

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

A TREATISE
IN THE SOCIOLOGY
OF KNOWLEDGE

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Introduction: The Problem of the Sociology of Knowledge

The basic contentions of the argument of this book are implicit in its title and subtitle, namely, that reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes in which this occurs. The key terms in these contentions are "reality" and "knowledge," terms that are not only current in everyday speech, but that have behind them a long history of philosophical inquiry. We need not enter here into a discussion of the semantic intricacies of either the everyday or the philosophical usage of these terms. It will be enough, for our purposes, to define "reality" as a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot "wish them away"), and to define "knowledge" as the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics. It is in this (admittedly simplistic) sense that the terms have relevance both to the man in the street and to the philosopher. The man in the street inhabits a world that is "real" to him, albeit in different degrees, and he "knows," with different degrees of confidence, that this world possesses such and such characteristics. The philosopher, of course, will raise questions about the ultimate status of both this "reality" and this "knowledge." *What is real? How is one to know?* These are among the most ancient questions not only of philosophical inquiry proper, but of human thought as such. Precisely for this reason the intrusion of the sociologist into this time-honored intellectual territory is likely to raise the eyebrows of the man in the street and even more likely to enrage the philosopher. It is, therefore, important that we clarify at the beginning the sense in which we use these terms in the context of sociology, and that we immediately disclaim any pretension to the effect that so-

ciology has an answer to these ancient philosophical preoccupations.

If we were going to be meticulous in the ensuing argument, we would put quotation marks around the two aforementioned terms every time we used them, but this would be stylistically awkward. To speak of quotation marks, however, may give a clue to the peculiar manner in which these terms appear in a sociological context. One could say that the sociological understanding of "reality" and "knowledge" falls somewhere in the middle between that of the man in the street and that of the philosopher. The man in the street does not ordinarily trouble himself about what is "real" to him and about what he "knows" unless he is stopped short by some sort of problem. He takes his "reality" and his "knowledge" for granted. The sociologist cannot do this, if only because of his systematic awareness of the fact that men in the street take quite different "realities" for granted as between one society and another. The sociologist is forced by the very logic of his discipline to ask, if nothing else, whether the difference between the two "realities" may not be understood in relation to various differences between the two societies. The philosopher, on the other hand, is professionally obligated to take nothing for granted, and to obtain maximal clarity as to the ultimate status of what the man in the street believes to be "reality" and "knowledge." Put differently, the philosopher is driven to decide where the quotation marks are in order and where they may safely be omitted, that is, to differentiate between valid and invalid assertions about the world. This the sociologist cannot possibly do. Logically, if not stylistically, he is stuck with the quotation marks.

For example, the man in the street may believe that he possesses "freedom of the will" and that he is therefore "responsible" for his actions, at the same time denying this "freedom" and this "responsibility" to infants and lunatics. The philosopher, by whatever methods, will inquire into the ontological and epistemological status of these conceptions. *Is man free? What is responsibility? Where are the limits of responsibility? How can one know these things?* And so on. Needless to say, the sociologist is in no position to supply

answers to these questions. What he can and must do, however, is to ask how it is that the notion of "freedom" has come to be taken for granted in one society and not in another, how its "reality" is maintained in the one society and how, even more interestingly, this "reality" may once again be lost to an individual or to an entire collectivity.

Sociological interest in questions of "reality" and "knowledge" is thus initially justified by the fact of their social relativity. What is "real" to a Tibetan monk may not be "real" to an American businessman. The "knowledge" of the criminal differs from the "knowledge" of the criminologist. It follows that specific agglomerations of "reality" and "knowledge" pertain to specific social contexts, and that these relationships will have to be included in an adequate sociological analysis of these contexts. The need for a "sociology of knowledge" is thus already given with the observable differences between societies in terms of what is taken for granted as "knowledge" in them. Beyond this, however, a discipline calling itself by this name will have to concern itself with the general ways by which "realities" are taken as "known" in human societies. In other words, a "sociology of knowledge" will have to deal not only with the empirical variety of "knowledge" in human societies, but also with the processes by which *any* body of "knowledge" comes to be socially established as "reality."

It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such "knowledge." And insofar as all human "knowledge" is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted "reality" congeals for the man in the street. In other words, we contend that *the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality.*

This understanding of the proper field of the sociology of knowledge differs from what has generally been meant by this discipline since it was first so called some forty years ago. Before we begin our actual argument, therefore, it will be useful to look briefly at the previous development of the

discipline and to explicate in what way, and why, we have felt it necessary to deviate from it.

The term "sociology of knowledge" (*Wissenssoziologie*) was coined by Max Scheler.¹ The time was the 1920s, the place was Germany, and Scheler was a philosopher. These three facts are quite important for an understanding of the genesis and further development of the new discipline. The sociology of knowledge originated in a particular situation of German intellectual history and in a philosophical context. While the new discipline was subsequently introduced into the sociological context proper, particularly in the English-speaking world, it continued to be marked by the problems of the particular intellectual situation from which it arose. As a result the sociology of knowledge remained a peripheral concern among sociologists at large, who did not share the particular problems that troubled German thinkers in the 1920s. This was especially true of American sociologists, who have in the main looked upon the discipline as a marginal specialty with a persistent European flavor. More importantly, however, the continuing linkage of the sociology of knowledge with its original constellation of problems has been a theoretical weakness even where there has been an interest in the discipline. To wit, the sociology of knowledge has been looked upon, by its protagonists and by the more or less indifferent sociological public at large, as a sort of sociological gloss on the history of ideas. This has resulted in considerable myopia regarding the potential theoretical significance of the sociology of knowledge.

