

## **Mannheim's Concept of the "Detached Intellectual"**

**Y. F. Haddad\***

Karl Mannheim's theory of the sociology of knowledge is generally called radical, in that it is a "total" sociology of knowledge... social life does not only have importance for the realization of thoughts and ideas, but it also finds expression in the content, form and structure of intellectual utterances.(1) The discovery of truth is seen as socially and historically conditioned. The ideas not only of our enemies but those of all groups - including our own - are recognized as temporal, relative and therefore limited.(2)

In the history of the development of theories of ideology, more and more it was seen that error and deception in all human thought were inevitable and irremovable. Marx also fashioned a total concept of ideology. He accused the entire mind of being ideological. He sensed in man's total behavior an unreliability which he regarded as a function of the social situation in which man found himself. Yet Marx's concept was limited or special since it exempted the thought of the proletarian class from the charge of ideology within the context of the revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish a more rational and human social order.(3)

Mannheim advanced the total and general concept of ideology. He saw the thought of all groups as ideological. This view was elaborated into an all-inclusive principle which pictures the thought of every group as arising out of its life conditions. Whereas Marx could anchor his "truth" to history with a particular revolutionary class, Mannheim could not anchor his theory to anything substantial. His sociology of knowledge was entirely dynamic and unsettling. For Marx, history was the bearer of "truth". For Mannheim, history was a rug being constantly pulled from under our feet.

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\* Professor of Sociology at Kuwait University

Having done considerable reading in the field of the sociology of knowledge, I believe that most critics of Mannheim interpret the results of his work roughly in the fashion which has been outlined above. To be sure, when one is examining the "scriptures" of Marx or Weber or Parsons or Mannheim, one can always find "proof texts" or quotes to support a point of view at variance with the commonly accepted understanding of the man's work. Since this paper is compelled to be relatively brief, and is not a thesis, it is necessary to summarize the arguments.

An abstract of this paper would include two essential points:

- (1) There is consensus among the critics that Mannheim fell upon his "free-floating intellectual" argument in order to move beyond the uncomfortable position of believing that all human thought is relative and thereby always in error.
- (2) Mannheim's argument for the detached intellectual is looked upon as highly questionable.

There is agreement among the writers who have analyzed Mannheim's views that he surely represents one of the great minds of modern times. Coser and Zeitlin(4), e.g., being typical of the critics, frequently "come down hard" on Mannheim, but always with sympathetic style that is obvious. There is a human warmth that exudes from Mannheim, or even in reading about him, that is pleasing to experience. The man possessed a quality of likableness that was rare. This is commonly reported of Mannheim's personality; it is evident in his writing style.

Put very simplistically (by this writer, not Mannheim), Mannheim stated that intellectuals, in modern societies, because of their education and their position, are relatively unattached to any social class. They have come from all strata of society. Their primary loyalty is to the world of ideas. They are able to see the social forces and conditions behind the ideas, and thereby they can weigh and analyze the conflicting points of view so that a synthesis of historically appropriate ideas can be reached. Intellectuals engage in a continued dialogue with each other, wearing away their original biases through mutual criticism.

Mannheim is not suggesting that all intellectuals will "see life whole" and be able to recognize all the flaws and all the strong points in all the arguments emanating from all kinds of groups of people. "My claim was merely that certain types of intellectuals have a maximum

opportunity to test and employ the socially available vistas and to experience their inconsistencies"(6). This certainly is not an immodest claim, per se. In the same section, in the previous two pages, he points out that he does not mean that intellectuals are a "superior" stratum, and that they are not a separate, cohesive group or class. They are "between, not above" the classes, and their peculiar social position does not assure any greater validity for their perspectives. This position simply allows some intellectuals to have an opportunity to do something which members of other strata are less able to do - examine the social sources, the extra-logical features of the ideas competing in the world. Due to their position in the interstices of society, Mannheim is saying, intellectuals have a potential for progressive thought that non-intellectuals cannot have.

Mannheim was aware that the increasing bureaucratization of life, and the growth of large organizations, alongwith further specialization of work, discouraged dissent and innovation. Since research and scholarship were being more and more carried out in corporations or governments, intellectual creativity was being dried up, and mental workers were becoming more dependent not independent(7). Mannheim stressed that intellectuals ought to be constantly critical - of themselves as well as others - and not accept societal givens. He recognized that intellectuals are usually powerless, and usually align themselves with one power group or another.

