

STUDIES

CAN THE STRONG PROGRAM BE GENERALIZED?*

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Abstract: In this paper I argue that, despite recent attempts, the strong program in the sociology of knowledge cannot be applied as a general method of inquiry to the history of ideas. My main point is that its methodological commitments only allow the strong program to be fruitful in those fields of knowledge whose content can be given by truth conditions. But even in these fields sociological questions can be asked that are not sensitive to truth conditional content. In these cases, as I argue, a hermeneutic method is more promising.

Keywords: sociology of knowledge, strong program, ideology-critique, content, truth conditions, worldview

INTRODUCTION

With the coming of the *strong program* in the sociology of knowledge, sociological attention turned away from fields of inquiry traditionally considered as ideological, such as religion, philosophy, and art. The primary focus shifted to other fields, such as mathematics, natural sciences and technology. Recently though (e.g. Kusch 1995 and 2000), the strong program has reverted its interests to the former fields, the preoccupation of much of classical sociology of knowledge.

As early as 1973, David Bloor implies that the strong program is continuous with classical sociology of knowledge, and solves the problems that the latter could not address effectively. It may thus seem natural to extend the methodological consciousness of the strong program to the fields of classical interest, hoping for deeper insights. In this paper I take a closer look at the presupposition of continuity, and more precisely, at the question whether the strong program can be a *general method* of inquiry into the history of ideas. I argue that the strong program promises

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more than it can deliver in that its method is not fit for the fields of knowledge whose content is not considered truth-conditional. In these fields, I suggest instead, a hermeneutically informed method is a better option for a sociologically inclined history of ideas.

THE STRONG PROGRAM AND THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

Let me start with a look at a case study in the history of philosophy. Martin Kusch's monograph, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge*, is probably the most self-conscious attempt to apply the strong program's methodology in this field. Kusch reconstructs the psychologism debate in Germany at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth century. This debate centered around the question of whether various fields of inquiry, most prominently logic and semantics, are reducible to psychology or not.

For Kusch, this controversy is a side effect of the gradual dissociation of experimental psychology from philosophy, and its eventual recognition as an independent field. The controversy was triggered by physiology reaching the limits of its institutional expansion by the establishment of physiology chairs at every German university. This led to experimental psychologists, beginning with Wilhelm Wundt, applying for philosophy chairs, and those conducting research in philosophical psychology increasingly turning to experimental psychology. And this is why the anti-psychologist movement, whose emblematic masterpiece was Edmund Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, became so influential among philosophers.

As Kusch (1995: 60f) points out, Husserl borrows a significant share of his arguments from Gottlob Frege. Why was it then that it was Husserl, and not Frege, who became the symbolic leader of the anti-psychologist movement in philosophy? Kusch's answer is threefold (1995: 203–210): 1) Husserl, who followed Rickert as *Ordinarius* in Freiburg, occupied a more central role in the academic network than Frege, who taught at Jena, then at the periphery, where he even rejected a chair; 2) Frege's arguments relied on the tools of mathematical logic, and thus he posed an equal threat to those committed to "pure philosophy" as did the psychologists: both seemed dangerous from the perspective of traditional philosophical practice; 3) Husserl attacked the expansion of experimental psychologists explicitly, clearly stating his position in relation to other philosophical outlooks, and in greater detail than Frege, thereby forcing others to react (Kusch 2000: 22).

Furthermore, Kusch (1995: 259–272 and 2000: 23ff) emphasizes that the closure of the controversy, which brought the triumph of phenomenology to philosophy departments, was not due to conclusive arguments against psychologists, but to the following causes: 1) the expansion of psychology in philosophy departments stopped, and some of the chairs that had been established in psychology were even regained by philosophers, thus there was no point in attacking psychology any more; 2) the parties involved in the controversy lost interest because by the 1920s almost everyone had been accused of psychologism, and thus the label became meaningless; 3) experimental psychology seemed less threatening because it had failed to deliver the results expected by the decision makers of scientific policy; 4) World War I first forced

the suspension of the controversy, and then transformed philosophical interest so that pure philosophical investigation of the Husserlian or neo-Kantian styles were no longer favorable; instead, attention turned towards existential problems, and with it towards the philosophies of Scheler and Heidegger.