There have been different definitions of the nature and scope of the sociology of knowledge. Indeed, it might almost be said that the history of the subdiscipline thus far has been the history of its various definitions. Nevertheless, there has been general agreement to the effect that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises. It may thus be said that the sociology of knowledge constitutes the sociological focus of a much more general problem, that of the existential determination (*Seinsgebundenheit*) of thought as such. Although here the social factor is concentrated upon, the theoretical difficulties are similar to those

that have arisen when other factors (such as the historical, the psychological or the biological) have been proposed as determinative of human thought. In all these cases the general problem has been the extent to which thought reflects or is independent of the proposed determinative factors.

It is likely that the prominence of the general problem in recent German philosophy has its roots in the vast accumulation of historical scholarship that was one of the greatest intellectual fruits of the nineteenth century in Germany. In a way unparalleled in any other period of intellectual history the past, with all its amazing variety of forms of thought, was "made present" to the contemporary mind through the efforts of scientific historical scholarship. It is hard to dispute the claim of German scholarship to the primary position in this enterprise. It should, consequently, not surprise us that the theoretical problem thrown up by the latter should be most sharply sensed in Germany. This problem can be described as the vertigo of relativity. The epistemological dimension of the problem is obvious. On the empirical level it led to the concern to investigate as painstakingly as possible the concrete relationships between thought and its historical situations. If this interpretation is correct, the sociology of knowledge takes up a problem originally posited by historical scholarship—in a narrower focus, to be sure, but with an interest in essentially the same questions.²

Neither the general problem nor its narrower focus is new. An awareness of the social foundations of values and world views can be found in antiquity. At least as far back as the Enlightenment this awareness crystallized into a major theme of modern Western thought. It would thus be possible to make a good case for a number of "genealogies" for the central problem of the sociology of knowledge.³ It may even be said that the problem is contained *in nuce* in Pascal's famous statement that what is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other.⁴ Yet the immediate intellectual antecedents of the sociology of knowledge are three developments in nineteenth-century German thought—the Marxian, the Nietzschean, and the historicist.

It is from Marx that the sociology of knowledge derived its root proposition—that man's consciousness is determined by

his social being.⁵ To be sure, there has been much debate as to just what kind of determination Marx had in mind. It is safe to say that much of the great "struggle with Marx" that characterized not only the beginnings of the sociology of knowledge but the "classical age" of sociology in general (particularly as manifested in the works of Weber, Durkheim and Pareto) was really a struggle with a faulty interpretation of Marx by latter-day Marxists. This proposition gains plausibility when we reflect that it was only in 1932 that the very important *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* were rediscovered and only after World War II that the full implications of this rediscovery could be worked out in Marx research. Be this as it may, the sociology of knowledge inherited from Marx not only the sharpest formulation of its central problem but also some of its key concepts, among which should be mentioned particularly the concepts of "ideology" (ideas serving as weapons for social interests) and "false consciousness" (thought that is alienated from the real social being of the thinker).

The sociology of knowledge has been particularly fascinated by Marx's twin concepts of "substructure/superstructure" (*Unterbau/Ueberbau*). It is here particularly that controversy has raged about the correct interpretation of Marx's own thought. Later Marxism has tended to identify the "substructure" with economic structure *tout court*, of which the "superstructure" was then supposed to be a direct "reflection" (thus Lenin, for instance). It is quite clear now that this misrepresents Marx's thought, as the essentially mechanistic rather than dialectical character of this kind of economic determinism should make one suspect. What concerned Marx was that human thought is founded in human activity ("labor," in the widest sense of the word) and in the social relations brought about by this activity. "Substructure" and "superstructure" are best understood if one views them as, respectively, human activity and the world produced by that activity.⁶ In any case, the fundamental "sub/superstructure" scheme has been taken over in various forms by the sociology of knowledge, beginning with Scheler, always with an understanding that there is some sort of relationship between thought and an "underlying" reality other than thought. The

fascination of the scheme prevailed despite the fact that much of the sociology of knowledge was explicitly formulated in opposition to Marxism and that different positions have been taken within it regarding the nature of the relationship between the two components of the scheme.

Nietzschean ideas were less explicitly continued in the sociology of knowledge, but they belong very much to its general intellectual background and to the "mood" within which it arose. Nietzsche's anti-idealism, despite the differences in content not unlike Marx's in form, added additional perspectives on human thought as an instrument in the struggle for survival and power.⁷ Nietzsche developed his own theory of "false consciousness" in his analyses of the social significance of deception and self-deception, and of illusion as a necessary condition of life. Nietzsche's concept of "resentment" as a generative factor for certain types of human thought was taken over directly by Scheler. Most generally, though, one can say that the sociology of knowledge represents a specific application of what Nietzsche aptly called the "art of mistrust."⁸

Historicism, especially as expressed in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, immediately preceded the sociology of knowledge.⁹ The dominant theme here was an overwhelming sense of the relativity of all perspectives on human events, that is, of the inevitable historicity of human thought. The historicist insistence that no historical situation could be understood except in its own terms could readily be translated into an emphasis on the social situation of thought. Certain historicist concepts, such as "situational determination" (*Standortsgebundenheit*) and "seat in life" (*Sitz im Leben*) could be directly translated as referring to the "social location" of thought. More generally, the historicist heritage of the sociology of knowledge predisposed the latter toward a strong interest in history and the employment of an essentially historical method—a fact, incidentally, that also made for its marginality in the milieu of American sociology.

