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***Intellectuals' Analysis of Intellectuals: A Critical Response***

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**ABSTRACT**

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*The aim of this study is to elaborate on Karl Mannheim's understanding of intellectuals and its relationship with his account of ideology. His formulation of ideology and free-floating intellectuals will be compared with Gramsci's organic intellectuals and his explanation of hegemony.*

**Keywords:**

Analysis of Intellectuals, Response

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Much of Karl Mannheim's reputation in social theory, especially in sociology, owed to his contribution to the establishment of a new branch of sociology, known as the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim's analysis of the special role of intellectuals in contemporary society is another important contribution to social theory. In this paper, I will compare his conception of free-floating intelligentsia with Gramsci's organic intellectuals and other contemporary accounts of intellectuals provided by Bauman, Foucault and Bourdieu. The comparison will focus on the collective identity of intellectuals, their function and position within society. I will start with Mannheim's evaluation of intellectuals. But, his analysis of free-floating intellectuals cannot be fully understood without analysing his contribution to the sociology of knowledge. Thus, we will start our discussion with his analysis of the sociological foundations of belief, ideology and knowledge.

**2. Mannheim: From Sociology of Knowledge to Free-Floating Intellectuals**

**2.1. Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge**

As Mannheim elaborates on the social roots of belief systems, his analysis builds upon the historical-contextual nature of ideology and knowledge. For Mannheim, all political thinking is a collective activity. He proposes that thought is a product of everyday world experience, and knowledge can only be understood within its "existential connectedness" or "existential boundedness". (Loader, 1985: 112-3)

Mannheim's account of the term ideology starts with an analysis of the meaning of the term, to be complemented thereafter with an historical and sociological analysis. He notes the existence of two distinct meanings of ideology, namely the particular and the total conceptions of ideology. The particular conception of ideology concerns the psychological level, thus its point of reference is the individual, her interests and motivations. The total conception of ideology uses a more formal functional analysis, without any reference to the specifics about the individual. It tries to reconstruct the systematic theoretical basis underlying the single judgements of the individual, thus the issue in question is the reconstruction of the whole outlook of a social group. It is not the individual perspectives that matter but the correspondences between given social situations and perspectives. (Mannheim, 1985: 56-8)

As Mannheim states “previously one’s adversary as representative of the certain social-political position, was accused of conscious or unconscious falsification. Now...having discredited the total structure of his consciousness, we consider him no longer capable of thinking correctly.” (Mannheim, 1985: 69) Mannheim considers the false consciousness thesis as an evolutionary step in the construction of the sociology of ideology. This thesis provides a basis for examining the “total structure of consciousness” of the subject. It is no longer enough to show that “the adversary suffers from illusions or distortions” on a psychological level, a sociological analysis on the systemic level is needed. (Mannheim, 1985: 69)

Mannheim adds another distinction of “special and general” to that of “particular and total”. Mannheim holds that the decisive question in the distinction between the special and general concepts of ideology is “whether the thought of all groups (including our own) or only that of our adversaries is recognized as socially determined.” (Mannheim, 1985: 77) In addition to making these distinctions, Mannheim also distinguishes between evaluative and non-evaluative forms of the general variants of total concept of ideology. In the non-evaluative concept of ideology, truth has no importance. In this case, knowledge is related to social position. It should be noted at this point that, whereas the false consciousness thesis is an evaluative account of ideology, Mannheim’s account of ideology with respect to the sociology of knowledge is a non-evaluative general total conception of ideology with descriptive and historical qualities.

Mannheim builds his account of ideology upon a modern theory of knowledge. “It is impossible to conceive of absolute truth existing independently of the values and position of the subject”, of “the social context,” and of “historical experience.” (Mannheim, 1985: 79) Truth and knowledge are relational such that “all knowledge is oriented toward some object” and “dependent on the nature of the knower” in relation to the historical context. (Mannheim, 1985: 86) Thus he favours an indirect approach to truth, since truth is relational, and absolute truth may never be acquired.

