and compassion. The task that reveals itself is, indeed, far beyond the meagre resources of the single individual or even the whole of humankind. But this recognition is followed by another: one which signifies the "goal" has been attained. What is the content of this second recognition? It is this; the actualization

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[159] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by David Magarshack (London: Penguin Books, 1958), 64.

of unrestricted love does not depend upon the individual's "store" of love; rather, it depends upon sharing the gratuity of love with others.

The gratuitous nature of active love cannot be quantified; it cannot be possessed; it cannot be with-held; it can only be deflated or intensified. When it is deflated, love is sought as an object and within the object. Love becomes restricted to money, cars, lust, power and other cognate symbols for the value of mere self-preservation. When it is intensified, love is passed on to more and more people; it moves into more and more areas of human life -- culture, science, society and politics. This intensification underscores the creative character of active love. Or to express it in other terms, gratuity demands creative love. As Charles Davis comments;

> ... we are asked to love others, including our enemies. It is the kind of love we are asked to have or rather allowed to share. Th[is] love ... is a creative, not just a responsive love. In other words, it is not a love that simply responds to a goodness already there in those loved; not even a love that simply seeks out the least vestige of goodness, so as to respond to it by nurturing it -- the kind of love that finds goodness in the worst of our enemies. No, it is the kind of love that does not presuppose goodness, but creates it.[160]

Herein lies, perhaps, the "miraculous power of the Lord." And herein lies as well the framework for a critical theology as the "science of active love." Its task is to elucidate how an active love which shares a gratuitous love can contribute in a critical fashion to the rational organization of society. Unlike subject-centred reason and all other vestiges of the philosophy of consciousness, active love does not initiate yet another version of the dialectic of enlightenment. Active love as gratuitous love is not

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[160] Charles Davis, *Soft Bodies in a Hard World: Spirituality for the Vulnerable* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1987), 15.

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grounded in the subject as Dostoevsky illustrates. It lives only as a radical intersubjectivity, that is, as creative love: as God's love. And if we love in this fashion, says Davis, then

> we shall not wait to perceive the spark of goodness in others. We shall go out to meet them, even when we cannot discern anything that renders them lovable, and our love will go out from us as a transforming force. Only thus will we break the cycle of injury and vengeance, only thus will we call a halt to the cumulative effect of hatred responding to hatred. Our love like God's, as a share in God's love, must be utterly gratuitous. It must not demand lovableness as its condition, but anticipate and create lovableness.[161]

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[161] Davis, *Soft Bodies*, 15.

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