

THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE AS PROCESS MEANING  
IN SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENA

by

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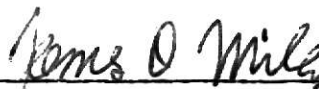
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## CHAPTER I

The relationship between subject and object - between man and his environment - has confounded thinkers for possibly as long as man has been aware of the separation between himself and the world about him. Epistemologically this relationship can be described by three elements: the subject - or knower; the object - the to-be-known; and knowledge or cognition, which is the known.<sup>1</sup>

Assumptions about the relations among these elements and the effect - if any - of one element upon another must be the bases for any scientific investigation, or for that matter any casual observation.

Basically, there are two such assumptions; absolutism and relativism. Absolutism maintains that man's universe is ordered in a way that can be discovered with the use of proper tools. This is the traditional basis of the natural sciences and particularly includes phenomena which can be described quantitatively. The epistemological elements do not affect each other. The character and existence of the object is not determined or modified by either the subject or knowledge of the object.

Relativism assumes either that the universe is in a constant state of change and thus any truth or knowledge can only be temporary; or that the universe is ordered but that order cannot be fully discovered by man. Because of each man's unique spatio-temporal location within the universe, his relationship to, and

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<sup>1</sup>Kurt H. Wolff, From Karl Mannheim, ( New York, Oxford University Press, 1971) p. xxiv.

cognition of the universe is unique. Such an assumption is more common in the study or observation of socio-cultural phenomena both historically and in the present than in the observation of 'natural' phenomena. Relativism allows that the elements may have some effect upon each other.

It seems to be a basic belief of most social and cultural systems of thought that there is order in the universe. Whether this order is attributed to divine guidance, natural laws, causal relationships or astrological habit, man has sought methods of explaining and hopefully understanding this order. Through rationalism and the experimental method a scientific approach to the natural world accomplished a beginning toward this goal. The success of this approach led to attempts to develop a science of society...sociology. Here a major confrontation between these two assumptions, absolutism and relativism, began anew.

Positivism in the natural sciences, which studied objects via concepts not amenable to perspectivistic individual approaches met head-on with historicism which recognized the perspectivistic nature of observation and maintained that the perspective of a given epoch must be re-established to investigate and accurately describe every human action of that epoch. Historicism sought to explain and understand historic and social sciences through dynamic concepts, not in a 'time-less' positivistic fashion, but in relation to spatio-temporal indices and epochal style.<sup>2</sup> Because human values and emotions change and are factors influencing observation, trans-epochal or trans-cultural interpretations of human acts are not valid unless the investigator empathizes with or intellectually transposes himself into that epoch or culture.

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<sup>2</sup>Karl Mannheim, *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul

Karl Mannheim was among those who sought a synthesis between the two approaches. He rejected both absolute and relative views on the possibility of knowledge in favor of 'relationism'.

"Relationism signifies merely that all of the elements of meaning in a given situation have reference to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal interrelationship in a given frame of thought."<sup>3</sup> He rejected positivistic sociology because of its basic contradiction in claiming human knowledge can be complete without metaphysics and ontology and then becoming a metaphysic itself by adopting a particular concept of empiricism in which certain paradigmatic methods provide certain knowledge.<sup>4</sup> By accepting a phenomenological difference between the inanimate and cultural-historical world and at the same time treating these differences as superficial, Mannheim attempted to reach the 'very core of things', to the substance of historical reality. The development of a method to accomplish this task became the sociology of knowledge. With the ideas of existentially determined knowledge\* based upon Marxist materialism and the perspectivistic nature of knowledge drawn from historicism, Mannheim sought to establish a discipline in which the relationship of the three epistemological elements could be determined and through it to investigate the object, thus increasing knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

This synthesis of what perhaps could be labeled, explanation and understanding is a goal Mannheim failed to accomplish.

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1936) p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Mannheim, Essays, p.150.

\* Further elaboration p. 3 below.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.4.

Although he failed to 'scientize' perspectivistic knowledge, his studies, problem outlines, and his sociology of knowledge can alert us to the other part of sociology - beyond, or before positivism and empiricism to what Weber called 'verstehen' - understanding, and as elaborated below fills a middleground between establishment of the primacy of the social determinant of thought and a methodology to examine that social determinant.

