

Flashback

# The Problem of “Unmasking” in “Ideology and Utopia”

## Karl Mannheim, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt

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### Introduction

Long before modern intellectuals began to equate masking with domination and unmasking with “radical doubt toward the testimony of consciousness,” the mask had a very different connotation in Western political thought.<sup>1</sup> In ancient Rome, the concept of *persona* (mask) invested agents with what today we would call legal personality; it transformed them from natural beings bound to the affairs of household, kith and kin, to bearers of rights and obligations equipped to participate as equal

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<sup>1</sup> See Clark [1994, 12], and Ricoeur [1970, 9]. The principal harbingers of the hermeneutics of suspicion, on Ricoeur’s reckoning, were Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Eric Voegelin [1994, 257-273] added Max Weber. Mannheim [1936, 309-310] cites Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Pareto as early contributors to the sociology of knowledge, suggesting that the overlap between sociology and suspicion is considerable.

members of a political community. So began a process that steadily expanded and reshaped human powers of representation,<sup>2</sup> eventuating in legal personality's being attached to ecclesiastical orders, guilds, towns, universities, trade unions, professions and other collective actors and corporations.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the theatrical quality of *persona* in the Roman conception, and the fact that *persona* was an attribute of a *res publica* or commonwealth rather than a natural datum, dramatized something unknown to the barbarian world: that by entering the public stage the individual leaves the private world of intimacy to consort freely with his peers and, by so doing, is able to speak and deliberate on and decide political affairs [Arendt 1963, 106-109]. In effect, the *persona* entailed the construction of a second self: an equal of others who, while in other respects familial strangers, are bound together by the common tie of citizenship; a self able to cooperate with these strangers, to see things from multiple points of view and be seen seeing. From the modern perspective, in contrast, masking is a way of *not* being seen, of pseudo representation, of falsification, of imposture; it is *unmasking* that provides visibility and transparency. *Theatrum mundi*, the perdurable image of the polity, later the society, as a stage or theatre on which humans act, is no longer the setting of distinction and glory as it was for the Greeks and the Romans, but of ignominy, proof that “illusion and delusion” are “fundamental questions of social life” [Sennett 1974, 35]. And far from suggesting citizen equality, masking emphasizes the lamentable existence of human domination both within and outside of the political sphere.

To say that writers in the ancient world took a different view of masking than we moderns do is not to suggest that they were strangers to the art of dissembling. Far from it: Cassius Dio and Tacitus were among its great chroniclers. So was Plutarch. But the chasm that separates our composite traditions from theirs, at least since the Eighteenth century, is palpable in the expansion of three claims integral to modern personhood: sincerity, authenticity and, probably at their root, autonomy. In each case, masking is anathema, unmasking a temptation. Sincerity puts a premium on wholeness, on the honest homology between private and public selves. The sincere person says: I really am what I profess to be; what I profess to be, I feel. Authenticity<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As Hobbes [1996, 111-112] pointed out in *Leviathan*. Hobbes delineates a tripartite classification of persons: “The natural, whose actions are his own; the artificial, whose actions are owned by another; and the fictitious, to whom the ability to own actions is granted by pretence.” See Runciman [1997, 7].

<sup>3</sup> J. N. Figgis [1989, 111-127], following Gierke, argued that this personality was not fictive but real.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Grant [1997, 58-59] argues that “integrity” is preferable to “authenticity” when describing Rousseau’s approach to political ethics. Integrity has stronger moral connotations than authenticity. For Rousseau it is not enough to be oneself. One must also be good.

insists on a self-created and original identity. Its bearer says: I am who I am and I am different from you and from others. Join me but only by being yourself [Trilling 1971]. Autonomy harbours the idea that persons think for themselves and are beings who are able to assess critically the judgments of others. The autonomous person says: I am not, and will not be, a dupe of others.

All three of these “values,” as we now call them, drew energy from their nemesis, Society, the alleged source of conformism, fakery, and standardized mechanical reproduction. Rousseau’s crusade to rip off from court society the “deceitful veil of politeness” which conceals “fear, coldness, reserve, hate, and fraud” was among the opening salvos in the unmasking war.<sup>5</sup> The Genevan iconoclast strained “to see the true visage behind the mask, to grasp the ‘thing in itself,’ to touch the reality behind the appearance, the substance beyond the accident.”<sup>6</sup> Later writers such as Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud followed suit while identifying their own peculiar mode of domination to expose. Sociological views of society, in contrast, were from the beginning more complex, more ambivalent, and, depending on the theorist, more benign: Catholic counter-revolutionary thinkers such as Bonald, for instance, considered society to be the very condition of civilized life and consciousness [Nisbet 1966]. It was natural law, natural right, that were inventions, abstractions of the estranged consciousness, not society on which humans depended for their companionship and attachments, their channel to the divine. But whenever power and domination were considered to define social relations, rather than simply affect them, sociology too was prone to the unmasking temptation: to show hidden, pernicious forces working below the consciousness of human conduct, determining what agents felt and did. Karl Mannheim’s greatness consists both in his skilful elucidation of the unmasking attitude and in the herculean attempt he made to overcome it.<sup>7</sup>

The first part of this essay reconstructs his account of unmasking, focusing on, but not restricted to, *Ideology and Utopia* [1929],<sup>8</sup> while the second and third parts examine critiques of Mannheim’s project by Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt respectively. Why bring these writers together? Principally because their confrontation reveals the scandal that Mannheim’s sociology posed for German philosophy, and the manner in which an established philosopher (Jaspers) and a neophyte (Arendt) sought to respond to it. If Mannheim receives extensive treatment below while Arendt

<sup>5</sup> Rousseau [1993, 7]. See Elias [1983, 242-243], on women’s fans as masks.

<sup>6</sup> Starobinski [1988, 73-75]. Transparency was also a leitmotif of the French revolutionaries, as historians such as François Furet, Lynn Hunt, Lucien Jaume, and Carol Blum have shown. For a useful overview of their work on this topic, see Clark [1991, 313-315].

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Aron, a critic of Mannheim, also sought to confront unmasking in sociology. I have described this attempt, and explained why it failed, in Baehr forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Mannheim [1936]; the original German version is Mannheim [1929].

and Jaspers are examined far more sparingly, this arises from a simple fact: Mannheim wrote amply about unmasking during the Weimar period, while his philosopher critics only touched on it. For Jaspers, unmasking never became a major preoccupation though it was the single most important reason, as we shall see, for his loathing of psychoanalysis and sociology. For Arendt, unmasking loomed ever larger as a problem of social science and modern life, but only after the Second World War. Her review of *Ideology and Utopia* marks the start of this abiding antipathy. She sketches only the outlines of objections that later would gain considerably in finesse and ferocity.