The methodological principles of the strong program, referred to and applied by Kusch, have been put forward by David Bloor (1973, 1991: ch.1). Bloor poses four principles for sociological inquiry: its explanations must be *causal*; they must be *impartial* concerning the truth or falsity of what is being explained; truth and falsity require *symmetric* explanations, that is, both must be explained by the same kind of causes; and finally, the inquiry must be *reflexive*, i.e. its principles must be applicable recursively to its results. In his methodological introduction, Kusch explicitly adopts the principles of impartiality and symmetry, and implicitly adopts the causal principle when, quoting Bloor, he points out the need for investigating the causes of the controversy in order to facilitate better understanding. Similarly, he interprets his own enterprise as a reflection on the “conditions of possibility” of intellectual phenomena (Kusch 1995: 24). In general, the book is informed by a causal idiom throughout.

FOCUSING ON TRUTH AND ITS PROBLEMS

These methodological commitments may be shown to be problematic in the humanities, arts, and religion – in the fields where classical sociology of knowledge was most interested. Following the principles of causality, symmetry and impartiality can lead to informative insights in the history of science, but they are problematic in the history of ideas. If we consider the social mechanisms that interact in the development of a theory and influence its acceptance, we can learn something that is divergent from the commonsense view of science.

This is at least partly due to the fact that our everyday notion of truth, as Bloor (1991: 37, 43) aptly points out, is based on the idea of *correspondence*: Our true theories are thought to be true because they are thought to describe reality as it is, and they are thought to be useful in explanatory and predictive contexts precisely for this reason.¹ So understood, the meaning of theories is specified by reference to conditions in the world, *truth conditions*, that must hold in order for the theories to be true. If we approach scientific theories with this initial attitude, it is illuminating to see, as a result of subsequent sociological inquiry, that our true theories are not produced by pure interaction between scientists and reality, but that social factors also play a formative role. This is thus not only in the case of distorting influences such as mistakes and errors, but also in the case of theories held true. Eventually, this insight might also induce changes in the commonsense notion of truth attached to scientific theories, and also in the meaning of scientific theories as long as it is understood in a truth-conditional way.

However, if we turn away from science, our expectations concerning truth are different. Our ideal of correspondence truth is replaced by a criterion of acceptance

¹ However, the relevance of the sociology of knowledge does not depend on any particular theory of truth. Generally speaking, it is useful in those cases when a theory of truth ignores social processes as irrelevant.

that is different from correspondence to the way the world actually is. Correspondence truth may even disappear, and with it the value of causal sociological explanation diminishes. This process can be illustrated by the different ways in which the term ‘philosophy’ can be understood. If philosophy is considered as a cognitive practice aiming at a *speculative* explanation of the world as a whole, or as theory construction that is continuous with the sciences, then the notion of truth as correspondence remains applicable. In this sense, philosophy offers theories about what is not accessible via empirical research, for example, the fundamental structure of the world, or how things are in some of its unobservable regions. Even if these theories cannot be confirmed by empirical evidence, they may nevertheless be true. And this is only the case when the world exists as described by these theories. Note, however, that philosophy so understood bears significant resemblance to theoretical physics, and that our intuitive notion of truth is similar in these two cases. Both can be read as aiming at truth about the fundamental nature of the world. It is only in the means of so doing that they differ, and their insights may be surprisingly close. For instance, we can think of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics as making the world mind dependent in an important sense, thus getting fairly close to a kind of idealism.

Should we think about philosophy as *conceptual* analysis instead, the idea of a correspondence truth begins to seem quite odd. Conceptual analyses can be correct, apt, and illuminating, but they cannot be correspondence true – except if we stipulate the existence of some unchanging Platonic ‘conceptual realm’. Similarly, *normative* disciplines like logic and ethics are also problematic in the same respect: correspondence truth here can be supported only if one ontologically commits oneself to abstract entities. Some philosophers, like Frege and Husserl in the psychologism debate, do not hesitate to take on such commitments, and in this case it may make sense to talk about truths attainable by *a priori* means. But if one would rather avoid paying this high metaphysical price, then conceptual analysis cannot deliver true results in any strict and robust sense.

