

## Philosophy and sociology\*

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The arguments that follow focus closely on Karl Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie*,<sup>1</sup> and constitute an attempt to analyse the foundation Mannheim has provided there for sociology and the aspirations this discipline has set for itself. They will not directly address Mannheim's analyses of individual historical cases, in which he is far more competent than this reviewer. Instead, assuming that readers are already familiar with Mannheim's book, I will confine my examination here to the fundamental philosophical purpose of the work, which is to reveal the precariousness of modern spirituality (*Geistigkeit*) from an historical perspective. What significance does this insight into the precariousness of spirituality have for philosophy? What is the nature of the problems raised in this context that it can so disturb philosophy?

Mannheim's book disturbs philosophy for the following reason: Although he argues that every intellectual expression is bound to a certain position, indeed, a political position, Mannheim himself adopts none of these positions. At best he inquires after the social conditions in which such lack of commitment to a specific position is possible. It is at this point that sociology touches on philosophical issues and has something to say to philosophy. Despite its attempts at analytical dissection (*Destruktion*), sociology is nevertheless in search of 'reality' (p. 54; p. 87) rather than in search of socio-economic interest as a foundation of theory. It seeks out that which is pragmatically valuable for orientation within the world.<sup>2</sup> The will to orient oneself in the world, however, implies that the spiritual sphere is significant, that lack of commitment to a particular position involves awareness of the potential fruitfulness of neutrality. It is precisely this which distinguishes Mannheim's position from that of Georg Lukács. Although Lukács also challenges the assumption that the intellectual sphere can claim priority, in contrast to Mannheim he speaks from the standpoint of the proletariat, thereby imperceptibly and without hesitation adopting its concept of interests.<sup>3</sup> This proves very fruitful in a concrete interpretation.

Such a detachment from every standpoint, however, which involves awareness that the principled lack of commitment to a position is itself historically conditioned, is significant for philosophy in two ways: First, for Mannheim inquiry after reality means inquiry into the true origins of spirituality. Second, by

extending his approach to *all* positions, which are thereby radically relativised, he comes to the conclusion that every 'interpretation of existence (*Seinsauslegung*)'<sup>4</sup> is a means of orientation in a particular historical world whose meaning is constituted by human communal life.

In philosophical terms, the problem which lies at the heart of Mannheim's sociology is the uncertain nature of the relationship of the ontic to the ontological.<sup>5</sup> Where philosophy inquires after the 'being of the essent' (*Sein des Seienden*, Heidegger) or the self-understanding of 'existence' (*Existenz*, Jaspers) in its detachment from everyday life, sociology, by contrast, inquires after the 'essent' which is the basis for this 'existential interpretation'. It is interested precisely in what philosophy judges to be irrelevant.

According to Mannheim, all human thought is 'existentially bound', that is, it can only be understood in terms of the specific situation in which it arose. This is also true of philosophical thought, which claims to be independent of all special ties and wants to be taken for the truth as such. It declares itself to be *absolute*. This claim cannot be refuted simply by a general demonstration that philosophical thought is bound to a particular situation. There is only one way to refute it: to show in each case how the philosophy in question is rooted in a specific situation. Existential bondedness is not only *conditio sine qua non* but also *conditio per quam*. If the vital bondedness of thought were only *conditio sine qua non*, nothing would be revealed about the spiritual meaning contents themselves, in spite of their state of detached objectivity. Real genesis (*Realgenese*) does not simply turn into meaning genesis (*Sinngenese*). In each particular case, existential bondedness must not only be acknowledged in an abstract sense but also concretely shown to be the driving force. The spiritual contents can then be defined as a special type of this transformation which is itself vitally bound (philosophy, for example, can first emerge only from within a particular social position). Only at this point can the absolute separation between ontology and the ontic be overcome in favour of the ontic. In its historical changeability, the ontic either gives rise to or destroys a variety of ontologies. The showing of an indissoluble bond between the spheres of being and the essent is greatest where the consciousness of the absolute is traced back to its ontic determinants and is thereby refuted. Thus, critical analysis not only *relativises* (which would be quite innocuous) but it also is capable of refutation. It strips consciousness of its absolute claims and unmasks it as *ideology* in the sense of a 'total ideology' (p. 8; p. 49), that is, as a consciousness unaware of its determining ontic factors and one which believes itself to be unconditional. The important point here is not merely the fact that the ontological is bound to the ontic. Exposing ontology as ideology also means that, as ontology, it is the result of concealments *rooted in the essent itself*.

