Critical Thinking as an Anarchist Weapon

Wolfi Landstreicher

Contents

Introduction . . . 3

Chapter 1. Stirner on critical thought (from *The Ego and Its Own*) **4**
Some basic steps in critically analyzing arguments... . . . 5

Chapter 2. Logical Fallacies Index **7**
Fallacies of distraction . . . 7
Appeals to motives rather than supportive argument . . . 8
Changing the subject . . . 8
Inductive fallacies . . . 9
Fallacies involving Statistical Syllogisms . . . 10
Causal Fallacies . . . 11
Missing the point . . . 12
Fallacies of Ambiguity . . . 12
Category Errors . . . 13
Non Sequitur . . . 13
Syllogistic Errors . . . 14
Fallacies of Explanation . . . 14
Fallacies of Definition . . . 15

Chapter 3. Critical Thinking as Anarchist Methodology **17**
Critique . . . 17
Analysis . . . 17
Strategy . . . 17
Tactics . . . 18

Chapter 4. *An Introduction to Critical Theory* by Lev Chernyi **19**
Schizoid self-theory: Ideology and common sense . . . 20
Positive theory . . . 20
Mystified subjectivity . . . 21
Unitary thinking . . . 22
Dialectical method . . . 23

Chapter 5. *What is Ideology?* (Excerpts) by Jason McQuinn **25**

Introduction

The development of an anarchist practice that can act intelligently requires a capacity to analyze the situation in which we are struggling in terms of our desires and our principles. In other words it requires the *practice* of *theory*. In order to avoid the transformation of our theoretical endeavors into ideology — the reification of ideas into dominating concepts that control and direct our thinking — it is necessary to grasp certain tools, particularly those that allow us to think *critically*.

Critical thinking is the practice of examining a situation or an argument, assessing its strengths and weaknesses in order to be able to grasp it and turn it to one's own ends. This involves the capacity for recognizing fallacious reasoning and methods of manipulating language, facts and emotions.

Of course, as anarchists, we do not want to be trapped within the limits of rationalism and its logic. We base our project of revolt on our will to make our lives our own, on our desire to live beyond the constraints imposed by any ruling order and on our dreams of a world in which there are no longer any institutions or structures that impose on our capacity for self-determination and free association. Thus, it is a project that goes beyond reason. But as Stirner points out in *The Ego and Its Own* (see the excerpt below), all reasoning, all criticism, starts from a assumed basis that is itself beyond reason. For most people (including most anarchists) this basis is a fixed idea — an ideal that they place above themselves and want everyone to accept. It can be quite amusing to watch such true believers waste their reasoning in trying to prove to others that their fixed idea is the best. For me, and for those anarchists for whom anarchy is not an ideal above them, but the necessary condition for the life they desire, the criterion from which we start is ourselves, our desires and aspirations for a life that is our own to determine without any external authorities limiting our capacities to do so. Thus, for us reason is one weapon among many that we use in our struggle to reappropriate our lives here and now and to destroy the society that stands in our way. Our lives are at stake and we will not renounce any weapon that we can use as *our own.*

I have included a passage from Stirner about criticism and thought that I feel expresses well how to use the tool of critical thinking. After this, some basic methods for critically analyzing arguments are described. These are useful in exposing fallacious arguments, but also in developing our own analyses in a more coherent manner. Some specific forms of fallacious reasoning are described, showing manipulative and sloppy ways of thinking and arguing that we should avoid them if we want to develop useful and intelligent revolutionary theory. There is a piece about how we as anarchists can use critical thinking in our practice. After this, I reprint Lev Chernyi's "An Introduction to Critical Theory" (*Anarchy: a Journal of Desire Armed* #18), followed by excerpts from "What Is Ideology?" (*Anarchy:AJODA* #52) to expand on the distinguishing features of critical, theoretical thinking as opposed to ideological thinking.

There has been a tendency in recent years among anarchists to belittle reasoning and intellectual activity. This has led to sloppy theorizing or a complete rejection of theoretical activity, and consequently an unanalyzed and incoherent practice that is often in contradiction with the ideas which one proclaims. A strong coherent anarchist practice must take up the weapon of critical thinking once again and use it to strike fiercely and precisely.

Chapter 1. Stirner on critical thought (from *The Ego and Its Own*)

Every one criticises, but the criterion is different. People run after the "right" criterion. The right criterion is the first presupposition. The critic starts from a proposition, a truth, a belief. This is not a creation of the critic, but of the dogmatist; nay, commonly it is actually taken up out of the culture of the time without further ceremony, like *e.g.* "liberty," "humanity," etc. The critic has not "discovered man," but this truth has been established as "man" by the dogmatist, and the critic (who, besides, may be the same person with him) believes in this truth, this article of faith. In this faith, and possessed by this faith, he criticises.

The secret of criticism is some "truth" or other: this remains its energizing mystery.

But I distinguish between *servile* and *own* criticism. If I criticize under the presupposition of a supreme being, my criticism *serves* the being and is carried on for its sake: if *e.g.* I am possessed by the belief in a "free State," then everything that has a bearing on it I criticize from the standpoint of whether it is suitable to this State, for I *love* this State; if I criticize as a pious man, then for me everything falls into the classes of divine and diabolical, and before my criticism nature consists of traces of God or traces of the devil (hence names like Godsgift, Godmount, the Devil's Pulpit), men of believers and unbelievers; if I criticize while believing in man as the "true essence," then for me everything falls primarily into the classes of man and the un-man, etc.

Criticism has to this day remained a work of love: for at all times we exercised it for the love of some being. All servile criticism is a product of love, a possessedness, and proceeds according to that New Testament precept, "Test everything and hold fast the *good.*"[1]

The critic, in setting to work, impartially presupposes the "truth," and seeks for the truth in the belief that it is to be found. He wants to ascertain the true, and has in it that very "good."

