

## MANNHEIM's VAULT



### *A social metaphysics of the human mind?*

The epistemology of Karl Mannheim is a non-determinist model of human society which moves in generational processes of knowledge production and distribution. Social relationships, economic conditions and ultimate beliefs are viewed as a holistic Gestalt that resembles not only a social science of the human mind, but a 'theology' of human society. This research approach is, at the same time, a humanistic and rational model of social relationships which emerged from the biographical encounter with the irrationality of mass movements and the fatal consequences for free thought.

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Perfection is predominantly not an affair of this world, but most people will agree to the working proposal that human conditions which can be improved by advancing knowledge should be; this spiritual attitude refers not only to the ‘perfection’ of tech-know-logical artifacts, but also to the material quality of life and unmet human needs which are affairs of this physical world. The pilgrimage of human life, the lasting sanity of the soul and the generation of knowledge depend deeply on an economic culture where **free scientific inquiry** is understood as a ‘technical’ medium towards human progress, i.e. the gradual betterment of living chances. The socio-logical approach of Karl Mannheim (Mannheim Karoly:1893-1947) falls definitely into this cognitive category of human inquiry where sociology factually merges (or at least, profoundly intersects) with theology and social science embarks into the unknown under-currents of last questions, that is a social science (ecology) of the human mind.

The Hungarian, the German and the British Mannheim, and his approach of a ‘free intelligence’ is a biographical consequence of life events and condensed experiences. Scientific knowledge, social life and psychological health cannot be disconnected, and no human society on this globe can make any (ethical) progress without the forward-pressing intelligence of free thinking groups of people. Social disorganizations (war, revolution, great social conflicts) arise from a dangerous lack of free cultural communication which is caused by material and mental maldistribution (manipulation) of human living chances; this is a non-determinist model of human social action which does not fit into the authoritarian or totalitarian path of ‘societal salvation’ and implies a great warning for the **diagnosis of our time**, despite the impressing technical systems evolution of information technology. Mannheim’s vault is, at the same time, higher and deeper than a determinist conception and view of human history. In his psychological view, the human soul is much more than a complex chemical reaction, human life much more than thermodynamic evolution, and human knowledge much more than academic science. In Mannheim’s vault, human education is a holistic selection program for informative knowledge that enables for the freedom of choice, concerning human living chances; it is the vital view of the world citizen who has left his ‘bourgeois possessions’ at home and seeks his fortune in the ‘knowledge perfection of the living soul’, i.e. proletarian culture, class consciousness and materialistic determinism are not seen as ‘redemptive forces of humankind’, only ‘learning can reduce suffering’.

The **knowledge architecture** of Mannheim's vault was 'designed, manufactured and engineered' in certain biographical waves of social learning processes; the life stream from Sas utca (Budapest) to Golders Green (London) was actually a very compressed vita of only a half century while his 'socio-logical' cousin Ernő (Ernest) Manheim (1900-2002), who emigrated further to the US (Chicago, Kansas City), was happy to receive almost the double life span. The location of K. Mannheim's (and Juliska's) urn in Golders Green columbarium is somehow 'metaphysical' as it is very close to the Jewish cemetery and Golders Green is a traditional Jewish neighborhood. It is ironically said that artists, philosophers, mathematicians and chairs of sociology can avoid the heavy stress of life, but this humorous notion does not apply to Karl Mannheim who adopted the English spirit very fast, and who merged it pragmatically with the profound socio-political experiences of cosmopolitan Budapest (before 1919) and Weimarian Germany (1918-1933). Although this author does politically not share the 'technocratic proposal' of 'democratic planning', which emerged in Mannheim's thought as being counter-intuitive to 'free market ideology and utopia', he shares the foundational idea and ideal that the 'road to freedom' leads via knowing and learning. The Hungarian philosopher and German sociologist transformed in London into a British educator, who understood learning primarily as value creation, e.g. economic knowledge as 'social product' of human learning, i.e. economic action is object to human ecology and subject of knowledge generation. From this follows a very distinct view of human society which depends economically on knowledge production and dissemination; this is a very futuristic view of human economic life that anticipates the coming of the information society.

We can learn much more from the socio-logical 'Torah' of Karl Mannheim than we can see at first glance from his whole oeuvre, given that his research work in the social science (of the human mind) was neglected for a long time ('a revival started in the late 1980s') and many papers were translated or published posthumously. While **natural science** still has to explain and integrate the dynamic interplay of thermodynamics and evolution, social science has to inform us more about the vital interaction of human ingenuity and physical resources on this planet -and- time is getting short! There do exist alternative roads to serfdom that can lead over market fundamentalism, monetary excess and policy failure,

e.g. invisible hands that empty our pockets and the rapid rise of the rent-seeking society.

According to Karl Mannheim, the socio-logical quest for ‘more’ knowledge cannot be disconnected from men’s final or ultimate beliefs, i.e. there is no real demarcation line between **theology and sociology**: the everyday actions of human beings reveal their real belief, despite ‘official affiliations, ideologies or proclamations’. Social life (and economic action) is a material reflection of human beliefs and real preferences, the economic world can be best understood by a practiced set of values and price formations are quantitative responses to value preferences (of a mass of people), i.e. matter and mind are perceived in direct relationship, economic and mental freedom are deeply connected, economic calculation is posteriori, post mortem and an informed guess. Numbers are social constructs, conventions and mental tools; social reality is driven by irrational human desires or illusions that should be technically balanced via rational planning and democratic control. The spontaneity of the markets can lead to many irrational results, more social chaos and human alienation; so much to the diagnosis of our time as looked through the lens of Mannheim’s socio-logical ‘Torah’. The joke that sociology might be a hidden Jewish religious sect carries some truth as the quest for the social relationships from men to men cannot be disconnected from men’s ultimate belief in the real forces of and in social reality; the best example of this scientific question is the superstitious function of money in society which is exchange tool (measurement unit for markets) and omnipotence machinery (‘bankers doing God’s work’) at the same time. In our transformative age of societal informatization and information technology, the epistemological approach of Karl Mannheim, his social science (ecology) of the human mind, is of utmost actuality. As social relationships are being tech-knowlogically transformed, the advancement of the economic conditions of production and distribution will depend even more on the expansion of human knowledge and learning than ever, marking the definite transition from industrialism to informatization, i.e. all economic factors of production (land, labor, capital) will become more knowledge-intense and the social context of human life will be changed profoundly, in earthly terms of new models of sharing, earning and learning.

For progressive people the present  
is the beginning of the future. For  
conservative people the present is  
the end of the past.

— *Karl Mannheim* —

### **Literature/Links**

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At the end, an open guess: H.Broch (1886-1951) who coined the term ‘total economy’ (1939) in social relationship to the human condition of total serfdom warned very early against a cognitive dominance of ‘economism’ as a pathological phenomenon in the modern mass society. How is it possible to exercise free thought under the Zeitgeist of economism, i.e. the economic subordination of social relationships to monetary tools of exchange? This would be a contemporary puzzle for Mannheimian ‘free intelligence’ as economic serves are not allowed to practice free thought, because they are occupied with making a living and repaying accumulated debt. Of course, this is the stuff for another research project on the role of free intelligence in an age of mass economism.

