

IDEOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND WORK: A NEW EVALUATION OF KARL MANNHEIM'S THIRD WAY

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La sociología del conocimiento de Karl Mannheim supone un intento de controlar lo irracional en la política gracias a una mejor comprensión de las fuerzas ideológicas que determinan el pensamiento y la acción políticos. Para la sociología del conocimiento de Mannheim es fundamental su epistemología. Se trata de un método para comprender el conocimiento más que una teoría del conocimiento. Sin embargo, al ofrecer una solución sociológica a un problema que es al mismo tiempo sociológico y epistemológico, la tercera vía de Mannheim ha de ser reformulada de manera que incluya un concepto de trabajo moderno y dialéctico si ésta ha de ser desarrollada como una aproximación viable a la política o como una solución al problema del conocimiento en las ciencias sociales. Si se entiende el pensamiento como un modo específico de trabajo, entonces se pueden evaluar las creencias del mismo modo que otro tipo de trabajo: según lo efectivas que sean para eliminar las contradicciones.

Palabras clave: Mannheim, epistemología, sociología del conocimiento, ideología, praxis.

I

Formulated sixty years ago in a political and social climate of extreme polarization, Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge represents an attempt to find a rational means to master the irrational in politics. It proposes a third way which, Mannheim hoped, might surpass the seemingly irreconcilable contradictions between the political left and right by allowing humankind to understand --and thereby master-- the ideological forces that determine political thinking and action. Fundamental to Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is his epistemology. Proposed as an alternative to the bankrupt relativist and absolutist theories of knowledge, this epistemology is a methodology for understanding knowledge rather than a the-

ory of knowledge. The growing interest in his work beyond the confines of Anglo-American sociology where he has long had a strong following is testimony to the value of Mannheim's contribution to a question that has yet to be satisfactorily resolved. Yet, because it ultimately proposes a sociological solution to a problem that is both sociological and epistemological, if it is to be developed as a viable approach to politics or a solution to the problem of knowing in the social sciences, Mannheim's third way must be reformulated to include a modern dialectical concept of work.

Since the publication of *Ideology and Utopia* in 1929, Mannheim's epistemology has been variously criticized, if not ridiculed, from both the philosophical left and the theoretical right. These criticisms have occasionally touched on important problems with Mannheim's theory, but almost all reveal a misunderstanding of its fundamental tenets. They are based on assumptions which Mannheim explicitly rejects, or (more importantly) whose limited usefulness for the social sciences has been demonstrated by Mannheim or his predecessors. Even partisans of the sociology of knowledge like Werner Stark interpret Mannheim's epistemology as a radical relativism, while Mannheim's opponents on the left have rejected his attempts to transcend relativism outside the confines of Marxian dialectics:

Like all agnostics of the imperial period, Mannheim protested against the accusation of relativism. He solved the question with a new term and called himself a relationist. The difference between relativism and relationism is about the same as that between the yellow and the green devil in Lenin's letter to Gorky (Lukács *Destruction* 633)

Most often they have attacked his idea of a "detached intelligentsia," sneering at the pre-eminent role which he gives intellectuals:

Now why the thinking of the 'floating intelligentsia' was no longer 'situation-bound', and why relationism did not now apply its own tenet to itself,

as it was asking historical materialism to do, is known only to the sociology of knowledge (637)

These criticisms are particularly interesting, and not only because they focus on the two most problematic elements in Mannheim's work and were written by his countryman, Georg Lukács. Lukács analysis of the sociology of knowledge in *The Destruction of Reason* is cursory at best and bears all the marks of the bitterness of colleagues estranged by the divergent evolution of their political views¹. More important, however, is Lukács later work, *The Ontology of Social Being*, for it provides some of the conceptual tools necessary for answering many of the questions the sociology of knowledge raises but leaves only partially answered.