Presuppose means nothing else than put a *thought* in front, or think something before everything else and think the rest from the starting-point of this that has *been thought*, *i.e.* measure and criticize it by this. In other words, this is as much as to say that thinking is to begin with something already thought. If thinking began at all, instead of being begun, if thinking were a subject, an acting personality of its own, as even the plant is such, then indeed there would be no abandoning the principle that thinking must begin with itself. But it is just the personification of thinking that brings to pass those innumerable errors. In the Hegelian system they always talk as if thinking or "the thinking spirit" (*i.e.* personified thinking, thinking as a ghost) thought and acted; in critical liberalism it is always said that "criticism" does this and that, or else that "self-consciousness" finds this and that. But, if thinking ranks as the personal actor, thinking itself must be presupposed; if criticism ranks as such, a thought must likewise stand in front. Thinking and criticism could be active only starting from themselves, would have to be themselves the presupposition of their activity, as without being they could not be active. But thinking, as a

[1] "The good" is the touchstone, the criterion. The good, returning under a thousand names and forms, remained always the presupposition, remained the dogmatic fixed point for this criticism, remained the — fixed idea.

thing presupposed, is a fixed thought, a *dogma*; thinking and criticism, therefore, can start only from a *dogma, i. e.* from a thought, a fixed idea, a presupposition.

With this we come back again to what was enunciated above, that Christianity consists in the development of a world of thoughts, or that it is the proper "freedom of thought," the "free thought," the "free spirit." The "true" criticism, which I called "servile," is therefore just as much "free" criticism, for it is not *my own*.

The case stands otherwise when what is yours is not made into something that is of itself, not personified, not made independent as a "spirit" to itself. *Your* thinking has for a presupposition not "thinking," but *you*. But thus you do presuppose yourself after all? Yes, but not for myself, but for my thinking. Before my thinking, there is — I. From this it follows that my thinking is not preceded by a *thought*, or that my thinking is without a "presupposition." For the presupposition which I am for my thinking is not one *made by thinking*, not one *thought of*, but it is *posited* thinking *itself*, it is the *owner* of the thought, and proves only that thinking is nothing more than — *property*, *i.e.* that an "independent" thinking, a "thinking spirit," does not exist at all.

This reversal of the usual way of regarding things might so resemble an empty playing with abstractions that even those against whom it is directed would acquiesce in the harmless aspect I give it, if practical consequences were not connected with it.

To bring these into a concise expression, the assertion now made is that man is not the measure of all things, but I am this measure. The servile critic has before his eyes another being, an idea, which he means to serve; therefore he only slays the false idols for his God. What is done for the love of this being, what else should it be but a — work of love? But I, when I criticize, do not even have myself before my eyes, but am only doing myself a pleasure, amusing myself according to my taste; according to my several needs I chew the thing up or only inhale its odor.

[…]

For all free criticism a thought was the criterion; for own criticism I am, I the unspeakable, and so not the merely thought-of; for what is merely thought of is always speakable, because word and thought coincide. That is true which is mine, untrue that whose own I am; true, *e.g.* the union; untrue, the State and society. "Free and true" criticism takes care for the consistent dominion of a thought, an idea, a spirit; "own" criticism, for nothing but my *self-enjoyment*. But this the latter is in fact — and we will not spare it this "ignominy"! — like the bestial criticism of instinct. I, like the criticizing beast, am concerned only for *myself*, not "for the cause." I am the criterion of truth, but I am not an idea, but more than idea, *e.g.*, unutterable. *My criticism* is not a "free" criticism, not free from me, and not "servile," not in the service of an idea, but an *own* criticism.

True or human criticism makes out only whether something is *suitable* to man, to the true man; but by own criticism you ascertain whether it is suitable to *you*.

Some basic steps in critically analyzing arguments…

a. break down the argument into premise/conclusion form.

   Is there an argument — i.e., a conclusion based on/supported by other claims offered as premises?

b. if an argument is present — what sort of argument? Deductive (an argument in which, once one has accepted he premises, it would be irrational to reject the conclusion) or inductive (the inference of a general principle from observed particulars)

   If the argument is deductive: does it follow valid (e.g., modus ponens — if *p*, then *q*; *p*, therefore *q* — , modus tollens — if *p*, then *q*; not *q*, therefore not *p*) or invalid (affirming the consequent, denying the antecedent) structure? If its structure is valid — does it avoid other sorts of fallacies, e.g., equivocation, fallacy of accident, ad hominem, etc.?

   If the argument is inductive, does it avoid the various fallacies of inductive arguments (fallacies of relevance, straw man, questionable cause, hasty generalization, hasty conclusion, slippery slope, questionable statistics, unrepresentative sample, unknowable fact, etc.)?

   If the argument is an analogical argument — does it avoid becoming a questionable analogy? (That is, consider the pertinent *similarities*, over against pertinent *dissimilarities*.)

c. Consider the explicit, stated premises of the argument: are they obviously true — or do they require additional support? Where would such support come from? Are these premises generally acknowledged to be true — or accepted only by people who subscribe to a given worldview?

   (This is a way of getting at the fallacies of false dilemma, questionable premise, and others: it is also a way of getting at the role of background beliefs, wishful thinking, and self-deception in our acceptance or rejection of arguments ular instances)?.)

d. Consider the conclusion(s) the argument attempts to establish. Who profits (and who loses) from your/our accepting these conclusions? If someone stands to gain something of importance from your acceptance of the argument — is their self-interest a possible motive for their constructing the argument? Is that self-interest grounds for being suspicious of the argument in general?

   (It is important to distinguish, however, between questions of "who profits?" as grounds for suspicion regarding an argument — and rejecting an argument because of an attack on its source [= ad hominem].)

e. Consider the implicit, unstated premises — the additional assumptions that must be admitted in order to have a complete argument. Address the same sorts of questions to these premises that you addressed to the explicit, stated premises in "c)".

   In addition — what *additional* conclusions might follow from the argument? Are these conclusions plausible, controversial, dependent on ideological/worldview commitments, absurd, etc.?

f. Consider the premise(s) and conclusion(s) of the argument together. Does the conclusion merely restate one or or more of the premises? If so, the argument may be suspected of question-begging and/or circular reasoning.

g. Consider what is left out of the argument — i.e., "read between the lines."

