

Sociology and the Mistrust of Thought:

Hannah Arendt's Encounter with Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge¹

Abstract

Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* ranks among the few truly seminal texts of sociology. The charter document of the sociology of knowledge, the book was recognized from the beginning as a pioneering and provocative work. Among its early critics was a young, obscure philosopher who later emerged to become one of America's most controversial public intellectuals: Hannah Arendt. This article examines the encounter between Arendt and Mannheim and describes the stakes of what it symbolized in the confrontation between sociology and philosophy. Two themes are especially salient. The first centers on Arendt's objections to the Marxist-cum-sociological stratagem of "unmasking." The second demonstrates that while Arendt detested sociology, she was drawn, despite herself to construct her own political sociology of knowledge – namely, of Jewish assimilation. That suggests something philosophers and political theorists are frequently loath to admit: that a covert sociology – latent, unacknowledged, inchoate – undergirds much of their writing on society.

INTRODUCTION

"Every age has its own originality," Hannah Arendt (1930).²

"Can we master the global tensions [that beset us] or must we suffer shipwreck upon our own history?" Karl Mannheim (1932).³

This article examines Hannah Arendt's appraisal of *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), Karl Mannheim's foundational argument for the sociology of knowledge.⁴ Written before she developed her own political theory, Arendt's review is moderate and discriminating, bereft of the acidic contempt for sociology that would come later. If she had perished in Auschwitz or

¹ I am grateful to David Kettler and Volker Meja for their helpful remarks on an earlier draft of this paper.

² Arendt ([1930] 1994, p. 35) = Arendt ([1930] 1982, pp. pp. 521-522), which is the German version I cite below. The article first appeared as "Philosophie und Soziologie: Anlässlich Karl Mannheim, Ideologie und Utopie," *Die Gesellschaft*, 7, 1 (1930), pp. 163-176

³ Mannheim ([1930-1932] 2001, p. 77).

⁴ Mannheim ([1929] 1936) = Mannheim (1929a).

Treblinka, we would today read this essay as little more than a period piece, a small contribution to a debate that ephemerally caught scholarly attention in the twilight years of the Weimar Republic. But Arendt was not murdered in a Nazi camp. She fled Germany in 1933 to become one of America's most celebrated and controversial public intellectuals until her death in 1975. And throughout her post-war career Arendt repeatedly attacked the social sciences, those "abominable" disciplines that were, she said, congenitally disabled from grasping the terrible novelty of totalitarian regimes.

Seen from that elongated perspective, her youthful collision with the sociology of knowledge assumes greater significance. First, it comprised her only explicit encounter with a major sociological work. If she found sociology "disturbing" at this point in her career, she was at least still willing to engage with its exponents, a fact confirmed by her attendance of the Frankfurt interdisciplinary seminar, conducted under Mannheim's auspices, on "Social History and History of Ideas: Early Liberalism in Germany."⁵ Nothing in her subsequently published oeuvre or literary remains written after 1933 suggests that Arendt took a serious interest in Mannheim again. The Mannheim she knew and occasionally recalled was the prodigy of Weimar, not the melancholy exile in England who became a champion of rationalism and planning. Second, Arendt's review of Mannheim is significant in prefiguring her aversion to the Marxist-sociological stratagem of "unmasking" - a rhetorical mode of exposure she later condemned as naïve, sinister and cruel - and her dislike of what she called "functionalism". As a

⁵ More precisely, the "Working Group on Social History and History of Ideas" was a joint academic venture led by Mannheim together with, Adolf Löwe, Ludwig Bergsträsser and Ulrich Noack; respectively, this fielded a sociologist, an economist, a political scientist and a historian. The workshop spanned the academic years 1931-33. Among the student attendees were Arendt, her then husband Günther Stern, Hans Weil, Norbert Elias (actually, Mannheim's paid assistant, working on his *Habilitation*), and Hans Gerth. Gerth went so far as to claim that the historical passages in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* were stimulated by this workshop, but to what extent that is true is hard to judge and, to this author, is doubtful. For this information, see the comments by Ulrich Herrmann to his edition of Gerth (1976, pp. 9 and 81).

mature political theorist, writing in America, she lacerated both stances. Here we see the first inklings of that opposition.⁶

I begin by sketching the background to Arendt's encounter with Mannheim, proceed to outline her critical review of *Ideology and Utopia*, and then examine Mannheim and Arendt's contrastive analyses of intellectuals. I contend that her study of the pathologies of Jewish assimilation, begun in the year that she composed the review of Mannheim, offers a distinctive, if unacknowledged, political sociology of knowledge. Having renounced sociology, she ended up doing it by default. We might be tempted to see that as a personal irony. In fact it cuts to a deeper issue. Once philosophers attribute powers to social phenomena, and once they seek to explain mental, emotional, political and other factors in terms of these powers, they are invariably implicated in sociological practice, whether they realize it or not.

BEFORE THE CATAclysm: THE BACKGROUND TO ARENDT'S ENCOUNTER WITH MANNHEIM

The occasion was the publication in 1929 of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, which Arendt reviewed a year later for *Die Gesellschaft*. The flagship theoretical journal of the German Social Democratic Party, founded by Rudolf Hilferding, *Die Gesellschaft* was principally run after 1928 by Albert Salomon.⁷ That the editors commissioned three other critical pieces on *Ideology and Utopia*, penned by Paul Tillich, Herbert Marcuse and Hans Speier,⁸ indicates the fanfare with which Mannheim's work was greeted. And it was not only leftists who took note. Ever since his electrifying contribution to the Sixth Congress of German Sociologists in 1928 –

⁶ Arendt's post 1945 critique of sociology is discussed in Baehr 2002a.

⁷ In 1928, Hilferding became German Minister of Finance.

⁸ They are collected and translated in Meja and Stehr (1990).

the lecture on “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon,” – Mannheim had become somewhat of a phenomenon himself, the centre of attention for those who either applauded or excoriated the new “sociology of knowledge” (Mannheim [1929] 1971). Attended by such present or future luminaries such as Alfred Weber, Werner Sombart, Emil Lederer, Hans Jonas, Adolf Löwe, Norbert Elias and Leopold von Wiese, among others, the Congress afforded a remarkable audience of sociological elders and neophytes in front of which to showcase the sociology of knowledge. Most important for an ambitious young scholar, Mannheim’s arguments provoked annoyance and dissent. Marxists were upset about Mannheim’s dilution of, and challenge to, Marxism itself; the implication that it could be “unmasked” like other ideologies was particularly unwelcome. Conversely, liberal-minded sociologists were suspicious that Mannheim’s theory was little more than Marxism shorn of its most simplistic claims, a materialist Trojan Horse bearing down on the sociological citadel. And anti-sociologists (notably, Ernst Robert Curtius [1929] 1990) called down a plague on both ideological houses, insisting to boot that the sociology of knowledge was a nihilist’s charter.⁹ On all counts, Mannheim’s challenge was hard to ignore. It earned him a growing reputation and contributed to his appointment as Professor of Sociology at Frankfurt’s Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in 1930.

Ideologie und Utopie was centrally concerned with political questions - notably the malaise of Weimar (truncated in the English translation) and discussion of socialism, fascism, liberal democracy, bureaucratic and “historicist” conservatism. Its longest chapter is entitled “Is a Science of Politics Possible?” Mannheim averred that it was. Politics, he says, is a kind of “action” that is novel, previously unregulated, and requiring initiative - in contrast to

⁹ For a sparkling account of the stakes of the conflict between Curtius and Mannheim, see Lepenies ([1985] 1988, pp. 313-333).

“administration” which is concerned with routinized, settled, “reproductive” behaviour.¹⁰ Thus, an official who attends to a well-worn procedure, or a judge who applies a precedent to an uncontroversial legal case, is not involved in politics in Mannheim’s ([1929] 1936, p. 113) sense.

We are in the realm of politics when envoys to foreign countries conclude treaties which were never made before; when parliamentary representatives carry through new measures of taxation; when an election campaign is waged; when certain opposition groups prepare a revolt or organize strikes – or when these are suppressed.¹¹

A science of politics is no other than the sociology of knowledge. It is urgently needed in age of “total” ideology. A total ideology is more than the claim that an opponent is consciously or semi-consciously disguising his interests behind his opinions. That is what Mannheim calls a “particular” conception of ideology which spans the gamut from the outright lie to self deception. When social actors embrace a “particular” notion of ideology, they do so as individuals confronting other individuals. Yet even as they seek to expose duplicity, both parties share the same basic frame of reference and “criteria of validity”. They argue on the assumption that, were it not for the obtuseness and perversity of the other, justice would prevail - “justice” being a datum every clear sighted person could agree on. Since ego and alter inhabit the same

¹⁰ The theoretically resonant German term for action – *Handeln* – is translated in Shils’s English version as “conduct.” And the title of this chapter in English (“The Prospects of Scientific Politics”) misses the allusion to Max Weber’s post-war lectures on politics and science that is unmistakable in the German original: “Ist Politik als Wissenschaft möglich?” These and other changes were orchestrated not by Shils but by Mannheim himself, who was keen to domesticate *Ideologie und Utopie* for an Anglophone audience. See the illuminating discussion in Kettler, Meja, and Stehr (1984, pp. 107-128) and Kettler and Meja (1995pp. 193-246) and, also on translation issues, Kurt H. Wolff’s Introduction to Wolff (1971, at pp. lxi-lxxii).

¹¹ Mannheim cites the work of Albert Schäffle as the source of this distinction. He acknowledges that the boundary between “routine affairs of state” and “politics” allows many shades of grey. A rather different view of politics is affirmed on p. 212. In the footnote on that page, Mannheim states that “politics” is capable of many definitions, each suited to a particular heuristic purpose and perspective.

mental universe, each takes it for granted that a solution exists to what can only be a temporary impasse. The “total” conception of ideology is very different. Seen from that perspective, an individual’s foibles or particular interests are irrelevant. So, too, are his motives. Far more important is that one’s opponent is the bearer of a social stratum whose mind set, categories, and values are at odds with one’s own; a person’s views are at root a “function” of the milieu and world view into which he has been inducted. Accordingly, modern political dispute rages over incommensurable *Weltanschauungen*, “fundamentally divergent thought-systems,” which clash without respite. As vectors of impersonal social forces, ciphers of social structure, disputing parties inhabit different, dehumanized, “worlds” (Mannheim ([1929] 1936, pp. 55-64). No compromise between them is possible because no common faith exists to form the basis of their reconciliation.

What are the social conditions that have caused the emergence of the “total” conception of ideology? The modern world, Mannheim points out, is no longer a unitary cosmos. It is deeply fractured along class and cultural axes. The clash between commercial and feudal society, and, later, the growth of Marxist and fascist social movements, betray an epoch in deep crisis (pp. 64-5, 74-5, 84, 103, 105). Political discourse is marked by reciprocal unmasking and by irreconcilable judgements. As such, we “do not hold up to the adversary that he is worshipping false gods; rather we destroy the intensity of his idea by showing that it is historically and socially determined” (p. 250).

Political discussion is, from the very first, more than theoretical argumentation; it is the tearing off of disguises – the unmasking of those unconscious motives which bind the group existence to its cultural aspirations and its theoretical arguments...In addition to

the gradual dissolution of the unitary objective world-view, which to the simple man in the street took the form of a plurality of divergent conceptions of the world, and to the intellectuals presented itself as the irreconcilable plurality of thought-styles, there entered into the public mind the tendency to unmask the unconscious situational motivations in group thinking (Mannheim 1936, p. 39; cf. 40-1, 48; also Mannheim [1930] 1936, pp. 64, 74, 83, 96, 150, 162, 250).

Mannheim himself was ambivalent towards the rhetoric of unmasking, unveiling or debunking – the English terms that Edward Shils and Kurt Wolff offer as renditions of *Enthüllung*.¹² The German word appears early in Mannheim’s work, making its debut in his “Lady from Biarritz,” an unpublished one-act play written in 1920 to evoke liberation from an alienated marriage.¹³ It was also a staple of Marxist analysis.¹⁴ The fundamental presuppositions of unmasking might be represented thus:

- Unmasking is prompted by suspicion; it is accusatory and tends towards violence
- It is something done to others, conceived as opponents or enemies

¹² Did Shils’s and Wolff’s translations miss some subtlety of the German that Mannheim himself would have wished to see preserved? After all, the German language does have a specific term for unmasking (*demaskieren*) which Mannheim himself avoided; *enthüllen* rather than *demaskieren* is Mannheim’s word of choice, as in *Ideologie und Utopie* pp. 16, 17, 33, 236, 249. Two clues suggest that Mannheim’s translators were correct to use “debunk,” “unmask” and “unveil” as very close synonyms. The first, in *Ideologie und Utopie*, is Mannheim’s resort to the English word “feign” – the context is a discussion by David Hume – as a forerunner of *Enthüllung*. (“Diese enthüllende Einstellung ist ein Grundzug unserer Zeit.” etc. *Ideologie und Utopie*, p. 17.) Feigning is a kind of pretence or dissimulation. The second, and the clincher, is the widespread use of “unmasking” in the Mannheim-vetted English translation of *Ideology and Utopia*, and especially the chapter written specially for an Anglophone audience, “Preliminary Approach to the Problem.” There “unmasking” is principally employed by Mannheim, with “debunking” and “unveiling” as close seconds. See Mannheim (1936, pp. 39, 40, 41; Mannheim [1929] 1936, pp. 64, 74, 78, 262).

¹³ I draw on Loader (1985, pp. 33-35) who notes that while unmasking appears first as a liberation from convention, it later emerges as an “ultimately stultifying” rhetorical trope.

¹⁴ See especially Lukács ([1918-1930] 1971, pp. 50, 54, 58, 65-66, 69-70, 72-73, etc.).