II

The sociology of knowledge is first of all a study of ideology. The unity of the quantitative and qualitative in thinking has long been implicit in theories of knowledge, as it is in all mythico-religious ways of seeing the world. Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, for example, represents a struggle between conflicting views, not only of justice, but of truth which is inextricable from justice; and these views are themselves inextricable from the conflicting interests of Zeus and Prometheus. The Sophists also recognized that men's interests colour their view of what is true, but even more than for Aeschylus, these interests are those of individuals and do not concern the complex of beliefs that make up the world view of a society or a class. According to Mannheim, the separation of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of knowing is characteristic of the modern age:

¹ One of Mannheim's first publications was an admiring review of Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*. But Mannheim and Lukács did not follow the same political road. Mannheim, for example, did not participate in the ill-fated Hungarian Soviet in which Lukács was Commissar of Education. For a discussion of Lukács' influence on Mannheim (and vice-versa) see Joseph Gabel's *Mannheim et le marxisme hongrois*.

In this most recent epoch, the ideal of science has been mathematically and geometrically demonstrable knowledge, while everything qualitative has been admissible only as a derivative of the quantitative (*Ideology* 165)

At the beginning of this age, for example, Descartes gave a paradigmatic role to mathematics, and Luther attacked the Aristotelian amalgamation of theology and metaphysics because it confuses the human and the divine, which he claimed could only be revealed. And it was only with the modern era and as an answer to the problems rising from this separation that the social origins of thinking became evident and were defined as the problem of ideology.

In his study of ideology, Mannheim acknowledges his debt to Machiavelli, Bacon and Marx, but develops further their ideas on the social origins of thought. He agrees with the principal tenets of the Marxist conception of ideology: first, that men's interests form the way they think and, second, that men do not think alone but as they live, in groups:

... it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals who do the thinking, but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of thought in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations characterizing their common position.

Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that the individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that he participates in thinking further what other men have thought before him. He finds himself in an inherited situation with patterns of thought which are appropriate to this situation and attempts to elaborate further the inherited modes of response or to substitute others for them in order to deal more adequately with the new challenges which have arisen out of the shifts and changes in his situation (3)

However, Mannheim criticizes Marx on the grounds that his conception of ideology does not go far enough. He calls Marx's conception of ideology the particular conception of ideology and considers it primarily a critical approach to the problem of the social nature of thought:

We speak of this conception of ideology as *particular* because it always refers only to specific assertions which may be regarded as concealments, falsifications, or lies without attacking the integrity of the *total mental* structures of the asserting subject (266)

The particular conception of ideology uses the discovery that men think in groups and that interests colour men's view of the truth to attack an opponent. It has become, since Marx, one of the principal weapons used by all parties in political struggles. In short, it amounts to undermining any claims an opponent might make of the truthfulness of his position by demonstrating that his view of a question is inseparable from his interests. Such unmasking has given rise to the problem of relativism because it destroys the notion that truth can exist independently of any perspective.

Mannheim, however, goes beyond this 'particular' concept of ideology to the 'total' concept of ideology, or 'perspectivism,' a term he prefers because it avoids the negative connotations of the word 'ideology' (266). Just as every epoch has its style of art, so every epoch has its style of thinking. As art can be dated by its style, so can thought. (271) The object of study of the sociology of knowledge is these styles of thought: the total complex of quantitative and qualitative factors making up the ways groups of human beings see their world. Mannheim's perspectivism differs from the particular concept of ideology in that it does not assume that, because thinking is coloured by meaning and volitional factors, it is necessarily distortion or false consciousness. On the contrary, Mannheim maintains that it is impossible to think in a manner uncoloured by value. All thinking occurs within a specific ideological context, and is done by persons whose values and aspirations form their style of thought and their view of what is truth. They think from a *perspective*. Because all thought is value-laden, the problem of knowledge is no longer simply how to demystify and render transparent the thinking of (and thereby the assertions claimed to be true by) any particular group. Rather, the problem is first of all descriptive: How does a specific style of thought occur? and, second, evaluative: If truth in the absolute, exclusively quantitative sense is

an illusion, how is it possible not to fall into the trap of relativism, where all assertions are equally valid? How is it possible to choose between conflicting views of what is true?

