

Bourgeois Marxism. A Review Essay on Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (original edition in 1930, translated from German by Alan Scott)

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Abstract

This essay by Otto Neurath, titled “Bourgeois Marxism,” is a review essay on Karl Mannheim’s *Ideologie und Utopie*. It was originally published in 1930, and has been translated for the first time from German by Alan Scott.

Der Kampf, Vienna, 1930¹

Marxism is spared nothing. First it is passed over in silence. Then it was taken to mean the demagoguery of the barricades. At last the time came when bourgeois scholars discovered it. They then wrote annual definitive refutations. Finally, without really being aware of it, more and more of Marxism’s opponents came to deploy its concepts. Now a new stage seems to begin: Karl Mannheim, for example, in his book *Ideologie und Utopie* in a certain sense consciously adopts what he calls a Marxist standpoint in order then to demonstrate that Marxists do not apply Marxism to themselves, and that, viewed from a higher vantage point, Marxism appears to be one among other partial perspectives. Salvation can thus only come via a synthesis in theory and in instruction.

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1. [Trans. note] “Bürgerlicher Marxismus. Rezensionaufsatz zu: Karl Mannheim *Ideologie und Utopia*, Bonn 1929.” First published in *Der Kampf*, 23(5), Vienna (1930, pp. 227–232). Reprinted in Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte (Eds.) (1981, pp. 349–356) and in Volker Meja and Nico Stehr (Eds.) (1982, pp. 584–593).

If we do not allow ourselves to be confused by the metaphysical–soulful language common in German works of sociology, with its twists and turns, and fluid meanings, the upshot of the first two parts of the book in particular is roughly as follows: all thought processes depend on the sociological location of the observer such that a history of shifting human understandings cannot be detached from a history of human social conditions. Mannheim distinguishes between the “particular concept of ideology” (one notes, for example, that the opponent has particular ideas because these correspond to their interests, irrespective whether this is a matter of a conscious lie or an instinctive covering up of a fact) and the “radical and total concept of ideology” (the whole thought of one class is of a fundamentally different kind from that of another, or the thought of one period compared to that of another), whereby he emphasizes the collective character of ideologies.

From the start, Mannheim’s observation is skewed because he understands ideology as a kind of forgery, whereas Marxism understands ideology as thought processes as such, insofar as further behaviour is not included (cf. “ideological superstructure”). And now he emphasizes, not without satisfaction, that:

It is no longer the privilege of socialist thinkers to examine “bourgeois” thought in terms of its ideological boundedness [*Ideologiehafteigkeit*]: the method is being applied by all camps, and thus we arrive at a new stage. In Germany, Max Weber, Sombart, and Troeltsch — to mention only the most important — have here made a start. Max Weber’s words have become ever more true: “the materialist interpretation of history is (...) not a hire cab to be boarded at will, and it does not come to a halt even in front of the bearers of revolution!” [Weber, 1919/1988, p. 446]. (Mannheim, 1929/2015 [1936], pp. 68–69 [pp. 66–67]).²

And thus Mannheim, with considerable force, thinks that he can explain that: “no one can forbid the opponent from also analyzing Marxism in terms of its own ideological boundedness” (*ibidem*, p. 69 [p. 67]). And that, namely, the bourgeois must provide for us! “One fully captures the *total* concept of ideology if one *has the courage* [Neurath’s emphasis] to view not only oppositional, but in principle all thought — and therefore *also one’s own position* [original emphasis] — as ideological” (*ibidem*, p. 70 [pp. 68–69]). And now the author arrives at the thesis: “in the first place, it can easily be demonstrated that *those who think in socialist-communist terms see ideology in the political thought only of their opponents, while their own thought indisputably counts as above ideology* [Neurath’s emphasis] (*ibidem*, pp. 108–109 [p. 118]).” That is so mistaken that one can only interpret such a view in terms of Mannheim’s “location”! From the start, Marxism has always and everywhere seen itself as the ideology of the proletariat, and, quite apart from the countless statements [to this effect], its whole educational and political praxis is one continuous testimony to that fact. In Russia in particular, where the application of Marxism is a matter of daily concern, Lenin and others ask at every opportunity how it can be explained that particular Marxist thought processes are in the foreground at particular times and under particular conditions; how it is that others are not applied, or are distorted, by specific groups!