Scheler's interest in the sociology of knowledge, and in sociological questions generally, was essentially a passing episode during his philosophical career.¹⁰ His final aim was the establishment of a philosophical anthropology that would

transcend the relativity of specific historically and socially located viewpoints. The sociology of knowledge was to serve as an instrument toward this aim, its main purpose being the clearing away of the difficulties raised by relativism so that the real philosophical task could proceed. Scheler's sociology of knowledge is, in a very real sense, *ancilla philosophiae*, and of a very specific philosophy to boot.

In line with this orientation, Scheler's sociology of knowledge is essentially a negative method. Scheler argued that the relationship between "ideal factors" (*Idealfaktoren*) and "real factors" (*Realfaktoren*), terms that are clearly reminiscent of the Marxian "sub/superstructure" scheme, was merely a regulative one. That is, the "real factors" regulate the conditions under which certain "ideal factors" can appear in history, but cannot affect the content of the latter. In other words, society determines the presence (*Dasein*) but not the nature (*Sosein*) of ideas. The sociology of knowledge, then, is the procedure by which the socio-historical selection of ideational contents is to be studied, it being understood that the contents themselves are independent of socio-historical causation and thus inaccessible to sociological analysis. If one may describe Scheler's method graphically, it is to throw a sizable sop to the dragon of relativity, but only so as to enter the castle of ontological certitude better.

Within this intentionally (and inevitably) modest framework Scheler analyzed in considerable detail the manner in which human knowledge is ordered by society. He emphasized that human knowledge is given in society as an *a priori* to individual experience, providing the latter with its order of meaning. This order, although it is relative to a particular socio-historical situation, appears to the individual as the natural way of looking at the world. Scheler called this the "relative-natural world view" (*relativnatürliche Weltanschauung*) of a society, a concept that may still be regarded as central for the sociology of knowledge.

Following Scheler's "invention" of the sociology of knowledge, there was extensive debate in Germany concerning the validity, scope and applicability of the new discipline.¹¹ Out of this debate emerged one formulation that marked the transposition of the sociology of knowledge into a more nar-

rowly sociological context. The same formulation was the one in which the sociology of knowledge arrived in the English-speaking world. This is the formulation by Karl Mannheim.¹² It is safe to say when sociologists today think of the sociology of knowledge, *pro* or *con*, they usually do so in terms of Mannheim's formulation of it. In American sociology this is readily intelligible if one reflects on the accessibility in English of virtually the whole of Mannheim's work (some of which, indeed, was written in English, during the period Mannheim was teaching in England after the advent of Nazism in Germany, or was brought out in revised English versions), while Scheler's work in the sociology of knowledge has remained untranslated to date. Apart from this "diffusion" factor, Mannheim's work is less burdened with philosophical "baggage" than Scheler's. This is especially true of Mannheim's later writings and can be seen if one compares the English version of his main work, *Ideology and Utopia*, with its German original. Mannheim thus became the more "congenial" figure for sociologists, even those critical of or not very interested in his approach.

Mannheim's understanding of the sociology of knowledge was much more far-reaching than Scheler's, possibly because the confrontation with Marxism was more prominent in his work. Society was here seen as determining not only the appearance but also the content of human ideation, with the exception of mathematics and at least parts of the natural sciences. The sociology of knowledge thus became a positive method for the study of almost any facet of human thought.

Significantly, Mannheim's key concern was with the phenomenon of ideology. He distinguished between the particular, the total, and the general concepts of ideology—ideology as constituting only a segment of an opponent's thought; ideology as constituting the whole of an opponent's thought (similar to Marx's "false consciousness"); and (here, as Mannheim thought, going beyond Marx) ideology as characteristic not only of an opponent's but of one's own thought as well. With the general concept of ideology the level of the sociology of knowledge is reached—the understanding that no human thought (with only the afore-mentioned exceptions) is immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context.

By this expansion of the theory of ideology Mannheim sought to abstract its central problem from the context of political usage, and to treat it as a general problem of epistemology and historical sociology.

Although Mannheim did not share Scheler's ontological ambitions, he too was uncomfortable with the pan-ideologism into which his thinking seemed to lead him. He coined the term "relationism" (in contradistinction to "relativism") to denote the epistemological perspective of his sociology of knowledge—not a capitulation of thought before the socio-historical relativities, but a sober recognition that knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain position. The influence of Dilthey is probably of great importance at this point in Mannheim's thought—the problem of Marxism is solved by the tools of historicism. Be this as it may, Mannheim believed that ideologizing influences, while they could not be eradicated completely, could be mitigated by the systematic analysis of as many as possible of the varying socially grounded positions. In other words, the object of thought becomes progressively clearer with this accumulation of different perspectives on it. This is to be the task of the sociology of knowledge, which thus is to become an important aid in the quest for any correct understanding of human events.

