

◆◆ Chapter 5

*Background Logic, Critical Thinking, and Irrational Language Games**

Abstract

In this, the most technical of his papers, written for the Second International Symposium on Informal Logic in Windsor, Canada (1985), Richard Paul develops, at length, the concept of background logic: the notion that the reasoning and thinking which we overtly express can best be understood as surface manifestations of a complex system of thought which is, for the most part, implicit, presupposed, and unexpressed. With this view, Paul implies that comprehending the words and actions of other people and our selves is best understood as the problem of deciphering the use of three logics: the logic of natural languages (such as, English or French), the logic of society (for example, everyday U.S. cultural practices), and personal logic (our personal system of assumptions and meanings). There are three major patterns of life-style that emerge from the ways people orchestrate these logics in pursuing their ends: idealizing, rationalizing, and reasoning. The first option, idealization, is dominant in the lives of uncritical persons. The second, rationalization, is dominant in the lives of selfishly critical persons. The third, fairminded reasoning, is dominant in the lives of fairmindedly critical persons. Most people act, on Paul's view, with minimal awareness of the social and personal meanings that dominate their lives, with little sense of how their minds have been shaped and in turn shape their experience and action. Paul believes that "irrational" language usage is rampant in everyday life. The consequence is far-reaching: "When background logic is left in the background, unformulated, we are dominated rather than freed by the logic of our own thought and social transactions."

Everywhere and always the quota of generally accepted rules and opinions weighs, however lightly, on the individual spirit, and it is only in theory that the child of 12–14 can submit all rules to a critical examination. Even the most rational of adults does not subject to his 'moral experience' more than an infinitesimal proportion of the rules that hedge him round. Anxious though he was to escape from his 'provisional morality', Descartes retained it to the end of his days.

Jean Piaget, *The Moral
Judgment of the Child*

* This essay is somewhat more difficult than most of the others. The reader might defer reading it until most of the others are clearly understood.

◆ *Introduction*

Every human thinks. Thinking is intrinsic to human life. Thought is necessary to and implicit in all human activities. Everything that humans do is “thought-full”. So deep-seated and intrinsic to our being is it that we can’t stop thinking even if we want to. It is our nature to think. But we do little thinking *about* our thinking. And what we do is rarely fruitful. It is difficult to do, it must be systematically encouraged, and easily degenerates into worry, speculation, or daydreaming. At this point in our evolution as a species we have not learned how to take command of our thinking by mastering the art of thinking about our thinking.

Why is this so? Besides being thinking beings, we are also egocentric ones. When we think, our thought is spontaneously egocentric. This means that our thought is continually oriented toward the goal of getting what we want. We spontaneously form ideas that serve our selfish interests, including a self-serving image of ourselves.

This image is partially conscious and partially unconscious. The conscious part, or much of it, helps obscure that part which is unconscious. Put another way, part of what it means to be egocentric is to project an image of ourselves which conflicts with what we are. This results in strong resistance to seeing ourselves as we are. We naturally and spontaneously resist thinking about how we think, for doing so would disclose self-deceptive and ego-protective acts.

To maintain a positive self-image, we often resist admitting any inconsistency, hypocrisy, or contradiction. When we sense that our actions conflict with our ideals, we tend to respond defensively or hostilely. We often hide our inconsistencies and shortcomings, even from ourselves. To defend our behavior, we often distort not only our motives but their consequences. We routinely defend our distortions. We work hard to maintain the illusion that we are what we are not.

A second reason we generally lack command of our thought is that we are sensual-perceptual beings. We are deeply involved in a world we can see, touch, smell, hear, and taste. And though we freely fabricate mythical entities in our minds, most are entities we can “picture” in sensual terms. But our thought processes cannot be “observed” in sensual-perceptual terms. We cannot look into our minds and simply watch what takes place. Our mind is not a *place* and so we cannot turn to it. Special skills are necessary for thinking about our thinking. These are not observational skills but rather *analytic* ones. We think about our thinking not by looking in a new place, but by using new ways of dissecting what we say and do. We do not need new experiences but insight into what is implicit in our experiences.

Thinking about our thinking is partly a set of linguistic skills. We cannot effectively think about our thinking unless we learn to use words with discipline. This requires that we learn to distinguish educated use from social misuse. Thinking about thinking is partly a set of social skills. We cannot effectively think about our thinking unless we learn to analyze the

social settings in which we think, to recognize how our thought is often embedded in our action in a social world.

Thought is logical. That which is logical has logical *components*, logical *relations*, and logical *direction*. For example, one cannot think without beginning one's thought "somewhere", that is, by setting off from *premises* that embody *assumptions*. Secondly, having "begun somewhere", thought proceeds in some *direction* and for some *purpose*, leaving a trail of logical *connections* and relations.

While we are thinking we do not fully know *why* or *how* we think. We do not completely know the functions of our thought, our total set of premises and assumptions, what logical connections we are developing, and the conclusions toward which our thought is tending. Yet the more we learn to think about our thinking the more we come to identify, in the very process of thinking, the logical ingredients of our thought.

◆ Background Logic

Most critical thinking pedagogy and theory focuses on the part of thinking actually spoken or written — what we call "manifest logic". What we say or write, however, is only a small portion of the thinking process — the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Surrounding any line of thought is a large substructure of *background thought*, *logical connections* not lying on the surface of reasoning, but prior to it, underlying it, or implied by it. In the background of all thinking are foundational concepts, assumptions, values, purposes, experiences, implications, and consequences — all embedded in lines of thought radiating outward in every direction.