Philosophy not only transcends everyday reality but it originates in it in the sense that everyday life provides its decisive motivations; reality is *conditio per quam*. From a sociological point of view, philosophy is no longer the answer to the question of the 'being of the essent', because as an essent among other

essents, it is chained to and entangled in the world of the essents and in the forces that motivate them. The ultimate reality of philosophy is here called into question by reference to a 'more original' reality which philosophy has supposedly forgotten. Indeed, its transcendence is understood as a straightforward case of 'having forgotten', and its absolutist claims are a consequence of having neglected its own historical rootedness. As a result, it is not only philosophy's claim to be absolute that is challenged but also its validity in more specific situations. Sociology brings up a question which is itself philosophical – that of the meaning of philosophy.

Before examining Mannheim's response to this question, it will be helpful to consider briefly two modern philosophical approaches against which Mannheim's book is polemically directed. I will intentionally summarise in a somewhat one-sided fashion only those themes which are essential for a preliminary orientation.

Karl Jaspers has made human existence a theme for philosophy. In his view, existence does not refer to the continuity of everyday life but to the few 'boundary situations'<sup>6</sup> in which the human being is authentically himself and becomes aware of his own independent existence, as well as of the general uncertainty of the human situation. Everyday life represents a 'sliding off' from these 'boundary situations' and from 'being authentically oneself'. The human being is therefore really only himself when he is detached from and free of the everyday here and now in which he must constantly prove himself, i.e., he is himself only when he is in the absolute solitude of the 'boundary situation'. It is of little importance here that Jaspers argues that everyday life, and 'sliding off' into it, are prerequisites of human existence. The term 'sliding off' is implicitly negative and everyday life itself is explained by way of what is 'not everyday'. Sociology attempts to take exactly the opposite position: it understands the 'not everyday' as a mode of the everyday. We shall later ask to what extent sociology succeeds in this attempt. In any case, sociology maintains that the everyday here and now is itself a concrete reality, and that even 'peak moments' must be viewed in terms of historical continuity and merely relative validity. From this point of view, solitude appears as a negative mode of human existence, as escape from and anxiety about the world, or (in Mannheim's terms) as a consciousness 'that is incongruous with the state of "being" within which it occurs' (p. 169, p. 173; cf. also pp. 52f., p. 86).

In its basic approach to everyday life, sociology inclines toward Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Heidegger proceeds from everyday human existence (*Dasein*) – for our purposes, from everyday human communal life – in which '*Dasein* maintains itself proximally and for the most part'.<sup>7</sup> He calls it *das Man*, the 'they'. Each individual human being owes so much to the human community and the historical world that the state of being authentically oneself 'does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the "they"; it is rather an *existentiell* modification of the "they" – of the "they" as an essential *existentiale*'.<sup>8</sup> Being human is in essence 'Being-in-the-world'.<sup>9</sup>

his basic philosophical premise, *Dasein* is therefore understood as existence in a particular world. Like Jaspers, Heidegger describes a 'basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness as a "falling" *Dasein*'. Authenticity, *Dasein*'s 'potentiality for Being its Self' first becomes possible after we have rescued ourselves from the unavoidable state of 'Being-lost in the publicness of the "they"'.<sup>10</sup>

