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KARL MANNHEIM

# IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY  
OF KNOWLEDGE

TRANSLATED BY  
LOUIS WIRTH AND EDWARD SHILS  
WITH A PREFACE BY  
LOUIS WIRTH

CHINA SOCIAL SCIENCES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
CHENGCHENG BOOKS LTD.

## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

意识形态与乌托邦:英文/(德)曼海姆著。—影印本。

—北京:中国社会科学出版社,1999.12

(西学基本经典·社会学类/西学基本经典工作委员会 编)

ISBN 7-5004-2648-8

I. 意… II. 曼… III. 知识社会学—英文 IV. C912.67

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(1999)第 68479 号

版权总代理:TAO MEDIA INTERNATIONAL

(2790 19th Avenue, Ste. 20, San Francisco, CA 94132 U. S. A)

西学基本经典·社会学类

西学基本经典工作委员会 编

中国社会科学出版社 出版发行

(北京鼓楼西大街甲 158 号 邮编 100720)

E-mail: 5004@Peoplespace.net

诚成图书有限公司制作

中国建筑工业出版社密云印刷厂印刷

新华书店经销

1999 年 12 月第 1 版 1999 年 12 月第 1 次印刷

开本 880×1230 1/32 印张 80.5

社会学类全 6 册 定价:300.00 元

总策划 严平 野夫

项目策划 张自文 任建成

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## FOREWORD

THE present volume combines a number of different writings of the author. Parts II–IV represent Professor Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie* (F. Cohen, Bonn, 1929—now, Schulte-Bulmke, Frankfurt-am-Main); Part V consists of his article "Wissenssoziologie", originally published in Alfred Vierkandt's *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie* (F. Enke, Stuttgart, 1931). Part I was especially written to introduce the present volume to the Anglo-Saxon reader.

Whereas Parts II–IV deal with the central problems of the sociology of knowledge and exemplify the method of this emerging discipline as applied to some of the most significant phases of recent and contemporary social life, the last part seeks to formulate a concise prospectus of this new scientific interest.

Stylistically the first four parts of this book will be found to differ markedly from the last. Whereas the former develop their respective themes rather fully, the latter, being originally an article for an Encyclopædia, is scarcely more than a schematic outline.

A classified bibliography is appended containing all of the works cited by Professor Mannheim in the above-mentioned article. To these items have been added some of the more significant representative contributions of American, English, French, and German thought on this subject which appeared to the translators to be relevant and suggestive.

Despite the involved language of the original, the translators have thought it worth while to adhere as closely as possible to the German text. While certain modifications have at times seemed necessary for the sake of intelligibility, strenuous efforts have been made to convey the author's meaning accurately.

Thanks are due to Professor Robert Cooley Angell, of the University of Michigan, for reading sections of Parts II and V, and to Mr. Arthur Bergholz, of the University of Chicago, who read sections 1–9 of "Ideology and Utopia". Thanks are also tendered to Mrs. E. Ginsberg (M.A., Oxon), and Miss Jean McDonald (B.Sc. (Econ.), Lond.), for their help and valuable

suggestions concerning the editing of the translation. The Social Science Research Committee of the University of Chicago generously provided assistance in typing the manuscript.

LOUIS WIRTH.

EDWARD A. SHILS.

## PREFACE

By LOUIS WIRTH

THE original German edition of *Ideology and Utopia* appeared in an atmosphere of acute intellectual tension marked by widespread discussion which subsided only with the exile or enforced silence of those thinkers who sought an honest and tenable solution to the problems raised. Since then the conflicts which in Germany led to the destruction of the liberal Weimar Republic have been felt in various countries all over the world, especially in Western Europe and the United States. The intellectual problems which at one time were considered the peculiar preoccupation of German writers have enveloped virtually the whole world. What was once regarded as the esoteric concern of a few intellectuals in a single country has become the common plight of the modern man.

In response to this situation there has arisen an extensive literature which speaks of the "end", the "decline", the "crisis", the "decay", or the "death" of Western civilization. But despite the alarm which is heralded in such titles, one looks in vain in most of this literature for an analysis of the basic factors and processes underlying our social and intellectual chaos. In contrast with these Professor Mannheim's work stands out as a sober, critical, and scholarly analysis of the social currents and situations of our time as they bear upon thought, belief, and action.

