

Habermas makes, or allows for, a threefold distinction between (1) "**opinions**" (on the primary level of "interaction"); (2) "**theoretical statements**" (on the secondary level of "discourse"); and (3) "**action-orienting knowledge**" (again, on the primary level of "interaction").

Opinions become theoretical statements as and when the claims to truth that they make or imply are critically validated. Theoretical statements, in turn, become action-orienting knowledge as and when they cease to be "virtualized" and hypothetical and become instead rules or principles of action.

It would seem that "doctrines" in the theological sense might very well be used to mean all three of these, although it is probably most commonly used to mean the second and third. (This is clearly the case with "dogmas," which is widely, and correctly, analyzed as referring to products of critical reflection on witness that have an action-orienting significance or function.) But the ambiguity of "doctrines" (and, possibly, "dogmas") is, or should be *systematic*, which it can be only if the differences between these three meanings are taken fully into account.

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