

Epistemological Issues in Karl Mannheim's
Sociology of Knowledge – II

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Introduction

This is the second part of a two-part inquiry into some of the many epistemological issues raised in Karl Mannheim's writings on the sociology of knowledge. The inquiry is primarily concerned with the relationship of epistemology to the sociology of knowledge and attempts to show how Mannheim's sociology of knowledge developed, in part, as a response to some of the epistemological problems which Mannheim saw as having been inadequately resolved by classical epistemology. Part I, published separately, regards epistemology and the sociology of knowledge as separate intellectual disciplines and briefly offers some distinctions between the two as articulated by some of those authors writing under the rubric of the "sociology of knowledge." It also attempts to clarify some of the basic epistemological issues which are central to Mannheim's thought and to reconstruct a critique of post-medieval epistemology from the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge along lines suggested by Mannheim. Part II, offered here, presents and critiques Mannheim's own model for epistemology.

A New Model for Epistemology

Mannheim asserts that the sociology of knowledge developed largely out of earlier theories of ideology. But he distinguishes the two by postulating that whereas the study of ideology is primarily concerned with analyzing more or less conscious and deliberate distortions made

in support of the special interests of any given social group, the sociology of knowledge concerns itself more with tracing out the process by which any body of knowledge arises within a social setting and with asking how factors present in the latter contribute to the manner in which the former takes shape. In Mannheim's words, it is concerned with "...the varying ways in which objects present themselves to the subject according to the differences in social settings."¹

The motive for studying ideologies, according to Mannheim, arose with the desire of various social groups and political parties to expose what they saw as the deliberate attempt on the part of their opponents to falsify knowledge in the interest of furthering their own political goals. In the earlier stages in the history of thinking about ideologies, it could still be generally thought that the task of separating truth from error could be fulfilled by considering the social perspective out of which the various ideological truth-claims emerged. Yet, it became increasingly clear to those who studied ideologies, that the truth-claims of a particular group could not always be simply reduced to calculated lies; it became more apparent that a particular group-member's truth-claims could be better regarded, Mannheim suggests, "...as a function of the social situation in which he finds himself."² The influence of Marx on Mannheim's thought is most apparent in this assertion, since it rests on the Marxian assumption that a person's views and ideas are

conditioned by his position in the social order. Mannheim, however, partially modifies this claim, as will be seen.

Mannheim continues that as soon as the essential tools necessary for an investigation of ideological thinking became available to all the various competing interest groups, however, the interest groups found themselves in a position where, even if the ideological elements in their own thinking had been exposed, they could in turn expose the ideological elements in their opponents' thinking. This gave the concept of "ideology" a new meaning, and paved the way for the development of the sociology of knowledge. While the central theme of Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* is the mapping out of the various means by which he thought social stability is achieved through the legitimizing effect of ideologies and the means by which the utopian wish-dreams of ascending social groups propel social change, it is Mannheim's view of the sociology of knowledge which has the most relevance for the epistemological issues raised in the first part of this inquiry.

It should be noted from the start, however, that Mannheim's sociology of knowledge does not brand all forms of thinking, and the knowledge thereby attained, as "ideological." Such a position would necessitate making the all-encompassing statement that all thinking, and hence all knowledge, can and must be regarded in light of the social position of the person making a truth-claim, implying a more or less deterministic view of the relationship between knowledge and society. "It is senseless," Mannheim wrote in *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, "to pose questions such as whether the mind is socially determined, as if mind and society each possessed a substance of its own."³ Hence, Mannheim resists any attempt

to reduce all thinking to a dependency upon sociological factors.