It seems to be characteristic of our period that norms and truths which were once believed to be absolute, universal, and eternal, or which were accepted with blissful unawareness of their implications, are being questioned. In the light of modern thought and investigation much of what was once taken for granted is declared to be in need of demonstration and proof. The criteria of proof themselves have become subjects of dispute. We are witnessing not only a general distrust of the validity of ideas but of the motives of those who assert them. This situation is aggravated by a war of each against all in the intellectual arena where personal self-aggrandizement rather than truth has come to be the coveted prize. Increased secularization of

life, sharpened social antagonisms and the accentuation of the spirit of personal competition have permeated regions which were once thought to be wholly under the reign of the disinterested and objective search for truth.

However disquieting this change may appear to be, it has had its wholesome influences as well. Among these might be mentioned the tendency toward a more thoroughgoing self-scrutiny and toward a more comprehensive awareness of the interconnections between ideas and situations than had hitherto been suspected. Although it may seem like grim humour to speak of the beneficent influences arising out of an upheaval that has shaken the foundations of our social and intellectual order, it must be asserted that the spectacle of change and confusion, which confronts social science, presents it at the same time with unprecedented opportunities for fruitful new development. This new development, however, depends on taking full cognizance of the obstacles which beset social thought. This does not imply that self-clarification is the only condition for the further advancement of social science, as will be indicated in what follows, but merely that it is a necessary pre-condition for further development.

## I

The progress of social knowledge is impeded if not paralysed at present by two fundamental factors, one impinging upon knowledge from without, the other operating within the world of science itself. On the one hand the powers that have blocked and retarded the advance of knowledge in the past still are not convinced that the advance of social knowledge is compatible with what they regard as their interests, and, on the other hand, the attempt to carry over the tradition and the whole apparatus of scientific work from the physical to the social realm has often resulted in confusion, misunderstanding, and sterility. Scientific thought about social affairs up to now has had to wage war primarily against established intolerance and institutionalized suppression. It has been struggling to establish itself against its external enemies, the authoritarian interest of church, state, and tribe. In the course of the last few centuries, however, what amounts at least to a partial victory against these outside forces has been won, resulting in a measure of toleration of untrammelled inquiry, and even encouragement of free thought. For a brief interlude between the eras of medieval, spiritualized darkness



and the rise of modern, secular dictatorships, the Western world gave promise of fulfilling the hope of the enlightened minds of all ages that by the full exercise of intelligence men might triumph over the adversities of nature and the perversities of culture. As so often in the past, however, this hope seems now to be chastened. Whole nations have officially and proudly given themselves up to the cult of irrationality, and even the Anglo-Saxon world which was for so long the haven of freedom and reason has recently provided revivals of intellectual witch hunts.

In the course of the development of the Western mind the pursuit of knowledge about the physical world resulted, after the travail of theological persecution, in the concession to natural science of an autonomous empire of its own. Since the sixteenth century, despite some spectacular exceptions, theological dogmatism has receded from one domain of inquiry after another until the authority of the natural sciences was generally recognized. In the face of the forward movement of scientific investigation, the church has yielded and time after time readjusted its doctrinal interpretations so that their divergence from scientific discoveries would not be too glaring.

At length the voice of science was heard with a respect approximating the sanctity which formerly was accorded only to authoritarian, religious pronouncements. The revolutions which the theoretical structure of science has undergone in recent decades have left the prestige of the scientific pursuit of truth unshaken. Even though in the last five years the cry has occasionally been raised that science was exerting a disruptive effect upon economic organization and that its output should therefore be restricted, whatever slowing down of the pace of natural science research has taken place during this period is probably more the result of the decreasing economic demand for the products of science than the deliberate attempt to hamper scientific progress in order to stabilize the existing order.

The triumph of natural science over theological and metaphysical dogma is sharply contrasted with the development in the studies of social life. Whereas the empirical procedure had made deep inroads on the dogmas of the ancients concerning nature, the classical social doctrines proved themselves more impervious to the onslaught of the secular and empirical spirit. This may in part have been due to the fact that the knowledge and theorizing about social affairs on the part of the ancients

was far in advance of their notions about physics and biology. The opportunity for demonstrating the practical utility of the new natural science had not yet come, and the disutility of existing social doctrines could not be convincingly established. Whereas Aristotle's logic, ethics, æsthetics, politics, and psychology were accepted as authoritative by subsequent periods, his notions of astronomy, physics, and biology were progressively being relegated to the scrap-heap of ancient superstitions.

Until early in the eighteenth century political and social theory was still under the dominance of the categories of thought elaborated by the ancient and medieval philosophers and operated largely within a theological framework. That part of social science that had any practical utility was concerned, primarily, with administrative matters. Cameralism and political arithmetic, which represented this current, confined themselves to the homely facts of every-day life and rarely took flights into theory. Consequently that part of social knowledge which was concerned with questions most subject to controversy could scarcely lay claim to the practical value which the natural sciences, after a certain point in their development, had achieved. Nor could those social thinkers from whom alone an advance could come expect the support of the church or the state from whom the more orthodox wing derived its financial and moral sustenance. The more secularized social and political theory became and the more thoroughly it dispelled the sanctified myths which legitimized the existing political order, the more precarious became the position of the emerging social science.