The necessary brevity of this paper prohibits a discussion of Mannheim's concern for the enlargement of democratically-controlled social planning involved in his plea for a thorough reconstruction of society(8) Mannheim, 1940; 1950; and several other works not cited in the bibliography. His suggested reconstruction was reformist, not revolutionary, and it was to be accomplished through the cooperation and good will of the upper-class owners of property. Mannheim's intellectuals and elites were to play a key role in advising the "establishment" power structure of the advantages accruing to them of such social planning that would be in the best interests of all. Mannheim believed that intellectuals could be most influential in bringing about this planned social change. This is mentioned here only because of the place of the intellectual in this scheme.

At this point, I can only say that Mannheim appears to be hopelessly naive and socially unrealistic in his expectation (or even hope) that the ruling class of a capitalist social structure would willingly give up

any of its privileges on behalf of improving the lot of the masses, or that the militaristic nation - states would be desirous of international cooperation for the benefit of all humanity. Mannheim's concerns are laudable, to be sure, and in his defense critics generally note that these innocently optimistic writings occurred during the inter-class camaraderie in England during World War II.

In order to save space, the following discussion, which is largely critical of the "detached intellectual" view, is going to be in almost informal style. Mannheim's idea touched on so many areas, and there are so many materials relating to this, that somewhat of a round-table discussion format will be followed.

First of all, let it be noted that Mannheim wrote in quite a different period from contemporary times. Were Mannheim writing today, it is certain that he would have formulated his position in a different manner, and certainly he would have been more cautious in his hopes.

When Mannheim spoke of the "relatively unattached intellectuals" he was not referring to the general run of scientists or Ph.D.'s or writers that readily come to mind. Mannheim was speaking from his first-hand experience, above all. He was a part, especially in Budapest in his youth, of a group of intellectuals that indeed was "free-floating". These people were not working for large corporations. They were not doing military or government research in universities. They lived at a time when governments did not have the means of propaganda and communication and transportation, etc., to be as repressive as is the case today. Mannheim's group consisted of people who travelled freely and were true cosmopolitans at a time when the masses of people did not have such advantages at all - when the masses of people were illiterate, in fact.

It is also important to bear in mind that Mannheim was physically dispossessed, driven out of Hungary and Germany, and finally settled in a very alien England. Literally hundreds and hundreds of intellectuals had similar experiences in Europe in the first half of this century. These kinds of people were truly "unattached". They were really in a position to see above and beyond the local issues and prejudices. They were stateless people, authentic internationalists, linguistically as well as residentially. Mannheim is speaking from his personal experience with people similar to himself in personal and intellectual backgrounds. Undoubtedly

Mannheim's friends were superior people in their ability to see the many-sided points of view surrounding the issues of the day.

It is also well to remember, before we glibly ridicule or attack Mannheim's view, that if he is altogether wrong, then clearly there is no hope for human survival on this earth. If the authentic intellectuals are not able to challenge the status quo and work for a rational society, then who can or who will? If the intellectuals are not able to recognize the deception and violence and tragic injustice and immorality of this social system, then who is going to do so? Perhaps Mannheim's position is a statement of faith above all, of faith in the possibility of a sane and just and peaceful social order.

In this sense, it can be seen that Mannheim was perhaps incorrect in details, but largely right in moral emphasis. Mannheim was well ahead of his time, in effect. He recognized the dead end to which the present social order is headed, and he called for intellectuals (and others as well, of course) to wake up and realize that a change of course is urgently required if what we know as civilization is going to survive.

If we move to the present, it appears that Mannheim's views on the detached intellectual are without much support. Mannheim stressed the value of the education received by intellectuals, of how this "equipped" the intellectual "to envisage the problems of his time in more than a single perspective"(9). It is quite clear that the present educational system does not train people to be critical of the societal givens. It does not train students to see social issues from several different perspectives.

Actually, the educational system systematically trains students not to think(10). If students are going to think critically, it is despite their training not because of it. The educational system is a rigorous supporter of the status quo. and it painstakingly socializes students into uncritical acceptance of the status quo.