We can now identify a double polemic here: First (as above against Jaspers), the possibility of being free from the 'they' is called into question together with authenticity (which Heidegger demonstrates in his notion of 'Being-towards-death'<sup>11</sup> and Jaspers in his 'borderline situations'). Second, this implicitly calls into question as well the appropriateness of the categories of authenticity and inauthenticity and suggests instead a concept of 'being' that lies beyond the alternatives of authenticity and inauthenticity, of genuineness and ingenueness, since all these categories can apparently be employed entirely arbitrarily. It is no longer self-evident here why 'being myself' should take precedence over 'being part of the "they"'. The neutrality which is typical of all those categories is a result of a radical relativisation and historicisation. The sociologist is not just interested in the phenomenon of the 'they' but he is especially 'interested to find out how it arose . . . where the philosopher stops . . . the work of the sociologist begins'.<sup>12</sup> This implies that the 'they' does not necessarily always exist. Not only may the degree of its compelling power and explicitness change in the course of history,<sup>13</sup> but, in addition, there could also be a kind of human historical existence for which the 'they' (and thus a public interpretation of existence) would not exist at all (as opposed to not yet having been *discovered*). The sociologist does not approach 'Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*)' as a formal structure of historical existence, but he rather inquires into the particular historical world in which the human being lives. This self-limitation of sociology at first appears to be harmless, since sociology does little more than define the limits of its own competence. However, once sociology in fact claims that the world will never be understood as a formal structure of human existence but can only be grasped in substantive terms, as associated with a particular way of life, it poses a threat to philosophy. Sociology denies the possibility of an ontological interpretation of human existence, and it argues that the ontological structures of human existence – to the extent that their immutability (cf. hunger and sex) is beyond question – are unessential and of no further concern to us. In every attempt to explain our own existence we are thrown back upon the ever-changing ontic element, which, opposed to the 'theories' of philosophers, endures as the only true *reality*. Although Mannheim does not explicitly say so in his book, we may infer from his basic premiss, that the spirit has no reality whatsoever.<sup>14</sup>

Everything spiritual is interpreted as either ideology or utopia. Both 'transcend existence' and stem from a consciousness 'that is incongruous with the state of existence within which it occurs' (p. 169; p. 173). The *distrust* of the spirit which can be discerned in sociology and in its effort at critical analysis is the result of the homelessness to which the spirit has been condemned in our society (p. 128; p. 142). This homelessness and apparent uprootedness ('socially

unattached intelligentsia') (p. 123; p. 137) casts suspicion on everything spiritual. A reality more original than the spirit itself is sought, and in terms of its image all spiritual and intellectual expressions are interpreted or critically dissected. Critical dissection here does not simply refer to destruction but rather to a tracing back of the claim to validity to the particular situation in which it arose.

Psychoanalysis also claims to have discovered a more original reality in the same way. Two points distinguish it from Mannheim's approach, quite apart from the fact that psychoanalysis can only be a 'partial' and never a 'total' ideology (pp. 9f.; pp. 50f.). First, Mannheim to some extent accepts the validity of the spiritual sphere as bound to a particular situation, while psychoanalysis sees everything spiritual as 'repression' or 'sublimation'. Accordingly, for psychoanalysis the spirit possesses no validity whatsoever and does not even become manifest in a truly unrepressed (that is, properly functioning) consciousness. Second, and this is the crucial point, for the reality which psychoanalysis critically analyses, meaning and spirit are alien. The unconscious, to which everything is traced back, will never be fully under human control. It represents the ahistorical sphere as such. Sociology, by contrast, is committed to history, i.e., to what is (or once was) within the bounds of human freedom. Both sociology and psychoanalysis, however, call for a method of interpretive understanding that is fundamentally different from the typical method of the human sciences. Theirs is not a *direct* understanding which takes its object at face value, nor is it unmediated analysis; instead, it follows a detour by way of a reality which is held to be a *more original* one. The approaches of both sociology and psychoanalysis consider the spirit as secondary, as alien to reality. The 'reality' of psychoanalysis, however, is far more alien to the spirit than is the reality of sociology which, by way of an understanding of the 'collective subject', calls for an interpretive understanding that is rooted in the historical and social milieu (p. 8; p. 49). Sociology sees as its most essential task the apprehension of history by way of critical analysis. It is thereby turned into an historical science.