A dramatic instance of the difference between the effects of and the attitude toward technological as contrasted with social knowledge is furnished by contemporary Japan. Once that country was opened to the streams of Western influence the technical products and methods of the latter were eagerly accepted. But social, economic, and political influences from the outside are even to-day regarded with suspicion and tenaciously resisted.

The enthusiasm with which the results of physical and biological science are embraced in Japan contrasts strikingly with the cautious and guarded cultivation of economic, political, and social investigation. These latter subjects are still, for the most part, subsumed under what the Japanese call *kikenshiso* or "dangerous thoughts". The authorities regard discussion

of democracy, constitutionalism, the emperor, socialism, and a host of other subjects as dangerous because knowledge on these topics might subvert the sanctioned beliefs and undermine the existing order.

But lest we think that this condition is peculiar to Japan, however, it should be emphasized that many of the topics that come under the rubric of "dangerous thought" in Japan were until recently taboo in Western society as well. Even to-day open, frank, and "objective" inquiry into the most sacred and cherished institutions and beliefs is more or less seriously restricted in every country of the world. It is virtually impossible, for instance, even in England and America, to inquire into the actual facts regarding communism, no matter how disinterestedly, without running the risk of being labelled a communist.

That there is an area of "dangerous thought" in every society is, therefore, scarcely debatable. While we recognize that what it is dangerous to think about may differ from country to country and from epoch to epoch, on the whole the subjects marked with the danger signal are those which the society or the controlling elements in it believe to be so vital and hence so sacred that they will not tolerate their profanation by discussion. But what is not so easily recognized is the fact that thought, even in the absence of official censorship, is disturbing, and, under certain conditions, dangerous and subversive. For thought is a catalytic agent that is capable of unsettling routines, disorganizing habits, breaking up customs, undermining faiths, and generating scepticism.

The distinctive character of social science discourse is to be sought in the fact that every assertion, no matter how objective it may be, has ramifications extending beyond the limits of science itself. Since every assertion of a "fact" about the social world touches the interests of some individual or group, one cannot even call attention to the existence of certain "facts" without courting the objections of those whose very *raison d'être* in society rests upon a divergent interpretation of the "factual" situation.

## II

The discussion centring around this issue has traditionally been known as the problem of objectivity in science. In the language of the Anglo-Saxon world to be objective has meant to be impartial, to have no preferences, predilections or prejudices,

no biases, no preconceived values or judgments in the presence of the facts. This view was an expression of the older conception of natural law in accord with which the contemplation of the facts of nature, instead of being coloured by the norms of conduct of the contemplator, automatically supplied these norms.<sup>1</sup> After the natural law approach to the problem of objectivity subsided, this non-personal way of looking at the facts themselves again found support for a time through the vogue of positivism. Nineteenth century social science abounds in warnings against the distorting influences of passion, political interest, nationalism, and class feeling and in appeals for self-purification.

Indeed a good share of the history of modern philosophy and science may be viewed as a trend, if not a concerted drive, toward this type of objectivity. This, it has been assumed, involves the search for valid knowledge through the elimination of biased perception and faulty reasoning on the negative side and the formulation of a critically self-conscious point of view and the development of sound methods of observation and analysis on the positive side. If it may appear, at first glance, that in the logical and methodological writings on science the thinkers of other nations have been more active than the English and Americans, this notion might well be corrected by calling attention to the long line of thinkers in the English-speaking world who have been preoccupied with these very same problems without specifically labelling them methodology. Certainly the concern with the problems and pitfalls involved in the search for valid knowledge has constituted more than a negligible portion of the works of a long line of brilliant thinkers from Locke through Hume, Bentham, Mill, and Spencer to writers of our own time. We do not always recognize these treatments of the processes of knowing as serious attempts to formulate the epistemological, logical, and psychological premises of a sociology of knowledge, because they do not bear the explicit label and were not deliberately intended as such. Nonetheless wherever scientific activity has been carried on in an organized and self-conscious fashion, these problems have always received a considerable

<sup>1</sup> It is precisely to that current of thought which subsequently developed into the sociology of knowledge and which constitutes the main theme of this book that we owe the insight that political-ethical norms not only cannot be derived from the direct contemplation of the facts, but themselves exert a moulding influence upon the very modes of perceiving the facts. Cf. among others the works of Thorstein Veblen, John Dewey, Otto Bauer and Maurice Halbwachs.

amount of attention. In fact, in such works as J. S. Mill's *System of Logic* and Herbert Spencer's brilliant and much neglected *Study of Sociology*, the problem of objective social knowledge has received forthright and comprehensive treatment. In the period that followed Spencer this interest in the objectivity of social knowledge was somewhat deflected by the ascendancy of statistical techniques as represented by Francis Galton and Karl Pearson. But in our own day the works of Graham Wallas and John A. Hobson, among others, signalize a return to this interest.