- It supposes transparency; once the mask slips or is torn away the true identity of the rival is exposed
- It is a term prone to inducing self-satisfaction and self-righteousness, derived from the dishing of a foe
- Unmasking is testimony to the fraudulence, disingenuousness and ignorance of human beings
- The objective of unmasking is control – of the self, of others, and of the world

Mannheim's response to the unmasking strategy was inventive. On the one hand, he posed simply as its chronicler, explaining the causes of its emergence and consolidation. The "weapon of ... reciprocal unmasking" is a problem to be described, a temporary intellectual impasse, and a challenge to be resolved by the sociology of knowledge (Mannheim 1936, p. 41).¹⁵ On the other hand, he acknowledged that unmasking represented a formative moment in the emergence of the sociology of knowledge itself, embedded in the discipline's own presuppositions. Now, because Mannheim wished to go beyond the mentality of unmasking, with its poisonous impact on political discussion, yet also recognized its skeletal features in his own project, he was caught in a dilemma. He annulled it in an ingenious way. First, Mannheim occasionally resorts to a Heideggerian formulation, dropping the verb *enthüllen* (with its Marxist inflection) and replacing it by "uncover" (*aufdecken*), a salient term and concept in *Being and Time* (1927).¹⁶ By that

¹⁵ The gradual obsolescence of unmasking as a strategy, and its replacement by the sociology of knowledge, is the leitmotif of Mannheim 1925, pp. 66-71. Cf. Meja and Stehr (1990, p.5).

¹⁶ Heidegger's vertiginous prose is hard to render plainly. We might say that uncovering, in contrast to unmasking, is

- Prompted by the search for truth and understanding
- It refers not to an object but to a mode or comportment of Being

means, a Heideggerian concept is appropriated for sociological purposes. An example is Mannheim's assertion that the job of "political sociology" is not to indoctrinate but to "prepare the way" for "arriving at decisions...which have scarcely been noticed before." Such a discipline will "uncover the determining factors underlying" class judgments, "disclosing" the collective forces that condition them.¹⁷ The stratagem's rhetorical impact is deflationary, absorbing one's rival by domesticating his terminology. Second, Mannheim takes both Marxist and existentialist ideas but re-describes them in a technical idiom suited to the new sociology of knowledge. This is the language of "functionalism," "correlation" and "correspondence," a lexicon that converts the language of suspicion into a social scientific framework.¹⁸ "Function" and its cognates appear often in Mannheim's Weimar and pre-war writings, and they predate *Ideology and Utopia*. As he observes, every "sociological 'explanation'... whenever it functionalizes intellectual phenomena – e.g. those found in a given historical group – with respect to a 'social existence' that lies behind them, postulates this social existence as a context of meaning more

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- It supposes the obscurity of Being and of Dasein (the human way of Being); neither can be definitively fathomed
 - Uncovering illuminates, among much else, Dasein's "fallen" state and the horizon of death
 - Uncovering is testimony to the mystery and wonder of Being.
 - Uncovering is the pursuit of authenticity, knowing one's possibilities as a questioning being in a world suffocated by conformity.

Besides "aufdecken" and "entdecken", Heidegger does occasionally resort to *enthüllen* and its derivatives to describe aspects of Dasein and Being, for instance in his discussion of fear in *Sein und Zeit* ¶30 (= Heidegger [1927] 2001, pp. 140-142, at p. 141).

¹⁷ Mannheim ([1929] 1936, p. 162 = Mannheim 1929a, pp. 132-133). See also the German Contents page (XV) and Mannheim's summary statement of the concluding remarks under the title "Die Entdeckung der Unentbehrlichkeit des Utopischen."

¹⁸ On "correlation" and "correspondence" see, inter alia, Mannheim ([1929] 1936), p. 58, and Mannheim (1929b, pp. 59-115, at pp. 107, 109, 111). One must not exaggerate the extent of this sociological redescription. At the very end of *Ideology and Utopia* (p. 262), Mannheim remarks that "the objectivity which comes from the unmasking of ideologies always takes the form of self-clarification for society as a whole". And he interpolates into the English version of that text the contention that "by unveiling the hidden motives behind the individual's decisions" the sociology of knowledge puts a person "in a position to really choose" his own fate. Unveiling/unmasking thus assumes a positive dimension; it results in self-clarification which in turn furnishes the opportunity for self-control. To that extent, Arendt was right to see unmasking as integral to his sociological enterprise, a point to which I return.

comprehensive than, though different from, those phenomena, whose ultimate significance is to be understood in relation to this context.”¹⁹ A sociological approach to intellectual phenomena views them extrinsically, rather than immanently; it is concerned with “functional meaning” as distinct from “intrinsic meaning”; or rather it is concerned to connect both to social reality (Mannheim 1926, p. 124). This in turn requires “the uncovering of all existentially conditioned relationships that alone make possible the emergence and the impact of an intellectual phenomenon” (Mannheim 1926, p. 121).²⁰

The contemporary political preoccupation with unmasking, Mannheim opines, is divisive and destructive. Yet he spies an opportunity for the sociology of knowledge. It promises to offer illumination of the current political scene and clarification of the observer’s position in it. This elucidation is neither disinterested nor free of value judgements. Instead, it affords the engaged and reflexive actor with a means of criticism and self criticism, enhancing his capacity for conscious self control and self-correction. A “systematization” of doubt, the sociology of knowledge prepares the ground for “a new conception of objectivity” in which “not only the object but we ourselves fall squarely within our field of vision. We become visible to ourselves,” aware of the multiple determinations that make us the persons we are.²¹ That orientation, in turn, impedes a sense of self-righteous dogmatism. And it is precisely by offering a comprehensive

¹⁹ Mannheim (1926, p. 123). The essay shows the very close relationship between Marxism and Mannheim’s own sociological project, at least at this stage of his thought.

²⁰ And on p. 129 Mannheim describes sociological interpretation as a “variant” of the “positivist, functionalization of phenomena.” Mannheim’s view persisted to at least his first lecture course at the University of Frankfurt in 1930, in which he contrasted two approaches to understanding human beings. The first standpoint centered on one’s internal life history (that is, on one’s own personality and the unique decisions that flow from it). The second was functionalist in which “motivations are traced to the social process” and in which one thinks of oneself as an object and in [terms of] categories of objects”. While Mannheim sees both perspectives as fruitful, and acknowledges that sociology has to contend with the tension between them, he is adamant that functionalism “dominates in sociology”. See Mannheim ([1930-1932] 2001, pp. 77-78).

²¹ “Preliminary Approach to the Problem” - Mannheim (1936 p. 47 and, more generally, pp. 45-50). Written especially for the English version of *Ideology and Utopia*, this essay is post-Weimar though pre-war. For that reason, I refer to it separately from *Ideology and Utopia*. Arendt probably never read it. Her own copy of *Ideologie und Utopie*, with marginalia, can be found in Bard College’s Arendt collection.

view of society's contending forces, by offering a synthesis of their partial viewpoints, that a science of politics is made possible.²² The sociology of knowledge promises a systematic "mediation" of political differences and, through its synthesis, "a dynamic reconciliation" too. Finally, since politics is a dynamic force, constantly in the state of becoming, and since new issues recurrently arise to test it with new challenges, no procrustean solution is possible or desirable. The point is to "reconstruct" the many vantage points of contemporary political actors so as to enable greater self-consciousness, stimulate openness, and facilitate mutual comprehension.

Mannheim, like Arendt, was Jewish, though originally from Hungary. Like Arendt, too, he hailed from an urban, liberal and assimilated milieu. In the same year, 1933, that Arendt fled Germany bound eventually for the United States, Mannheim repaired to England. Before that period of exile, both scholars were trained in philosophy and studied briefly under Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. Yet, unlike Arendt, Mannheim was detested by both illuminati, and not only for his ideas. In 1929, the *annus mirabilis* in which "Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon" and *Ideology and Utopia* were published, another essay appeared in which Mannheim sought explicitly to clarify the relation between sociology and philosophy. His tone was conciliatory. Philosophy, he says, constitutes a particular and irreducible problem level. And, personally, "I am not only not against but expressly *for* metaphysics and ontology...; I am only opposed to the presence of metaphysics which is not recognized and thus can serenely absolutize particulars." To this end, Heidegger is approvingly contrasted to those "pseudo-

²² Mannheim (1936, pp. 2, 43) and Mannheim ([1929] 1936, pp. 106, 149-52, 170-1, 183-5, 188-9).

metaphysicians who weigh on our political and sociological thought.” Heidegger’s “struggle for an ontology” marks “one of the most decisive achievements of contemporary philosophy.”²³

But elsewhere Mannheim is less emollient. In *Ideology and Utopia* ([1929] 1936, p. 193), while conceding that the nature of reality and of existence “as such” is a problem “which belongs to philosophy,” he proceeds to say that “existence as such” is a phantasm. To the degree that “man is a creature living primarily in history and society, the ‘existence’ that surrounds him ... is always a concrete historical form of social existence.” Mannheim’s essay “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon” is equally provocative; it is intended, he says, to “make a contribution to a sociological theory of the mind.”²⁴ In the process, Mannheim pours scorn on *das Man*, Heidegger’s term (ostensibly) to depict that unthinking, somnambulant, “inauthentic” impulse which discourages people from pursuing unique choices and possibilities.²⁵ Such a notion, Mannheim implies, is sociologically useless and politically feeble:

The philosopher looks at this “They”, this secretive Something, but he is not interested to find out how it arose; and it is just at this point, where the philosopher stops, that the work of the sociologist begins. Sociological analysis shows that this public interpretation

²³ Mannheim (1929b, p. 270). The essay is largely framed in terms of the relationship between philosophy and sociology – the title of Arendt’s own Mannheim review. The stakes were obvious to everyone. On p. 264, coming close to the visionary sociological imperialism he always denied, Mannheim invoked a “three-dimensional deepening of vision – in the direction of the terrestrial, the social and the historical – [that] has, in the form of a sociology that reaches into questions of philosophy, become the organon of the new man, the breakthrough of a new feeling of life: man is once again shedding his skin, striving after an enlarged form of his existence”.

²⁴ “Mind” lacks the historical baggage of the German term *Geist* - and its ambiguity: the adjective *geistig* can mean spiritual, intellectual, or, at a stretch, cultural. “Cultural competition” might be better rendered “Intellectual rivalry.” See Mannheim (1929c, pp. 327-328). Heidegger criticized the concept of *Geist* extensively in *Being and Time*, e.g. at ¶82 = Heidegger ([1927] 1962, pp.480-486). On his later treatment of *Geist*, see Wolin ([1991] 1993, p. 289).

²⁵ Mannheim garbles Heidegger’s argument. It would have been closer to Heideggerian terminology for Mannheim to have objected to *das Man-selbst* - the “they- self” - rather than *das Man*. The distinction, which Mannheim elides, is pertinent because for Heidegger *das Man* is as an essential part of Being in the World. It is, so to speak, the ground of culture from which all projects of authenticity must embark. It is only the numb, herd-like, careless “they-self” that we are exhorted to repudiate. See *Being and Time* ¶27 = Heidegger ([1927] 1962, pp. 163-168).

of reality is not simply “there”; nor, on the other hand, is it the result of a “systematic thinking out”; it is the stake for which men fight. And the struggle is not guided by motives of pure contemplative thirst for knowledge. Different interpretations of the world for the most part correspond to the particular positions the various groups occupy in their struggle for power [which Mannheim then goes on to enumerate].²⁶

Not only, then, is thought “existentially connected,” socially situated and conditioned.

Intellectual and cultural phenomena are above all a product of rivalry and resolve, as various groups seek to impose their own definitions of reality on others. Thought has an activist core; human interests are the tracks along which knowledge develops. And “in the last analysis the movement of thought depends upon the tensions which dominate the social sphere” (Mannheim [1929] 1971, p. 246). To be sure, theoretical conflict is not reducible to social conflict. But it is certainly shaped by it because in “actual life, it is always some volitional centre, some locus of energy, which sets thought going; competition, victory, and the selection based upon it, largely determine the movement of thought” (p. 244).²⁷ As Mannheim sardonically declares:

²⁶ Mannheim ([1929] 1971, p. 230. Arendt refers to this article in her review of *Ideology and Utopia*. The Bard College library contains a special edition of “Die bedeutung der Konkurrenz im gebiete des Geistigen” (= “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon”) with marginalia and an inscription in German: “To Miss Arendt with very best wishes, KM”. Reinhard Laube tells me that the marginalia in this work and the Bard copy of *Ideologie und Utopie* “clearly reflect the general thrust of her argument in ‘Philosophy and Sociology’”(Letter to the author, November 22, 2005). I have not yet seen the original editions myself.

²⁷ And in *Ideology and Utopia* (p. 213), Mannheim strongly opposes a history of ideas approach to the explanation of utopian mentalities. On the Chilastic utopianism, associated with Thomas Münzer and his followers, Mannheim notes: “‘Ideas’ did not drive these men to revolutionary deeds. Their actual outburst was conditioned by ecstatic-orgiastic energies.” What Mannheim failed to offer was a clear analysis of the source of this energy. That has since been explained by Randall Collins in his theory of interaction ritual. Applying that theory to intellectuals – or to what would now be described as intellectual networks – Collins argues that great intellectuals are those with large quantities of drive, initiative and ambition, an “emotional energy” (EE) that is not free-floating but requires social conditions to sustain it. These include a person’s location in the white heat of a controversy, previous or contemporary links with prestigious teachers, and ready access to media – universities, think tanks, publishing houses, t.v, stations, internet blogging sites – that allow ample scope for communication. Accordingly, EE ebbs and flows in intensity to the degree its protagonists are at the centre of the cultural fray. Those who possess EE are likely

“Philosophy, ladies and gentlemen, may look at this matter differently; but from the point of view of the social sciences, every historical, ideological, sociological piece of knowledge (even should it prove to be Absolute Truth itself) is clearly rooted in and carried by the desire for power and recognition of particular social groups who want to make their interpretation of the world the universal one” (pp. 228-9). A measure of decorum prohibits Mannheim from going all the way: he refrains from stating that modern *Existenz* philosophy is also explicable in sociological terms. But the innuendo is unmistakeable²⁸, particularly when he proceeds to examine philosophy’s sub-types and epistemology. Political philosophy, for instance, “is always *the product of a particular mentality*”, the history of ideas being a history of “styles of thought” (p. 242). Similarly, the “categorical apparatus of thinking” is the vehicle of social contention and discord (p. 250). The English are often deemed masters of the under-statement. Hungarians are obviously their peers. “I do not suggest,” Mannheim remarks, “that Heidegger, as a philosopher, would agree with the sociological theory I am propounding” (p. 228, referring specifically to *Being and Time*).