Mannheim's conception of ideology leads to a rejection of absolutist and relativist theories of knowledge. This rejection is well-founded, and Mannheim's reasons are easily summarized. Common to all absolutist theories of knowledge is their foundation on a set of eternal and self-justified true statements transcending any contextual- and value-conditioning of thought. From whatever perspective it is made, a statement is judged against this set of true statements and is decreed either true or false. Since modern absolutism claims to transcend the qualitative aspects of truth, it is ironic that absolutism requires the existence of a benevolent god who guarantees the validity of both man's reason and the foundational beliefs against which all other beliefs must be justified. However, more than the demise of the religious world view, it was the discovery that different and even contradictory points of view can provide means for solving problems that brought about the end of epistemological absolutism and the rise of relativism. In contrast to absolutism, relativism discards any notion of statements true in themselves in all contexts. Relativism takes a set of beliefs which make up a particular world-view as its foundation and justifies a statement only according to this set of beliefs. A statement can hence be considered true or false only for the specific context in which it occurs. Outside this context its truth-value is irrelevant and there is no means for choosing between opposing world-views. Relativism therefore condemns humanity to powerlessness and inaction, or to the kind of blind, spontaneous acts dear to fascist theory (see Gentile 74-77). Common to both absolutist and relativist theories of knowledge is the assumption that truth is an attribute of discourse. Justification implies the comparison of a statement to an existing set of beliefs or statements, be they absolute or only absolute within a specific context. Whatever the differences between absolutist and relativist theories of knowledge, both approaches consider statements and the beliefs used to justify them statically and as discrete from the concrete events of life. Neither approach

considers knowledge as a problem which extends beyond the realm of discourse.

The critical difference between Mannheim's relationism and traditional (absolutist and relativist) theories of knowledge is its rejection of any notion of "a sphere of truth valid in itself" (*Ideology* 297), an idea which is nothing more than a vestige of ancient dualist conceptions of the universe. Mannheim rejects the idea that knowledge must ultimately rest on some Archimedean point of objectivity (Hekman 138), be that point absolute or relative, and proposes that it is better to define truth as the relation between beliefs and concrete situations, rather than as a discrete and static entity. Justification of beliefs is then done neither against a set of absolute and self-justified beliefs, nor against a set of beliefs forming the particular perspective in which a statement is made. Rather, justification becomes possible through a description of the relation of the statement both to the set of beliefs forming the perspective in which it occurs *and* to the actual, concrete conditions of life at the time it occurs. For Mannheim, truth thus considered ceases to be an attribute of discourse: it does not belong only to beliefs about a situation but also to the situation itself:

This solution does not imply renunciation of the postulate of objectivity and the possibility of arriving at decisions in factual disputes ... Relationism, as we use it, states that every assertion can only be relationally formulated. It becomes relativism only when it is linked with the older static ideal of eternal, unperspectivistic truths independent of the subjective experience of the observer, and when it is judged by this alien ideal of absolute truth (300)

Like the relativist, Mannheim accepts the discovery that thinking and truth are coloured by the life situation and the perspective of the thinker. He also accepts the view that it is possible to think productively from any perspective. But unlike the relativist, Mannheim emphasizes the fact that it is possible to think more productively from some perspectives than from others. The problem is not one of correspondences of beliefs with foundational truths, but one of describing how men and groups of men

come to think in a particular way in order to understand and master the qualitative elements in our thinking. Truth, according to Mannheim, is dynamic and historical, but it is an attribute of changing reality as well as of the ways of thinking developed to understand and master this reality. More precisely, truth is the relation between the concrete conditions of life and the ways men have to understand them and give them meaning. Beliefs are not strictly true or false in the absolutist sense; they can only be as true or false as the way of life to which they belong.