These background connections often emerge only after extended dialogical discussion. Two people may begin with a specific question: Was the President right to order the bombing of ...? The discussion predictably moves to other questions, topics, and subjects: Should any country be bound by international law if its interests are served by violating it? What does history tell us about the likely consequences of an action such as this? Does our country have a special historic responsibility to intervene in the affairs of other countries if democracy is threatened? How can we evaluate the motives of public figures in distant countries? Are there universal ethical principles?

Disputants will probably raise points regarding other foreign policy decisions and will discuss further historical background and psychological considerations, domestic policy, news coverage, and so on. Such a broadening movement from sub-issue to sub-issue is often necessary to fully canvass the original issue. While trying to persuade the other, each arguer cites evidence, interpretations, principles, etc., which the other may or may not accept, and so must sometimes be argued. Thus, points that at first blush seem unrelated to the original question become relevant as each reasoner explores the conflicting background thinking surrounding the beliefs of the other.

People engaged in such discussions are often surprised at what the other says. Arguments that to each seem compelling, the other finds weak. The other can provide reasons to defend a seemingly indefensible position, or answer an apparently unanswerable objection. We are all largely unaware of the substructure of belief and thought that underlies what we overtly assert.

One of the reasons we ignore the importance of background logic in our thought is that our schooling did not teach us how to explicate it. In fact for most people background thought doesn't exist. They respond to the surface of what is said or done, oblivious of what is not staring them in the face.

Another reason why background thinking is not taken seriously is our over-fascination with formal procedures and what we take to be scientific objectivity. In an age of science it seems to many that all important problems are questions that should be settled by some objective scientific process that transcends the "subjectivity" of thought. Our obsession with scientific formalism, our scientism, is actually quite old, ultimately traceable perhaps to Aristotle's deductive logic.

Plato's method of intellectual give-and-take, of dialogical exchange between opposing viewpoints, was relegated by many to an inferior role, and formal syllogistic reason officially accepted as the exclusive means of acquiring true knowledge. In place of argumentation between conflicting points of view Aristotle's followers held that definite methods should be developed that lead more or less directly and objectively to the truth. This laid a foundation for a long history of formal approaches to logic: logic largely divorced from context, from the conceptual problems of everyday life and dispute, and from the practical problems faced in an irrational, multi-faceted, deeply disguised world.

Philosophy, in contrast to science, maintained dialectic as its fundamental means of inquiry. Bring opposing philosophers together and it is usually necessary to test each of their views against the objections of the other. This process is at its roots informal, for there are no hard-and-fast rules or formulas for deciding how and when to object to an opposing philosophical position. This point can be generalized to any assessment of reasoning within one point of view by reasoning from another. When one is engaged in multi-dimensional argumentation, one disputes not only the proper answer to a question but often the nature of the question itself. One must often develop new ideas, not simply use established ones. Because the ground rules typically used by a perspective for settling its own questions come under dispute, one cannot use them to adjudicate differences. Informal give-and-take, not formal or procedural skills, become primary and crucial.

Unfortunately, however, the history of "informal" argumentation within philosophy has had no perceptible influence on common practice in everyday life. Philosophy remains an elite subject, largely abstracted from everyday life and practical concerns, at least in the minds of most non-philosophers. Hence the background logic of everyday beliefs and thought is rarely systematically explored, formally or informally. In everyday life it seems anything goes, any move one can get away with is maintained as legitimate thought.

The intellectual discipline most philosophers exercise seems irrelevant, pedantic, and unintelligible to most people tackling everyday issues.

Some time after philosophers retreated from the marketplace to their own inner circles, science began its slow but steady development. With it came the emergence of more narrowly defined technical disciplines with increasingly refined procedural approaches, testifying to the power of procedure in settling narrowly defined one-dimensional questions. By the 20th Century even some philosophers began a systematic attempt to make their work “scientific”. This meant to many that traditional philosophical argumentation should give way to precise and formalized method. General, comprehensive, philosophical skills seemed to many in need of replacement. Specialized, formal procedures, parallel to those used by the physical sciences, seemed necessary for philosophy itself. Philosophy, it was thought by many, should become specialized and scientific.

This demand that philosophy “professionalize” itself, and thus substitute disciplined *procedure* for freewheeling *dialectic* has diminished in the last 20 years. Likewise, educators increasingly recognize that education based on training in unconnected and isolated disciplines does not prepare one well for most of the issues one faces in everyday life. Furthermore, many concede that an overly narrow or fragmented education — the kind associated with an emphasis on specialization — engenders minds that compartmentalize and cannot easily adapt or generalize specialized understandings. There is also an increasing recognition that narrowly skilled persons may be as irrational in much of their lives as unschooled people tend to be.

Similarly, there is a growing recognition that the comprehensive thinking of a rational person cannot be equated with formal reasoning or the following of narrow rules and procedures. The crucial problems we face in the complexities of everyday life are increasingly recognized to be multi-faceted and resistant to single-discipline approaches.

Unfortunately, the fragmented schooling of today leaves little room for intellectual give-and-take or for interdisciplinary thinking. Too often questions which do not submit to disciplinary procedures are defined away or ignored. People leave school with few of the skills necessary to plumb the background logic of their own beliefs and thought, and so with few convictions, and little sense of the many contradictions that underlie their thoughts, words, and deeds. Most importantly, they lack the ability to strip off surface language and consider alternative ways to talk; little sense of what it would be to question basic labels and categories on the basis of which inferences and meanings are multiplied.

