A New Concept of Ideology?

With the incorporation of the teachings of Karl Marx into contemporary social science, the intention of his basic concepts is being transformed into its opposite. Their usefulness consists essentially in the unified explanation of social movements in terms of the class relationships determined by economic development. The aim of his theoretical work was the transformation of specific social conditions, not knowledge of a "totality" or of a total and absolute truth. In this connection, Marx criticized philosophy as well, but he put no new metaphysics in place of the old.

The discussion of Marxist theory in Germany has taken on substantial proportions in the past several decades. A recent, particularly acute attempt to include some of its concepts in a purely philosophical investigation is to be found in the works of Karl Mannheim, especially in his book *Ideology and Utopia.*[1] The book has justifiably met with broad critical acclaim, for it offers a particularly astute example of how these increasingly explosive questions are being treated today. I would like here to contribute to this effort by analyzing Mannheim's concept of ideology.

According to Mannheim, the task of the sociology of knowledge is to transform the theory of ideology from the "intellectual armament of a party" into a "sociological history of thought" above parties (78). In his interpretation, the achievement of the concept of ideology thus far has been to discredit the views of one's political opponents by reference to their social determination. But now that one can no longer avoid recognition of the "situational determination" of one's own

intellectual standpoint, the concept has become a general tool of knowledge according to which the past can be investigated anew, and with which the crisis-ridden intellectual situation of the present can be assessed. The science of the social ascription of ideas which thus emerges, he argues, constitutes the only way out of the intellectual crisis of our time—a time in which faith in the unconditional validity of the various world views has been fundamentally shaken (98–99, n. 32).

At the beginning of this new sociology of knowledge stands a new concept of ideology, the history of which Mannheim sets out to describe. A "metaphysical orientation" developed, probably in political praxis, which suspects that the individual ideas of one's opponents are deceptions that serve their interest. In time, according to Mannheim, this suspicion becomes pervasive. It concerns not the form but only the contents of the opposing thought, which he explains psychologically in terms of self-interest. If the accusation of "ideology" extends no further than asserting that "this or that interest is the cause of a given deception or lie," Mannheim calls it "particular." In comparison with this "particular" concept of ideology, the "total" concept, which calls into question "the opponent's total *Weltanschauung* (including his conceptual apparatus)," constitutes an important advance (56ff.). According to Kant, in whose philosophy of consciousness this new concept is said to be grounded theoretically, the whole of our experience is formed by the active application of the elements of our understanding, and is not the mirror of an independently existing world. In this sense, the total concept of ideology also asserts that the structure of a world view is dependent upon the subject. But the subject no longer perceives unconditionally and generally, as with Kant; rather, the subject's entire perceptual apparatus and all categories and forms of perception are determined by historical and sociological conditions. Not just certain contents but indeed a definite way of knowing—and, accordingly, of judging and acting—are said to "correspond" with the situation of a social group. In contrast to the particular concept of ideology, in which real human beings with their interests are examined for the explanation of their ideas, the total concept refers to an "ascribed subject" [*Zurechnungssubjekt*], that is, an ideal mode of perception that belongs according to its meaning to the position of a given group in a society (59).[2] If the originally philosophical intention of the total concept of ideology is joined to the political intention of the

particular concept, it is no longer isolated ideas that come under attack; instead, the charge of false consciousness is decisively generalized.

> Previously, one's adversary, as the representative of a certain political-social position, was accused of conscious or unconscious falsification. Now, however, the critique is more thoroughgoing in that, having discredited the total structure of his consciousness, we consider him no longer capable of thinking correctly. This simple observation means, in the light of a structural analysis of thought, that in earlier attempts to discover the sources of error, distortion was uncovered only on the psychological plane by pointing out the personal roots of intellectual bias. The annihilation is now more thoroughgoing since the attack is made on the noological level and the validity of the adversary's theories is undermined by showing that they are merely a function of the generally prevailing social situation (69).

According to Mannheim, the total concept of ideology makes its first appearance as the concept of class consciousness in Marxism. But, he claims, it is only now that the courage has been found to think it through to its conclusions. As long as class-bound false thought is sought only in the camp of the opposition, and one's own position is not recognized as ideological, the problem of ideology has not been put consistently, but instead has been restricted unjustifiably. Accordingly, Mannheim wants to oppose a "general" version of the total concept of ideology to the "special" version beyond which Marxism has not reached. Because not only bourgeois consciousness but that of *every* social group is dependent upon social circumstances in its content and form, not even Marxism may lay claim to unrestricted validity (77).