Lecturing on Plato in the winter semester of 1931-32, Heidegger fired back, comparing the exponents of the sociology of knowledge to the cave dwellers of Plato’s famous simile, mistaking shadows for real objects and unable to sense the illumination provided by the sun. An escapee from the cave who returned to liberate its residents, delivering the news of the light of Truth, would doubtless be received with suspicion. Heidegger ([1998] 2002, p. 62) lays on the sarcasm: the liberator would be told by the cave dwellers that he was “one sided”:

to cultivate more of it in a value-added spiral as their careers progress. However, EE may also dissipate when a thinker overreaches himself or when the stakes of the debate in which he has been focally implicated change. See Collins 1998; and chapter 5 (“Internalized Symbols and the Social Process of Thinking”) of Collins 2004.

²⁸ As Arendt ([1930] 1994, p. 31) recognized.

Presumably, indeed certainly, they would have, down there in the cave, a “sociology of knowledge” with whose assistance they could explain how he [the liberator] operates with “worldview” presuppositions contradicting and disturbing what is agreed upon within the cave...Down there they don’t want to know anything of philosophy, e.g. of the philosophy of Kant, but at best they take an interest in the *Kant Association*.²⁹

Greeted with that reception, Heidegger jeers, it would be incumbent for the real philosopher, knowing the light’s true source, to dismiss the cave prattle, grab a few of its most worthy dwellers, and “drag them out...of the cave.” Not that Heidegger himself would stoop to such futile exertion. Significantly, the only “sociologist” who he (and Hannah Arendt) respected was Georg Simmel - for whom sociology was always something of a diversion from philosophy. And what is philosophy? It is certainly not, Heidegger says, “a cultural phenomenon, a realm of man’s creativity and of the works that issue from it.” Neither is it “a worldview” nor even a philosophy of existence. Philosophy, instead, is a *questioning* of and about Dasein, the human way of Being ([1998] 2002, p. 84).

Karl Jaspers’ animus towards Mannheim was even more visceral. He opposed unsuccessfully Mannheim’s *Habilitation*, the postdoctoral degree required to teach in German universities.³⁰ And in a letter to Heidegger dated July 25, 1931, he exulted in Mannheim’s discomfiture two years’ previously when “annihilated” in a Heidelberg seminar by Werner Brock’s probing critique.³¹ 1931 was also the year that Jaspers published his *Geistige Situation*

²⁹ See also the discussion in Safranski ([1994] 1998, p. 214).

³⁰ See Loader and Kettler (2002, p. 69, n. 24). Mannheim’s *Habilitation* sponsors at Heidelberg were Alfred Weber and Emil Lederer. Mannheim’s *Habilitationsschrift* (1925) topic was early German conservatism. An English version appears as Mannheim 1986.

³¹ In Biemel and Saner ([1990] 2003, Letter 108, p. 137).

der Zeit [The Spiritual Situation of Our Time], a short treatise in existential philosophy framed by a denunciation of sociology, psychology, anthropology and, more cryptically, Karl Mannheim himself.³² Translated two years' later into English as *Man in the Modern Age*, Arendt assigned the book to startled philosophy students at Berkeley in March 1955. Today this little-known text reads like an exercise in self-parody, abounding in the obscure and sententious phrases beloved of a certain species of German professor. Still, because of its chronological and moral proximity to Arendt's own *Das Gesellschaft* piece, it is worth examining more closely.

After acknowledging that the science of sociology has “manifold varieties”, Jaspers promptly ignores them. Instead he devotes the bulk his treatment to one variety: Marxism, “the best known and most familiar example of sociological analyses” (Jaspers [1933] 1957, p.165). Marxists believe that they have scientifically grasped “the true being of man. Man, they say, is the outcome of his life as a social being” (p. 163). Jaspers glosses that contention at some length before insisting that it is false. So too is the assertion that “[p]hilosophies are but ideologies” justifying particular, situation-bound interests (p. 163). Far from being a science, Marxism is little more than “an intellectualist faith” in which “man as he truly is, is always lost sight of” (pp. 164-5). Fortunately, sociology has a better model to follow in the imposing example of Max Weber. Yet it is not Weber's sociological insights that Jaspers applauds. Of far greater import is his mentor's recognition that sociology could never be “the philosophy of human existence.” Weber's perspectivism “leaves man in himself untouched” (p. 166), vouchsafing only a modest “science of human behaviour and its consequences” (p.165). Heidegger commended Weber for

³² For a parallel, if rather different, discussion of anthropology, psychology, and biology, see *Being and Time* ¶10 = Heidegger ([1927] 1962, pp. 71-75).

broadly similar reasons, while also alleging that Jaspers had, in his *Psychology of World Views*, misunderstood him.³³

If only modern psychology had a Weberian equivalent! Instead, having lost its anchor in “metaphysical principles”, psychology deteriorated during the nineteenth century into behaviourism, the study of aggregates of sensory data (p. 166). Whereas Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had grasped psychology’s potential to connect thought to existential concerns, its contemporary variants were a bundle of confused “doctrines and facts.” Freud’s psychoanalysis promised a new coherence and had made an important contribution to the analysis of psychopathology. But Jaspers considered psychoanalysis to be demeaning. Its preoccupation with basic drives, particularly the libido, and with an unconscious which determines everyday life, reduced Man to an animal or a “puppet” (p. 167). Psychoanalysis was thus just as reductive or “functionalist” as Marxism. Granted, no one can sensibly deny the reality of human impulses and instincts. “They are real enough, of course, but we have to set bounds to them, and to learn to contemplate human existence as something different from them.” As for anthropology, the third of Jaspers’ targets, it too suffers from an exaggerated naturalism.³⁴ Its deterministic racial explanations degrade a being that is above all a “being of liberty.”

Jaspers concedes that sociology, psychology and anthropology have their uses (p. 172). But overall these sciences of mankind are disastrous: reductive and “ruinous to whatever is

³³ The charge must have been particularly wounding for Jaspers who, at this time, looked up to Weber as one of the immortals. (Much later, when Jaspers learned of the adulterous relationship between Weber and Elsie Jaffé, the demi-god rudely tumbled from his pedestal.) In essence, Heidegger ([1919-21; sic] 1998, pp. pp. 34-35) argued that Jaspers’s extrapolation of Weber’s sociological approach to the field of psychology was bound to obscure the latter. “To emulate Weber truly would rather be to strive just as radically and incessantly as he did to achieve ‘systematic’ mastery in one’s own field of psychology and, more particularly, with reference to the problem of working out the whole of psychology as a science.” For more on Heidegger’s characterization of Weber, see Laube (2004, pp. 148-149).

³⁴ Jaspers refers to anthropology in its original sense, as “the science of man, embracing human physiology and psychology and their mutual bearing,” (to quote from the *Oxford English Dictionary*). In Jaspers’s day, anthropology was strongly associated with eugenics.

unconditioned” (p. 173). In that they articulate the mood of modern times. “They will turn against any one who has faith, of whatever kind; and they will ‘unveil’ him in their sense of the term” (p. 173). Jaspers’s retort is to turn the tables on his adversaries, grasping their own master metaphor and using it against them. These sciences, he insists, furnish “the most widely diffused veilings of mankind. The direct brutality of hatred and of eulogy which have come to prevail with the development of mass-life finds its expression therein” (p. 171). Positivism, too, is no better whenever it arrogantly seeks to overreach itself, for then it creates its own “mask” under which “people can conceal their own aridity” (180). In a summation that Arendt herself could have written, Jaspers opines:

Sociology, psychology, and anthropology teach that man is to be regarded as an object concerning which something can be learnt that will make it possible to modify this object by deliberate organization. In this way one comes to know something about man, without coming to know man himself; yet man, as a possibility of a creature endowed with spontaneity, rises in revolt against being regarded as a mere result....[An astute student of these disciplines recognizes that their approach to understanding] is nothing more than a deceptive substitute for true philosophy, and that those who wish to escape from freedom seek justification for their action in a spurious knowledge of being (p. 174).

Jaspers’s jeremiad is not over. For having first assailed the “sciences of man,” he then turns to confront their grotesque progeny in the shape of the modern Sophist.

An intriguing endnote in the Arendt-Jaspers correspondence states that the model for Jaspers' portrait of the Sophist was no other than Mannheim himself.³⁵ If true, that depiction is more ironic than Jaspers may have realized. In "Preliminary Approach to the Problem" - Chapter 1 of the English version of *Ideology and Utopia*, written specifically to clarify his ideas for an Anglophone audience - Mannheim credits "the Sophists of the Greek Enlightenment" as a distant forerunner of the sociology of knowledge. That Enlightenment consisted precisely in "an attitude of doubt" – the kind of doubt on which Mannheim's own project is predicated. Rather than censure the Sophists for pointing out the indeterminacy of epistemological and moral standards, they deserve praise for their courage to express openly what "every person who was really characteristic of the epoch felt, namely, that the previous unambiguity of norms and interpretations had been shattered, and that a satisfactory solution was to be found only in a thoroughgoing questioning and thinking through of the contradictions" (Mannheim 1936, p. 9) Comparing the youthful sociology of knowledge with venerable Greek Sophism may appear to be a tad presumptuous. But immodesty becomes downright self-serving when Mannheim (p. 10) invites an even more illustrious comparison:

Was it not ...the great virtue of Socrates that he had the courage to descend into the abyss of this scepticism? Was he not originally also a Sophist who took up the technique of raising questions and then raising further questions, and made it his own? And did he not overcome the crisis by questioning even more radically than the Sophists and thus arrive

³⁵ Arendt ([1985] 1992, p. 706, n. 4), edited by Kohler and Saner. Neither the German (Jaspers [1931] 1933, pp. 152-154) nor the English (Jaspers [1933] 1957, pp. 182-188) versions of Jaspers's text mention Mannheim by name, so we have to rely on the editors' gloss. That Hans Saner was a longtime assistant of Karl Jaspers, and in a position to know his dislikes, gives the attribution some authority. Arendt (1982, p. 7) called Saner the only disciple Jaspers ever had – in other words, the only thinker who knew Jaspers well enough to be worthy of being a disciple.

at an intellectual resting-point which, at least for the mentality of that epoch, showed itself to be a reliable foundation?

Needless to say, Jaspers' figure of the Sophist bears none of these appreciative markings.³⁶ On the contrary, the Sophist is berated for a host of sins. His intellectual and spiritual bankruptcy "can only be described as an unceasing perversion... Well versed in all possibilities, as opportunity arises he seizes now this one and now that one" (Jaspers [1933] 1957, p. 183). Among the epithets that Jaspers hurls at the Sophist are the following: he is dishonest as an adversary, vain and crudely rationalistic as an intellectual, disloyal and shameless as an individual. Most of all, Jaspers's tirade is aimed at the Sophist's lack of enduring principle and unwillingness to take a firm or uncompromising stand. The Sophist is "pliable when vigorously resisted." He is an ironist who "metamorphoses everything" and is an inveterate master of the art of compromise. As such he has no real existential independence. At bottom, which is quickly plumbed, he is a sham, hiding behind a "mask of indignation" (quotes from pp. 183-184).

The ferocity of this invective points to more than a philosophical profile; it gestures at extreme personal dislike. In turn, a testy Mannheim took an increasingly dim view of Jaspers's stratospheric abstractions. To students attending his Frankfurt lectures in the summer semester of 1932, Mannheim bemoaned the vacuity of *Geistige Situation der Zeit*: "When Jaspers speaks of a spirit as such and a self as such, in his book, *The Spiritual Situation of our Time*, the emptiness of such talk is clearly evident." Individuals understand themselves, not as an "as such", but only to the extent they grasp the situation in which they are placed. Sociology is the vehicle of that self-

³⁶ Sophism – as philosophical movement and as philosophical symbol – was a staple of Weimar discussion. For a discussion of its modalities, see Laube (2004, esp. pp. 139-151). Writers as different as Georg Lukàcs and Eduard Spranger concurred in querying the "relativism", "skepticism," and "sophism" of the sociology of knowledge (Laube, pp. 150-151).

clarification.³⁷ We need not pursue these issues further, except to say that Jaspers's depiction of Mannheim as the mercurial Sophist received its mild-mannered counterpart from a by no means unfriendly source: Jean Floud (née McDonald) who worked with Mannheim on the English revision of *Ideologie und Utopie* in the mid-1930s. She recalled: "there was something in his conversational manner that was 'slippery'. He trimmed and adjusted what he was saying, in order to forestall objections and keep the flow. He sought thereby to create the impression of general agreement, even when his evasions left the point quite muddled and his partner in conversation often quite frustrated."³⁸ Alfred Meusel, a participant in the original sociology of knowledge dispute, hinted at something similar when he complained of Mannheim's "intellectual liberality" and taxed his lack of courage to draw firm political and intellectual boundaries.³⁹ A more sympathetic reading of Mannheim's conciliatory manner is offered by his foremost modern interpreters: Mannheim, they say, was preoccupied "with bridging mutually alien worlds, overcoming conflicts, and cultivating comprehensive unities" (Kettler, Meja, and Stehr 1984, p. 15).