As a consequence of his inclination to generate types, which, particularly since Dilthey, has wreaked havoc on German research, Mannheim fails to see that one can investigate ideologies

2. [Trans. note] Neurath did not provide page numbers. I have translated the quotations from Mannheim and have given the page references to the standard current German edition of *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929/2015). Where I have been able to locate the equivalent passages in the standard English translation (1929/1936), I have given the page numbers in square brackets.

sociologically alongside each other where one has a scientific and the others an unscientific character! The unscientific ideologies can be overcome by a scientific stance, the scientific, however, cannot. It is clear as a consequence of our inadequate data alone that several scientifically consistent theories of society are possible. And it makes good sense to justify sociologically the selection between scientifically possible suppositions. There is, however, no higher vantage point from which this scientific inadequacy, which differs from era to era, can be overcome other than through scientific research that narrows the options!

All this Mannheim overlooks. Because Marxism chooses among possible scientific constructs *one* that is empirically demonstrable, Mannheim associates it with “irrationality.” And now he distinguishes between five conceptions of the world [*Weltauffassungen*] that correspond to the major political-sociological groups: “1. bureaucratic conservatism; 2. conservative historicism; 3. liberal-democratic bourgeois thought; 4. the socialist-communist view; 5. fascism” (*ibidem*, p. 102 [p. 104]). Here he avoids allowing anyone of these groups to remain bound to an essentially religious vision, perhaps because their equation would then create problems for him. In this way he can, however, say that each of these groups is one-sided; that it has a particular aspect of being. He points out that the first four ways of seeing are occupied with in some sense predictable courses of worldly events, whereas fascism leaves everything open, and is thus oriented towards the free act! Mannheim, whose clever observations throw a most interesting light on many issues, suggests that fascism, through its paucity of predictions, demonstrates a conservative posture! It wants to change nothing fundamental, merely place power in new hands! For this one needs no sociological prediction!

Now Marxism stands alongside other ways of seeing, which, as Mannheim constantly emphasizes, are one-sided. How does one arrive at a “*synthesis*” that overcomes such partiality in the way that a piece of music to a degree unites all sounds? A thinker schooled in Marxism immediately asks: which group is called in collective effort to carry through this synthesis? Answer: that middle class of the intelligentsia that sends theorists to the proletarian and bourgeois front, should they have individually decided to take sides! But there are also members of this middle class who do not understand the decision to side with one party. They are — and Mannheim is clearly to be counted among them — the “neutral ones” who are more entitled to scientific synthesis than the parties with their partialities! Certainly, Mannheim is right, such efforts as those he undertakes come from the middle class intelligentsia. But he fails to see that this way of viewing Marxism as one among other perspectives is a typically bourgeois attitude, as will now be shown.

The question is not how one can arrange a higher vantage point, *but rather which of the various views is more complete in scientific terms, and what chance it has of prevailing*. Imagine that at some point in time people who have magical, theological, metaphysical, and scientific modes of thought appear alongside each other. What would we say to a scholar who is of the opinion that the scientific point of view would greatly benefit by freeing itself from all these “partialities” by constructing a higher synthesis of magic, theology, metaphysics, and science! Mannheimian relativism places the empirical-logical formed strict science of Marxism alongside unscientific forms of thought [*Denkgebilde*!]! It is as if someone thought that 2 times 2 is 7 by deducing that from the alignment of the stars; another that 2 times 2 is 5 because it is God’s will; a third that 2 times 2 is 8 because this corresponds to the cosmic view; while the scientist is of the view that 2 times 2 is 4. And now the synthesis comes along, unites all four “partial” perspectives, or even adopts an average perspective, and claims: 2 times 2 is 6.

Mannheim applies his relativism one stage too soon! Those who think correctly will find that alongside unscientific, metaphysical, normative, and other observations concerning soci-

ological matters, there are also strictly scientific ones that may *differ* among themselves! This can however equally be the case among physicists who share a common standpoint. Among scientifically researching sociologists, differences are conceivable that arise because some still believe assumptions to be permissible that others reject! Our insufficient knowledge of available data alone means that our predictions are *ambiguous*. And a decision must resolve [the matter]! This is often historically determined by the transmitted form of cognitive cooperation! Acting masses of people are most successful when they have common ideas. The intellectual leaders of mass movements always prefer to cooperate than to dispute, and thus prepare the formation of a *communis opinio*. Here speculations like Mannheim's can be deployed, but we are already *within the scientifically oriented proletarian front!* The sociological conditionality of bourgeois and proletarian forms of thought lies herein: the bourgeois form of thought is, as we shall show, necessarily *conflicted* [*zweispältig*], while the shift towards a unified science [*Einheitswissenschaft*] is, on sociological grounds, only possible on the proletarian side.