Most people unconsciously internalize the basic world view of their peer group and society with little or no conscious awareness of what it would be to rationally decide upon alternative ways to conceptualize everyday situations, persons, and events. Utterances, by themselves and others, are taken at their face value, or twisted by egocentric inclinations and vested interests. Similarly, most people are responsive to and awed by social rituals and the

trappings of authority, status, and prestige. They live their lives, as it were, in surface structures. They reduce complex situations to self-serving verbalizations. Thus, not surprisingly, most people do not know how to explicate and clarify an issue, how to enter sympathetically into points of view they have consciously or unconsciously rejected. Deeply insecure, most people are only concerned with injustices inflicted upon themselves personally or upon those they ego-identify with. They easily dehumanize those who thwart, or appear to thwart, their vested interests; they typically resent those whose beliefs conflict with their own. Their reasoning is often infantile at root.

It is tendencies, qualities, and dispositions such as these which give rise to the problem of "uncritical thought". They define the obstacles against which proposed critical thinking pedagogy must be measured. The problem of teaching critical thinking to essentially rational persons in a rational society differs greatly from the problem of teaching it to irrational persons in an unconsciously irrational society. In a society that uncritically defines itself and its social, political, economic, and personal rituals as civilized, rational, and free, there is no impetus to probe beneath the surface of public discourse. When the most fundamental logical structures, the most basic concepts, assumptions, beliefs, inferences, and category-decisions are typically unexpressed, unconscious, and irrational, then the problem of background logic assumes new proportions and the language games implicit in everyday life are in need of a fundamental reconstrual. A society incapable of exploring the roots of its own thought and action is not a free society, properly so called. People cannot be said to have freely chosen what they do not recognize to exist. The rest of this paper tries to make a modest contribution to reversing this incapacity, this inability to grasp the foundations and substructure of thought and action.

◆ *Some Principles*

1) All human behavior is intelligible to us finally only in terms of some background of concepts and distinctions, values and meanings, associations and assumptions, purposes and goals. This background is embedded ultimately, as Wittgenstein put it, in concrete forms of life — in behavior. Yet there is little awareness of the background logics in use. We absorb these structures uncritically through socialization. We are not encouraged to explicate and assess them.

2) Often background systems of meanings are misused or confused, resulting in a multitude of category mistakes in which persons radically mis-describe their experience. For example, because we commonly characterize ourselves as free, reasonable, just, and caring, we assume that our behavior matches what these words imply. In fact words often substitute for realities named by them. Fundamental contradictions or inconsistencies in our lives typically go unquestioned. Yet to this day no adequate the-

ory of background logic has been developed and the concept remains in need of foundational analysis and clarification.

3) The inferences we make depend upon the concepts we use. Some concepts, being more basic, are implicit in unmonitored inferences that shape our behavior in many domains of life. Three important categories of background logic influence our point of view or perspective as individuals: the natural language we speak (English, French, etc.), the technical languages we study in school (the language of biology, zoology, anthropology, mathematics, etc.), and the social practices that shape the meanings fostered in social situations, the sociocentric logic of our peer group or culture. Presently I will explain how we selectively internalize these networks to define our personal philosophy, our world view, the filter through which we interpret or construct our experience. It is crucial to recognize the differences between these background domains, particularly between the logic of natural languages and that of social behavior. Social behavior often incorporates ordinary language in distorting ways. We learn how to gain advantage by a systematic misuse of everyday language. Before we consider how everyday irrationalities are obfuscated in social practices, however, it is useful to set out four dimensions of background logic implicit in every instance of reasoning.

◆ *Four Dimensions of Background Logic*

Whenever we reason and express our thinking in words, there are four background dimensions of our thought which can be probed. Each of these dimensions expresses a different point of reference and a different order of analytic fact: 1) the dimension of our thinking *temporally prior to* what we have expressed, 2) the dimension of our thinking *logically presupposed by* what we have expressed, 3) the dimension of our thinking *implied by* what we have expressed, and 4) the dimension of our *thinking developed when our thinking is challenged* by others.

The basic idea behind these distinctions is simple. Before we formulate our reasoning on a subject we must decide on our purpose and how to describe what we think is the central issue or problem we are facing. We do some *pre-thinking*, in other words. Moreover, once we formulate our thinking there is a *substructure* to it — foundational concepts and assumptions — and a *direction* to it — implications and consequences unexpressed or not fully expressed. Finally, any line of reasoning inevitably *conflicts* with other lines of reasoning. The moves that can be made in exploring any of these conflicts are important “background logic” to understand when attempting to come to terms with any reasoning set out for our assessment. When we look into the background logic of a line of reasoning, therefore, we look into various domains presupposed by it: its pre-thinking, its substructure, its implications, and its possible defense in relation to conflicting lines of thought. We analyze background logic because we recognize that we must delve into these unexpressed domains to come to terms with that part of the thought which is expressed.

This approach can be likened to coming to understand new acquaintances. We learn something of their prior lives, something of their deeper thoughts, something of where they are headed, and something of how they respond to challenges from others. We use what people overtly say and do as guides or indicators of their “background”. We understand what people say or do not only by examining directly what they say or do, but also by finding out what lies in the background of what they say and do — how they came to these actions from their past, what is presupposed by these actions at the moment, where these actions take us if we follow them out to their logical consequences, and how these actions stand-up under critique from divergent standpoints.

THE DOMAIN OF PRE-THINKING

Before we reason with respect to an issue or goal, we must frame a goal or formulate an issue or problem. In other words, we must define a problem before we can look for a solution. The problem of deciding on one issue rather than another and of wording an issue one way rather than another goes a long way toward shaping reasoning with respect to it. If, in other words, all reasoning consists in an attempt to settle a question, then all reasoning presupposes an issue to settle, an issue shaped through the thinking of the reasoner. Before we argue with our spouses about some aspect of our marriage, we pre-think the situation or problem. We define it in some way, even if merely to define it as “problematic” rather than “unproblematic”. We often fail to notice that the situation did not present itself as a problem, our thinking (our “pre-thinking” in other words) concluded it to be so. Perhaps we began with a feeling of disquiet or frustration then leapt to the conclusion that this particular aspect of the other person or the relationship is problematic. The reasoning behind our interpretation of the original discomfort as arising from this particular thing is often unconscious. We are not aware of having reasoned at all, but seem to have perceived the root of the problem directly.