The application of the general total concept of ideology, which is of fundamental importance for Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, is said not to entail philosophical relativism (for reasons to be discussed below). The concept is only meant to show that all thought is "situationally determined," that is, that it is "rooted" in a definite social situation. To every group there conforms a cognitive totality, the various aspects of which relate thoroughly to one another and to its historical foundation. This fundamental "reference of all elements of meaning in a given situation to one another and the fact that they derive their significance from this reciprocal interrelationship in a given frame of thought [M.]" Mannheim calls "relationism" (86). Sociologists of knowledge can investigate these relationships in their historical rise and decline without having to take sides for one or the other

of the systems of thought and judgment. They may be content with considering the history of the various views which laid claim to truth and with showing how, "in the whole history of thought, certain intellectual standpoints are connected with certain forms of experience, and with tracing the intimate connection between the two in the course of social and intellectual change [M.]" (81).

According to Mannheim, this "value-free" application of the developed concept of ideology pushes beyond itself dialectically and leads to a new division of systems of thought with respect to their truth content. Whereas philosophy had previously distinguished a certain view from all others as the true theory of reality as a whole, Mannheim is convinced that, in consequence of the continuous transformation of reality, a system valid in the past could become a fateful falsehood. Research in the sociology of knowledge, he claims, has shown that forms of consciousness may persist when the social situation to which they were appropriate has changed. Given this lack of correspondence between the existential foundations and the life span of the systems of thought ascribed to them, there are at any given time various ways of interpreting the world. Some of these are appropriate to the social reality and prove themselves therein, others are obsolete, and still others (as "utopias") outdistance that reality (83ff.). The degree of this lack of correspondence provides sociologists of knowledge with a standard according to which they can distinguish "the true from the untrue, the genuine from the spurious among the norms, modes of thought, and patterns of behavior that exist *alongside one another in a given historical period*" (94).[3]

Thus those demands that are precisely attainable would be true or genuine "in ethical terms"; in "the moral interpretation of one's own action," true or genuine would be an attitude which neither obscures nor prevents the "adjustment and transformation of man"; in theoretical terms, true or genuine would be those views with which one could orient oneself in the given reality. In essence, then, *false* consciousness is to be distinguished from correct consciousness in that its norms and modes of thought are "antiquated" and that it "conceal[s] the actual meaning of conduct rather than . . . revealing it" (95). Since according to this theory the truth content of every consciousness is measured against a reality that never remains the same, the concept of ideology attains a more dynamic character at this level.

The "crisis" of the present is said to consist in the fact that each of the "systems of life that struggle against one another but that exist side by side" are to be grasped as "particular." To be sure, all of them claim to interpret adequately the whole of the world and of life—that is, to be definitively valid truths. But in reality, each and every one is a "situationally determined" partial view. This is not to be understood as saying that they deal with fundamentally different objects; in this case, one could simply combine together the most progressive among them into an overall theory. According to Mannheim, however, the diversity results from the circumstance that the facts are experienced in a given "context of life and thought," which differs according to the individual's social standpoint. The way in which something is experienced, the questioning and the mastery of a problem is said everywhere to contain a metaphysical presupposition, a "vital and intellectual commitment [M.]" (102), that corresponds to one of the many conflicting existential foundations in our fragmented present. If it is really true "that we hardly live in the same world of thought, that there are competing systems of thought which in the end no longer experience the same reality" (99), however, it becomes questionable to what extent one can speak of a common reality. Our peculiar predicament consists in the fact that we have access to an infinite number of scientific methods and individual observations—even if the crisis is said to have "penetrated even into the heart of empirical research" (102)—and yet, in the "questions of totality," we have completely lost the "somnambulistic certainty of more stable times" (102) due to the discovery of the "particularity" of all standpoints. The sociology of knowledge seeks to protect us from misunderstanding this reality; indeed, it strives to intensify this shattering of "values and contents" through the consistent application of its new concept of ideology to all past and present beliefs. But precisely in its unmasking of the dependence of all "styles of thought" on a mutable historical situation, it recognizes the spark "that should serve as an impetus to the type of thought required by the present situation" (99, n. 32). The sociology of knowledge refuses to allow any system of thought which understands itself as unconditional to exist in isolation. Instead, it comprehends each system on the basis of its historical presuppositions, thus practicing "sociological diagnosis of the times." The sociology of knowledge thus believes itself to be on the only plausible path to the

"totality." According to Mannheim's philosophical conviction, the latter is to be grasped neither as the quintessence of all that is nor as a completely comprehensive theory. Rather, totality means "both the assimilation and transcendence of the limitations of particular points of view. It represents the continuous process of the expansion of knowledge, and has as its goal not achievement of a supra-temporally valid conclusion but the broadest possible extension of our horizon of vision" (106). The objective of the sociology of knowledge is to advance the cause of freeing human beings from their dependence on ephemeral certainties, and thus to disclose to them with the aid of history the evolution of their own being through a "situational report [M.]," which is to be based on intellectual history and which must constantly be revised.