Justification, therefore, implies an evaluation of statements, but also an evaluation of the total historical life situation and the perspective from which the statement is made. First, the relationship between a statement and the concrete life situation and beliefs of the context in which it occurs is described. A statement such as 'Kings rule by divine right' might be attributed to a fourteenth century English king, while the condemnation of social classes expressed in the verses 'When Adam delve, and Eva span/ Who was then the gentleman?' can be attributed to partisans of the peasant revolts of the same period. Second, the statement and the way of life to which it belongs are evaluated in the context of what Mannheim calls the 'trend in history.' This evaluation has two parts. The first is an examination of the statement from a 'detached perspective,' that is, a perspective from which not only the ideological assumptions of others but also those assumptions in one's own perspective become transparent. The second step represents an attempt to determine the effectiveness of a way of life and a perspective in relation to the current trend in history. It is possible to think productively from any perspective, but with differing results. Hence, how useful is a particular perspective for resolving the problems which history presents? Because there is a continuation in both experience and thinking --each person or group of persons does not begin again from nothing-- perspectives are continuously broadening. New points of view are adopted and integrated into a synthesis which Mannheim calls the broadening basis of knowledge² It is from the vantage

² This broadening basis of knowledge is not, as Ricoeur claims (Lectures 170-2), a Hegelian totality. It is an open-ended and continuing synthesis and always only

point of this broadening basis of knowledge that the sociologist of knowledge attempts to explain and justify the effectiveness of beliefs in solving the specific problems humankind faces at a given historical moment.

Thus what is true for one moment in history is not necessarily true for another. In fourteenth century England, for example, economic and social conditions, and with them ideology, were such that the view that 'Kings rule by divine right' was tenable. Because he was king, Richard II was so revered even by those of his subjects who had rebelled that he was able to trick the rebel leaders and squash the rebellion. Three centuries later, however, Charles I could not truthfully hold the same belief. He lost his head because he maintained a view which history had left behind. He, and the social group to which he belonged, had a way of life and hence a way of thinking that did not allow them to see the way events were moving and thereby master them. Charles' view of what was true was less true than had been Richard's, though a statement used to express their beliefs could well be the same one³. The historicity of truth means that the problem of truth concerns what a statement means in relation to a concrete life situation, not whether any statement corresponds to other statements. And the meaning of kingship in England had changed from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.

It would be incorrect, however, to imagine that simply the apparent success of a particular point of view in mastering specific problems in a

partial, both because it belongs to a specific moment in history and because even in relation to this moment it is never complete.

³The fact that Richard would not have found it necessary to consider such a statement reinforces rather than undermines this argument. Statements of a belief need only be expressed, in fact, can only be expressed as such once the belief is made to a certain degree transparent by socio-historical changes that distance it from its context, thereby rendering it transparent. Only when conditions change so as to make possible the realization that a particular belief is a belief and not a fundamental, integral part of the way the world is made --a truth-- does it become necessary to express this belief. Dante's *Comedy* is one of the best examples of such an attempt to express and affirm beliefs and a world order that are becoming transparent.

particular context is the measure of the truthfulness of that point of view. For truth is the relation between beliefs and life; and hence the effectiveness of a point of view is never evaluated only in terms of how well it serves one in a struggle, in the sphere of the immediate and the practical - -which beliefs allow whom to slaughter whom. Might is not right. Rather, because all thought and action occur within both a concrete physical context and a set of beliefs and values, it is impossible to separate actions from their qualitative, ethical implications. Any evaluation implicates the views and beliefs of those doing the evaluation as well as those being evaluated, and hence is always an evaluation inseparable from ethical considerations. Without the foundation of a god guaranteeing the validity of a set of self-justified beliefs, truth must nevertheless incorporate both the quantitative and the qualitative. It is inseparable from meaning, which means inseparable from man's practices and social life.