Or, to take a more scholastic example, consider the history of philosophy. It can fruitfully be viewed as a series of disagreements regarding how best to frame philosophical questions, and hence disagreements about what specifically is at issue. Philosophers, we could say, are intensely concerned with prior questions and prior reasoning. They are invariably concerned with the issues buried in the pre-thinking of actions, judgments, and decisions.

THE DOMAIN OF SUBSTRUCTURE

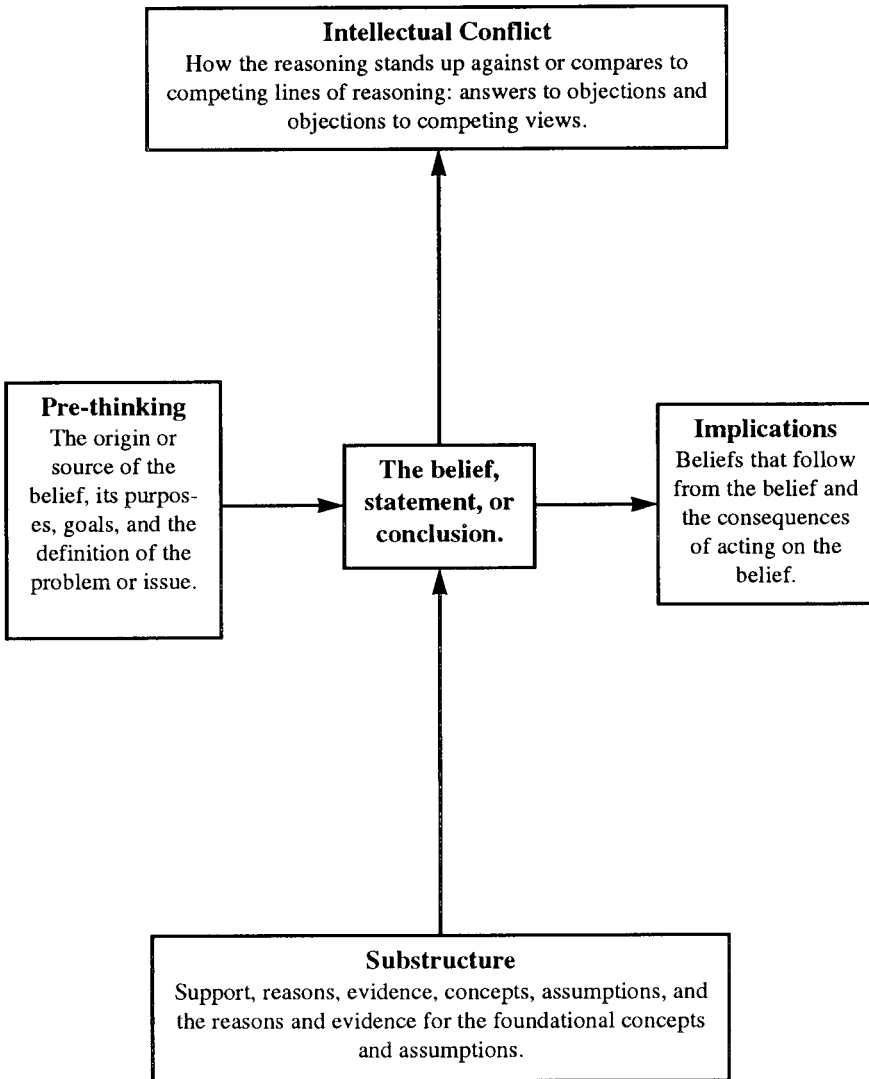
Just as the domain of pre-thinking spans the initial choices of goals, problems, and issues, the substructural domain spans the concepts and assumptions presupposed in the reasoning. It is not explicit in the manifest logic since few people explicitly discuss their assumptions in their expressed thought. They use but do not focus on them. We need to probe beneath a person’s reasoning to make their most fundamental concepts and assumptions explicit.

For example, to understand whether disagreements in manifest thought can be resolved, we must often use skills that probe the “inner” logic of that thought. We must often determine whether assumptions that underlie two lines of thought are reconcilable. We must often explore whether their fundamental ideas are consistent or inconsistent. For example, if an advocate of market capitalism is debating an economic issue — say, “Should the capital gains tax be reduced?” — with an advocate of democratic socialism, the basic concepts and assumptions of capitalism and socialism underlie the reasoning of the debaters. Under what conditions is “competition” more fruitful than “cooperation”, or “private interest” the best guide to “public interest”? Exploring issues such as these helps lay bare what I call the substructural dimension of thought. Of course how far we probe into these deeper, underlying issues depends upon our purpose in discussing the issue in the first place. Practical considerations may restrict us to a more superficial analysis, to discussing the manifest logic alone.

Once we begin to explore the concepts and assumptions presupposed in two lines of thought we are often driven to consider background facts and information, the empirical or experiential support for those concepts and assumptions. Hence, advocates of capitalism if pressed to defend the concept of competition will cite a variety of “facts” and “experiences” which they believe justify the concept. If pressed they will cite cases to argue for the concept of competition in *general*. Focus on surface facts — the facts cited in support of positions on the *original* issue — gives way to focus on “infralogical facts”, the empirical considerations advanced when probing into foundational concepts and assumptions. We begin talking about a current economic problem; we are then driven to talk about our foundational ideas and what supports them; we then move back to the original issue with a broader sense of perspective, a broader sense of the background logic of both positions.