While no attempt is made here to provide a detailed picture of Mannheim’s intellectual network, it bears emphasis that Mannheim, Arendt, and Jaspers were no distant, detached disputants; before the triumph of National Socialism, they argued passionately, often face to face, about the nature of philosophy and sociology. Jaspers was Arendt’s doctoral advisor for her thesis on the concept of love in the thought of St. Augustine. After the war, a deep friendship blossomed between them; she worked tirelessly to see Jaspers’ work translated into English and was a frequent visitor to his home in Germany and, later, Switzerland. In turn, he offered steady commentary on her work that exhibited pride in her achievements, solidarity with her struggles, and wise counsel where she appeared to overreach herself.

Both Jaspers and Arendt disavowed Mannheim’s deflation of philosophy, but the teacher brought to the encounter a personal animus that was lacking in his student. Jaspers opposed unsuccessfully Mannheim’s *Habilitation*, the postdoctoral degree required to teach in German universities [Loader and Kettler 2002, 69, n. 24].<sup>9</sup> 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 [Biemel and Saner 2003, 108, 137]. 1931 was also the year that Jaspers published his *Geistige Situation der Zeit* (The Spiritual Situation of The Age),<sup>10</sup> a short treatise in existential philosophy framed by a denunciation of sociology, psychology, anthropology and, more obscurely, Karl Mannheim himself.<sup>11</sup>

Arendt’s relationship with Mannheim was, if never warm, at least engaged and discursive. She attended some of his Heidelberg seminars, offered during the summer semesters of 1927 and 1928, on the “History of Political Thought in Germany. I. Conservatism,” and “The Social Significance of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Cen-

<sup>9</sup> His *Habilitation* sponsors at Heidelberg were Alfred Weber and Emil Lederer. Mannheim’s *Habilitation* topic was Nineteenth century conservatism. An English version appears as Mannheim [1986].

<sup>10</sup> The book was translated by Eden and Cedar Paul and published in 1957 as *Man in the Modern Age* [Jaspers 1957].

<sup>11</sup> For a parallel, if rather different, discussion of anthropology, psychology, and biology, see Heidegger [1962, 10, 71-75].

tury” [Blomert 1999, 427, n. 3, and 433, n. 44]. She participated in the Frankfurt interdisciplinary seminar, conducted under Mannheim’s auspices, on “Social History and History of Ideas: Early Liberalism in Germany.”<sup>12</sup> And in 1930 she reviewed *Ideology and Utopia* for *Die Gesellschaft*, the flagship theoretical journal of the German Social Democratic Party [Arendt 1994a].<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

Let us return to the prodigy.

## 1. Politics and “Total Ideology”

*Ideology and Utopia* 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 “historicism” 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 administration which is concerned with rou-

<sup>12</sup> 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 1931-1933. Among the student attendees were Arendt, her then husband Günther Stern, Hans Weil, Norbert Elias (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 U. Herrmann to his edition of Gerth [1976, 9 and 81].

<sup>13</sup> Founded by Rudolf Hilferding, *Die Gesellschaft* was principally run after 1928 by Albert Salomon. In that year, Hilferding became German Minister of Finance.

<sup>14</sup> Among other things, I base this statement on a) the paucity of references to Mannheim in Arendt’s post-Weimar writings; b) the remnants of her library, now housed at Bard College. That library contains *Ideologie und Utopie* (with marginalia), a special edition of “Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz im Gebiete des Geistigen” (“Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon,”) again, with marginalia and an inscription in German: “To Miss Arendt with very best wishes, KM”) and “Strukturanalyse der Erkenntnistheorie” (without marginalia and probably unread). Note, too, that none of Mannheim’s works in the Bard Arendt library are in English; this supports the conjecture that Arendt never read the Shils-Wirth version of *Ideology and Utopia* with its two added chapters, “Preliminary Approach to the Problem” (chapter 1, written specially for the English translation) and the capstone encyclopedia article “The Sociology of Knowledge” (orig. 1931), which becomes chapter five. It is possible she perused the latter in its original German form but we have no evidence of her having done so. Arendt’s marginalia in her copy of *Ideologie und Utopie* are deciphered and probed by David Kettler; see <http://www.bard.edu/arendtcollection/kettler.htm>.

tinized, settled, reproductive behaviour.<sup>15</sup> 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 sense. On the other hand,

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.<sup>16</sup>

A science of politics is no other than the sociology of knowledge. It is urgently needed in an 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.<sup>17</sup> When social actors embrace a “particular” notion of ideology, they do so as individuals confronting other individuals. Yet even as they seek to expose falsity, both parties tend to 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 can agree on. Since ego and alter inhabit the same mental universe, both take 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 this perspective, an individual’s foibles or particular interests are irrelevant. So, too, are his motives. Far more important is the fact that one’s opponent is the bearer of a social stratum’s mindset, categories, and values which are at odds with ones own; a person’s views are a “function” of the milieu and world view into which he or she has been inducted. Accordingly, modern political dispute rages over incommensurable *Weltanschauungen*, “fundamentally divergent thought-systems,” such as Conservatism and Marxism, which clash without respite. As vessels of impersonal social

<sup>15</sup> 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 by Mannheim himself who was keen to domesticate *Ideologie und Utopie* for an Anglophone audience. I rely on Kettler, Meja, and Stehr [1984, 107-128], and Kettler and Meja [1995, 193-246].

<sup>16</sup> Mannheim [1936, 113] 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 gray. A rather different view of politics is affirmed at page 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.

<sup>17</sup> To be precise, Mannheim states that the “particular conception of ideology [...] signifies a phenomenon intermediate between a simple lie at one pole, and an error, which is the result of a distorted and faulty conceptual apparatus, at other. It refers to a sphere of errors, psychological in nature, which unlike deliberate deception, are not intentional, but follow inevitably and unwittingly from certain causal determinants” [*ibidem*, 61].

forces, ciphers of social structure, disputing parties inhabit different, dehumanized, “worlds.”<sup>18</sup> No compromise between them is possible because no common faith exists to form the basis of their reconciliation.