   Does an argument omit a point that is well-known, but which would weaken the argument (= suppressed evidence, straw man)?

Chapter 2. Logical Fallacies Index

Fallacies of distraction

Each of these fallacies is characterized by the illegitimate use of a logical operator in order to distract the reader from the apparent falsity of a certain proposition. The following fallacies are fallacies of distraction.

False dilemma

A limited number of options (usually two) is given, while in reality there are more options. A false dilemma is an illegitimate use of the "or" operator. Example: "America — love it or leave it.

Biased statistics

Use of statistics in a way to prove an assumed point. As an example, I will state the same (fictitious) statistic in two different ways, each of which serves a specific agenda: "1 in 3 children in the world are malnourished". "2 in 3 children in the world have enough to eat". The statistic here is the same; the two ways of stating it have opposing implications of service to specific agendas.

Argument from ignorance

Arguments of this form assume that since something has not been proven false, it is therefore true. Conversely, such an argument may assume that since something has not been proven true, it is therefore false. Example: Since you cannot prove that ghosts do not exist, they must exist.

Slippery slope

In order to show that a proposition P is unacceptable, a sequence of increasingly unacceptable events is shown to follow from P. A slippery slope is an illegitimate use of the "if-then" operator.

Complex question

Two otherwise unrelated points are conjoined and treated as a single proposition. The reader is expected to accept or reject both together, when in reality one is acceptable while the other is not. A complex question is an illegitimate use of the "and" operator. Example: "When did you stop lying to your friends?" The two points that are conjoined are that the person being questioned does not presently lie to his/her friends but that in the past s/he did so.

Appeals to motives rather than supportive argument

The fallacies in this section have in common the practise of appealing to emotions or other psychological factors. In this way, they do not provide reasons for belief.

Appeal to force

The reader is told that unpleasant consequences will follow if they do not agree with the author. Example: You know I built the better sand castle, and if you disagree, I'll kick yours down. (Note: between enemies who share no common ground — such as anarchists and the state — the actual *use* of force, particularly by the "weaker" party may be necessary, but this is not done as a method of convincing the opponent of an argument, but as a method of achieving a desired practical end. E.g., "We will continue to attack police stations until you release our comrades from prison.")

Appeal to pity

The reader is told to agree to the proposition because of the pitiful state of the author. Example: We hope you'll accept our recommendations. We spent the last three months working extra time on it.

Appeal to tradition

Something must be right because it has been done in the past.

Prejudicial language

Loaded or emotive terms are used to attach value or moral goodness to believing the proposition. Example: A *reasonable person* would agree that our income statement is too low. "Reasonable person" is the prejudicial term.

Popularity

A proposition is held to be true because it is widely held to be true or is held to be true by some (usually upper crust) sector of the population. This fallacy is sometimes also called the "Appeal to Emotion" because emotional appeals often sway the population as a whole. Example: Everyone knows that the Earth is flat, so why do you persist in your outlandish claims?

Changing the subject

The fallacies in this section change the subject by discussing the person making the argument instead of discussing reasons to believe or disbelieve the conclusion. While on some occasions it is useful to cite authorities, it is almost never appropriate to discuss the person instead of the argument.

Attacking the person *(ad hominem)*

The person presenting an argument is attacked instead of the argument itself. This takes many forms. For example, the person's character, nationality or religion may be attacked. Alternatively, it may be pointed out that a person stands to gain from a favourable outcome. Or, finally, a person may be attacked by association, or by the company he keeps.

There are three major forms of Attacking the Person: (1) ad hominem (abusive): instead of attacking an assertion, the argument attacks the person who made the assertion. (2) ad hominem (circumstantial): instead of attacking an assertion the author points to the relationship between the person making the assertion and the person's circumstances.(3) ad hominem (tu quoque): this form of attack on the person notes that a person does not practise what he preaches.

Appeal to authority

While sometimes it may be appropriate to cite an authority to support a point, often it is not. In particular, an appeal to authority is inappropriate if: (i) the person is not qualified to have an expert opinion on the subject, (ii) experts in the field disagree on this issue. (iii) the authority was making a joke, drunk, or otherwise not being serious.

A variation of the fallacious appeal to authority is hearsay. An argument from hearsay is an argument which depends on second or third hand sources.

Anonymous authority

The authority in question is not named. This is a type of appeal to authority because when an authority is not named it is impossible to confirm that the authority is an expert. However the fallacy is so common it deserves special mention.

A variation on this fallacy is the appeal to rumour. Because the source of a rumour is typically not known, it is not possible to determine whether to believe the rumour. Very often false and harmful rumours are deliberately started in order to discredit an opponent.

Style over substance

The manner in which an argument (or arguer) is presented is taken to affect the likelihood that the conclusion is true. Example: Why don't you take the advice of that nicely dressed young man?

Inductive fallacies

Inductive reasoning consists of inferring from the properties of a sample to the properties of a population as a whole. For example, suppose we have a barrel containing of 1,000 beans. Some of the

beans are black and some of the beans are white. Suppose now we take a sample of 100 beans from the barrel and that 50 of them are white and 50 of them are black. Then we could infer inductively that half the beans in the barrel (that is, 500 of them) are black and half are white.

All inductive reasoning depends on the similarity of the sample and the population. The more similar the same is to the population as a whole, the more reliable will be the inductive inference.

On the other hand, if the sample is relevantly dissimilar to the population, then the inductive inference will be unreliable.

No inductive inference is perfect. That means that any inductive inference can sometimes fail. Even though the premises are true, the conclusion might be false. Nonetheless, a good inductive inference gives us a reason to believe that the conclusion is probably true.

Hasty generalization

The size of the sample is too small to support the conclusion. Example: Fred, the Australian, stole my wallet. Thus, all Australians are thieves.