SOCIOLOGY AND THE "MISTRUST OF THOUGHT"⁴⁰

The sociologist does not inquire into "Being in the world" as a formal structure of existence as such but into the specific historically determined world in which any given human being lives. This delimiting of sociology appears harmless, as if all it did was

³⁷ Mannheim, "Introduction to 'Theory and History of Social Classes, Problems of Upward Mobility and the Cultivated Stratum,'" in Mannheim ([1930-1932] 2001, pp. 163-164).

³⁸ Quoted in Kettler, Meja, and Stehr (1984, p. 155).

³⁹ Quoted in Kettler and Meja (1995, p. 118; cf. 282).

⁴⁰ Arendt's essay refers repeatedly to *Geist*, *Geistigkeit*, and *das Geistige*. Robert and Rita Kimber, whose translation I use, observe that these terms may be rendered as "spirit" or "spirituality" but that in the context of Arendt's review of Mannheim, they are more appropriately translated as "mind", "intellect", "thought" or "intellectual activity." See Arendt ([1930] 1994, p. 42, n. 2).

define the discipline's field of competence. It becomes a threat to philosophy only at the point when it claims the world can be investigated only in its particulars, not as a formal structure of human existence. This calls into question the possibility of an *ontological* understanding of being (Arendt [1930] 1994, p. 33).

The nature of "reality" or "existence as such" is a problem which belongs to philosophy, and is of no concern here. However, what is to be regarded as "real" historically or sociologically at a given time is of importance to us and fortunately can be definitely ascertained. Inasmuch as man is a creature living primarily in history and society, the "existence" that surrounds him is never "existence as such," but is always a concrete historical form of social existence. (Mannheim [1929] 1936, pp. 193-194).

We are now in a position to look more closely at Hannah Arendt's estimation of Mannheim's project. Saturated in the philosophical terminology of Heidegger and Jaspers, one is not surprised to see her review raise many of their concerns. It shows no trace of political interest.⁴¹ Published three years before Hitler's seizure of power, Arendt had yet to develop her own political theory.⁴² Mannheim's lament that all too often the "experience of contemplative types of men are

⁴¹ Nor does the review of her first husband Günther Stern (later known as Günther Anders, also an erstwhile student of Heidegger's) who wrote a parallel commentary on *Ideology and Utopia*. See Anders (1930), translated in Meja and Stehr (1990, pp. 183-185). In 1981, Anders attached a coda to the republication of the article remarking that, as a student of philosophical anthropology and aesthetic theory, he had "virtually no familiarity with Hegel and Marx" (p. 194).

⁴² But she would do so soon: 1929 was the year that Arendt commenced work on the book that was eventually published as *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* ([1958] 1997), a scathing account of the follies of both inwardness and "exceptionalist" strategies among cultivated Jews. When Arendt fled Germany in 1933, all but the two final chapters were written; they were virtually complete by 1936.

arbitrarily imposed upon political reality,” later became a fundamental Arendtian motif.⁴³ In 1930, however, protecting philosophy from an intellectual parvenu was of far greater moment to the fledgling scholar. And even then Arendt was less concerned to challenge sociology’s existence as a field of enquiry – that lay in the future - than to examine its disquieting implications for philosophy in general and for its Heideggerian and Jasperian variants in particular.

Philosophy, Arendt begins, is the art of thinking *par excellence*; more than that, it offers the prospect of ontological understanding, of investigating the “Being of the what Is” (Arendt [1930] 1994, p. 29), or what Jaspers calls *Existenz*: moments during which individuals, reflective and solitary, experiences their authentic self. For Jaspers such authenticity occurs in those “border situations” where the individual momentarily breaks with ordinary life in the habitual here and now, and recognizes his uniqueness and vulnerability. The mundane world, routinized and reified, is a “falling away” from this authenticity (p. 31). The possibility of *Dasein* “being itself” – a questioning being, pursuing its own unique possibilities - requires an extrication of that self from what Heidegger calls the “publicness of the ‘they’” (p. 32).

Sociology’s root assumptions and priorities, as formulated by Mannheim, are very different, Arendt argues. Though a sociologist like Mannheim cannot escape entirely ontological questions - the “analytical deconstructing” (*Destruktion*) of reality he champions presupposes a reality that can be destructured⁴⁴ - his attention is focussed “on the very thing that philosophy

⁴³ Mannheim ([1929] 1936), p. 175. See also p. 173 on the distinction between the “contemplative, intellectualist point of view and the living standpoint.” Arendt’s own contrast between the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, and their alternative approaches to politics, is the pivot of *The Human Condition* (1958).

⁴⁴ Mannheim ([1929] 1936, p. 193) admits as much when he says that “a definite conception of ‘existence’ (*Sein*)...underlies” the distinction between ideology and utopia. Heidegger also employed the concept of *Destruktion* in his attempt to unravel the history of ontology. *Being and Time* ¶6 = Heidegger ([1927] 1962, pp.19-27. See also *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* §5 = Heidegger ([1975] 1988, pp. 19-23) which describes the “three basic components” of the ontological method: reduction, construction, destruction (in that order); destruction

deems irrelevant” (p. 29): the ontic or everyday, the “What is” rather than the “Being of what Is.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the mode of thinking that seeks to grasp the everyday, and render it coherent and meaningful, is typically bound to specific social situations, so that the primacy given by *Existenz* philosophers to the solitary moment and the search for authenticity it promises to reveal is bogus. For if thought is itself a function of social situations, there is simply no asocial, quintessentially individual, authenticity to be discovered. It follows, too, that philosophical reflection on some absolute reality is equally chimerical. Not only is (social) reality in constant transformation; it is also the source and impulse of the philosopher’s own categories. It transpires that philosophy is thus parasitic on the very order it claims to transcend - the ontic and everyday - which, ironically is the “more original” (p. 30) i.e. the more basic reality that philosophy “has forgotten.” “From a sociological point of view philosophy can no longer yield any answers about the ‘Being of the What Is’, but is now revealed as one What is among others, bound to and entangled in the world of What Is and its motivations” (p. 30). Sociology “relativizes” philosophy by historicizing thought. But it also attempts something far more radical: a “refutation” of philosophical enquiry by tracing all validity claims to the peculiar social locations from which they arise, hence “unmasking consciousness of the absolute as *ideology* (in the sense of ‘total ideology’) that is, as a consciousness that is unaware of being bound to the ontic precisely because of ontic conditions” (p. 30). Through its attack on the possibility of individual transcendence, sociology brings “even ‘peak experiences’ down to the level of [everyday, concrete] reality, making them subject to its historical continuity and its laws. In this view solitude can be understood, if at all, only as a negative mode of human existence (fear of and

is part of construction. The book is based on a lecture course delivered at the University of Marburg in the summer of 1927.

⁴⁵ The distinction between “ontology” and the “ontical” is discussed in *Being and Time* ¶4 = Heidegger ([1927] 1962, pp. 32-35).

escape from the world or, as Mannheim puts it, a consciousness ‘that is not congruous with the world around it’” (p. 31).

The problem with this epistemological deflation of solitude is not only that it banishes philosophy’s concern with the authentic and non-authentic, which are now considered by the sociologist to be redundant categories. Nor is it simply that the everyday world from which thought arises appears to be principally a structure of economic relations. The more basic problem is that Mannheimian sociology has caricatured the experience of both solitude and transcendence. Though Arendt acknowledges that detachment from “communal life” is no guarantee of authenticity, this is not to say that solitude and the transcendence of the everyday it allows are without purpose. On the contrary it is “a positive and genuine possibility of human life” (pp. 38-39). Arendt claims that transcendence “can be a *positive* way of saying no the world without being utopian”, and in support of this contention she adduces the case of Christian brotherly love – an example also employed by Mannheim ([1929] 1936, pp. 194-195). Its exemplar was St. Francis of Assisi, a man who lived in the world, who did not seek to escape it, and who was “guided by a transcendence that does not conceive of itself as realizable on earth” (Arendt [1930] 1994, p. 40). Mannheim’s ideal-typical schema is thus too procrustean; it ignores modes of being which are neither ideological nor utopian. Moreover, that solitude is not tantamount to a simple “flight from the world” is also evidenced by Max Weber’s study of early Protestantism. Calvinists had an intense feeling that they were alone, with no possibility of priestly intercession, and with no way of knowing whether they constituted one of the elect. They were not animated by a “utopian” search for a better secular order; rather, the believer’s purpose was to do his duty and resist life’s pleasures and blandishments. Yet out of this solitary, detached, and transcendent consciousness came world-shaping activity which has done its share

to impose an economic order on the individual from which today it is difficult to be free (pp. 40-1). A final irony is that while sociology seeks to “unmask” thought, it can neither do without it nor convincingly deny its effectiveness in certain situations (p. 38). Besides, what else are Mannheim’s free-floating intelligentsia than a group whose thought is able to transcend the ideology and utopia of their times?

Behind Mannheim’s alleged denigration of Being, truth and authenticity, Arendt discerns both an emotion and a programme. The emotion is sociology’s “inherent *mistrust* of thought” (p. 39), or, as she puts it elsewhere, its “mistrust of the mind” (p. 33), a suspicion that Mannheim himself locates in the “homelessness” and deracination of modern intellectuals. No longer either a caste in its own right or an organic representative of a status group, the intelligentsia becomes disenchanted, detached from a stable society, aware of multiple worlds and irreconcilable values. Their lack of belonging to any class or rank gives intellectuals a vantage point that enables them not to find some objective truth, but to decide on which set of current ideas is adequate - appropriate, realistic - to the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. “Ideology” and “utopia” refer to modes of thinking that are inappropriate to the time in which they are formulated, either because they are regressive, clinging quixotically to an outmoded past whose standards have ceased to be congruent with the current era, or because they look speculatively to a future that is as yet unlikely.⁴⁶ However, whereas “ideology” is chained to the past and thereby relinquishes all

⁴⁶ Mannheim ([1929] 1936, pp. 192-204) describes *both* ideology and utopia as “transcendent” orientations. Ideologies consist of ideas that are unrealizable under current conditions; they fall short of their ideals. One example he cites is the ideal of Christian brotherly love which cannot be lived consistently in a society that is class divided and exploitative. Utopias are transcendent in seeking a rupture with current arrangements, a break that is potentially realizable. Utopias are not only incongruous with reality, as ideologies may be too. They seek fundamentally to shatter reality in the here-and-now. Mannheim grants that the distinction between ideology and utopia is somewhat blurred in real life, not least because many ideas that challenge the social and political order are deemed utopian by those happy with the way things are. In addition, it is the existing order that gives birth to utopias which then strain to transform it – just as feudal society harbored a bourgeoisie which, with its utopia of “freedom” eventually negated it. Ultimately, however, Mannheim’s criterion of demarcation between ideology and utopia is retroactive:

attempts to build a new order, “utopia” struggles to transform the present into the kind of world its visionaries wish to see established; “utopia” has the ability to create new realities and is thus a major source of power. Considered within this framework, philosophy looks very much like “ideology,” an intellectual pastime that doggedly retains a mode of thought that is not only incongruent with modern life, but also “forgets” its own social determination (p. 36). Sociology is the “unmasking” science.

I observed earlier that Mannheim was ambivalent about the tactic of unmasking. Arendt was not. Sociology’s “relativization” of Being, its “refutation” of the absolute by “unmasking consciousness...as ideology” (p. 30; cf. p. 38), she condemned unreservedly. As a mature political theorist, even more than as a young existentialist philosopher, Arendt repeatedly attacked the implications of that language, arguing that it was a kind of formalism which denied the reality of events and domains; its sublimation into the language of “functionalism,” made it no less repugnant to her. Here we can simply note that in “Philosophy and Sociology,” Arendt avoids Mannheim’s use of the term *enthüllen* which possesses a certain semantic complexity. In both English and German, “unveiling” and “unmasking” are often used synonymously yet have slightly different connotations. Both terms imply something deceitful, but only unmasking does so on all occasions.⁴⁷ To unveil a woman or man (and especially the former) is, in one usage, to see them free of the shroud that has previously obscured them; it is as if one were to pull away a curtain to reveal the light of day. Unveiling thus discloses a face previously hidden from view; it divulges the “real” person. Unmasking, on the other hand, does not so much disclose as expose,

the ability of the latter, as distinct from the former, to realize its goals; to, in other words, be successful in the project of transforming the world and, in some cases, “tearing it asunder”.

⁴⁷ For instance, to unveil a party program is simply to reveal at the appointed time its provisions and promises. To unmask a party programme, on the other hand, is to show that its provisions are a ruse and that its promises are spurious.

insinuating that the person behind the mask is both real and unreal simultaneously: unreal inasmuch as they are a fraud, real to the extent that being a fraud is what they really are. Arendt's appraisal of Mannheim's project has no time for these linguistic niceties. Instead she replaces *enthüllen* with the starkly negative, and unequivocal, verbs *demaskieren* (to unmask) and *entlarven* (to expose in the sense of revealing a person as a scoundrel).⁴⁸ Hence, even against Mannheim's protestations against unmasking as an ultimately sterile approach to understanding, which the sociology of knowledge would transcend, Arendt associates his whole project with it.

If sociology's emotion is the mistrust of thought, its programme, Arendt claimed, is to be the adjudicator of which kinds of consciousness are adequate and tenable in any given period. "Sociology claims to be the 'key science' because it alone is capable of revealing the determinants of thought" (p. 37), of distinguishing 'ideology' from 'utopia' - and tracing their social locations - and of insisting that "thought's passion for the absolute is simply an unacknowledged forgetting of the conditional" (p. 37). From sociology's perspective, "human freedom, and with it the freedom of thought as such" are "mythical borderline" phenomena (p. 38).