III

Mannheim's sociology of knowledge contains profound and useful insights into the way men think and act. Perhaps most significantly, it proposes a sociological alternative to the sometimes mechanistic views of knowledge which have been advanced under the banner of dialectic materialism. Mannheim's most important contribution to the problem of knowing is his insistence on the social nature of all thinking, and the arguments he puts forward to support this thesis. Ironically, this insistence is also the principal failing of Mannheim's epistemology of relationism. For Mannheim in fact brings a sociological solution to what is both a sociological and an epistemological problem without first demonstrating that such a solution is a valid one. He suggests that a social group, the floating intelligensia⁴, is in a position to best choose between conflicting views of the truth, to arbitrate questions that are both sociological and epistemological. It is this solution that has provoked the ire especially of Marxists, who have accused Mannheim (like Plato before him) of giving

⁴The intelligensia in question is characterized less by its association to educational institutions than by its cultural uprootedness and mobility. It is this latter attribute which, combined with formal intellectual training, places the intelligensia in a privileged position for choosing between conflicting views of truth.

to himself and his colleagues the exclusive right to be the arbitrators of truth.

Lukács, for example, seized upon a fundamental problem with Mannheim's solution: namely, that he does not demonstrate that intellectuals stand in a different epistemological position from any other social group but at the same time claims that their social position places them in a particular epistemological position. While it may be true that the social position of intellectuals (particularly as Mannheim sees them) places them in a unique epistemological position, Mannheim's attempt to demonstrate this is full of contradictions.

Mannheim himself insists on the inseparability of thinking and acting, but the role of judges of truth which he gives intellectuals implicitly contradicts his thesis on the meaningful and volitional nature of thought. The viability of such a role for intellectuals rests on the view that their evaluations of beliefs would be better because they are more rational, yet Mannheim is explicit in his denunciation of the traditional hierarchy of activities which places the contemplative life at the summit. Not only does this hierarchy represent one social group's self-justification for its ideological hegemony, but it hides the weaknesses of this group and of the methods it employs to solve the concrete problems of existence. That is, seeking always further information in order to minimize the chances of error, those who, by their way of life are contemplative, like Hamlet, have a tendency to postpone indefinitely and fatally crucial decisions and, hence, action. And even should they have a privileged view of knowledge and understand better than others what political solutions would be best for a society, without the means to implement their solutions all the intellectuals' wisdom is as futile as the predictions of Cassandra or the counsel of Lear's fool⁵.

Mannheim explicitly distances himself from fascists for whom the Act is a quasi-mystical and autonomous reality in itself. Contrary to fascist the-

⁵In fairness to Mannheim, it should be mentioned that to recognize the privileged position and perspective of intellectuals is in fact to recognize their particular moral and social responsibilities.

ory, for Mannheim an act is rooted in all that came before and is in no way accidental or spontaneous. He does, however, propose to abandon the traditional hierarchy of activities which separates thinking from action and insists on the role of the man of action in our understanding of the world (*Ideology* 134-39). Underlying his sociological inquiries into the respective roles of contemplation and action in what he calls 'the broadening synthesis of knowledge' is an insistence upon the historical and contextual origins of all thoughts and actions. More important, however, is the implicit corollary of his thesis of the inseparability of knowledge and practice: as Bacon understood, in order to change the world one must understand it; but also, to understand the world one must change it. If knowledge is indeed inextricable from practice, if there is a qualitative difference (which separates thinking from other forms of work) between their activity and that of other social groups, then the very fact that they would be detached from practice would disqualify intellectuals as the best judges of truth. That is, if by the nature of their work or as a social group intellectuals are detached from social practice, they are at a handicap at least insofar as thinking about social and political matters is concerned; and this is precisely the domain where Mannheim hoped they would provide an alternative to traditional (destructive) means for deciding the validity of conflicting views of truth. Yet, on the other hand, if intellectuals do implicate themselves in social matters and are hence, by acting, able to understand matters of social practice, according to Mannheim's own views on the nature of thought, their thinking is partisan; they cannot have a detached perspective and are disqualified as arbitrators of truth.

Hence, though they are ultimately sociological and political attacks, Lukács' and other Marxian criticisms of Mannheim's theory are based on a correct evaluation of contradictions between Mannheim's discoveries about the nature of knowledge and his solution to the problems raised by these discoveries. Being sociological, these attacks are true to the spirit of Mannheim; but also (and for this very reason) they do not address, much less resolve, the epistemological questions Mannheim's theory raises. Other (epistemological) critiques and discussions of Mannheim's discoveries have not been more fruitful, however; and too often they reveal an

unfortunate tendency to try to sidestep what has become known as Mannheim's paradox.