Unrepresentative example

The sample used in an inductive inference is relevantly different from the population as a whole. Example: The apples on the top of the box look good. The entire box of apples must be good. (*Of course, the rotten apples are hidden beneath the surface.*)

False analogy

In an analogy, two objects (or events), A and B are shown to be similar. Then it is argued that since A has property P, so also B must have property P. An analogy fails when the two objects, A and B, are different in a way which affects whether they both have property P. Example: Employees are like nails. Just as nails must be hit in the head in order to make them work, so must employees.

Slothful induction

The proper conclusion of an inductive argument is denied despite the evidence to the contrary. Example: Hugo has had twelve accidents in the last six months, yet he insists that it is just a coincidence and not his fault. (*Inductively, the evidence is overwhelming that it is his fault.*)

Fallacy of exclusion

Important evidence which would undermine an inductive argument is excluded from consideration. Example : The Leafs will probably win this game because they've won nine out of their last ten. (*Eight of the Leafs' wins came over last place teams, and today they are playing the first place team.)*

Fallacies involving Statistical Syllogisms

A statistical generalization is a statement which is usually true, but not always true. Fallacies involving statistical generalizations occur because the generalization is not always true. Thus, when an author treats a statistical generalization as though it were always true, the author commits a fallacy.

Accident

A general rule is applied when circumstances suggest that an exception to the rule should apply. Example: It is good to return things you have borrowed. Therefore, you should return this automatic rifle from the madman you borrowed it from.

Converse accident

An exception to a generalization is applied to cases where the generalization should apply.

Causal Fallacies

It is common for arguments to conclude that one thing causes another. But the relation between cause and effect is a complex one. It is easy to make a mistake.

In general, we say that a cause C is the cause of an effect E if and only if:

i. Generally, if C occurs, then E will occur, and

ii. Generally, if C does not occur, then E will not occur either

Post hoc

The name in Latin means "after this therefore because of this". This describes the fallacy. An author commits the fallacy when it is assumed that because one thing follows another that the one thing was caused by the other.

Joint effect

One thing is held to cause another when in fact both are the effect of a single underlying cause. This fallacy is often understood as a special case of post hoc ergo prompter hoc (above). Example: You have a fever and this is causing you to break out in spots. (*In fact, both symptoms are caused by the measles.*)

Genuine but insignificant cause

The object or event identified as the cause of an effect is a genuine cause, but insignificant when compared to the other causes of that event. Note that this fallacy does not apply when all other contributing causes are equally insignificant.

Wrong direction

The relation between cause and effect is reversed. Example: Cancer causes smoking.

Complex Cause

The effect is caused by a number of objects or events, of which the cause identified is only a part. A variation of this is the feedback loop where the effect is itself a part of the cause. Example:

The accident was caused by the poor location of the bush. (*True, but it wouldn't have occurred had the driver not been drunk and the pedestrian not been jaywalking.)*

Missing the point

These fallacies have in common a general failure to prove that the conclusion is true.

Begging the question

The truth of the conclusion is assumed by the premises. Often, the conclusion is simply restated in the premises in a slightly different form. In more difficult cases, the premise is a consequence of the conclusion. Example: We know that God exists, since the Bible says God exists. What the Bible says must be true, since God wrote it and God never lies. (*Here, we must agree that God exists in order to believe that God wrote the Bible.)*

Irrelevant conclusion

An argument which purports to prove one thing instead proves a different conclusion. Example: "The cutting edge periodicals of the new movement originate in Eugene, Oregon; Greenburg, Pennsylvania; Columbia, Missouri; and Tucson, Arizona, all of which are college towns, not big cities. Therefore, not much is happening in the cities." The premise only proves that something is happening in college towns, but tells us nothing about what is happening in cities.

Straw man

The author attacks an argument which is different from, and usually weaker than, the opposition's best argument. Example: Equating all individualism with "bourgeois individualism" and then using arguments against *bourgeois* individualism to try to discredit revolutionary anarchist individualism.

Fallacies of Ambiguity

The fallacies in this section are all cases where a word or phrase is used unclearly. There are two ways in which this can occur.

i. The word or phrase may be ambiguous, in which case it has more than one distinct meaning.

ii. The word or phrase may be vague, in which case it has no distinct meaning.

Equivocation

The same term is used with two different meanings. Example: Hot dogs are better than nothing .Nothing is better than steak. Therefore, hot dogs are better than steak.

Amphiboly

The structure of a sentence allows two different interpretations. Example: Last night I shot a burglar in my pajamas.

Accent

The emphasis on a word or phrase suggests a meaning contrary to what the sentence actually says. Example: The first mate, seeking revenge on the captain, wrote in his journal, "The Captain was sober today." (*He suggests, by his emphasis, that the Captain is usually drunk.)*

Category Errors

These fallacies occur because the author mistakenly assumes that the whole is nothing more than the sum of its parts. However, things joined together may have different properties as a whole than any of them do separately.

Composition

Because the attributes of the parts of a whole have a certain property, it is argued that the whole has that property. Example: The brick wall is six feet tall. Thus, the bricks in the wall are six feet tall.

Division

Because the whole has a certain property, it is argued that the parts have that property. Example: Each brick is three inches high, thus, the brick wall is three inches high.

Non Sequitur

The term non sequitur literally means "it does not follow". In this section we describe fallacies which occur as a consequence of invalid arguments.

Affirming the Consequent

Any argument of the form: If A then B, B, therefore A. Example: If your dog has puppies, she must be a female. Your dog is female. /.. She must have puppies.

Denying the Antecedent

Any argument of the form: If A then B, Not A, thus Not B. Example: If I made it to class, that means my car is working well. I didn't make it to class. So I guess my car isn't working well.

Inconsistency

Asserting that contrary or contradictory statements are both true. Example: John is taller than Jake, and Jake is taller than Fred, while Fred is taller than John.

Syllogistic Errors

The fallacies in this section are all cases of invalid categorical syllogisms.

Fallacy of Four Terms

A form of defective syllogism that is deficient because the middle term occurs in two different senses. Example: All kids cry. That goat is a kid. Therefore that goat cries.

