

ELŻBIETA HAŁAS
University of Warsaw

Between Rejection of Religion and World-Saving: Itineraries of Sociology and Postsecular Social Theory

Abstract: Encroachments of contemporary social theory on the field of theology are the focal point of this essay. In postmodernity, theology facilitates connections with social theory. In the domain of theology, sociocultural problems are being presented as theological issues. Secularized variants of world theology meet with theologizing postsecular social theory above and beyond sociology. This is facilitated by the constant discourse of ambiguity. In this discourse, “the theological” is a vehicle of indeterminate meanings. Praxis’ oriented discourse uses the term “social theory” with its modernist connotative envelope of science and rationality, but with no obligation whatsoever to maintain objectivity of cognition. Sociology doesn’t interfere with theological discourse, but may analyze it, leaving the otherworldly outside its perspective on sociocultural phenomena. The sociotheological discourse of ambiguity, however, opposes both religion and the rationality of science.

Keywords: postsecularism, praxis, social theory, sociology, theology.

Initial Remarks

The presented essay discusses different kinds of knowledge and the associated ambiguities, as well as the influence of changes in knowledge on cultural changes. It also alludes to the dispute which inevitably arose together with the birth of a clearly differentiated system of secular scientific knowledge; the secular cultural and social sciences, and sociology in particular, played a central role here. I will also deal with the ambiguities that were used as arguments in this dispute. To mind comes at once—from a historical point of view—Christian sociology, as well as religious sociology, as opposed to the program of sociology and sociology of religion as its subdiscipline. Christian sociology and sociology of religion have never been synonymous, but they both show how sociology, as soon as it came into existence, became the target of attempts to subordinate it anew to theological reflection. This question is not merely historical, since certain circles still uphold this orientation.

Today, we can observe a reverse tendency—it consists in attempts to subordinate theological discourse to cognitive interests, which develop on the grounds of social theory in quite a peculiar fashion. I will discuss the encroachments of postmodernist social theory on the field of theology in more detail further on. I intend to focus on the contemporary trend that I call “postmodernist postsecularism.” I am interested not only in the relationship between sociology and theology, as well as between social

theory and theology, but also in the relationship between sociology and postmodernist social theory, which is ceasing to be a theory in the hitherto functioning epistemological sense, especially since it loses its explanatory function. In the article's title, I have used the metaphorical expression *itineraries*, since I intend to sketch out the roads and directions of the changes which are taking place in the types of knowledge discussed here.

In order to avoid ambiguity, which can easily arise when one begins to analyze the relationship between social sciences and theology, since this topic is tainted by differing outlooks, I wish to emphasize that my reflections are from a culturological point of view, and that I treat the presented perspectives of sociology, theology and social theory as different cultures of knowledge. I take a clearly judging stand, but only because I recognize the value of the autonomy of rational secular knowledge. Thus, my standpoint is close to that of Karl Mannheim, who debated with theologians about the crisis of modernity during World War II, but also stated clearly that fusion of the sociological perspective with the theological perspective would start an entirely new epoch, marked by the rejection of sociology as a secularized branch of knowledge about the mechanisms of shaping historical reality, precluding a religious approach to anything supernatural (Mannheim 1947: 116).

Mannheim was referring to the tradition of Christian theology. Currently there seem to be no signs of such a cultural turning point; although numerous enclaves of fundamentalism exist, the principle of autonomous secular knowledge predominates. However, as I intend to show, new phenomena are appearing—phenomena which do not match existing terms. To avoid any other ambiguity, I also wish to emphasize that I recognize the value of theology—both in its intellectual, cultural dimension and in its spiritual dimension. My standpoint is close to that of Niklas Luhmann, who accepted the multiple perspectives of human knowledge and cognition, and who consequently proposed observation from multiple perspectives, e.g. of theology by sociology or of sociology by theology (Hahn 1994: 19). On the other hand, I have little esteem for postmodernist social theory which rejects sociology, uses an ambiguous discourse and dons a robe of theological language, mixing science with doctrines, ideology with *praxis*.