And if philosophy is considered to be the actual field of deep *wisdom*, then the idea of correspondence is clearly not applicable at all. In this sense philosophy seems more like art, whose value resides in the subjective experiences and insights that the reader gains, and not in a description of the world that aspires to correspondence truth. And one could suspect that *a sociological approach whose methodological principles are focused on truth could hardly serve the purposes of historical interpretation in contexts where truth has no role to play.*

REVISING THE NOTION OF TRUTH

Although Kusch puts the principles of symmetry and impartiality into the centre of his method, in practice this means only that his explanations are not retrospective: he does not begin from the presupposition that Husserl’s eventual victory was due to the inherent superiority of his position. The conclusion resulting partly from this outlook, namely that philosophical debates are typically abandoned rather than decisively settled (Kusch 1995: 277), might be enlightening in the case of scientific controversies, but not in philosophical debates. This is due to the different intuitive expectations that we have concerning these two fields: philosophical problems, as

opposed to scientific ones, are seldom imagined to be conclusively solvable. Some of them become old-fashioned, uninteresting, others disappear and then emerge again, and thus the insight that the dissolution of philosophical debates is, at least partly, due to sociological factors can easily be accepted. And this may be put down to a feature of philosophical inquiry which is uncharacteristic of science. The problems of philosophy as traditionally understood, arise from human existence and as such they are closely connected to the conditions of existence, among them to ways of life, everyday practices (including linguistic ones), conflicts, and so on. However, science as traditionally understood has its own internal logic and its problems are not connected to everyday experiences – a view aptly revised by the strong program.

It is easy to see, for example, why controversies around theories of social contract had become especially interesting with the transforming social relations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and why they were less appealing afterwards. As works of philosophy and art can be naturally looked at as expressing a *worldview* – as opposed to having a content specifiable by truth conditions – it is less illuminating to learn that social processes play a significant role in their formulation. Having said that, it is always worth learning how the actual process takes place. And this is what Kusch can offer: a causal story about why psychologism became such a pressing problem in some quarters of the academic world.

The requirements of symmetry and impartiality are not as useful in this context as they are in the case of natural sciences, precisely because our expectations are different with regard to these two fields of knowledge – as are the notions of truth we associate with them. *A major mission of the strong program was to revise the concept of truth that we associate with the results of scientific research*, to show that truth in science does not entail detachment from the causal network of social connections. The strong program also sets out to convince us that our scientific truths do not hold a privileged position given the way scientific results are born: social relations should not be assigned an exclusively distorting role, as they partly constitute what we consider as true knowledge. This mission, however, cannot be pursued fruitfully in discourses that are not truth-functional, whose standards of acceptance are not based on truth conditions. Therefore, in spite of its obvious success as a method in the historiography of science, it should not be generalized as a method for the history of ideas.

The status of philosophical insights is not influenced by the causal history that a sociologist can reveal behind individual works, as they are not truths of the scientific kind. Exploring the context of academic politics in which the psychologism debate takes place does not help us to a better understanding of psychologism and its discontents. Instead, it helps us to a more detailed picture of the contemporary institutional setting; the group dynamics of academic life; and even its psychological relevance. It thus explains the genesis of certain ideas.

However, all this does not contribute to the understanding of their content. And this is obvious in Kusch's case study too: Kusch reconstructs both the anti-psychologist arguments of Frege and Husserl in detail, as well as Husserl's reception. However, these reconstructions do not reflect the influence of a sociological point of view – as if it was a tacit acknowledgment that philosophical content could not be approached this way. Exploring causal history may contribute to understanding in contexts where the idea of a descriptive truth is applicable. As truth conditions here specify meaning,

showing them to be different entails a different understanding of the content of scientific theories too. But given that descriptive truth does not play a central role in the humanities and art, it must be approached from a different angle.