Mannheim's sociology of knowledge failed to discover a method to establish knowledge accounting for the interaction of subject, object and knowledge, and the resulting shared perspectives; George H. Mead explains that interaction, and the way individuals develop through a process of human communication by language, a shared means of understanding the nature of phenomena on a foundation of common meaning. This common meaning is the basis of knowledge and the objective character of individual perspectives.

This study does not seek to resolve the Cartesian problem of the relation of essence to existence nor to thoroughly analyze the complete thought and theories of Karl Mannheim and George H. Mead. It's objective is the examination of the contribution of Mannheim and Mead to the study of socio-cultural phenomena via a sociology of knowledge.

Chapter two explicates the problem as posed by Mannheim and discusses his attempt to solve it.

The third chapter will examine G.H. Mead's theory on the historical development of common meanings in social acts and his views on the objective nature of individual perspectives.

The fourth chapter attempts to draw out the parallels between the work of Mannheim and Mead and suggests that Mead provides a necessary social-psychological basis for the sociology of

knowledge, an element missing in Mannheim's work.

## CHAPTER II

The most direct criticism of Karl Mannheim's work is that which is directed to any relativistic thought -- in undertaking to demonstrate that human thought is determined by objective forces such as social reality a theorist exposes his theory itself to the objection that being an element of thought, it is a product of those same social forces and thus exhibits the same precarious relationship to reality as those subjects with which the theory deals. Mannheim seemingly opened the way for such objections of circularity by attempting to demonstrate that factual knowledge of a certain kind is determined by social factors.

In considering Mannheim it is difficult to escape this notion of the theory destroying its own foundation. Although mathematics and natural sciences are exempted and empirical investigation is not to be preempted, knowledge of cultural phenomena is existentially determined. The problem of existential determination remains if this 'existential determination' is considered a kind of total determination of a "causal type that leaves no room for free choice or argument".<sup>1</sup> \*

Mannheim considered such a rigid causal determination as a static 'natural science' category based on supro - temporal

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p 29.

\*Such a 'total determination' must refer to a model in which a fixed set of unique factors cause the event of a unique effect, which in turn is one of the causes of a similar cause-effect relationship. In such a cause-effect chain there is no room or opportunity for outside influences. In such a closed causal system, choice - to be a choice- must be the effect of a previous link and thus is not 'choice' at all.



reason. He claimed that epistemology of such static reason was necessary to allow for the conceptualization of 'eternal laws' in the natural sciences and that "although epistemology is supposed to provide a foundation for various sciences, [this epistemology] is in fact dependent both as to its own structural framework and as to its concrete historical content, on those spheres of knowledge which supply the material for its analysis".<sup>2</sup> Thus the epistemology is taken from the science and is merely a new systemization of existing knowledge rather than an analysis of the basis of that knowledge. Furthermore, such a rigid causal determinism, based on a 'static philosophy of reason', is devoid of universal applicability and fits a type of thinking one-sidedly oriented toward manipulation of thing-like objects:

When one speaks of formal categories or normal values one thinks of containers or tubes in which liquids, say wines, can be constantly poured and where the vessels are thought of as permanent forms endowed with enduring identities. One obtains, however, a completely different correlation between form and content, when one starts out from models based on living and growing (organisms). The farther we get away from the world of rigid 'things' the closer we get to the actual historical substratum of psychic and intellectual reality, the more we shall doubt the validity of such ostensibly supra-temporal attempts at splitting up reality which concentrate all change on one side and all permanence on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Mannheim confronts the static philosophy of reason with a 'dynamic historical philosophy of life' in which history (the on-going social process) itself is a meaningful process. The mind-cultural phenomena are determined not by some great meaningless force, but by something which itself has meaning...the social process.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.92

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.

Mannheim seeks to make distinctions between general scientific explanations and understanding of meanings. His attempt is to somehow reunify the study of human experience and override notions that the positivistic natural science model can explain most human behavior and that what is left over is inexplicable. It is a recurring theme in Mannheim's work to distinguish between explanation and understanding.\* A major goal of his sociology of knowledge was to explain understanding in a quasi-positivistic fashion. The disunity of various modes of explanation in 'science' is opposed by the unity of "Weltanschauung" or global outlook. Only by interpreting "Weltanschauung" is a unity of 'science' comparable to the unity of life developed. Such a unity Mannheim contends will lead to understanding and "adequacy in the sphere of communitive cannot be measured by the standards of the conjunctive, but adequacy here is of far greater intrinsic importance to the life of man than is any verifiable precision in scientific endeavors (narrowly understood)".<sup>4</sup>