The sciences, for example, have developed exact methods for deliberately eliminating any ideological bias in their work. This is not to say that the problem of bias never becomes an issue for science. For those cases in which private interests or ideological commitments do affect the accuracy of a scientist's investigations (as, for example, in the case of a scientist with racist leanings who distorts factual information about genetics in support of his view), knowing the social position of the scientist may be of crucial importance—not for determining the validity of his statements, but for understanding why he made them in the first place. But such situations are marginal and fairly easy to expose. Even where ideological differences could be expected to be the greatest, there is usually little difference in the respective groups regarding the proper methods of insuring accuracy. Joseph Ben-David notes, for example, that physics in the U.S.S.R. has been essentially the same as in democratic societies.⁴

There are definite limitations, then, it seems, to any position which attempts to hold that the social position of an individual determines everything which the individual in question thinks. If the phrase "social position" is used to indicate such factors as whether a person is a land-owner or a peasant, an urbanite or a rural-dweller, an entrepreneur or a wage-earner, these factors may contribute to an observer's understanding of a given individual's political outlook, religious affiliations, and so forth.⁵ Yet, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for one to maintain that in all instances, these factors have a direct bearing on, say, the scientific theories a scientist comes to accept as being true.

There is perhaps a profounder sense, however, in which the phrase "social position" can be taken. Mannheim writes,

The sociology of knowledge ... consciously and systematically subjects all intellectual phenomena without exception, to the question: In connection with what social structure did they arise and are they valid?⁶

Again, there is a certain ambiguity in the phrase "social structure." It can be taken in the sense suggested above for the phrase "social position," or it can be taken in a more specific sense to mean instead the intellectual and social matrix in which intellectual phenomena arise. In this latter sense, such factors as inheriting an intellectual tradition from one's predecessors, attempting to persuade one's colleagues of the correctness of one's theories, and discussing the viability of alternative theories to the ones held by a particular group of investigators, becomes central. There is a social element in all of these activities, and if the phrase "social structure" is restricted to these social elements, rather than being taken in a more inclusive sense, a certain plausibility is lent to the notion that there can be a discernible relationship, though not necessarily a directly causal one, between social structures and intellectual phenomena. It is not always clear that Mannheim consistently distinguished between these two meanings of the phrase "social structure." In most instances, however, it seems as if he used the phrase in the more inclusive sense first indicated. This will become clearer as Mannheim's view on what consequences follow from knowing the genesis of an idea is discussed next.

One of the questions Mannheim addressed himself to was the following: Does knowing how

an idea originated and the circumstances in which it is conceived alter in any way one's notion concerning the validity of an idea? Mannheim suggested that there were at least three possible ways of answering this question.⁷ First, one could say that the ultimate validity of any idea is automatically denied once its origin is determined and the context in which it was formulated becomes known. Second, it could be maintained that knowing these origins and contexts has nothing to do with establishing the ultimate validity of an idea. And third, one could hold that once the origin of an idea has been established, the extent of its validity can be particularized to the context, social or intellectual, in which it is set forth. Each of these views will be examined respectively.

In the first case, it could be argued that the uncovering of the origin of an idea will always reveal that the idea was conceived in a particular place, at a particular time, and in a particular social setting, and the immediate suspicion will be that the idea has only partial validity. It is conceivable that under different circumstances, an idea contrary to the first could arise in a setting geographically, historically, and socially isolated from that in which the first idea originated. The conclusion might be drawn, then, that since all ideas are situation-bound, none of them can have any validity whatsoever; they must all be false. The implication of this view, as has been mentioned earlier, is that all thought is essentially ideological in nature, and the criticisms which have been advanced against this view will still hold. Furthermore, as Mannheim suggests, "...the mere factual demonstration and identification of the social position of the assertor as yet tells us nothing about the truth-value of the assertion."⁸ It is possible that, regardless of the social position of the assertor, he may in fact discover, even if by accident, true assertions.

This objection leads naturally to a consideration of the second claim, since the objection seems to entail that knowing the social position of the assertor is irrelevant to an assessment of the validity of his assertions. This view can be harmonized fairly consistently with the traditional epistemological contention that if an idea is valid, it must be valid for all persons, at all times, and in all places. Hence, for an assertion to be true, it must be true regardless of any consideration of the social and historical setting in which it originated; and, for reasons indicated in Part I of this inquiry, traditional epistemology holds that such truth is capable of being attained.⁹ For Mannheim, however, this view is problematic, since in many cases, he thought, what was once conceived in a particular social, geographic, and historical setting as being universally valid for all social, geographic, and historical settings, could later be shown to be valid only in the opinion of the persons in the original situation in which the idea was conceived.

