

## THE LOGIC OF MANNHEIM'S SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Ivan Chapman, Oklahoma State University

### LOGIC

In traditional logic, propositions assert or deny something of something else. There is a subject about which an assertion is made, and the assertion about the subject which is the predicate. The subject and the assertion about the subject are called the *terms* of the proposition. The proposition is the synthesis or unity of these terms by means of a verb, *to be*. When assertions are made about objects, questions of the truth or falsity of these assertions may be raised. Such objects as *terms* are elements of propositions either as a class of objects or as attributes or characteristics which determine the objects. The first aspect where classes of objects as *terms* enter the proposition is called the *denotation* or *extension* of the term. The second aspect where attributes or characteristics which determine the objects as *terms* enter the proposition is called the *connotation* or *intension* of the term. The intension and extension of a term, although distinct as aspects, are inseparable. "Why a term is applied to a set of objects is indicated by its intension; the set of objects *to which* it is applicable constitutes its extension" (Cohen, Nagel 1934 31)

There are several senses in which the term *intension* may be employed. 1) *Subjective intension* is psychological and varies from person to person. It is sometimes taken to mean the sum total of the attributes which are present to the mind of any person employing the term. 2) The *conventional intension* or *connotation* signifies the set of attributes which by convention are essential or necessary in order for the object to enter as an element of the term. 3) The *objective intension* or *comprehension* signifies all of the attributes which the objects in the denotation of a term have in common, whether these attributes are known or not.

### SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Where the object or set of objects to be determined is *valid social knowledge*, the existence and validity of all three of these intensional variables of meaning must be maintained if the relation of ideas to their social base is to

be pursued in a logical manner required by the sociology of knowledge. The sociology of knowledge attempts to answer the question of how conventional knowledge is formed from the interaction of persons and objects in societies. The logical necessity of retaining all three variables of intensional meaning is based on the recognition that object qualities, comprehended and uncomprehended, including the psychologically apprehended meaning and the conventional attributed meaning are necessary parts of social knowledge.

In reference to social knowledge, according to Mannheim (1966 1), "This so-called pre-scientific inexact mode of thought, however ... is not to be understood solely by the use of logical analysis. It constitutes a complex which cannot be readily detached either from the psychological roots of the emotional and vital impulses which underlie it, or from the situation in which it arises and which it seeks to solve. ... It is the most essential task of this book, (*Ideology and Utopia*) to work out a suitable method for the description and analysis of this type of thought and its changes, and to formulate those problems connected with it which will both do justice to its unique character and prepare the way for critical understanding. The method which we will seek to present is that of the sociology of knowledge.

Mannheim's method was to reduce the three intensional meanings to one psychologically determined intensional meaning. This subjective meaning then made up the attributes and characteristics of the object which entered Mannheim's propositions and denoted social knowledge.

Mannheim offered three major propositions for performing this task. 1) Relativism is the old epistemology and it is false. 2) Relationism is the new epistemology, in two categories of *ideology* and *utopia*. Ideology is divided into *particular* and *total*. 3) The sociology of knowledge as the external view is the true historical comprehension of the relation between social existence and thought. The historical perspective, which transcends local and general interests of persons in society, is then imputed by sociologists of knowledge

as true social knowledge to those in error because of their ideological or utopian thinking (Mannheim 1966 276). This is *psychic annihilation* by Mannheim's own admission (1966 35). It is *imputing* in Gruenwald's terms (1970 215) in that the external view "... imputes an intellectual product posited by an individual, not to that individual, but to a concrete form of the layer of being which was made absolute behind the individual subject."

As a basis for imputing, Mannheim developed an historical perspective in which the development of ideology corresponded to his particular and total conceptions of ideology. This development was portrayed as an outcome of political conflict in which historically a rationalized struggle for social predominance was carried on at a political level in which the social status, public prestige and self-confidence of the opponent is attacked and unmasked as unconscious motives of cultural and group self-interest.

In the historical development and emergence of the general formulation of the total conception of ideology, "... the simple theory of ideology develops into the sociology of knowledge. What was once the intellectual armament of a party is transformed into a method of research in social and intellectual history generally." (Mannheim 1966 69)

From this perspective of the sociology of knowledge the old epistemology as *relativism* was to be displaced with a new perspective, *relationism* according to Mannheim (1966):

Once we recognize that all historical knowledge is relational knowledge, and can only be formulated with reference to the position of the observer, we are faced one more with the task of discriminating between what is true and what is false in such knowledge. (71) This means that the sociology of knowledge has the task of disentangling from every concretely existing bit of 'knowledge' the evaluative and the interest-bound element, and eliminating it as a source of error with a view to arriving at a 'non-evaluative' 'supra-social' and 'supra-historical' realm of 'objectively' valid truth. (166)

Mannheim's propositions of "objectively" valid truth thus become the criteria of true social knowledge. But imputed propositional truth is not limited to Mannheim (Weber 1949; Parsons 1951; Marx 1952; Dahrendorf 1959).