THE DOMAIN OF IMPLICATIONS

Another domain of background logic we may need to consider, another way we may need to go beyond what is “manifest” in reasoning, is that of implications and consequences. Thinking not only has a pre-history and a substructure, it also has a *direction*. It leads us one way rather than another. It takes us from one set of beliefs to other beliefs that “follow from” the first. Furthermore, beliefs acted upon have consequences, for different things happen when we act on different beliefs. No one can fully explore the implications and consequences of his or her reasoning. We are often circumscribed by pressures to decide and act. Nevertheless implications and consequences are always implicit in what we say and do. Unfortunately few have been taught to recognize anything but the most obvious implications and consequences and many frequently don’t even recognize them.



Background Logic

There are four directions in which thought can be pursued.

THE DOMAIN OF INTELLECTUAL CONFLICT

A fourth domain of background logic for a line of reasoning is revealed when we set it into conflict with competing lines of thought. Coming to understand the strengths and weaknesses of reasoning in relation to opposing thought adds a further dimension to our grasp of the reasoning. Hence Kant's reasoning adds a dimension to our understanding of the logic of Descartes and Hume, while their reasoning contributes to our understanding of his. By the same token, different stages in the development of a discipline constitute background logic that contributes to the intelligibility and definition of each. We have a much clearer and well-developed sense of the assumptions of Newtonian physics since Einstein and quantum theory. Often then we conclude that we had not fully understood a point of view until it was superseded by another. However confident in a given line of reasoning, however attentive to the basic shaping of issues, however focused on our basic principles, concepts, and assumptions, however conscientious in explicating further implications and collateral consequences, we do not fully understand reasoning until we grasp its force in conflict with other reasoning.

◆ *Toward a Richer Understanding
of Background Logic*

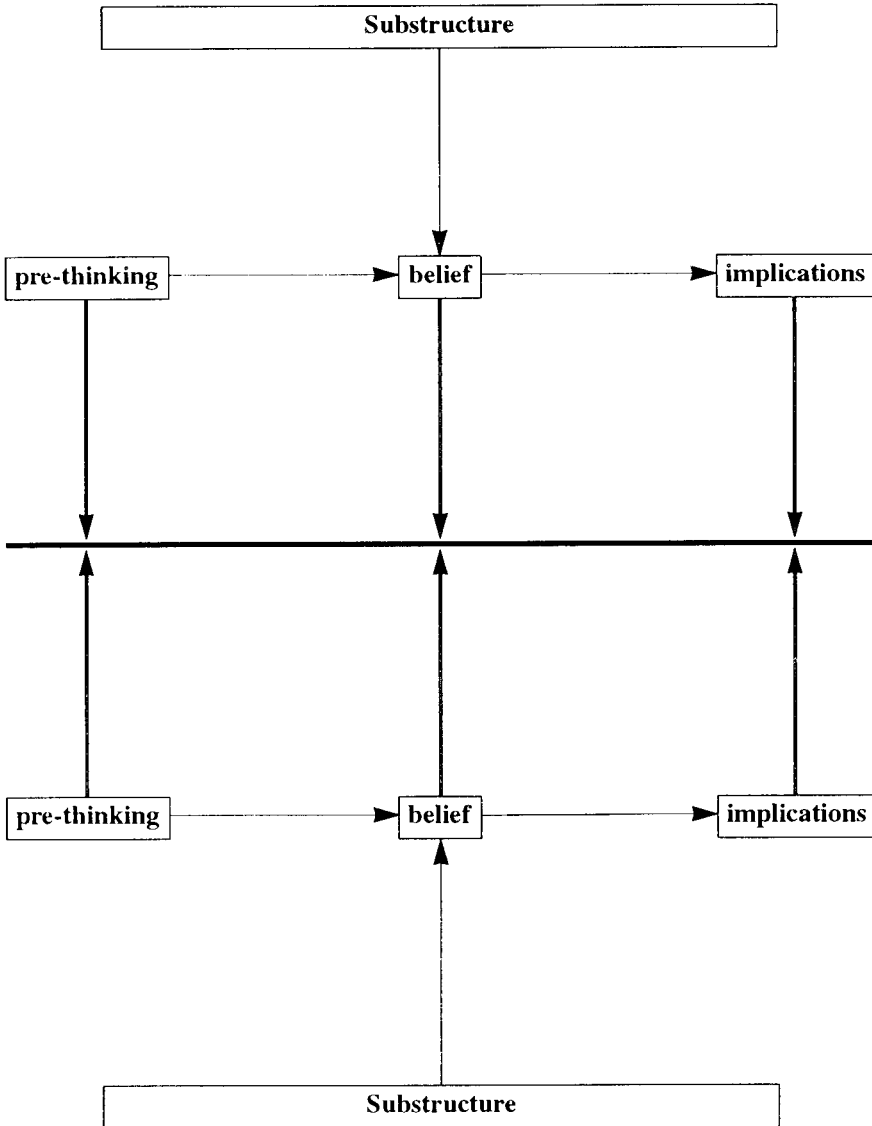
There is no reason, of course, why a portion, even a significant portion, of what is background logic in one context cannot become foreground or manifest logic in another. Indeed an essential characteristic of the critical mind is its passion to penetrate, explicate, and dialectically assess competing background logics. Once background logic is formulated it becomes part of manifest logic. Of course there is no way that one can formulate all the background logic for a line of reasoning, just as there is no way to describe all aspects of a person. We can go as far as we please, but we do not run out of further places to explore in all the directions that follow outward from our thought.