Yet compared with psychoanalysis, sociology's ambitions are relatively modest. Both sociology and psychoanalysis claim "to penetrate to a more original reality" than thought itself; both promote a form of "understanding" that proceeds not "directly", taking consciousness in its own right, but by means of a "detour" to a world more primal; both "disciplines share a conception of thought as secondary and alien to reality." Yet while sociology preserves, however derivatively, the validity of the intellectual realm by at least showing its relationship to social situations, psychoanalysis denies the validity of that realm altogether by insisting that it is

⁴⁸ Arendt [1930] 1982, pp. 517, 525). For a later dismissal of the "debunking" mentality, see Arendt's 1959 research proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation, in Arendt (2003, pp. 200-201).

nothing but the result of “repression” or “sublimation.” And more decisively still, whereas sociology proceeds historically, and thus takes for granted the realm of history itself, the locus of human freedom, psychoanalysis claims to have privileged access to “that very realm over which human beings do not have, and never have had, control, i.e. to the realm of the ahistorical” (p. 33). For this reason “the ‘reality’ of psychoanalysis is far more alien to thought than is that of sociology” whose method commits it to being “a historical discipline” (p. 34). Even so, sociology ends up with a view of reality which not only slights thought as a sui generis human capacity; it also has a restricted conception of reality itself. Sociology is above all concerned with “reality that exerts power over thought. Reality exerts power over thought because thought is at its origins alien to reality, as is shown by the example of ideology, which *forgets* the actual world that determines it” (p. 36).

Arendt recognized *Ideology and Utopia* as a serious, scholarly and provocative book. It deserved to be rebutted rather than dismissed out of hand. Had she never embarked on a career as a political writer, historians of sociology might today depict her as a young philosopher considerably less hostile to sociology than most of her philosophical contemporaries. That impression would gain added credence by perusing her subsequent review of Hans Weil’s *The Origin of the German Cultural Principle* (1930), a sociological analysis of the development of the German cultural idea from the time of Herder. Written under Mannheim’s auspices, it was published in the series he edited entitled *Writings on Philosophy and Sociology*. Even when disagreeing with its arguments, Arendt refers to the book in glowing terms, calling it “weighty

and stimulating,” and, in its “predominantly sociological analysis [yielding] one of the best of the modern portrayals of Humboldt.”⁴⁹

In contrast, from the very beginning of her published work, Arendt discloses a consistent and vehement hostility to psychoanalysis.⁵⁰ Her principle objection – that it denies the realm of thought, reducing it to a neurological substratum – endured till the end of her days. To it, however, other accretions soon became discernible. For one thing, Arendt plainly saw psychoanalysis as a threat to human dignity, a point tersely conveyed in her 1956 Preface to *Rahel Varnhagen*. There she deplored the modern attempt to “penetrate (*durchschauen*)” a “subject’s tricks” aspiring “to know more than the subject knew about himself or was willing to reveal”. The “pseudoscientific apparatuses of depth-psychology, psychoanalysis, graphology, etc., fall into this category of curiosity-seeking” (Arendt [1958] 1988, p. 83).⁵¹ Second, psychoanalysis was a convenient means to explain away human responsibility, to suggest that human freedom was illusory.⁵² And, third, from the mid-fifties onwards, Arendt accused psychology tout court of a more sinister project. The social sciences as “behavioral sciences,” Arendt (1958, p. 45) claims, “aim to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal.” Psychology, the behavioral science par excellence, is the worst of all. Concluding a lecture course delivered at Berkeley in the spring of 1955, Arendt compared modern psychology to “desert psychology: when we lose the faculty to judge – to

⁴⁹ Arendt’s review was published in a journal with a strong sociological pedigree, the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 66 (1931):200-05; the quotations are, respectively, from pp. 200 and 203.

⁵⁰ Mannheim’s “Preliminary Approach to the Problem” (1936) is replete with psychological and psychoanalytical terminology. The word “unconscious” – as in “unconscious motivations” or “collective unconscious” or “collective-unconscious motivations” – appears twenty seven times. To be sure, Mannheim’s starting point is always the *situation* from which these impulses derive. But the marriage of sociological and psychological discourse, evident in this new chapter is striking. For comments on Freud, see Mannheim ([1930-1932] 2001, pp. 42-46).

⁵¹ Some speculate that Arendt’s antagonism towards psychoanalysis was a defensive response to the terrifying experience of her father’s insanity. But that view is precisely the kind of *Durchschauen* that Arendt detested.

⁵² Arendt (2002, Vol. 2, p. 769 = a notebook entry from March 1970).

suffer and condemn – we begin to think that there is something wrong with us if we cannot live under the conditions of desert life” She continued:

Insofar as psychology tries to “help” us, it helps us to “adjust” to those conditions, taking away our only hope, namely that we, who are not of the desert though we live in it, are able to transform it into a human world. Psychology turns everything topsy-turvy: precisely because we suffer under desert conditions we are still human and still intact; the danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it.⁵³

In this disquisition, the “desert” stands for the annihilation of the human “world”, Arendt’s term to denote the fragile cultural, technical, and political artifacts of civilization that lend human existence its durability and which provide the space for human initiative. The “world” both joins and separates us, providing a sense of human community but also of human singularity. “Desert” existence encroaches on this world incrementally and degrades it. But it does more; it also threatens to overwhelm our private lives, the “oases,” the pre-political experiences of solitude, love and friendship which are largely indifferent to public life and which afford us with emotional shelter. Arendt ([1955] 2002, p. 202) then comes to the ultimate denunciation:

Both psychology, the discipline of adjusting human life to the desert, and totalitarian movements, the sandstorms in which false or pseudo-action suddenly bursts forth from the deathlike quiet, present imminent danger to the two human faculties that patiently enable us to transform the desert rather than ourselves, the conjoined faculties of passion

⁵³ “Epilogue” [1955] in Arendt (2005, pp. 201-244, at p. 201).

and action. It is true that when caught up in the totalitarian movements or the adjustments of modern psychology we suffer less; we lose the faculty of suffering and with it the virtue of endurance. Only those who can endure the passion of living under desert conditions can be trusted to summon up in themselves the courage that lies at the root of action, of becoming an active being.

Nothing in her condemnation of sociology matches the virulence, hyperbole, and sheer melodrama of this indictment.⁵⁴

THE INTELLIGENTSIA

Of Mannheim's many portraits in *Ideology and Utopia*, none is better remembered today than his depiction of the socially unattached intelligentsia (*freischwebende Intelligenz*), a stratum uniquely positioned to be the bearers of a science of politics.⁵⁵ United by a common education and cultivation (*Bildung*), its members harbored the potential to rise above narrow partisanship, ease communication across class divides, and pursue an "advanced form of political science" that offered theoretical synthesis and political vision. Mannheim was no stranger to intellectual fanaticism, and he deplored it. He understood that detachment was a matter of degree; or, rather, a matter of location and discipline. But he also believed that the *Intelligenz* embodied a force for good in a world of cynicism and special pleading. An alternative to party indoctrination and

⁵⁴ In a more qualified form, one could certainly make an Arendtian case against some branches of psychology: for instance, one might look at the role that psychiatry played in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, and the attempts to "re-educate" critics of the regime (see Munro 2003). Arguably, some types of occupational psychology also encourage human adaptation. Arendt's condemnation is blanket, however, and therein lies the rub.

⁵⁵ Mannheim ([1929] 1936, p.155). On the pedigree of *Intelligenz* in Mannheim's work, see Loader (1985, pp. 89-90). As has been often noted, the concept of "socially unattached intellectuals" (a term first employed by Alfred Weber) was given a somewhat derogatory connotation in Mannheim's earlier work. See Mannheim (1986, pp. 117-120; this is Mannheim's *Habilitationsschrift* of 1925).

ideology, “watchmen in an otherwise pitch dark night,” intellectuals could provide a forum for wisdom “in universities or in specialized higher institutions of learning”.⁵⁶ The intelligentsia, in Mannheim’s specific use of the term, were not identical with all those “who bear the outward insignia of education”. They represent “those few among them who, consciously or unconsciously, are interested in something else than success” – most importantly, being a social bulwark against routinized complacency. And today, Mannheim opined, the socially unattached *Intelligenz* are needed more than ever. The pacification of the workers’ movement, attendant on its own institutionalization, presages an age without obvious social tensions, an era of adaptation and moral torpor. Under those conditions, intellectuals are free to become hardened sceptics, ideological revivalists, or aesthetic quietists, paths that are already being taken by many of their number. But Mannheim ([1929] 1936, pp. 258-260) hoped ardently for an alternative course: that at least some intellectuals would remain true to the utopian impulse for change and renewal.

The *Intelligenz* was that rare thing: an entity capable of prudentialism and principle, vision without fanaticism, realism with ideals. But transcending myopic antagonism required something more than a socially unattached stratum. It demanded a distinctive pedagogy enshrined in the sociology of knowledge. Current political education, Mannheim cautioned, was dominated by party schools, each with its own agendas and animosities, each limited by its own assumptions. On that basis, politics all too often degenerated into polemic. A new kind of training was called for, one that would not sanitize politics but allow a forum in which “a relatively free choice among alternatives” might be enabled (Mannheim [1929] 1936, p. 183). Political interests, far from being extinguished, would be transmuted, by means of a “prior total orientation”, into a more self-critical ore. It is mistaken, Mannheim emphasizes, to conceive of

⁵⁶ Phrases in quotation marks come from Mannheim ([1929] 1936), pp. 153-164.

politics as tantamount to radical slogans or revolutionary initiatives. Responsible governance is required too. But that is only possible when one understands the complex social conditions on which politics depends. The sociology of knowledge promotes such understanding because it is a method capable of controlled replication. It allows those who employ it the following formula:

Given such and such interests, in a given juncture of events, there will follow such and such a type of thinking and such and such a view of the total social process. However, what these specific sets of interests will be depends on the specific set of traditions which, in turn, depends on the structural determinants of the social situation. Only he who is able to formulate the problem in such a manner is in the position to transmit to others a survey of the structure of the political scene, and to aid them in getting a relatively complete conception of the whole (p. 163).⁵⁷

Furthermore, a “survey” of the political scene would be considerably enhanced by the creation of independent institutes of higher learning, charged with the responsibility of training aspirant politicians in history, law, and economics, and introducing them to “the objective technique of mass-domination, and the formation and control of public opinion” (p. 183). The sociology of knowledge is the prism through which such subjects should be taught, the scientific organon of political knowledge. The educational centres it inspired would bring together people of contrasting temperaments and persuasions to ensure a many-sided illumination (pp. 183-4).

⁵⁷ The phrasing is redolent of Max Weber’s “Science as a Vocation” (Weber [1919] 1970, pp. 129-156, at 151; while the ending of Mannheim’s essay, with its fear of mediocrity, and a world bereft of heroism and ideals, reminds one of the concluding lines of *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism* (Weber [1905] 2002). In both cases, the loss of utopian élan and the consolidation of complacency is attributed to man’s quest for “rational mastery”. The influence of Weber on Mannheim is cogently demonstrated by Loader (1985).

Evaluative rather than simply bureaucratic, yet technically suited to the specialized conditions of today, sociological training would present students with a range of alternatives, “a total perspective which embraces all points of view” (p. 172). It would infuse fledgling politicians with a sense of realism, complexity, discrimination, flexibility, and, most of all, the capacity to make responsible decisions. Indeed the sociology of knowledge is itself premised on such a decision, one in “favour of dynamic intellectual mediation” (p. 189). Its promise is to enlarge the scope of decision making. Recognizing the environments that shape our thoughts, our categories and our lives does not mean a renunciation of freedom; it is the road to it. For the more we understand about the forces that constitute our social being, the better able we are to liberate ourselves from unconscious impulses, and to make informed “situational diagnoses” of our time.⁵⁸ In short, the sociology of knowledge offers “the possibility of the scientific guidance of political life” (Mannheim 1936, p. 5) based on increased “transparency,” calculation, broad prediction of the correspondence between collective interests and modes of thought, and hence control.⁵⁹

What did Arendt think about Mannheim’s account of the *Intelligenz*? Her review of *Ideology and Utopia* gives us no clear answer. It is likely that Arendt was sceptical or critical, as she was with the book as a whole. Of one thing, however, we can be certain: that shortly thereafter she went on to develop a series of sketches of intellectuals that stressed their conformism, irresponsibility and unworldly character.⁶⁰ To that extent, contemporary

⁵⁸ Mannheim (1936, p. 45). The same point appears in *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 189. “Actually, it is the one who is ignorant of the significant determining factors and who acts under the immediate pressure of determinants unknown to him who is least free and most thoroughly predetermined in his conduct.”

⁵⁹ Mannheim ([1929] 1936, pp. 189-90; cf. Mannheim (1936, pp. 47-48) where control is also emphasized.

⁶⁰ A full inventory of Arendt’s interpretation of intellectuals must wait for another occasion. It would include her comments on the Russian Pan-Slavist intellectuals, (Arendt [1951] 1973, p. 236-243), the inter-war European avant garde (Arendt [1951] 1973, pp. 326-340), the misunderstandings between European and American intellectuals

developments refuted Mannheim's aspirations for the socially unattached *Intelligenz*. Weimar's collapse and its aftermath had revealed an intelligentsia far too social and far too attached; Arendt recorded that conviction in a 1964 television interview with the German commentator and culture critic Günter Gaus. Of course, she had expected enemies. Enemies were natural. But that her friends, fellow intellectuals prominent among them, would disown the republic and so quickly fall into goose step with the Nazis was far more shocking – and revealing: “it was as if an empty space formed around one.”

I lived in an intellectual milieu, but I also knew other people. And among intellectuals *Gleichschaltung* [compliant synchronization] was the rule, so to speak. But not among the others. And I never forgot that. I left Germany dominated by the idea – of course somewhat exaggerated. Never again! I shall never again get involved in any kind of intellectual business. I want nothing to do with that lot (Arendt 1965, p. 11).

