

KARL MANNHEIM

IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY
OF KNOWLEDGE

TRANSLATED BY
LOUIS WIRTH AND EDWARD SHILS
WITH A PREFACE BY
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To
JULIA MANNHEIM-LANG

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 *hikenshiso* 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.¹ 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

¹ 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.