Theoretical approaches to culture in the natural science tradition have split society into sharply delineated domains such as art, religion, literature, etc., resulting in the neglect of concrete experiential wholes. "These include the concrete 'whole' of this or that work, the more comprehensive 'whole' of culture and "Weltanschauung" of an epoch."<sup>5</sup> Only by determining the global

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\*This distinction is variously referred to as communicative vs. conjective knowledge, general scientific explanation vs. interpretation of meaning, erklären vs verstehen, Naturwissenschaften vs. Geisteswissenschaften.

<sup>4</sup>David Kettler, *Sociology of Knowledge and Moral Philosophy: The Place of Traditional Problems in the Formation of Mannheim's Thought*, Political Science Quarterly, 32 (Sept. 1967) p. 399.

<sup>5</sup>Mannheim, Essays, p.36.

or total outlook of an epoch can the philosophy and social thought of that epoch be understood. By working toward a synthesis of these various strata of cultural life (religion, literature, art, etc.) and "penetrating to the most fundamental totality in terms of which the interconnectedness of the various branches of cultural studies can be understood"<sup>6</sup> a process of interpretation is derived which has no counterpart in the natural sciences. "Weltanschauung" is thus conceived as an atheoretical entity which Mannheim recognizes could degenerate into relativism.\* However, this was not relativism, he claimed, but rather relationism. Meaning in these acts and events must be considered as a result of the interacting process of the subject and object. In the historical process the object is another individual and, thus, as a subject to himself is interacting with the subject to which he is an object. Because knowledge, in the form of recognized meanings, is guiding the actions of both subject and object it too is relational to the meaning existing in the completed act. Mannheim claims that "Knowledge arising out of our experience in actual life situations, though not absolute, is knowledge none the less."<sup>7</sup>

Relationism signifies merely that all of the elements of meaning in a given situation have reference to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal inter-relationship in a given frame of thought. Such a system of meaning is possible and valid only in a given type of historical existence, to which for a time, it furnishes appropriate expression.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

\*The problem of relativism plagued Mannheim through most of his work. He tried to claim that the social origin of any intellectual problem affected its meaning or epistemological status and that such relevance was not relativism. The distinctions between such relevance and relativism were elucidated - though not too clearly or convincingly.

<sup>7</sup> Mannheim, Ideology, p.36

Knowledge is orientated toward some object and is influenced by the nature of that object. "But the mode of approach to that object is dependent upon the nature of the knower."<sup>9</sup> The extent to which experience can be organized and expressed in order to be transmuted into knowledge is dependent upon "the frames of reference which happen to be available at a given historical moment".<sup>10</sup> \*

Socio-cultural phenomena cannot be separated and studied as unique entities, but must be considered in relation to other aspects of the social situation and in relation to the entire epoch. The whole or gestalt of each phenomena must be understood in order to properly understand each part. This is true on a graduating scale from a singular act or work to the entire history of an epoch.

Translating this approach into a more rigorous methodology was regarded by Mannheim as a central problem in the cultural sciences. Mannheim employs the concept of "Weltanschauung" and levels of meaning in attempting to develop such a methodology and gain an understanding of socio-cultural creations.

In socio-cultural events meaning exists on three levels: (1) the objective meaning which is immediately given, (2) expressive meaning including the intentional meaning of the actors, and (3) documentary meaning, the interpretation by a third party of the event in relationship to the total social context.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

\* These are the 'meaningful existential pre-suppositions' referred to below.

Let us look at Mannheim's own illustration of these levels of meaning. He is walking down the street with a friend. A beggar is standing at the corner, the friend gives him alms. This simple state of affairs is a socially meaningful situation which can be interpreted immediately as to its objective meaning. The act is a vehicle of meaning, in this case of "assistance". With knowledge of the content of the friend's or beggar's intentions, the intentional or expressive meaning can be distinguished. One can grasp the act 'authentically', i.e., as it was intended. The third level of meaning in this example is the way in which Mannheim, as the viewer, interprets the meaning. In understanding the actor's perspective so as to arrive at the intended meaning, the viewer is able to go further and interpret the specific act within the entire framework of the actor's world view in context with the objective and expressive meaning. The act has expressive meaning if it expresses an emotion of the actor. In giving alms the friend may seek to express sympathy. Yet Mannheim viewing the act and considering it in the greater context of the total social situation and the actor's own history may treat it as hypocrisy.