Did she still feel that way? asked her interviewer. Not to the same degree, Arendt replied. Nor did she personalize matters as much. What had astonished her at the time was not the compliance of those who had a family to protect. It was the credulity of intellectuals who, for however short a period, “really believed in Nazism.” Now she understood that these intellectuals “were trapped by their own ideas” as intellectuals so often are, for “it belongs to the essence of being an intellectual that one fabricates ideas about everything” (p. 11).

Arendt distinguished among a variety of professors who supported National Socialism: those who cooperated passively; those who actually adopted Nazi ideology for a shorter or

(Arendt [1948/1949], and the timidity and fashion-consciousness of university intellectuals (2002, pp. 702-703, 714-715). I examine in the next section Arendt's view of Jewish intellectuals.

longer time; and true believers who owed their careers to the regime.⁶¹ Among the second type were academics such as Carl Schmitt, Gerhard Kittel, Hans Freyer, Walter Frank, and Heidegger, who briefly served the Reich and lent it the tincture of respectability. Their naïveté was quickly exposed. The Nazis' own credo had nothing in common with arguments of real profundity. What the Nazis wanted most was "techniques and technicians with no ideas at all or educated from the beginning in only Nazi ideas" (Arendt 1946a, p. 202). Least of all did the Nazis need real scholars like Schmitt or like Heidegger "whose enthusiasm for the Third Reich was matched only by his ignorance of what he was talking about," and who was soon replaced by the nonentity Alfred Bäumler.⁶² Significantly, however, it was not the crimes of the Third Reich that repelled many of its initial intellectual supporters. It was the regime's *vulgarity*. And after the war ended, many German intellectuals forgave their own collusion by rationalizing their deeds, or by projecting themselves as secret opponents of the regime.

The degeneration of scholars into Nazis was Arendt's first, and most bracing, experience of how great thinkers could behave in an unworldly manner. Yet National Socialism's foes, the Jews, displayed an unworldliness of their own to which Arendt devoted considerable attention – unlike Karl Mannheim, her fellow Jew and exile. Mannheim's silence about the history and fate of European Jewry, before and after the Final Solution, is puzzling. His "own identification as a Jew was never in question"; and his "vivid experiences of anti-Semitism, and consequent exile from both Hungary and Germany" are not in doubt (Kettler and Meja 2004, p. 325). It was left to

⁶¹ Arendt ([1951] 1972, p. 339, n. 65) drawing on, but mildly dissenting from, Weinreich 1946. One of the very first reports on a Nazi death camp (Grossman [1944] 2005, p. 303) observed: "All the witnesses remember one feature which SS men in Treblinka had in common: they loved theoretical constructions, philosophizing. They all indulged in making speeches in front of the prisoners. They boasted and explained the great significance for the future of what was taking place in Treblinka".

⁶² "Most interesting is the example of the jurist Carl Schmitt, whose very ingenious theories about the end of democracy and legal government still make arresting reading; as early as the middle thirties, he was replaced by the Nazis' own brand of political and legal theorists, such as Hans Frank, the later governor of Poland, Gottfried Neesse, and Reinhard Hoehn," Arendt ([1951] 1973, p. 339, n. 65).

his student, Jacob Katz, to take up the theme almost on his teacher's behalf, extrapolating a Mannheimian perspective to the history of Jewish assimilation. Arendt, an attendee of Mannheim's Frankfurt seminars, but never a disciple, had her own view of assimilation – and it was far more acerbic and controversial than Katz's. It prompted one major Israeli scholar, otherwise known for his sobriety, to assert at a conference in Jerusalem that I attended that if Arendt had not been a Jew she would have been a Nazi. That charge is absurd. But it does at least gesture at the unsparing tone of Arendt's criticisms of European Jewry. That tone has often been noted. Less obvious is the fact that her analysis of Jewish assimilation offers nothing less than a political sociology of knowledge, albeit covert, unacknowledged and with Arendtian characteristics.

JEWISH ASSIMILATION, JEWISH INTELLECTUALS

If the sociology of knowledge is essentially a position that grounds ideas and emotions in social relations and political structure; if it demonstrates the “existential interconnectedness” of being and thought, the primacy of “ontic” (as Heidegger would have it) or everyday conditions for mental and spiritual life; if the rivalry, will, energy and contention of collective actors are key to its explanatory framework, then it is undeniable that Arendt did, on more than one occasion, offer a sociology of knowledge of her own. It avoided the rhetoric of unmasking or of functionalism, and focused principally on rituals of adaptation, but was no less insistent that a group's mind-set and action was strongly circumscribed, shaped, and directed by the tensile social relations in which it is implicated. My argument will be unwelcome among those Arendtians who share her hostility towards the social sciences. To defend it requires close reconstruction of her narratives. But let us immediately acknowledge that even Heideggerian

categories show some congruence with Mannheim's own sociology of knowledge. Arendt agreed. To be sure, Mannheim had little time for transcendental ontology and for the concept of authenticity. Yet, in other respects, his "assessment of everyday life, sociology seems to approach Heidegger's view in *Being and Time*":

Heidegger takes as his starting point the everydayness of human existence – Mannheim's everydayness of human communal life or what Heidegger calls the "they" (*das Man*) – in which "existence" (*Dasein*) most immediately and most commonly manifests itself." Communal human life, that is, the historical world, is so much a condition of being oneself that "*authentic Being-one's-Self* does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the 'they'; *it is, rather, an existentiell modification of the "they" – of the "they" as an essential existentielle* (Arendt [1930] 1994, pp. 31-32).⁶³

Perhaps, then, Arendt's putative sociology of knowledge is no more than an adaptation of Heideggerian phenomenology or even Kantian political philosophy. For did not Kant believe in the "sociability" of man, the fact "that men are interdependent not merely in their needs and cares but in their highest faculty, the human mind, which will not function outside human society?"⁶⁴ Call Arendt's approach what you will. The pertinent fact is that the explanation of actors' conduct and ideas (including the ideas of intellectuals) is couched in terms of conflicting

⁶³ Arendt is alluding to *Being and Time* ¶27 = Heidegger ([1927] 1962, pp. 163-168, at 168). While "existential" refers to *Dasein*'s ontology, its general way of Being, "existentiell" refers to the questions asked by an individual *Dasein*, typically unaware of ontological matters. Existentiell questions are, nonetheless, a precondition for ontological understanding, a starting point which enable agents to probe more deeply into the nature of Being.

⁶⁴ Arendt's paraphrase in 1982 p. 10; cf. p. 14.

social relations; and that thought and emotions are given a socio-political determination. Soon after the Mannheim review Arendt augmented her view of solitude in her “life-story” of Rahel Varnhagen (begun in 1929), a portrait of a sensitive Jewish woman’s inner struggles to cope with the indignities of assimilation. We might have expected from Arendt yet another paean to transcendence. Instead we receive a caustic treatment of the dangers of inwardness, and particularly its perversion as introspection.⁶⁵ It is almost as if she had taken to heart Hans Weil’s admonition that inwardness is “merely a form of compensation for a failed worldliness”.⁶⁶

Let us now consider more closely Arendt’s study of Jewish assimilation. Her thesis developed gradually, unfolding in *Rahel Varnhagen*, her commentaries for the New York based German-language newspaper *Aufbau* beginning in 1941, and her essays and reviews, between 1942 and 1950, for outlets such *Contemporary Jewish Record*, *Jewish Social Studies*, *Jewish Frontier* and *Menorah Journal*, periodicals like *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and *The Nation* and, in a somewhat more academic vein, the *Review of Politics*.⁶⁷ Much of this work appeared, adapted and updated, as Parts One and Two of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) from which I begin my summary.

Between the seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries, Arendt explained, wealthy European Jews had played a vital public role, first as “court Jews” handling the financial transactions of the emergent absolutist monarchs, then, building on this function, as bankers for nation-states whose expanded orbits of operation required ever great amounts of capital and credit. This role, however, shrank in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when, with the

⁶⁵ “If thinking rebounds back upon itself and finds its solitary object within the soul – if, that is, it becomes introspection – it distinctly produces...a semblance of unlimited power by the very act of isolation from the world,” (Arendt [1958] 1997, p. 90). For Arendt’s scathing account of Romantic introspection, which she accuses of sheer mendacity, see pp. 91-2.

⁶⁶ Arendt (1931, p. 201). The context shows that Arendt was criticizing this view. My point is that she went on to adapt it.

⁶⁷ The most important pieces are collected in Arendt 1978a.

emergence of imperialism, the state increasingly took over functions that Jews had previously discharged, or turned them over to a non-Jewish bourgeoisie. During the age of imperialism, individual Jews still made fortunes as middlemen and advisors, but the links of these individuals to the state as well as to the Jewish community at large were ever more tenuous. By the end of the First World War, the Jews' financial power had declined substantially, as had their contribution to the state; and Arendt argued that it was the perception of Jews as publicly useless that brought anti-Semitism to new depths of virulence. The Jews' loss of power and function opened them to the charge of being parasitical; worse still, a string of myths had already grown up around them, the tenacity of which survived, indeed was aggravated by, the decline of their influence.

In their heyday, wealthy Jews had provided a state service; however, since they were not themselves elected or publicly accountable, since their actions took place in the shadow of political life rather than in its light, it was easy for their opponents to tar them with the slur that Jews were a secret society engaged in a national or world conspiracy. Moreover, the longstanding symbiosis of state and the Jews had accustomed every group who attacked the first to become anti-Semitic. The consequences of such political condensation became brutally apparent in France during the Dreyfus Case of the 1890s when Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer of the French General Staff, was prosecuted on trumped-up charges of passing secret documents to Germany. This incident was preceded by a spate of political and financial scandals with which prominent Jews were implicated, and the trial of Dreyfus triggered an outburst of anti-Semitism of ferocious proportions. Arendt saw in the rhetoric and organization of the anti-Dreyfusards a chilling presage of what was to come in the 1930s. France itself had momentarily survived the onslaught of this proto-totalitarian movement, thanks to the heroism of individuals like Georges

Clemenceau who had helped mobilize republican opinion against it, and thanks also to the vestigial strength of the Third Republic's legal and political institutions. But the Dreyfus case graphically indicated that modern anti-Semitism was more than the old intolerance for and jealousy of Jews; it arose within, and was predicated on, the relationship between the Jews and the modern state.

Moreover, to this political vulnerability was added a social one. During the nineteenth century many talented Jews - Benjamin Disraeli is the paradigm case - cultivated Jewishness as a putative psychological quality or racial characteristic, as distinct from a political condition and religious creed. Attempting to transform the apparent disadvantage of marginality into social capital, Jewishness now became a vaunted character trait, accentuated in the calculation that it might become a source of fascination to Gentile society, and a means to ascend its ladder of power and privilege. This stratagem worked; but it was also dangerously capable of backfiring. Forces hostile to the Jews hijacked part of their mythology and twisted it to their own purposes: the Disraelian emphasis on the Jews' mystique, cunning and inscrutability, on their pervasive world-influence, now became a model both to imitate (Arendt insisted that totalitarian leaders were profoundly impressed by what they saw as the Jews' global achievements) and to surpass. Transmogrified into anti-Semitic propaganda, Jewish uniqueness as a chosen people came to mean that the Jews were a race apart from, and a blight upon, the rest of humanity. The extirpation of "integral" Jewish qualities then meant nothing less than the extermination of the Jews themselves.⁶⁸

Underlying this analysis was Arendt's astringent assessment of what she called "exceptionalism" – the parvenu divisive strategy pursued by Jews wishing for assimilation by

⁶⁸ This précis draws on chapters one to four of Arendt ([1951] 1973).

European societies on the basis of idiosyncratic qualities. Exceptionalism was above all an adaptive response, if a flawed and dangerous one, to the fact that even where Jews had been “emancipated,” they were rarely honoured as equal citizens. In nineteenth century Prussia, for instance, Jews were exhorted by Gentile society, in the shape of the liberal Protestant theologian H.E.G. Paulus, to educate themselves, to become cultivated; if successful they would be admitted to society on that basis of their personal merits.⁶⁹ The chief mistake of European educated Jewry was to accommodate itself to this situation instead of relentlessly demanding political equality for the Jews *as a whole*. Without such striving, Jews were destined to inhabit a nether world of humiliation and vulnerability. Privileges can always be retracted. Personal qualities are no substitute for genuine citizenship. Moreover, the psychology of exceptionalism was by definition fissiparous. Instead of defending the Jews *en masse*, individual Jews sought principally to shield themselves by claiming a special status. The culmination of this strategy was disastrous. As Arendt remarked:

The collapse of German Jewry began with its splitting up into innumerable factions, each of which believed that special privileges could protect human rights – e.g. the privilege of having been a veteran of World War I, the child of a war veteran, or if such privileges were not recognized any more, a crippled war veteran or the son of a father killed at the front. Jews “*en masse*” [having] seemed to have disappeared from the earth, it was easy

⁶⁹ Arendt (1946b, pp. 106-7). Arendt invidiously contrast the attitude of Paulus with “Humboldt’s humanism....[which] aimed to liberate the people as a whole, without bestowing special privileges upon individuals.” To that extent Humboldt’s remark that “I love the Jew really only *en masse*; *en détail* I strictly avoid him” was, for Arendt, not only preferable to being patronized but was also a remark consistent with republican notions of *political* equality. Paulus’s desire to promote the welfare on exceptional Jews exhibited the opposite sensibility.

to dispose of Jews “*en detail*.” The terrible and bloody annihilation of individual Jews was preceded by the bloodless destruction of the Jewish people.⁷⁰

How had Jewish intellectuals fared under these conditions? What role had they played in the fate of European Jewry? Arendt argued that of all Jews, it was the intellectuals who were the most assimilated and who, like Moses Mendelssohn, found in cultivation an entry ticket to Gentile society. In contrast the Jewish “notables” – the court Jews and, later, the Jewish bankers and businessmen – were far more prepared to accept life within “the very narrow limits of their invisible ghetto” (Arendt [1951] 1973, p. 62). Arendt portrays the Jewish notables of the nineteenth century as stranded between two worlds: no longer a social or a geographical part of Jewish communities, they did not belong to Gentile society either. Their brilliant careers had transformed them into a “kind of community of exceptions” with a vested interest in keeping the Jewish masses in their place (p. 63). They protected Jewish communities against the state, while controlling them through philanthropy and acts of charity. Jewish intellectuals, often the sons and daughters of the notables, rebelled against this situation but in an ironically conformist way. While the notables wished to dominate the Jewish community and, accordingly, had no desire to break with it, their progeny sought total escape. Yet both notables and intellectuals felt themselves to be “exceptional” Jews:

The “exception” Jews of wealth felt like exceptions from the common destiny of the Jewish people and were recognized by the governments as exceptionally useful; the

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

“exception Jews” of education felt themselves exceptions from the Jewish people and also exceptional human beings, and were recognized as such by society (p. 64).