Mannheim believed that different social groups vary greatly in their capacity thus to transcend their own narrow position. He placed his major hope in the "socially unattached intelligentsia" (*freischwebende Intelligenz*, a term derived from Alfred Weber), a sort of interstitial stratum that he believed to be relatively free of class interests. Mannheim also stressed the power of "utopian" thought, which (like ideology) produces a distorted image of social reality, but which (unlike ideology) has the dynamism to transform that reality into its image of it.

Needless to say, the above remarks can in no way do justice to either Scheler's or Mannheim's conception of the sociology of knowledge. This is not our intention here. We have merely indicated some key features of the two conceptions, which have been aptly called, respectively, the "moderate" and "radical" conceptions of the sociology of knowledge.¹³ What is remarkable is that the subsequent development of the so-

cology of knowledge has, to a large extent, consisted of critiques and modifications of these two conceptions. As we have already pointed out, Mannheim's formulation of the sociology of knowledge has continued to set the terms of reference for the discipline in a definitive manner, particularly in English-speaking sociology.

The most important American sociologist to have paid serious attention to the sociology of knowledge has been Robert Merton.¹⁴ His discussion of the discipline, which covers two chapters of his major work, has served as a useful introduction to the field for such American sociologists as have been interested in it. Merton constructed a paradigm for the sociology of knowledge, restating its major themes in a compressed and coherent form. This construction is interesting because it seeks to integrate the approach of the sociology of knowledge with that of structural-functional theory. Merton's own concepts of "manifest" and "latent" functions are applied to the sphere of ideation, the distinction being made between the intended, conscious functions of ideas, and the unintended, unconscious ones. While Merton concentrated on the work of Mannheim, who was for him the sociologist of knowledge par excellence, he stressed the significance of the Durkheim school and of the work of Pitirim Sorokin. It is interesting that Merton apparently failed to see the relevance to the sociology of knowledge of certain important developments in American social psychology, such as reference-group theory, which he discusses in a different part of the same work.

Talcott Parsons has also commented on the sociology of knowledge.¹⁵ This comment, however, is limited mainly to a critique of Mannheim and does not seek an integration of the discipline within Parsons' own theoretical system. In the latter, to be sure, the "problem of the role of ideas" is analyzed at length, but in a frame of reference quite different from that of either Scheler's or Mannheim's sociology of knowledge.¹⁶ We would, therefore, venture to say that neither Merton nor Parsons has gone in any decisive way beyond the sociology of knowledge as formulated by Mannheim. The same can be said of their critics. To mention only the most vocal one, C. Wright Mills dealt with the sociology of knowl-

edge in his earlier writing, but in an expositional manner and without contributing to its theoretical development.¹⁷

An interesting effort to integrate the sociology of knowledge with a neo-positivist approach to sociology in general is that of Theodor Geiger, who had a great influence on Scandinavian sociology after his emigration from Germany.¹⁸ Geiger returned to a narrower concept of ideology as socially distorted thought and maintained the possibility of overcoming ideology by careful adherence to scientific canons of procedure. The neo-positivist approach to ideological analysis has more recently been continued in German-speaking sociology in the work of Ernst Topitsch, who has emphasized the ideological roots of various philosophical positions.¹⁹ Insofar as the sociological analysis of ideologies constitutes an important part of the sociology of knowledge as defined by Mannheim, there has been a good deal of interest in it in both European and American sociology since World War II.²⁰

Probably the most far-reaching attempt to go beyond Mannheim in the construction of a comprehensive sociology of knowledge is that of Werner Stark, another émigré continental scholar who has taught in England and the United States.²¹ Stark goes farthest in leaving behind Mannheim's focus on the problem of ideology. The task of the sociology of knowledge is not to be the debunking or uncovering of socially produced distortions, but the systematic study of the social conditions of knowledge as such. Put simply, the central problem is the sociology of truth, not the sociology of error. Despite his distinctive approach, Stark is probably closer to Scheler than to Mannheim in his understanding of the relationship between ideas and their social context.

Again, it is obvious that we have not tried to give an adequate historical overview of the history of the sociology of knowledge. Furthermore, we have so far ignored developments that might theoretically be relevant to the sociology of knowledge but that have not been so considered by their own protagonists. In other words, we have limited ourselves to developments that, so to speak, sailed under the banner "sociology of knowledge" (considering the theory of ideology to be a part of the latter). This has made one fact very clear. Apart from the epistemological concern of some sociologists

of knowledge, the empirical focus of attention has been almost exclusively on the sphere of ideas, that is, of theoretical thought. This is also true of Stark, who subtitled his major work on the sociology of knowledge "An Essay in Aid of a Deeper Understanding of the History of Ideas." In other words, the interest of the sociology of knowledge has been on epistemological questions on the theoretical level, on questions of intellectual history on the empirical level.

We would emphasize that we have no reservations whatsoever about the validity and importance of these two sets of questions. However, we regard it as unfortunate that this particular constellation has dominated the sociology of knowledge so far. We would argue that, as a result, the full theoretical significance of the sociology of knowledge has been obscured.