Building upon the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim’s conception of ideology, as seen from his account of knowledge as presented above, is an amalgam of the particular and total conceptions of the term, realising the unity of the subject and the object within a historical context. His conception of ideology also presupposes, since Mannheim states that no thought is presuppositionless, a couple of propositions with respect to the nature of thought and knowledge. Mannheim argues that the individual is born into a world where political and social ideas are already formed into patterns. Within these patterns, emerge the ideologies that are in fact nothing but cognitive maps or frameworks, needed in order to realise a routinization of the social world. At this point, Heidegger’s notion of existential boundedness enters into Mannheim’s conception of ideology. Ideologies are “collective attempts to give expression to the fundamental structure of our everyday world experiences.” Forms of thought, namely ideologies and/or utopias, are socially produced and developed in response to definite social circumstances which are independent of the individual. Being a social and historically bounded collective activity, they emerge out of the conflict between social groups in society. (Turner, 1995: 721-723)

Mannheim’s approach to the notion of ideology can be formulated as “the non-evaluative general total conception of ideology.” With the creation of the formulation of the non-evaluative general total conception of ideology, the theory of ideology develops into the sociology of knowledge. Indeed, he tries to develop a kind of “neutral” sociological approach to belief and knowledge. While evaluating such an approach, he is mainly concerned with social roots and knowledge. He claims that new sociological approach to the knowledge must involve the assumption that “all historical knowledge is relational knowledge” that can only be understood with reference to the values and position of the subject and to the social context. The issue for Mannheim is not any more concerned with the problem of “what ultimate truth is.” For him, the modern investigator should try to discover the course of historical development out of the complex process from which the approximate truth emerges. The issue for him is not to discover truth itself but to discover the “cultural settings and many hitherto unknown ‘circumstances’ which are relevant to the discovery of truth.”

## 2. 2. Mannheim’s Free-Floating Intellectuals:

What is the relationship between Mannheim's account of ideology and free-floating intellectuals? The main problem of Mannheim's account of ideology that haunted his attempt to develop a sociology of knowledge is relativism. Mannheim, on the one hand, holds that historical and political thought is determined by the socio-historical location of the thinker and the political aspirations and material interests of the group or groups to which she belongs. But, on the other hand, he asserts that such thought is inherently evaluative, one-sided, distorted, and therefore false. In short, all systems of historical-social-political thought are ideologies. At this moment we encounter with Mannheim's paradox: if all such perspectives are ideologies, then we cannot talk about a sociology of knowledge. Mannheim's attempt to avoid relativism involves his separation of relativism from relationalism and the notion of free-floating intellectuals.

Relativism does not deny the existence of universal truth; it simply denies that this truth can be grasped by any real, concrete subject. In Mannheim's terms, the subject is existentially bound, but truth itself is universal. The other alternative is relationalism which abandons the theory of eternal truth in favour of a truth that continually changes. (Loader, 1985: 113-4). Instead of the concept of absolute truth, he adopts relational truth. He proposes that "all historical knowledge is relational knowledge." (Mannheim, 1985: 79) Mannheim likens an historical object to a natural landscape. He holds that neither of them "can be grasped in one picture." Just as one's perception of a natural landscape is only one perspectives of the different angles, "the different historical pictures do not contradict each other in their interpretations, but encircle the same materially identical given historical content from different standpoints and at different depths of penetration." (Quoted in Mullins, 1979: 143.)

