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The Alienated Mind

The Sociology of Knowledge in
Germany
1918-1933

David Frisby



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This book, first published in 1983, with a second edition in 1992, investigates the emergence of the sociology of knowledge in Germany in the critical period from 1918 to 1933. These years witnessed the development of distinctive paradigms centred on the works of Max Scheler, Georg Lukács and Karl Mannheim. Each theorist sought to confront the base-superstructure models of the relationship between knowledge and society, which originated in Orthodox Marxism. David Frisby illustrates how these and other themes in the sociology of knowledge were contested through a detailed account of the central sociological debates in Weimar Germany. This reissue of *The Alienated Mind* will be of particular interest to students and academics concerned with the development of an important tradition in the sociology of knowledge and culture, social theory and German history.

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Responsibility for the views contained in this study remain my own.

David Frisby
Glasgow
1982

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David Frisby
1991

Preface

The following study does not pretend to be a comprehensive guide to the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany; rather, it concentrates upon the works of three writers, two of whom, Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim, are usually associated with its development. The early work of Georg Lukács down to the publication of *History and Class Consciousness* is also presented since it provides the most forceful Marxist presentation of some of the central problems in the sociology of knowledge. This is quite apart from the relationship between Lukács' work and that of Mannheim.

Rather than summarising the many other contributions to the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany, attention is focused upon the central debates surrounding this tradition, since they illuminate its basic features. Even if we include Lukács within the discourse concerning the sociology of knowledge, it is apparent that a starting point for all three central figures is a theory of culture and cultural crisis. In each case, the reflections that we associate with the sociology of knowledge emerge out of a theory of culture, usually a critique of contemporary culture that is seen to be in a state of crisis.

However, the diversity of reflections upon the relationship between knowledge and society is mirrored in the plurality of terms used to denote this area: 'Erkenntnissoziologie', 'Soziologie des Erkennens', 'Soziologie des Denkens', 'Soziologie des Wissens', 'Soziologie des Geistes' and 'Wissenssoziologie'. The act of cognition, thought, the mind, and simply knowledge, were all seen to be related to diverse aspects of society: 'group soul', 'social group', 'social strata', 'constellations of experience', and 'social classes'.

Nonetheless, there are some common features of the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany aside from its origins in various theories of cultural crisis. As the various debates surrounding its development make clear, deliberations upon the relationship between knowledge and society invoked in the Weimar context — unlike other traditions in say France or the United States — a confrontation with Marxism and, specifically, with a theory of ideology. Whether they involved a confrontation with Marx's work and whether they grew out of a critique of ideology remains to be investigated. The sociology of knowledge developed, in part, as a reaction to particular Marxist traditions. This reaction is clearly negative in Scheler's case, whereas

Mannheim's relationship to Lukács' version of Marxism is more ambiguous. Whatever the relationship between Marxism and the sociology of knowledge, it remained at the centre of the debates surrounding the latter, and especially following publication of Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*, in 1929.

From a very different direction, the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany often saw itself as contributing towards, if not itself constituting, a foundation for the social sciences as a whole. It sought to raise the issue of the nature of social knowledge and how this might best be grasped. It further raised the question of the role of the social sciences and, especially, of sociology within society. This ambitious project is most apparent in Mannheim's work, but Scheler's account of the role of values and his claims for a study of world views also move in this direction. Indeed, Scheler's account of the three types of knowledge — religious, metaphysical and scientific — seems to raise the question of cognitive interests that has animated much recent work by Habermas and Apel on the foundations of social scientific knowledge.

More specifically, the meta-theoretical concerns of the sociology of knowledge can be viewed as an extension of the earlier debates on the nature of social scientific knowledge that had raged in the decades before the First World War. One of Mannheim's early papers must certainly be understood as a confrontation with the earlier *Methodenstreit*. The aim of the sociology of knowledge, to examine critically evaluative standpoints — a feature of both Scheler's and Mannheim's paradigms — can also be read as an extension of the *Werturteilsstreit*. Finally, the debate surrounding the role of science itself — the so-called *Wissenschaftsstreit* — which was initiated by Max Weber shortly before his death, animated some of Scheler's earlier Weimar writings.