Through this interpretative nature of documentary meaning, Mannheim goes beyond "immanent or intrinsic interpretation, and by interpreting extrinsically, above all sociologically, attempts to identify those meaningful existential presuppositions to which intrinsic interpretation is necessarily blind". <sup>11</sup>

Mannheim again and again stresses the case for attempting a broader understanding of man and society than is possible through positivistic 'science' as conceptualized in the study of nature.

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<sup>11</sup>

Wolff, op. cit., p. xiii.

The problem of unconscious hypocrisy in the example of the friend and the beggar foreshadows Mannheim's later concept of 'total ideology'. Simply put, this concept states that there "is a correspondence between a given social situation and a given perspective, point of view, or apperception mass".<sup>13</sup> Preceding this notion is a conceptual framework in which cultural events have meaning through a particular interpretation in a given epoch and this interpretation cannot be disregarded or overridden at a later time. If a particular social event is viewed from another situation (epoch), a different meaning might be attributed to it. Only by reconstructing the situation intellectually, Mannheim claims, can it be assured that the original meaning is ascribed. Mannheim later concludes that a necessary foundation for this theory is an "unattached intelligentsia". This intellectual social stratum remains free of culture-bound and epoch bound values and influences and thus can establish the perspective of any given epoch in order to correctly evaluate events of that epoch. It was this role, in a more specific sense, that Mannheim assumed in the example of the friend and the beggar in order to assess the documentary meaning of the situation. Being 'above' or out of the situation he was able to consider the act, the actors, and the situation and arrive at the 'documentary meaning'.

Mannheim's examples of this documentary meaning, of viewing and interpreting socio-cultural events in this context, are drawn mainly from art. Here the case is seen as different from the natural sciences. Each style, each period has its own validity.

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<sup>13</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology*, p.53.



Philosophy falls somewhere between these extremes. "No straight 'yes' or 'no' can pass from one historical stage to another, but a new, complete system of validity is begun at every stage."<sup>14</sup> And so, a positivistic method which uses a timeless system of validity is not appropriate to the study of cultural phenomena.

Mannheim tries to expand theory in order that it may settle over these atheoretical and pre-theoretical aspects and not dispute or ignore them but rather subsume them. In claiming that positivistic standards cannot be applied, he doesn't suggest that studies of socio-cultural creations should be abandoned. Relatively rigorous positivistic standards can be applied to problems of objective and expressive meaning. In the third level of meaning, the documentary, in which the "influence of his spacio-temporal location upon the interpreter" is a deciding factor, Mannheim fails to develop a methodology susceptible to such rigorous scientific standards.

Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge could more appropriately be called the sociology of cognition or perhaps the sociology of belief. He does claim that all socio-cultural phenomena have a truth value or an absolute meaning -- that knowledge is possible -- that there is a unique meaning to each social event or phenomenon and that the meaning exists in some relationship to the larger social situation of which it is a part. A socio-cultural phenomenon cannot be known only in itself, but must be known within the larger social context.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

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## CHAPTER III

George H. Mead traces the historical development of human interaction and communication and explicates a theory of meaning as developing awareness in humans of their own actions and the probable and actual results of these actions in social processes.

The foundation of all social processes is the gesture. Gesture is that part of the social act presented by one organism which serves to initiate actions in other organisms involved in that social act.<sup>1</sup> Mead uses a dog fight to exemplify gesture at its simplest level. Each dog's behavior is a response to the other dog's actions. One dog presents a gesture such as a growl or snap which serves as a direct initiation of the response in a second dog. There is no awareness on the part of the dog of a pattern of stimulus-response in their behavioral process. Each gesture has no particular meaning other than expressing the attitude of the dog making the gesture and serving as a stimulus to the other dog's response. However, a similar gesture by a human can express an idea as well as an attitude.\* If a man shakes his fist at another, he not only expresses a hostile attitude,

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<sup>1</sup>George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, ed. Charles W. Morris, (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1934) p.42.

