The basic experience constituting sociology as a new scientific method is the fundamental insight that the world is not what it pretends to be. This means that everyday claims as well as scientific notions about the world and the social world as well are not to be taken for granted, they cannot be taken at face value. This experience is relativizing, and relativity therefore from the very beginning is both the constituting or generating aspect of sociology as well as one of the most important objects of research for sociology. Sociology has been one of the products of the same relativity which it tries to analyse. In the history of sociology this problem of relativity as the core phenomenon of modern cultures became a problem especially within the sociology of knowledge. Simultaneously it became Mannheim’s central analytical problem. Thus, debating “the problem of relativism in the sociology of knowledge” an analysis and discussion of the theoretical position Karl Mannheim elaborates during his Weimarian period is indispensible.

Mannheim develops a general epistemological perspective of a research methodology for the sociology of knowledge (and in this way a general sociological research strategy), and he thereby treated the problem of relativism as the core question. Due to his philosophical education and in-

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2 Cf. Berger/Berger/Kellner 1973 on processes of cultural pluralization in modern times.
terests Mannheim’s main concern was an epistemological one. This focus makes him a most valuable interlocutor as well as counterpart for philosophers. The same holds for sociologists interested in epistemological questions. Therefore it is somewhat surprising that Mannheim is referred to in this context seldomly. For example, Brian Fay in his “Contemporary philosophy of social science”, published in 1996, mainly deals with the questions of particularism, perspectivism, and relativism in contemporary methodology, but he did not even mention Mannheim in his study. And if one looks at one of the most prominent anthologies in the field, the volume Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes edited on “Rationality and Relativism” nearly thirty years ago in 1982, Mannheim is mentioned only once. Barnes & Bloor here argue that Mannheim shares a “dualist and rationalist view when he contrasted the ‘existential determination of thought’ by ‘extra-theoretical factors’ with development according to ‘immanent laws’ derived from the ‘nature of things’ of ‘pure logic possibilities’”. And they continue: “This is why he exempted the physical sciences and mathematics from his sociology of knowledge.” In the following, I will just give a short hint later on their approach and primarily focus on Mannheim’s general epistemological perspective asking whether Mannheim has anything to tell us that is of interest in this respect.

Relationism

I will try to present a three step analysis here leading to the idea of general historicity. Let me start by introducing the central thesis of my presentation: I will neither argue against relativism in order to strengthen rationalism, nor will I argue for the rationality of relativism in order to prevent it from its common criticisms. On the contrary I will argue for relationism as the structure of rationality in order to introduce Mannheim’s answer as a third way (and to my mind the currently most plausible way) of handling the question of relativism. I would like to argue that Mannheim’s general position can be systematized in the sense of a conception of sociology as methodological relationism. Mannheim with his thesis of an

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5 Ibid.
6 See the paper of Markus Seidel in this volume.
epistemological relationism neither argues for an absolute individualism nor does he claim or insist that there is an absolute vantage-point. Both arguments Mannheim regards as clearly contradictory and self-refuting.\textsuperscript{7}

Mannheim, regarded from the perspective of the history of ideas, consciously takes an intermediate position between the radical position of Karl Marx, who asserts that ultimately there is a largely causal-deterministic relationship between society ("basis") and its culture ("superstructure") and, in a different sense, the likewise radical position of Max Scheler, who though conceding the societal contingency of knowledge and its thereby given relativity, does not draw the conclusion that there is in principle a total relationism, because he regards values as a priori and thereby conceives of them as essentially unaffected by societal change.\textsuperscript{8}

Mannheim takes a kind of middle position, but still quite a radical one. Even though Mannheim in a letter to Kurt H. Wolff on April 15, 1946, stated: “I want to break through the old epistemology radically but have not succeeded yet fully.”\textsuperscript{9}

Mannheim’s project of a sociological analysis of knowledge introduces a distinction between the sociology of knowledge as “theory”, on the one hand, and as “socio-historical research,” on the other hand:

\textsuperscript{7} Cf. Mannheim himself: „Der Leistungswert wissenssoziologischer Analysen liegt also […] zwischen Sinnirrelevanz [i.e. relativism] und zwischen totaler Sinnrelevanz [i.e. absolutism], in einer bisher noch nicht gesehenen Mitte“ (Mannheim 1931, p. 224) (The function of the findings of the sociology of knowledge lies somewhere in a fashion […] between irrelevance to the establishment of truth on the one hand, and entire adequacy for determining truth on the other (Mannheim 1936, p. 285)).