Alluding to Harrison C. White's concept of disciplines, one may say that we are watching an arena, upon which a struggle is underway—an attempt to establish the valuation order of knowledge and the criteria of its purity (White 2011: 79–132). On one hand, we have the not too long tradition of purely secular, hypothetical scientific knowledge about society, in other words—about sociocultural phenomena, which are mainly the domain of sociology. On the other, there is the long tradition of theology, once considered the queen of sciences and known also as the sacred theology, with its criteria of revelatory, sacred knowledge and absolute truth. Postmodern social theory has the shortest history. I refer here to the multiform, postcritical *praxis* theory, which violates the “pure orders” of sociological and theological knowledge.

Using the singular number when speaking about sociology, theology and social theory is a simplification; however, it facilitates tracking crucial changes in the relationships between these forms of knowledge, and also makes it easier to spot the

problems which might stem from the transformation of secular science dealing with sociocultural phenomena into theology, or—conversely—from the transformation of theology into secularized knowledge. Moreover, postmodern, postcritical social theory frequently appears in literature in the singular number. It is a type of post-secular knowledge, in the sense that it is pursued under the conditions which arose as a result of secularization in the West, and also, simultaneously, under conditions created by globalization processes, which show how exceptional Europe is in this aspect. Social theory as a *praxis* theory must bear in mind the global religious context and the religious cultures which exist in the world. It is a postsecular theory precisely because it attempts to be a kind of “theological” social theory, “reaching up”—in other words, transcending boundaries in the vertical dimension between secular and sacred knowledge. In the horizontal dimension it blurs the boundaries between scientific disciplines and, essentially, rejects scientific methodology. The debate between Seidman and Alexander is just one example of the modern antinomies of sociology and peculiarly defined social theory (Seidman 1991; Alexander 1991). On the arena which I present here, a struggle is underway, with the aim of transforming the existing culture of knowledge not just for the transformation itself, but with the intention of inducing sociocultural changes.

As a result of the changes which it, too, has undergone, theology facilitates connections with this postmodern social theory, since theology can also appear in a post-secular form. A fragment of the lecture *Marxism and the perspectives of monastic life*, given on December 10, 1968 by a Trappist monk, Father Louis—Thomas Merton, fascinated—as he wrote—with the *quasi*-mysticism of Marxism (Merton 2007: 258) may serve as an illustration for my further reflections. Merton stated, namely, that some kind of dialectics must exist between rejecting the world and its acceptance. Rejection of the world by a monk is simultaneously a readiness to accept a world which allows changes. In other words, rejection of the world by a monk takes place from the position of his yearning for a change. This puts him on common ground with a follower of Marxism, since a Marxist directs his dialectical criticism of social structures at the effects of revolutionary changes (Merton 2007: 262).

Theology in the Process of Secularization

When presenting theology and some of the changes it is currently undergoing, I will refer to studies which reach beyond the frames of particular confessions. They show theology as an intellectual undertaking which, at least formally, is analogous to all other sciences, if we agree that theology also has its research subject and method. The authors of the entry “Theology” in the monumental work *The Great Ideas. A Synopticon of Great Books of the Western World*, published under the aegis of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1952, agree that the significance of theology for the whole of human knowledge has rarely been questioned (Adler 1952: 882). I cannot explore here the problems associated with varied ways of perceiving knowledge and science, as well as science and philosophy, or with opinions regarding the status of theological knowl-

edge. If theology is closely linked with religion and science means intersubjectively verifiable statements based on empirical methods of studying observable phenomena, then theology is the direct opposite of science.