Today we encounter a fully developed sociology grounded in materialism that can be a part of a unified science only within the framework of Marxism. Marxism can absorb everything that presents itself as an empirical claim anywhere, but can also employ everything that other anti-metaphysical schools of thought have accomplished. In contrast, it can make no use of the metaphysical elements that it may encounter in the rest of sociology. It would have to be demonstrated on a separate occasion that the "interpretive" sociology (political economy [*Nationalökonomie*], history of philosophy, etc.) of Max Weber, Sombart, Scheler, and others is completely metaphysical, and that today there is only one school of thought that seeks in principle to pursue an unflinchingly anti-metaphysical sociology: Marxism. This is also quite intelligible from a Marxist perspective because a strictly scientific sociology grounded in materialism — irrespective of the specific claims it makes — has the ability not merely to increase the proletarian front's technical effectiveness, but also to recruit new followers. When workers, employees, and peasants who are today still with the bourgeois front are schooled sociologically, they are more inclined to join the proletarian front! Scientific sociology has namely enlightened them as to their class position. Matters are quite different in the case of the bourgeois. Certainly, scientific sociology is also suitable for increasing their technical effectiveness, but in terms of propaganda the bourgeois front has nothing to gain from a dissemination of scientific sociology! When scientific sociology — which today means Marxism — has demonstrated that nationalism, patriotism, religion, and much besides are bound to time and to class these are already dispelled as compelling forces! There is, for Marxism, no higher "duty," nothing that is beyond the human. The joint decision determines everything. Workers, employees, and peasants who have understood this will no longer be attached to their class enemy through patriotism, nationalism, religion, folk commonality [*Volksgesamtheit*], and the like. If they find it desirable to support their national customs, their national language, then this is a decision that need not necessarily have anything to do with the cooperation between proletariat and bourgeoisie, as we can clearly see in the nation states of Russia where people, on the basis of proletarian rule, extend national education systems. That is quite possible without metaphysics, whereas ideology adverse to class struggle requires metaphysics. This is why on the bourgeois side a unified scientific education is not possible. The scientific stance must be intermittently interrupted by national, religious, and patriotic propaganda! The student who studies technology in the morning, is, by the evening, attending seminars on the categories of being, disembodiment, political economy, and proof of the existence of God.

They stand facing each other: the bourgeois front — which, due to sociological conditions, is necessarily conflicted: half scientific, half unscientific — and the proletarian front,

whose fundamental orientation is scientific through and through! In practice, the bourgeois side currently achieves more than the proletarian in terms of scientific detail because the bourgeois front controls the educational apparatus, chances to publish, and much more. But the personal stance of a Marxist worker who has pursued some studies is more scientific — at least in the field of sociology — than that of the average bourgeois anti-Marxist student who has enjoyed considerably more education.

As an evident result of this situation, only a very restricted *common scientific basis* is possible between bourgeois and proletarian research, particularly on social matters. A strictly scientific education for a life of action, particularly in the sphere of politics, is conceivable only on the Marxist side where nothing can be scientific enough, while on the bourgeois side, as a rule, everything must be imposed metaphysically, indeed theologically — full of normative discipline. That Mannheim, on the basis of the premises set out above, comes to *seriously propose a neutral political education* can therefore only be explained in terms of his bourgeois disorientation, even though he is familiar with the orientation of the proletarian front.

Mannheim first describes the fact that individual [political] parties must decide to “expand their party schools ever more systematically” (*ibidem*, p. 128 [p. 131]). And now he thinks that one-sidedness will result from this, which only a neutral position can overcome. He does not see that there is no pedagogic synthesis between those who, like Marxists, seek to deduce verifiable propositions in a strictly scientific manner on the basis of given sociological conditions, and those who, in metaphysical longing, pursue the quiet workings of the spirit of the people [*Volksggeist*] and, like Scheler or the philosophizing sociologist Leopold von Wiese, occasionally want to incorporate within their “field of vision” God, nature, the cosmos, or other sublime matters as an effective power, to remain within the terminology of this direction of thought.

Obviously any Marxist would see it as a success of the proletarian front if contemporary universities and research institutes were at least neutral; if they would, on a principle of parity, admit Marxist professors alongside professors of unscientific normative disciplines — alongside professors of, for example, metaphysics and theology; if, where there are Catholic schools, there were also Marxist schools! But, from the Marxist side, this demand for neutrality for scientific reasons has nothing to do with the desire for an impartial ground between Marxist and non-Marxist ways of thinking in order to *overcome one-sidedness*. Mannheim does not notice how the flood of metaphysical, theologizing, norm-setting sociologists on the bourgeois side swells, while simultaneously, on the other side, a no longer negligible, determined, and ever growing number of thinkers turn to logical-empirical research, which, in the field of sociology, takes the form of Marxism. Mannheim feels sustained by his university circle in which the synthetic, foggy atmosphere is in places admired, while in the majority of cases a very determined malignant anti-Marxist bourgeois stance, from which Mannheim clearly distances himself, is customary. Precisely because Mannheim presents himself to the reader as, so to speak, a Marxist within certain limits, he will influence some young Marxists who do not see the connections with sufficient clarity, and who above all overlook the fact that Mannheim does not examine Marxist teaching as such, so that instead of talking about its scientific content he talks again and again about its total perspective. In this way, as we have seen, Marxism comes to resemble the other “worldviews” in which science alone does not rule!

