

Introduction

Karl Mannheim would not have been surprised by the fact that his reputation in sociology has fluctuated during the sixty years since his death, and that different aspects of his work have been variously recognized or consigned to history by later generations. The study of changing and differing perspectives on knowledge was after all his lifelong preoccupation. Insofar as his work has been scrutinized only in terms of his grandest theoretical ambitions—the hope that sociology of knowledge could be an organon for overcoming ideological constraints on knowledge and for grounding a science of politics, or the aspiration towards a diagnosis of post-liberal society with therapeutic effects, based on a new mode of rationality—the question of Karl Mannheim largely belongs to the past. In recent years, however, with the maturation of a generation of scholars who have not been party to the earlier, rather one-sided grand debates, there have been modest receptions of Mannheim as exciting innovator and fruitful discussion partner in more limited fields of inquiry, from the sociology of generations to the sociology of artistic productions. These welcome uses of Mannheim's work have to make their way in scientific discussions without claims to authority from any master or school. They make use of texts in the usual way of scholarship by extracting ideas or methods or findings and by attempting to make them good as resources for their work.

Our present undertaking is different, although its aim is to support this work. In order to expand the scope of Mannheim's usable legacy, we shall apply some selected studies of texts by Mannheim to the reconstruction of the promising and surprisingly productive research programme that he was only barely able to initiate among collaborators—mostly doctoral candidates—during his brief term in Frankfurt between 1930 and 1933. There was never a Mannheim School, but there was a Mannheim research group, whose members include several who became well-known indeed, as well as others whose promise was destroyed by the years of National Socialist rule—whether at home or in exile. Although their work has been catalogued and briefly characterized in earlier treatments, it has never been taken together as mutually complementary products of a research paradigm whose interest derives as much from adaptations of Max Weber as from practical translations of Mannheim's designs, and whose accomplishment deserves to be assessed as a whole—and made available for present-day adaptations.

Some academic generations ago, it made good sense to open a plea for a reconsideration of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge by rejecting the tendency to treat him as a muddled if admirable precursor of an inquiry that had to be completely recast to satisfy the then current standards of social-scientific rigor (Kettler 1967). The need then was to propose ways of comprehending and

legitimizing modes of social theory that served critical reflection without being constrained by the norms of theory formation variously imported from economics and psychology. In addition to resources derived from philosophy, there was help to be found in traditions of political theory, as well as influential currents of discursively grounded public philosophies, subject to dialectical appreciation and assessment. The polarized state of academic debate was an obstacle to the more balanced proceedings which are open today, where recognition is given to many more models of theory-formation and where the relations between empirical inquiries—including the kinds of inquiries earlier absolutized—and the reality-testing of theories have become more subtle. As for Karl Mannheim, moreover, his life's work is no longer cast in stone as obsolete relic or classical monument but malleably subject to fresh interrogation, negotiation, and adaptation. It is even possible to distinguish for the sake of argument, as he did himself, between his philosophically charged, rather personal theoretical enterprise and a more nearly collaborative research programme of investigations into empirical social relations, which he sponsored and led, using the most widely accessible methods for testing the kinds of claims that such a programme entails. The latter is the prime subject of our present study.

A central feature of Karl Mannheim's analysis of modern intellectuals is the recognition of their versatility. They have the capacity, he maintains, of orienting to multiple social constituencies and mediating diverse expectations and outlooks. Applied to Mannheim himself, this insight illuminates his multifaceted legacy. In addition to a long line of academic studies that addresses him strictly within the frame of reference of sociology of knowledge as a contested subfield of academic sociology, there have been several divergent receptions in the past generation, first, of his achievements as pioneer experimenter in reflexive sociology, oriented to a public of literary intellectuals, and second, of his efforts in political education, constituted by his exchanges with wider educated publics and elites. Insufficiently attended to by these important receptions to which the present authors have contributed (Loader 1985; Kettler and Meja 1995; Loader and Kettler 2002), is the aspect of Mannheim's work that had Max Weber's social-scientific prospectus as paradigm and that formed an essential element in his interaction with the most admired substantive sociological studies of his time. This more nearly technical work shaped his relations with his advanced students, legitimated his standing in the wider emerging international profession, and enacted his genuine curiosity about the resourcefulness of empirical sociology as a practice.

The present study seeks to explore this "empirical" aspect of Mannheim's project, with special attention to its first and especially creative constituency, the regrettably small group of postgraduate students whose doctoral researches were given their direction by him during the few years between his appointment at Frankfurt in 1930 and his dismissal in the Nazi purge in 1933. Contrary to the view that Mannheim's sociology was a strictly individual performance, essentially limited to his suggestive and widely read but idiosyncratic *Ideology and Utopia*, and lacking the capacity of initiating a sociological research programme, we shall

argue that several of his less well-known papers, as well as the researches of his students show that he did develop a model and strategy of research that was not narrowly constrained within his distinctive metasociological convictions.