Paul Ricoeur's discussion of Mannheim's work in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, for example, illustrates well the sort of attempts that have been made to resolve this paradox. Ricoeur begins by misconstruing Mannheim's definition of the partial and total concepts of ideology:

To express the psychological and comprehensive approaches to ideology, Mannheim resorts to the unfortunate vocabulary of "particular" and "total" conceptions, and this has created many misunderstandings. What he means is not so much that one approach is particular, but that it is located in the individual. It is particular in the sense that it is particular to the individual. The total conception, on the other hand, includes a whole world view and is supported by a collective structure (162)

Ricoeur has interpreted two concepts of ideology: the partial (ideology as conscious falsification), and the total (ideology as the constellations of beliefs in which all thinking occurs), which both refer to descriptions of how groups of people think, as an individual (psychological) complex of beliefs and as a comprehensive (social) complex of beliefs. This crucial misunderstanding (especially of the total concept of ideology) allows him to later affirm that "the critique of ideology always presupposes a reflective act that is itself not part of the ideological process" (171). Similarly, writing on Ricoeur's *Lectures*, Bernard Dauenhauer affirms that "that which is simply entertained ... has a different logical status than do adopted ideologies and utopias and therefore elude Mannheim's paradox" ("Ideology" 37). Such solutions pointedly ignore Mannheim's thesis that *all* thinking is situation bound, that all thinking (even the philosopher's) is and can only be from within a perspective, a total ideology, and propose that the solution to Mannheim's paradox is to ignore the tenets of Mannheim's theory that are at the origin of the paradox. By not abandoning the notion that some kinds of thinking might (somehow?) escape social conditioning, such responses suggest a return to ideas of a sphere of truth in itself and, thereby, to the traditional epistemological problem of absolut-

ism and relativism. Their value for developing further Mannheim's inquiry is therefore quite limited. Yet they do, implicitly, raise the question of whether Mannheim's paradox even needs to be addressed.

Indeed, Ricoeur's treatment of the question makes clear that attempts to resolve Mannheim's paradox are also attempts to re-affirm the possibility of transcending the ideological, qualitative element of thinking⁶. It also makes clear that the paradox is meaningful only when the idea of non-perspectivist truth and the notion of a sphere of truth in itself are maintained. It becomes meaningless if Mannheim's basic tenets concerning the qualitative, situation-bound and dynamic nature of truth are accepted. The problem of knowledge is not one of which thinker or what kind of thinking may be able to escape the paradox, but simply how, within the bounds of the paradox, (that is, accepting Mannheim's view of truth) it is possible to choose between conflicting views of truth. As a solution to this question, Mannheim's epistemology of relationism is inadequate not because its method is not viable, but because Mannheim does not demonstrate how, as he claims, truth is indeed the relation between perspective and the concrete conditions of existence. Mannheim fails to do this because, surprisingly for someone who insists on the inseparability of thinking and concrete situations and between knowledge and action, he deals with thinking and ideology as belonging to an autonomous realm and does not show by what means they belong to and participate in the concrete conditions of life. It is this error that permits him to suggest (contrary to the thesis on the need to act upon the world in order to understand it) that those who would enjoy the vantage point offered by some sort of detached perspective would be the best judges of truth.

The role of intellectuals in the evaluation of beliefs is the aspect of Mannheim's theory that is most easily criticized, but it is in fact only a product of a more fundamental problem with his theory. Mannheim insists that all thinking is a collective phenomenon rooted in the common

⁶ It should be remembered that Mannheim never attempted to do this. In his view the intelligensia cannot transcend all perspectives; it is only in the position best suited for effecting a synthesis of existing perspectives, for working within the broadest perspective possible at any given moment in history.