However, “theology” is not limited to so-called dogmatic theology, which explains the dogmas of a given religion, especially of Christianity, on the grounds of which an elaborate theological system shaped itself. Theology in this sense of the word is also known as the sacred theology, and its ultimate source is the Revelation. However, there is also a different kind of theology—natural theology, which has been pursued for ages. Roger Bacon called it “divine philosophy” and Immanuel Kant “*teologia rationalis*,” as distinguished from “*teologia revelata*” (*ibid.*: 883). Thus, an opposition exists between philosophical science, based on reason, and sacred science, stemming from the Revelation. Thomas Aquinas acknowledges its presence in his *Summa Theologica*. Natural or philosophical theology remains a part of metaphysics, dealing with a narrow scope of problems revolving around the central question of proving the existence of God, as opposed to sacred theology (*ibid.*: 887). Sacred theology is both speculative and practical, since it examines human actions concerning God as a constant point of reference. It is an expression of a faith which seeks understanding (*fides querens intellectum*).

The relationship between natural or philosophical theology and theology associated with religion is important for our question about the relationship between sociology or social theory and theology. Mystical theologians in the Middle Ages attacked irreligious, impious theology based on philosophy and inspired by the *artes liberales*, especially by dialectical techniques. Luther also criticized this brand of theology, because he considered it a threat to Christian faith and to the religious spirit (*ibid.*: 890). Thus, theology with its speculative controversies has long been an arena for disputes about the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy.

The authors of the study discussed here, when describing the standpoint of all who oppose the separation of theology from religion, write that from such a perspective, separating theology and religion appears diabolical (*Adler 1952: 890*). They quote the words of Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust*, as regards theological studies:

“I would not lead you willingly astray,
But as regards this science, you will find
So hard it is to shun the erring way,
And so much hidden poison lies therein,
Which scarce can you discern from medicine.” (Goethe)

In the monumental encyclopedia of religion edited by Mircea Eliade, David Tracy presents a form of theology which is neither dogmatic nor merely a branch of philosophy. This new theology, so-called comparative theology, develops under the influence of the modern humanities—first the historical sciences, then the social sciences. Obviously, the comparativity of comparative theology can be understood in many ways, but one of them predominates; namely, the type of theology that grew out of comparative studies on religion. James Freeman Clarke’s work *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology*, published in 1871, is mentioned as one of the first works in this current. As Tracy writes, the term “comparative theology” now refers to secular

studies on the history of religion, in which theologies belonging to different religious traditions are subjected to comparative analysis. Terms such as “world theology” or “global theology” have also appeared (Tracy 2005: 9126). Comparative theology requires acknowledging the phenomenon of religious diversity and then accepting religious pluralism. “Pluralism” is not only a statement of diversity and a tolerance for this diversity, but also implies a positive valuation of multiplicity and variety.

Thus, the modern program of comparative theology is marked by secularization of knowledge, which brings this brand of theology closer to the secular scientific disciplines. However, it also differs significantly from those disciplines in that it is a kind of *praxis*—it consists in a reflexive orientation towards the studied theological traditions, transforming them in the process of creating comparative theology. In other words, it represents a challenge for those traditions, which from the perspective of comparative theology are thought to be limited cultural perspectives (Tracy 2005: 9133). Significantly, in the period of globalization and the development of a world society, such a theology begins to function outside the Western cultural context within which it was born.

This transformation of the culture of theological thought has been influenced by certain other important factors: the shaping of modern historical consciousness, the birth of modern hermeneutics and finally—this is especially significant for the issue of relationships between theology, sociology and social theory which I am discussing here—the development of the social sciences. “Theology” acquires a new meaning, which differs not only from its historical meaning, shaped by the Christian tradition, but also from the source term, the Greek word *theos* (Tracy 2005: 9126). Not only because the term “theology” refers to the self-understanding of the tradition of various non-theistic belief systems. In this new sense, it is difficult to say what “theology” actually refers to. In comparative theology, the distinctions between the innerworldly and otherworldly, as well as between transcendence and immanence seem to disappear. Thus, here we return once more to the question of postmodernist language, the use of ambiguities which facilitate covert transitions between diverse cognitive perspectives, blurring their boundaries—in other words, discussing a theology which ceases to be the hitherto known theology and a social theory which no longer can be considered a theory in its hitherto accepted sense—a system of verifiable explanatory statements.