Two questions now arise: first the philosophical question regarding both the reality to which all spiritual matters are reduced as well as the manner in which spirituality transcends reality; second, the question of competent historical research.

The reality which is primary in relation to spirituality is the vital level from which spirituality originates – the 'concretely effective order of life'. It, in turn, 'is to be conceived and characterised most clearly by means of the particular economical and political structure on which it is based' (p. 171; p. 174). This may at first sound as if the economic order from which we infer each particular effective order of life (i.e., reality), is little more than a heuristic principle. The very fact that it is such a principle, however, that something can be inferred from it and that it constitutes a more authentic measure of reality than any intellectual or spiritual expression, is of fundamental significance. The assertion that all philosophical knowledge is existentially bound not only fails to refute philosophy, but may even provide support for it, although philosophy's claim that

it is absolute (a claim which it could in fact renounce without losing its meaning) is thereby made relative and may even be altogether invalidated.

Mannheim himself argues that it is precisely the fact of this vital bondedness of thought that offers 'a chance for knowledge' (p. 35; p. 72). This type of knowledge goes beyond the noncommittalism and vacuity of assertions that are supposed to apply to everyone (p. 41; p. 72). Knowledge can, in fact, substantiate its uniqueness precisely by reference to the particular forces to which it is bound. In this process of coming to terms with a particular situation, the question of meaning is bound to arise. How a particular truth has emerged is not necessarily relevant to the question of its originality and 'genuineness'. It is, after all, 'easily possible that there are truths or correct intuitions which are accessible only to a certain individual disposition or to a definite orientation of interests of a certain group' (p. 138; p. 149). Only someone who mistakes particular historical 'origins', for example the origins of Western history, with 'origin as such', can deny this fact. Even a simple example can show that this is impermissible: As we know today, it was more natural for the early Greeks to communicate in metrical language than in prose; in our own time, however, it would be taken as a sign of extreme lack of originality and even affectation to cultivate this habit as being 'more original' and to prefer speaking in verse to speaking in prose. This example shows that 'origin (*Ursprung*)' and 'originality (*Ursprünglichkeit*)' are not identical. Each age has its own originality.

As Mannheim emphasises (p. 33; p. 70), to view something as relative because of its existential bondedness constitutes *relativism* only so long as interpretive historical understanding is combined with a concept of truth which is itself bound to a tradition and belongs to an age in which 'existentially connected thinking' had not yet been discovered. Mannheim's 'relationism', on the other hand, implies a new concept of knowledge, discovered by way of interpretive historical understanding, according to which the truth is always existentially bound. Existence, however, in which every spiritual expression is grounded, is defined as the social state of communal life which is inferred, in turn, from the 'economic power structure'. It is therefore from the beginning presupposed as self-evident that the existence to which the spirit is bound, the reality for the sake of which it is critically analysed, is a *public existence* (*öffentliches Sein*). This assertion follows from the conviction that this state of existence alone is historically changeable, in contrast to 'such natural and inevitable limitations as birth and death' (p. 167; p. 170). This public existence, which is considered to be the ultimate reality (*Welt*), also determines individual existences who are confronting it. Only in this conflict between public and private existence can individual human life become *historical existence* (p. 141; p. 151). The view that the historical world is most clearly evident in the economic sphere implies that it is most univocally itself where it is most thoroughly alienated from meaning and from the spirit. For this reason, the spirit by necessity always 'transcends reality'. It is not yet reality itself, although it may know how to arrange itself with the existing economic and social reality, if only in the sense of discovering in it an incentive for revolution.