The third alternative — the alternative which Mannheim suggests is most appropriate for the sociology of knowledge — particularizes the truth-claims to the situation in which they were conceived. Particularization is similar to the first position above, in that it still endeavors to discover what relationships exist between a truth-claim and the context in which it is stated. But the inference does not have to be drawn that since all truth-claims are situation-bound, they all must therefore be false. Rather, Mannheim suggests, through the process of particularization, the validity of a truth-claim is not undermined, but only restricted to a narrower scope. The particularizing process, in Mannheim's own words, "...does not merely relate the assertion to a standpoint, but, in doing so, restricts its claim to validity which at first was absolute to a narrower scope."¹⁰

There seems to be a touch of pragmatism in this approach, in that if it is admitted that assertions are set forth in a particular situation with a view towards solving a particular problem, the validity of the assertion is not dependent on how well it solves all such problems in similar contexts, but only upon how well it solves a particular problem at hand in a particular situation. Mannheim's implicit pragmatism is brought out in the following passage:

...the sociology of knowledge regards the cognitive act in connection with the models to which it aspires in its existential as well as its meaningful quality, not as insight into "eternal" truths, arising from a purely theoretical, contemplative urge, or as some sort of participation in these truths... , but as an instrument for dealing with life-situations at the disposal of a certain kind of vital being under certain conditions of life.¹¹

Yet, all knowledge does not aim at practical results, nor does it always employ itself as a means for "dealing with life-situations." Mannheim's depreciation of "theoretical" and "contemplative" thinking ignores the fact that these modes of thought are often engaged in meaningfully, sometimes because it is considered that such activities have an intrinsic value, but mostly because there is a strong desire in many people to simply want to understand and acquire knowledge about themselves and their world.

Moreover, Mannheim's pragmatic view of truth betrays a specific epistemological orientation, whereas — in spite of the just-quoted passage — Mannheim wishes to maintain that the sociology of knowledge, by itself, does not. What Mannheim's sociology of knowledge attempts to point out,

however, is that a relationship between socio-historical situations and the ideas which are germinated in them can be discerned. It is the business of what Mannheim calls the “relational procedure”¹² to discover just what the nature of these relationships are.

The relational procedure depends, in part, on Mannheim’s theory of perspectives. So long as an individual has no contact with structures of thought different from those of his immediate environment, he can have no understanding of what might be called the perspectivist nature of thought. Translated into the theory of consensus discussed in Part I of this inquiry, the individual has as of yet neither encountered nor been exposed to any structures of thought which break the consensus of the social group of which he is a member; his perspective has not yet become, to use Mannheim’s word, “detached.” A detached perspective can be acquired, according to Mannheim, in one of three ways: either the social position of the individual can change, the views of the whole society can change, or within the same society conflicting modes of interpretations can arise.¹³ The familiar analogy of the fish in the water is applicable here: when the fish has only known water all its life, the thought of what it would be like to be outside of the water cannot even be imagined. Only when the fish has in some way been removed from its environment can a distinction be made.

Initially, at least two points may be made about this view. First, it seems as if Mannheim’s typology of the ways in which a detached perspective could be acquired ignores the possibility of an individual coming to question the perspectives of his society completely on his own without previously knowing of any conflicting perspectives. How else, for example, would it be possible for the perspectives of a whole society to change or for con-

flicting modes of interpretations to arise within the same society, if there were not some creative impulses on the part of some members of those societies which had the effect of introducing new perspectives into the group as a whole? Second, one may question, as was questioned before, whether or not any society in history has ever been so completely homogenous that there were not present in that society a variety of different perspectives on a variety of different issues.