In the context of the sociology of knowledge, the modern concept of ideology is put at the service of a task which contradicts the theory from which it derives. Marx wanted to transform philosophy into positive science and praxis; the sociology of knowledge pursues an ultimately *philosophical* intention. The sociology of knowledge is preoccupied with the problem of absolute truth, its form and its content; it sees its mission in the illumination of that problem. The effort to achieve ever deeper insight into the evolution of all metaphysical decisions with which human beings attempt to comprehend the world in its totality becomes itself a metaphysical undertaking. The possibility of gradually disclosing the essence of things gives this approach its sanctity. Those who were disappointed by the older metaphysics need not despair. To be sure, we have no final conception of truth valid for all times and for all human beings, but the sociological investigation of the fate of the world views that have emerged historically yields at each higher level a richer perspective on "reality" (103). Reality is to be understood principally as "the ascent of human beings." This process takes place and "becomes intelligible in the course of the variation in the norms, the forms, and the works of mankind, in the course of the change in institutions and collective aims, in the course of its changing assumptions and points of view, in terms of which each social-historical subject becomes aware of himself and acquires an appreciation of his past" (92). In the changing course of intellectual conceptions, in other words, the essence of humanity gradually reveals itself to the sociologist of knowledge.

In Mannheim's hands, the sociology of knowledge connects up with important aspects of Dilthey's philosophy of history. Dilthey, too, argues that there is no philosophical system that grasps the essence of the world in a generally valid way. Nonetheless, through investigation of the modes of conduct and systems which have arisen historically in all areas of culture, we can recognize ever more clearly the essence of humanity that expresses itself therein. He characterizes it as a "position close to my own" that one "can study the infinite content of human nature only in its development in history."[4] "Man knows himself only in history, never through introspection; indeed, we all seek him in history. . . . The individual always realizes only one of the possibilities in his development, which could always have taken a different turning whenever he had to make an important decision. Man is only given to us at all in terms of his realized possibilities. In the cultural systems, too, we seek an anthropologically determined structure in which an 'X' realizes himself. We call this human nature."[5]

Mannheim, however, expresses himself much less clearly than Dilthey, and argues only that "all the systems of meaning which constitute a given world are simply a historically determined and continuously shifting curtain, and that the development of humanity takes place either within or behind them [M.]" (85). At the same time, he also gives expression to the notion that the meaning to be discovered in history, which "imparts to the historical and the social its impetus [M.]" (92), is really the development of "humanity."

In Dilthey, this philosophy of history is entirely consistent with the rest of his doctrines. He is convinced that the development of the intellectual realms of culture is rooted not merely in society but equally "in the individual as such."[6] According to him, the deeds and creations of human beings of all times, peoples, and classes emanate from one and the same human "being," the essence of which all existing persons carry within themselves. He emphatically opposes a sociology which seeks the basis of the forms of spirit in the social life process; instead, philosophy, art, and religiosity are to be traced back to an ultimate creative principle. "If one could imagine a lone individual on earth, it would, given a life span of sufficient length, develop these functions in complete isolation."[7] During his time, psychology had only investigated humanity on the basis of its experimental subjects and reconstructed the whole of culture from the spiritual elements

discerned thereby. In contrast, Dilthey's achievement consists in the fact that he made the history of ideas an important means for studying humanity.

This philosophical conviction seems appropriate to Dilthey's individualistic mode of thought; it is difficult to understand how Mannheim, as a sociologist, can speak of the "essence" of humanity, the development of which takes place behind or in cultural forms. Mannheim cannot possibly mean, as with Dilthey, that all human beings at all times have the same essence, that all individuals contain the same components and functions. Any such assertion which referred to the definite object "humanity" would certainly stand condemned before the tribunal of the "total, general, and dynamic" concept of ideology. However imprecisely Mannheim himself may express this view of the philosophy of history, his version indicates that research in the sociology of knowledge yields experience of an essence of humanity not determined by history. For him, too, genuine historical research is supposed to lead to knowledge of our own essence. Thus, like Dilthey's human science, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge reveals itself as an heir of classical idealist philosophy. The latter posited as the result of real, recorded history the self-knowing subject, which constituted for it the sole true, self-sufficient essence, and thus the "totality." But the idealist credo—according to which the subject, the essence "humanity," or some other real or ideal entity intrinsic to humanity is said to have absolute or exclusive priority over all else—comports no better with the comprehensive theory of ideology than any other "self-hypostatization." If we take Mannheim's theory of ideology seriously, then there is no adequate justification for claiming that, in a thoroughly conditioned and mutable reality, the "development of humanity" alone should occupy this exceptional position. Nor is it convincing to argue that, of all kinds of knowledge, the anthropological is not ideological. From a standpoint which claims "to discover the ideological element in all thinking" (84), Dilthey's belief in a "humanity" which unfolds in the course of history—the most progressive form of the idealist philosophy of history—must appear as the mere "absolutization" of a single situationally determined perception.