Undistributed Middle

Two separate categories are said to be connected because they share a common property. Example: Every member of the NEFAC is a platformist. He is a platformist. Therefore he is a member of NEFAC.

Illicit Major

The predicate of the conclusion talks about all of something, but the premises only mention some cases of the term in the predicate. Example: All men have hands. No women are men. Therefore no women have hands.

Illicit Minor

The subject of the conclusion talks about all of something, but the premises only mention some cases of the term in the subject. Example: All anarchists are radicals, and all anarchists are anti-authoritarians. Therefore all radicals are anti-authoritarian.

Fallacy of Exclusive Premises

A syllogism has two negative premises.

Fallacy of Drawing an Affirmative Conclusion From a Negative Premise

What the name implies. Example: All mice are animals, and some animals are not dangerous, therefore some mice are dangerous.

Existential Fallacy

A particular conclusion is drawn from universal premises.

Fallacies of Explanation

Subverted Support

The phenomenon being explained doesn't exist. Example: John went to the store because he wanted to see Maria.*(This is a fallacy if, in fact, John went to the library.)*

Non-support

Evidence for the phenomenon being explained is biased. Example: The reason why I get four or better on my evaluations is that my students love me. *(This is a fallacy when evaluations which score four or less are discarded on the grounds that the students did not understand the question.)*

Untestability

The theory which explains cannot be tested. Example: The reason why everything exists is that God created it. *(This may be true, but as an explanation it carries no weight at all, because there is no way to test the theory. No evidence in the world could possibly show that this theory is false, because any evidence would have to be created by God, according to the theory.)*

Limited Scope

The theory which explains can only explain one thing. Example: People get schizophrenia because different parts of their brains split apart. *(this theory explains schizophrenia — and nothing else.)*

Limited Depth

The theory which explains does not appeal to underlying causes. Example: My cat likes tuna because she's a cat.

Fallacies of Definition

Too Broad

The definition includes items which should not be included. Example: Anarchism is a radical movement. (*So are many other movements.*)

Too Narrow

The definition does not include all the items which should be included. Example: Anarchism is the radical movement based on the anti-authoritarian collectivist ideas of Bakunin. (*In fact, there are many currents of anarchism, some of which reject Bakunin's collectivism.)*

Failure to Elucidate

The definition is more difficult to understand than the word or concept being defined. Example: An object is beautiful if and only if it is aesthetically successful. *(The term "aesthetically successful" is harder to understand than the term "beautiful".)*

Circular Definition

The definition includes the term being defined as a part of the definition. Example: An anarchist is one who adheres to the ideas and practices of anarchists.

Conflicting Conditions

The definition is self-contradictory. An individual is truly free only if : a) she decides for herself how she is to live; b) she is free to associate with whom she chooses; and c) she follows the consensus-based decisions of the collective she is in. (*If she must follow collectively-made decisions, she is no longer free to decide for herself, and has given up the freedom of association for a determined association.*)

Chapter 3. Critical Thinking as Anarchist Methodology

It is important to look at how critical thinking operates in terms of developing a course of action in the real world. The crucial components to critical thought are the following:

Critique

We notice that the world is not as we desire, and so we ask the question, "Why not?" We look at the mechanisms, institutions, and social dynamics that create and perpetuate the world as it is, and analyze them thoroughly, down to their root causes — hence the term radical. For example, there is exploitation in the world. We need to examine what we mean when we use the term and what other people mean when they use it; an anarchist definition will probably be different than that of a statist. We need to figure out why that is. Next we need to try to discover the main causes of exploitation, and who benefits from its continued existence.

Analysis

We try to understand how this society is created and perpetuated, and why it differs from what we desire. We study, discuss, and interpret the relevant facts and history of the problem, and begin to formulate a reasonable solution based on those facts. Using the example of exploitation, we develop our analysis by tracing its widespread practice by the various institutions that exist in the US, and what they have in common with other formal and informal institutions around the world. We will probably discover that, as the world has become more dominated by industrial capitalism, it has become increasingly more exploitative. A possible solution to the continued existence of exploitation, therefore, might begin with the idea of abolishing industrial capitalism.

Strategy

We devise a set of goals for how we want to change the situation into one that fits our principles and analyses. This is where our overall vision is based. We try to figure out how to implement our ideas practically. A major goal of an anarchist strategy is to undermine people's belief in the legitimacy of the State, to make it possible for all people to gain confidence in taking back control of all aspects of our lives.

Tactics

We come up with actions that are compatible with our strategy. The main question to ask is "What methods/tools can be used to achieve the goal?" The answer is whatever helps to make the goal(s) a reality; whatever is expedient at the moment depending on who's involved and what exactly we are trying to accomplish. Of course our tactics must be in keeping with our principles. But it is important to remember that tactics are not the same thing as principles. Non-violence is not an anarchist principle; it is a tactic. Depending on the situation, we decide when it's convenient — or not — to adhere to non-violent guidelines. At times we may decide that it makes more sense to fight back with force. Morality plays no part in deciding upon which tactics to use in a given situation — it only matters what is compatible with our strategy and principles.

Chapter 4. *An Introduction to Critical Theory* by Lev Chernyi

> *The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling* material *force of society, is at the same time its ruling* intellectual *force. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression [both in content and form] of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make one class the ruling one, hence the ideas of its dominance.*
>
> — K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845)

> *There they flaunt their sensitivity, ranting in private against theory as being something cold and abstract, and lauding "human relations".*
>
> — Jeanne Charles, *Arms and the Woman* (1975)

> *Man, your head is haunted; you have wheels in your head!*
>
> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (1844)

Human life without theory is impossible.[1] Between the conception of a desire and its satisfaction always stands the human activity necessary for the unification of that desire with its object. In every case this necessary activity has two coincident aspects — the *practical* and the *theoretical*. These aspects are *not* strictly separate and totally different; but rather they are intertwined and can be best conceived as simply crystallizations at different points of the same *unitary* human activity.