To begin to make effective use of our knowledge of background logic, we must develop a taxonomy of background logical distinctions in addition to the four dimensions above. For example, we must distinguish technical one-dimensional (monological) background logics, specified in fine detail, narrowly defined and procedurally developed, — for example, chemistry or algebra — from the background logic one unconsciously absorbs, for example, in the socialization process. Raised in the United States, we internalize different concepts, beliefs, and assumptions about ourselves and the world than we would have had we been raised in China or Iran, for example.

Furthermore, we must distinguish both technical and cultural background logics from the background logic of natural languages. Natural languages are a resource for virtually unlimited conceptual possibilities. They are much more flexible than technical languages. They are more neutral than the belief systems of cultural groups. As critical thinkers, we should be cog-

Dialectical Background Logic

To understand our thinking, we should appreciate the multiple dimensions in which it contrasts and sometimes conflicts with the thinking of others.



nizant, in other words, of the extent to which we are reasoning within the technical concepts of a specialized discipline, within the concepts implicit in our cultural relationships and experience, or within the concepts implicit in the language we speak. Of course, our reasoning might use concepts from all three of these dimensions simultaneously. Critical thinking requires sensitivity to the conceptual problems that may arise from this blending of domains. We will see something more of the importance of these distinctions in the next section of the paper.

◆ *Background Logic and Language Games*

The logic of the English language, and of all other known natural languages, should not be confused with the background logic of the egocentric mind or, for that matter, of the sociocentric mind. All human existence is necessarily multi-dimensional, not only because it involves beings whose nature and behavior can never be reduced to one category alone, but also because it involves some necessary intersection of personal, social, and linguistic background logics. Every interpretation of language usage, in other words, is a complex act in which we respond to cues that reflect three variously-related background logics, that of the egocentric individual, that of the social group, and that of the natural language of the user. Hence sometimes a communication is idiosyncratic, and its meaning can only be understood correctly if one understands something about the specific history or background of the speaker. For example, only if you understand something of the history of the conflict between two people, may you be able to recognize the significance of a given utterance. What may seem a compliment to an outsider may in fact be an insult.

Or, to highlight another background logic, it may be more illuminating to interpret what is said as a social or in-group performance, as a communication that presupposes familiarity with the ideology or rituals of a social group. For example, within a given society, though the leader may ask whether anyone disagrees with his or her view, it may be socially unacceptable to express such disagreement.

Or finally, one might best understand what is being said as expressing straightforwardly what is implied by the words as used by educated speakers of the language, irrespective of the society in which they were raised or of their personal idiosyncrasies. For example, a Japanese person, having learned proficient English in a Japanese school, may express his "Japanese" ideas in English. Language learning in itself does not transform the culture of the person speaking the language. It may be the occasion for such learning but does not necessarily include it.

Psychoanalysts aim at developing facility in decoding highly idiosyncratic utterances, and of disclosing thereby primitive assumptions and concepts which patients unconsciously hold about themselves, about people close to

them, or about the nature of their world. All the sophisticated defense mechanisms, so called, can consequently be viewed as various forms of irrational, but highly functional language games by which people fend off unpleasant reality and maintain their unconscious world views. Thus, for an individual, weight-loss may represent a "promised land" of unreal expectations of perfection, and unhealthy eating habits may represent the safety of the familiar, protection from sexual advances, an escape, or an excuse for problems, shortcomings, and unhappiness. Neither food nor weight have these meanings socially or in the natural language: food is sustenance, nutrition, relieves hunger, and can taste good or bad. These idiosyncratic meanings may develop in our minds without our awareness of their development.

The sociocentric or in-group background logic and associated language games are easier to decode than idiosyncratic background logic, since they are more public. If one belongs to the in-group, or if one has studied the world view or perspective presupposed in given social interactions, one can render these meanings explicit, as sociologists do. However, the nature of sociocentric logic, like egocentric logic, is not ordinarily formulated as such, and for good reason. If you paid enough attention to the language which maintains and expresses the inner dynamics of group power to construct a dictionary of basic meanings, you would have a text more like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*, than like the *Oxford English Dictionary*. You would find at least two layers of meaning at work simultaneously: meanings implied by surface verbalizations and, in contrast, meanings implied by behavior, with frequent contradictions between the two. An outsider or naive person would take the surface meaning to be the sole meaning. The sophisticated in-group member however would respond not simply to the surface meaning but also to latent cues and implied meanings. Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* presents numerous examples of these contrasting levels of meaning.

A business party, for example, though explicitly defined as a party, and with all of its external forms and trappings — hence a time to relax, have fun, socialize, let your hair down, be yourself without the pressure of having to meet expectations — is not a party in the normal sense. It imposes limitations on behavior, and has innumerable hidden rules and agendas. The poor, naive junior executives who behave appropriately for a more genuinely *social* gathering — friendly teasing, eccentric behavior, careless flirtations — will wonder why they do not get the promotions due them given their job performance. They don't realize that actions at parties *are* part of their job performance.

If there is a split within a society between two opposing behavioral logics, and so between two social groups or classes whose action embodies those logics, then the discrepancy between verbally and behaviorally implied meanings may become a subject for discussion, analysis, and critique. But as long as the "hypocrisy", "deception", or duplicity is more or less universal within a group, it is rarely noticed as such. Things go quite as expected, no disturbances highlight contradictions.

One can distinguish three different modes of living that represent different values and different skills of analysis with respect to decoding language usage within these background systems. Some tend to idealize social interactions, routinely accepting fostered impressions and surface language usage. These people, let us dub them naive idealizers, tend to accept the ideology of their society as descriptive of reality. Their horizons are conceptually and pragmatically limited. They are not adept at manipulating situations to their advantage, since they are minimally aware of the transactions going on beneath overt meanings and behaviors. They tend to be easily manipulated by those sensitized to the deeper levels of transaction.