\*Attitude as here used by Mead is surprisingly similar to Mannheim's objective meaning in which the act is considered as a vehicle of meaning - not necessarily recognized or intended by the actors. According to Mead attitudes express themselves by the act and are recognized only in form..."anger expresses itself in attack; fear expresses itself in flight". Neither Mead nor Mannheim saw attitudes as a conscious determinant of the act but as meaning immediately attributed to an act by an observer. Mead's "idea" is likewise similar to Mannheim's second level of meaning - expressive meaning - which includes the intention of the actors. If an individual's gesture has an idea behind it, he has reflective or conscious determination to express himself in a way calculated to develop in the other recognition of his attitude.

but quite possibly, has an idea behind the gesture. When the gesture comes to represent this idea ("Leave my girl alone or I'll ...") to both the person presenting the gesture and the person it is presented to, it can in Mead's terms, be labeled a significant symbol. A gesture that has such a mutually accepted meaning in the context of a social process is language.<sup>2</sup>

One of the major aspects of Mead's development of consciousness, meaning and mind arises here when, again and again, he emphasizes the importance of gesture, as developing into significant symbol by arousing in the individual making the gesture the same meaning as it arouses in the individual to whom the gesture is presented.

Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same response which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed...<sup>3</sup>

An individual's awareness of the content and meaning involved depends on his viewing his own gestures with the same attitude as the other(s) do.<sup>4</sup>

A conversation of gestures, unlike language, does not carry with it a symbol which has a universal significance to all different individuals involved in the social process. A conversation of gestures may elicit co-operative activity in that responses to certain gestures, as stimuli may be fixed -- genetically as perhaps in bee and ant colonies, or socially, as in crowd movements, where there is no awareness of specific meaning in the gestures that

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 45,46.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

cause one to move this way or that, this speed or that.<sup>5</sup>

In a conversation of significant symbols (language) among humans the tendency to react to ones own gesture in the same way as another tends to react, allows a break in the simple stimulus response model. This break allows the realization of ones self as a separate and distinct organism, and provides the opportunity to evaluate the meaning of the gesture that one is presenting. The symbolic interaction of humans is a total social process, not a pyramid of stimulus-response networks. That is, the originating gesture initiates the social process which is a continual interchange of ideas and attitudes consciously communicated by the actors; it is not an individual act that calls forth a reciprocal act or response. By realizing the relationship between this initiating gesture and the social processes that follow, an individual can modify the gesture to modify the social process. He has, to some extent, control over his social environment.

The vocal gesture has an importance no other gesture has: an individual hears himself speak and thus is more likely to pay attention to the gesture he is presenting to others.<sup>6</sup> Examples of persons answering their own questions, finishing other person's sentences and talking to themselves, illustrate Mead's contention of the twofold nature of language, both as an intermediary gesture between attitude and completion of the social process and as a control or modifying gesture in the social process. Facial gestures can be compared and contrasted to language as gestures. Though an actor 'trains' his face to communicate attitudes in

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.65.

hopes of controlling his audience most people do not. A rather common comment is, "I could tell he was lying by the look on his face." An individual modifies his vocal gestures to attempt to portray his attitude as he wants others to respond to it. One is able to do this because he can anticipate others' response in the same way.

Meaning is the relationship between the gesture as stimuli and subsequent behavior as response. Thus the mechanism of meaning exists in the social act before awareness of meaning occurs.<sup>7</sup> In return to the example of the dog fight, there is meaning because there is a response brought about by a gesture. It is only as the gesture becomes a significant symbol that awareness or self consciousness develops. Mead's contention here is that meaning is not dependent on conscious awareness but exists implicitly within the social process and is brought 'up' to the level of awareness by use of significant symbols in that process. In order for meaning to exist at a self-conscious level, that is, the level where the organism involved in the process recognizes the meaning existent in that social process, the organism presenting the gesture must be able to recognize the response of another organism as a response to its gesture. This is possible with the use of significant symbols as the organism can compare his own tendency to respond with the response of the other organism.<sup>8</sup>

The central nervous system contains certain retentive or delaying facilities that allow for the suspension in time of the gesture. This facilitates in the individual human the opportunity

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 76,77.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 30,31.

to test variable tendencies to react within his own awareness, and so allowing conscious behavior; that is, self directed and modified behavior, as opposed to behavior which is merely the response to stimuli outside of the organism as is the case with animal behavior. Mead refers to this ability as reflection or reflective behavior.<sup>9</sup> Man can direct his own behavior by selection of stimuli because he is aware of the meaning of stimuli in the social process from initiation to completion of a social act. Mead contends that man does not control his motor processes, only the perceptual or sensory process. An individual chooses and tests in his own consciousness the stimuli he communicates to the other, the other responds to that stimuli and chooses and directs the stimuli he communicates back. Behavior is controlled by stimulus selection. Man does not give meaning to the world; rather, he gains awareness of its existence in social relations as gesture becomes significant symbol, and through consciousness modifies these social relations which lead to the discovery of more meaning .... meaning exists neither in 'nature' nor in man but in the social process.