REPLACING TRUTH

This point can be illustrated with other sociological attempts that are, however, not based on the strong program. For example, Carl E. Schorske (1961) in his influential book on *fin-de-siecle* Vienna explains the turn in Klimt's style in 1901 as a product of a causal chain of events that took place in politics and academic life. However, while analyzing individual works of art he does not rely on the resources of a sociological outlook, and it is hard to see how it would be possible at all. Schorske is interested in the genesis of ideological and artistic "content", but upon arrival at the "content" he kicks away the sociological ladder and concentrates exclusively on "pure" content.

This symptom similarly appears in Norbert Elias' (1991) short monograph on Mozart. Elias explains Mozart's eventual "failure" as resulting from his conflicting ambitions: to become an independent artist within the institutional forms of subsidizing artists that do not favor individualism. He does not even try to interpret particular pieces of music in this causal context. Again, this is not surprising at all: sociological interest is different from historical interest in ideas and philosophy, and from aesthetics too – it is neither worse nor better, but different. It can, as Schorske's book impressively illustrates, live together in peace with pure aesthetic interest even within the same study. Tension only becomes apparent if one tries to convince the reader, as Kusch (1995: 21ff.) does, that the outcomes of a causal-sociological approach are relevant for the history of ideas as conceived traditionally. But even Kusch could not manage to support this claim convincingly. That is not to say, of course, that Kusch's results are useless: far from it, they are illuminating historically and sociologically, but less so philosophically.

The claim that the strong program as a method designed for writing histories of science is not suitable for the history of ideas can be illustrated further if we turn to fields of knowledge that are not cognitive. Moritz Csáky in his book (1988) on Viennese modernity reconstructs the function and meaning of Viennese operettas in the context of the contemporary socio-historical situation. He interprets operettas, mainly *Die Fledermaus*, *The Merry Widow* and *The Gypsy Baron*, as reflecting the political, social and ethnic problems of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. He reveals, with attention to this social context, the meaning of operettas for the contemporary audience, the *Weltanschauung* they express, and also their decay with the dissolution of this context. Due to the fact that truth in this context is not significant at all, it does not make sense to talk about the "truth" of operettas as it does of scientific theories. Thus the principles of symmetry and impartiality cannot be followed here.

Following the causal principle would also be less informative, because it does not shed light on the meaning – understood in this case as social significance or relevance, and not as truth-conditional content – of the pieces, as they can be entirely independent of their causal origins. Although it seems possible to reconstruct a causal history of the emergence of operettas, and thereby explaining the genesis of the genre, this would not

facilitate an understanding of the works themselves – that is an unfolding of the meanings of the ideas expressed in relation to a specific social context.

To reiterate: explanations based on the principles of symmetry, impartiality and causality are useful primarily where the revision of our commonsense notion of *truth* is at stake, where we intend to show, for instance, that the genesis of truths is about the same as that of mistakes. This revision may rely on the analysis of the causal processes that lead to the formulation and acceptance of a given theory, and may show that the process does not support the notion of the descriptive or correspondence truth that we intuitively attach to the theory. Consequently, *the content or meaning of the theory will be revised too, as long as it is taken to depend on truth-conditions.*

As can be seen from the problems surrounding the principles of causal explanation, symmetry and impartiality, approaches to the history of ideas based on the strong program aim at a quasi-scientific *explanation* of ideas. The principle of causal explanation leads to the outlook of the sociology of knowledge being, to use Mannheim's (1982[1980]: 77.ff) happy phrase, genetic, or to be more precise, *socio-genetic*. Mannheim, by starting from what he takes to be more basic, in this case, social facts, tries to explain contents – as opposed to merely interpreting them. Bloor (1991: 5) shares this perspective when he points out that theories of the sociology of knowledge “will be in the same causal idiom as those of any other scientist. Their concern will be to locate the regularities and general principles or processes which appear to be at work within the field of their data. The aim will be to explain these regularities.” To offer an *explanation* in the sociology of knowledge is to reconstruct the socio-historical processes and regularities which led to the work itself; to *interpret* works with sociological sensitivity is to situate them in a socio-historical context which reveals new aspects of their (non truth-conditional) meaning. And as meaning is what is important to the historian of ideas, this latter perspective may be the basis of a more fruitful interpretative methodology.