But although these themes are confronted in the following study, its main focus lies elsewhere. Our title 'The Alienated Mind' refers to the centrality of theories of alienated consciousness that run through the Weimar tradition in the sociology of knowledge. The mind or consciousness as detached from 'real' circumstances, and indeed as determined by them, is an important implication of a base-superstructure model of society, having its origins not only in a mechanistic Marxism but in the philosophy of culture prevalent in Germany before the First World War. When contemporaries reacted to what they took to be the Marxist theory of base and superstructure, they were responding to earlier conceptions of cultural alienation prevalent in German sociology and philosophy. In very different ways, Scheler, Lukács and Mannheim all started out from a theory of culture whose origins lay not only in contemporary Marxism but also in the philosophy of culture found in the works of Simmel, Weber, Nietzsche and Dilthey. In turn, all three writers viewed the contemporary period as one of cultural crisis whilst,

at the same time, reacting to that crisis largely within the confines set by these earlier traditions.

The sociology of culture and knowledge and the critique of ideology developed by Scheler, Lukács and Mannheim confronted these traditions in different ways. But the concern of each writer was still with the alienation of consciousness. In Scheler's case, and as has been most forcefully argued by Kurt Lenk, this took the form of a commitment to a 'powerlessness of the mind' thesis. For Lukács, the problem of the alienation of modern culture assumed its most radical form in the conception of reified consciousness. This theme forms the central chapter of his *History and Class Consciousness*. Amongst the reviewers of Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*, Hannah Arendt astutely pointed to Mannheim's 'homelessness of the mind' thesis, which made so urgent his search — via the sociology of knowledge — for a 'diagnosis of the times'.

On the other hand, to present these as the only theses of the three major writers under consideration would be an oversimplification. It is for this reason that other themes mentioned earlier have also been covered in this study. Otherwise the many claims made for the sociology of knowledge in this period would be unintelligible. Although the various meta-theoretical intentions of the three writers, and especially their philosophies of history, are important to the sociology of knowledge and the critique of ideology, the intellectual project upon which its central figures were engaged should not be reduced to these intentions. Even if the various claims made for a sociology of knowledge are not subjected here to the kind of epistemological critiques so common for several decades now, in this area of Anglo-American sociology and philosophy, this does not mean that many of the criticisms cannot be made. Rather, the main concern here is with a reconstruction of the original texts in order to illuminate both their intellectual and social sources.

1982

For this Second Edition, I have added a new Afterword which introduces some modifications and amplifications of themes and arguments contained in the original edition.

David Frisby

1991

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1 The Sociology of Knowledge in Weimar Germany: Its Background and Context

I

Any serious attempt to understand the distinctive nature of the German tradition of the sociology of knowledge in the Weimar Republic, must take into account not merely the immediate theoretical and practical context of its emergence but also its antecedents.¹ Our particular concern will be with those philosophical and sociological traditions that inform the sociology of knowledge as it developed in Weimar Germany: the Marxism of the Second International, Dilthey's philosophy of the human sciences, Nietzsche's critique of ideology, Simmel's theory of alienation, Weber's theory of values, and Troeltsch's historicism. Some of these traditions also permeate the theoretical crises in Weimar Germany — such as 'the crisis of historicism' (Troeltsch) or the *Wissenschaftsstreit*.² Indeed, the whole atmosphere of crisis informs much of the writing on the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany. Mannheim, for instance, saw his *Ideologie und Utopie* as itself 'conscious of an intellectual crisis situation'.

Whereas Mannheim, however, often viewed this crisis as an intellectual one, there is little doubt that it was itself a part of a wider social and political crisis in Weimar Germany of the kind that surfaces in various forms in the sociology of knowledge. Often, the sociology of knowledge itself can be seen to emanate from these practical crises. For instance, one cannot fully comprehend Mannheim's theory of political ideologies without being aware that *Ideologie und Utopie* was written in the context of a crumbling political structure in the latter stages of the Weimar Republic.