The questions that appear in the frames of a theology thus pursued ought to be relational; they require viewing every answer in the context of other religions or systems that discuss the problem of the ultimate transformation of human existence. Here we can see a certain convergence with the functionalist current in studies on religion, where an inclusive definition of religion means that “religion” may also denote secular ideological or *quasi*-religious systems. In comparative theology, “salvation” appears as the equivalent of enlightenment, emancipation or liberation (Tracy 2005: 9126).

The relational approach of comparative theology represents a challenge for the basic theological tradition with its fixed set of truths—not only because it ignores the content of beliefs and formulates an utopian program of translating the language of one religion into others, *ad infinitum*. This implies the necessity of changing the self-understanding of religion, and thus, of theological tradition, as a result of inter-

pretative work carried out from the perspective of comparative theology (Tracy 2005: 9127). Thus, comparative theology is a critical program, since it attempts to revise theological traditions. Paul Tillich's postulate regarding the theological interpretation of a given situation (Tracy 2005: 9132) serves to give sense to religious diversity in the world of theological interpretation. Giving religious diversity a religious sense seems problematic. Religious diversity throughout the world is a cultural phenomenon which can hardly be considered a basis for religious experience as such, although it may require a new interpretation of religious tradition. From the culturological point of view, it is important to distinguish between religious diversity and religious pluralism. As James Beckford rightly notes, the frequently interchangeable use of those terms is unjustified, since it causes confusion of facts and values. In the normative sense, pluralism can mean many different things. It can be a conviction about the positive value of religious diversity, or about the positive value of freely choosing/changing one's religious affiliation as a pluralist situation, or it can be an internalization of pluralism, consisting in simultaneous participation in different religious traditions (Beckford 2003: 79–80), analogously to internalized multiculturalism on the level of a personal system.

The program of comparative theology, in which a situation of religious diversity requires theological interpretation, leads to critical interpretation of religious symbols which appear in the context of their hitherto existing traditions. It is difficult to predict the theological conclusion that would result from comparing Christian symbols with the symbols of the cults of Inti, Dionysus etc. It is worth noting that such a task of comparative theology differs from the hermeneutics of religious symbols in the sense proposed by Paul Ricoeur, who associated this kind of hermeneutics with reviving the symbolic function of former religious symbols which have lost significance as a result of secularization (Ricoeur 1975: 18). Viewing the issue from a culturological perspective, one needs to consider whether the program of comparative theology contains no possibility of deconstructing religious symbolic systems from multiple perspectives, which would represent a threat to cultural traditions.

The program of comparative theology refers to religious sciences, and more broadly—to cultural sciences. It has undoubtedly been formed under the influence of social sciences and cultural sciences; however, the term “science” is fraught with ambiguities at this point. It is both a science and a non-science, just as theology is no longer the old theology, nor does it grow out of religious tradition. The fluidity of postmodern culture manifests itself here, particularly as regards the semantics of knowledge.

At a time when the notion of method is disparaged in the postmodernist culture of knowledge, just like the notion of scientific discipline, comparative theology aspires simultaneously to the status of a discipline and to its own method. The subject of theology is supposed to be religious pluralism and its method is to consist in a new sort of hermeneutics—in other words, a method of interpretation which, by changing the hitherto obvious self-understanding of religion as a result of changing its theology by utilizing the comparative perspective, is supposed to become a reflexive process of changes which the phenomenon of religion undergoes on a global scale. Thus, given

the present state of things, questions arise as regards the unity of human culture, as well as cultural and religious universalism.

Let us leave the theological evaluation of comparative theology to theologians. For the purpose of our reflections, it is sufficient to say that in the field of theology the influence of social and cultural sciences is evident to the point that sociocultural problems are being presented as theological problems. Robin Gill emphasizes the fact that in the 20th century, theology was more strongly influenced by the social sciences, as opposed to the 19th century, when the influence of the historical sciences had been more evident, and to the earlier influence of philosophy, which had been present for centuries. Such theologians as Richard Niebuhr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich can serve as examples. On the other hand, Karl Barth opposed those secularizing currents in theology. Barth's famous thesis that Christianity is not a religion in the natural or cultural sense is a theological expression of faith that transcends the sociocultural order (Gill <http://>).