TAB. 1. *Contrasts between Particular and Total Ideologies*

	Particular	Total
Subject of analysis	Individual/groups of individuals; motives of [63, 69, 77]	Epoch/era/class; “fundamentally divergent thought systems” of [57, 69, 77]
Mode of analysis	Analysis of “psychology of interests,” causes of [57, 61]	Causal/functional and formal analysis [55-64]
Domain of analysis	Part of subject’s assertions questioned	Whole framework of assertions questioned
Attitude (See also cells below on Objective of critique and Orientation)	One-sided debunking/unmasking/ especially of individuals; climate of mistrust [64-65]	Unmasking shading into “radical scepticism” and reciprocal unmasking [64, 74, 75]
Conditions of existence of ideology	Conflicting parties inhabit the “same world”; share same style of thought [64]	Conflicting parties are “worlds apart”; clashing thought styles [65]
Bearer of critique	Factions/cliques within same class	New classes: rising bourgeoisie, rising proletariat [65, 74]
Objective of critique	Limited advantage of one group vis-à-vis another	“Mutual destruction of styles of thought” [65]
Mode of validation*	“Traditional anathema” [70]	“scientific demonstration” [71]
Scale of values*	Transcendental [71]	Secular [71]
Orientation	Scholastic/contemplative [72]	Political/”pragmatic” [72-74]

Page references are to the English-language edition of *Ideology and Utopia* [Mannheim 1936]. Cells marked with an asterisk indicate modalities that Mannheim applies to critiques of “false consciousness.” Even so they appear to overlap with the Particular-Total binary.

Note something unusual about Mannheim’s usage. Typically, we think of ideology as a mental framework of an individual or a group, especially one that claims universal validity for what can be shown to be a partial view. But for Mannheim, “ideology” – especially total ideology – is not the thought world that masks a reality;

<sup>18</sup> Mannheim [1936, 55-64]. See also Mannheim [1986, 55]: “Interests do not merely oppose interests: words struggle against worlds”; see also pages 56, 77-78, 82, 95-9, 100. Conservatism, Mannheim says, is not just an oppositional force but a “comprehensive counter-current” to natural law modes of thought. “Conservatism did not merely want to think ‘something different’ from its liberal opponents; *it wanted to think it differently*” [*ibidem*, 102-3, emphasis in original].

it is the technique of demolishing that reality by unmasking it.<sup>19</sup> It transpires that ideology and unmasking are intrinsically conjoined, the latter being the performance signalled by the former.

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 [Mannheim 1936, 64-65, 74-75, 84, 103, 105]. Political discourse is marked by reciprocal unmasking and by irreconcilable judgments. 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” [*ibidem*, 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 [*ibidem*, 39; cf. 40-41, 48. Also 64, 74, 83, 96, 150, 162, 250].

Unmasking – especially of “false consciousness” – was a trope of Marxist analysis<sup>20</sup> at the time that Mannheim was writing. He incorporates it in “The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge,” (1925) an essay that anticipates and with greater economy discusses, the treatment of unmasking and total ideology in *Ideology and Utopia*. In its modern (read “total”) form, Mannheim says, unmasking is characterized by the following properties. First, it is an oppositional mode of consciousness that pre-dates Marxism but finds “its first conscious, reflective formulation in Marxism.” Second, unmasking is a characteristic of all modern social classes, or rather their intellectual representatives, not simply the proletariat; hence liberals, who present the world-view

<sup>19</sup> As Loader [2011, 476] remarks: Mannheim “defines ideology primarily as the Marxist tactic of ‘unmasking’ rivals’ claims to universality by tying their ideas to a specific social group. Here ideology is viewed as the product of a reflective subject doing the unmasking rather than an active subject making the initial claims for universality. Thus ideology is essentially negative, a technique to attack the legitimacy of opponents’ aspirations. Utopia, on the other hand, is the actor’s view of the world. It defines the subjects’ aspiration to change the world by gaining universality for their interpretation of reality. If it acknowledges the opponents’ unmasking of it as socially limited (ideological) as accurate, it will cease to be a utopia, for the political aspiration for universality will be defeated.”

<sup>20</sup> See especially Lukács [1971, 50, 54, 58, 65-66, 69-70, 72-73, etc.] See Mannheim [1936, 70, 74 (n. 14), 76, 94-95]. On Lukács as an unveiler, see Muller [2003, 273].

affiliated with the bourgeoisie, relentlessly unmask socialists. Third, unmasking is not concerned with the veracity of an idea, its truth-value or content, for to deny the truth of a proposition is to put oneself on the same ideational ground as one's opponent. Instead the unmasker seeks to "disintegrate," "dissolve," or "corrode" ideas, propositions and thought systems by demonstrating the "extra-theoretical function" they serve.<sup>21</sup> The idea is not refuted, then, so much as re-described. Its "practical effectiveness" is deflated when true believers are shown that what they had considered natural or certain is no more than a construction of social forces and tendencies. It follows, fourth, that unmasking is a relativisation of thought, with the implication that this extends also to the thought of the unmasker. Finally, Mannheim distinguishes between the unmasking of lies and the unmasking of ideologies. When one unmasks a lie one indicts the integrity of the person who utters it; a lie is distinguished from an error by being an ethical lapse rather than an empirical or theoretical mistake. Unmasking a lie, revealing it as a fabrication, is an old practice. Unmasking ideology, on the other hand, is an "exclusively modern phenomenon." The latter "in its pure form attacks, as it were, merely an impersonal socio-intellectual force [...] In unmasking ideologies we seek to bring to light an unconscious process, not in order to annihilate the moral existence of a person making certain statements, but in order to destroy the social efficacy of certain ideas by unmasking the function they serve" [Mannheim 1971a, 65-66, italics are mine].

Conspicuous is the martial terminology in the foregoing: attack, annihilate and destroy. Elsewhere, Mannheim refers to unmasking as a "weapon."<sup>22</sup> One is reminded of the young Marx's characterization of philosophy as the "weapon of criticism," except that Marx's language, far from lofty and impersonal, is visceral and exterminatory. Marxian informed criticism "is involved in a hand-to-hand fight, and in such fights it does not matter what the opponent's rank is, or whether he is noble or interesting: what matters is to hit him." The "people must be put in terror of themselves in order to give them courage." In the "war on the conditions in Germany," criticism is "not a scalpel but a weapon. Its object is its enemy, which it aims not to refute but to destroy."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Carl Schmitt [1986, 17, 23] had used somewhat similar terminology in his critique of the Romantic *occasio* (the disposition of Romantic thinkers – an ideational product of the bourgeoisie – to negate binding norms, and to treat the world as an opportunity and platform for subjective mastery); he called the *occasio* a "disintegrative concept."

<sup>22</sup> *Inter alia*, Mannheim [1936, 75, 78, 88; see also 265].

<sup>23</sup> Marx [1973, respectively 251, 246-247. Specifically on unmasking, see 244].