Taking a simplified model of the socio-political and economic constellation in Weimar Germany, we can pick out three basic periods. The first is the aftermath of the First World War 'defeat', the Revolution of 1918/19, and the political and economic upheaval down to 1923, including the uprising of March 1921. This is the period in which the essays that make up Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* were written. For Lukács, of course, his role in the Hungarian Revolution, participation

in Bela Kun's short-lived revolutionary government, and subsequent exile are also of central importance. This was the period of Lukács' adherence to what he later termed messianic Marxism. The second period, characterised as that of 'relative stabilization', extends from 1924 and the Dawes Plan down to the financial collapse of 1929. Lukács, in a later account of German philosophy and social theory, located Scheler's sociology of knowledge within this period.³ One might add that most of Mannheim's work on the sociology of knowledge also falls within this period. The third period, from 1929 to 1933, is characterised by the collapse of the German economy and the increasing disintegration of the political structure. The fragmentation that characterized the parliamentary political scene gave way to an increasing polarisation and, what was crucial for Mannheim, to the collapse of parties occupying the middle ground of the political spectrum. Though, strictly speaking, this final period cannot be said to inform Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*, which was completed in 1928, Mannheim nonetheless incorporated the fragmentation of the political structure into his sociology of knowledge, both in his paper on competition and in *Ideologie und Utopie*. Furthermore, the publication of the work in 1929 ensured that Mannheim's contemporaries would recognize that the 'intellectual crisis' of which he spoke was itself part of a much deeper crisis permeating the Weimar Republic.

What this suggests is that the sociology of knowledge was not merely viewed as an academic discipline concerned with broad theoretical issues but that it contained practical and sometimes overtly political aims. Scheler and Mannheim both saw a significant pedagogic role either for a *Weltanschauungslehre* or for the sociology of knowledge. Much of Mannheim's later work seeks to relate the insights gained from his sociology of knowledge to the contemporary situation. This is most explicit in *Ideologie und Utopie*, where one of the work's immediate aims — and that of the sociology of knowledge — is 'a diagnosis of the times'. In Lukács' case, the practical, political intentions of the critique of ideology contained in *History and Class Consciousness* are presented openly. But in Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*, too, the problem of ideology is also located within the context of a discussion of theory and practice. Thus, wherever possible, it is important to investigate these contexts initially in the light of the interests of the sociology of knowledge itself. In this way, they are no longer 'external' contexts, but a constituent element of our textual understanding. Conversely, the works themselves must be seen as interventions in the crises — controversies of both the theoretical and practical domains — and not merely writings about these crises.

II

Within the various philosophical and sociological traditions adopted by the sociology of knowledge there can be seen important modes of reflection upon issues that were taken up by the sociology of knowledge at a later date. A sociology of culture, a theory of ideology, hermeneutic and historicist reflection upon the problem of interpretation, a sociological-biological critique of reason, a base-superstructure model of society, a theory of cultural alienation, *Weltanschauungsanalyse*, and the relativist problematic — are some of the central themes in the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany. All of them were developed within the various philosophical and sociological traditions that the sociology of knowledge was to take up in Weimar Germany. At the end of one of his essays Mannheim very briefly reviews the development of the sociology of knowledge and highlights the most important of its forerunners: Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey and, more recently, Lukács and Scheler.⁴ Lukács and Scheler, and their association with this tradition, are examined in detail in chapters 2 and 3. It would thus seem reasonable to consider how important were the others listed in the development of the sociology of knowledge in Germany. But this, in itself, would not give us a sufficiently clear focus upon the specific problems raised by the sociology of knowledge and its distinctive mode of dealing with them. Rather, we need to know in advance what the common features of the sociology of knowledge were.