lived experience of a social group and that truth is a relation between a perspective and a concrete situation. Yet, he presents the synthesis of knowledge (upon which rests his argument for the special role of the intellectuals) as occurring within the ideological structure, abstracted from the concrete relations and forces which inform social life. That is, the ever-widening synthesis of points of view forming the detached perspective of the intellectuals is ultimately a synthesis of ideologies rather than of ideologies in their relations with concrete experience. Mannheim is right to insist on the importance of the active subject (both collective and individual), of perspectives through which men understand the world, but he does not show how a synthesis of knowledge can in fact occur independently of a synthesis of practices. His failure to elaborate on the kind of relation that exists between subject and object allows his concepts of ideology and knowledge to be interpreted as referring to self-generating entities abstracted from the objective world. Similarly, his concept of a trend in history is vague because its relation to the objective forces that shape history remains vague; and (this is Mannheim's paradox) though he insists on the meaningful and volitional nature of thought and practice, he does not show how a detached perspective can be achieved when (by his own evaluation) detached practices are manifestly impossible. Ultimately, then, the principal difficulties with Mannheim's alternative to absolutism and relativism have their origins in his failure to establish a sound basis for the claims he makes concerning the relation between thought and social practice.

IV

Mannheim's failure to elaborate the relation between thought and social practice can be attributed to a failure to renounce in all instances the long-standing inversion of the relation between thinking and work. As old as philosophy itself, this inversion postulates a qualitative difference between thinking and acting, and proposes that truth belongs to a realm abstracted from practice. Mannheim begins his criticism of traditional epistemology by rejecting this inversion and insisting on the inseparability of thinking and acting. However, when he proposes that intellectuals are in a particu-

lar and advantageous position for evaluating the truthfulness of beliefs, he not only contradicts the principal tenets of his theory, but also returns to the traditional hierarchy which places thinking over acting. In order to make use of Mannheim's discoveries and develop a viable alternative to relativism and absolutism, it is therefore necessary to reject his (sociological) solution which proposes a special role of intellectuals in the evaluation of beliefs. This rejection does not mean that Mannheim's epistemology must be completely abandoned, however. It only means that another (epistemological) solution must be sought to validate the relationist concept of truth.

The first step which this solution demands is a (relatively) simple clarification of Mannheim's somewhat nebulous concept of a trend in history by defining it as the complex of concrete, objective forces that shape and are shaped by societies and social groups. It is against these forces, or rather against the best approximation of the development of these forces within the widest possible perspective at a given moment in history, that beliefs and perspectives would be evaluated using Mannheim's relationist method. The fact that a perspective would be self-evaluating, the perspective being evaluated also forming the criteria of its own evaluation, is integral to Mannheim's view of truth and his epistemology, and does not lessen the validity of the method or imply a return to relativism. It only means that it is necessary to introduce a second element to the solution: a modern, dialectical concept of work which describes the relation between thinking and the concrete conditions of existence in order to provide grounds for the claim that truth is indeed a relation between these conditions and a perspective.

In *The Ontology of Social Being*, the last book he completed before his death, Lukács outlined a concept of work that provides a point of departure for going not only beyond the contradictions in Mannheim's work, but also beyond his own earlier criticisms of Mannheim's epistemology. Work, Lukács notes, has its origins in necessity:

The essence of human labour . . . depends firstly on its arising amid the struggle for existence, and secondly on all steps of its development being products of man's own activity (iii)

It does not matter how the objective conditions of this struggle may have changed since the beginnings of humanity, that determinants like weather may have given way, at least in part, to economy and social organisation. In its essence work remains the same activity, including all activity whereby the active subject transforms the object with a purpose and is transformed by this activity. The concept of work in question does not, then, consider work primarily in its function as a means of producing exchange- and surplus-value. Above all, this concept considers work as a means for producing use-value by finding new answers to concrete problems that arise out of new conditions of life. Work transforms an object not with the purpose of realizing a pre-determined goal, but with changing the given conditions of existence. Specifically excluded from this concept, then, is alienated work where man is only an instrument participating in the realization of a pre-determined end (the slave-labour used by Plato as a paradigm for all work when he condemns the poets). Work is not a series of unconscious responses to the particular elements of a given situation. If the consciousness of a complex of solutions inherited from the past (the past of humankind and of the individual) is essential to it, work is nevertheless not simply a repetition of old solutions. Because work is (as Mannheim says of thought) the working further of what has been worked before, it necessarily implies a meaningful orientation, one which includes the qualitative and volitional elements in humankind's consciousness. Further, because knowledge and technique are always limited, and because subject and object are transformed, the accidental, the unforeseen can never be excluded.