## 2. Mannheim’s Ambivalence

Mannheim was ambivalent towards the rhetoric of unmasking, unveiling or debunking – the English terms that Edward Shils and Kurt Wolff offer as renditions of *Enthüllung* and to which Mannheim consented. The German word appears early in his work, making its debut in the “Lady from Biarritz,” an unpublished one-act play written in 1920 to evoke liberation from an alienated marriage.<sup>24</sup> 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, a challenge to be resolved by the sociology of knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, he acknowledged that unmasking represented a formative moment in the emergence of the sociology of knowledge, embedded in the discipline’s own presuppositions. It was Marxist theory that “first achieved a fusion of the particular and total conceptions of ideology” [Mannheim 1936, 74, 61]. Even if unmasking is “undignified and disrespectful” when pursued as an end in itself, one can still grant its symptomatic importance in marking an era in transition, bound “to break with many antiquated traditions” [*ibidem*, 64]. Still, Mannheim says, the sociology of knowledge represents an advance on Marxism on a number of fronts, evidenced by a proliferation of distinctions (see below) that Marxism either evades or conflates. Marxism’s Achilles’ heel as a proto-sociology of knowledge is that it is un-reflexive. Its approach to knowledge is “indistinguishable from the unmasking of ideologies” – and these ideologies are never Marxism’s own [*ibidem*, 277, 310].<sup>26</sup> A mature sociology of knowledge avoids this partisan sequestration. And whereas Marxism is an example of a “special-total” formulation of total ideology that refuses to apply its unmasking premises to itself [*ibidem*, 250], the sociology of knowledge builds on a “general-total,” all embracing, variant that, in turn secretes non-evaluative and evaluative iterations.<sup>27</sup> Both are valuable but it is the latter that metamorphoses into the

<sup>24</sup> I draw on Loader [1985, 33-35]. Loader notes that while unmasking appears first as a liberation from convention, it later emerges as an “ultimately stultifying” rhetorical trope.

<sup>25</sup> “Preliminary Approach to the Problem” [1936], in Mannheim [1936, 41, see n. 21]. This important essay was especially written as the introduction to the English translation of *Ideologie und Utopie*. It does not appear in the German original. The gradual obsolescence of unmasking as a strategy, and its replacement by the sociology of knowledge, is the leitmotif of Mannheim’s 1925 essay “The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge” [Mannheim 1971, 59-115]. See also Meja and Stehr’s discussion of the unmasking “impasse” [Meja and Stehr 1990, 5].

<sup>26</sup> Lukács, Mannheim goes on to say, ended in a similar bind.

<sup>27</sup> Mannheim divides “total” ideology into two sub-types, “special-total” (in which a totalizing optic applies to groupings other than one’s own) and “general-total” (in which the optic surveys all groups without exception). The “general- total” in its evaluative mode transitions to the sociology

sociology of knowledge proper. The non-evaluative mode provides a sobering sense of distance, detachment, and “relationalism”; it shows thereby “that every point of view is particular to a social situation” [*ibidem*, 84-86]. Its evaluative counterpart furnishes something more constructive: a perspective from which the validity of ideas can be judged rather than simply recorded [*ibidem*, 88, 97, 100, 106, 149, 189-191]. The basis of that appraisal, Mannheim believes, turns on the extent to which the thought form in question – and this includes moral credos too – is congruent with real conditions. A normative position – such as the taboo against taking interest on loans – is rendered invalid when it “does not allow for the accommodation of action and thought to a new and changed situation and in the end actually obscures and prevents this adjustment and transformation of man.” Equally, a theory is “wrong if it in a given practical situation it uses concepts and categories which, if taken seriously, would prevent man from adjusting himself at that historical stage” [*ibidem*, 95]. For instance, a theory of economics and politics based on patriarchal assumptions would be simply inappropriate to a market economy and an electoral system in which women participated; the theory would provide no guidance for action.<sup>28</sup>

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 sought to escape it in an ingenious way that has three components. First, Mannheim occasionally resorts to a Heideggerian formulation, dropping *enthüllen* (with its Marxist inflection) and replacing it by “uncover” (*aufdecken*), a salient term and concept in *Being and Time* [1927].<sup>29</sup> By that means, a Heideggerian concept is appropriated for sociological purposes [Woldring 1986, 147-150]. 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

of knowledge *bona fide*. The mass of distinctions Mannheim introduces into his sociology is a major part of its sophistication. What others elide, Mannheim carefully separates.

<sup>28</sup> In his restatement of sociology, W. G. Runciman [2000, 37, 124, 155] offers a non-evaluative variant on Mannheim’s argument (though without citing him). A distinctively sociological explanation is one that accounts for the existence of a practice by showing its “competitive advantage” – the inducements provided by the environment for its selection. Hence infantry-drill in seventeenth century Europe prevailed as a unique kind of formation when it was shown able to reap dividends in battle.

<sup>29</sup> Besides “aufdecken” and “endecken,” 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* [Heidegger 1962, 30, 140-142, at 141]. All these terms operate, according to context, at synonyms for what in English would be disclosure, exposure, divulging, uncloaking, and uncovering. That being the case, my own focus on specific usage is only approximate; the meaning of any one term is not fixed and should not be exaggerated.

that condition them [Mannheim 1936, 162].<sup>30</sup> The stratagem’s rhetorical impact is deflationary, absorbing one’s rival – Heidegger loathed the Hungarian upstart and the new discipline he was championing<sup>31</sup> – by domesticating his terminology. To understand the subtleties of this *démarche*, a brief excursus is helpful.

In 1929, the *annus mirabilis* in which “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon”<sup>32</sup> and *Ideology and Utopia* were published, another essay appeared in which Mannheim sought 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-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.”<sup>33</sup>

But elsewhere, including other passages of “Competition,” Mannheim is less emollient. Hence while conceding in *Ideology and Utopia* 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 1936, 193]. 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.”<sup>34</sup> In the process, Mannheim pours scorn on *das Man*, Heidegger’s term (ostensibly)

<sup>30</sup> Mannheim [1929, 132-133]. Also see the latter’s Contents page (xv) and the summary statement of the concluding remarks on “Die Entdeckung der Unentbehrlichkeit des Utopischen.”

<sup>31</sup> For Heidegger’s indictment of the sociology of knowledge, see Heidegger [1988a, 62, 84]. See also Safranski [1999, 214].

<sup>32</sup> Mannheim [1971b]. The essay was based on his electrifying contribution to the Sixth Congress of German Sociologists in 1928.

<sup>33</sup> Mannheim [1971c, 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 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.”