There is little doubt that one of its central features was either a confrontation with the theory of ideology or an attempt to develop it further or, finally, an attempt to transform it into a sociology of knowledge. It might be thought, at first, that the source of this theory of ideology, and its extension in the sociology of knowledge, lay in Marx's critique of ideology. But even in the case of Lukács, whose *History and Class Consciousness* appears to be a Hegelian-Marxist reinterpretation of Marx's critique of ideology, we find that his theory of ideology and reification is deeply embedded in the German sociological tradition, however critical of it he might be. In the case of Mannheim it has often been assumed that the roots of his sociology of knowledge lay in Marx. Grünwald, for instance, suggests that Mannheim's philosophical position '... is that of a historicism derived from Marx and Dilthey interspersed with phenomenological elements'.⁵ In the course of the discussion surrounding Mannheim's paper on competition, he himself agreed that 'Marx has influenced me but ... in association with Dilthey's spirit'.⁶ In Scheler's case — and he was less obviously concerned with the development of a theory of ideology — one is confronted with a bewildering array of influences. For instance, Coser suggests,

As one proceeds to read his work, one is struck even more forcibly by the

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variety of his intellectual forebearers. Besides Husserl, influences of Dilthey, Bergson, of German neo-vitalism, and *above all of Nietzsche* (italics added: D.F.), are unmistakable. But Scheler's thought is also deeply marked by Saint Augustine and Pascal, by Cardinal Newman and Saint Francis.⁷

Of course, not all of these are responsible for Scheler's quasi-biological base-superstructure theory of knowledge and ideology; it is probably Nietzsche who is central to this aspect of his work.

Thus, whereas at first sight it seems as if the theory of ideology in the sociology of knowledge is derived from Marx's work, the situation is indeed more complex. The specific constellation of intellectual currents is well expressed by Barth with reference to the theory of ideology in Weimar Germany:

The problems that emerge with the concept of ideology in the present period, their scope and comprehensiveness, become intelligible primarily through the intellectual-historical background which had been formed with the amalgamation of motifs of recent historicism and philosophy of life, together with Nietzsche's socio-biological critique of reason and Marx's base-superstructure doctrine.⁸

Barth highlights four central strands that are important for an understanding of the German tradition in the sociology of knowledge: Marx, Dilthey (*Lebensphilosophie*), historicism and Nietzsche. In order to give some indication of the specific form which the theory of ideology (*Ideologienlehre*) took in Weimar Germany, we may point to Barth's account of its four basic presuppositions. He highlights them as follows:

1 In the anthropological conception, the irrational will and drives take over the leading functions. Intellect and reason appear as epiphenomena that owe their emergence to human beings' need for orientation to the world and are created and prove successful as instruments in the service of the life-struggle. Human intellectual capacity is a form of adaptation to the general struggle for the maintenance and development of existence.

2 By means of the primacy of the will over reason, the main body of human activity is situated in this practical behaviour that is to be characterised, in the broadest sense of the word, as the economy. The recognition of the predominance of the will over the mind and reason, confirms the view that the will, directed toward life's welfare and the institutional forms in which it operates, relates to human intellectual functions and their creations in the same way as the material base relates to the ideological superstructure. This viewpoint is dangerous in so far as it supports the tendency to believe that cognitive and concrete-practical behaviour can be separated from one another and in so far as it encourages the impression that the economic welfare of life takes place without the co-operation of intellectual functions. Yet, as Marx correctly remarked, the economy is always composed of both intellectual and mental labour . . .

3 Since intellectual activity develops originally in the closest contact with the provision of life and orientation to the world, since therefore it is

assumed that it is linked with concrete-practical interests, there emerges the belief that, in its apparently 'pure' development, its primary function — to operate in the service of life — is not sacrificed.