It is the process of communication via significant symbols that provides man access to meaning...

It does this by furnishing those gestures which in affecting us as they affect others call out the attitude which the other takes, and that we take in so far as we assume his (attitude). We get the attitude, the meaning, within the field of our own control, and that control consists in combining all these various possible responses to furnish the newly constructed act demanded by the problem.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.90.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.97.

Mentality is the relationship of the organism to this meaning.

Language, the use of significant symbols, allows man to select and share the meaning he discovers in his relations to others and to objects. Language provides a control over meaning from which the field of mind emerges.<sup>11</sup> Only when the individual gains awareness of the functioning relationship within the social process does meaning become conscious, and only when that meaning is, in turn, controlled so as to direct the social process does mind emerge. Because the meaning is complete only in the total social context, to re-establish that meaning - to grasp it historically, once the social context has changed - "awareness of the functioning relationship within the social process from originating stimulus to response to completion of that social act" must be re-established.

Using communication through significant symbols as the basis for awareness of meaning, Mead proceeds to expand that awareness from the unique individual meaning to common meaning. That is, he allows for perspectives but maintains that the basis of social existence and continuity is the common meaning that develops out of reflective behavior.

As reviewed above, the individual 'raises' meaning to the level of awareness by the reflective thought process -- his tendency to respond to his own gestures in the same manner as another tends to respond, brings about a realization of the link between his own stimulus and the response of the other - this link is meaning.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>12</sup>G. H. Mead, "Social Consciousness and Consciousness of Meaning", in Selected Writings, ed. by Andrew Reck (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), p. 125.

The individual, in Mead's terms, can take the role of the other in relationship to himself and bring a consciousness of meaning to his own actions. This role taking, however, is not absolute - that is, the tendency to respond and the manipulation of the stimulus is not absolutely programmed or correlated among individuals. Each human is a unique intelligent being whose role is unique; thus giving rise to perspectives. In Mead's theory there is the self and the other involved in the social process -- there is also 'an other other'<sup>13</sup> which Mead terms the 'generalized other'. The generalized other is the group...the family, baseball team, nation, etc., which the self and others consider an entity or social being in itself. The individual in taking the role, or perspective, of the generalized other gains awareness of the 'common meaning'. This common meaning is the basis of knowledge.

In the field of any social science the objective data are those experiences of the individuals in which they take the attitude of the community, i.e., in which they enter into the perspective of the other members of the community.<sup>14</sup>

The common perspective is the objective basis for investigation of socio-cultural phenomena. The social scientist replaces the "narrower social perspective of other communities (with) that of a more highly organized and hence more universal community... (science).<sup>15\*</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>H. Orbach, Seminar on Social Theory (Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas ) Spring, 1972.

<sup>14</sup>Mead, "The Objective Reality of Perspectives", Selected Writings, p.310.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.311.

\*This again, compares closely to Mannheim's documentary meaning by removing one's self from the situation and viewing the situation extrinsically or via an intellectual elite the true or documentary meaning can be as attributed to that situation.



Head's work needs to be clarified primarily in regard to his use of the terms attitude - perspective - and role. These terms, while perhaps specifically distinguishable, in the general context of Head's work can be taken to mean point of view. Head's reference to 'taking the role of the other', or 'taking the perspective of the other', - or generalized other, can broadly be interpreted as assuming the point of view of the other, having the same tendency to act and/or acting as the other would act.

Attitude is manifested in act, to which meaning is attributed. The very foundation of the social process, the social development of mind and thought is attitude and the expression and sharing of attitudes through vocal communication. The development of the generalized other which is the shared and commonly accepted attitude of the group, and the interaction with that generalized other is the basis of the common meaning which is knowledge.



## CHAPTER IV

Mannheim failed first to establish the possibility of the sociology of knowledge in that his arguments contain nothing that could ground the primacy of the social determinant among other transcendent determinants of thought such as race or climate.