\textsuperscript{8} Mannheim’s positioning is to be viewed not least against the background of the Weimar constellation: a) against Scheler: who is the Nestor respectively the prima donna of sociology of knowledge, b) against the sociologists-scolding in Zurich, c) against the Georgians. Mannheim operated with plain typological attributions. The conceptual polarity was obvious to him: on the one side Frankfurt sociology of critical theory: ideological criticism – society – conceptual thinking, on the other side the Georgians: myth – elitism – inner prospect. As the explicit opponents of the sociologists, he considered the former members of the circle grouped around Stefan George, the “Georgians” and their aestheticistical ideology (with exceptions, as the case of the curator of Frankfurt University Kurt Riezler shows, who had close contact with Horkheimer, Mannheim, Adolf Löwe and others and supported their appointments). A quite stable mutual repulsion: while for sociologists the Georgian worldview was an example par excellence for an ideology, for the Georgians sociology exemplarily represented the modern estranged, flattened mode of being (cf. Schivelbusch 1982, p. 15).

As theory it seeks to analyse the relationship between knowledge and existence ('Seinsverbundenheit' des Wissens); as historical-sociological research it seeks to trace the forms which this relationship has taken in the intellectual development of mankind\textsuperscript{10}.

Defining the systematic profile of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge as “a theory [...] of the non-theoretical conditioning factors in knowledge”\textsuperscript{11} “methodological relationism” first of all points to the Marxian roots of his thinking: Mannheim reverses the Marxian thesis that the ideological nature of thinking is not an unchangeable essential attribute of human reason, but rather the result of societal class structures and makes clear that the ideological nature is simply an essential attribute of human structures of thinking. This argumentation offers Mannheim the opportunity to go from a tendency to a mono-causal explanatory scheme (as it can be identified at Marx) to a basically open interpretive process of multiple relationing as constitutive for any knowledge.\textsuperscript{12}

To Mannheim the ideological character of knowledge is an indispensable aspect of human thinking itself. The central object of his sociology of knowledge approach is to grasp and analyse the so-called “centers of systematization,” that is the final and basic categorical structures of thinking essential to every human’s thought within a certain milieu or socio-cultural life-world.\textsuperscript{13} The sociology of knowledge has to identify and to uncover the reasons for the taken-for-granted character of historically specific knowledge. It has to provide an analysis of the constitution of the genesis and the validity of human knowledge, of its taken-for-grantedness forming the elementary forms of thinking and knowing within a socio-historical context. In other words: transforming the Marxian basis-superstructure-scheme Mannheim at first glance made it a relatively unspecific notion about the relationship between social structures, on the one hand, and the conditions of human life, on the other hand – basically pointing to a quasi-anthropological structure. His analysis tries to identify the socio-historical apriori; I would like to call it a weak apriori.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Mannheim 1936, p. 264 (Mannheim 1931, p. 216).
\textsuperscript{11} Mannheim 1936, p. 264 (Mannheim 1931, p. 659, col. 1–2).
\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Schnädelbach 1996, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Lenk 1984, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Schnädelbach 1996.
The Relational Procedure

The best clarifications of his central concept of “relationing (relationieren)” can be found in Mannheim’s article on “Sociology of Knowledge,” which he wrote in 1931 for the Handbook of Sociology. I would like to view Mannheim’s dictionary entry as his legacy to this field of research.\textsuperscript{15} If we have a look at his writings from the article on “Historicism” (1924) to the one on the “Sociology of Knowledge” (1931), we then realize that it was due to the criticism of the contribution he presented at the 1928 congress of sociology on “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon” and the clarifications he therefore integrated into his 1929 introductory essay on “Ideology and Utopia” in the book of the same name, that he especially focused on the problem of relativism in his article for the 1931 Handbook of Sociology (cf. table 1 and 2, pp. 177–81). And because this remains his most systematic contribution to the sociology of knowledge, it happens that the epistemological problem of relativism legitimately has been viewed as his dominating research interest in this field.