A more serious problem, however, is that Mannheim’s process of particularization and his relational procedure seem to succumb to an essentially relativistic position. However, Mannheim himself thought that relationism would avoid many of the pitfalls of relativism, as this passage near the end of *Ideology and Utopia* indicates:

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.¹⁴

The implication is that the ideal of “absolute truth” – the very ideal which traditional epistemology held out for – contains within it the very seeds of relativism; hence, if “absolute truth” is no longer an ideal, relativism is no longer a threat.

Still, as Werner Stark notes in his article on Mannheim in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, relationism does not entirely solve the problem of relativism, since it “. . . merely shifts the relativity, and does not remove it.”¹⁵ If, as Mannheim originally claimed, the sociology of knowledge must inquire into the connection between all intellec-

tual phenomena and the social structures in which they arise,¹⁶ and if it shows, as Mannheim seems at times to think it does, that all knowledge is perspectivistic in nature and can be particularized to those social structures, then on what grounds can any objective consensus on intellectual matters be based? Furthermore, Mannheim is confronted with the following dilemma: Could not the statement that all perspectives can be particularized to social structures itself be particularized to the social structure which Mannheim was a part of? Does not Mannheim's position presuppose the same "static ideal of eternal, unperspectivistic truth"¹⁷ he had previously criticized, as if his own statements about perspectives were not themselves perspectivistic in nature?

Mannheim continued to hold, however, that the hypothesis that all knowledge may be essentially perspectivistic in nature does not detract from the fact that such knowledge is important and often useful. Essentially a shifting of ideals is called for, and the result may be that knowledge will actually become less sterile and more "human." Complete objectivity may be unattainable, yet a level of objectivity sufficient to most purposes can be reached. According to Mannheim,

The problem is not how we might arrive at a non-perspectivistic picture but how, by juxtaposing the various points of view, each perspective may be recognized as such and thereby a new level of objectivity attained. Thus we come to the point where the false ideal of a detached, impersonal point of view must be replaced by the ideal of an essentially human point of view which is within the limits of a human perspective, constantly striving to enlarge itself.¹⁸

Despite the optimism this passage expresses, the original dilemma still exists however. And Mannheim seemed to recognize some of the implications of this dilemma when he wrote,

The analyses characteristic of the sociology of knowledge are...by no means irrelevant for the determination of the truth of a statement; but these analyses, on the other hand, do not by themselves fully reveal the truth because the mere delimitation of the perspectives is by no means a substitute for the immediate and direct discussion between the divergent points of view or for the direct examination of the facts.¹⁹

It seems here as if Mannheim falls back on the very epistemological models which he had previously rejected, and several inconsistencies become apparent. It could be asked, for example, to what extent is what Mannheim refers to as the "immediate and direct discussion between divergent points of view" little more than a restatement of the view that "reason" (or "rational" discussion) will ultimately provide the grounds for consensus? A strict rationalism after the manner of a Descartes, a Spinoza, or a Leibniz need not be involved in this. But again, if Mannheim holds that the initial "perspectives" involved in such a discussion can indeed be particularized to the social situations of those involved in the discussion, then discussion alone cannot establish the validity of an assertion nor bring the group to a consensus concerning that validity. The same could be said of Mannheim's call for a "direct examination of the facts." In what sense might this not simply be a reinstatement of empiricism (again, not necessarily a strict empiricism after the manner of the British Empiricists, for example)? This becomes a more crucial point if Mannheim's sociological perspectivism is linked

with an epistemological perspectivism, in which it is held that objects can only be viewed from some limited perspective, thus rendering a “total perspective” impossible.