The book consists of an introduction and twelve chapters. In the first three chapters we examine the textual and contextual setting for Mannheim's empirical model, with recurrent emphasis on his relationship to the Weber brothers, Alfred and Max, especially the latter. While Alfred Weber had served as Mannheim's mentor and patron during his years as candidate and Privatdozent at Heidelberg, it was Max Weber's work that became ever more important to Mannheim as a point of reference for his own project. We show the complex interweaving between Mannheim and Max Weber, first, in connection with *Ideology and Utopia*, which also permits a brief look back at our earlier emphases on the interpretive side of Mannheim. Second, then, we examine Mannheim's treatment of time as a constituent of sociological formations, which he considered to be the issue that most clearly showed his effort to advance loyally beyond Max Weber. We conclude this section with, third, a close reading of what we consider an important entry point into Mannheim's empirical sociology, his 1930 "contribution to the sociology of economics," whose German title is best translated as "On the Nature and Significance of the Striving for Economic Success. A Contribution to Economic Sociology."¹ This essay is Mannheim's most sustained attempt to make sociological use of Max Weber's *Economy and Society*, a book that is much less a theoretical treatise than a guide for empirical research. Mannheim's empirical designs, we attempt to show, however much informed by his years with Alfred Weber, emerge above all out of his negotiations with the work of Max Weber.

In the eight following chapters we examine the work of a research group around Mannheim, including a number of dissertations but also two important studies by individuals who were further advanced in their studies than the postgraduate students. As will be shown, the parameters of Mannheim's research programme were broad enough to permit independent initiatives by the collaborators, given a certain commonality in style and a substantial measure of intercommunication among the researchers. There was no Mannheim "school," but there is an important and promising body of work that centers on his version of the Weberian model.

In the final chapter we briefly consider the sequel to the Frankfurt years, in Mannheim's efforts in exile to reconstitute a research group, all of which failed, notwithstanding his professional success in other respects, as well as in the subsequent careers of selected members of the group, where these were not simply aborted by domestic oppression or distraction in exile. The aim of the book is intended to be constructive and contributory to fresh work in sociology, but no

1 The title in the posthumous English translation is revised, presumably in order to underline its connection to Mannheim's later interests and reads "On the Nature of Economic Ambition and its Significance for the Social Education of Man" (Mannheim [1930] 1970 [1952]). When three dates appear in the citation, our ordering is as follows: the [original publication], the more recent German edition, the [English translation].

treatment of this generation can simply neglect the historical dimensions of the epoch from which we seek to learn.

Mannheim's Interpretive Hopes and Empirical Projects

To begin by bridging the gap between our earlier and present findings, we preface our new departure with a quick review of the hardest example, where the interpretive, philosophical and empirical strands are most closely interwoven; we begin with a review of Mannheim's best-known project, seminally expressed in *Ideology and Utopia*, a work whose centrality for its time is indicated by the quality of reviewers from the author's generation—including Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt—and whose subsequent reception in English translation made it an academic standard.

We thus turn, first, to the interpretive dimension. As a writer for a broader public, and even more as a teacher, Mannheim believed that one had to speak directly to actual experiences, that it was pointless to offer answers to questions that people have not been led by their lives to ask or recognize. With his sociology of knowledge, Mannheim hoped to clarify—and to help overcome—at least three kinds of troubling experiences, all of which are as common today as they were in his time. The first experience takes the form of a discrepancy between one's own situation, as lived subjectively in mind and body, and the supposedly objective "meaning" ascribed to it by the publicly recognized and officially sanctioned ways of talking about things. Mannheim cites the cases of women and young people: there is an accepted definition of what it means to be a woman or to be a youth, but women and youth cannot apply those meanings to make sense of what is happening to them, what they are doing and what they are feeling. The existence of a generally accepted objective construction of meanings—often called "worldview"—caught Mannheim's attention early on, instructed by some of the intellectual mentors of his younger years, notably the sociologist, Georg Simmel, and the literary and social theorist, Georg Lukács. While other sociologists are more likely to emphasize the extent to which such socially constituted constructions of reality shape and define our experiences, Mannheim focuses on the experience of discrepancies between the "objective" and the "subjective," which his own mentors variously saw as a source of profound and irremediable dissatisfaction (Simmel's "tragedy of culture") or as a potential source of crisis and revolutionary overturn (Lukács's theory of "alienation"). For Mannheim, the awareness of such discrepancies was rather the opening and point of departure for an activity of learning, which he believed to have constructive possibilities, if it is not prematurely closed.