In its analytical attempts, sociology presupposes the spirit as homeless, as living in a profoundly alien world.<sup>15</sup> For this alien world, the spirit is transcendent; however, if in spite of its fundamental transcendence it is nonetheless brought into a relation with the world, it becomes either *ideology* or *utopia*.

If we pursue this line of reasoning still further, we come to the following realisation: Underlying the view that every spiritual (and intellectual) expression is either utopian or ideological is the conviction that spirit can only emerge once consciousness no longer coincides with the social existence in which it finds itself and with which it must come to terms. Consciousness and ideas are 'true' if they contain 'neither less nor more than the reality in whose medium [they] operate' (p. 54; p. 87). In this sphere of congruency, however, it has not yet been discovered that the spirit can transcend existence. This discovery becomes possible only once consciousness calls into question reality itself and inquires after the authentic and true reality as such. Such a consciousness, however, is 'false consciousness' if 'in a given practical situation it uses categories which, if taken seriously, would prevent man from adjusting himself at that historical stage' (p. 51; p. 85). Every ideology has its origin in 'false consciousness', usually a false consciousness that employs 'categories which are inappropriate' (p. 53; p. 86). In other words, in ideology a past state of things, to which the individual is still bound, is set up in thought as an absolute, in order to struggle against a new reality of life with which the individual cannot cope. Ideology can therefore critically dissect only the mere ghosts 'with which we ourselves are not too intimately identified' (pp. 43f., n. 1; pp. 78f., n. 1). A consciousness is utopian, on the other hand, if it tends to 'shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time' (p. 169; p. 173) for the sake of a future world toward which it is oriented. It is 'relevance to reality (*Wirklichkeitsrelevanz*)' that distinguishes utopia from ideology (p. 29; p. 66). As utopia, the spirit's inevitable transcendence of existence becomes once again part of reality and, accordingly, possesses a certain power over it, although the spirit always transcends every particular reality.

For ideology, by contrast, either a world that existed in the past may become the criterion of relevance to reality since, as a matter of principle, it rejects translation into contemporary reality (for example, the romantic ideology of the Middle Ages), or a 'world beyond' that transcends existence in an absolute sense (for example, Christian religiosity) is presupposed and consequently becomes disinterested in the existing world. What fundamentally distinguishes utopia from ideology is thus its willingness to face reality. Utopia creates a new reality and thereby becomes a force to be reckoned with. It is only as utopia that the spirit can create a new reality with which to confront the reality to which it is actually bound. Sociology, in other words, is not primarily concerned with reality as such but rather with a *reality which has power over the spirit*. It possesses this power because reality is essentially foreign to the spirit, as for example in ideology, where the spirit fails to take account of the world as it actually is at the time. The spirit thus neglects precisely that which allowed it to become spirit in the first

place and to which it remains implicitly bound, although it inevitably forgets this fact. Sociology identifies those determinants of thought in which thinking takes no interest. It thereby demonstrates that the passion for the unconditional is actually little more than an implicit forgetting of the conditioning factors. This passion for the absolute is typical for both ideology and utopia, since utopia too is convinced that the world it evokes is an absolute one. For this reason they can both be invalidated. Sociology claims to be the 'key science' (p. 233; p. 222) because it alone is able to identify these determinants.