In this contribution we find Mannheim’s concept of the sociology of knowledge in its mature, revised form, supplementing his earlier contributions. “Relationing”, as “the procedure of the sociology of knowledge” is viewed, according to this text, as relating “individual ideas to the total structure of a given historico-social subject”: “Relationism,” Mannheim points out, “does insist […] that it lies in the nature of […] assertions that they cannot be formulated absolutely, but only in terms of the perspective of a given situation”\textsuperscript{16} (i.e., in standpoint-bound aspect-structures). As Mannheim puts it in his paradigmatical thesis: “Relationism, as we use it, states that every assertion can only be relationally formulated. It becomes relativism only when it is linked with the older static ideal of external, unperspectivistic truths independent of the subjective experience of the observer, and when it is judged by this alien ideal of absolute truth”.\textsuperscript{17} Once again Mannheim in a formulation of 1929:

\begin{quote}
Relationism signifies merely that all the elements of meaning in a given situation have reference to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Following Kurt H. Wolff, “this is not only Mannheim’s last statement on his conception of the sociology of knowledge …, but also his last paper in the area generally” (1993: 63 f.).

\textsuperscript{16} Mannheim 1936, p. 283 (Mannheim 1931, p. 666/223, col. 2).

\textsuperscript{17} Mannheim 1936, p. 300 (Mannheim 1931, p. 674/231, col. 1).
interrelationship in a given frame of thought. Such a system of meanings is possible and valid only in a given type of historical existence, to which, for a time, it furnishes appropriate expression.\(^\text{18}\)

Thus “the relational procedure,” for example, relates certain opinions “to a certain mode of interpreting the world which, in turn, is ultimately related to a certain social structure which constitutes its situation.”\(^\text{19}\) Mannheim thereby understands “perspective” (I would prefer to speak of aspect-structures (Aspektstrukturen)) as “the manner in which one views an object, what one perceives in it, and how one construes it in his thinking.”\(^\text{20}\) This definition of the “formal determination of thinking” is of systematic importance, because Mannheim here differentiates three aspects of his concept of aspect-structures: “which” = perspectivity, “what” = selectivity, “how” = constructivity. This conceptual triad can be summarized under the headline of historicity, i.e. relationality.

Furthermore, this definition refers to both the “formal determination of thinking” and to “qualitative elements in the structure of thought” like, first, the analysis of the meaning of the concepts being used; the phenomenon of the counter-concept; the absence of certain concepts; [second] the structure of the categorial apparatus; [third] dominant modes of thought; [fourth] level of abstraction; and [fifth] the ontology that is presupposed.\(^\text{21}\)

Mannheim tries to exemplify the analysis of these qualitative elements in the structure of thought, i.e. of aspect-structures, by pointing out:\(^\text{22}\)

First: that “the concepts in their concrete contents diverge from one another in accordance with differing social positions” (e.g., concept of freedom; conservative as freedom to, i.e. positive; liberal as freedom of, i.e. negative);

Second: that “the basic categories of thought may likewise differ” (morphological categories used by conservatives; analytical methods used by liberals);

\(^{18}\) Mannheim 1936, p. 86. The closeness and the familiarity of Mannheim’s epistemological perspective with the structuralist approach in the analysis of language as introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure (1905/10) is obvious here.

\(^{19}\) Mannheim 1936, p. 282 (Mannheim 1931, p. 666/223, col. 2).

\(^{20}\) Mannheim 1936, p. 272 (Mannheim 1931, p. 662/219, col. 2). Italics are mine.

\(^{21}\) Mannheim 1936, p. 272 (Mannheim 1931, pp. 662 f./219 f.).

\(^{22}\) Mannheim 1936: 273–9; Mannheim 1931: 663 ff./220 ff.
Third: that “the model that is implicitly in the mind of a person when he proceeds to reflect about an object” differs (e.g., forms of orientation towards the world, modes of life referring to classes, generations, status groups, sects, occupational groups, schools and so on). The typical difference is the one between organic or holistic models of thought and individualistic models of thought;

Fourth: that characteristics of perspectives are to be found “by investigating the level of abstraction, beyond which a given theory does not progress, or the degree to which it resists theoretical, systematic formulation”, i.e., “the approach to the problem, the level on which the problem happens to be formulated, the stage of abstraction and the stage of concreteness that one hopes to attain, are all and in the same way bound up with social existence”. Mannheim’s example is Marx as “an observer whose view is bound up with a given social position” due to which he “never succeed[s] in singling out the more general and theoretical aspects which are implicit in the concrete observations that he makes”, that is “the fundamental findings of the sociology of knowledge concerning the relationship between human thought and the conditions of existence in general”;

Fifth: that “it is dangerous to approach [the] problems [of a ‘basic ontology’] naively, without first taking into account the results suggested by the sociology of knowledge”. This fifth point directly addresses Heidegger’s ‘fundamental-ontology’, which I will leave aside here.