4 There exists a relationship of dependency between the world of objective and subjective mind, on the one hand, and the socio-economic basis, on the other. This dependency is embodied in an insidious and dubious metaphor: it is maintained that the contents and forms of the mind are the 'expression' of these material existential foundations and their organisation.⁹

Even from this brief outline, it is clear that it would be erroneous to assume that the theory of ideology embodied in the sociology of knowledge is simply taken from Marx. Therefore, one of the tasks of illuminating the context within which this theory of ideology is developed in the sociology of knowledge will be to examine this understanding in the light of its mediation through the Marxism of the Second International and through German sociology itself.

In his study of the reception of Marx's work in the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany, Lenk demonstrates how far this tradition relied for its understanding of Marx's critique of ideology upon interpretations of Marx that had already gone some way towards 'destroying' Marx's critique of ideology.¹⁰ Lenk argues that the sociology of knowledge in Weimar Germany derived its interpretation of Marx either from the Marxism of the Second International or from German sociology itself through the writings of Simmel, Max Weber and Troeltsch. Despite the fact that Lenk seeks to draw a sharp demarcation line between Marx's and Engels' notions of ideology and those base-superstructure notions that have proved difficult to maintain in the light of recent analyses by Wellmer,¹¹ Böhler¹² and others, his account of the Marxism of the Second International and of Engels' own later work suggests that the development of vulgar Marxism was already well underway before the substantive development of sociology in Germany. The base-superstructure model of society, Lenk argues, which itself presupposes two realms of existence, was already present in Marxism itself.

In comparison with Marx, Engels exhibits a preference for concepts that signify a causal or interactional relation between base and ideology, expressions such as 'mirror-image', 'reflection', 'economic reflection', . . . etc, that in part are also already applied by Marx but which do not yet possess this dominating character as in Engels.¹³

The simple reduction of the superstructure to a material base, and the absence of reflection upon the nature of the truth of this 'consciousness' in the superstructure, are thus to be found in Marxism itself. Similarly, the naturalization of society in the scientific and positivistic interpretation of Marxism also reduces any dialectical notion of the

subject-object relationship to that of 'interaction'. Socialism as a scientific world view sought to understand Marxism as a world view

that encompassed nature, history and society. In it, science and politics, theory and practice are identical in the sense that politics is merely the application of scientific knowledge.¹⁴

A second tendency towards the 'scientisation' of Marxism lay in a contrary orientation towards separating empirical propositions and normative implications within Marxism itself. The implications for the sociology of knowledge of this 'scientific' Marxism, especially in its first variant, are probably already evident. Lenk maintains:

If law-like regularities are valid for nature and society to the same extent, then the social base must be explained as the authentic reality — in the sense of an ontologised *ens realissimum*; the superstructure however, must be explained as a relatively insignificant epiphenomenon with regard to the real movement of history and the social process.¹⁵

But it is not merely the reduction of the 'superstructure' to an epiphenomenon that is problematic in the Marxism of the Second International. The original critical intention of Marx's critique of ideology is lost when the material historical 'base' is naturalized. This has recently been argued by Wellmer in relation to Engels' substitution of the naturalisation of history for the historicization of nature.

The uncritical, ontological conception of dialectics in Engels' theory no longer supports a critical concept of 'ideology'. 'Ideology' is bound to degenerate into a notion designating contents of consciousness in general. As Habermas puts it, 'the dependence of consciousness on social being becomes a special case of a general ontological law according to which the higher is dependent on the lower and ultimately everything is dependent on its material "substratum"'. Consequently the concept of ideology loses the unique strategic significance which it had in Marx's theory, namely, that of a concept signifying a *false* consciousness which *in its falseness adequately expresses* and reflects a 'false' social reality.¹⁶

The original relationship between theory and practice posited in such a critique of ideology is thus severed. In other words, the naturalisation of society according to this world-view must also lead to the demise of the significance of human practice, an approach that Lukács criticized under the rubric of 'orthodox' Marxism. In the sociology of knowledge, the two-sphere notion of reality is at the centre of Scheler's sociology of knowledge. In its extreme form, this ontological separation of base and superstructure leads to what Scheler himself termed 'the powerlessness of the mind', or, in a different context, to Mannheim's notion of 'the homelessness of the mind'.