<sup>34</sup> “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 [1982, 327-328]. Heidegger criticized the concept of *Geist* extensively in *Being and Time*, e.g. Heidegger [1962, 82, 480-486]. On his later treatment of the concept, see Wolin 1993, 289.

to depict that unthinking, somnambulant, “inauthentic” impulse which discourages people from pursuing unique choices and possibilities.<sup>35</sup> 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 as this point, where the philosopher stops, that the work of the sociologist begins. Sociological analysis shows that this public interpretation 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, see Mannheim 1971b, 230].<sup>36</sup>

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” [*ibidem*, 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” [*ibidem*, 244].<sup>37</sup> As Mannheim sardonically declares: “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” [Mannheim 1971b, 228-229]. A measure of decorum prohibits Mannheim from going all the way: he refrains from stating that modern *Existenz* philosophy is also explicable in sociological

<sup>35</sup> 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 Heidegger [1962, 27, 163-168].

<sup>36</sup> Arendt refers to “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon” in her review of *Ideology and Utopia*.

<sup>37</sup> And in *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim [1936, 213] 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.”

terms. But the innuendo is unmistakeable<sup>38</sup>, 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” [*ibidem*, 242]. Similarly, the “categorical apparatus of thinking” is the vehicle of social contention and discord [*ibidem*, 250]. “I do not suggest,” Mannheim remarks, “that Heidegger, as a philosopher, would agree with the socio-logical theory I am propounding.”<sup>39</sup> The English are often deemed masters of the under-statement. Hungarians are obviously their peers.

I said above that Mannheim's attempt to escape the dilemma of unmasking had three components. I have now dealt with the first: his incorporation of Heideggerian language that, simultaneously, demoted its existential claims. 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.<sup>40</sup> “Function” – often used in a mathematical sense – and its cognates appear plentifully 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 comprehensive than, though different from, those phenomena, whose ultimate significance is to be understood in relation to this context” [Mannheim 1971d, 123].<sup>41</sup> 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 [*ibidem*, 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” [*ibidem*, 121].<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> As Arendt recognized in “Philosophy and Sociology” [Arendt 1994a, 31].

<sup>39</sup> Mannheim [1971b, 228], referring specifically to *Being and Time*.

<sup>40</sup> On “correlation” and “correspondence” see, inter alia, Mannheim [1936, 58], and Manhheim [1971a, 107, 109, 111]. One must not overstate the extent of this sociological re-description. At the very end of *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim [1936, 262] remarks that “the objectivity which comes from the unmasking of ideologies always takes the form of self-clarification for society as a whole.” See below for more on this point.

<sup>41</sup> The essay shows the very close relationship between Marxism and Mannheim's own sociological project, at least in this stage of his thought.

<sup>42</sup> On page 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: first, from the standpoint of internal life history (subjective, centered on one's own personality

Third, Mannheim redefines the sociological optic as a “perspective” rather than an as an ideology and this enables him to furnish a much richer set of distinctions than Marxism provides. In an encyclopedia article published two years after *Ideology and Utopia*’s appearance, Mannheim delineates the impressive range of the sociology of knowledge as applied to the formation of concepts and counter-concepts: “The absence of certain concepts; the structure of the categorical apparatus; dominant modes of thought; level of abstraction; and the ontology that is presupposed” – and then proceeds to give examples of each of the foregoing. Consider, for instance, the concept of “freedom.” For the old-style German conservative, freedom meant the liberty of “each estate to live according to its privileges,” whereas for the romantic-conservative it meant the right to live according to one’s own personality, inner freedom. The liberal idea of freedom, in contrast, is equality under the law. All such views tally with the respective positions of their bearers “in the social and political structure” [Mannheim 1936, 272 ff.].

The contemporary political preoccupation with unmasking, Mannheim says, 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 [*ibidem*, 47, and more generally, 45-50. See n. 21]. That orientation, in turn, impedes a sense of self-righteous dogmatism. And it is precisely by offering a comprehensive view of society’s contending forces, by offering a synthesis of their partial viewpoints, that a science of politics is made possible [*ibidem*, 2, 43, 106, 149-152, 170-171, 183-185, 188-189]. The sociology of knowledge promises a systematic “mediation” of political differences and, through its synthesis, “a dynamic reconciliation” too. Because politics is constantly in flux, no procrustean solution to political problems is possible or desirable. We must confine ourselves to “reconstructing” the plural vantage points of

and the unique decisions that flow from it); second, functionalist in which “motivations are traced to the social process” and in which one thinks of oneself as “an object and in categories of objects.” While Mannheim sees both standpoints as fruitful, and acknowledges that sociology has to contend with the tension between them, he is adamant that functionalism “dominates in sociology.” See Mannheim [2001, 77-78]. Arendt’s critique of sociological functionalism is discussed in Baehr [2010, chapters 1 and 2].

political actors so as to enable greater self-consciousness and mutual comprehension [Woldring 1986, 229].

Mannheim believed that sociology was a “progressive” and “responsible” force; these words, together with “crisis” and “transition,” appear often in *Ideology and Utopia*. Sociology promised a much needed “dynamic intellectual mediation” that would build bridges of understanding between opposing parties currently locked into irrational, outmoded battles [Mannheim 1936, 189]. Even so, the prospect of a pacified, sated world filled Mannheim with foreboding. Writing in a period of relative calm, in the interregnum before Nazism surged to victory, he regretted the waning of the utopian impulse; the book’s closing pages are an elegy to its decline, redolent in pathos to the finale of *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*. The routinization of party politics and class struggle, and especially a loss of *will*, was eroding idealism, except on the political extremes of left and right where the remnants of chiliastic ecstasy still existed in mutated form. If, in the longer term, the world witnessed “the complete disappearance of all reality-transcending doctrines,”<sup>43</sup> that would be a sure sign of social enervation [*ibidem*, 255].<sup>44</sup> Fortunately, the intelligentsia offers one countervailing force to such ennui. Its relative detachment from partisan social interests, its lack of congruence with the status quo, makes it angular to the prevailing society, equipping it to “reach out beyond [a] tensionless situation.”

We seem to have advanced a long way beyond the rhetoric of unmasking. So, in many respects, we have. Yet traces of its vocabulary and method remained in Mannheim’s project, suggesting that my earlier characterization of Mannheim’s annullment of ambivalence requires some qualification. Like Marxism, the sociology of knowledge concerns itself with “distorted types of mental structure,” with revealing things that “conceal” reality [*ibidem*, 96-97].<sup>45</sup> And in a move at once ironic and provocative, Mannheim appropriates the term “false consciousness” (almost always in scare-quotes) from Marxism. Duly adapted, he seems to say, “false consciousness” is an apt designation of ideas that have become anachronistic and socially redundant. Sociology should not flinch at announcing them so. Nor is this especially difficult or presumptuous. For instance, the anathema on taking interest on loans is simply absurd in a capitalist economy. Idealization of a society that no longer exists is another example of false consciousness, as also is the desire to posit absolute values in

<sup>43</sup> In this passage Mannheim speaks as if such an event had already transpired.