To include epistemological questions concerning the validity of sociological knowledge in the sociology of knowledge is somewhat like trying to push a bus in which one is riding. To be sure, the sociology of knowledge, like all empirical disciplines that accumulate evidence concerning the relativity and determination of human thought, leads toward epistemological questions concerning sociology itself as well as any other scientific body of knowledge. As we have remarked before, in this the sociology of knowledge plays a part similar to history, psychology, and biology, to mention only the three most important empirical disciplines that have caused trouble for epistemology. The logical structure of this trouble is basically the same in all cases: How can I be sure, say, of my sociological analysis of American middle-class mores in view of the fact that the categories I use for this analysis are conditioned by historically relative forms of thought, that I myself and everything I think is determined by my genes and by my ingrown hostility to my fellowmen, and that, to cap it all, I am myself a member of the American middle class?

Far be it from us to brush aside such questions. All we would contend here is that these questions are not themselves part of the empirical discipline of sociology. They properly belong to the methodology of the social sciences, an enterprise that belongs to philosophy and is by definition other than sociology, which is indeed an object of its inquiries.

The sociology of knowledge, along with the other epistemological troublemakers among the empirical sciences, will "feed" problems to this methodological inquiry. It cannot solve these problems within its own proper frame of reference.

We therefore exclude from the sociology of knowledge the epistemological and methodological problems that bothered both of its major originators. By virtue of this exclusion we are setting ourselves apart from both Scheler's and Mannheim's conception of the discipline, and from the later sociologists of knowledge (notably those with a neo-positivist orientation) who shared the conception in this respect. Throughout the present work we have firmly bracketed any epistemological or methodological questions about the validity of sociological analysis, in the sociology of knowledge itself or in any other area. We consider the sociology of knowledge to be part of the empirical discipline of sociology. Our purpose here is, of course, a theoretical one. But our theorizing refers to the empirical discipline in its concrete problems, not to the philosophical investigation of the foundations of the empirical discipline. In sum, our enterprise is one of sociological theory, *not* of the methodology of sociology. Only in one section of our treatise (the one immediately following this introduction) do we go beyond sociological theory proper, but this is done for reasons that have little to do with epistemology, as will be explained at the time.

We must also, however, redefine the task of the sociology of knowledge on the empirical level, that is, as theory geared to the empirical discipline of sociology. As we have seen, on this level the sociology of knowledge has been concerned with intellectual history, in the sense of the history of ideas. Again, we would stress that this is, indeed, a very important focus of sociological inquiry. Furthermore, in contrast with our exclusion of the epistemological/methodological problem, we concede that this focus belongs with the sociology of knowledge. We would argue, however, that the problem of "ideas," including the special problem of ideology, constitutes only part of the larger problem of the sociology of knowledge, and not a central part at that.

The sociology of knowledge must concern itself with every-

thing that passes for "knowledge" in society. As soon as one states this, one realizes that the focus on intellectual history is ill-chosen, or rather, is ill-chosen if it becomes the central focus of the sociology of knowledge. Theoretical thought, "ideas," *Weltanschauungen* are not *that* important in society. Although every society contains these phenomena, they are only part of the sum of what passes for "knowledge." Only a very limited group of people in any society engages in theorizing, in the business of "ideas," and the construction of *Weltanschauungen*. But everyone in society participates in its "knowledge" in one way or another. Put differently, only a few are concerned with the theoretical interpretation of the world, but everybody lives in a world of some sort. Not only is the focus on theoretical thought unduly restrictive for the sociology of knowledge, it is also unsatisfactory because even this part of socially available "knowledge" cannot be fully understood if it is not placed in the framework of a more general analysis of "knowledge."

To exaggerate the importance of theoretical thought in society and history is a natural failing of theorizers. It is then all the more necessary to correct this intellectualistic misapprehension. The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is "real" for the members of a society. Since this is so, the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people "know" as "reality" in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, commonsense "knowledge" rather than "ideas" must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this "knowledge" that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist.

The sociology of knowledge, therefore, must concern itself with the social construction of reality. The analysis of the theoretical articulation of this reality will certainly continue to be a part of this concern, but not the most important part. It will be clear that, despite the exclusion of the epistemological/methodological problem, what we are suggesting here is a far-reaching redefinition of the scope of the sociology of knowledge, much wider than what has hitherto been understood as this discipline.

The question arises as to what theoretical ingredients ought to be added to the sociology of knowledge to permit its redefinition in the above sense. We owe the fundamental insight into the necessity for this redefinition to Alfred Schutz. Throughout his work, both as philosopher and as sociologist, Schutz concentrated on the structure of the commonsense world of everyday life. Although he himself did not elaborate a sociology of knowledge, he clearly saw what this discipline would have to focus on:

All typifications of common-sense thinking are themselves integral elements of the concrete historical socio-cultural *Lebenswelt* within which they prevail as taken for granted and as socially approved. Their structure determines among other things the social distribution of knowledge and its relativity and relevance to the concrete social environment of a concrete group in a concrete historical situation. *Here are the legitimate problems of relativism, historicism, and of the so-called sociology of knowledge.*²²

And again:

Knowledge is socially distributed and the mechanism of this distribution can be made the subject matter of a sociological discipline. True, we have a so-called sociology of knowledge. Yet, with very few exceptions, the discipline thus misnamed has approached the problem of the social distribution of knowledge merely from the angle of the ideological foundation of truth in its dependence upon social and, especially, economic conditions, or from that of the social implications of education, or that of the social role of the man of knowledge. Not sociologists but economists and philosophers have studied some of the many other theoretical aspects of the problem.²³

While we would not give the central place to the social distribution of knowledge that Schutz implies here, we agree with his criticism of "the discipline thus misnamed" and have derived from him our basic notion of the manner in which the task of the sociology of knowledge must be redefined. In

the following considerations we are heavily dependent on Schutz in the prolegomena concerning the foundations of knowledge in everyday life and greatly indebted to his work in various important places of our main argument thereafter.

Our anthropological presuppositions are strongly influenced by Marx, especially his early writings, and by the anthropological implications drawn from human biology by Helmuth Plessner, Arnold Gehlen and others. Our view of the nature of social reality is greatly indebted to Durkheim and his school in French sociology, though we have modified the Durkheimian theory of society by the introduction of a dialectical perspective derived from Marx and an emphasis on the constitution of social reality through subjective meanings derived from Weber.²⁴ Our social-psychological presuppositions, especially important for the analysis of the internalization of social reality, are greatly influenced by George Herbert Mead and some developments of his work by the so-called symbolic-interactionist school of American sociology.²⁵ We shall indicate in the footnotes how these various ingredients are used in our theoretical formation. We fully realize, of course, that in this use we are not and cannot be faithful to the original intentions of these several streams of social theory themselves. But, as we have already stated, our purpose here is not exegetical, nor even synthesis for the sake of synthesis. We are fully aware that, in various places, we do violence to certain thinkers by integrating their thought into a theoretical formation that some of them might have found quite alien. We would say in justification that historical gratitude is not in itself a scientific virtue. We may cite here some remarks by Talcott Parsons (about whose theory we have serious misgivings, but whose integrative intention we fully share):

The primary aim of the study is not to determine and state in summary form what these writers said or believed about the subjects they wrote about. Nor is it to inquire directly with reference to each proposition of their "theories" whether what they have said is tenable in the light of present sociological and related knowledge. . . . It is a study in social *theory*, not *theories*. Its

interest is not in the separate and discrete propositions to be found in the works of these men, but in a *single* body of systematic theoretical reasoning.²⁶

Our purpose, indeed, is to engage in "systematic theoretical reasoning."

It will already be evident that our redefinition of its nature and scope would move the sociology of knowledge from the periphery to the very center of sociological theory. We may assure the reader that we have no vested interest in the label "sociology of knowledge." It is rather our understanding of sociological theory that led us to the sociology of knowledge and guided the manner in which we were to redefine its problems and tasks. We can best describe the path along which we set out by reference to two of the most famous and most influential "marching orders" for sociology.

One was given by Durkheim in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, the other by Weber in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Durkheim tells us: "The first and most fundamental rule is: Consider social facts as things."²⁷ And Weber observes: "Both for sociology in the present sense, and for history, the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action."²⁸ These two statements are not contradictory. Society does indeed possess objective facticity. And society is indeed built up by activity that expresses subjective meaning. And, incidentally, Durkheim knew the latter, just as Weber knew the former. It is precisely the dual character of society in terms of objective facticity and subjective meaning that makes its "reality *sui generis*," to use another key term of Durkheim's. The central question for sociological theory can then be put as follows: How is it possible that subjective meanings become objective facticities? Or, in terms appropriate to the afore-mentioned theoretical positions: How is it possible that human activity (*Handeln*) should produce a world of things (*choses*)? In other words, an adequate understanding of the "reality *sui generis*" of society requires an inquiry into the manner in which this reality is constructed. This inquiry, we maintain, is the task of the sociology of knowledge.

I. The Foundations of Knowledge in Everyday Life

1. THE REALITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Since our purpose in this treatise is a sociological analysis of the reality of everyday life, more precisely, of knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life, and we are only tangentially interested in how this reality may appear in various theoretical perspectives to intellectuals, we must begin by a clarification of that reality as it is available to the common-sense of the ordinary members of society. How that common-sense reality may be influenced by the theoretical constructions of intellectuals and other merchants of ideas is a further question. Ours is thus an enterprise that, although theoretical in character, is geared to the understanding of a reality that forms the subject matter of the empirical science of sociology, that is, the world of everyday life.