This effort to demonstrate a thoroughgoing determination of thought soon comes up against 'spheres of inseparability' (p. 163; p. 167). There remains, as the residue of freedom of thought, the 'metaphysical ontological value-judgment' which no destruction of ideology can really shake and no analysis of the economic structure can really diminish. It can only be delayed by 'increased knowledge' (pp. 43, 165; pp. 78, 169). There remains, in addition, the 'ecstatic realm beyond history' which 'somehow exists as something which time and again, as it were, puts meaning into history and into social experience'; it is conceded that 'history time and again departs from it' (p. 47; p. 82). The 'delayed metaphysical value-judgment' and the ecstatic realm beyond history, the existence of which is ultimately 'admitted', constitute the outer limits of what we can know through sociology. This fact gives them a peculiar character. Because sociology claims to be the key science, whatever becomes visible only at its outer limits necessarily assumes a curious *boundary character*. Sociology believes that it is only possible to encounter these phenomena once everything that can be known historically has in fact been invalidated. Because sociology has proclaimed the homelessness of the spirit (of ideology and utopia) in the world, it believes that freedom of the spirit (understood as *primum movens*) can only exist beyond *historical communal life*. The spirit therefore exists *authentically* precisely in a state of total lack of reference ('ecstatic realm beyond history'), of ahistoricity. (This remarkable fact, however, is paradoxical only on the surface.) Only what the spirit effects is part of history and can be studied. Given its fundamental lack of reference, it can only be characterised *negatively*, and in deliberately indeterminate terms (such as 'somehow', 'as it were', 'being human is more than') (p. 47; p. 82).

In its unknowable authorship – an authorship that can only be discovered by negation – the spirit stands in a relationship to those communal human associations that can in fact be experienced and explored, and that are comparable to the relationship of the God of negative theology to the actual world he has created. From the point of view of this actual world, God can only be described negatively, as something he is *not*. Indeed, we may pursue this curious parallel to negative theology even further and argue that negative theology too was only able to deduce God's *existence* from what was already given, and that this existence represents the *limits* of human experience. We can then compare this to sociology where human freedom, and thus also freedom of the spirit, has been turned into a mysterious borderline fact of human knowledge. The human spirit



thereby transcends its own human world to a greater degree than even sociology had thought possible. Sociological inquiry (in Mannheim's sense) emerged at a time when the spirit perceived itself as reality-transcendent. The sociologist nevertheless saw spirit as rooted in and as arising from a reality that was different in each particular case. Sociology challenges precisely the notion of a transcendence of existence, which the spirit had asserted in its claims to be absolute, by interpreting this transcendence as determined by the essent itself. Its interpretation is based on the argument that thought is only capable of transcending reality once humans can no longer tolerate reality and are no longer at home in it. Transcendence is thus interpreted as a flight from a reality which is inadequate to consciousness. But by understanding the spirit's transcendence as *flight*, sociology fails to do justice to certain very distinct human possibilities and only *appears* to be capable of unmasking these. Unanticipated results of its analysis consequently push sociology in the direction of a much greater radical transcendence than even the spirit would have claimed for itself. A curious phenomenon results from sociology's unwillingness to admit to the possible primacy of the spiritual sphere and even from the critical analysis itself which never even defined its own limits (this could not meaningfully be accomplished, of course, since something immune to criticism can only be discovered by way of critical analysis): the spirit, now a transcendent and ahistorical one, alone remains in place, since the reality of history is understood in such a way that there is in it no room for the spirit any longer.

Sociology considers this phenomenon to be unexplainable and can shed no further light on it. For philosophy, however, this phenomenon need not remain in this indeterminate, negative state. The 'ecstatic realm beyond history' is basically identical with human historical existence, with 'existence' in Kierkegaard's sense. And philosophy is perfectly capable of speaking about it. What was originally a courageous and virtuous attempt to deny the existence of transcendence, to subject everything to universal critical analysis, ultimately must lead to the admission that a residue remains that cannot be invalidated and which is then equated with transcendence. Sociology thereby relegates phenomena to the sphere of the irreducible which philosophy with good reason does not consider to be transcendent at all.