As a determination of facticity in this sense, the first process of “relationing” for Mannheim constitutes the first step of every analysis in the sociology of knowledge.

Historicity

This first process is followed by the second process of “particularization”. With this supplementation, made in his 1931 dictionary entry, Mannheim unfolds the systematic meaning of his aforementioned formulation, used in Ideology and Utopia, that a relational system is “possible and valid only

23 Mannheim 1936, p. 277.
24 Thus we have to distinguish between the epistemological problem of relationism, which for Mannheim is of secondary interest, and the process of relationing as the primary research strategy of the sociology of knowledge.
in a given type of historical existence”. It is valid because in the “particularizing process” not only attribution as such is achieved, but here a “limitation of validity,” a restriction of “its claim to validity” occurs. This means that the mere determination of the facticity of a fixed standpoint is “transcended” insofar as the domain of validity of the thereby referred to aspect-structure is named: the genetic analysis is supplemented by a reflexion of “theoretical validity” (geltungstheoretische Reflexion). Insight into the constitutive particular character of knowledge does not lead to relativism because it is only valid in this way. Like Husserl, Mannheim connects the question of origin with that of validity here. Therefore, it becomes clear that Mannheim is arguing against the claims for validity, on the one hand, and stating a certain type of validity, on the other hand. We might call this type particular validity.

This second process is followed by a third process of “neutralization of situational determination”. Since at the first stage this process implies a tendency which “neutralizes the various conflicting points of view”, at the second stage it “creates out of this neutralization a more comprehensive and serviceable basis of vision”. According to Mannheim, this is possible because here “a higher degree of abstractions” as well as an “increasing degree to formalize the phenomena” is reached. As Mannheim himself tries to explain it:

Rather the neutralizations of the qualitative differences in the varying points of view, arising in certain definite situations, result in a scheme of orientation which allows only certain formal and structural components of the phenomena to emerge into the foreground of experience and thought.

As far as I see, it never has been noticed that Mannheim in order to illustrate his strategy of research explains it by referring to everyday conventions (“the rules of etiquette and social intercourse”) as well as to everyday processes of typification. As for the latter I would like to quote Mannheim in more length:

25 Mannheim 1936, p. 86.
28 Mannheim 1936, p. 302 (Mannheim 1931, pp. 674 f./231 f.): „schafft aus dieser Neutralisierung eine umfassendere, tragfähigere Sichtbasis”.
The qualitative understanding of the mutual relationship, which is formalized to such an extent that it becomes a ‘formal sociological category’ indicating, so to speak, is only the specific role of the relationship. The other party is regarded merely as an ‘ambassador,’ ‘stranger,’ or ‘train conductor.’ […] The formalization in such cases is itself an expression of certain social situations, and the direction which formalization takes […] is dependent on the social situation, which enters, even though in a diluted form, into the categories that we use.\(^{30}\)

Thus, Mannheim in the sense of the program formulated by Ernst Troeltsch “[to] overcome history through history and [thus to] level the foundation for a new creation”,\(^{31}\) argues with historicism against historicism. His attempt to solve the problem of relativity leads him beyond an awareness of the fundamental total relativity of all knowledge to a reflected relationism.\(^{32}\)

Speaking from a historical point of view the problem of relativity is not a new one. It can be seen as the result of historism (not: historicism). Historism in general emerges between 1790 and 1830. It is to be associated with historians like Leopold von Ranke, Jacob Burckhardt, Johann G. Droysen, Wilhelm Dilthey; even though the term “historism” became fashionable at the turn of the 20th century in a polemic voice. Following the historical-systematic analysis of Herbert Schnädelbach one has to differentiate three types of historism:\(^{33}\)

A first type of historism can be called the positivism of the humanities (Geisteswissenschaften), cultivating a tendency of escalating collection and listing of historical data as scientific style. This tendency is best called in German ‘Faktenhuberei’, i.e. anorak or wonk, and includes both a type of research typical for a special form of historical research as well as a tendency of making philosophy a type of philology that Schnädelbach once called “morbus hermeneuticus”.\(^{34}\) A second type of historism is to be identified as a philosophical position arguing for a general historical relativism. Finally, a third type of historism is viewing all socio-cultural phenomena as historic ones. Ernst Troeltsch, for example, is arguing for

\(^{30}\) Mannheim 1936, pp. 304 f. (Mannheim 1931, p. 676/233, col. 1).