There is a second instance in which Mannheim may have “hedged,” so to speak, on his criticism of traditional epistemology, and held that the validity of an assertion could be judged independently of the situation in which it was produced. He suggests the simple mathematical proposition $2 \times 2 = 4$, and then comments,

It is true of this type of knowledge that its genesis does not enter into the results of thought. From this it is only a short step to construct a sphere of truth in itself in such a manner that it becomes completely independent of the knowing subject.²⁰

It becomes clearer, then, that even if Mannheim’s program for the sociology of knowledge included subjecting all intellectual phenomena to the question of how they are conditioned by the social structures in which they are conceived, it could not show in all cases that knowing the genesis of an idea contributes in any significant way to an assessment of its validity. Had Mannheim pressed a little harder on this point, he may have been able to avoid many of the problems which his sociology of knowledge presents.

Yet, in spite of these objections, Mannheim thought that the factual findings of the sociology of knowledge necessitated a new orientation for epistemology — one which stands in direct contrast to the model offered by traditional epistemology. Mannheim writes, “. . . epistemology is not supplanted by the sociology of knowledge but a new kind of epistemology is called for which will reckon with the facts brought to light

by the sociology of knowledge.”²¹ There are several reasons, in addition to the ones already mentioned, why Mannheim thought a new epistemological orientation was called for. One of the more obvious ones was summarized by Stark when he wrote that Mannheim “. . . was moving close to the belief that the traditional *adaequatio rei et intellectus* (correspondence of thought and reality) should be replaced by a new test, the *adaequatio intellectus et situs* (correspondence of thought and situation).”²² There is an ambiguity in Mannheim’s idea of “situation,” however, which will be discussed shortly.

A more striking reason is revealed in Mannheim’s essay entitled “Historicism.”²³ In this essay Mannheim makes a distinction between what he calls “static” and “dynamic” thought. The Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, he argues, were committed to an essentially “static,” unhistorical view of knowledge. The modern period, by contrast, is more aware of the fact that systems of knowledge undergo changes and modifications. These “dynamic” changes do not necessarily constitute a threat to the acquisition of knowledge, but rather contribute to a body of knowledge which is capable of being refined, modified, and improved upon. Yet, a new epistemological orientation can indeed be called for if the process by which these conceptual changes enhance man’s understanding of the world is to be fully explicated. There is evidence that a new epistemological orientation in this sense has already been attempted with a fair amount of success, not only by earlier philosophers of science, but also by recent philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn and Stephen Toulmin.²⁴

In offering some final criticisms of Mannheim’s position, a second look will need to be taken at the distinction previously drawn between the two ways in which terms such as “social position” and

“social structure” can be used.²⁵ If the more restricted meanings of the phrases are consistently employed, perhaps Mannheim’s concept of particularization can be cast in a somewhat different light and it may be possible to obtain a clearer understanding of how groups of investigators establish consensus among their members.

It will have to be conceded, as some of the latter passages quoted in Mannheim also seem to concede, that when investigators do submit themselves to an “immediate and direct discussion” or to the “direct examination of the facts,”²⁶ that the extent to which such factors as one’s political outlook, religious affiliations, etc., can have a discernible influence on what the investigators come to regard as being valid assertions about the world is greatly minimized, if not even entirely eliminated. There can be little disagreement about such elementary facts as whether or not it is raining outside, or whether or not the litmus paper will turn red under certain given circumstances. It is upon facts such as these, the validity of which can be established without question and without regard for the “social position” of the investigator, that true knowledge has its foundation.

Even at this level, however, coming to an agreement about what the facts are, presupposes a consensus on certain fundamental assumptions. Language provides a basic example. Before a consensus concerning the facts can be established, there must be an agreement as to what names will be given to certain objects, processes, relationships, etc. For example, it is agreed that this substance will be called “rain,” and not “sleet” or “hail”; that this color will be called “red,” and not “blue” or “green”; and so forth. Against the objection that notions of truth and falsity are acquired merely through a consensus on how words should be used correctly, Ludwig Wittgenstein

points out in his *Philosophical Investigations* that it is not that

. . . human agreement decides what is true and what is false. . . . It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.²⁷

An agreement concerning how key terms are to be used is one of the preconditions for acquiring knowledge. In many cases, there is no overt procedure which is used for coming to a consensus on how words should be defined; rather, the meanings are typically implied in the language one learns from his own culture. In other cases, however, there can be strong disagreements over definitions; one only need think here of the various disputes which have arisen, even among scholars, over the definition of words such as “mind,” “soul,” and so on. Part of the process for establishing valid knowledge consists in giving accurate and precise definitions to words which in everyday currency are vague and ambiguous.