All practical activity (or at least that which occurs above the level of purely reflexive behavior) expresses theory. A trivial example might be: you can't go downtown without having some idea, or theory, of where downtown is.

All theoretical activity is at the same time practical. Even the most contemplative interpretation of the world has innumerable practical consequences — including for instance, and often most importantly, the adoption of a stance of passive suffering of the fortunes and misfortunes of that world.

Unavoidably, the conception of a theory *unrelated* to any practice, and of a practice *unrelated* to any theory is itself a theoretical construction which contains a very definite *relation* to practical activity. Theory is inseparable from practice just as the objectifications of theory are inconceivable without the activity of their production and use.

[1] By my use of the name "critical theory" here I do not mean to indicate only — or even primarily — the ideas of the Frankfurt School, which have unfortunately become overly identified in some people's thinking with the idea of critical theory per se.

Schizoid self-theory: Ideology and common sense

Yet, for many, if not most people, "theory" seems alien, because for all of us "theory" has usually meant having our thinking done *for* us by ideologues and authorities — by parents, priests, teachers, bosses, politicians, "experts", counselors, etc. As a result the theory we use in our every day lives to realize our desires, our *self-theory*, has generally become artificially split into two fragments whose forms reinforce and reproduce each other.

On the one side we often appropriate, as if it is our own thought, an explicit and formal *ideology* (or fragments of various ideologies) we "believe in". This becomes what is for us our "*conscious*" theory. It tends to be abstract, idealist and rigid. On the other hand, we allow the more immediately practical side of our self-theory to remain at a level of *unconscious* assimilation and use. It appears as such a "natural" expression of "the way things are" (i.e., as "common sense") that there seems to be no need to question its origins, its basis, or its relation to us. All too often this side of our self-theory is never consciously identified as theory at all.

The thought of most people oscillates between the two poles of this split in our thinking. The theory thus expressed can be classified according to the usual (or average) place it occupies in the continuum between the two poles. Some people tend to be more ideological in their thought. They attempt to situate themselves in some kind of more or less *theoretically coherent* relation with their world as a whole; but they usually attempt this by forcing their entire lives to revolve around the some abstract "beliefs" (for a very few examples — Jesus freaks and all the more idiotic of the self-professed "Christians", Marxists (and especially members of the putrid Leninist/Trotskyite/Maoist/etc. sects, and other cultists of all kinds).

Other people tend toward un(self)conscious "self-expression"; they take this world as it superficially *appears* to them for granted as if it were a humanly unchangeable environment and try to get by on an absolute minimum of personal thought. They usually function almost entirely within terms of the images and slogans which are systematically force-fed to them by the mass media and all the dominant institutions whose propaganda seems so nearly inescapable (the churches, government, schools, corporations, etc.). When they are forced to think about their lives , their thinking always remains fragmentary and incoherent since they really have *no conscious idea* of where they stand in relation to the totality of society, its institutions or their very world.

In the end, wherever a person's mode of thinking might be classified on this continuum, by default, one way or another, that person's thinking is largely done *for* him or her *by* others.

Positive theory

All the thoughts which unreflectively seem so "natural", all these beliefs tend to express the *positive* needs, principles and social relationships of the dominant modes of organization of our society *at the same time* as they tend to *deny* the subjective reality of those who hold them! As such they are essentially expressions of what can be called "positive theory" or "ideology".

Positive theory always expresses a defense (whether explicitly or implicitly) of our social alienation. In our present epoch it functions largely as a defense of the closest thing we have to a worldwide system of domination and exploitation — capitalism — by propagating justifications for most forms of hierarchical organization and commodity (buying and selling) relationships.

It assumes that the basic forms of the existing political-economy, and of social relationships in general, are purely "natural facts" rather than products of human social activity within a history that is subject to rationally determined changes. This assumption deforms all positive theory making it *ideological* in essence.

In our era ideology nearly always constitutes a theoretical acceptance at some level of the *logic of capital* (the alienation of life-activity through its conversion to commodities which are bought and sold within a hierarchical social system). As such, ideological or positive theory can be characterized very simply as the form taken by capitalism in the realm of thought. It is as if capitalism were thinking up its own justifications through us. Indeed, it is as if the bodies of human beings were not only the tools and resources capitalism needs for the reproduction of its physical social relationships (corporations, the institutions of private property, cops, courts, laws, etc.), but it is as if our minds have largely become appendages of this system also.

Because ideology is *always* the form taken by alienation in the realm of thought, the more alienated we are, the less we understand our real situations. The less we understand where we are and what we are really doing, the more we allow our lives to be determined and controlled by the dominant institutions, and the less we really do exist in any meaningful way as *ourselves*. And the less we assert our own autonomous existence, the more palpable an existence is taken on by capitalism, by the frozen images of our roles in all the various social hierarchies and transactions of commodity exchange. It is as if all previous genuinely human communities have been invaded, taken over by an alien race of body-snatchers, and been supplanted by an entirely different and vacantly hideous form of life.

Mystified subjectivity

The schizoid split or separation involved in our self-theory (mentioned earlier) is actually a split in *positivist* self-theory. It is a reflection in thought of the basic split in our daily life-activities between the more immediate personal reality we *live* and experience as our *own* every day, and the more abstract and alienating ideological reality we have allowed ourselves to be enclosed within. It reflects the conflict between our most intimate and genuine desires, and the alienating social context which always seems to confront them.

Instead of a transparent relation between an individual and her/his world in which the individual is a conscious subject with the world constituting the objects of desire, there is a mystified relationships. The actual social subject displaces his or her own desires with those of a theoretical abstraction which demands submission to *its* desires. And this abstraction is at the same time the projection of the real domination of the individual subject by capital onto the realm of myth, metaphor, or superstition. Without realizing it, human beings consent to being taken over and used as the tools of God, or Progress, or Historical Necessity, or the Market, Authority, Democracy, the Dollar, etc. And for most people, this actually means allowing themselves to be torn in many different directions by several (or even scores of) different demands seemingly made by such abstractions. In such a situation, can it really be any surprise that most people are so totally confused about nearly everything?