But, this time we encounter another problem: how can such a synthesis be possible if each person's outlook is determined by the socio-historical location of the thinker and material interests of the group or groups she belongs? The answer to this question is also Mannheim's second solution to the problem of relativism; the free-floating intelligentsia. Turner argues that "Mannheim wanted to preserve some notion of the universal validity of scientific thought and struggled in his own account of epistemology to maintain some space within which valid general knowledge of the world could be defended. This attempt was the thrust behind the idea of the free-floating intellectuals." (Turner, 1995: 727)

While the dominant class and the working class are constrained by their class interest, intellectuals are not tied to a particular class position; in this sense they are able to articulate alternative beliefs which are not reduced to their location in the social structure. Intellectuals do not constitute a single integrated social class and they are not associated with any single political movement or party. They are therefore not directly determined by their class position or by their class interest. Mannheim defines this "socially unattached intelligentsia" as an "unanchored, *relatively* classless stratum." (Mannheim, 1985: 155)

Mannheim underlines a pluralism of intellectual commitments, which eliminate the possibility of an organic intellectual. For Mannheim, intellectuals represent a variety of groups and commitments. As he puts it:

The decisive fact of modern times, in contrast with the situation during the Middle Ages, is that [the] monopoly of the ecclesiastical interpretation of the world which was held by the priestly caste is broken, and in the place of a closed and thoroughly organized stratum of intellectuals, a free intelligentsia has arisen. Its chief characteristic is that it is increasingly recruited from constantly varying social strata and life situations, and that its mode of thought is no longer subject to regulation by a caste-like organization. Due to the absence of a social organization of their own, the intellectuals have allowed those ways of thinking and experiencing to get a hearing which openly competed with one another in the larger world of the other strata... In this process the intellectual's illusion that there is only one way of thinking disappears. (Mannheim, 1985: 11-12)

The status of intellectuals in modern times permits them to exchange perspectives with one another, to understand the interrelationships of the different world views. This possibility of communication is confined to the intelligentsia, who, because of their heterogeneity, are in a position to be engaged with a greater variety of world aspirations than other groups in society.

In their analysis of Mannheim, Kurzman and Owens (2002) assert that Mannheim's free-floating intellectuals do not form a distinct class and they are potentially able to transcend their class of origin. Although Mannheim accepts that intellectuals are too heterogeneous and differentiated to be seen as a single class, "there is, however, one unifying sociological bound between all groups of intellectuals, namely, education, which binds them together in a striking way." (Mannheim, 1985: 155) On the other hand, those who are "not oriented toward the whole through [their] education" and who "participate in the process of production –the worker and the entrepreneur" tends to absorb the worldviews of a particular class and mode of life. (Mannheim, 1985: 156) However, education provides intellectuals the ability "to attach themselves to classes to which they originally [do not] belong... because they and they alone [are] in a position to choose their affiliation." (Mannheim, 1985: 158)

Colin Loader (1985) makes a distinction between the notions of "existentially bound" and "existentially connected" while evaluating Mannheim's concept of socially free-floating intellectuals. Loader states that "socially free floating" is synonym of "existentially connected" and not of "existentially bound". He makes the interpretation that "the intelligentsia did not float above social conflict but rather were directly connected to it; intellectuals had their origins in and maintained ties with the competing socio-political groups and their world aspirations. The existential connectedness resulted in the intelligentsia as a whole being heterogeneous; and their heterogeneity prevented them from becoming existentially bound, for they were not limited to any one perspective but incorporated to them all." (Loader, 1985: 118-119)

In this sense, intellectuals cannot be politically committed and free-floating. Political commitment is what characterizes groups or parties; and political change results from their political commitments. Intellectuals, on the other hand, are characterized by their heterogeneity, and they are not part of those political commitments. Intellectual common will is "not the political will to change the world but rather the intellectual will to clarify political positions." They are "not politicians but political scientists." (Loader, 1985: 119) Loader draws our attention to the similarities between Mannheim and Max Weber. In "Science as a Vocation", Weber denies that there is an organic unity of spirit, and he suggests that science should reconcile itself with pluralism and should renounce claims to the monopoly in valuation. Weber holds that "scientific 'pleading' is meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other." (Weber, 1974: 147) Mannheim, like Weber, suggests intellectuals to take science as their vocation and to realize the distinction between science as a vocation and politics as a vocation.