\(^{31}\) Troeltsch 1922, p. 772.

\(^{32}\) According to Lenk a „Versuch einer Überwindung des historischen Relativismus durch den Nachweis seiner eigenen geschichtlichen Bedingtheit“ (an attempt to overcome historical relativism by certifying its own historical relativity) (Lenk 1984, p. 41).

\(^{33}\) Cf. Schnädelbach 1983, pp. 51 ff. See also Schnädelbach 1974.

\(^{34}\) Cf. Schnädelbach 1981.
a process of a “principal historization of all human thinking about man, culture, and values (grundsätzlichen Historisierung alles unseres Denkens über den Menschen, seine Kultur und seine Werte)”.

Thus, historism 1 as well as historism 2 are forms of degeneration or symptoms of decline of the third type of historism. Historism 3 serves a type of enlightenment. It is this third type of analysis Mannheim is striving for in his sociology of knowledge approach.

Mannheim’s account therefore can be called radical because he regards all forms of knowledge – thus also the knowledge in the natural sciences (Mannheim mentions “quantum theory”), as he states in his 1931 legacy, as well – as in principle accessible to a sociological analysis on the basis of his research hypothesis of a universal existential connectedness of all knowledge („einer generellen Seinsverbundenheit allen Wissens“). Here his 1931’s contribution radicalizes his former position excluding the natural sciences and esp. mathematical knowledge from his approach. One should point out that again Mannheim seems to be at least ambivalent in this point. But while he once states that his analysis holds for “certain assertions”, this contradicts passages where he indeed much more frequently says that his analysis holds for “every” type of knowledge.

Mannheim’s analyses are concentrated on the dynamics of knowledge. Mannheim is not only interested in the historical dynamics of socio-cultural processes and processes of vertical mobility due to which the problem of a sociology of knowledge may arise, but also in the “changes”

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35 Troeltsch 1922, p. 102.
36 Also biographically it makes little sense to attribute a relativistic position to Mannheim, because it was one of the central items on the program of the “Free School of Humanities”, founded out of the Sunday Circle in 1917/18, to oppose to “relativistic impressionism” (Karádi/Vezér 1985, p. 12). And even if the program itself was not formulated by Mannheim, yet he was one of its major figures and in their second semester in February 1918 gave the program lecture “Soul and Culture”. In the other case it would have to be successfully found early Mannheim’s demarcations to the program or a clear break in his thinking from his Heidelberg years (see also the dependence on Neo-Kantianism and Logos- movement and position of methodological pluralism vs. Monism of science, cf. Karádi/Vezér 1985, pp. 12–14).
in everyday knowledge itself.\textsuperscript{41} As he generally said: “The meaning of history and life is contained in their becoming and in their flux”.\textsuperscript{42} And Mannheim himself is aware of his historical position in time, which makes it impossible to bridge the socio-culturally created gap between living and thinking. He speaks about “the rise of a particular new attitude of consciousness”\textsuperscript{43} (das Aufkommen einer spezifisch neuen Bewusstseinshaltung) in modern times. This attitude, leading to a type of “experimental life” (experimentelles Leben) implies a “distancing from life” (Lebensdistanzierung). And this process will take place historically, if the “unambiguity of orientation of meaning in life disintegrates”\textsuperscript{44} (wenn die Eindeutigkeit der Bedeutungsrichtung des Lebens zerfallen ist), which, according to Mannheim, occurs in the socio-historical process when the religious world has been destroyed.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{Catharsis}

It was Mannheim with his concept of relationism, inspired by the sociology of knowledge, who first succeeded in avoiding the methodological problem of relativism by clarifying the logical paradox of non-contradictory (Nichtwiderrälsprührlichkeit) as well as the self-refuting structure (sich selbst widerlegende Struktur) of a radical or absolute relativism.