America, despite the barren picture of its intellectual landscape that we so generally find in the writings of Europeans, has produced a number of thinkers who have concerned themselves with this issue. Outstanding in this respect is the work of William Graham Sumner, who, although he approached the problem somewhat obliquely through the analysis of the influence of the folkways and mores upon social norms rather than directly through epistemological criticism, by the vigorous way in which he directed attention to the distorting influence of ethnocentrism upon knowledge, placed the problem of objectivity into a distinctively concrete sociological setting. Unfortunately his disciples have failed to explore further the rich potentialities of his approach and have largely interested themselves in elaborating other phases of his thought. Somewhat similar in his treatment of this problem is Thorstein Veblen who, in a series of brilliant and penetrating essays, has explored the intricate relationships between cultural values and intellectual activities. Further discussion of the same question along realistic lines is found in James Harvey Robinson's *The Mind in the Making*, in which this distinguished historian touches on many of the points which the present volume analyses in detail. More recently Professor Charles A. Beard's *The Nature of the Social Sciences* has dealt with the possibilities of objective social knowledge from a pedagogical point of view in a manner revealing traces of the influence of Professor Mannheim's work.

Necessary and wholesome as the emphasis on the distorting influence of cultural values and interests upon knowledge was, this negative aspect of the cultural critique of knowledge has arrived at a juncture where the positive and constructive significance of the evaluative elements in thought had to be recognized. If the earlier discussion of objectivity laid stress upon the elimination of personal and collective bias, the more

modern approach calls attention to the positive cognitive importance of this bias. Whereas the former quest for objectivity tended to posit an "object" which was distinct from the "subject", the latter sees an intimate relationship between the object and the perceiving subject. In fact, the most recent view maintains that the object emerges for the subject when, in the course of experience, the interest of the subject is focused upon that particular aspect of the world. Objectivity thus appears in a two-fold aspect: one, in which object and subject are discrete and separate entities, the other in which the interplay between them is emphasized. Whereas objectivity in the first sense refers to the reliability of our data and the validity of our conclusions, objectivity in the second sense is concerned with relevance to our interests. In the realm of the social, particularly, truth is not merely a matter of a simple correspondence between thought and existence, but is tinged with the investigator's interest in his subject matter, his standpoint, his evaluations, in short the definition of his object of attention. This conception of objectivity, however, does not imply that henceforth no distinction between truth and error is ascertainable. It does not mean that whatever people imagine to be their perceptions, attitudes, and ideas or what they want others to believe them to be corresponds to the facts. Even in this conception of objectivity we must reckon with the distortion produced not merely by inadequate perception or incorrect knowledge of oneself, but also by the inability or unwillingness under certain circumstances to report perceptions and ideas honestly.

This conception of the problem of objectivity which underlies Professor Mannheim's work will not be found totally strange by those who are familiar with that current of American philosophy represented by James, Peirce, Mead, and Dewey. Though Professor Mannheim's approach is the product of a different intellectual heritage, in which Kant, Marx, and Max Weber have played the leading roles, his conclusions on many pivotal issues are identical with those of the American pragmatists. This convergence runs, however, only as far as the limits of the field of social psychology. Among American sociologists this point of view has been explicitly expressed by the late Charles H. Cooley, and R. M. MacIver, and implicitly by W. I. Thomas and Robert E. Park. One reason why we do not immediately connect the works of these writers with the problem complex of the present volume is that in America what the sociology of knowledge deals with

systematically and explicitly has been touched on only incidentally within the framework of the special discipline of social psychology or has been an unexploited by-product of empirical research.

The quest for objectivity gives rise to peculiarly difficult problems in the attempt to establish a rigorous scientific method in the study of social life. Whereas in dealing with the objects in the physical world the scientist may very well confine himself to the external uniformities and regularities that are there presented without seeking to penetrate into the inner meaning of the phenomena, in the social world the search is primarily for an understanding of these inner meanings and connections.

It may be true that there are some social phenomena and, perhaps, some aspects of all social events that can be viewed externally as if they were things. But this should not lead to the inference that only those manifestations of social life which find expression in material things are real. It would be a very narrow conception of social science to limit it to those concrete things which are externally perceivable and measurable.