Positive or ideological theory includes all such theories of human activity in which ideas seemingly escape their real connection with the subjective human world from which they must arise and are instead perceived as purely "objective", ahistorical, and either of "higher" value than

our own personal values, or else as "value-less" entities moving according to their own "laws". Inevitably, these ideological abstractions actually come to rest in an unconscious, unperceived, and mystified relationship with the world they are used to attempt to comprehend.

Unitary thinking

The resolution to the dilemma posed by the split which accompanies all instances of positive theory is the dialectical path toward unitary thought — *critical theory*. Critical theory attempts to restore the alienated, isolated individual to a position as a real social subject in the life of the world. It maintains a constant awareness of its own relation to its origins in individual subjectivity and to the object it wishes to comprehend.

In contrast to positive theory, which ignores or suppresses any awareness of its place in the class struggle, critical theory locates itself directly in the conflict as the theory of all the real elements of opposition to authority, alienation and exploitation. While positive theory arises from the nature of capitalist society as its *positive* expression, critical theory arises as its *negative* expression, the expression of all the forces working toward its supersession. This means that critical thought "is the function of neither isolated individuals nor of a sum total of individuals. Its subject is rather a definite individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature. The subject is no mathematical point like the ego of bourgeois philosophy; his activity is the construction of the social present." (Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, pp. 210)

Critical theory is thus not based upon any narrowly political, or economic, or any other fragmentary opposition to the status quo. Its basis is immanent in *all* human activity — within every individual and social group — since within every contradiction in every person and social group, capitalist society contains the seeds from which a rationally constructed, free human society could one day bloom.

First and foremost, critical theory is the unitary body of thought that we *consciously* construct *for our own use*. We construct it when we make an analysis of why our live are the way they are, why the world is the way it is, and when we simultaneously develop a strategy and tactics of practice — of how to get what we really most desire for our lives.

Those who assume (usually unconsciously) the impossibility of realizing their life's desires, and thus of fighting for themselves, either end up fighting for alien ideals or causes (as if they were their own), or remain relatively passive victims of the illusions and deceptions of others. The critical theorist "goes through a reversal of perspective on his life and the world. Nothing is true for him but his desires, his will to be. He refuses all ideology in his hatred for the miserable social relations in modern capitalist-global society. From this reversed perspective [it is easy to see] with a newly acquired clarity, the upside-down world of reification [the "thingification" of aspects of daily life], the inversion of subject and object, of abstract and concrete. It is the theatrical landscape of fetishized commodities, mental projections, separations, and ideologies: art, God, city planning, common sense, ethics, smile buttons, radio stations that say they love you, and detergents that have compassion for your hands." (Negation, *Self-Theory*, pp.4–5)

When such a person can no longer go on living according to the dictates of such insanity, when every compulsory role becomes too absurd to perform, each constraint and alienation required

by the hierarchical, capitalist organization of social relations is felt sharply as what it really is — a negationof personal subjectivity and life, as a situation that must be undermined and subverted. The critical theorist constantly feels the need to confront and change the system that destroys him of her each day.[2]

Dialectical method

The method of critical theory is dialectical and contrary to the dualistic and one-sidedly analytic[3] methods of positive theory which always pose every problem (and thus their solutions) in terms of two abstractly separate and mutually exclusive choices. The philosophical basis of critical theory lies in a radical phenomenology and its origins from the fundamental "fact" of our *lived experience* contrary to the ontological dualism[4] of all ideological theory.

[2] Anyone who sets out to change the world soon finds that she or he can't accomplish much in isolation. The basic structures of our world that need to be changed are *social* — the organized *relations* of people to each other, as well as their material foundation (anchoring) in socially produced personality and character structure. The only way they can be changed radically is through movements of common communication and committed, yet autonomous participation in the project of collective self-transformation and self-realization (or, in other words, through social revolution). For the critical theorist this is the only worthwhile meaning of that a "political" orientation toward life can have. It is a realization that one can have. It is a realization that one can only change one's life radically by changing the nature of social life itself through the transformation of the world as a whole, which requires collective efforts. And one can only change the world as a whole beginning with one's own life, as well.

[3] The fetishization of analytic method always functions to conceal a dualistic metaphysic. The mere act of conceptually breaking down (analyzing) specific processes and subjects is not in itself a major problem here. It is the treatment of specific one-sidedly analytic methods *as if* they (and their hidden metaphysical assumptions) are the *only* or *most true* methods of examining the *fundamental nature of things* that coincides with the demands of ideological theory. For example, a rigid belief in the absolute truth of some type of mechanical, atomistic philosophy will usually accompany (no matter how much it may be denied) the fetishization of an analytic method focusing on the breaking down of objects into discrete parts which are then conceptually re-united by solely cause-effect relations. Another example might be the fixation on an analytic method based upon a "systems" orientation". In this case, the mechanism becomes somewhat more subtle, but a dualistic metaphysic based upon the concepts of systems, feedback, and homeostasis (or levels of stability) takes the place of the atoms and cause-effect model with very similar end results. What happens in each case is that the *conceptual metaphors* used for analyses are reified — the metaphors come to be seen as the-way-things-really-are, rather than as finite metaphors for describing our world which both reveal certain partial truths about it and at the same time impose certain partial falsifications. The structures of different languages shape the range of possibilities for certain types of thought. English and the other Indo-European languages encourage "cause-effect" and "actor-action-receiver" thought patterns as a result of their "subject-verb-object" or "subject-object-verb" sentence patterns. In the same way, the types of analytical methods (in fact, based on analytical metaphors) that we choose shape the range of possibilities we are able to use for understanding the world. Once we become fixated on one method as the *only correct method* we lose the ability to distinguish what that method can reveal to us from what that particular method at the same time conceals from us. We end up directly confusing the metaphor for the structure of our world with predictably bizarre results in practice.