*Distrust* of the spirit eliminates the spirit in another sense as well. On the one hand, the spirit is pushed toward absolute transcendence. On the other, it is relativised at the level of the 'collective subject', which is considered to be the authentic bearer of history. In our opinion, however, this 'collective subject' is actually relatively *more removed from history*. The individual is not only relegated to this collective subject and co-determines it but (especially once his own being becomes a factor in history) he exists in a state of *separation* from it which arises when the individual is no longer in tune with the social existence to which he belongs. In this state of separation, the actual historical world into which he was born becomes simply something that is extant (*das Vorhandene*) and at hand (*das Vorfindliche*) and thus, precisely because of this detachment, something that

changes and can be changed. Mannheim uses the term 'utopian consciousness' to describe this freedom from 'public existence', which views the world as something that is to be changed. The following assumptions are implicit in his interpretation of this type of consciousness: The will to change the world arises because consciousness does not coincide with the prevailing public existence. This also leads to a certain freedom from the world. Even detachment is understood as a separation from the given world. The possibility of 'freedom from' is itself the result of being 'existentially bound'. Genuine solitude is thus never seen in positive terms as a realistic alternative. Although it should indeed be argued against philosophy that authenticity does not always require its absolute separation from communal life, Mannheim's explicit assumption must nevertheless be challenged that authenticity is always inextricably bound to community, that solitude can therefore be understood only negatively, as an avoidance of ideology or as flight into the future (utopia).

The criterion of 'relevance to reality' is consequently not always applicable to the two different ways of transcending existence, ideology and utopia. Transcending existence can be a *positive* way of saying nay (*Neinsagen*) to the world without being utopian (Christian love, for example). Mannheim would interpret Christian love as ideology inasmuch as the religious person believes that love can only be realised, as utopia, by absolute transcendence, inasmuch as he wants to achieve God's kingdom on earth. There is a third possibility, however, which does not represent an arbitrary example, but was in fact a crucial element in the formulation of Christian love in ancient Christianity; this is the possibility of living in the world while believing that Christian love cannot be realised on earth (eschatological consciousness). Such a detachment from the world does not lead to a desire to change it; yet it is also no flight from the historical world. For example, St Francis of Assisi lived in the world *as if it did not exist* and fulfilled this 'as-if-it-did-not-exist' in his own life.

Sociology can easily make the following objection to this particular argument: To interpret something as 'ideology' implies that its own ideological nature is concealed from the mind. Thus its self-image provides merely the *material* for sociological interpretation and communicates nothing directly to the interpreter. However, it is highly doubtful that this *self-interpretation* can simply be skipped over in this manner. It may be that it contributes something new, that it makes itself into what it understands itself to be in the first place. The fact that all thought necessarily transcends existence invariably goes along with separation and detachment from the particular situation. This detachment may be the decisive fact underlying all intellectual and spiritual expressions but it can nonetheless be interpreted in different ways. The interpretation is not (or at least not always) simply added on to the fact (e.g., as ideological superstructure, in the view of the study of ideologies), but it rather *makes* this fact into one which can be interpreted in the first place and thereby valid and effective in the historical world. It is thus only as 'ideology' that it can become 'historical'.

In his essay, 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism', Max Weber

has described how a specific public state of existence (capitalism) arises from a specific form of solitude and its self-image (Protestantism).<sup>16</sup> A state of bondedness, originally religious in nature, according to which the world is not one's home, creates a world of everyday life which leaves little room for the unique individual. It does not create this world because it possesses utopian consciousness, as in the case of the chiliastic movement,<sup>17</sup> but rather in consequence of seeing it as the *expression* of a profound feeling of not being in the world, yet having to come to terms with it. The world is here understood negatively, as a world in which one is compelled to do one's duty. This is the only sort of world that must be permitted to exist, since otherwise it would demand that human beings be committed to it. Only when the religious bond has disappeared, does the public sphere become so powerful that solitude is possible only as flight from it. For this to happen, the self-created world must first be defined in terms of a world that originally did not exist: that of economy and society. Nowadays we are perhaps so much at the mercy of this public state of existence that even the possibility of our detachment from it can only be defined, indirectly, as 'being free from it'. This does not alter the fact that the public sphere need not always be dominant. Only once the 'economic power structure' has become so overwhelming that the spirit which created it is no longer truly at home in it, will it be possible to interpret spiritual expressions as ideology or utopia.<sup>18</sup>

Sociology too therefore has its own historical location from which it was first able to arise – this is the point where the legitimate distrust of the spirit grew from its homelessness. As an historical science, sociology thus has very specific limits to its *historical jurisdiction*. To critically analyse spiritual phenomena as ideology or utopia is only justified where the economic sphere has become so dominant that the spirit can, and in fact must, become 'ideological superstructure'. The prior reality of the 'economic power structure' has its own history and is an integral part of the modern history of thought.