In Mannheim’s work an epistemological orientation seems to dominate,\textsuperscript{46} which is prominently focused on the problem of relativism. Mannheim’s main concern was an epistemological one, but he is not only interested in the problem of relativism: We have to differentiate two steps of his analysis, as presented, for example, in his \textit{Ideology and Utopia}. There he distinguishes the “uncovering”, the “revelation” (Enthüll-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Cf. Mannheim 1936, pp. 3, 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Cf. Mannheim 1936, p. 26.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Cf. Mannheim 1930, p. [6].
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Cf. Mannheim 1930, p. [15].
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Cf. Mannheim 1930, p. [16]. For further elaboration of this point see Endreß on historicity (Endreß 2001: esp. pp. 78 ff.).
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Even though this cannot be said in Mannheimian terms, because to him epistemological reflections are “oriented within the polarity of object and subject” (Mannheim 1936, p. 13). Despite this classical exposition, Mannheim himself understands the structure of “self-clarification (Selbstklärung)” as a dialectic of subject and object (Mannheim 1936, p. 49).
\end{itemize}
lung) of the situational determination (Seinsgebundenheit) and therefore ideological character (Iideologiehaftigkeit) of all knowledge [as an (anthropological) structural phenomenon] from a “possible” second and “additional” analysis of its connection with an included “epistemological attitude” (erkenntnistheoretische Haltung).

Focusing his work on everyday knowledge, as well as by continuing his earlier studies on “conjunctive thinking,” Mannheim intends to criticize the claims for general validity by pointing to the existential or situational boundness or determination (Seinsgebundenheit) of all knowledge. But while it is his aim to present a critique of our everyday knowledge, at the same time he tries to illustrate his analytical strategy using examples that refer exactly to this type of knowledge. A most prominent example is especially the proverbial “peasant boy” (Bauernjunge), with reference to whom Mannheim tries to explain the processes of “the acquisition of perspective,” the processes of distancing (Distanzierungsprozesse) shifting from “the mode of thinking and speaking characteristic of [his] village […] gradually to [those characteristic of] city life.”

Thus, the process of revealing the concealing potentiality of certain cognitive styles (das Aufdecken des Verdeckungspotentials von Denkformen) is Mannheim’s primary account, and only further investigations lead him to “the problem of what constitutes reliable knowledge” (Eingehen auf die Wahrheitsproblematik): a problem, which first of all opens up the issue of relativism and relationism.

With regard to the question of the status of everyday knowledge, Mannheim’s approach should be seen as a critique of everyday knowledge. As Mannheim puts it in Ideology and Utopia, which appeared in 1929: “If, therefore, we are to rise to the demands put upon us by the need for analyzing modern thought, we must see to it that a sociological

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47 Cf. Mannheim 1936, p. 78.
50 See also Mannheim 1922/25: 178 [197]: “The problem of relativism, as it has become the question of our life, can only be mastered if we make it into the axis, the starting point for theory, and only afterwards ask how it could be overcome at the stage at which it confronts us” (Das Problem des Relativismus, wie es für uns heute Lebensfrage geworden ist, ist nur überwindbar, wenn wir [es] zur Achse, zum Ausgangspunkt der Theorie machen und erst nachträglich fragen, wie man [es] auf der Stufe, auf der [es] uns entgegentritt, überwinden könnte).
history of ideas concerns itself with the actual thought of society”\textsuperscript{51} (das faktische Denken des Menschen). And Mannheim confirms this aim of his analysis in the new first chapter written for the English edition of this book in 1936, when he states that it is “the so-called pre-scientific inexact mode of thought” he intends to describe and analyse.\textsuperscript{52}

Mannheim – following the classical idea of enlightenment – intends to present an analytical \textit{catharsis of thinking}. He argues for a correlation of the processes of self-control, self-correction, self-illumination, self-knowledge (Selbstkontrolle, Selbstkorrektur, Selbstdurchleuchtung, Selbstkenntnis) and thus self-extension (Selbsterweiterung) or self-clarification (Selbstklärung) by individuals and groups, on the one hand, and, one can say, of world-clarification (Weltklärung), on the other hand.\textsuperscript{53}

Sociology of knowledge as a form of critique tries to show the situational determination of thinking. Because this analysis is valid for all knowledge, for all thinking, it is also valid for everyday knowledge and everyday thinking.

Since Mannheim tries to show the existential boundedness of knowledge, his approach can be called a (hermeneutical) “deconstruction” of group-constituted knowledge. Focusing on the intersubjective constitution of meaning and knowledge, Mannheim argues that “knowledge is from the very beginning a co-operative process of group life”.\textsuperscript{54}

At this point we are in need of a clarification of the term “constitution”. Mannheim himself understands his analysis, i.e., the analytical strategy of his conception of the sociology of knowledge as contrary to the analysis of ideologies as a “constitutional” one.\textsuperscript{55} It seems that this theory of constitution turns out to be an analysis of the structural conditions of all types of knowledge. The theory or analysis of “structural conditions” is understood here as an analysis uncovering those attributes of human interactions that are not at anyone’s disposal. It means to talk about conditions which constitute human’s empirical reference scheme of knowledge.