Intellectuals, no matter how we define them, simply do not come from all strata of society, as Mannheim often suggested(11). Those who can legitimately be termed intellectuals, in any case, disproportionately have come from middle and upper class families. The class bias of the educational system was probably even stronger in Mannheim's day than now.

Mannheim believed that intellectuals were in the interstices of

society, "relatively unattached" to any class. The brunt of the argument against Mannheim is precisely on this point, and much more will be said later. Today it is obvious that intellectuals are overwhelmingly found strongly in support of the central institutions of society, not on the periphery, but in the center of government, the universities, and the corporations. Intellectuals are found in the mainstream of the power structure.

Contemporary "radical sociologists" or "critical theorists" have stressed a fact of which Marx, more than Mannheim, was aware. Since some men derive political and religious authority and social status by manipulating other men's beliefs, there is a built-in bias against the discovery of objective truths about society. There are structural obstacles preventing the masses of men from ever learning the elementary truths about their social existence(12). This understanding is a world removed from the artlessness of Mannheim's proposals for training political leaders(13). His political sociology was primarily the attempt to reach a synthesis of the various political perspectives, as if the problem of political warfare could be solved simply by bringing together the antagonists in gentlemanly discussion. This is related to Mannheim's "technocratic bias which led him to view social change primarily as a scientific-technical problem"(14). Mannheim was addressing the elites. He placed his faith in their good will. He largely ignored the class structure of society and "the tremendous resistance to social change generated by the upper advantaged strata"(15).

Zeitlin justifiably attacks Mannheim's conservative views on planning. I mention this only because it is related to the Mannheim position on intellectuals and elites. In fact, the intellectuals were to advise the elites, who would govern wisely and benevolently. Zeitlin shows the influence of Saint-Simon and Durkheim upon Mannheim's "positivistic, technocratic, and paternalistic" social-planning views(16).

It is almost pathetic to read the naive statement in *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* about the power of the intellectuals to motivate the populace to do what is for their own good, about the intelligentsia being as powerful and as useful in society as the "Chiefs of the Army or big businessmen". In the light of contemporary social problems, when reading Mannheim on "democratic planning" it is as if one is reading about some kind of strange life on another planet. It is clear that Mannheim became more conservative in his "English years", and that his writings on the elites, the intellectuals, and planning are quite out of

touch with reality today. They are also out of touch with the sociology of knowledge principles he had earlier recognized.

Mannheim's hopes for the benign influence of intellectuals upon the social scene have borne bitter fruit. The following are a variety of points made by critical sociologists.

The balance of the impact of the social sciences has been to justify and legitimize the status quo with concepts interpreted so as to assume its existence and continuance. Practical information has been provided which much more often has been utilized by the powerful to maintain their institutionalized positions over the powerless(18). Perhaps the most common charge is that social scientists are under pressure to take the side of those who pay for their services - government, industry and the military(19).

"The largely humanist-oriented, occasionally ideologically minded intellectual dissenter, who saw his role largely in terms of proffering social critiques, is rapidly being displaced either by experts and specialists, who become involved in special governmental undertakings, or by the generalists-integrators, who become in effect house ideologues for those in power, providing overall intellectual integration for disparate actions"(20).

A most slashing onslaught on the role of intellectuals in the universities and the government has been made by Chomsky(21). He demonstrates that the "free-floating intellectual has become outdated", that he has been replaced by the scholar-expert wholly at the service of American imperialism. Chomsky's attack centers on the servile support given to the Vietnam adventure by intellectuals.

"Anyone can be a moral individual, concerned with human rights and problems, but only a college professor, a trained expert, can solve technical problems by "sophisticated" methods. Ergo, it is only problems of the latter sort that are important or real. Responsible, nonideological experts will give advice on technical questions; irresponsible "ideological types" will "harangue" about principle and trouble themselves over moral issues and human rights, or over the traditional problems of man and society, concerning which "social and behavioural science" have nothing to offer beyond trivialities"(22).