Clearly, idealizers are not critical thinkers, since they cannot get beyond surface logic. The rationalizers of this world, on the other hand, penetrate the surface level and identify meanings and pay-offs. They function comfortably within meanings not disclosed to the naive. They get used to reading between the lines and to taking advantage of the opportunities for gaining advantage thereby. Those who design political campaigns, with their double messages and manipulative meanings, are an excellent case in point.

Being engaged in manipulations to further their self-interest, rationalizers tend to ignore the discrepancies and inconsistencies in the unspoken social ideology they use to their advantage. Having discovered how to play a game that advances their interests, they see no value in making the game public. Besides, like all humans, rationalizers need to maintain a positive view of themselves. This would be difficult if their manipulative use of other people were made explicit. To put this another way, uncritical idealization invites manipulation, and rationalizers take advantage of openings for power and gain. Idealizers, oblivious of the struggle for power and advantage lurking beneath the surface of social transactions are tailor-made for those seeking advantage. Rationalizers are empowered to get what they want through their deeper understanding of how to use social masks to obtain private ends.

This leaves one final life-style choice with respect to the socio-linguistic activities of everyday life: interesting one's self in making hidden dimensions of discourse explicit, striving to decode as fully as possible the real, deeper, meanings and contradictions in social transactions. I would dub this third choice of life-style that of the reasoner, the genuinely fairminded, critical thinker, the person striving to transform blind conformity into rational conviction. Admittedly a tiny minority, this group is a force for progressive social change and transformation.

Reasoners or fairminded critical thinkers, on this view, learn to see their behavior in terms of the tacit infrastructure of thinking that underlies it. This necessarily requires a willingness to undergo stress, to face personal and social contradictions, to develop rational passions, and, on the whole, to engage in self-transformation. On this view, no one can become fairminded and avoid the "hot" issues that underlie personal and social life, or the necessity of facing, indeed the necessity of *constructing*, some opposition to the social status quo. Most importantly, then, fairminded critical thinking requires a passion for

social disclosure not simply for abstract theorizing about social interaction, a passion for synthesis that takes into account the specific relations between, and the problems of overcoming, unformulated but lived, and formulated but un-lived logical systems. Insightful critical thinking requires understanding how language is systematically misused to achieve unexpressed, self-serving social and personal ends. Since such activity requires courage and concern for social justice, it is intrinsically a moral activity.

◆ *Synthesis*

At the same time that our everyday experience presupposes and reflects continual and spontaneous acts of logical synthesis that transcend any particular academic category, our conscious knowledge remains logically fragmented. Our everyday action is socially more sophisticated than our conscious thinking implies. We seem able to take into account at the behavioral level more than we analyze at the intellectual level. Consider this example taken from the research of Hans Toch and Henry Clay Smith:

Any perception is an awareness that emerges as a result of a most complicated weighing process an individual goes through as his mind takes into account a whole host of factors or cues. It must be emphasized at the very outset how tremendously complex even the simplest perception is — for example, the perception of a star point. For it can be demonstrated that, in perceiving a star point as such, a whole host of indications are weighed and integrated to give us our final experience ... the integration of all these factors is accomplished in a fraction of a second and is, more frequently than not, entirely unconscious.

This spontaneous weighing and totalizing process applies in everyday experience to our perception of individuals, groups, ideologies, religions, and any manner of complex or “simple” events. We instantly know how to respond to any number of people playing diverse social roles. Unfortunately, because most of our *de facto* skills of synthesis reflect background logical systems that are egocentric, sociocentric, or both, our skills of *rational* synthesis are not enhanced thereby. The paradox is that while our irrational mind easily uses background logical systems to integrate, synthesize, and structure behavior and events, our rational mind is still highly compartmentalized, reinforced by an academic world whose fundamental interest is narrow and non-synthetic, an interest in keeping disciplinary categories unintegrated and free of dialectical and interdisciplinary thought. The academic world, it would seem, is convinced that there is no significant loss from traditional academic specialization. But we cannot face situations in everyday life in the terms in which we are academically trained. The real world of human action is not compartmentalized into academic categories. The social, the psychological, the philosophical, and the economic are, in the real world, often so entwined that it makes no sense to try to explain any one dimension without explaining the roles of the others.

Consequently, we cannot turn to isolated disciplines for an answer to the problem of uncritical thought in everyday life. The only “neutral” background logic we have at our critical disposal is that of natural languages themselves. Academic or technical languages, in contrast, presuppose the compartmentalizations they themselves have created. We can ask, for example, whether what we in the U.S. call “democratic” is consistent with what the word ‘democratic’ implies in the English language. We can reflect upon whether modern elections with their well-funded campaigns and reliance on manipulative practices, are consistent with the belief that the people are ruling. The concepts of the English language allow us to abstract from ideologies, academic agendas, and social presuppositions.

We can take any word that expresses an important human value — friendship, love, intimacy, honesty, integrity, equality, justice — analyze what its use implies to educated speakers of the language, and then compare these verbal implications to the world as we find it. We can learn to resist assuming that social situations commonly described by value-laden words really do merit the characterization. To do so requires a disciplined awareness of the difference between what is linguistically implied by given words in the English language and what is commonly described as such within social groups that happen to use English to talk about events in their everyday life. Unfortunately, however, few people can distinguish those uses of language which twist or distort social reality from those which reveal it.