The European reaction that followed Napoleon’s defeat prompted some Jews – Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Boerne, Karl Marx prominent among them – to be sickened at their status, furious at the financial backing given to reactionary governments by Jewish bankers, and especially sympathetic to the conditions of other subordinated groups. But few intellectuals were prepared to become or remain pariahs; they preferred to create an individual niche for themselves and thus, “in the long run” rebellion petered out into “a specific kind of conformism” (p. 65). Moreover, it was far easier for an educated person to conform to the stereotype of the exceptional Jew than someone with limited intellectual gifts. And that conformism required intellectuals both to “differentiate themselves clearly from ‘Jews in general’” while still remaining Jews, different from their Gentile neighbours: “a man in the street and a Jew at home.”

This quest to be released from the fate of “ordinary Jews” was psychologically destructive. In vivid passages that offer nothing less than a sociology of emotions and mental life, Arendt depicts the consequences of assimilation for those compelled or willing to accept it on unequal terms. Complying through differentiation and distinction, Jews were transformed from a religiously or nationally based entity into “a social group whose members shared certain psychological attributes and reactions, the sum total of which was supposed to constitute ‘Jewishness.’ In other words, Judaism became a psychological quality and the Jewish question became an involved personal problem for every individual Jew” (p. 66). The defining features of this “so-called complex psychology” were an uneasy combination of regret with a bad conscience: regret at not being fully successful and accepted; and a bad conscience for betraying

the Jewish people by exchanging equal rights for personal privileges. It was the ambiguous situation of Jews, suspended between being outcasts and being fully fledged citizens, that produced a confused inwardness and self-preoccupation, and a haunting realization that assimilated Jews “lived in a twilight of favour and misfortune” knowing “with certainty only that both success and failure were inextricably connected with the fact that they were Jews” (p. 67). Both Jewish apologists and Jew haters misrepresented the Jewish experience. The former claimed for the “Jews in general” elevated qualities – “humanity, kindness, freedom from prejudice, sensitiveness to justice” – which were in fact rare in Jewish society’s upper crust. To find such qualities one needed to turn instead to the Jewish fringe, to the opponents of fashionable society: Jews who preferred the way of life of the outsider or “pariah,” fighting for equal rights, to the indignity of Gentile exceptionalist condescension. Conversely, attributes assigned to Jews by anti-Semites – “inhumanity, greed, insolence, cringing servility, and determination to push ahead” - were not entirely baseless, except that these features were not inscribed in the physiognomy of the Jew but rather a consequence of the parvenu social status that many Jews had adopted (p. 66).

In Arendt’s lifetime, Zionism was the chief political alternative to the plight of assimilation. She focused on its most Westernized and elite expression; and her assessment of it was ambivalent and ultimately negative.⁷¹ Again, she resorted to a sociology of knowledge worthy of Mannheim himself to explain the attraction of the Zionist programme, enunciated in the latter part of the nineteenth century by Theodore Herzl and his followers. Two factors explained its rise to prominence. The first was the mushrooming of anti-Semitism across Europe

⁷¹ Arendt (1945, pp. 136-140) does address the trajectory of socialist Zionism, which she associates with eastern and central Europe, and with a sectarian and laborist ethos which took such pride in creating the *kibbutzim*. But most of her attention is devoted to the more politically oriented, Westernized Jewish intellectuals.

during the 1880s and particularly the anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia which triggered a great migration from the East. The fact that this spate of anti-Semitism was not only trans-European, affecting Eastern, Central and Western Europe alike, but was also actively supported and led “by sizeable sections of the European intelligentsia refuted beyond doubt the traditional liberal contention that Jew-hatred was only a remnant of the so-called Dark Ages” (Arendt 1946c, p. 168). Moreover, the Eastward migration galvanized Jews more generally, pushing them together, and encouraging both *Ostjuden* and Western Jews to glimmer a common predicament. Russian Jews who came to Germany saw that the legacy of enlightenment had left Jew-hatred untouched. Native German Jews saw in their refugee compatriot an unnerving premonition of their own fate.

The second factor responsible for political Zionism was, unlike the first, a departure from Jewish history: “the emergence of a class entirely new to Jewish society, the intellectuals of whom Herzl became the main spokesman and whom he himself terms the class of ‘average (*durchschnittliche*) intellectuals’” (Arendt 1946c, pp. 168-9). Having divested themselves of Judaism in both its cultural and religious aspects, these intellectuals were deeply assimilated. Fitting neither into the traditional Jewish milieu of business nor into the Jewish community as such, they were able to see another viable option: a Jewish state in Palestine. It was their social liminality that gave Jewish intellectuals a certain independence of mind. If there are tinges here of Karl Mannheim, Arendt makes them explicit, though with a twist. The Western Zionist intellectuals who, by the grace of their bourgeois background, attended university and entered the liberal professions, art and science, were unable to afford the luxury of establishing themselves “as *freischwebende Intellektuelle* (Karl Mannheim)” (Arendt 1945, p. 144). Turn of the century Jew-hatred put paid to that. Instead, if Jewish intellectuals wanted to make something of themselves that was distinctive and political they had to find a new direction. In their own

right, they were too poor, or disinclined, to support their fellows with charity, the alms of philanthropists which were the time honoured way of expressing solidarity and creating dependence. And since “there was no place for [these intellectuals] in the house of their fathers,” to “remain Jews at all they had to build a new house”: that was the house of Israel in Palestine:

Zionism, hence, was destined primarily, in western and central Europe, to offer a solution to these men who were more assimilated than any other class of Jewry and certainly more imbued with European education and cultural values than their opponents... The hollow word-struggles between Zionism and assimilationism has completely distorted the simple fact that Zionists, in a sense, were the only ones who sincerely wanted assimilation, namely, “normalization” of the people (“to be a people like all other peoples”), whereas the assimilationists wanted the Jewish people to retain their unique position (Arendt 1945, pp. 145-6).

But, yet again, this was another kind of conformism: unlike the socialist Zionists who worked with their hands on the *kibbutzim* and who, while no champions of the oppressed, wished to establish justice within their own Jewish enclave, “these western Zionists were no revolutionaries at all; they neither criticized nor rebelled against the social and political conditions of their time; on the contrary, they wanted to establish the same set of conditions for their own people” (p. 146). Political Zionism, represented after Herzl’s death in 1904 by Chaim Weizmann and his supporters, represented the rule of an elite which had little concern with empowering Jewry *en masse*.

Arendt faulted Zionism as being yet another –ism that the 19th century had produced in abundance. It was an ideology that believed it held in its hands the “key to history,” the answer to the riddle of the Jewish people. But she credited Zionism, especially under Herzl, with at least being a political movement inspired by a political idea, namely, that the Jews should become a nation among nations, taking their place in the international order. Crucially, they had to do this for themselves. Standing up and being counted was dignified and avoided postures that Arendt condemned as irresponsible. Chief among these, aside from parvenu exceptionalism, were passivity and escapism. She bemoaned a tradition of Jewish historical reflection which repeatedly invoked the Jews as not as “history-makers but history sufferers”, wallowing in a cult of the victim.⁷² Equally, she abhorred the tendency of fellow Jews to take refuge in a hallowed past free of political implications while ignoring “responsibility for the immediate past” which brims with them (Arendt 1946b, p. 108). The moral of nineteenth century history was “that men who were not ready to assume a responsible role in public affairs in the end were turned into mere beasts who could be used for anything before being led to slaughter” (p. 110). Affirming the dignity of Jews was central to her recommendation for the formation of a volunteer Jewish army to fight the Wehrmacht (Arendt 1941). To fight the Axis forces would give Jewish people a sense of being a “nation” in arms, a participant in, rather than a spectator of, their own destiny, and it would encourage a solidarity that transcended tribalism and charity alike. Just as valuable, the presence of a Jewish military contingent would bolster demands for Jews to have a place at the postwar conference table, able to contribute to the new Europe.

More generally, Arendt urged a greater sense of political responsibility and political realism. Alas, the “realism” preached by Herzl and the epigone was itself perverse. The Zionist

⁷² Arendt (1948a, p. 95); and on the “irresponsibility” of passivity, see 97. These quotes come from an appreciative review of Scholem (1946) which offered a dynamic and activist portrayal of Jewish history.

project rested on three static and misconceived claims: that the nation should be understood as a pre-existent, unchanging, biologically based entity; that the world was starkly divided into Jews and the rest who were either explicit or closet anti-Semites, thirsting for the destruction of the Jewish race; that the international order was stable enough to extend state sovereignty to a new Jewish member. Arendt sought to refute all three propositions. First, considering the nation to be tantamount to an organism suggested an ethnic rather than a republican idea of the nation-state; it recapitulated the German rather than the French model of citizenship. As such, it had no way of understanding the complexities of class structure and class struggle, which every modern state had to deal with, or means of comprehending the role of political parties or social movements. Worse, the achievement of a state in Palestine was assumed to mean that, henceforth, Jews could live in a sequestered world, unaffected by other nations and safe at last to realize the potential of a mystically-vouchsafed order (Arendt 1946c).

Second, Herzl's and Leon Pinsker's binary vision of Jews versus *Goyim*, destined to be in perpetual conflict and enmity, was unhistorical and unpolitical. Instead of registering the peculiar factors that caused anti-Semitism, it preferred, once again, to retreat to an immanentist and Manichean idea of the Jewish destiny. This denied "the Jewish part of responsibility for existing conditions", especially the role played by the Jewish plutocracy in nation-state building (Arendt 1945, pp. 147-8); froze into an eternity what was an essentially dynamic set of relations between Jews and Gentiles; conflated anti-Semitic parties with the nations from which they sprang, thereby denigrating attempts to reform these nations from within; and divested the Jews of non-Jewish alliances. Herzl's definition of a nation as "a group of people...held together by a common enemy," Arendt regarded as pernicious; for to believe that a firm Jewish identity actually required anti-Semitism was perversely to relish the latter as a cultural *sine qua non*. "The

result could only be, of course, an utter confusion in which nobody could distinguish between friend and foe, in which the foe became the friend and the friend the hidden, and therefore all the more dangerous, enemy” (p. 148). A study of history showed, Arendt contended, that Jews were not a single body of people; they were not a single community of fate; not all “in the same boat”. They were, like other peoples, socially diverse and divided, even if nationalist ideology pretended otherwise.

The third species of pseudo-realism that Arendt rejected concerned the nature of the international order a Jewish state was supposed to join, and the status of Arabs living in Palestine. Arendt granted that, during Herzl’s lifetime, the quest for national self-determination seemed rational. What he could not have seen, and which contemporary Zionists still refused to see, was that in the modern world no nation was truly sovereign. Imperialist expansion had put paid to that fantasy (Arendt 1946c, p. 173). Claiming total sovereignty now was utopian, not realistic; and claiming it over a land which already had non-Jewish inhabitants threatened to create a diaspora among these peoples that Zionism had rejected for the Jew.

Arendt granted that the experience of totalitarianism and the extermination camps had given added credence to the view that Gentiles were the eternal enemy of Jews, and that a Jewish state was an urgent requirement to protect Jews from their tormentors.

What the survivors now want above all else is the right to die with dignity – in case of attack, with weapons in their hands. Gone, probably forever, is that chief concern of the Jewish people for centuries: survival at any price. Instead, we find something essentially new among Jews, the desire for dignity at any price (Arendt 1946c, p. 176).

Even so, Arendt disagreed with the Zionist view that Israel should be a unitary state. Her preference was for a federal polity in which Jews and Arabs would live as equals, possibly under the loose aegis of the British Commonwealth. Without a federal solution, the new polity, having escaped British mandate vassalage, would perforce become a client of another power, dependent on it for aid and military protection. Isolated from the rest of its neighbours and virtually under a state of siege, the “sovereignty” of the Jewish polity would prove to be chimerical. Threatened, too, would be the great institutions of the *Yishuv* (the pre-Israel “homeland” in Palestine), among them the *kibbutzim* and the Hebrew University, beacons of Jewish traditions that celebrated “the universality and predominance of learning” and “the passion for justice” (Arendt 1950, p. 212). Moreover, “a new category of homeless people, the Arab refugees” were in the process of being created:

These not only form a dangerous potential irredenta dispersed in all Arab countries where they could easily become the visible uniting link; much worse, no matter how their exodus came about (as a consequence of Arab atrocity propaganda or real atrocities or a mixture of both), their flight from Palestine, prepared by Zionist plans of large-scale population transfers during the war and followed by the Israeli refusal to readmit the refugees to their old home, made the old Arab claim against Zionism finally come true: the Jews simply aimed at expelling Arabs from their homes (Arendt 1950, pp. 215-216).