Political theology, theology of liberation, theology of revolution, feminist theology and gender theology are all closely linked with comparative theology, for which reflections on religious pluralism represent the most important issue. The aim of all these branches of theology is to transform the sociocultural determinants of human existence. Joseph Ratzinger commented on such orientations in modern theology in his book *Einführung in das Christentum (Vorlesungen über das Apostolische Glaubenskenntnis)*, published in 1968. He showed that they reduce faith to the issue of changing the world, whereas—as he argued—faith belongs to another, spiritual dimension of existence and its sense (Ratzinger 1970: 30). Like Karl Rahner, Ratzinger considers theology the self-understanding of faith and not religion. A diagnosis of the multiple variants of world theology (an expression taken from the title of one of the books of the well-known theologian of liberation, Johann B. Metz) which bloomed in the 1960s lends an interesting aspect to our question regarding the connections between theology and social theory. We can find their reflection in contemporary postmodernist social theory. It seems that the postmodernist turn can be interpreted in the light of the *faciendum* category, which Ratzinger used to describe another turning point in the development of modernity. In its first stage, prepared by the conceptions of Descartes, he emphasizes the role of Giambattista Vico, who stated that the only cognizable part of reality is the *factum*—that which has been done and which is specific for the human world, and thus for culture. Vico expressed this using the formula *verum quia factum*, with which the modern historicism was born. It appears that Ratzinger aptly identified another turning point, one which he expressed using the formula *verum quia faciendum*, which means that truth refers to action directed towards the future—it is the truth of shaping the world (Ratzinger 1970: 28). Ratzinger identifies this turning point with the application of the Eleventh Thesis of Karl Marx. The drive towards establishing the superiority of *faciendum* over *factum* also means a drive towards reshaping traditions which originate in the past. As one may conclude, comparative theology is based on this principle and attempts to transform religious traditions. Thus, it is a *praxis* understood as the production of meanings which take the place of earlier cultural orders (Bauman 1999: 96). The turn from *factum* towards

faciendum has become intensified in postmodernism, which also substitutes new orders of meaning for the modern culture of scientific knowledge. The terms which signify this culture—“science” and “theory”—are becoming increasingly ambiguous, as are other cultural categories, including religion and theology.

Lacking a Connection: Sociology and Theology

Changes in theological discourses which have taken place as a result of the development of historical consciousness, the historical sciences and, later, under the influence of the social sciences and cultural sciences, might interest a sociologist of knowledge. Theology, both modern and pursued in past historical periods, would also be a subject for sociological research, similar to other realms of culture, while the roles of theologians would resemble the other roles of men of knowledge (Znanięcki 1984: 371–392).

Theology, whether focused on explaining and defending church doctrines or taking the form of a more or less autonomous reflection on religion (Lonergan 1975: 321), may also come within the scope of interests of a sociologist of religion; this has been exemplified by the classics of sociology, including Max Weber, in their sociological studies on the world’s religions. However, in each of the above-mentioned cases sociological research, in a way, secularizes religion and theology. From a theological point of view, or from the perspective of religious faith, the researched phenomena inevitably become reduced when sociological descriptive categories are applied to them. Studies on religious conversion, which—in the face of the importance of religious movements for sociocultural changes—have led to the birth of a subdiscipline, sociology of conversion, may be considered subversive from the perspective of faith, since they entirely omit the supernatural factor (Hałas 2007). The sociologization of religious phenomena has often rightly been considered a threat because it may lead to secularization (Gill [http://](#)).

On the other hand, the use of sociology, its tools and methods by theology, e.g. by pastoral theology, to research religious structures, religious organizations and movements, may meet with sociologists’ protests only when those methods are used inappropriately. It may also elicit approval or even be supported by sociologists; one example is the pioneering study by Franciszek Mirek, novel on the global scale, on the sociology of parishes, with an introduction by Florian Znanięcki (Mirek 1928).