Arthur Child holds "that the characteristics of thought that Mannheim enumerates actually do characterize thought; moreover, they do seem to bear witness to the constitutive function of reality in the intellectual realm".<sup>16</sup> However, the postulational skeptic might object that these facts "only become evident or that they only exist or that they are only true upon the very supposition of what they purport to prove -- namely that society does determine thought."<sup>17</sup> Such skepticism primarily represented by Ernst Grünwald recognizes that evidence supporting the validity of one transcendent interpretation is drawn upon the basic premise one starts with. Evidence which might contradict one's own fundamental premise, that thought is determined by race, social or vital factors is interpreted away, therefore, "for each of the various interpretations, one might claim the power of revealing the genuine objective determinants of thought." <sup>18</sup>

Such 'postulational skepticism' would be undermined by an adequate social theory of mind. If mind itself has a social origin -

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Child, "The Theoretical Possibility of the Sociology of Knowledge", Ethics, LI (April, 1941), p. 415.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.406.

if, that is, it arises through the process of communication - and if thinking consists at bottom in the manipulation of generalized attitudes taken over from the social group as a whole, then there can be no question of the social determination, in some sense, of knowledge and thought.<sup>19</sup> Such a social theory of mind is outlined by George H. Mead.

If thought is indeed a social process, as Mead describes it, then there can be no question that, whatever transcendent determinants may exist besides society they can determine mind only through the intermediation of social reality.

Though some of Mead's development seems confused and contradictory, his general tenets seem quite susceptible of development into a theoretical foundation for the interpretation of thought from a social standpoint.

Mead's concept of "group attitudes as incorporated into the structure of the individual mind"<sup>20</sup> overcomes the singular determinate problem of other existential determination theories. His concept allows economic and class interests as well as group emotion, individual genius, social-historical tradition, etc., as constitutive of a manifold social determinate. Moreover, the evident plurality of these factors supports the wholistic approach to socially determined knowledge as Mannheim advocated.

Mead's theory that attitudes function as a means of existential determination allows the individual both as a socialized being and as a dynamic individual to react to and act upon the group attitude so that the individual itself is a social determinate.

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<sup>19</sup> Arthur Child, "The Existential Determination of Thought", Ethics, LII (January, 1942), p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 416.

Mead's theory provides the means by which Mannheim's social determination comes about and at the same time provides the flexibility which Mannheim claimed as an alternative to total determinatism. Mead's elucidation of the development of societal interaction, individual mind and common meaning provides an integration into the social determinant of the 'wholes' which Mannheim felt to be a necessary approach to understanding.

The attraction of Mannheim's work and at the same time the failure of his attempt to 'scientize' it, perhaps can be best understood as David Kettler suggests in relation to the 'moral - philosophic syndrome'.<sup>21</sup> This, explains Kettler, is the moral philosophic vein which runs through much of social science and is what attracts many to the social sciences -- yet is a philosophic viewpoint or a moral philosophic ideology -- which is not scientific. Mannheim's attempt was to establish and account for the viewpoint and to combine it with the scientific method.

Mannheim attempted to reach beyond the canons of science of his time to find a means of understanding and explaining socio-cultural phenomena more completely. His explanation of the need for a more encompassing approach is extensive and convincing, yet the resulting methodology, an 'unattached intelligencia' remains undeveloped, unconvincing, and politically naive.

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<sup>21</sup>Kettler, op. cit.

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE AS PROCESS MEANING  
IN SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENA

by

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As initiated by Karl Mannheim, the Sociology of Knowledge treats products of thought - doctrines, ideas, and science - as social happenings and thus the proper area for sociological investigation. Mannheim attempted to develop a methodology with which the relationship of individual, the social situation, and such products could be explained. By posing what was termed "relationism", a position which maintained that a relationship exists between individual, situation, and the thought products, Mannheim opened the way for charges of relativism.

George Mead's concepts of process meaning and its historical development, help make this relationism and its effect on meaning in socio-cultural events more clearly understandable.

Though Mannheim succeeded in raising questions about investigation of phenomena not amenable to the canons of science of his time, he failed to establish the methodology he sought. This failure, itself, can be seen as support for his theories. His own world view was closely tied to the natural science methodology he attempts to overcome in the study of socio-cultural phenomena.