It should be evident, then, that our purpose is *not* to engage in philosophy. All the same, if the reality of everyday life is to be understood, account must be taken of its intrinsic character before we can proceed with sociological analysis proper. Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. As sociologists we take this reality as the object of our analyses. Within the frame of reference of sociology as an empirical science it is possible to take this reality as given, to take as data particular phenomena arising within it, without further inquiring about the foundations of this reality, which is a philosophical task. However, given the particular purpose of the present treatise, we cannot completely bypass the philosophical problem. The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their

Notes

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

1. Cf. Max Scheler, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* (Bern, Francke, 1960). This volume of essays, first published in 1925, contains the basic formulation of the sociology of knowledge in an essay entitled "Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens," which was originally published a year earlier.
2. Cf. Wilhelm Windelband and Heinz Heimsoeth, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Tübingen, Mohr, 1950), pp. 605 ff.
3. Cf. Albert Salomon, *In Praise of Enlightenment* (New York, Meridian Books, 1963); Hans Barth, *Wahrheit und Ideologie* (Zurich, Manesse, 1945); Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Knowledge* (Chicago, Free Press of Glencoe, 1958), pp. 46 ff.; Kurt Lenk (ed.), *Ideologie* (Neuwied/Rhein, Luchterhand, 1961), pp. 13 ff.
4. *Pensées* v. 294.
5. Cf. Karl Marx, *Die Frühschriften* (Stuttgart, Kröner, 1953). The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* will be found on pp. 225 ff.
6. On Marx's *Unterbau/Ueberbau* scheme, cf. Karl Kautsky, "Verhältnis von Unterbau und Ueberbau," in Iring Fetscher (ed.), *Der Marxismus* (Munich, Piper, 1962), pp. 160 ff.; Antonio Labriola, "Die Vermittlung zwischen Basis und Ueberbau," *ibid.*, pp. 167 ff.; Jean-Yves Calvez, *La pensée de Karl Marx* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1956), pp. 424 ff. The most important twentieth-century reformulation of the problem is that by György Lukács, in his *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin, 1923), today more readily accessible in the French translation, *Histoire et conscience de classe* (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1960). Lukács' understanding of Marx's concept of dialectics is all the more remarkable as it antedated by almost a decade the rediscovery of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.
7. The most important works of Nietzsche's for the sociology of knowledge are *The Genealogy of Morals* and *The Will to Power*. For secondary discussions, cf. Walter A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (New York, Meridian Books, 1956); Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (English translation—New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

8. One of the earliest and most interesting applications of Nietzsche's thought to a sociology of knowledge is Alfred Seidel's in *Bewusstsein als Verhängnis* (Bonn, Cohen, 1927). Seidel, who had been a student of Weber's, tried to combine both Nietzsche and Freud with a radical sociological critique of consciousness.

9. One of the most suggestive discussions of the relationship between historicism and sociology is Carlo Antoni's in *Dallo storicismo alla sociologia* (Florence, 1940). Also, cf. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, Knopf, 1958), pp. 183 ff. The most important work of Wilhelm Dilthey's for our present considerations is *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Stuttgart, Teubner, 1958).

10. For an excellent discussion of Scheler's conception of the sociology of knowledge, cf. Hans-Joachim Lieber, *Wissen und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1952), pp. 55 ff. See also Stark, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

11. For the general development of German sociology during this period, cf. Raymond Aron, *La sociologie allemande contemporaine* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). For important contributions from this period concerning the sociology of knowledge, cf. Siegfried Landshut, *Kritik der Soziologie* (Munich, 1929); Hans Freyer, *Soziologie als Wirklichkeitswissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1930); Ernst Grünwald, *Das Problem der Soziologie des Wissens* (Vienna, 1934); Alexander von Schelting, *Max Webers Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen, 1934). The last-named work, still the most important discussion of Weber's methodology, must be understood against the background of the debate on the sociology of knowledge, then centering on both Scheler's and Mannheim's formulations.

12. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1936); *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1952); *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1953); *Essays on the Sociology of Culture* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1956). A compendium of Mannheim's most important writings in the sociology of knowledge, compiled and with a useful introduction by Kurt Wolff, is Karl Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie* (Neuwied/Rhein, Luchterhand, 1964). For secondary discussions of Mannheim's conception of the sociology of knowledge, cf. Jacques J. Maquet, *Sociologie de la connaissance* (Louvain, Nauwelaerts, 1949); Aron, *op. cit.*; Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Chicago, Free Press of Glencoe, 1957), pp. 489 ff.; Stark, *op. cit.*; Lieber, *op. cit.*

13. This characterization of the two original formulations of the discipline was made by Lieber, *op. cit.*

14. Cf. Merton, *op. cit.*, pp. 439 ff.

15. Cf. Talcott Parsons, "An Approach to the Sociology of Knowledge," *Transactions of the Fourth World Congress of Sociology* (Louvain, International Sociological Association, 1959), Vol. IV, pp. 25 ff.; "Culture and the Social System," in Parsons et al. (eds.), *Theories of Society* (New York, Free Press, 1961), Vol. II, pp. 963 ff.

16. Cf. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1951), pp. 326 ff.

17. Cf. C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics and People* (New York, Ballantine Books, 1963), pp. 453 ff.

18. Cf. Theodor Geiger, *Ideologie und Wahrheit* (Stuttgart, Humboldt, 1953); *Arbeiten zur Soziologie* (Neuwied/Rhein, Luchterhand, 1962), pp. 412 ff.

19. Cf. Ernst Topitsch, *Vom Ursprung und Ende der Metaphysik* (Vienna, Springer, 1958); *Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ideologie und Wissenschaft* (Neuwied/Rhein, Luchterhand, 1961). An important influence on Topitsch is the Kelsen school of legal positivism. For the implications of the latter for the sociology of knowledge, cf. Hans Kelsen, *Aufsätze zur Ideologiekritik* (Neuwied/Rhein, Luchterhand, 1964).