We need to forge critical thinking abilities that focus on a command of background logics. Special intellectual skills are required, both destructive and constructive: on the one hand ability to question the on-going stream of fostered definitions and social conceptualizations, choices of basic concepts and categories that uncritically shape our daily thought and experience, and on the other hand, ability to synthesize across these concepts and categories so that our “totalization”, our summing up of people, facts, and events, represents characterizations to which we can give, and do give, conscious assent. We have a responsibility to educate people to have a disposition to see social life as a whole, especially its living contradictions and hypocrisies, to look beyond surface meanings and compartmentalized academic categories, to see not only how everyday life is structured but how it might be structured were we to commit ourselves to live by the moral values we have long verbally espoused.

◆ *Some Unresolved Questions*

Since all reasoning, all thought, presupposes questions at issue, and since fundamental questions require critical explication of background logic, we need a fuller exploration and specification of what this entails, especially in contrast to discipline-specific training. We need to decide how to frame background logical questions and how to make this deeper mode of questioning socially acceptable. We must not forget that the social world is a real world, one whose background logic transforms the lives and minds of people. When Background logic is left in the background, unformulated, we are dominated

rather than freed by the logic of our own thought and social transactions. If we think egocentrically and sociocentrically, we stifle our capacity for insight, intellectual freedom, and self-command.

This brings us to an important question, a question to which our concrete lives provide an answer, even if our words do not: is it rational to be rational in an irrational world? Less paradoxically, is it rational to give up the advantage for personal gain provided by the many who allow themselves to be manipulated? One can gain status, prestige, money, power, easy self-satisfaction, and ego-gratification only if one's actions at least *appear* to validate socially dominant views. Is it worthwhile to make contradictions and hypocrisies public to achieve abstract goals such as intellectual and moral integrity? The wisdom of the world, the answer suggested by those most heavily engaged in it, would seem to be,

No, it is not worth it. To be rational is to be a successful rationalizer, accepting and using the ascendant social ideology, to be skilled in personal self-deception, able to question fostered appearances only when personally advantageous, and if anything else, adept in helping your friends and hurting your enemies.

Socrates and Plato might have won the academic debate against sophistry but history demonstrates they did not win the battle for the hearts and minds of people. The everyday world of social action is shot through with sophistry and hypocrisy.

◆ *Summary & Conclusion*

Academic disciplines with their compartmentalization of thought fail to provide a plausible approach to everyday uncritical thought. We live as inferential beings enveloped in unformulated systems. The logical systems of the schools frequently have little to do with the logic we live. We are often controlled and confused by, and consequently have never consciously assented to, the inner logic we ourselves create in our behavior. We don't know how to get perspective, how to critically analyze and synthesize what lies behind our behavior. In contrast, our inner world, the world of our self-constituted experience is heavily synthesized, but unconsciously, egocentrically, and sociocentrically so. We have not yet developed insight into the importance of background logic. We have not yet learned how to probe it and bring it under our intellectual self-command. We have not yet grasped how unformulated dimensions of thought and action dominate us. We are so fixated on action, on the agendas of our lives, that we have not yet interested ourselves in the thought embedded in our action. To come to a deeper understanding of the unformulated thinking buried in our lives, we must make background logic accessible to our conscious thought. Instead of impugning the motives of others, we should learn how to explore the background meanings that make social and personal contradictions and hypocrisies intelligible.

In any case, a fundamental distinction must be drawn between the logic of natural languages and egocentric or sociocentric uses of them. Because of his failure to note the latter two, Wittgenstein failed to distinguish irrational from rational language games. He failed to see that many socially common uses of words are not innocuous. He failed to see how social groups systematically misuse language for self-serving ends. He failed to see, for example, how often we “confuse” concepts to obscure our own hypocrisies, while calling attention to the hypocrisies of our opponents, the hypocrisies of the “enemy”. He failed to recognize the need to probe the unformulated dimensions of our lives to see patterns that reveal who we really are, how much we live three significantly distinct forms of life: that of the idealizer, that of the rationalizer, and that of the reasoner.

If there are idealizers in the world, given to idiosyncratic speech acts, presumably with thoughts to match, it follows that they live in narrow, self-enclosed worlds, highly vulnerable to manipulation and frustration. If there are rationalizers in the world, given to sociocentric speech acts, presumably again with thoughts to match, it follows that, whatever advantages they gain, they cannot fully assent to the character of their own behavior. If there are fairminded thinkers in the world, with a passion to transcend egocentric or sociocentric life worlds and the irrational language games which define them, it follows that they would strive to engage in discourse which does not presuppose egocentric or sociocentric concepts and values, that they would use words with a rich sense of their implications. If these three life worlds are in some sense logical possibilities for every person, then interpretation of language usage requires an ability to distinguish egocentric, sociocentric, and rational discourse. Because these distinctions cannot be made except in reference to background logical considerations that may not be immediately apparent, and because those background logics may be hidden and denied, the problem of analysis and explication is difficult.

To become a reasoner or fairminded critical thinker requires skills of analysis and synthesis as yet underdeveloped. We get little help from the academic world with its pervasive fragmentation and specialization. We need new skills in the art of totalizing experience, and in the dialectical testing of competing ways to conceptualize experience. We need to see that human social life is still at an uncritical stage of development. Full fledged critical thought is nevertheless possible for the future. It has not yet become socially acceptable except in circumscribed ways under constraining conditions. We cannot yet embrace it. We do not yet know *how* to embrace it. We have not yet learned to live as rational persons.

We need more knowledge of the logic of questions, of background systems of thought, of the power and inner attraction of egocentrism and sociocentrism, and of how to combat the “wisdom of the world”, which, till now, meets emerging critical thought with disdain, ignores or suppresses it, and thus answers with a resounding “No!” the question, “Is it rational to be rational in an irrational world?”