While the characterization of "the development of humanity" as the metaphysical reality to which the sociology of knowledge affords access is inadequate according to its own premises, the general claim

remains that there exists a foundation of history outside history. This claim includes the corresponding notion that the true cause of human activity is a "realm beyond history," rather than mutable society (92). The denial in this claim is illuminating. All processes of which real history reports, all nations and classes with their deeds and fates, the famines, wars, economic crises, and revolutions, are not the "real" things toward which our investigations are directed. According to Mannheim, it would be mistaken to seek the true cause of these processes in the realm of the positive, or even in that of the determinately expressible. All factual matters are already determined by a "conceptual apparatus" which itself is determined and mutable. To imbue experience with validity as the true reality is said to be impossible because the standpoint from which we have these experiences prohibits, due to its inherent limitations, assertions of definitive truth—claims about reality "as such." Were we to attempt to disclose "reality" nonetheless, we would thus have to seek the traces of the extrahistorical in mundane history. Mannheim is thinking of this "essence," without the expectation of which "history is mute and meaningless," when he states that "something of profound significance does transpire in the realm of the historical" (93). If one disregards its metaphysics of "humanity" as such, the central idea of this sociology remains the dubious belief that all "standpoints and contents . . . are part of a meaningful overall process."[8]

Despite its indeterminacy, this meaning of history is more closely defined. It is the "ineffable element at which the mystics aim" (92)—in other words, if we understand correctly, the divine. One cannot name it or express it "directly," but it must "necessarily bear some relation" to that which actually takes place.

Mannheim himself speaks in this respect of a "point of view which is based without doubt on a particular attitude toward historical and social reality" (92). In any case, history is metaphysically transfigured by this attitude. Mannheim disputed like few other philosophers the possibility of an eternal essence sufficient unto itself; according to him, all meaning is bound to practice. But in this secularization of the sacred, it is not only in the language that the reference to metaphysical foundations remains. For the revolutionary idea that no standpoint can claim the certainty of eternal validity is qualified by the assertion that the ontological decisions according to which we experience and

analyze facts increasingly reveal an overarching meaning.[9] Mannheim fails to reject the concepts of a metaphysics that transfigures the overall movement of history; indeed, despite all the criticism, he retains them in an unclear and vague form. This is hardly reconcilable with his own total concept of ideology. The assertion of a unified and at the same time positively evaluated meaning of history, which plays a decisive role in the construction of Mannheim's central concepts, connects his view with contemporary philosophy yet, like the latter, is rooted in Europe in Christian theology. But given Mannheim's sociology, can unity have a greater ontological probability than multiplicity—indeed, than chaos? Can the divine be more likely than the diabolical (such as Schopenhauer's blind world motive [*Weltwille*])? Why should that which we perceive from our restricted standpoint as the divine meaning not also prove to be a deceptive myth? This decisive question could be convincingly answered on the foundations of a theistic or pantheistic theology, which of course would have to reject the application of the concept of ideology to its own contents. Yet all of the terms with which Mannheim attempts either directly or indirectly to describe the "essence" belong to metaphysical systems whose validity it is precisely the intention of his theory of ideology to dispute. Whether the terms used to distinguish that essence from "a mere X" are "the ascent of human beings," "the ecstatic element in human experience which . . . is never directly revealed or expressed" (92), "the whole" (106), or "unity and meaning" (92), he is unable to reconcile them with his basic conception.

This revolutionary sociology, which dissolves everything "dynamically," requires the support of a dogmatic metaphysics. On the contrary, it sublates [*aufhebt*] the destruction of all philosophical investigation of absolute meaning by recommending itself as the latter's most progressive form. At the price of unfailing consistency—which he maintains in all other respects—Mannheim privileges the task of the metaphysician. Marx tried to overthrow the prestige of metaphysics with his concept of ideology. Insofar as the concept is not merely applied but deepened, generalized, and thought through to its conclusions and made more flexible, this new sociology seeks to reconcile it with that form of thought whose validity it was supposed to undermine. Marx correctly sought to do away with the conviction

that there is some essence of being which pervades all epochs and societies and lends them their meaning. It was precisely this element of Hegelian philosophy that appeared to him to be an idealist illusion. Only human beings themselves—not the "essence" of humanity, but the real human beings in a definite historical moment, dependent upon each other and upon outer and inner nature—are the acting and suffering subjects of history. Only earthly creatures have a "fate"; one cannot sensibly say of either "spirit" or of any "essence" that the fates of "the historical and social . . . are somehow its fates as well" (92). Because the fates of human beings are extremely unequal and reveal no unified context of meaning either in different times or at the same time, indeed within the same people, Marx's theory calls it "ideology" to mitigate the real sufferings of economically underprivileged classes by asserting such a context.