Within German sociology, the reception of Marx's work was also problematical. Bosse, in his study of the relationship between the

sociology of religion and the treatment of Marx's critique of ideology in the work of Max Weber and Troeltsch, suggested that

Troeltsch and Weber, with their critique of 'economism' and 'materialism' claim to have refuted the core of the Marxist critique of ideology. They presuppose the unity and continuity of the Marxist critique of ideology from Marx to their Marxist contemporaries.¹⁷

This is not to suggest that they did not differentiate between their Marxist contemporaries or to deny that Weber, as Löwith argued,¹⁸ was primarily concerned with a critique of orthodox Marxists such as Kautsky. Nonetheless, Marxism as the 'materialist interpretation of history' was criticized for its economic mono-causality whilst, at the same time, it was viewed as a fund of possible working hypotheses. Its approach to the study of society became one of many possible approaches. Specific aspects of Marx's theory, such as the theory of alienation, and commodity fetishism, were — with the exception of Simmel¹⁹ — almost completely ignored in both German sociology and orthodox Marxism. Both were taken up by Lukács as central themes in his *History and Class Consciousness*. But in the sociology of knowledge, insofar as it either remained fixed upon this earlier interpretation of Marxism (Scheler) or failed to take up these aspects of Lukács' work whilst retaining others (Mannheim), a theory of alienation was developed that had its origins not in Marx but in various traditions in German philosophy and sociology.

The reduction of Marx's critique of ideology to a base-superstructure theory of society in which the causal relationships posited between the two result in the superstructure being viewed as an epiphenomenon, could also lead to the substitution of a *theory* of ideology for its critique. The simple positing of connections between base and superstructure as a theory of ideology reduces the truth claims of propositions, theories, etc., in the superstructure to mere assertions that are invalidated just by virtue of their being socially rooted in the base. In other words, their truth claims are ignored. To what extent this was the direction in which the sociology of knowledge moved must be examined later.

Although not systematically developed in his work, a critique of ideology can also be found in the writings of Nietzsche. This critique is perhaps as significant for the German tradition as is the caricature of a Marxist theory of ideology.²⁰ In our examination of the relevance of Nietzsche's work for the sociology of knowledge, it will not be possible to do more than outline some of the salient features of his critique of ideology and his philosophy of history. Its significance for the sociology of knowledge, however, is particularly evident in Scheler's work. Mannheim too argued that, aside from Marx,

The other source of the modern theory of ideology and the sociology of

knowledge is to be found in the flashes of insight of Nietzsche, who combined his concrete observations in this area with a theory of drive-structures and a theory of knowledge that is reminiscent of pragmatism. Though he too employed sociological imputation, it is largely the categories 'aristocratic and democratic cultures' to which he imputed specific modes of thought.²¹

Is this, in fact, where the relevance of Nietzsche's work for the sociology of knowledge lies?

In his examination of Nietzsche's theory of ideology, Barth draws attention to the connection between Nietzsche's biological and sociological critique of reason and truth, on the one hand, and his theory of ideology on the other. The latter is a constituent element of the former. Nietzsche's critique of reason is one that reduces the whole cognitive apparatus back to a biological basis, and in particular to 'the will to power'. He engages in a radical destruction of logical forms and laws, which he views as merely manifestations of the will to power. In more general terms, the search for knowledge in all its forms is reduced to a function of the will to power: hence, questions of truth become questions of power.