<sup>44</sup> To some extent this is in tension with Mannheim’s claim that a moral action is invalid when “it does not allow for the accommodation of action and thought to a new and changed situation” [Mannheim 1936, 95].

<sup>45</sup> Mannheim says that this is a property of the “general-total” view of ideology that is also evaluative. Strictly speaking, this is not the sociology of knowledge as such, but it is an element of it, one of the conditions out of which the mature sociology of knowledge is consolidated.

a value pluriverse. Or consider a landowner whose estate has become a highly-tuned productive machine, run on capitalist economic lines, yet who still seeks to play the role of the old, patriarchal head, and explains the world to himself through such feudal categories. Such category confusion is “false consciousness” plain and simple. Why not call a spade a spade?

More than this, the mandate of the sociology of knowledge has the task of enabling “transparency” to actors and situations, empowering people to take control of their lives [*ibidem*, 189]. *Ideology and Utopia* even reprises the unmasking/unveiling topoi. At the very end of the book, Mannheim remarks: “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 the 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 after all; it results in self-clarification that in turn furnishes the opportunity for self-control. To that extent, Mannheim’s attempt to jettison the unmasking attitude was incomplete, a fact not lost on those of his detractors who saw the sociology of knowledge as little more than Marxism redux.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Jaspers: Mannheim the Sophist

In the voluminous work on the sociology of knowledge controversy, Karl Jaspers is rarely invoked. The standard translation of the dispute – edited by Volker Meja and Nico Stehr – attests to his marginality. Jaspers’s name does not appear in the editors’ list of twenty five contributors; and of the six references to Jaspers in the index, four of them appear in Arendt’s contribution. The other two citations by Ernst Grünwald and Mannheim himself refer to Jaspers’s *Psychology of World Views* (1919 edition). That Jaspers’s presence is unfelt in this dispute is understandable because, as we shall see, his attack on Mannheim in *Geistige Situation der Zeit* (1931) was cryptic and enfolded into a lamentation about sociology as a whole – Max Weber excepted. Like Arendt, Jaspers believed that Mannheim’s alternative to philosophy was a resounding failure; moreover, despite all attempts at extrication, sociology remained an unmasking pseudo-science.

<sup>46</sup> In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann [1967, 21] say that by the “expansion of the theory of ideology Mannheim sought to abstract its central problem from the context of political usage, and to treat it as a general problem of epistemology and historical sociology.” However unmasking has strong political connotations that Mannheim was unable, and perhaps even unwilling, completely to expunge in *Ideology and Utopia*.

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.” 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.” 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. 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.” 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,” vouchsafing only a modest “science of human behaviour and its consequences” [Jaspers 1957, 163-166]. Martin Heidegger commended Weber for broadly similar reasons, while also alleging that Jaspers had, in his *Psychology of World Views*, misunderstood he object of his devotion.<sup>47</sup>

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. 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.” 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 natural-

<sup>47</sup> The charge must have been particularly wounding. In essence, Heidegger [1998, 35] argues that Jaspers’ extrapolation of Weber’s sociological approach to the field of psychology is 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, 148-149].

ism.<sup>48</sup> Its deterministic racial explanations degrade a being that is above all a “being of liberty” [*ibidem*, 166-167].

Jaspers concedes that sociology, psychology and anthropology have their uses. But overall these sciences of mankind are disastrous: reductive and “ruinous to whatever is unconditioned.” 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.” Jaspers’ vengeance 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.” 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” [*ibidem*, 171-180]. In a summation that his student Arendt could have written, Jaspers fulminates:

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 [*ibidem*, 74].

Jaspers’ jeremiad is just warming up. For having just 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.<sup>49</sup> If true, that depiction is uncanny. In Chapter 1 of the English version of *Ideology and Utopia*, written specifically to clarify his project to an Anglophone audience, Mannheim credits “the Sophists of the Greek Enlightenment” as a distant forerunner

<sup>48</sup> 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’ day, anthropology was strongly associated with eugenics.

<sup>49</sup> Arendt and Jaspers [1992, 706, n. 4]. Neither the German nor English versions of this text mention Mannheim explicitly, 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 [1982a, 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. Compare Jaspers [1957, 182-188] with Jaspers [1933, 152-154].

of the sociology of knowledge. That antique Enlightenment launched “an attitude of doubt” – the kind of doubt on which Mannheim’s own project is based. Rather than censure the Sophists for pointing out the indeterminacy of epistemological and moral standards, we should praise their courage in expressing 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, 9]. Comparing the youthful sociology of knowledge with venerable Greek Sophism may appear to be a tad presumptuous. But that is nothing compared with an even more illustrious comparison that appears to put Mannheim’s achievement on the same plane as that of the great Athenian’s:

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 at an intellectual resting-point which, at least for the mentality of that epoch, showed itself to be a reliable foundation? [*ibidem*, 10].

Needless to say, Karl Jaspers’ figure of the Sophist bears none of these appreciative markings.<sup>50</sup> 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.” 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’ 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” [Jaspers 1957, 183-184].

The ferocity of this invective points to more than a philosophical profile; it gestures at extreme personal dislike. In turn, Mannheim took a dim view of Jaspers’ abstractions. To students attending his Frankfurt lectures in the summer semester

<sup>50</sup> Sophism – as philosophical movement and as philosophical symbol – was a staple of Weimar discussion. For a discussion of its modalities, see Laube [2004, especially 139-151]. Writers as different as Georg Lukàcs and Eduard Spranger concurred in querying the “relativism,” “skepticism,” and “sophism” of the sociology of knowledge.

of 1932, Mannheim [2001, 163-164] homed-in on *Geistige Situation der Zeit*, and bemoaned its vacuity: “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-clarification. We need not pursue these issues further, except to say that Jaspers’s depiction of Mannheim as the mercurial Sophist was echoed by Alfred Meusel, a participant in the original sociology of knowledge dispute, when he complained of Mannheim’s “intellectual liberality” and taxed his lack of courage to draw firm political and intellectual boundaries [Kettler and Meja 1995, 118, 282]. 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, 15].