Indeed, history as a whole cannot possibly be the expression of some meaningful whole. For history is the recapitulation of processes that arise from the contradictory relationships of human society. These processes reveal no spiritual or intellectual unity; they are not the effect of struggles between mere attitudes, positions, styles of thought, and systems. Instead, completely unequal human and extrahuman forces influence their development. Insofar as history does not emerge from the conscious direction of human beings determining it according to a plan, it has none. One can attempt to comprehend the various driving forces of a certain epoch under laws, but the assertion of a comprehensible meaning behind these facticities is founded upon philosophical poesy—whether it is really elaborated, as it is by Hegel, or merely asserted, as it is by Mannheim. It is central to Marxian materialism to give expression to the unsatisfactory condition of earthly reality as true being, and not to permit vague ideas of humanity to be hypostatized as Being in a higher sense. Materialism is the sworn enemy of every attempt to understand reality on the basis of some idealist paradise or of any purely intellectual order. After Marx, we are forbidden any such consolation about the world.

With Mannheim, by contrast, such a consoling idealist belief is not merely the central idea of his sociology, but the highest concern of all intellectual effort. Correspondingly, he repeatedly seeks to defend his theory against the charge of relativism. In contemporary logic, the

charge was originally leveled against an epistemology that sought to derive logical principles from individual facts. Later, this accusation was extended to that theory which refuses to ascribe eternal truth to judgments about factual matters. In this broad form, the charge is only comprehensible from the standpoint of a static ontology, and it rests on an overextended concept of truth which maintains the universality of factual judgments—that is, their independence from the perceiving subject. In the meantime, this idea, too, has fallen into disrepute in philosophy.[10] Static ontology and a universalistic concept of truth have become untenable. For it is just as certain that all our ideas—the true ones as well as the false—depend upon conditions that may change, and that the notion of an eternal truth which outlives all perceiving subjects is unattainable. None of this affects the validity of science. For example, the statement that a definite form of nature would exist after the death of all human beings remains binding for us, and it would be equally false to imagine this nature in terms other than those of the logical and mathematical laws that we recognize from our determinate standpoint. Such statements, whose content concerns something that reaches beyond the lifetime of humanity, certainly express something about the relationship of humanity and nature on the basis of our theory of objective time, but nothing about the relation of truth and being in general. In other words, they are in no way connected with the fate of the overextended concept of truth. Those in science concerned with the accuracy of their judgments about spiritual matters, whether about the time until their death or about a later time, have nothing to hope for and nothing to fear from a fundamental decision concerning the problem of absolute truth. But Mannheim attempts to rescue his theory of ideology from the objection to this untenable concept of truth, which is intrinsic to his own view of the overarching meaning of history. He interprets the charge of relativism as itself relative before the judgment of eternal truth, and therefore as missing the mark. That epistemology which would characterize as relativistic an understanding of all standpoints as "particular," he argues, is itself merely particular.

The concept of particularity, which plays a central role in Mannheim's work, refers quite simply to the relationship of any given standpoint to eternal truth. It claims that every statement is inadequate to the latter due to the conditioned character of the speaker.

But the notion that the "situational determination" of any judgment should have any influence on its truth content is incoherent: why is the insight not just as situationally determined as the error? The sociology of knowledge—like every metaphysics—characterizes every standpoint *sub specie aeternitatis.* It claims not yet to have taken possession of eternal truth; rather, it considers itself merely on the way to its attainment.

When Mannheim evaluates beliefs according to their practical applicability, the undertaking is only loosely connected with this overextended concept of truth. This concern with pragmatic evaluation is also intended to parry the charge of relativism. But it is obvious that such an assessment of truth, which understands itself as determined, is inadequate to a philosophy for which relativism in this sense constitutes an accusation. This pragmatic conception, which confuses the contradiction between true and false with that of genuine and spurious (94), is reminiscent of *Lebensphilosophie*; the latter, however, shares "the at present widespread fear of relativism"[11] much less than does Mannheim himself.

Mannheim treats the most important aspects of the metamorphosis of his concept of ideology, as they have been set out above, as stages of a development that have led to a deepening and radicalization of the concept. There is indeed no doubt that he has "thought it out to its conclusions." The concept has become so generalized that it has gained the authority to deal with "questions of totality" in Mannheim's sense, but at the same time it has forfeited its determinate content. To think out a concept does not necessarily lead to making it a more refined tool of knowledge; if this were the case, the widespread contemporary practice of transforming concepts that have been fruitful in specific areas into world-embracing theories would have had greater success.