Though this quest for truth and knowledge is itself an essential social need, the intellect creates a world that is of value to us but is at the same time a world of illusions. As Nietzsche puts it: 'We only live through illusions', or 'The fundamental aspect of all that is great and lively rests upon illusion. The pathos of truth leads to decline.'²² Hence, the most general consequence of the intellect is delusion about one's self and the world, since its creations ignore the fact that it is itself merely an organ of the will. Human beings are not interested in 'the truth' as such but merely in the use to which it may be put. In their theories and their morality, people seek to establish timeless and reified (the concept of *Verdinglichung* occurs often in Nietzsche's work) notions that ignore 'the eternal flux of all things', 'the eternal transformation'. Hence, 'There are no eternal facts: just as there are no absolute truths'.²³ The 'relative' truths that we produce are the result of our pragmatic interests. In this connection, Habermas has suggested that

Nietzsche's 'theory of knowledge' . . . consists in the attempt to comprehend the categorial framework of the natural sciences . . . , the operational basis of experience . . . , and the rules of logic and calculation as the relative a priori of a world of objective illusion that has been produced for the purposes of mastering nature and thus of preserving existence.²⁴

This 'world of objective illusion' — that also exists in the moral sphere too — is relative because both intellect and drives are, for Nietzsche, 'reducible to the will to power'. It is also 'a perspectivistic illusion', since this world

. . . can be *interpreted* differently, it does not have a meaning behind it, but innumerable meanings — 'Perspectivism'. It is our needs *that interpret the world*; our instincts and their pro and con.²⁵

The theory of knowledge must therefore be replaced by a theory of perspectives — a task not carried out by Nietzsche but by a doctrine of world views (*Weltanschauungslehre*) and the sociology of knowledge.

The key to Nietzsche's critique of ideology lies in his 'universal reduction of psychological, intellectual and social forms and contents of life to the will to power'.²⁶ We may take morality as an instance of one of the forms that is a central focus of attack in Nietzsche's critique of ideology. Nietzsche posits a diversity of moral systems that both fulfils the needs of various social strata, is related to the diversity of their creators and agents, and takes a hierarchical form:

Each class and each strata possess the morality that is appropriate to its interests and its will to power. For Nietzsche, the principle of this social order rests in the polarity of domination and subordination, command and commanded, leaders and led . . . The sociological aspect of his critique is thus manifested in the fact that he investigates the notions of moral behaviour as to whether they are the expression of an elite or a mass.²⁷

Barth goes on to suggest that the whole of the 'superstructure' in Nietzsche's critique of ideology possess an instrumental character; it is the instrument of vital interests of the organism and especially of the will to power. It thus robs both reason and the mind of any autonomy and removes any questions of truth from this 'superstructure'. The mind is always 'directed' (*dirigiert*) by the will to power even in a period of the devaluation and inversion of values — itself a central theme in Scheler's social philosophy.²⁸ In such a period there exists a 'war of the mind', a struggle for power but in the form of a struggle between 'value-judgements' and an attempt to devalue those of one's opponent. These value-judgements change with the conditions of life but can, in turn, be reduced to drives and impulses, that is, to a biological basis. Hence, the mind is merely a part of a larger organism and is distinguished from biological processes only by its 'sophistication'. As Nietzsche put it, the mind is 'merely a means or an instrument in the service of higher life'.

Nietzsche's radical critique of ideology, with its socio-biological reductionism, its elite-mass model of society, its destruction of truth claims, and hence its predication of relativism (or 'perspectivism'), is important in understanding Scheler's and, to a lesser extent, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. But in Mannheim's sociology of knowledge Nietzsche's philosophy of history, as an early instance of historicism, is also relevant.²⁹ History is significant for Nietzsche only insofar as 'history serves life'. It too is instrumentalized. In his critique of ideology, perspectivism plays a central role. Historical knowledge, too, is possible only through perspectivism. Each approach to history presupposes an interest structure that is dependent upon specific life-situations. But more significant for Mannheim's development is the

work of Wilhelm Dilthey, as Mannheim himself acknowledged.³⁰ Commenting on Dilthey's work, Grünwald argues that in it

there lie contained *in nuce* all the difficulties with which, subsequently, historicism and the sociology of knowledge that was founded upon it had to grapple.³¹

These difficulties include the delineation of the form of existence to which knowledge is related, the understanding of expressions of that existence, the interpretation of world views, the relativity of world views, and the attempt to synthesize them.³²