On another level, there must also be certain agreed-upon rules which determine such things as what should be admissible as data, what procedures should be used to obtain that data, and how the data should be organized. One can be assured, then, that if such-and-such procedures are followed, i.e., if the agreed-upon rules are correctly applied, certain results will necessarily be obtained. Thus, if one follows a recipe exactly, a cake can be baked; if one correctly combines two elements, a certain compound will be produced; if one does a certain set of calculations without error, a mathematical problem can be solved. There is nothing particularly sacrosanct about the rules themselves, however, other than that they help one to perform certain operations. Stephen Toulmin suggests in an article, entitled “Rules and their Relevance for

Understanding Human Behavior," that humans are capable of engaging in what he calls "rule-testing" behavior, in which the ". . . rules themselves. . . become the *objects of our intellectual activity*, and not merely *elements in its production*."²⁸ By engaging in "rule-testing," new procedures can be established which have the potential of opening up new avenues for exploration. One may try modifying a recipe, for example, and come up with a better-tasting cake. However, since by definition there are no further rules which "rule-testing" can appeal to, there is likely to be a period after new rules have been introduced in which they are subjected to a vigorous debate before a consensus can be established regarding their viability.²⁹

After the definitions and rules have been decided upon and the facts established, the situation becomes more complicated, however, once an attempt is made to interpret the significance of these facts, to systematize them into theories, and to draw inferences as to how they are related to other known facts. In all of these processes there are more occasions for disagreements to arise. To a certain extent these disagreements can be settled by reviewing the procedures used to obtain the facts and by re-examining the proposed theories in light of these facts, in order to test their adequacy for accounting for the facts.

The individual investigator is not left entirely to his own devices in these matters. He inherits and is part of a tradition in which certain interpretations regarding the facts have already been tested and established. The tradition, however, is continually in a state of flux, in the sense that certain interpretations which were awkward at the time of their original inception, are later refined and elaborated upon. Other interpretations which were once thought to be viable, are sometimes

later shown to be inadequate, and such interpretations may be abandoned altogether. Knowledge viewed in this way is indeed, in Mannheim's words, dynamic rather than static.

In light of these considerations, it does seem in a limited way to make sense to say that the "position" of the investigator will have a bearing on what conceptions of the world he will come to hold as being true. It is not meant here, of course, that his *social* position will have a discernible bearing on this, but rather that his position in the history of an intellectual tradition, which is in a state of development, will cause him to see things differently than someone else would who occupies a different historical position in the discipline. One would hardly expect a student of Ptolemy's and one who studies astronomy after the "Copernican Revolution" to have the same views on the relationship of the earth to the sun. Here, of course, it is one's position in the historical development of the discipline, rather than his social position which is significant.

There is nothing particularly profound in acknowledging that as a discipline progresses different perspectives will arise in the course of its development. Still, this is one way of accounting for the problem with which this paper began, namely, how it is possible that divergent conceptions of the world can be produced. This still leaves untouched, however, the problem of whether there are "identical human thought-processes" involved in this. Mannheim himself intimated that perhaps there are not.³⁰ The thought-processes which are involved in establishing valid knowledge are to a certain extent conditioned by the state of the discipline at any given point in its history. The structures into which facts and theories are placed serve to establish a basis for consensus by providing a "grid," so to speak, through which the

investigators who adopt them interpret their data. Through further investigations, experimentation, and theorizing, these structures are susceptible to change, and when they change, an individual's thought-processes must be re-oriented to the new structures. Where the structures of two groups of investigators are different, either because they are formulated at different times in the development of a discipline or because of geographic isolation, the thought-processes which are oriented to them will also be necessarily different, i.e., the thought-processes are aligned with differing perspectives as to how the structures should be viewed. Here is Mannheim's theory of perspectives cast in an entirely different light.