\textsuperscript{51} Mannheim 1936, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{52} Cf. Mannheim 1936, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{54} Cf. e.g. Mannheim 1936, pp. 28, 29.
\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Mannheim 1936, pp. 266, 271, 279 (Mannheim 1931, pp. 660/217, col. 1, 662/219, col. 1, 665/222, col. 1). The English translation of this article reads here: “structural or noo-logical level” (266), “essential significance” (271), and “constitute an essential part” (279).
Insofar as sociological theory is concerned with an analysis of constitution, i.e., the analysis of the origin, of the genesis of social knowledge, it must always rely on particular constitutional acts. Mannheim here especially refers to the interpretation processes of certain carrier groups (Deutungsprozesse oder -akte von Trägergruppen).

As far as this process of catharsis is a permanent one, Mannheim renews an argument at this stage of his analysis, which he first mentions in his 1924 study on “Historism”. Talking about the general phenomenon of perspectivity, Mannheim in his earlier paper made clear that any “reproach of relativism” (Vorwurf des Relativismus) consequently implies “a doctrine of the ahistorical character of reason”\(^56\) (eine Lehre von der Überzeitlichkeit der Vernunft). For systematic reasons this hint has to be interpreted as a *quasi-transcendental rejection of relativism*.\(^57\) Criticizing the implication of a possible universal validity as accompanying necessarily any assertion of the relativistic character of a theory of perspectivity in general, clarifies the performative contradiction of any critique of relativism. Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge-approach provides us with an argument guiding a transcendental reflection of the conditions of relational claims of validity.\(^58\)

**Methodological Architecture of Relationism**

We are now prepared for final reflections on the architecture of Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge. As stated before, Mannheim’s conception of the sociology of knowledge consists of two parts:

*First* he thinks of it as a kind of *theory*. In this respect it is read here, i.e., as far as the sociology of knowledge is a “theory concerning the significance of the extra-theoretical conditioning factors in knowledge”\(^59\) (Theorie über die Bedeutung der außertheoretischen Bedingungen des Wissens), it has to be viewed as an analysis of what might best be called the structural conditions of knowledge.

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\(^{56}\) Cf. Mannheim 1924, pp. 253 f., 301.


\(^{58}\) See Endreß 1999, p. 341 for a clarification of Mannheim’s three-digit-position: a comparison of the two notions “x in context A is y” and “x in context B is z” combines both the external particular validity of these statements as well as their internal absolute validity.

Second, the sociology of knowledge, for Mannheim, is a research strategy, putting emphasis on the processes of “sociological imputation” (soziologische Zurechnung) by identifying certain carrier groups of knowledge and focusing on particular “social forces” (treibende Sozialkräfte). This understanding of his sociology of knowledge-approach as reflecting sociological conditions of knowledge, is of much more importance to us.

To put it more precisely: On the basis of a general presupposition of distancing knowledge thus far is taken-for-grANTED, and in completion of the first step of relating “individual ideas to the total structure of a given historico-social subject” mannheim’s conception of the sociology of knowledge as a research strategy, consists of three further steps: on a second step, called “horizontal analysis” (Horizontalanalyse), the basic structure of a cognitive style must be analysed. This is the so-called static analysis. On the third step, called “vertical analysis” (Vertikalanalyse), the direction of the development of a style of thinking has to be analysed. This phase is the first dynamic one. On a fourth step, the “sociological imputation” (soziologische Zurechnung) takes place, identifying carrier groups (Trägergruppen) for certain strata of knowledge. Insofar as this analysis also is concerned with the variability of the relation between knowledge and carrier groups, this phase leads to a second dynamic one.

In summing up, we are confronted with some kind of shuttle service between the qualification and the assignment of knowledge. Thus according to the first level of mannheim’s conceptual framework, giving the grounding for the following, he basically is concerned with the structural aspects of cognitive styles. As he points out in his 1930 lecture: “Sociological analysis always has to reach the structural and try to grasp it” (Die soziologische Analyse muß immer auf das Strukturelle zugehen und es zu erfassen versuchen). This first level of analysis is concerned with anthropological structural phenomena, while the second one analyses the “situational boundedness” or “situational determination” of knowledge in detail. It analyses the concrete, the specific relational character of all knowledge. And this relationality is due to certain aspect-structures.