Characteristic of work is its teleological orientation, something Mannheim recognized as crucial to all human activity:

The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced then with

the greatest paradox imaginable . . . when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man's own creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it (*Ideology* 262-63)

This orientation does not mean a movement towards any sort of fixed and pre-defined goal existing prior to and independently of efforts to bring about its realization. It is not the fixed and limited orientation of alienated labour. Rather, it implies simply a search for something other (*le voulu*) than that which is immediately present (*le vécu*)⁷, a search where goals and methods are continuously redefined by the activity of the search itself. The mutual transformation of subject and object through work establishes concretely the essential relation between perspective (total ideology, including its utopias) and a trend in history (the actual, material conditions of existence at a given moment in history). In Lukács' words, work is "the only point at which a teleological positing can be ontologically established as a real moment of material actuality" (*Ontology* 8). Work is the activity which (temporarily) overcomes contradictions between the *vécu* and the *voulu* and realizes a synthesis of perspective and the material conditions of existence, transforming both these conditions and the perspective. As such, work establishes as concrete the relation between perspective and conditions of existence essential to Mannheim's epistemology.

Having suggested how work constitutes this relation it becomes possible to propose an epistemological solution where a sociological one proved inadequate because it returned to the traditional hierarchy of thought over work. If thought is taken as nothing more than a specific mode of work, qualitatively the same as other modes of work, it becomes possible to

⁷ The French terms *le vécu* and *le voulu* are mentioned only because the English translations are rather awkward. The first means 'the lived', roughly the 'concrete experience of life'. The second means 'the willed', 'the desired', 'the wished for'. It refers to that which is desired and other than the present concrete conditions of life, and implies both ideological and utopian elements in thinking as they are made apparent by their contradiction with the lived.

evaluate beliefs in the same manner as other modes of work (as proposed above in the discussion of Mannheim's epistemology), according to how effectively they resolve contradictions. The greater the contradictions they permit to be resolved, the truer the beliefs. At one extreme is social impotence (akin to madness or despair) where the categories through which the world is perceived do not even permit a mastery of the simpler problems of everyday life, while at the other are ways of thinking and acting which permit men and women to master as effectively as is possible at a given moment in history the most acute contradictions of a society.

This solution explicitly prohibits conceding a privileged perspective to any group in society (such as the intelligensia), for to do so would imply that there exists a qualitative difference between their work and that used to validate the notion of truth as a concrete relation; ultimately, any such attempt would lead back to Mannheim's paradox. Nevertheless, a remark made by the Italian philosopher, Galvano della Volpe, concerning Lukács' preference for Thomas Mann over Franz Kafka may provide some justification, if not for a special role for the intelligensia, at least for intellectual inquiry. Della Volpe rejects Lukács' choice made on sociological (and political) grounds as artificial because "authentic poetry is always realist (sociological) truth" (*Critique* 243). Without entering into a discussion of what della Volpe means by sociological truth, it is nevertheless useful to note that he proposes that poetry be evaluated on strictly epistemological grounds. For example, though he was committed Marxist and opposed to T. S. Eliot's political views, della Volpe nevertheless insisted on the value of Eliot's poetry precisely because (in his view) it expresses the greatest contradictions of the poet's society (68-82). The specific value of intellectual work may be then, that as Mannheim proposed, when (if?) intellectuals (like artists) apply themselves to social and political issues, their training and familiarity with theories of how men and women think and act may help them, not transcend their perspectives, but simply and modestly, explicate the deep-seated assumptions and contradictions of their time.

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