Another important social philosopher who had an impact on Mannheim was Lukacs. Lukacs argues that knowledge is bound up with history. Different societies at different historical stages produce different forms of knowledge. Lukacs denies the distinction between ideology and science; they are the products of the totality of a particular society in a particular historical stage. For him, an individual's perspective on the world is a consequence of her social position. This account of ideology resembles Mannheim's depiction of the notion. As we have already discussed, Mannheim tries to avoid relativism in his account with his introduction of the free-floating intellectuals into the debate. Thanks to its relative detachment from the class structure, the free-floating intellectuals are able to synthesize particular perspectives into a valid whole. But for Lukacs, only the working class can provide a complete understanding of the nature of society. So there are two different social categories that are capable of achieving universal truth; Mannheim's intellectuals and Lukacs's working class.

Longhurst (1989) disagrees with the idea that the free-floating intellectual is Mannheim's alternative to Lukacs's proletariat. As he rightly observes, the place of intellectuals in Mannheim is structurally different from that of the proletariat in Lukacs's thought. Lukacs perceives the role of the working class as determined by a general philosophy of history. However, there is not the same weight of historical necessity behind the function of Mannheim's free-floating intellectual. As Longhurst states, since Mannheim's intellectuals are "relatively classless", his development of the sociology of knowledge cannot be seen as a 'bourgeoisification' of Lukacs." (Longhurst, 1989: 10-11)

### **3. Gramsci: From Hegemony to Organic Intellectuals**

Gramsci's analysis of intellectuals cannot be fully understood without analysing his account of the notion of hegemony. Gramsci holds that ruling classes do not rule only by coercion, but they also rule by securing consent. Any power, to win hegemony (and consent), should find the way of equating its own interests with the interests of the whole society by diffusing its own world-view throughout the society. In Gramsci's analysis hegemony comprises the "spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequently confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production." (Gramsci, 1971: 12) Gramsci makes a distinction between civil society and political society, i.e., state, and associates the notion of hegemony with the realm of civil society. All kind of institutions and means mediating between the state and economy, like family, church, schools, the media, can be seen as apparatus of hegemony and ties individuals to ruling authority by consent rather than coercion. Direct domination or coercion, on the other hand, is associated with the realm of state. As Eagleton has observed, the contribution of Gramsci to the debate revolving around the notion of ideology is his attempt of making a transition from ideology as "systems of ideas" to hegemony as lived habitual social practice. While ideology has static connotations, hegemony is "an inherently relational, as well as practical and dynamic notion." (Eagleton, 1991: 115)

Gramsci asserts that no group or class can win hegemony or political power if it does not succeed in exercising hegemonic leadership. As Gramsci has put it "the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'." (Gramsci, 1971: 57) In this sense, in any attempt of gaining hegemony, intellectuals have important and crucial roles. Intellectuals can be defined as those who elaborate a new and integral conception of the world. This function of intellectuals associates them with the notion of hegemony.

Gramsci's analysis of intellectuals starts with the question of whether intellectuals constitute "an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialised category of intellectuals?" (Gramsci, 1971: 5) Gramsci rejects the idea that intellectuals exist as a distinct social category, independent of class. In this sense, his account of intellectuals radically differs from Mannheim's elaboration of intelligentsia. Gramsci rejects the assertion that intellectuals are a class apart, autonomous, and thus in a position to produce unbiased or objective theories and knowledge. The main function of intellectuals, for Gramsci, is to generate particular class consciousness, a feeling of homogeneity to classes that produce intellectuals. Gramsci holds that "every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields." (Gramsci, 1971: 5) The capitalist class and the working class produce their own organic intellectuals. Gramsci points out that there is a "relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production." (Gramsci, 1971: 12) According to Gramsci, everyone is in some sense an intellectual in her own way and unconsciously because every human activity comprises a kind of "philosophy" or perception of the world. "All men are intellectuals... but not all men have in society the social function of intellectuals." (Gramsci, 1971: 9) The role of the organic intellectuals is to give a form, homogeneity and awareness to the practical understanding of other individuals. In this sense, the organic intellectuals are not detached from "the exigencies of political reality." (Coben, 1995: 4)