TOWARD IDEOLOGY-CRITIQUE

Due to its Marxian origins, *ideology-critique* is frequently thought of as a method for *unmasking* the interests lying behind ideas. This method relies on the *particular concept of ideology* (cf. Mannheim 1968[1929]: 57ff.), almost a synonym of “lie” that serves the purposes of justification for the interests of social classes – for Marx typically those of the ruling classes. Ideology is thus just a form of social power (Little 1991: 125-127): functionally speaking, it serves the purpose of distorting reality for the members of class society. The means of this distortion are cultural institutions such as schools, churches, cultural canons, and traditions that present particular interests as general interests. They thereby facilitate the maintenance of social relations that correspond to the particular interests of the ruling classes. As a result, ideology masks social injustices making them tolerable to the exploited, and thus deterring them from the rational, e.g. revolutionary, course of action. The purpose of ideology-critique in this sense is to offer a *critique of social relations* by unmasking these distortions.

Approaching ideas with this unmasking attitude results in reductionism: the content of ideas is reduced to sociologically specified circumstances from which agents put them forward or represent them. As with the sociology of knowledge, unmasking

ideology-critique is a causal outlook: the individuals' position in the productive processes constrains their perspective from which ideas can be put forward. The difference between the sociology of knowledge and unmasking ideology-critique is that unmasking ideology-critique considers the relations of social production to be fundamentally decisive as to meaning, while the sociology of knowledge builds upon a more general and broader base with the intention of deriving theoretical interconnections from extra-theoretical constellations (cf. Mannheim 1982[1980]: 82).

Due to this narrower scope, unmasking ideology-critique does not step beyond the conceptual resources provided by the dichotomy of the economic base and institutional superstructure. Ideology-critique unmasks the real functioning of the cultural superstructure by reducing the meaning of cultural production to its practical base. Up to this point ideology-critique goes hand in hand with sociology of knowledge as far as focusing on causal relations is concerned.

Unmasking ideology-critique faces several difficulties. It strictly separates science and ideology: it portrays the former as aiming at an undistorted picture of reality – it pictures science as aiming at truth, not at masking reality. Given this distinction, ideology-critique itself is taken to be a kind of science (Márkus 1995: 91), social science, and it is thus close to the sociology of knowledge in this respect too. But this similarity results in a feature alien to the principles of the sociology of knowledge: by classifying ideology-critique as science, unmasking ideology-critique denies the need for reflexivity, the fourth principle in the strong program's methodology. This is due to unmasking ideology-critique being connected to a nineteenth-century view of science (Cohen 1978: 46; Lynch 1994: 199), which is, after Kuhn, Bloor, and others, no longer tenable. Furthermore unmasking ideology-critique can serve and, in *The German Ideology*, does serve, ideological purposes by its own standards. All this shows that ideology-critique is in need of revision, and in the unmasking sense it cannot be applied as a method of interpretation in the history of ideas – only as a tool for political activists.

IDEOLOGY-CRITIQUE AS HERMENEUTICS

Traces of an alternative concept already appear in Marx (cf. Márkus 1995), providing the possibility of overcoming the problems of the orthodox Marxist conception. The greatest shortcoming of unmasking ideology-critique is that it overlooks the evaluative aspects of the term 'culture' while emphasizing exclusively the masking and justificatory functions of its content. Thus, it also ignores the possibility that cultural production may not necessarily be a means of upholding the social power of the ruling classes, as other authors such as William Lynch (1994: 198) and Daniel Little (1991: 130) think, but the expression of the most sophisticated human capacities (Cohen 1978: 205). Ideologies also give creative, socially motivated answers to problems arising from life situations that are related to the inherited cultural canon. If viewed from this angle, an alternative, *emancipatory concept of ideology* is in order that emancipates, as it were, the concept from its exclusively negative, distorting connotations (Márkus 1995: 68, 72).