[4] Ontological dualism is the *conception* that existence is fundamentally dual, or split in two, in nature. It is the archetypal metaphysical conception that "Being" is fundamentally divided into two ultimate parts which can never be resolved into one. It is the necessary basis for all dogmatism and ideological theory. Unfortunately, most of the self-proclaimed "monistic" systems of thought which claim to have "overcome" dualism actually only transpose their metaphysical dualities into a hidden level of theory. For example, *every* "monistic" religion conceals a duality of *spirit* (or its equivalent) and *matter* (or its equivalent) — usually by attempting to completely suppress the material side of this duality (by proclaiming its complete non-existence or its "illusory" nature!), or by awkwardly attempting to marry the concepts of spirit and matter by subsuming them both under some other extremely abstract and artificial super-concept.

Whereas positive theory must always remain dualistic, incorporating the division between individual subjects and their alienated social structures as a completely unquestioned and unconsciously held assumption, critical theory dialectically transcends all ontological dualism. For each abstract separation and dichotomy rigidly held by positive theory, critical theory attempts to show the real relatedness and unity of its elements — how one side of an abstract separation can never exist without the other. Thus, where positive theory holds that value and knowledge are always separate entities (and strives for "objectivity"), critical theory reveals that all knowledge is social and historical, and that it is always humanly generated *for a purpose* (or a constellation of purposes), even if those purposes remain unclear to its creators. Critical theory reveals that value is always immanent in human knowledge. It demonstrates that there are inherent values in the choices of which questions to ask, how to from them, the criteria for satisfactory answers, the range of acceptable methods for finding such answers, etc.

Where positive theory defends the notion that theory and practice are essentially unrelated, critical theory maintains that the truth of a theory is never a mystical property that somehow inheres in it; truths must be proved in practice, i.e., they must be *lived*. Theory is not suprahistorical or suprasocial (some sort of pure knowledge "in itself" — simply to be cerebrally discovered or deduced by the theorist); rather, theory is always generated by a particular social subject from her or his practice. The practice of that subject is then influenced by the theory which has been generated, and a new round of development then ensues. There is a constant two-way, dialectical "feedback" that characterizes the acquisition and application of knowledge.

And where positive theory insists on the fragmentation, specialization and compartmentalization of knowledge, critical theory is always unitary. It picks out and employs all the most worthwhile formulations of ideologies (their partial truths) while rejecting any useless or irrelevant aspects along with the ideological core. The partial truths that are thus appropriated, along with other new observations, are then synthesized with the current body of one's critical self-theory to form a new totality. Critical theory is a continually evolving attempt at the conception of theoretical and practical unity. It is a dynamic totality under construction, always dialectically transcending (abolishing, yet preserving) itself.

Self-demystification and the construction of critical self-theory don't immediately eradicate one's alienation. After all, the "world" of alienation goes right on reproducing itself each day. But it is a start on the road towards the collective self-activity required for that eradication.

Alienation must first be perceived and understood before anything very coherent can be done to eliminate it. This means that everyone must become his or her own theoretician. We must all cease to allow others to think for us. We must criticize all thought ruthlessly, especially our own. Instead of allowing the reference point for our lives to always be somewhere else, we must become the conscious centers of our own self-theories.

Once all the layers of ideological mystification are peeled off, we are laid bare to ourselves, and our relations to other people and to the universe can be made progressively more transparent. We can then see that all the unnecessary and mystifying abstractions were only projections of our individual and social powers, our own alienated powers and the powers of other people just like us.

The only really critical theory exists where no morals, abstract ideals, or hidden constraints that cloud the air. It facilitates our unity with others as individuals who are conscious of our desires, unwilling to give an inch to mystification and constraint, and unafraid to act freely in our own interests.

Chapter 5. *What is Ideology?* (Excerpts) by Jason McQuinn

[…]

There certainly can be genuine confusions over the meaning of the word ideology since the word has been used for many purposes entailing quite different meanings. However, when I (and other anti-ideological anarchists) criticize ideology, it is *always* from a specifically critical, anarchist perspective rooted in both the skeptical individualist-anarchist philosophy of Max Stirner (especially his master work, translated into English as *The Ego and Its Own*) and the Marxist conception of ideology, especially as it was developed by members of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and others) in their version of critical theory.

Although Stirner did not use the word "ideology", he developed a fundamentally important critique of alienation which crucially encompasses a critique of alienated and alienating theory. For Stirner theory can either be employed to express the subjective aims of its creator or it can be allowed to subordinate and control the person employing it. In the frst instance theory facilitates the fulfillment of one's most important desires, assisting people in analyzing and clarifying their aims, the relative importance of particular aims and desires, and the best means for achieving the overall configuration of projects that is one's life in the world. The alternative (what has now most often come to be called "ideological") use of theory involves the adoption of theories constructed around abstract, externally-conceived subjectivities (god, state, capital, anarchism, primitivism, etc.) to which one feels in some way obliged to subordinate her or his own aims, desires and life.

I won't go into the complexities of the development of the critical Marxist conceptions of ideology. Suffice it to say that they emphasize an important, but incomplete conception of ideology in the service of institutional social formations, which programmatically forgets the central importance of individual subjectivity to any unalienated theory. The most important aspect of this critical theory of ideology is that the ideas of an alienated populace will tend to both explicitly and implicitly reflect in theory their actual subordination to alienating institutions — especially capital, state and religion — in practice. In other words, when one is enslaved one is forced to view the world to some degree from the perspective of the slaveholder (whether the slaveholder is a person or an institution or a set of institutions) in order to avoid punishment and accomplish any tasks demanded. And the more complex and pervasive the slaveholders demands, the more it becomes necessary to look at one's world from the slaveholder's perspective, until most people can and have lost sight of the very possibility of maintaining their own unalienated perspectives in opposition to their enslavement.

Wolfi Landstreicher
Critical Thinking as an Anarchist Weapon

Retrieved on May 7, 2009 from anti-politics.net

en.anarchistlibraries.net