The determinate meaning of the concept of ideology is damaged by the first step that removes it from the realm of political critique. As we have seen, this step leads from the "particular" to the "total" ideology. It is easy to see how the "particular" concept of ideology contributes to the criticism of ideas. Wherever nations or classes have secured their domination through moral, metaphysical, or religious ideas rather than with mere force, these notions were ultimately vulnerable to attack by the dominated. The struggle against the cultural

props of social conditions tends to engender and accompany political opposition in such a way that the distribution of the parties in the intellectual struggle corresponds to the political-economic interest situation. Accordingly, the discrediting of certain ideas, upon which an odious situation is based, supported, and mystified, is as old as these struggles themselves. Such an attack is characterized less by the Renaissance maxim advanced by Mannheim—that one thinks differently *in piazza* than *in palazzo*—than by the speech which Machiavelli puts in the mouth of the leader of a rebellion of the underclasses in his history of Florence: "If you will take note of the mode of proceeding of men, you will see that all those who come to great riches and great power have obtained them either by fraud or by force; and afterwards, to hide the ugliness of acquisition, they make it decent by applying the false title of earnings to things they have usurped by deceit or by violence."[12]

The total concept of ideology leaves behind isolated theories and evaluations of one's political opponents, dealing instead with their entire consciousness, "including their conceptual apparatus" (57). Our whole life context, everything we know, even if it influences our thought without being recognized as an "option," the smallest tidbits as well as the grand aspects of the context, ultimately the perceiving subject in its "totality," its entire "world motive" [*Weltwollen*], as Mannheim puts it, should be declared "ideological." It is asserted that every consciousness "corresponds to" a definite situation in history and in society, and thus its truth is to be doubted. Mannheim asserts that the attack is "radicalized" in that one disputes one's opponent's "capacity for correct thought." In reality, the attack is thus transformed from a determinate accusation into the unenlightening speech of a dogmatic philosopher. Neither interest nor any empirical facts whatsoever are supposed to serve as an explanation for the emergence and consolidation of a person's overall perspective; instead, an unadorned, unmediated "correspondence" is asserted. The fact that such a perspective represents a false consciousness must thus appear as fateful providence, as mystical destiny.

In this connection, Mannheim must reject not merely the old-style psychology of interest but contemporary psychology as well, insofar as the latter inherits the attempt to explain intellectual processes ultimately in terms of external necessity. He wants to replace

psychological findings with "an analysis of the correspondence between the situation to be known and the forms of knowledge" (58). What he means by this is never clearly expressed.[13] As far as we understand him, the systems of *Weltanschauungen*—that is, the intellectual totalities—do not develop out of the actual life situation of human beings, but rather are bound to definite social strata. To these systems of *Weltanschauungen* belong a definite "economic motive" [*Wirtschaftswollen*], as well as a style of art, a style of thought, etc. According to Mannheim, it would be incorrect to attempt to investigate the cognitive totality or its individual parts by reference to the social situation conditioning its carriers. Rather, he seeks "correspondences of form" between the social situation and the totality of a *Weltanschauung*, conceived in terms of an "ideal type." On the basis of certain peculiarities of a style of thought or judgment, the consciousness of an individual is ascribed to one of the ideal-typical "world postulates" [*Weltwollungen*]. Finally, and once again on the basis of very vague considerations, its origin in a social situation is "reconstructed." Even in Mannheim's work, the concept of ideology has something to do with the problem of truth; what can such "constructions" say about the truth, falsity, or problematic nature of a consciousness?

Whether this "total" concept of ideology is supposed to comprehend the perceiving subject or a dubious ideal "world postulate," it proves in every case to be an idealistic overextension, not unlike eternal truth and "the meaning of history." This overextension is rooted in the notion of a "totality" of consciousness. When the total concept of ideology refers to such a totality, it refers not to a mere sum but to the totality in the sense of a superficial concept of the whole. Just as it is said that all parts of an organism carry in themselves the mark of the living being, the parts of consciousness are supposed to contain the characteristics of the totality to which they belong. On the basis of such formal elements as the "style" of thought and judgment, we are supposed to be able to construct an ideal totality to which it is bound by inner necessity. But the notion of consciousness as a unified whole completely contradicts its unique character. The concept of totality, conceived in terms regularly misunderstood outside the realm of Gestalt research, has proven fruitful in recent biology, and especially in "Gestalt psychology." Here it has been possible to identify real events that are governed by Gestalt laws. But the consciousness of a human

being and the historical "systems of *Weltanschauungen*" have no such characteristic. A simple perception and a complex scientific theory, an isolated emotion and the enduring attitude toward one's fellow human beings, are bound up with the particular relations under which they appear. To these relations belong not only the instinctual structure of the individual but the influence of the dead and the living environment as well. Changes in the environment of individuals do not take place on the basis of the same conditions as their personal development (which is, of course, influenced by those changes). Thus conscious experience necessarily emerges in any given situation, but it is the result of quite multifarious causes. On the basis of psychological experience—that is, given some understanding of how a certain kind of entity tends to react in certain situations—we can certainly hold well-founded expectations about what will take place in its consciousness in this or that case. But without particular attention to the relations of noncognitive reality, it is impossible to construct a unified "world motive" [*Weltwollen*] on the basis of knowledge concerning certain parts of consciousness, and from which one would be able to comprehend these parts as deriving from a unifying principle. The notion that one could understand a *Weltanschauung* purely on the basis of investigations of intellectual constructs, without consideration of the material conditions of their emergence and existence, is an idealist illusion. Surely it is not difficult to recognize an idea as part of those views in the context of which it is typically found. Surely research in the most various areas has come so far as to be able to establish on the basis of apparently insignificant characteristics the society and the epoch from which an intellectual construct derives. Surely, alongside many discontinuities, elements of purely intellectual "affinity" are to be found in the ideas and more generally in the modes of individual and social life of a given epoch. But the leap from this pedestrian historian's knowledge, so to speak, to the assertion of a "total psychic-spiritual structured context belonging to the social and historical reality of a specific epoch"[14] is a leap from empirical science to Hegel's theory of the *Volksgeister,* which are resurrected as "world postulates" or "objective structural contexts."