#### **4. Arendt: Sociology and “the mistrust of thought”<sup>51</sup>**

Hannah Arendt also offered an appraisal of Mannheim’s project.<sup>52</sup> Again, the question of unmasking is central to her critique. Saturated in the philosophical terminology of her teachers, Heidegger and Jaspers, one is not surprised to see her review raise many of their concerns. It shows no trace of political interest.<sup>53</sup> Published three years before Hitler’s seizure of power, Arendt had yet to develop her own political theory.<sup>54</sup> Mannheim’s lament that all too often the “experience of contemplative types of men are arbitrarily imposed upon political reality,” later became a fundamental

<sup>51</sup> Arendt’s essay refers repeatedly to *Geist*, *Geistigkeit*, and *das Geistige*. Robert and Rita Kimber 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” [Arendt 1994a, 42, n. 2].

<sup>52</sup> Cryptic marginalia in Arendt’s copy of *Ideologie und Utopie*, transcribed with comments by David Kettler, are available at [http://www.bard.edu/arendtcollection/pdfs/Hannah\\_Arendt\\_Marginalia.doc](http://www.bard.edu/arendtcollection/pdfs/Hannah_Arendt_Marginalia.doc)

<sup>53</sup> Nor does that of her first husband Günther Stern (later known as Günther Anders, also an erstwhile student of Heidegger’s) who wrote a parallel commentary in the prestigious journal of social science that Max Weber jointly edited until his death in 1920. See Anders [1930, 492-509]. The article is translated by Volker Meja and Nico Stehr as “On the so-called ‘existential connectedness’ of consciousness” [Meja and Stehr 1990, 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” [*ibidem*, 194].

<sup>54</sup> But she would begin to 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* [Arendt 2000], a scathing account of the follies of both inwardness and “exceptionalist” strategies among cultivated Jews.

Arendtian motif.<sup>55</sup> 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 1994a, 29], or what Jaspers calls *Existenz*: moments during which individuals, reflective and solitary, experience 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 [*ibidem*, 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’” [*ibidem*, 32].

Sociology’s root assumptions and priorities, as formulated by Mannheim, are very different, Arendt declares. Though a sociologist like Mannheim cannot escape entirely ontological questions – the “analytical destructuring” (*Destruktion*) of reality he champions presupposes after all a reality that can be destructured<sup>56</sup> – his attention is focussed “on the very thing that philosophy deems irrelevant” [*ibidem*, 29]: the ontic or everyday, the “What is” rather than the “Being of what Is.”<sup>57</sup> Sociology asserts that thinking is bound to specific social situations. As a result, the primacy given by *Existenz* philosophers to the solitary moment and to the search for authenticity is either marginalized or considered bogus. For if thought is itself a function of the social world, then no individual authenticity is to be discovered. It follows, too, that philosophical reflection on some absolute reality is equally chimerical. Not only is (social) existence in constant transformation; it is also deemed by Mannheim to be the source

<sup>55</sup> Mannheim 1936, 175. See also page 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* [Arendt 1958].

<sup>56</sup> Mannheim [1936, 193] admits as much when he says that “a definite conception of ‘existence’ (*Sein*) [...] underlies” the distinction between ideology and utopia. Note, too, that Heidegger also employs the concept of *Destruktion* in his attempt to unravel the history of ontology. See Heidegger 1962, 6, 19-2. Also, Heidegger [1988b], §5 where Heidegger describes the “three components” of the ontological method: reduction, construction, destruction (in that order); destruction is part of construction. The book is based on a lecture course delivered at the University of Marburg in the summer of 1927.

<sup>57</sup> The distinction between “ontology” and the “ontical” comes from Heidegger [1962, 4, 32-35].

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” 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” [*ibidem*, 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, “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” [*ibidem*, 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 escape from the world or, as Mannheim puts it, a consciousness ‘that is not congruous with the world around it’”) [*ibidem*, 31].

The problem with this epistemological deflation of solitude is not just that it eclipses philosophy’s concern with the authentic and non-authentic, which are now considered by the sociologist to be vacuous categories. Nor is it simply that the everyday world from which thought arises appears, fundamentally, to be a structure of economic relations. The more basic problem is that Mannheimian sociology caricatures the experience of both solitude and transcendence, rigidly ignoring modes of being which are neither ideological nor utopian. Though Arendt acknowledges that detachment from “communal life” is no guarantee of authenticity, this is not to assert that solitude and the transcendence of the everyday it allows are without purpose. On the contrary transcendence is a “genuine possibility of human life” [*ibidem*, 38-39]. It “can be a *positive* way of saying no the world without being utopian.” In support of this contention she adduces the case of Christian brotherly love – an example also employed by Mannheim [1936, 194-195]. Its exemplar was St. Francis of Assisi, a man who lived in the world, who never sought to escape it, and who was “guided by a transcendence that does not conceive of itself as realizable on earth” [Arendt 1994a, 40]. 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, they sought to do their duty here on earth while resisting life’s pleasures and blandishments. Yet out of

this inward, detached, and transcendent consciousness came world-shaping activity [*ibidem*, 40-41]. And while sociology seeks to “unmask” thought, it can neither do without it nor convincingly deny its effectiveness in certain situations [*ibidem*, 38]. What else are Mannheim’s free-floating intelligentsia than a group whose thought is able to transcend the ideology and utopia of its time?

Behind Mannheim’s alleged denigration of Being, Truth, and authenticity, Arendt discerns both an emotion and a program. The emotion is sociology’s “inherent *mistrust* of thought,” or, as she puts it elsewhere, its “mistrust of the mind” [*ibidem*, 39, 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 free-floating and disenchanted, detached from a stable society, aware of multiple worlds and irreconcilable values. Eschewing all claims to objective truth, intellectuals affirm which set of current ideas is adequate – appropriate, realistic – to the prevailing *Zeitgeist*. “Ideology” and “utopia,” Arendt abbreviates, 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.<sup>58</sup> However, whereas “ideology” is chained to the past and thereby relinquishes all 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 [*ibidem*, 36].

Mannheim, we saw, 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” [*ibidem* 30, see 38], she condemned un-

<sup>58</sup> Mannheim 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 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. See Mannheim [1936, 192-204].

reservedly. 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 that denied the reality of events and domains; its sublimation into the language of “functionalism,” made it no less repugnant to her. Unmasking, she recalled, was also a favorite trope of French Jacobins and Russian revolutionaries who invoked it to terrorize their opponents. Here we can simply note that in “Philosophy and Sociology,” Arendt avoids Mannheim’s use of *enthiüllen*, a term which possesses a certain semantic complexity. Instead she replaces *enthiüllen* with the starkly negative, and unequivocal, verbs *demaskieren* (to unmask) and *entlarven* (to expose in the sense of revealing a person as a scoundrel).<sup>59</sup> Hence, against Mannheim’s protestations that unmasking is ultimately a sterile approach to understanding, Arendt associates his whole project with it.