Had Mannheim from the start understood Marxism as an anti-philosophical, strictly scientifically oriented view, and sociology, however, as a science whose task it is to make accurate predictions — while self-evidently also taking into account the sociological standpoint of those making the predictions and equally their actions which help shape their prophecies — then he could not consistently treat Marxism as a vague total orientation, but would have to examine

which sociological conditions determine its scientifically correct statements! Within science one can only analyze sociologically the various scientific systems! In general, the Marxists have contributed their work to the struggle of the proletariat and adapted Marxism to this task such that Mannheim's specific questions and answers rarely arise.

However, the matter has already been treated in exactly the formulation of the question that Mannheim wishes for. I can refer to my detailed analysis of this in *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf*:

Nationalism, religiosity, but also Marxism itself are for Marxists ideologies of particular times and life-orders; particular classes and groups. (pp. 148-149) (...) Through the application of its own method to itself, Marxism (...) announces to the proletarian front that it has become the bearer of scientificity. (...) *For the proletarian front, tactics of struggle and propaganda interests coincide with respect for science and overcoming metaphysics* [Neurath's emphasis]. (p. 151) (...) Some who come from the bourgeoisie are concerned whether the proletariat will have a feel for science — what does history teach us? [It teaches us] that it is *precisely the proletariat who will become the bearers of science without metaphysics* [original emphasis] (p. 152). (Neurath, 1928, pp. 148-152)

Mannheim has fully confirmed all this! Should a bourgeois thinker ever make the effort to accept as faithfully as possible the basic tenets of Marxism — however displaced and distorted, then he likes to do so with the aim of demonstrating to precisely this Marxism that a free-floating man of the intelligentsia can, via a higher synthesis, overcome Marxism's one-sidedness. Should the bourgeois agree with our account, so they are inclined to adopt a new defensive position that allows them to avoid admitting that for the last eighty years Marxism has been the only scientific sociology that commands a complete system and a coherent scientific tradition! That Mannheim conceives of Marxist teaching not as a scientific system but as a conception of reality one may interpret as a "defensive understanding." Marxism will no longer be rejected as the work of the devil, it will no longer be the senselessness of its teaching that will be depicted, rather it will be emphasized that it is simply one, among other, conceptions of the world! One can largely explain Mannheim's total orientation in terms of his bourgeois-metaphysical position. Instead of speaking of conditions and their effects, we find "associations of meaning [*Sinnbezüge*] that make the world world" (Mannheim, 1929/2015, p. 52). The talk is of the "deep stratum of the problem" [*Tiefenschicht der Problematik*]; of "social polarities" and "an entirely different will to the world [*grundverschiedenes Weltwollen*]" (*ibidem*, p. 60 [p. 57]); of the "ecstatic profusion that continuously makes history" (*ibidem*, p. 80 [pp. 80-81]); of "the distributions of accentuation," "the first step towards judgement and towards ontological decision" (*ibidem*, p. 83 [p. 83]); of "facets of the whole" [*Aspekte der Ganzheit*], and much of the same sort that one has become accustomed to through Scheler, Heidegger, and many others (by the way, there are successful researchers of this ilk in empirical inquiry too).

Which position Mannheim has to adopt with respect to this unified science grounded in materialism — as part of which Marxism undertakes making empirically testable statements about processes — can be deduce from his exposition of the two typical "dogmas" that, in his opinion, were apt to prevent formulating the fundamental question. We are particularly interested in the first dogma, which in all his accounts Mannheim seeks to combat and which characterizes the stance adopted by Marxism: "a teaching that simply negated metaphysics, philosophy, and other border questions, and only acknowledged the validity of empirical knowledge

of particularities — and allowed philosophy, in particular as logic, validity as a specialized discipline” (*ibidem*, p. 90 [p. 92]). Yes, at the end of the day here lies the major contrast: Mannheim seeks the all-encompassing view, an angle on the whole “world”; that is to say, metaphysics! Marxism, in contrast, seeks to make accurate statements concerning social processes! It wants to predict the future fate of the proletariat and other classes! Metaphysics versus science! In the end, and despite all his kindness, Mannheim versus Marxism: the bourgeois front versus the proletarian front! It’s the old familiar tune!

Translated by Alan Scott

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