Using Ronald J. McAllister’s proposed models of relationships between the sciences, one may say that sociology has sometimes exerted a one-way influence on theology to some extent (e.g. in the case of pastoral theology); sometimes their relation can be viewed as a closeness stemming from the fact that they both research the same phenomenon, only from different perspectives (a different formal subject), as in the case of conversion; and sometimes their relationship is heuristic. However, sociology and theology mostly lack a connection (the a-relational model) (McAllister 1987: 29). Some scholars pursue sociology of theology—examples can be found in Luhmann’s work *The Function of Religion* (Luhmann 1998)—or theology of sociology, but this changes nothing, since those scholars conduct their own observations from

their own perspectives. Thus, the conflict that arose between sociology and theology when Auguste Comte drew up a project of sociology has given way to a truce (Johnson 1987: 5), consisting in methodological agnosticism as regards the referent—the reality of religious symbolism, which remains outside the reach of scientific observation and analysis (Parsons 1968: 421). However, this state of things was preceded by the counterprogram of Christian sociology, popularized in the 19th century, starting with J. W. H. Stuckenbergs work *Christian Sociology*, published in 1880. This program was still very much alive in the 1930s and remains institutionally visible in some centers in the U.S. to this day, as shown e.g. by the fact that the Christian Sociological Society is affiliated with the American Sociological Association (Swatos [http://](#)).

Leaving aside integrist or fundamentalist reactions to secular sociological science which deals with religion, in the form of the so-called religious sociology, as well as the above-mentioned phenomenon of Christian sociology, we must not forget attempts to bring together sociology and theology, in other words—to build a model of reciprocal penetration, which—similarly to the reciprocal influence of chemistry and biochemistry—would lead to the creation of a new construct: sociotheology. This idea, presented in the 1980s by, among others, McAllister, who attempted to give sociology a lesson in theology, met with no success. As James A. Beckford notes, Kieran Flanagan’s proposal that the two perspectives, sociological and theological, should enter into a symbiotic relationship, also remains without response from sociologists (Beckford 2003: 188).

There is no direct connection between sociology and theology and plans to successfully establish one are doomed to failure. What can an attempt to rationally discuss divine matters, characteristic for theology (Bullock, Stallybrass, Trombley 1990: 856) have in common with the sociological analysis of the construction of sociocultural reality? Sociology does not utilize sources of revelatory knowledge, does not contemplate the mysteries of redemption, eschatology, eternity. Sociology isn’t prophetic—it does not prophesy, redeem or justify God, like theodicy, in the face of all the world’s imperfections. The foundations of sociological knowledge are empirical and rational; it may be applied in practice to solve social problems. It is a science dealing with historical processes, sceptical towards any form of *doxa*. It belongs to the human sciences.

Sociology is a young science—the world’s first Department of Sociology was opened in Chicago in 1892 (Vidich, Lyman 1985: 59). Even if—as the history of American sociology shows—sociology’s emancipation from theology’s rule did not occur overnight, and a significant step involved the translation of theodicy issues—the evil in the world—into the sociodicy of social problems (Vidich, Lyman 1985: 281), the sociology that deals with the civic society, its consensus and contracts has nothing in common with the theology of God’s covenant with His people. Even if at the beginning of that transformation on American universities, including places as crucial for the development of sociology as the University of Chicago and Columbia University, some of the scholars who entered this new discipline were members of the Protestant clergy, a sociologist is not a secular priest. To pursue sociology is to pursue a science, devoid of a theological dimension (Shils 1980). This doesn’t mean that no

attempts by social science to usurp the place of theology have taken place. As Robert Bellah wrote, “It is now social science that tells us what kind of creatures we are and what we are about on this planet” (quoted after Vidich, Lyman 1985: 305).