Ideology-critique based on the emancipatory notion of ideology is a *hermeneutic*, and not a political, enterprise. Hermeneutics is based on a commitment to reveal how various social practices are reflected in the realm of ideas, and “[i]n this sense ideology-critique is the transposition of the traditional method of immanent criticism from the realm of the textual into that of the social.” (Márkus 1995: 72) It aims at revealing how unreflexive presuppositions, the limits and structure of discourse and representation, and conceptual schemes reflect social circumstances.

Emancipatory ideology-critique reveals the social relevance of ideological forms of knowledge, or to put it more precisely, it reveals the *significance of ideas* in relation to a given social-historical situation. This may result in revealing unintended meanings. In specific social contexts certain intellectual works may be interpreted independently of, or even contrary to, the intentions of their authors.² Interpretations developed in this way can, of course, be divergent in several ways. There is no uniquely correct reading for example, nor quasi-scientific explanation, and even more significant, there are no criteria for judging the correctness of interpretation. The outcome of the interpretation depends on the particular aspects of the social context on which emphasis is placed in the process of reconstruction. Accordingly, there are several levels of sociologically relevant meaning that can be revealed with this method.

Correspondingly, the idea of the functional and/or causal determination of thought becomes irrelevant from this point of view, and it is replaced by the idea that the meaning of particular works can be understood as reflecting social relations – and this meaning can be accessed via ideology-critique. The emancipatory ideology-critique does not necessarily consider ideas as being determined by economic, social, historical or other circumstances, thus it can accommodate the fact that reflection can take several, even divergent forms of expression (Márkus 68: 73). It does not presuppose either that ideology belongs exclusively to the ruling classes – although they might be better placed to spread their own (Cohen 1978: 291).

Thus the method of ideology-critique, as both Cohen (e.g. 1978: 216) and Márkus (1995: 73) emphasize, can overcome the dichotomy of economic base and ideological superstructure. Cohen (1978: 46) also points out that the interpretation of ideologies within the framework of this dichotomy is problematic from the beginning, as by definition superstructure consists of institutions, and the works of culture are not themselves institutions but ideas. Similarly, emancipatory ideology-critique does not primarily deal with culture as an institutional structure, even if cultural institutions themselves play their part in cultural production. If viewed from this perspective, economic relations or, to use a more general term, the practical base, *do not cause the content of ideas, but provide an angle for interpretation*, a point of view from which a meaningful work can be understood in the context of the chain of events in the economy, society, history and so on. What is then important is not the social genesis of ideas, but their meaning and significance in a given context.

As we have seen above, the particular concept of ideology fits fairly well with the method of unmasking ideology-critique. The method of emancipatory

2 A good example could be Stefan George who, contrary to his intentions, was interpreted as being the poet of the *Weltanschauung* of the Third Reich. He emigrated from Nazi Germany just before his official birthday celebration.

ideology-critique is closer to the “total concept of ideology” – as Mannheim (1968[1929]: 57ff.) puts it, the “total structure of consciousness” of a given age or group – or, perhaps a better term, a *worldview*. In this sense Cohen’s concept of an “ideological service” can be understood as being based on the ability to express a worldview.

On Raymond Geuss’ (1981: 265) reconstruction the concept of a worldview can be taken to be coextensive with ‘ideology’ and to mean those beliefs: a) that are widely accepted among the members of the group; b) whose elements are connected systematically; c) that are central to the agents’ conceptual schemes (in Quine’s sense, i.e. that the agents do not give them up easily); d) that deeply influence the agents’ behavior; and e) that are about the central questions of metaphysics and human life in general. Emancipatory ideology-critique can be taken to reveal this worldview in particular works or genres whose elements are linked to the social context with the intention of clarifying the sociologically effective and relevant content of the ideas expressed.

While reconstructing worldviews, hermeneutics explores not only the social embeddedness of ideas, but also their relation to other ideas (Márkus 1995: 73). Its emphasis is again different in this from that of the sociology of knowledge which is more interested in the effects of social forces on the emergence and development of ideas than in their inter-relations. In this respect the causal affinity of ideology-critique is, so to speak, contrary to that of the sociology of knowledge: to the extent of its interest in causal influences it is more sensitive to the *social efficacy of ideas*. But it remains to be emphasized that the primary interest of ideology-critique in the emancipatory sense remains *hermeneutic*: it focuses on the contextual understanding of ideas (Márkus 1995: 69).