These considerations do not necessarily entail that as knowledge progresses, it progresses towards an unequivocally "truer" conception of the world, as might be held by a traditional epistemology which had taken cognizance of history. Without denying its possibility, a judgment on that conclusion would logically have to be suspended indefinitely.³¹ It is certain, however, that as man's knowledge of the universe increases, he comes to have an increasingly more accurate picture of it, and certain conclusions which were once held as being valid, are later discarded and surpassed through further investigation. It seems somewhat unfair, however, to label simply as "false" those conceptions of the world which from the standpoint of the present state of knowledge have lost their integrity and persuasiveness.³² This presupposes a position which is outside the process of further development. In the same way, a consensus about what is regarded from the standpoint of the present state of knowledge as valid may eventually be broken by subsequent investigations, and a new perspective will arise to take its place.

It is here, perhaps, that a refurbished version of

Mannheim's concept of particularization can have new applicability for the understanding of structures of thought different from one's own. One need not particularize the truth-claims of an individual to their social, economic, or political, etc., contexts — if indeed this could ever be plausibly done. One could still, however, particularize his truth-claims to the structures of thought which were available to that individual within his own particular time and area, or to the new and original structures of thought he himself created. Thus, while the ultimate validity of his truth-claims could be subjected to further testing, there is another sense of the term "validity" in which one could say that a limited validity continues to adhere to the truth-claim when it is placed within the context of a larger structure of thought and seen from the perspective of that structure of thought.³³ If there is an epistemological directive in all of this, it would be that any claim made for the truth should be stated tentatively, and should remain open to refinement, revision, or even rejection in light of additional evidence.

The views which have just been articulated are not specifically Mannheim's own, but they are based upon certain suggestions furnished by Mannheim's thought which Mannheim himself never fully developed. The ambiguities of such terms as "conceptions of the world," "structure," and "position" admit of at least two possible interpretations, as this inquiry has at various times indicated. The first interpretation views "conceptions of the world" simply as *Weltanschauungen*; "structure" as social structure; and "position" as social position. The second interpretation views "conceptions of the world" as established facts about the world; "structure" as the intellectual structures of thought into which these facts are systematically organized; and "position" as the

position occupied by an individual within an historically developing intellectual tradition or discipline. Unfortunately, Mannheim himself never fully distinguished between these two ways of approaching his subject matter, and because such a distinction remained blurred to him, he did not consistently limit himself to one interpretation or the other, but occasionally used them both interchangeably.

It is undoubtedly the case that in Mannheim's later writings, such as *Ideology and Utopia*, a concern with the first interpretation above predominates. While elements of the second interpretation are vaguely present in these writings, they remain largely submerged and in the background. In Mannheim's earlier writings, however, particularly in his doctoral thesis, "Structural Analysis of Epistemology," and the essay, "Historicism," the reverse seems to be true. Consider, for example, these passages from "Historicism":

... the philosophy of the philosophizing individual is never strictly his own product but always the reflection of a supra-individual psychic and intellectual *position*.³⁴

The change from one type of system to another may be explained by the shift from one centre of systematization to another, and it can always be shown which of these types of system is more comprehensive. Such a presentation must, indeed, concede that every systematization (even the highest available) is determined by a particular "*location*" and in this sense represents "*perspectivic*" knowledge.³⁵

Here such terms as "position," "location," and "perspectivic" must clearly be interpreted in light

of the second, rather than the first interpretation given above. Had Mannheim developed these points more fully, rather than emphasizing, as he later did, the questionable view that knowledge is conditioned by specifically social factors, such as one's position in the social order rather than his position in an intellectual tradition, his thinking could have developed perhaps more fruitfully in the direction the latter portions of this inquiry have indicated. The propensity for Mannheim to do so, however, was present from the beginning, though only marginally developed. Hence, the ambiguities remain.