Groups of pre-capitalistic origin, in which the communal element prevails, may be held together by traditions or by common sentiments alone. In such a group, theoretical reflection is of entirely secondary importance. On the other hand, in groups which are not welded together primarily by such organic bonds of communal life, but which merely occupy similar positions in the socio-economic system, rigorous theorising is a prerequisite of cohesion.

(pp. 93f.; pp. 116f.)

Only where, for example, as a result of economic ascendancy, the individual is suddenly able to belong to a completely different life community and where, consequently, the self-evident feeling of 'being part of a community' is no longer present, can ideology emerge as a means of defending one's own position against the positions of others. Only at this point, because of the uncertainty in one's own situation, does the question of *meaning* arise. And only once the individual has

achieved a place in the world based on economic status rather than tradition, has he become homeless. It is only a result of this homelessness that the question can ultimately arise of the justness and meaning of social position.

This question of meaning, however, is far older than capitalism. It arises from an earlier experience in history of human uncertainty in the world – from Christianity. The concept of ideology – indeed, the fact of ideological thought itself – alludes to something positive: the question of meaning. To invalidate this question of meaning for the sake of a ‘more primary’ economic reality is only possible once the world and human life are indeed largely determined by economic factors, and once the reality to which the spirit is bound has become fundamentally foreign to both spirit and meaning. This was not the case originally (in contrast to the psychoanalytic concept of reality). Before Mannheim’s question of the social and historical place of the sociological approach can be posed, we must first address the problem of the actual state of things in which sociological analyses become historically possible.

#### Notes

- \* Translation by Clare McMillan and Volker Meja of ‘Philosophie und Soziologie’, *Die Gesellschaft*, 7, 1 (1930), pp. 163–176.
- 1 Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Bonn: Cohen, 1929).
- 2 Karl Mannheim, ‘Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz im Gebiete des Geistigen’, *Verhandlungen des sechsten deutschen Soziologentages in Zürich, 1928* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1929), p. 80 [‘Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon’, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 219].
- 3 Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin: Malik, 1923) [*History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1971)].
- 4 ‘Konkurrenz’, p. 45 [‘Competition’, p. 196].
- 5 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927), pp. 6f. [*Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 26].
- 6 Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin: Springer, 1925), pp. 229f.
- 7 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 117 [*Being and Time*, p. 153].
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 130 [p. 168].
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 53 [p. 78].
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 175 [p. 220].
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 260f. [pp. 304f.].
- 12 ‘Konkurrenz’, p. 46 [‘Competition’, p. 197].
- 13 *Sein und Zeit*, p. 129 [*Being and Time*, p. 167].
- 14 Cf. Max Scheler’s expression ‘the powerlessness of the spirit’, in ‘Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens’, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Der Neue Geist Verlag, 1926).
- 15 Mannheim explicitly discusses only the homelessness of the spirit in the present-day world, p. 128 [p. 142].
- 16 Max Weber, ‘Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus’, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921) [*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1958)].

- 17 Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, p. 191 [*Ideology and Utopia*, p. 190]. Mannheim argues that the spirit first becomes bound to particular social strata in the chiliastic movement. Only once this has happened, can something like utopia, in Mannheim's sense, arise.
- 18 For more on the contemporary homelessness of the spirit, which appears to be less socially bound than in previous ages, cf. *Ideologie und Utopie*, pp. 123f. [*Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 138f.].