The second of the troubling experiences qualifies and to some extent undermines the first, in that one is often confronted with conflicting ways of assigning "meanings." There may be no single "publicly recognized or officially sanctioned way." And these multiple ways may be mutually incomprehensible, so that one group may not even understand what another group means. They "talk past each

other.” Mannheim emphasizes such contested concepts as religion, superstition, science, education, but also such fundamental philosophical categories as time and space. After Mannheim came to Germany in 1919, exiling himself from the harsh rightist regime of his native Hungary, and as he reflected on the pervasive intellectual, political and social conflict of postwar central Europe, he concluded that most sectors of modern societies are characterized by a competition among incompatible models of meaning, not by a single integrated worldview.

To designate these multiple constructions, he borrows and revises the concept of ideology from Marxist theory. From Marxism, too, Mannheim adapts the notion that ideologies have to be understood as a “function” of some distinctive social location, that there is a “correspondence” between occupying a certain position in society and interpreting the world in a certain way. Ideologies are socially grounded; they are “imputable” to a given social site. Mannheim avoids a causal vocabulary; he does not claim that all individuals sharing a social location profess the same ideology. Yet he is confident that a “fit” can be demonstrated and that the ideology can only be elucidated by reference to that experiential grounding.

Mannheim’s adaptation differs from the Marxist theory in two important respects. First, he identifies some social locations other than economic class position as possible grounds of ideologies. His prime examples in *Ideology and Utopia* are the bureaucracy—highlighted by Max Weber’s studies—to which he imputes a special kind of “bureaucratic conservatism,” as well as, within the strategic formation of “the intellectuals,” a deracinated segment that serves as social reference point for an understanding of fascist ideology. Generational and gender differences also enter as important sources for modifications or adaptations of ideological structures. As these examples suggest, Mannheim saw the primary ideologies competing in his time as taking the form of political ideologies, and he designated them by the names of prominent political tendencies and parties: socialism, liberalism, conservatism—and, as noted, bureaucratic conservatism and fascism.

In explaining the linkages between social locations and ideologies, Mannheim expressly avoids the notion that groups only talk about the world in a certain way because this promotes their economic interests. He acknowledges that this often happens, but he does not consider it to be the ultimate account of ideology. The rise of interest to prime category must itself be accounted for. He explores instead the metaphorical language of “perspective” and “standpoint.” Things simply look different when one is operating from different locations. Their respective socially grounded interpretations enable groups to orient themselves to the activities and problems peculiar to their location in social space and time, including their struggles for power. Ideologies make sense of the world they encounter.

Second, Mannheim differs from Marxism in rejecting the central Marxist claim, especially prominent in the version of Marxism brilliantly elaborated by his former mentor, Georg Lukács, that a class may be ordained by history with a privileged point of view, because it is destined to shape the next stage in history. Not rarely, Marxists apply the label “ideology” only to the views of their opponents

and the term “science” to their own. Mannheim expressly asserts that Marxism is as much an ideology as the “liberalism” of the bourgeoisie or the “conservatism” of the older dominant social groups hostile to modernity.

The most serious of the “troubling experiences” mentioned above presupposes the other two. On the German political scene of the 1920s, Mannheim diagnosed a crisis of universal distrust. All political parties claimed that they could see through the arguments of all the others as nothing but the self-interested point of view of some class or social grouping, “ideology” in the vulgar sense. Under these conditions, Mannheim concludes, there is no productive competition among ideologies. No one can persuade anyone of anything; they cannot even negotiate. And the fascists, Mannheim observed at the time, were the most thoroughgoing advocates of the proposition that there was nothing to reason or to bargain about in politics, that the only thing was to have an ideology that could win. “Ideology” and violence, in this view, are part of the same equation.

For Mannheim, in contrast, ideology is a partial but invaluable mode of knowing. Sociology of knowledge is a form of holistic “therapy.” It is a strategy for having available social knowledge take a form that promotes the reasonable management of human affairs. Implicit is the possibility of achieving a “synthesis,” which involves a “total” vision, bringing together in a multidimensional whole the things that the various ideological perspectives are best situated to see. Socialists can see the mechanisms of economic exploitation, for example, while liberals can see the dangers of oppressive state power. A “synthesis” of perspectives would not eliminate all conflicts among groups, but it could provide a common reference point for calculating the costs and benefits of different alternatives, and a reference point as well for bargaining and deal-making. There would be new opportunities for responsible choices within a constitutional order of democratic competition, a culminating point of the analysis that reveals Mannheim as a successor to Max Weber in political thought.