Boguslaw provides us with an excellent critique of the "new utopians", the engineers-experts-systems designers at the beck and call of the military and industry(23). He compares the classical utopians who were interested in improving man's lot on earth through the development of humanitarian communes with the present breed of systems designers, data processing specialists, and computer manufacturers. He finds that efficiency, not humanitarianism, is the dominant value orientation of the modern planners(24). In discussing how social science has adapted to the "new utopianism", he declares: "Social science becomes a very conservative intellectual force on the contemporary scene"(25).

Probably the most unnerving aspect of all of this is that the social scientists who so staunchly defend the status quo do so unwittingly, in most cases. Most of them undoubtedly consider themselves "liberal". They are "value free scientists", no less(26); However, they are merely doing what Mannheim counselled them to do: advise the elites. This remark is surely not fair to Mannheim, but it underlines the egregious error of his formulation.

Space does not permit an analysis of the role of the university in the power structure. It is, to say the least, a role not congenial to the hopes which Mannheim had for the intellectuals who are based in the university. The charge has been fully substantiated that the American university is an arm of the military-industrial complex(27).

Basically, the radical theorists are operating from the sociology of knowledge perspective, to which Mannheim contributed so much, when they raise critical questions about the autonomy of thought and research in sociology(28). C. Wright Mills(29) could be said to have summed up the essential problem: the default or dereliction of the intellectual. The intellectual withdraws from significant events by means of his methodology. His escape can be respectful through theory so grand that it is irrelevant; or through statistical ritualizing which produces the almighty unimportant fact. The intellectual escapes from his responsibility through specialization which leaves him indifferent to the total scene; or within a bureaucratization which is client instead of public-centered.

If super-particular validity is granted the "socially unattached intelligentsia," how does one arrive "at this valid generalization, except by epistemological fiat; and secondly, how can one objectively establish the fact that a specific individual is "socially unattached?" asks

Merton(30). If all knowledge is true for only a particular perspective, as Mannheim's sociology or knowledge warrants, then the possible unanimity of a group of intellectuals would make no difference, no matter how many agree. A perspective which synthesizes all other perspectives only multiplies the alternative. The truth is no synthesis of lies. Mannheim's views on perspectivism, if consistent, would attack his own view of the detached intellectual, too, making his views only true from a certain perspective. "His relationism degenerates to a pure relativism after all"(31).

Znaniecki(32) makes an interesting point about the "audience" or the "social circle" to which the intellectual addresses himself. As the contemporary critical theorists point out, the government, the military, and industry, obviously comprise the audience for social science research today.

History is determined by forces over which man has no control, so long as he is unaware of those forces. When he becomes aware of them, he can determine his future history.

"All critical science attempts to restore missing parts of the self-formation process to men and in this way to force a process of self-reflection that will enable them to reinterpret the legitimacy of existing control systems. Insofar as these reconstructions are able to link repressed dimensions of historical structures to both individual and collective self-forming processes and can be accepted as fitting all available facts, we can be liberated. That is, insofar as men become aware of the structuring of their self-formation they can distinguish between historically necessary modes of control and those that are but unnecessary patterns connected to distorted communicative systems. In this self-reflective recognition a pseudo - "necessity," the conditions needed to perpetuate unnecessary behavioral orientations, are removed and men can enter into a realm of self-discovery(33).

Why have intellectuals, in general, not been able to reflect critically upon society and upon their roles in society, as Shroyer suggests they should? There are many possible answers, of course. Above all, it has to be emphasized that intellectuals, as well as any other type of people, are simply not "free-floating" or "unattached". They, too, like other men, help make up the various institutions which comprise the social structure.

The sociology of knowledge perspective indicates that no institution is likely to transcend the broader social structure in which it is embedded, at least not for long. So how could we expect intellectuals to transcend the society that molds them as well as it molds other people?

Mannheim's method of perspectivism is useful as a method, but it is not a means for arriving at "truth" per se. It is only when the scientist can somewhat evaluate his relationship to the social system with its functional demands that he can see that he, too, is necessarily caught up in the value structure of the larger society. It is next to impossible to view one's role detachedly, yet much is to be gained even in the attempt to do so(34). Such efforts are the only antidote to the constant danger of ethnocentrism.