He also distinguishes the organic intellectuals from the traditional intellectuals, like catholic clerics, priests, left over from some previous historical period. Since traditional intellectuals are not organically linked to the dominant class, these intellectuals believe that they are independent thinkers, detached from class interests. Gramsci thinks that this idea of independence is an illusion. While producing its own organic intellectuals, the bourgeoisie eliminates even this illusion of autonomy by assimilating the traditional intellectuals. Gramsci's distinction between the traditional and the organic intellectuals might resemble Mannheim's distinction between the caste-like organization of intellectuals in the Middle Ages and the free intelligentsia of modern times representing a variety of groups and commitments. But this is only a mere resemblance. In Mannheim's case, the intellectuals of the Middle Ages can be defined as a class-in-themselves whereas free-floating intellectuals of modern times can be seen as classless. In Gramsci's case, on the other hand, the traditional intellectuals can also be defined as class-in-themselves

whereas the organic intellectuals, as we have discussed, can be treated as class-bound, representatives of their class of origin. The only possible similarity that can be constructed is between Mannheim's intellectuals of Middle Ages and Gramsci's traditional intellectuals. But, Mannheim's account of free-floating intellectuals and Gramsci's evaluation of the organic intellectuals are completely different.

#### 4. Other Voices: Bauman, Foucault, Bourdieu

In what follows, I will focus on some recent alternative accounts of intellectuals elaborated by Bauman, Foucault, and Bourdieu. In "Is There a Postmodern Sociology?", Bauman (1988) provides us with an account of intellectuals in the context of the passage from modernity to postmodernity. He, in a sense, like Gramsci's distinction between the traditional and the organic intellectuals, and Mannheim's distinction between the intellectuals of the Middle Ages and modern free-floating intellectuals, makes a distinction between the intellectual of modernity and the intellectual of postmodernity. Bauman states that "the concept of modernity connotes the new self-awareness of the intellectuals." (Bauman, 1988: 218) The passage from modernity to postmodernity, according to Bauman, marks the emergence of the "status crisis" of intellectuals which also results in a new focus on their own skills, techniques and raw materials. For Bauman, this "falling upon oneself" should be evaluated as "a response to the growing sense of failure, inadequacy or irrealism of the traditional functions and ambitions, as sedimented in historical memory and institutionalized in the intellectual mode of existence." (Bauman, 1988: 208) The demand for the services provided by the intellectuals of modernity for "social forces, which need the authority of cognitive and normative judgements as the legitimation of their actual domination", is much more smaller than one would expect it to be. (Bauman, 1988: 219) As the importance of such services, from which intellectuals derived their sense of social importance, receding, "their *raison d'être* is eroded." (Bauman, 1988: 219)

Bauman draws our attention to the undermining of the conditions of intellectual status. First of all, it appears now that "the task of establishing universal standards of truth, morality, taste does not seem that much important." (Bauman, 1988: 220-1) Moreover, "legitimation" has been replaced with "seduction" and, thus become redundant. Bauman holds that "the structure of domination can now be reproduced, ever more effectively, without recourse to legitimation; and thus without recourse to... intellectuals as make the legitimation discourse their speciality." (Bauman, 1988: 222) Bauman argues that replacement of legitimation, with seduction and repression is, to a certain extent, followed by the replacement of the academia with the market. Bauman observes that intellectuals, this time, "do not hide as thoroughly as in the past behind the role of 'organic intellectuals' of other classes" and they, now, "act as 'organic intellectuals of themselves'." (Bauman, 1988: 225)