The Theological Spectrum of Social Theory

Various Marxist movements were a vehicle for a new *quasi*-prophetism. As Vidich and Lyman note, for these movements, late-stage capitalism heralds the new millennium—the ultimate victory over historical contingencies and the return of society to man in universal brotherhood (Vidich, Lyman 1985: 305); in other words, the secular version of the “communion of saints.” When Daniel Bell announced the end of ideology in the social sciences—the end of millenarism, of chiliastic hopes and apocalyptic revolutionary thinking (Bell 1962), his frame of reference was sociology, free of ideologies. The secular version of theology, on the other hand, is visible in the tradition of critical social theory, and at present also in its postmodernist forms. Today, the secularized brand of theology meets with theologizing postsecular social theory above and beyond sociology. This facilitates the constant discourse of ambiguity. In this discourse, “theology” is a vehicle of increasingly indeterminate meaning—“something theological.” Theology is not the same thing as traditional theology. Social theory is also not a theory but a *praxis* that uses the term “social theory” with its modernist connotative envelope of science and rationality, but with no obligation whatsoever to maintain objectivity of cognition. Postmodernism does not acknowledge facts, relying instead on *faciendum*—the multiplication of vehicles of meanings without references, and thus on self-referencing discourse.

As Vidich and Lyman showed in their book, frequently quoted here, theological genealogies in the history of sociological thought have never, by any means, fallen into oblivion. However, attempts to reestablish the relationships and connections between theology and so-called social theory are a different matter. I say “so-called,” since I refer to the expropriation of this term from the field of social sciences to the grounds of practically, normatively and ideologically oriented social thought, drawing on the work of the Frankfurt school and on various currents of Marxism.

In the study entitled *Social Theory and Theology* (Harrington 2006), published in the compendium of modern European social theory edited by Gerard Delanty, Austin Harrington frequently uses the terms “social theory,” “sociological theory” and “social sciences” interchangeably. According to the postmodernist principle of postdisciplinarity, one might just as well use the terms “social philosophy,” “theology of liberation” or “feminist theology,” collectively known as “sociological theology” (Harrington 2006: 42). The designation applied to theology by Harrington is an example of self-referential, ambiguous discourse, which multiplies signifiers without references:

Theology in this sense appears to subtend modernising processes insofar as it systematises experience around a unified transcendental signifier, but is at the same time expelled from the modern scientific imaginary to a realm of mythos (Harrington 2006: 38).

The noun “the theological” creates a hypostasis. “The theological” appears in postmodernist discourse, the style of which is replete with allegories, metaphors and parables that serve to attain an equivocation of sense. This “theological” returns after Nietzsche’s “death of God.” As Harrington writes in picturesque language, “the theological” takes revenge for its banishment from the rational modernist systems by coming back in “...a spectral form, in the form of a returning engulfing metaphysical telos” (Harrington 2006: 38).

Criticizing rationalism and eurocentrism from the perspective of cultural globalization leads postmodernist thought to criticism of secularization; in other words, to criticism of rational imperialism as regards belief (Harrington 2006: 44). The return of the “theological” is an anamnesis of sorts in the reflexive process of social theory. Social theory should discover its theological sources, maintaining a critical distance, but without forgetting about them (Harrington 2006: 44–45). Harrington also calls this social theory “theological sociology,” which has two forms—unconscious and conscious social theory (Harrington 2006: 42).

What conclusions can we draw from the presented reflections? Sociology doesn’t disrupt the differentiated cultural tissue of meanings when studying them in social contexts. Thus, it doesn’t interfere with theological discourse, although it may analyze this discourse to further its own cognitive goals, leaving the otherworldly outside its perspective of analyzing sociocultural phenomena. On the other hand, postsecular social theory, since it is a postmodernist variant of the so-called critical *praxis*, rejects distance between the subject and object of cognition, as well as the hypothetical character of theorizing and methodological scepticism. It opposes sociology and rationality of science, as well as faith and religion. The sociotheological discourse of ambiguity and sophistic simulations of knowledge and faith can only create illusions of a New World—a new earth and a new heaven (Ap 21: 1).

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Biographical Note: Elżbieta Hałas is Full Professor of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her research interests are in cultural sociology, social symbolism and collective memory, interpretive social theory and history of sociology.

E-mail: ehalas@uw.edu.pl