## CRITIQUE

Mannheim's method in the logic of the sociology of knowledge is precisely to eliminate from consideration in the makeup of "true" social knowledge other psychological propositions and inferences than his own about object qualities. He retains a single individual psychologically apprehended meaning which enters his propositions as Kantian a priori fixed forms of *true* object qualities or social knowledge, becoming the criterion of all social knowing. This negates all other psychologically apprehended meaning as well as all conventionally shared meaning.

Particular, unique, innovative, creative, psychological, intensional meaning is residual in the "I" component of each person where the components of whole persons are considered to be both "I" and "me" (Mead 1934; Cooley 1956; James 1952). In this consideration, meaning for the "I" is at least partly unconventionalized, while meaning for the "me" is conventional and shared meaning. This recognition of the unique meaning in each individual who participates in society is the recognition that every individual has some input into the makeup of social knowledge, so that any attempt at sociological understanding of the relation of knowledge to its social base is not at liberty to omit this input. This opens up the question of imputed idols of the mind, which, contrary to Bacon's view, when imputing is recognized, can be seen to be legitimate intensional meanings residual in the "I" component of each person, and always present in the makeup of social knowledge. Because these residual intensional meanings were alien to Bacon's intensionally apprehended qualities of *true* social knowledge, Bacon called them *idols*.

Similarly, Mannheim as a sociologist of knowledge, set forth his unique intensional "I" terms which entered into his propositions as denotative of *true* social knowledge, and assumed that his proposition in each case, consisting of unique intensional meaning, was not only representative of the object, but *was the object*, while all other propositions containing other psychological or conventional inferences about object qualities as social knowledge or attributes were *false*. Thus, Mannheim's propositions about social knowledge assumed the position of

independent variables to which all other variables must conform. The assumed, independent, external, and defining characteristic of Mannheim's propositions is thus seen as an illusion and false, much like the *illusion of centrality*, where each particular view seems to the holder to be universal and the center of the universe, yet being the smallest possible view of the universal (Cooley 1918 50).

Mannheim was uncertain as to what constituted the proper base for the critical stance in his sociology of knowledge. Where should he place the origin of particular intensional terms which entered his propositions, changing these propositions into unquestioned criteria of truth from which all inferences of social truth were to be made? The best he could do was to postulate some kind of free-floating intellectuals, or "socially unattached intelligentsia". But he negated this possibility in other propositions which asserted that society conditions all members (Mannheim 1966 136, 238). Thus, no free-floating intellectuals, so necessary to the external view, are possible as logically sound inferences from Mannheim's own propositions. The external view thus becomes an imaginatively imposed self-exile where figuratively, the sociologist of knowledge steps outside his society and outside the influence of his society long enough to formulate his propositions which he then brings back into society for judging the truth or falsity of all social knowledge. This faulty operation of logic negates the knowing of other individuals and of all conventional meaning in other societies. It leaves a wasteland of personal and social meaning, made ready to receive the imprint of Mannheim's imputed "true" social knowledge.

The sociological question of how conventional knowledge is formed through the interaction of persons and objects in societies is neglected. It imputes the *external view of reality* to the formation of conventional knowledge in the theoretical assessments of mechanical to organic (Durkheim 1933), military to industrial (Spencer 1896), *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (Toennies 1957), folk to urban (Redfield 1947), sacred to secular (Becker, Barnes 1961), familistic to contractual (Sorokin 1957), and charismatic, traditional and rational (Weber 1947). Thus, the

sociology of knowledge rather than being a method in the search for understanding, in Mannheim's usage became a method for imputing *true* social knowledge to "others" and "other societies."

### KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

"The sociology of knowledge must concern itself with everything that passes for 'knowledge' in society." (Burger, Luckmann 1967 14) This puts the burden of inquiry into the nature and makeup of social knowledge on sociological investigation rather than leaving it to a philosophical quest for eternal truth or an endless ideological struggle between theorists of ontological truth and theorists of epistemological truth.

It is recognized that there are many kinds of knowledge in all societies.

Knowledge, like being, is a term of comprehensive scope. Its comprehensiveness is ... correlative with that of being. The only thing which cannot be an object of knowledge or opinion, which cannot be thought about in any way except negatively, is that which has no being of any sort — in short, nothing ... The consideration of knowledge extends to all things knowable, to all kinds of knowers, to all modes of knowledge, and all the methods of knowing (Adler 1952 330).

From this spectrum of knowing, we may consider six kinds of knowledge in contrast to Mannheim's single kind of knowledge:

- 1) **Opinion knowledge** defined as knowledge through the body senses, from vague experience, from signs which depend on ideas formed by memory and imagination (Spinoza).
- 2) **Reason knowledge** defined as derived from possessing adequate common notions and ideas about the properties of things (Spinoza).
- 3) **Intuitive knowledge** defined as a sort of knowing which moves from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things (Spinoza).
- 4) **Revealed knowledge** defined as knowledge not gained by man's own efforts, but received through divine revelation (Aquinas).
- 5) **The supernatural gift of knowledge** defined as knowledge through the wisdom of faith surpassing reason (Aquinas).
- 6) **Communicated knowledge** defined as knowledge capable of being disseminated

through all the means and methods of communication (Adler 1952 883,886,889).