Despite Mannheim's repeated insistence that these cognitive unities are closely bound up with the fate of the classes "committed" to their existence, his idealist project of conceiving intellectual processes as

unsullied by the raw power struggles of real human beings is so strong that the vague relationship between being and consciousness appears as a merely external juxtaposition, indeed as a predestined arrangement. For him, there exist the mundane struggles of everyday historical life, and *next to them also* the conflicts of the "systems of *Weltanschauungen.*" What is curious here is that each of the contending groups has laid claim to and persists in advocating one of these systems—but one knows not why: "We find in a given stage of history not only antagonistic groups with different social interests, but also *with them at the same time* a conflict of opposed world postulates." Just as the gods associated with the warring Greeks and Trojans warred among themselves above the troops, according to this modern sociology one is supposed to see "worlds . . . against worlds" struggling above the social classes.[15]

If the transformation of the concept of ideology from the particular to the total shifts our attention from real events upward to the misty regions of contending "world postulates," its further development takes the ground out from under our feet. For on the level of the total concept of ideology, upon which Marx is supposed to have stood, the "ideological character" of an overall perspective was at least judged from the standpoint of a theory understood as itself nonideological. With the removal of this restriction on the total concept of ideology—that is, with its transformation into the general concept—this distinction falls away, and "the thought of all parties in all epochs" is branded as "ideology" (77). Herewith the concept of ideology is cleansed of the residues of its accusatory meaning, and its integration into the philosophy of mind is complete. If all thought as such is to be characterized as ideological, it becomes apparent that ideology, just like "particularity," signifies nothing other than inadequacy to eternal truth. There may, of course, be certain differences in the genuineness or obsolescence of given ideas, but they are all fundamentally "ideological" because they are "situationally determined."

A consistent application of the general concept of ideology would have to call into question one's own theories about "being," about the structure of *Weltanschauungen,* and about the connection between the two if one is to speak—in contrast with the foregoing—in a determinate sense about the ideas, about their "correspondence," and about "being." With the "special" conception of the concept of ideology, it

appeared as if a definite theory was considered compelling—namely, the Marxist analysis of society as classes in conflict. In the substantive portions of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, this being is characterized among other things as "class society,"[16] as aristocracy, bureaucracy, and bourgeoisie. Now that it is recognized that Marxism's "own position is subject to the same criticism" (105)—now that it is emphatically demanded that Marxism reflect upon itself and recognize its own ideological character—this basic element of Marx's theory must also fall into disrepute. What is to constitute the fundamental sociological idea with respect to the categorization of various modes of thought, if not precisely this or some other specific theory of social structure? Without such a theory, the term "situationally determined" completely lacks content and draws dangerously close to the concept of being at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic,* where it has the dialectical tendency to transform itself into that of nothingness. The ground is really pulled out from under us. "Being," upon which all ideas are said to be dependent, retains in Mannheim's usage a certain relevance to social groups. But because the theory which offers an analysis of these groups is essentially only introduced in order to call it into question, we remain completely in the dark about the actual meaning of "situational determination." It can be interpreted by Marxists as categorization into social classes divided according to ownership relations, and by the declared enemies of the materialist conception of history, with Mannheim's agreement, as dependence upon a "particular mentality."[17] When, in the central parts of this sociology of knowledge, reference is made to a very general notion of connection "to the actually existing social situation" (78) or merely to "situational determination," Troeltsch's discussion of the concept of the social is particularly appropriate: "It is impossible to speak of society, as the essence of all large and small sociological circles and their mutual interpenetration and influence, as something comprehensible and scientifically useful. In the infinitude of its construction and of the arbitrary connection of phenomena from any given perspective, society is something quite unimaginable: an abstraction, like culture and history more generally, about which only the dilettantes talk in terms of their totality."[18] According to Troeltsch, the concept of "social" being "can only mean society organized according to its division of

labor, its social classes, its production of goods, and its exchange on the basis of economic need, together with its manifold complications."[19] Clearly, such determinate concepts of society would not just bring Mannheim's theory of the situational determination of all thought closer to the historical materialism which he declares to be ideological; they would entail an expansion of Marxism itself into adventurism. For one would go well beyond Marx if one were to assert that to each determinate class situation there belongs an entire *Weltanschauung*, with form and content, including all judgments and "subconscious" metaphysical decisions. In this specific version, the untenability of the general, total concept of ideology becomes completely clear. With the empty concept of "being" that appears in the central parts of the sociology of knowledge, in contrast, one can include in this assertion all theories—including one's own—as well as God and the world. The sociology of knowledge is scientifically meaningless, and has significance at best in the context of an absolute philosophy of quite dubious value.