Now, it is apparent that some intellectuals can do this-witness the ever-mounting criticism of establishment sociology by ever-growing numbers (still a small minority, relatively, no doubt) of critical theorists. The idea of "reflexive sociology"(35) is even becoming popular. To be sure, the idea of it is not the same as the practice of it. Goldman(36), while first criticizing Mannheim's view of the detached intellectual, nevertheless presents a very sophisticated outline for accomplishing precisely what Mannheim was talking about.

But Goldman states that only the "exceptional" scientist can do this; why can't more intellectuals do so? I think that Marx provides the most reasonable answer. Marx begins with the assumption that the ideas of the ruling class are in every historical period the ruling ideas of the society(37). The class which controls the means of material production also controls the means of mental production. The ideas of the ruling class merely express the dominant material relationships in the disguise of ethical and theoretical systems. These idea systems, therefore, only express the relationship which establishes the power of the ruling class. The division of labor appears in the dominant class as the division of material and mental labor. Some of its members work as the thinkers of the class, as the ideologists who perfect the illusion of the class about itself. Other members of the ruling class develop a receptive attitude to the ideas promoted by their ideological spokesmen, as they are busy with the practical activity of the class.

The ideologues always present their interest in an idea form as the common interest of all members of society. The ruling class promotes

its ideas as the only rational and universal ones(38). The ruling class also monopolizes all the societal means for purveying information and ideas - from the educational system to the mass media to the police. The ruling class controls the reward system for those conforming to its values. "Free-floating intellectuals," being unattached to the actual productive system directly, still must look to the ruling class for support, directly or indirectly. In our day, relatively greater affluence among the ruling elites allows a larger spillover for the intellectual lackeys. These intellectuals, particularly in the universities, are also granted a measure of autonomy - as long as they do not challenge the status quo - to administer their private affairs and to satisfy themselves with the illusion that they have "freedom of intellectual inquiry," or that they are in the "pursuit of knowledge". In a real sense most intellectuals are unattached. They are detached from an awareness of the reality of the power structure of society and of how it operates to dehumanize everybody - the beneficiaries as well as the victims of the system.

In the United States a great many people, be they "intellectuals" or otherwise, have been radicalized in recent years, especially during the events in Vietnam. It is only natural to expect that this radicalization in society would also be reflected within the ranks of the intellectuals. It appears that the intellectuals are being radicalized by the same events that have also radicalized many other segments of society, especially the youth. It is definite that the intellectuals, so-called, have not led the way for the rest of society. However, I do not believe that it is accurate to portray the intellectuals as the most responsible group in society - they are no more or no less so than other groups. I do not see any other groups leading the way to the Promised Land, either.

Within sociology, the stir created by critical theorists is promising. Certainly Mannheim was not altogether wrong. One can pick up almost any journal or "intellectual" magazine these days and find articles by scientists who are doing exactly what Mannheim expected many intellectuals to do - helping to create a critical science with humanistic concerns(39).

One point I must emphasize, though - neither the radical sociologists nor the conservative sociologists are "free-floating." There are no kind of intellectuals in this world who are "detached ". There are no people anywhere who are "unattached". All of us are bound in a thousand

ways to the values and norms of the larger social structure within which we exist. Mannheim could have avoided a lot of misunderstanding if he had not chosen to use those ill-famed words to describe the intellectuals: "free-floating," etc. It is strange that Mannheim, in his discussions of the "relatively unattached" intellectuals, in effect violated the very principles of the sociology of knowledge which he had done so much to elaborate and clarify.

Most intellectuals, as is the case with most people in all walks of life, are so attached to the social structure that only those on the margins can afford to be critical - and by definition those marginal people have no power leverage. This is one reason why they can be critical - it makes little difference. And once they have power or prestige they do not remain critical very long.

Gouldner(40), understanding that no intellectual is "unattached," and that the theorist's infrastructure provides the grounding out of which social theory grows, advocates the establishment of new communities, theoretical collectives he calls them, to nurture rational discourse by social theorists. His call for a theoretical community is akin to the classical understanding of a "community of scholars," in isolation and critical of the world, yet constructive in the sense of seeking to promote social change nonviolently. "Such theoretical collectives are far more important to the development of social theory and sociology than all the technical instruments and rules, and all the courses on research methods and techniques"(41).

Gouldner states that a critique of social theory necessarily implies a change in the social organization of social theory in furtherance of rational discourse. The knowledge that is required for this task, while crucial to theory, can transform the world, he believes.