The literature of social science amply demonstrates that there are large and very definite spheres of social existence in which it is possible to obtain scientific knowledge which is not only reliable but which has significant bearings on social policy and action. It does not follow from the fact that human beings are different from other objects in nature that there is nothing determinate about them. Despite the fact that human beings in their actions show a kind of causation which does not apply to any other objects in nature, namely motivation, it must still be recognized that determinate causal sequences must be assumed to apply to the realm of the social as they do to the physical. It might of course be argued that the precise knowledge we have of causal sequences in other realms has not as yet been established in the social realm. But if there is to be any knowledge at all beyond the sensing of the unique and transitory events of the moment, the possibility of discovering general trends and predictable series of events analogous to those to be found in the physical world must be posited for the social world as well. The determinism which social science presupposes, however, and of which Professor Mannheim treats so understandingly in this volume, is of a different sort from that involved in the Newtonian celestial mechanics.

There are, to be sure, some social scientists who claim that

science must restrict itself to the causation of actual phenomena, that science is not concerned with what should be done, not with what ought to be done, but rather with what can be done and the manner of doing it. According to this view social science should be exclusively instrumental rather than a goal-setting discipline. But in studying what is, we cannot totally rule out what ought to be. In human life, the motives and ends of action are part of the process by which action is achieved and are essential in seeing the relation of the parts to the whole. Without the end most acts would have no meaning and no interest to us. But there is, nevertheless, a difference between taking account of ends and setting ends. Whatever may be the possibility of complete detachment in dealing with physical things, in social life we cannot afford to disregard the values and goal of acts without missing the significance of many of the facts involved. In our choice of areas for research, in our selection of data, in our method of investigation, in our organization of materials, not to speak of the formulation of our hypotheses and conclusions, there is always manifest some more or less clear, explicit or implicit assumption or scheme of evaluation.

There is, accordingly, a well-founded distinction between objective and subjective facts, which results from the difference between outer and inner observation or between "knowledge about" and "acquaintance with", to use William James's terms. If there is a difference between physical and mental processes—and there seems to be little occasion to talk this important distinction out of existence—it suggests a corresponding differentiation in the modes of knowing these two kinds of phenomena. Physical objects can be known (and natural science deals with them exclusively as if they could be known) purely from the outside, while mental and social processes can be known only from the inside, except in so far as they also exhibit themselves externally through physical indexes, into which in turn we read meanings. Hence insight may be regarded as the core of social knowledge. It is arrived at by being on the inside of the phenomenon to be observed, or, as Charles H. Cooley put it, by sympathetic introspection. It is the participation in an activity that generates interest, purpose, point of view, value, meaning, and intelligibility, as well as bias.

If then the social sciences are concerned with objects that have meaning and value the observer who attempts to understand them must necessarily do so by means of categories which in



turn depend on his own values and meanings. This point has been stated time and again in the dispute which has raged for many years between the behaviourists among the social scientists who would have dealt with social life exclusively as the natural scientist deals with the physical world, and those who took the position of sympathetic introspectionism and understanding along the lines indicated by such a writer as Max Weber.

But on the whole, while the evaluative element in social knowledge has received formal recognition, there has been relatively little attention given, especially among English and American sociologists, to the concrete analysis of the role of actual interests and values as they have been expressed in specific historical doctrines and movements. An exception must be made in the case of Marxism which, although it has raised this issue to a central position, has not formulated any satisfactory systematic statement of the problem.

It is at this point that Professor Mannheim's contribution marks a distinctive advance over the work that has hitherto been done in Europe and America. Instead of being content with calling attention to the fact that interest is inevitably reflected in all thought, including that part of it which is called science, Professor Mannheim has sought to trace out the specific connection between actual interest groups in society and the ideas and modes of thought which they espoused. He has succeeded in showing that ideologies, i.e. those complexes of ideas which direct activity toward the maintenance of the existing order, and utopias—or those complexes of ideas which tend to generate activities toward changes of the prevailing order—do not merely deflect thought from the object of observation, but also serve to fix attention upon aspects of the situation which otherwise would be obscured or pass unnoticed. In this manner he has forged out of a general theoretical formulation an effective instrument for fruitful empirical research.

The meaningful character of conduct does not warrant the inference, however, that this conduct is invariably the product of conscious reflection and reasoning. Our quest for understanding arises out of action and may even be consciously preparatory for further action, but we must recognize that conscious reflection or the imaginative rehearsal of the situation that we call "thinking" is not an indispensable part of every act. Indeed, it seems to be generally agreed among social psychologists that ideas are not spontaneously generated and