These six kinds of knowledge cannot exhaust the typology of knowledge. Scheler (1926 59) listed seven classes of knowledge, ordered from the least artificial to the most artificial: 1) myth and legend; 2) knowledge implicit in the natural folk language; 3) religious knowledge, from vague emotional intuition to the dogma of a church; 4) the basic types of mystical knowledge; 5) philosophical-metaphysical knowledge; 6) positive knowledge of mathematics, the natural and cultural sciences; 7) technological knowledge. Simmel treated knowledge as both form and content, and held that knowledge could be reduced entirely to form on one hand, and entirely to content on the other hand (Wolff 1950 40). Thus, in a given case, a particular *form* of knowledge may pass for complete knowledge, or a particular *content* may pass for complete knowledge.

In viewing knowledge as made up of both form and content, we can see the possible relations of individuals, society, and culture in the production of knowledge. Society as an ongoing process may produce many forms of knowledge through the reciprocal interaction of individuals by which the forms are filled with content. Knowledge of this immediate social character may then be transmitted to the next generation or to "others" as cultural forms of the a priori stock of social knowledge.

In the cultural transmission of knowledge, if the individual to whom the forms are transmitted selects from all the various forms available to him the form which he personally validates and selects from all possible content that which he validates, he thereby becomes a very real factor in the ongoing process of knowledge production. He personally has power to collapse form into content or content into form, or to keep both form and content. If he elects to exercise the option of personal selection of a cultural form among many forms, and if he fills the cultural form with personal content, furnished from all the forms available, he has had a part in creating and validating both form and content, and knowledge will consist of both. But if he abdicates the prerogative of selecting form and validating content, whether by force or fraud, and receives the proffered cultural form

as complete knowledge, then the form and content so necessary to social knowledge will have been collapsed into mere form. Or if the person elects to reject all proffered cultural forms of knowledge and uses a narrow personal content as complete knowledge, the form and content necessary to social knowledge will have been collapsed into personal content.

This view reveals the fallacy of seeing socially produced knowledge as totally produced by any single individual, society, or culture. It makes a place for an examination of the part played by all three in the production and validation of the various kinds of social knowledge.

### MODAL MENTALITIES

When we examine the person as a factor in the production of social knowledge, we find various modal mentalities possible by which persons may select the form and validate the content of social knowledge. Bacon's four modalities were: 1) idols of the tribe, 2) idols of the den, 3) idols of the market, and 4) idols of the theater (Bacon 1952 109). The mode of mentality represented by idols of the tribe is a traditional mentality which validates traditional knowledge. The mode of mentality represented by idols of the den is a private mentality which validates personal knowledge. The mode of mentality represented by idols of the market is a definitional mentality which validates defined knowledge. The mode of mentality represented by idols of the theater is a theoretical mentality which validates theoretical knowledge. This crude index includes modal mentalities tending to traditional knowledge, to personal knowledge, to definitional knowledge, and to theoretical knowledge. To understand the formation of social knowledge, one must take into account the various modal mentalities participating in the ongoing production of knowledge.

In struggling with the vertigo of relativity regarding the production of social knowledge, Mannheim's solution was largely along reductionist lines (Berger, Luckman 1967 5; Mannheim 1966). Mannheim theoretically reduced valid knowledge to imputed knowledge. He imputed a historical knowledge to an imputed society made up of vacuous personalities. Weber (1947 115) also struggled with the

relativity of social knowledge, and his resolution was also along reductionist lines. Weber, using a bureaucratic model of society, theoretically validated a definitional knowledge as true social knowledge, thus invalidating the personal and traditional modes of knowing. Weber thus reduced social knowledge to rational knowledge produces as an "ideal type."

Parsons widened the social-cultural gap even further by systematizing the functionalizing society into a cultural "social system" by means of his four functional system prerequisites and his five pattern variables and the hierarchy of system components (Parsons, Smelser 1956 16; Parsons 1951 16; Parsons 1961 327). From Parsons' perspective, knowledge production is the function of a cultural artifact, an "ideal type social system" which reduces social and cultural knowledge to specific cultural directives.

## CONCLUSION

These theoretical attempts to unify the relativity of social knowledge production along reductionist lines can succeed only where individuals with various mental preferences for various kinds of knowledge in different societies abdicate their personal prerogatives of selecting and validating both form and content of knowledge in an ongoing process of knowledge, and bow to the authority of a particular theorist's construction of reality as being definitive truth. Where individuals assert their prerogative of participating in the ongoing production of knowledge, there can be no single legitimate body of knowledge, as envisioned in the theories of Mannheim, Parsons, or Weber. There is instead, a wide range of societies producing a wide variety of social knowledge by a wide array of persons. This contrasts sharply with knowledge produced from a single subjective meaning, itself personally, socially, and culturally biased, which is then imputed to vacuous persons and enforced by theoretically legitimate rational systems having theoretically legitimate power. This view of the wide range of alternatives possible in the makeup of social knowledge imposes on sociologists of knowledge the task of understanding the nature of these conditions as fully as possible and exposes the logical fallacy of the external view being

imputed as the criterion of *true* social knowing.

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