"The university's central problems is its failure as a community in which rational discourse about social worlds is possible. This is partly because rational discourse as such ceased to be its dominant value and was superseded by a quest for knowledge products and information products that could be sold or promised for funding, prestige and power... rewards bestowed by the state and the larger society that is most bent upon subverting rational discourse about itself. Indeed, theoretical communities need to protect themselves

from impediments to rational discourse still growing with the university, as much as from those in the larger society. In my view, the university provides a partially cleared but immensely threatened space in which such theory-generating communities might grow. The capacity of such theoretical collectivities to reach beyond the university, while maintaining a foothold there, is more than a way to express their relevance to the problems of the larger world; it is probably also a requisite for the maintenance of rational discourse in social theory.(42)

I believe that Mannheim made an unfortunate choice of words, as stated above. "Unattached" or "attached", the terms are quite meaningless, as anybody who is unattached in one sense has to be attached in another sense, at the other end of the continuum of which one speaks. Is Gouldner "unattached"? Is that why he can have such critical insights, because he is detached from society? It is absurd when put this way, no matter which side of the coin one would use to describe him, attached or detached. If, e.g., Gouldner were "free-floating" in the Mannheim sense, how could he arrive at this understanding of society? Everybody is detached in some sense and attached in another sense, but the Mannheim terminology falls quite in either case.

The more basic question, perhaps, is this: Should any body be detached from society, even in the Mannheim sense? Ought not one definitely be attached to certain humanistic values and political aims?

Trying to look at this polarization in the Mannheim frame, again, imagine an intellectual who has to make a living. He has to work at something, say, in a university. Suppose he is a sociology professor. How "relatively unattached" or "free-floating" can he be under the exigencies of trying to maintain his position, or even seek a promotion? What are the requirements for the furtherance of his academic career?

I am trying to point out that Mannheim's choice of terminology, no matter how we look at it, has discolored the debate on his proposal ever since he made it. The more Mannheim said about this, the more he seemed to have dug himself into a hole. If he had simply made a point about what kind of method is required in order for one to analyze society from a sociology of knowledge perspective, and then perhaps mentioned

that certain types of people are structurally better positioned to make this analysis than other... fine. Friedrichs(43) does this, e.g., in very respectable theoretical fashion, and does not tie himself into knots in the process, as Mannheim has done.

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## « مفهوم مانهائيم للمثقف اللامنتمي »

### د. يحيى حداد

لقد تميزت نظرية المعرفة عند مانهائيم ، بنزعتها التاريخية ، وإيمانه بفكرة النسبية ، وباتجاهه الوظيفي في تفسير الظواهر والاحداث الاجتماعية والتاريخية . فقد رأى مانهائيم أن « حركة التاريخ » وحدها هي مبعث الفكر ، وأن الحدس التاريخي في سعيه الحتمي الدائم ، هو المصدر الوحيد للمعرفة . ومعنى ذلك أن الفكرة التي يركز عليها علم الاجتماع المانهائيمي في المعرفة ، انما تتمثل في أن أنماط الفكر وأساليبه ، لا يمكن فهمها الا في ضوء الاصول الاجتماعية والصادر التاريخية ، فلا ينبغي أن تقتصر على مجرد الوقوف عند حدود الطبقة وحدها . فمفثقي المجتمعات الحديثة نظرا لما يتمتعون به من تعليم ولما يحتلونه من مراكز فانهم نسبيا لا ينتمون لاي من الطبقات الاجتماعية ، وولاؤهم الرئيسي لعالم الافكار ، حيث باستطاعتهم رؤية القوى والظروف الاجتماعية التي أفرزت هذه الافكار .

ويمكن حصر المناقشات التي تضمنتها هذه الورقة في نقطتين رئيسيتين :

أولا : هناك اجما لدى منتقدي مانهائيم يتركز حول مناقشة فكرته عن المثقف اللامنتمي Free-Floating Intelletual التي أدت به الى الاعتقاد بنسبية الفكر الانسانية .

ثانيا : تعرضت فكرة مانهائيم عن المثقف اللامنتمي Detached Intelletual للنقد والتشريح ووضعت موضع شك وتساؤل .