How can such a “synthesis” come about if all perspectives are partial? Mannheim’s famous answer is that modern societies include a stratum of social actors who are in important ways relatively “detached” from the social ground: the “intellectuals.” This formation, leaving aside the demoralized segment associated with fascism, is recruited from diverse social locations and engages in activities—notably of an intellectual kind—that keep its members from identifying completely with the groups and standpoints of their origins. Their formative experience of intense and advanced education—or, in rare cases, its autodidactic equivalent—, as well as their learned capacity for analysis and mutual exchange, permit them to gain a “distance” from the ideologies at home in one or another primary social location. They can acquire insight into ideology without the bitterness or frustration that accompanies the dismissive versions of that insight, which is typical of the political groups caught up in the “crisis of distrust.” As the intellectuals-turned-sociologists develop and refine the sociology of knowledge, then, they can promote “synthesis” and help to overcome the “crisis,” not by presuming to take command (as fascists do) but by a combination of two things. First, they act as catalysts in

the political process, offering interpretations that cool temperatures and promote bargaining. And second, they bring “political education” to the newly enfranchised democratic “masses,” to counteract fanaticism and to infuse the people with a recognition that there are no saviors or saving visions, echoing Weber, as well as a sense of their own responsibility.

The debate about *Ideology and Utopia* ([1929] 1969 [1968]), where these arguments were seminally laid out, was mainly philosophical and political, with the focus, first, on Mannheim’s hope of overcoming both ideology and political distrust through sociology of knowledge; second, on his conception of the intelligentsia as the social stratum uniquely equipped and even destined for this task; and third, on his activist conception of sociological knowledge, its inherent mediation, as a mode of public consciousness raising, between theory and practice (Meja and Stehr 1982; Meja and Stehr 1990). Almost all commentators recognized the special importance of Mannheim’s essay in *Ideology and Utopia*, “Is Politics as Science Possible (The Problem of Theory and Practice) [*Ist Politik als Wissenschaft möglich? (Das Problem der Theorie und Praxis)*].” (Mannheim [1929] 1969 [1968], 95 [97]) In it Mannheim argues that the comprehensive social knowledge capable of diagnosing the historical situation and grounding a scientific politics is generated by social interpretation of the clashing ideologies rending the political terrain. There are good reasons for believing this chapter to represent one of the essays in Mannheim’s unfinished effort to balance his complex accounts with Max Weber, expressing his most ambitious interpretative hopes of moving beyond Weber’s “disillusioned realism.”

In his lecture on “Science as a Vocation” (M. Weber [1919a] 1946), Max Weber distinguishes between words in politics and in science, likening the former to weapons for overpowering opponents and the latter to ploughshares for cultivating knowledge. Mannheim offers the sociology of knowledge as a way of bringing about the Biblical transformation of swords into pruning hooks prophesied by Isaiah. He claims that the sociology of knowledge constitutes the “organon for politics as a science.” It provides an instrument for operating on the ideological views active in politics so as to give them a new character, constituting a field of knowledge with a structure appropriate to this dimension of reality and to the work that knowing performs in it. Although Mannheim nominally defers to Weber’s conception of politics as a sphere governed by choices no knowledge can dictate, his conception of the political involvement implicit in gaining insight into political situations here shifts the meaning of the Weberian formulas he invokes. Mannheim credits Weber with uncovering that the Marxist method for exposing the social provenance and function of political ideas applies no less to the proletarian view of the world. But rendered nonpartisan, the method can now reveal its constructive powers. While the disillusioning discoveries of the earlier generation have to be preserved, they gain new positive functions. When Weber quotes Isaiah’s admonition to watchmen in the night, he intends to reproach those who wait in vain for prophets of salvation instead of soberly meeting the demands of the day. Mannheim uses the same passage to call intellectuals to a mission

of guardianship (Weber [1919a] 1946, 156; Mannheim [1929] 1969 [1968], 140 [143]). These high hopes of 1929 could not be sustained.

Mannheim's proposals were widely canvassed in the leading periodical reviews and subjected to intense criticism, but his reading of the intellectual situation was almost universally applauded. In the cultivated Weimar public for political-literary topics, as among the participants in what has been labeled the 'Weimar conversation' about the situation of social thought after Nietzsche and Marx, *Ideology and Utopia* figured as the representative book of its time, whether as symptom of cultural crisis or as promise of a way out. While Mannheim never disavowed his distinctive "political" sociology, he nevertheless devoted the remaining years in Germany almost wholly to themes closer to the agenda of sociology as an emerging profession. In brief, he shifted his emphasis from the interpretive to the empirical dimension, and this put him in contact and competition with a different side of Max Weber.