

## SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ITS APPLICATION FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The sociology of knowledge or "*Wissenssoziologie*" perspective can be particularly useful to social scientists in their research endeavors in two ways. First, this sociohistorical approach accentuates the unique development and orientation of a discipline. Thus, the social researcher can become a detached observer of his own academic community which itself has a system of values and norms. The second application associates ideology with other social settings. With a plurality of world views or "*Weltanschauungen*" within different subcultures of our society the sociology of knowledge perspective thrives. The youth counterculture could be examined within this conceptual framework.

Application of the sociology of knowledge perspective in social analysis can provide relevant insight and explanatory power as a conceptual framework for the social sciences. This is true of its internal and external application.

### ISSUES AND DEFINITION

Several scholars, including Karl Marx (1), Max Scheler (2), and Karl Mannheim (3), were instrumental in formulating the sociology of knowledge perspective. Marx, for example, believed that ideology of consciousness emerges from economic relations. A less deterministic view of man was presented by Scheler, who saw society providing the setting of various ideologies from which autonomous man makes his selection. While Marx defined ideology in relationship to an opponent, Mannheim broadened this definition to include any social group. Mannheim did stress, however, that the sociohistorical setting determines a "*Weltanschauung*." These men wrote during rapid transition periods when legitimate controls via the church were questioned. In this climate a different epistemology emerged, one in which ideas were not based on absolute standards but rather associated with collectivities (4).

In the 1950's writers such as Richard Hofstadter (5), Raymond Aron, S. M. Lipset, and, notably, Daniel Bell (6), adopted the thesis that ideologies as all-encompassing systems of belief which unite and activate people have become rhetoric that should be eliminated once and for all. In reaction to this Aiken (7) stated that:

"... in the context of social action, scientific theories, philosophical doctrines, religious

creeds, and even sociological statistics may serve an ideological role."

Moreover, King (8) pointed out that:

"... no sooner had Daniel Bell made his pronouncement than there emerged the new left movements in England and America seeking to revivify radical theory and practice in the vacuum left by the demise of the old left. In America, the 1960's saw the emergence of a movement for Negro civil rights which by the end of the decade had developed into black cultural and political nationalism; student uprisings that fed a growing sense of generational solidarity against dominant institutional and cultural structures . . ."

Because various definitions have been used by those engaged in the "end of ideology" debate and because ideology has a central place in sociology of knowledge, clarification and explication of this concept are necessary. Ideology as used in this paper refers to any belief or knowledge system, whether factual or error-hidden, which emerges from a social structure and historical epoch, either scientific or societal in nature. As operationally defined the concept ideology becomes an integral part in applying the sociology of knowledge perspective to the social sciences.

### INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL APPLICATION

An internal application of this perspective provides the social researcher a technique for self-evaluation. Each academic discipline has developed within a socio-historical setting emphasizing particular philosophical views. Ben-David (9), for one, used this approach in tracing the growth of psychology from philosophy and physiology. Moreover, Peter Berger (10)

analyzed both the "God is dead" movement and psychoanalysis within this conceptual framework. Still another study by Mannis (11) cited the social conditions conducive for the emergence of community mental health research.

The usefulness of the internal application can be seen in two recent methodology texts for social research. In one text, Denzin (12) accentuates the fact that the researcher is himself a product of a social system with particular ideologies. To compensate for this limitation Denzin suggested that three methods of data collection be used for any research project. In another method text, Sjoberg and Nett (13) further emphasize this point. As they state it, trends in social research are influenced by neoidealist and positivist tradition. The former tradition stems from the works of Kant, Hegel, and Dilthey into the symbolic interactionist perspective of Mead and Cooley, while the latter emphasizes the natural science method via the works of Comte, Pearson, and Lundberg.

A specific illustration of the relationship between ideology and research finding is presented in articles by Walton (14) and Hildah (15). On the one hand, according to these writers, sociologists more often than political scientists find a monolithic power structure in community studies. On the other hand, the latter group because of tradition and research method more often find a pluralistic power structure.

The second application is an extension of its original purpose which was to analyze the association of distinct ideology with particular groups in society. Previously, Max Weber and Robert Merton linked the protestant ethic with capitalism and with the scientific enterprise, respectively. With pluralism more prevalent today an external application of this perspective seems in order. For example, the counterculture has evolved within a sociohistorical setting and has a unique ideology. Some attempts to analyze these relationships are seen in the writings of Reich (16), Roszak (17), Slater (18), and King (8). While these men have formalized ideas for the movement, specific

empirical studies could verify them within the context of certain youth groups.

In summary, these two applications are particularly relevant today when so many different schools of thought and ideas are found within and outside the academic community. Not only could the social researcher become a detached observer of his own academic community by means of the sociology of knowledge perspective, but he could also study the youth counterculture by the same method. Although "Wissenssoziologie" as a perspective is not new, some contemporary circumstances make these suggestions worth considering.

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