In both his theory of the human sciences and his critique of historical reason, Dilthey takes as his starting point a cognitive subject that is not, as in Kant, a transcendental ego but 'the whole human being' as a historical and psychological reality that exists within a real life-process. The activity of consciousness is related, therefore, to effective life. The human sciences are to be grounded in the context of experience (*Erlebnis*), expression (*Ausdruck*) and understanding (*Verstehen*). Experience is the fundamental 'fact of consciousness'. The contents of this individual experience are contextual in character. They are located within the context of the 'course of life' (*Lebensverlauf*). This flow of life contains 'our notions, evaluations and purposes'. Life is thus more comprehensive than experience, and individual experiences are to be interpreted in the context of life as a totality. Schnädelbach describes their status as follows:

If, following Dilthey, one interprets experience as the unity of inner and outer, subjectivity and objectivity and as an element in the context of life, then 'life' too must also be understood as such a unity, i.e. *not* as a transcendental metaphysical principle [but] . . . after Hegel, i.e. after the discrediting of absolute idealism, 'life' is the concept of totality that . . . precisely replaces Hegel's 'absolute spirit'.³³

Hence, the concept of life becomes both the transcendental basis for the critique of knowledge and the constitution of the historical world, and a metaphysical principle (later developed by numerous philosophers as a *Lebensphilosophie*).

However, what is of significance for the sociology of knowledge is not merely this attempt to ground historical knowledge but also the importance of the hermeneutic problem of interpretation and understanding (*Verstehen*). Individual experiences, for Dilthey, are manifestations of life. The relationship between the two is reflexive since the interpretation of experiences and their objectifications in terms of life is itself to return to human beings themselves who constitute this life. Hence, the totality of human studies constitutes the scientific self-understanding of life, that is, the self-knowledge of humanity. The orientation of the knowing subject, therefore, and its attitude with

regard to its objects is what constitutes the human sciences. The cognitive subject interprets the objectifications of life in the light of his or her own life-experiences, namely within the context of life itself.

But this interpretation of the objectifications of life is also located historically and temporally. For Dilthey, the model of historical understanding is the autobiography, since

The autobiography is the highest and most instructive form in which the understanding of life confronts us . . . here we approach . . . the roots of all historical interpretation.³⁴

Historical understanding, therefore, must be rooted in individual experience. The instance of the autobiography is also instructive in that it is one in which

the distance between the subject of understanding and the object of understanding is here demonstrably mediated by the 'living' identity of subject and object, a phenomenon that, according to Dilthey, is constitutive for historical knowledge as such.³⁵

In other words, the relationship between subject and object posited here is unproblematic. In order to comprehend the significance of Dilthey's concept of historical knowledge for the sociology of knowledge, we must examine his notion of history and historicity further.

Dilthey's tendency, at least, in his earlier writings, to provide a psychological foundation of history in the individual human subject leads him into considerable difficulties since, as Lieber suggests,

the attempt to make psychology the foundation of history and to view the origin of all historical-social differentiation in a general psychological structure as a dynamic form of life, in fact leads him back to a strangely unhistorical view of history and society.³⁶

In his later writings, Dilthey attempts to deal with the temporality of life. Time, as something concretely experienced, is located in life:

In life . . . the present encompasses the notion of the past in memory and that of the future in fantasy, which follows its possibilities, and in the activity that, within these possibilities, sets purposes. Thus, the present is filled with the past and carries the future in itself.³⁷

Each of these dimensions of time are to be apprehended in different ways since

When we look back in memory, we comprehend the context of the past element of the flow of life with the category of meaning (*Bedeutung*). When we live in the present that is filled with realities we experience in intuitive understanding their positive or negative value, and as we hold out the future before us there emerge out of this process the categories of purpose.³⁸

In short, the past is apprehended through the category of meaning or significance, the present through that of value and the future through purpose. Of these categories, that of meaning is crucial since

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