20. Cf. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1960); Kurt Lenk (ed.), *Ideologie*; Norman Birnbaum (ed.), *The Sociological Study of Ideology* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1962).

21. Cf. Stark, *op. cit.*

22. Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, Vol. I (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1962), p. 149. Italics ours.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. II (1964), p. 121.

24. For discussions of the implications of Durkheimian sociology for the sociology of knowledge, cf. Gerard L. DeGré, *Society and Ideology* (New York, Columbia University Bookstore, 1943), pp. 54 ff.; Merton, *op. cit.*; Georges Gurvitch, "Problèmes de la sociologie de la connaissance," *Traité de sociologie* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), Vol. II, pp. 103 ff.

25. The closest approach, to our knowledge, of symbolic-interactionism to the problems of the sociology of knowledge may be found in Tamotsu Shibutani, "Reference Groups and Social Control," in Arnold Rose (ed.), *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 128 ff. The failure to make the connection between Meadian social psychology and the sociology of knowledge, on the part of the symbolic-interactionists, is of course related to the limited "diffusion" of the sociology of knowledge in America, but its more important theoretical foundation is to be

sought in the fact that both Mead himself and his later followers did not develop an adequate concept of social structure. Precisely for this reason, we think, is the integration of the Meadian and Durkheimian approaches so very important. It may be observed here that, just as the indifference to the sociology of knowledge on the part of American social psychologists has prevented the latter from relating their perspectives to a macro-sociological theory, so is the total ignorance of Mead a severe theoretical defect of neo-Marxist social thought in Europe today. There is considerable irony in the fact that, of late, neo-Marxist theoreticians have been seeking a liaison with Freudian psychology (which is fundamentally incompatible with the anthropological presuppositions of Marxism), completely oblivious of the existence of a Meadian theory of the dialectic between society and the individual that would be immeasurably more congenial to their own approach. For a recent example of this ironic phenomenon, cf. Georges Lapassade, *L'entrée dans la vie* (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1963), an otherwise highly suggestive book that, as it were, cries out for Mead on every page. The same irony, albeit in a different context of intellectual segregation, pertains to the recent American efforts for a rapprochement between Marxism and Freudianism. One European sociologist who has drawn heavily and successfully upon Mead and the Meadian tradition in the construction of sociological theory is Friedrich Tenbruck. Cf. his *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (*Habilitationsschrift*, University of Freiburg, to be published shortly), especially the section entitled "Realität." In a different systematic context than ours, but in a manner quite congenial to our own approach to the Meadian problematic, Tenbruck discusses the social origin of reality and the social-structural bases for the maintenance of reality.

26. Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (Chicago, Free Press, 1949), p. v.

27. Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Chicago, Free Press, 1950), p. 14.

28. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 101.

I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

1. This entire section of our treatise is based on Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *Die Strukturen der Lebenswelt*, now being prepared for publication. In view of this, we have refrained from providing individual references to the places in Schutz's published work where the same problems are discussed. Our argument here is based on Schutz, as developed by Luckmann in the afore-mentioned work, *in toto*. The reader wishing to acquaint himself with Schutz's

work published to date may consult Alfred Schutz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (Vienna, Springer, 1960); *Collected Papers*, Vols. I and II. The reader interested in Schutz's adaptation of the phenomenological method to the analysis of the social world may consult especially his *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, pp. 99 ff., and Maurice Natanson (ed.), *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York, Random House, 1963), pp. 183 ff.

II. SOCIETY AS OBJECTIVE REALITY

1. On recent biological work concerning the peculiar position of man in the animal kingdom, cf. Jakob von Uexküll, *Bedeutungslehre* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1958); F. J. J. Buytendijk, *Mensch und Tier* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1958); Adolf Portmann, *Zoologie und das neue Bild vom Menschen* (Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1956). The most important evaluations of these biological perspectives in terms of a philosophical anthropology are those by Helmuth Plessner (*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 1928 and 1965) and Arnold Gehlen (*Der Mensch, seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*, 1940 and 1950). It was Gehlen who further developed these perspectives in terms of a sociological theory of institutions (especially in his *Urmensch und Spätkultur*, 1956). For an introduction to the latter, cf. Peter L. Berger and Hansfried Kellner, "Arnold Gehlen and the Theory of Institutions," *Social Research* 32: 1, 110 ff. (1965).

2. The term "species-specific environment" is taken from von Uexküll.

3. The anthropological implications of the term "world-openness" were developed by both Plessner and Gehlen.

4. The peculiarity of the human organism as ontogenetically grounded was shown particularly in the investigations of Portmann.

5. The suggestion that the fetal period in man extends through the first year of life was made by Portmann, who called this year the "extrauterine Frühjahr."

6. The term "significant others" is taken from Mead. For Mead's theory of the ontogenesis of the self, cf. his *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1934). A useful compendium of Mead's writings is Anselm Strauss (ed.), *George Herbert Mead on Social Psychology* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964). For a suggestive secondary discussion, cf. Maurice Natanson, *The Social Dynamics of George H. Mead* (Washington, Public Affairs Press, 1956).

7. There is a fundamental dichotomy between the conception of man as a self-producing being and a conception of "human nature."