Concluding Remarks

Part I of this inquiry began by placing Mannheim's writings on epistemological issues in the historical context of the development of the sociology of knowledge as an intellectual discipline. A critique of post-medieval epistemology was then offered, which suggested that a more adequate epistemology would be necessary in order to account for the problem of conceptual change. In Part II an analysis and criticism was made of Mannheim's account of how the sociology of knowledge both raises and addresses itself to epistemological problems; this resulted in an attempt to redefine certain key concepts of Mannheim's with a view towards showing how they could be freshly applied to certain epistemological issues.

NOTES

1. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936), p. 265.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
3. Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, ed. Ernest Manheim and Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 44.
4. Joseph Ben-David, *The Scientist's Role in Society: A Comparative Study* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 4.
5. Max Weber, for example, provides an extensive analysis in Chapters VI and VII of his *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), of the types of religious outlooks one is likely to find among members of various social classes.
6. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 282.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
9. One might again wish to qualify these statements by making allowances for differences in mental capabilities, and by recognizing that these differences can often account for the inability to achieve and maintain consensus. This problem is discussed further in Part I.
10. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 284.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
12. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 282-283.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
15. Werner Stark, "Karl Mannheim," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. V, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. and The Free Press, 1967), p. 151.
16. See Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 282.
17. See *ibid.*, p. 300.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
22. Stark, "Karl Mannheim," *op. cit.*, p. 151.
23. Included in Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952).
24. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), and Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
25. Some of the ambiguities of these terms have already been discussed above.
26. See Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 285.
27. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1958), p. 88.
28. Stephen Toulmin, "Rules and their Relevance for Understanding Human Behavior," in *Understanding Other Persons*, ed. Theodore Mischel (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), p. 195.
29. Toulmin leaves himself open on this point, however, and one could easily imagine why. On the one hand, it seems, for example, that the criterion of making a better-tasting cake governs any "rule-testing" behavior which is engaged in to improve the recipe; on the other hand, there seems to be a circular argument involved in saying that "rule-testing" behavior must be governed by further rules, since once these latter rules become the object of "rule-testing" behavior, there must be still further rules to govern them, and so on *ad infinitum*.
30. See Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 9. After raising the question of how it is possible that identical human thought-processes concerned with the same world produce divergent conceptions of that world, he writes,

...from this point it is only a step further to ask: Is it not possible that the thought-processes which are involved here are not at all identical? May it not be found, when one has examined all the possibilities of human thought, that there are numerous

alternative paths which can be followed?

31. See, however, Kuhn, pp. 170-171. It may also be noted that Toulmin's attempt in *Human Understanding* to link conceptual change with epistemological models derived, in part, from evolutionary theory, also seems to disenfranchise to a certain extent the view that knowledge progresses towards universal principles; adaptability, rather than a supposed universality, becomes the key criterion for evaluating the adequacy of concepts. See *Human Understanding*, p. 413:

Once we have called in question the philosophical necessity for grounding human understanding on fixed principles, there is no longer any *a priori* reason to presuppose the existence of a universal and compulsory framework of intellectual forms, having a non-empirical status totally unlike that of the empirical concepts of scientific theory.

32. One may here perhaps draw a lesson, for example, from the rejuvenation of Greek atomism by early modern science after it had been discarded by medieval thought.
33. There are other senses in which one could use the term "particularization" with fresh applications. Thus, for example, the mutually exclusive statements (1) "Through a point not on a given straight line, one and only one straight line can be drawn parallel to the given line," and (2) "Through a point not on a given straight line, no straight line can be drawn parallel to the given line," could each be "particularized" to Euclidean and Riemannian geometries respectively, each having validity within their respective contexts. Since consistent geometries can be constructed on the basis of either postulate, it does not make sense to ask which is ultimately more "true." That would almost be like asking, which is truer: the metric or English systems of measurement?
34. Mannheim, "Historicism," *op. cit.*, p. 113. Emphasis added.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 120. Emphasis added.

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