Exercises illustrating the practice of emancipatory ideology-critique are easy to find in the field of intellectual history. One could read Csáky’s (1999) aforementioned book this way, as well as Géza Fodor’s (1999) intriguing essay “Solte man *Die Zauberflöte* zurücknehmen?” which contrasts two different lines of interpretation. One of them takes *The Magic Flute* to be the embodiment of Enlightenment humanism, while the other argues to the contrary, namely that the opera, in virtue of revealing the dialectic of Enlightenment, gives a critique of its spirit. Both approaches provide an interpretation of the opera from the perspective of the ideas expressed in it, and they disagree precisely on the question of what ideas are expressed in it. Thus they reflect different ideology-critical stances. Following a thorough analysis, Fodor eventually votes for the first reading, while pointing out that the interpretation of *The Magic Flute* as an emblematic piece of counter-enlightenment responds to ideological needs in itself: a disillusioned reaction to the all too optimistic humanism of the Enlightenment project (Fodor 1999: 95). In confronting two ideology-critical interpretations of the opera, Fodor’s approach is reflexive. He gives a close reading both of *The Magic Flute* and of its interpretations, and also addresses the questions of their sociologically relevant meaning, while ignoring the actual causal history of the opera’s birth.

IDEOLOGY-CRITIQUE GENERALIZED

The methodological ambition of the strong program is to provide a *general* method construed as broadly as possible in the history of ideas. I argued above that this ambition is less promising in fields of knowledge where truth-conditional content is not at stake. The question remains, however, whether it is possible to successfully apply the ideology-critical approach in the historiography of science. Marx's answer is negative as science for him is, by definition, not ideology (Márkus 1997: 66; Cohen 1978: 45ff) – but this answer is, as I pointed out above, mostly due to his view of science which is not tenable these days. Now, to say the least, it seems that science itself contains elements that Marx would have treated as ideological.

If ideology-critique is treated as a kind of hermeneutics then the question depends on answering another: can there be a hermeneutics of science? This question must be answered in the positive in order to extend ideology-critique to science. This seems possible given that ideology-critique in its emancipatory sense is an interpretation of worldviews. Scientific theories that can be and are treated as expressing a worldview, and not exclusively as having truth-conditional content, can be interpreted from this angle. We have examples of such treatment of theories. Paul Forman's (1971) study, for example, can be read as illustrating the thesis that the tendencies of quantum theory that diverge from commonsense metaphysics, such as the emphasis on acausality, reflect characteristic features in the worldview arising in the social atmosphere of the Weimar Republic. These include features such as increasing mysticism or the pessimistic attitude towards a rational approach of reality. Quantum theory can thus be interpreted as an expression of a worldview and therefore the perspective of an ideology-critical understanding is not entirely hopeless in the history of science either.

It is hard to overlook that, while drawing methodological boundaries between two sociologically oriented approaches to the history of ideas, these boundaries cannot be drawn sharply. The two approaches can be taken more or less simultaneously, or can be changed within a single study: it is easy to move back and forth between the focuses on the social determination of ideas and their social-historical significance (this happens frequently in Forman's paper). It also happens that the two approaches are intertwined to the extent that they cannot be separated, which may be due to the lack of methodological consciousness. This consciousness is characteristic of those following the strong program's methodology, but others lay on it significantly less emphasis, as can be documented in, for example, Mannheim's studies which also shift perspective fairly frequently. This is rarely disturbing, a fact which indicates that a feature of sociological interpretation and a key to its plausibility is in its *methodological complexity*. As ideas develop in a complex network of social and intellectual influences, the more complex a social-historical interpretation is, the more plausible a picture it can provide about the sociologically accessible aspect of ideas. Increasing the complexity of interpretation is then a sober heuristic rule to follow that should also be reflected in our methodologies and drive toward an unified theory of interpretation for a social history of ideas.

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