63 Mannheim 1930, p. [14].
The central object of research in the sociology of knowledge is for Mannheim “conceptually grasping the respective systematization centers, i.e., those last categorical structural units in which all thinking individuals of necessity participate in a cultural circle”. \(^{64}\) We can summarize the core of his research interest in the formula: The sociology of knowledge should uncover the reasons why specific knowledge appears to be self-evident. Thereby we are dealing, in the case of Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, with a specific form of analysis of structural conditions. For Mannheim, the analysis of structural conditions aims at revealing the aspect-structures of thinking within an ongoing two-level analysis, because insofar as “every epoch has its fundamentally new approach and […] sees […] from a new perspective [aspect-structure (Aspektstruktur)], […] the historico-social process is of essential (i.e., constitutive) significance”. \(^{65}\) Thereby the phenomenon of “situational determination” [existential boundness (Seinsverbundenheit)] is “an inherent factor [Konstituens] in […] the theory of relationism”. \(^{66}\) Thus Mannheim’s main concern is an analysis of the structural conditions of all types of knowledge, as I said before.

It is Mannheim’s interest to identify structurally necessary, indispensable impregnations of knowledge (strukturell-notwendige Imprägnierungen des Wissens). This analytical interest refers to his concept of total ideology (totaler Ideologiebegriff), i.e., his point of reference is the “mental structure in its totality” (Denkstruktur in ihrer Totalität). His analyses try to criticize thinking, as he puts it, “on the structural or noological level” \(^{67}\) (auf der Konstitutionsebene, auf der noologischen Ebene).

Even though, we might add, Mannheim also asks about the conditions for the constitution of the validity of aspect-structures, whereas “validity” in this context stands for the meaning structure as taken-for-granted. And his answer here is that it is due to carrier groups – even though this conception is not really elaborated in his writings: neither in *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) nor in his article on the sociology of knowledge (1931) and in his 1936 added part “Preliminary approach to the problem”.

\(^{64}\) Lenk 1984, p. 42.

\(^{65}\) Mannheim 1936, p. 271 (Mannheim 1931, p. 672/219, col. 1).

\(^{66}\) Mannheim 1936, p. 305 (Mannheim 1931, p. 676/233, col. 1).

\(^{67}\) Cf. Mannheim 1936, p. 266 (Mannheim 1931, p. 660/217, col. 1).
Concluding Remarks

The position of a methodological relationism elaborated in Mannheim’s case acquires central significance not only for his self-understanding and his sociology, but can also be regarded as a constitutive principle for sociology in general.

Mannheim faces the problem of relativism in the more general light of the question of socio-cultural and philosophical pluralism. Concerning this level of reflexivity it becomes clear that consequently we have to distinguish two different forms of consequences of pluralism: first: relativism in contrast to absolutism, totalitarianism, and fanaticism; and second: relationism as opposing to monism and universalism. And it is the latter which leads us to a culture of compromise, a culture of tolerance, and a culture of reciprocity – even in epistemic cultures.

The leading background thesis even of these problems is what I use to call the ‘structural ambivalence of modernity’ oscillating between heterogeneity (i.e. secularization and pluralization, see, e.g., M. Weber, P.L. Berger), on the one hand, and homogeneity (i.e. nationalization and globalization, see, e.g., E. Gellner, A. Giddens), on the other hand. While reflecting processes of standardization of culture, of language, and of modes of education, these questions demonstrate the intimate relationship of problems of the sociology of knowledge with those of the sociology of domination.

Thus Mannheim legitimately cannot be called a radical or absolut relativist. To put it in classical philosophical terms: while Protagoras’ homomensura-doctrine “Man is the measure of all things” (Der Mensch ist das Maß aller Dinge) argues for the individual human as being the only relevant criterion for truth, Mannheim argues differently by providing a two-step-answer: it is first of all the individual within its socio-cultural milieu and, secondly, we have to reflect this relation in the wider context of history. We therefore have to be aware of a double socio-historical apriori. A statement is apriori only in relation, i.e. something is apriori only in reference to something else. Therefore, it cannot be absolute as such, and the reproach of relativism does not make any sense. The problem of relativism is due to its confusion with the logic of relationism. Mannheim’s analysis helps us to clarify this point.
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Tab. 1: Content and structure of Mannheim’s contribution “Wissenssoziologie” – “Sociology of Knowledge” (1931)

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