The question of the correctness or falsity of equally situationally determined ideologies can only be put in terms of a judgment of their appropriateness for their time. The fundamentally spiritualistic attitude of this sociology emerges nowhere more clearly than in such an examination. The sociology of knowledge must remain arbitrary and unreliable because the determination of what is appropriate for the time and what is obsolete is not made on the basis of an explicit, scientific theory of society. Beyond that, however, this sociology takes to the limit its intention of substituting considerations of the history of ideas for investigation of the actual conditions which determine the relations between the real struggles of human beings and their ideas. Mannheim characterizes as an example of false (because antiquated) consciousness "a landed proprietor whose estate has already become a capitalistic undertaking, but who still attempts to explain his relations to his laborers and his own function in the undertaking by means of categories reminiscent of the patriarchal order" (96). In this case, Mannheim measures inappropriateness in terms of a theory which, like every natural-scientific theory, must raise the claim of "nonideological" correctness, and which declares on the basis of numerous observations that the relationship of the landowner to his workers is

"capitalistic," and thus cannot be comprehended in feudal terms. To base one's commitment to this theory on the grounds of its appropriateness to the epoch, which is precisely the basis upon which the theory is to be judged, would be circular. It is not this logical inadequacy that is characteristic of such efforts, however, but rather its fundamental restriction to the cognitive realm. What concerns Mannheim in this example is the fact that the landowner "fails epistemologically in comprehending the actual world [M.]" (96). Whether this "failure" in the intersubjective reality—in this case, in the actual relationship between landowner and agricultural laborer—also constitutes a shortcoming, or indeed whether this failure inevitably shapes that relationship, is never considered. The most important task of a sociology of knowledge, however, would be to investigate the extent to which the nature of such relationships affects adherence to the old way of thinking and, vice versa, what effect the latter has on the former. In Mannheim's work, attention is diverted from the social function of the "ideology" to exclusively intellectual considerations.

Throughout Mannheim, the sociological concepts are so attenuated that, in the end, they are no longer useful for understanding social life. A "diagnosis of the time" that operates primarily with the imprecise, idealist notions of this sociology of knowledge must yield an extremely one-sided picture. To be sure, it raises the claim of "analyzing . . . a cross-section of the total intellectual and social situation of our time" (93), but this cross-section leaves untouched the most important parts of social reality. In its "situational report" on the present, no real misery appears under the terms "need" and "crisis"; the "curiously appalling trend of modern thought" (87) refers essentially to the fate of the "category of the absolute." The "profound disquietude which we feel in our present intellectual situation" derives not from the condition of reality, but rather from the "notion of the possibility of a totally false consciousness [M.]" (70). And the "profound dilemma from which all our questions arise can be summed up in the single question: How can human beings still think and live at all in an epoch in which the problem of ideology and utopia has once been stated in radical terms and thought out to its conclusions?"[20]

Even in its application to well-defined, concrete subjects—such as in the investigations of "conservative thought,"[21] which are explicitly characterized as "sociological contributions to the development of

political-historical thought in Germany"—there are only scant references to the connections between social reality and the group of ideas branded as "conservative." The historical relations of the carriers of this thought, their relationship to other social strata, and the overall political situation are only occasionally touched upon, as if the constellation of "conservative" ideas could possibly be understood without careful discussion of these matters. The entire work is restricted almost exclusively to "the phenomenological-logical analysis of style," "immanent analysis of *Weltanschauung*," analysis of "experience," analysis of the confluence of various styles of thought, and similar dissections of cognitive constructs.

According to its own convictions, the sociology of knowledge represents a form of thought "which moves at the forefront of the real problematic of an epoch, and which is capable of seeing beyond any particular controversy [M.]". In the process, it employs an extremely "radical" terminology and Marxist modes of thinking. With its attempt to restore these tools of thought to the service of a philosophy of spirit from whose Hegelian form Marx had dissolved them, however, the sociology of knowledge ultimately leads to the idealist reinterpretation of existing contradictions as mere oppositions of ideas, "styles of thought," and "systems of *Weltanschauung*." Whereas Marx was concerned to distinguish real insights from the mystifying cloak of ideology, for Mannheim everything amounts to a question of the contradictions between finite and infinite truth. Ultimately, Mannheim distinguishes himself from those irresponsible philosophers whose blindness he claims is caused by their persistence in a " 'higher' realm" (104) only in that he returns there himself with a few weapons from the arsenal of Marxism.