Even after the partition of Palestine in November 1947 had all but destroyed hopes for a federal solution, Arendt enumerated the criteria for what she considered to be a sane Jewish policy in Palestine: a Jewish homeland, not the “pseudo-sovereignty of a Jewish state”; Jewish-Arab

cooperation, local self-government, and mixed Jewish-Arab municipal and rural councils; limited and phased immigration to Palestine; and, alluding to the Stern Gang and Irgun (Zionist paramilitary organizations), “elimination of all terrorist groups (and not agreement with them) and swift punishment of all terrorist deeds (and not merely protest against them)” (Arendt 1948b, p. 192).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: DEFAULT SOCIOLOGY – OR THE SOCIOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

The historian James Sheehan (2005, p. 4) observes that:

Most moral judgments about the past contain an implicit counterfactual claim: if x had done y, the situation would have been better or worse. And as is always the case in using counterfactuals, the power of counterfactual moral judgments depends on their plausibility, that is, on how close they are to the actual facts of the case. If it is implausible that x might have done y – or even thought of doing so – then the moral charge of the counterfactual is substantially weakened. Moral principles may be unchanging, but their application varies enormously from one situation to another.

How plausible was Arendt’s moral judgment about Jewish marginality and assimilation, and in particular her critical assessment of the parvenu strategy of advancement? The answer to that question requires a command of facts that this author does not possess. In particular, it demands a specification of the cultural resources that would have allowed Jews to behave differently in

the circumstances.⁷³ But let two things be noted. First, Arendt was not “blaming” the Jews for their own destruction; she recognized that as “long as defamed peoples and classes exist, parvenu- and pariah-qualities will be produced anew by each generation with incomparable monotony, in Jewish society and everywhere else” (Arendt [1951] 1973, p. 66). She was showing how the social and political position of the Jews, *and their own social and political positioning* - the assimilationist and other strategies they had typically employed - had put them in a situation of extreme jeopardy. She was arguing, in other words, that the destruction of European Jewry could be explained in small part as a response to the apolitical conduct of Jews themselves. And even where Jews had become political – as intellectuals leading the Zionist movement – the convictions that had driven them were short sighted and harmful. For Arendt, the Jews were active in their own fate, even in their adaptation and conformity.

Second, in placing Jews at the centre of their own story and connecting them as agents to other social actors and situations, Arendt furnished what is in all essentials a sociological account of Jewish history and psychology; better, a political sociology of Western Jewry that served to explain its attitudes, emotions and psychological predilections. Let us allow that Arendt’s references to “the social” and “society” are typically allusive or abstruse rather than systematic.⁷⁴ The terms variously designate market relationships, the sphere of necessity, a hybrid realm between the public and the private realm, high society and mass society. Arendt treats them as

⁷³ Arendt herself poses the counterfactual question in Arendt ([1958] 1997, p. 88) but simultaneously negates it: “A political struggle for equal rights might have taken the place of the personal struggle. But that was wholly unknown to this generation of Jews whose representatives even offered to accept mass baptism...” Tetlock and Belkin (1996, pp. 16-38) adduce six criteria for judging the plausibility of a counterfactual argument: clarity, logical consistency, historical consistency (the minimal-rewrite rule), theoretical consistency, statistical consistency, and projectability. For a contrasting discussion, more attuned to Arendt’s own way of thinking, see Hawthorn (1991, pp. 1-37).

⁷⁴ For Arendt’s most explicit attempts to articulate the concepts of the “social” and of “society”, see Arendt (1958a, Chapter 2) and Arendt (1963a, Chapter 2). However, these protean terms have a long and complex career in her intellectual biography. For a reconstruction of their meaning and trajectory, see Pitkin 1998. Also helpful is Benhabib (1996, pp. 22-31).

illusory in one context, potent in another, potent in their illusions in yet another. By turns, “the social” functions as a metaphor for thoughtless compliance and conformity, snobbishness and hierarchy, wilful introspection, a one-dimensional identity, and a disassociated identity. The social is sometimes ontological and timeless, like Heidegger’s *das Man*, at other times historical and new. As civil society it exists in contradistinction to the state yet also in alliance with it. Depending on Arendt’s argument, “the social” appears to be the stigma of inauthenticity, the ground of it or its outcome. Often “society” and “the social” function merely as residual categories in Arendt’s explanations. Yet they and their cognates are also capable of assuming a constitutive form: hence Arendt’s discussion of Jewish assimilation employs categories – notably, parvenu and pariah – that are *themselves* modes of status classification. Mostly, as one would expect from the above, “society” or “social” are invoked negatively, yet even this usage is by no means ubiquitous.⁷⁵

Given this conceptual confusion, does it make sense to assert that Arendt furnished her own sociology of Jewish intellectuals? It does, because to the degree that the social, under any description of it, has power to affect human conduct, one has in essence a sociological explanation. Let us put to one side the great array of sociological perspectives, and focus on the essentials of what sociologists do. Formally, a sociological *account* is one which begins with the situation (e.g. the anomalous position of Jews in Europe) and which goes on to show that human agency – (e.g. parvenu advancement and role playing) - is attributable in some shape or form to the influence, pressure, and facilitation of collective practices and resources, such as interaction rituals, modes of family socialization, market opportunities, sanctioned performances, and linguistic codes (e.g. the social dynamics among Jewish notables, families and intellectuals

⁷⁵ Arendt (1959) actually defends the integrity of the “social” realm. And on the importance of society and sociability for thinking, a Mannheimian theme par excellence, see Arendt (1982, pp. 10, 19, 26-27, 42, 69-70, 72-4).

within the context of unequal treatment and political marginality).⁷⁶ A sociological account approaches *competence* when the social is clearly defined and a social theory is clearly articulated. A sociological account is potentially *successful* when the social is cogently demonstrated to entrain human agents, that is, channel, energize or impede their activities, and do all this in a patterned, and typically routinized, manner. The question is not, then, whether Arendt adduced a political sociology in her writings – given her subject, she could hardly avoid one - but how adequate it was. Yet because Arendt opposed sociology, she could not even address the problem of a sociologically adequate account. Faced with that aporia, she provided a sociology by default.⁷⁷ So do most practicing philosophers and political theorists, even if a growing number of them are aware that sociology is implicated in their practice whenever they deal with social questions or evoke the conditioning situational force of social factors.⁷⁸

Concepts such as justice, obligation, freedom and rights presuppose not only ontological

⁷⁶ *Eichmann in Jerusalem* ([1963b] 1994) offers another covert sociology of knowledge and the emotions, this time explaining the erosion of conscience among Nazi functionaries. Nazi slogans and catch-phrases - the SS motto “My Honour is my Loyalty”, euphemisms such as “final solution,” “special treatment,” “resettlement” – functioned both to conceal the enormity of what was being done, and to lend murder the moral tincture of duty (p. 52). In addition, Arendt argued, the atmosphere of *collusion* was so complete - among the Nazi Party hierarchy, the Foreign Office, legal experts, the Ministry of Finance - that there was nothing, and no-one, to convince Eichmann that he was doing anything wrong (114-5). The absence of dissenting opinions, the fugitive and opaque character of resistance, such as it was, produced a cocoon in which crime was transmogrified into orthodoxy. Confronting no one who actually spelled-out the evil of what was happening, Eichmann toed the line. Who was he to protest? In part, it was the very success of the regime that made obeying it seductive, and made a virtue out of opportunism. But the situation was made worse because of the way the Jewish Councils of Elders cooperated with the Nazi functionaries in the deportation of their own people. Through the practice of establishing privileged categories of Jewish persons – “German Jews as against Polish Jews, war veterans and decorated Jews as against ordinary Jews, families whose ancestors were German-born as against recently naturalized citizens, etc” - through formulating various exceptions, the Jewish leaders had seemed to be willing to accept the rule. As a result, it was all too easy for the Nazi functionaries themselves to feel “that by being asked to make exceptions, and by occasionally granting them, and thus earning gratitude, they had convinced their opponents of the lawfulness of what they were doing” (132-3).

⁷⁷ For contrasting attempts to connect philosophical arguments to sociological analyses, see Bellamy 1992; Bernstein 1979; Doyal and Harris, 1986; Keat and Urry 1975; Fay 1987; Habermas 1981 and 1987; MacIntyre 1984; and Taylor 1992. These attempts are salutary but they are all too rare. In most universities, philosophers and political theorists have nothing to do with sociologists, and sociologists repay the compliment in kind.

⁷⁸ Unfortunately, most contemporary sociologists have little knowledge of philosophical problematics even though sociological practice enshrines them. The “classical” tradition of sociology was very different in this respect. Marx grappled with Aristotle and Hegel; Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel with Kant above all. Debates on ontology (nominalism and realism) and epistemology (empiricism and rationalism) were central to their “methodological” writings (see Alexander 1982; Baehr 2002b; Johnson, Dandeker and Ashworth; 1984; Parsons [1937] 1968).

characteristics of *homo sapiens* but social characteristics too; for instance, norms of abstract social inclusion (“human rights”), reciprocity, religious codes which seek to dissolve the differences between insiders and outsiders, or reinforce those differences, and so on. Equally, the basic vocabulary of political life means nothing in the abstract. It gains significance through temporalization (democracy in the ancient world summoned up the spectre of mob-rule; today it suggests parliament and the rule of law), through articulation - the manner in which different terms and conceptions are combined in one ideological package -, and through contestation: disputes over what is deemed to be valuable or harmful, legitimate or illegitimate, good or evil. In turn that contestation instantiates the strivings of social classes, movements, sub-cultures, and other collective actors to extract resources and render the lives of their members meaningful.⁷⁹ Arendt would have doubtless agreed with much of this description. But her opposition to sociology prohibited her from drawing the conclusion Mannheim saw so clearly: that because in everyday life the social and political are entwined and interdependent, one requires a political sociology to make sense of them. Similarly, reasoning about agency, and agency itself, presupposes a social location. As Doyal and Harris (1986, p. 80) remark, “the conscious formulation of an intention to perform an action depends upon the prior existence of social rules in terms of which actions have their justifications. You can only form an intention to do something that already makes sense to you as something that might be done....[H]umanity is the gift of society to the individual.”

I have said that wherever “the social” is deemed to shape human conduct one has an explanation that is essentially sociological in character. Is that sociology nascent and furtive? Or is it systematic and translucent? That is the choice an interpreter must make. And whether one

⁷⁹ I am distilling Freedman (2003), Koselleck (1985), and Richter (1995).

prefers to explain human agency in terms of causes, reasons, desires, energies, or rules; or whether one evokes conditions, sources, elements, factors, influences, stimuli, obstacles - that is *still* the choice. Say that someone is able to find in this context a third alternative to practicing sociology explicitly or covertly. He or she is still is required to show how *Arendt's* account of Western Jewry differed in principle from a sociological one. That will not be easy. Nor will it do to say that Arendt offered an historical rather than a sociological explanation of Jewish assimilation. She offered both. And, logically, it makes no real difference because Arendt has described sociology, in her Mannheim review, as an historical discipline. The Jews' situation is that of a distinctive stratum, or strata, defined by its relationship to the state (bereft of citizenship) and by its social marginality. The Jewish parvenu is a member of an out-group, belittled by internalizing the social standards of the oppressor, adapting to an alien world through "impression management".⁸⁰ Writing of the German Jews of the late Enlightenment, Arendt ([1958] 1997, p. 106) stated that they understood "that the past clung inexorably to them as a collective group; that they could only shake it off as individuals" – in other words, that even escape required a sensitivity to their social conditioning. Equally, she acknowledged, in social constructionist vein, that facts "have their own particular way of being true: their truth must always be recognized, testified to."⁸¹ Or, at further remove, consider her explanation, written in 1952 or 1953, of sociologists' attraction to the functionalist approach:

⁸⁰ The expression is Pitkin's (1998, p. 26), not Arendt's, but it is apposite. *Rahel Varnhagen* is strikingly Goffmanesque in its emphasis on performativity. Unlike Goffman, however, Arendt insisted on an authentic self.

⁸¹ Arendt ([1958] 1997, p. 92). She added: "Perhaps reality consists only in the agreement of everybody, is perhaps a social phenomenon, would soon collapse as soon as someone had the courage forthrightly and consistently to deny its existence.... Only truths discovered by reason are irrefutable; only these can always be made plain to everyone. Poor reality, dependent upon human beings who believe in it and confirm. For it as well as their confirmation are transitory...." Compare this with Peter Berger's concept of "structures of plausibility" in Berger ([1965] 1973, pp. 53-56; and Berger (1992, pp. 123-143).

It is undeniable that this desubstantializing functionalization of our categories is no isolated phenomenon occurring in some ivory tower of scholarly thought. It is closely connected with the growing functionalization of our society, or, rather, with the fact that modern man has increasingly become a mere function of society. The totalitarian world and its ideologies do not reflect the radical aspect of secularism or atheism; they do reflect the radical aspect of the functionalization of men. Their methods of domination rest on the assumption that men can be completely conditioned because they are only functions of some higher historical or natural forces. The danger is that we may *all* be well on our way to become members of what Marx still enthusiastically called a *gesellschaftliche Menschheit* (a socialized humanity).⁸²

The most reductive sociologist of knowledge could not have put it better.

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⁸² Hannah Arendt, "Religion and Politics," p. 379. Arendt's marginalia in *Ideologie und Utopie* suggest that Arendt did not dismiss Mannheim's sociology of knowledge out of hand, but rather sought to circumscribe its claims. On that account, Mannheim's approach was in keeping with, and a plausible interpretation of, a modern despiritualized world. His mistake, however, was to press his case too far, and to assume a more general validity for the sociology of knowledge. In her view, such a wider claim was self-contradictory, since the limited insights of sociology of knowledge presupposed a continuing capacity to pursue philosophy. I owe this point to David Kettler, who has painstakingly transcribed and interpreted Arendt's marginalia. For the relevant documents, see <www.bard.edu/arendt>.

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