Foucault and Deleuze's evaluation of intellectuals entails a radical rupture from the accounts of Mannheim and Gramsci. Foucault and Deleuze's intellectual is neither a "free-floating" intellectual nor an "organic" intellectual. Deleuze points to "the indignity of speaking for others" and argues that "a theorising intellectual... is no longer a subject, a representing or representative consciousness. Those who act and struggle are no longer represented, either by a group or a union that appropriates the right to stand as their conscience... Representation no longer exists; there is only action- theoretical action and political action which serve as relays and from networks." (Foucault, 1977: 206-7) He draws our attention to an important theoretical fact that "only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf." (Foucault, 1977: 209) In this sense, we can also conclude that Foucault and Deleuze's intellectuals are also not free-floating. Foucault asserts that "the intellectual's role is no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivist; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge', 'truth', 'consciousness', and 'discourse'." (Foucault, 1977: 207-8)

The work of Bourdieu on intellectuals also provides us with a critique of the notions of the organic intellectual and the free-floating intelligentsia. Although Bourdieu grants the "intellectual field" a "relative autonomy", he distances himself from the concept of unattached, free-floating intellectual. According to him, Mannheim's free-floating intellectual without ties and roots is "a sort of fantasy of social flight that is the historical substitute for the ambition of absolute knowledge." (Bourdieu, 1994: 184) For Bourdieu, intellectuals constitute a class fraction, specifically a dominated fraction of the

dominant class. He states that intellectuals “are dominant, in so far as they hold the power and privileges conferred by the possession of cultural capital”; but intellectuals are also “dominated in their relations with those who hold political and economic power.” (Bourdieu, 1994: 145) In this sense, intellectuals adopt an ambiguous position because of “this contradictory position of dominant-dominated, of dominated among the dominant or, of the left wing of the right wing... Despite their revolt against those they call the ‘bourgeois’, they remain loyal to the bourgeois order.” (Bourdieu, 1994: 145)

### 5. Conclusion:

For Mannheim, intellectuals are not tied to a particular class position. They are “socially unattached” and constitute a “relatively classless stratum.” (Mannheim, 1985: 155) As it has been discussed in this paper, there are several alternative approaches to Mannheim’s evaluation of intellectuals provided by Gramsci, Bauman, Foucault and Bourdieu. Gramsci’s evaluation of intellectuals is completely different from Mannheim’s account. Gramsci argues against the idea that intellectuals exist as a distinct social category, independent of class. He holds that the capitalist class and the working class produce their own organic intellectuals. In this sense, Gramsci’s intellectuals elaborate a new and integral conception of the world and give a particular class consciousness, a feeling of homogeneity to those classes. Bauman focuses on the “status crisis” of intellectuals result from the passage from modernity to post-modernity. Bauman argues that intellectuals should give up hiding, as in the past, behind the role of intellectuals of other classes. They should, now, “act as organic intellectuals of themselves.” (Bauman, 1988: 255) Foucault problematizes the issue of speaking for others. Foucault holds that the intellectual’s role is no longer to represent other social groups, but rather, “to struggle to against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere knowledge, truth, consciousness and discourse.” (Foucault, 1977: 208) And lastly, Bourdieu sees intellectuals as relatively a class-in-themselves, as having their own interests separating them from other social groups. (see, Kurzman and Owens, 2002: 78-80)

But, the most interesting critique of Mannheim comes from Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology can be seen as a critical response to Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge. “Reflexivity”, for Bourdieu, “is an epistemological principle which advises sociologists to turn their objectifying gaze upon themselves and become aware of the hidden assumptions that structure their research.” (Karakayalı, 2004: 352) In this sense, one of the most fundamental properties of Bourdieu’s sociology of sociology is that “every proposition that this science sets forth can and ought to apply to the subject who produces it.” (Bourdieu, 1994: 177) His reflexive sociology, when applied to the sociology of the intellectual world, is actually contributes to “our knowledge of the subject of knowledge by introducing us to the unthought categories of thinking.” (Bourdieu, 1994: 178) As Goldman has put it “Mannheim failed to apply his own methods in sociology of knowledge to himself, that is, in a reflexive way.” (Goldman, 1994: 274) Bourdieu’s intellectuals, on the other hand, have a monopoly on critical reflexivity, which allows them to examine their own “interest in disinterestedness” and thus to transcend their position of privilege. (see, Kurzman and Owens, 2002: 79).

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