If sociology’s emotion is the mistrust of thought, its program, 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,” 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” [*ibidem*, 37]. From sociology’s perspective, “human freedom, and with it the freedom of thought as such” are “mythical borderline” phenomena [*ibidem*, 38].

Compared with psychoanalysis, however, 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 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” [*ibidem*, 33]. For this reason “the ‘reality’ of psychoanalysis is far more alien to thought than is that of sociology” whose method commits

<sup>59</sup> Arendt [1982b, 517, 525]. For later objections to the “debunking” mentality, see Arendt’s 1959 research proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation, reprinted (in the original English) [in Arendt 2003, 200-201; Arendt 1994b ; Arendt 1994c]. On unmasking’s dangers for political life, see “The Social Question,” being chapter two of Arendt [1963].

it to being “a historical discipline” [*ibidem*, 34]. Even so, sociology ends up with a view of reality which not only slighted thought as a *sui generis* human capacity; it also has a restricted conception of reality itself. The reality with which it is concerned is a “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” [*ibidem*, 36].

While Arendt’s post-war treatment of sociology resembles scorched earth, her Weimar critique of Mannheim was modest and discriminating. Arendt recognized *Ideology and Utopia* to be 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 credibility by perusing her 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* [Weil 1930]. 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.”<sup>60</sup>

In contrast, from the very beginning of her published work, Arendt discloses a consistent and vehement hostility to psychoanalysis.<sup>61</sup> Even more than sociology, it is the quintessential unmasker. 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. Most importantly, Arendt 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” 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,

<sup>60</sup> Arendt’s review was published in a journal with a strong sociological pedigree, the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* [Arendt 1931]. The quotations are, respectively, from 200 and 203.

<sup>61</sup> Mannheim’s “Preliminary Approach to the Problem” is replete with psychological and psychoanalytical terminology [Mannheim 1936]. 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 (which Arendt is unlikely to have read), is striking.

psychoanalysis, graphology, etc., fall into this category of curiosity-seeking” [Arendt 2000, 83].<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has centered on the conflict among three prominent Weimar intellectuals over sociology and unmasking. All rejected the unmasking problematic but did so for different reasons. Mannheim believed its usefulness was past and that the sociology of knowledge had productively replaced it. Jaspers believed unmasking – reductive, demeaning, and a return to a new kind of sophism – to be very much alive in sociology and psychoanalysis. Arendt argued a somewhat similar case though with more circumspection. For her, sociology represented the pseudo-science of mistrust; it posed as the presumptive arbiter of rational opinions; and these were stances that recapitulated in a new functionalist language the unmasking temperament of old.

The sophistication with which Mannheim sought both to defend and to disarm unmasking, and to create a sociology out of its ruins, is among the most heroic intellectual ventures of the Twentieth century. In comparison with its vaulting ambition, Arendt’s Weimar critique is brief and unworldly. Her post-war analysis of unmasking, however, was as robust and profound as it was panoramic. It was also resolutely political. Whether Arendt is warning of the dangers of pity, denying the possibility of human transparency, identifying the folly of hypocrisy and the violent temptations of those who seek to expose it, explaining that consistency is a matter of words and actions rather than words and motives; whether she is considering the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks, imperial adventurers, the Front Generation, modern intellectuals – again and again, she illuminates the impasse to which unmasking leads. That part of the story cannot be told here.<sup>63</sup> Nor can another part be narrated which would recount sociology’s post-war love affair with unmasking; unlikely bedfellows include Peter Berger’s “humanistic” and Pierre Bourdieu’s “reflexive” sociologies.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Some speculate that Arendt’s antagonism towards psychoanalysis was based on the terrifying experience of her father’s insanity. But that view, which marginalizes Arendt’s stated reasoning, is precisely the kind of “penetration” she ridiculed. The greatest study on Freud’s approach as an unmasker is Philip Rieff’s *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* [Rieff 1959, especially chapter 4].

<sup>63</sup> Yet see the acute remarks of Patricia Owens in “Rage Against Hypocrisy: On Liberal Wars for Human Rights”, being chapter 6 of Owens [2009].

<sup>64</sup> On which see Baehr 2013 and Baehr and Gordon 2012. Discomfiture with unmasking is evident in the work of Luc Boltanski [2009], though it is not clear to me that his “pragmatic sociology of critique” avoids it. Still, Anglophone readers should note that Boltanski prefers “dévoiler” (to unveil, reveal, disclose) in preference to “démasquer” (to unmask); the former term allows more subtlety and discrimination than the latter (Boltanski’s English translator has “unmask”).

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It was sociology, not politics, that first prompted Arendt to write about unmasking. Since Mannheim’s death, in contrast, sociologists themselves have been far less reflective about the travails that unmasking brings to their craft, the perils it poses for rational disagreement, and the limitations it imposes on human understanding more generally.<sup>65</sup>

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## The Problem of “Unmasking” in “Ideology and Utopia”

Karl Mannheim, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt

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Abstract: Since the French Revolution, intellectual and popular cultures of the West have been characterized by tropes of “unmasking,” a kind of exposure that purports to show mendacity and domination operating unseen beneath the surface of human affairs. Karl Mannheim was a particularly astute commentator on this phenomenon. His *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) and cognate writings offer an account of unmasking that is detailed, contextual, nuanced and critical. While he grants that unmasking was a condition of sociology’s emergence, Mannheim argues that it has outlived its usefulness for purposes of explanatory understanding. He further decries the destructive impact of unmasking on political discourse: an openly debunking attitude poisons the well of principled dialogue by claiming one’s interlocutor to be either a charlatan or a dupe of history. Critics such as Hannah Arendt and her mentor Karl Jaspers went further, condemning unmasking as execrable in principle and depicting sociology and psychology as major casualties of its rhetorical excesses – Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge included. This article describes Mannheim’s analysis of unmasking, the rhetorical moves he employed to move beyond the unmasking mode, and objections to his project of Jaspers and Arendt. Mannheim’s reception is muted today while Arendt’s is on a steadily rising curve of appreciation. But a reconstruction of Mannheim’s ideas on unmasking reveals an author who, at the time Arendt sparred with him, demonstrated a far greater comprehension than she did of the history and stakes of a *topos* that pervades modern thinking.

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*Keywords:* Arendt, exposure, Jaspers, Mannheim, sociology, unmasking.

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