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Why Think? By PHILLIP GRANT

PERHAPS Rodin's statue, *The Thinker*, has done more harm than we can guess. It must have given many of us a false idea of what thinking is. For it is commonly believed that thinking solves problems, and that all one must do to become a mental giant is to sit quietly, elbow on knee, chin on hand, and presto! brilliant revelations swarm through the brain.

But that of course isn't so. Millions of men scattered all over the earth, are sitting elbow-on-knee and chin-on-hand today, and the more poverty-stricken the country is, the more chin-on-hand thinkers will be found in it. In this country, during hard times millions of men, out of work, sit like *The Thinker* in front of country post-offices, on city park benches, along the waterfront, and in cheap saloons, wasting their talents and lives, thinking.

Nor should the reader be astonished or shocked. For thinking, even the best, does not discover answers. Only reasoning can do that.

Just for fun, let's go back about a hundred years; and let's pretend we are in Rodin's studio during one of the days he spent working on his *Thinker*. In the middle of the room on a pedestal, a muscular, low-browed model poses in the posture that has since become so well known. And, let us further imagine we are able to hear the model's thoughts, and while we're at it let us also imagine that the French model thinks in a language we understand: English.

Needless to say, any one of millions of thoughts might be going on in that interesting head. Perhaps the model—let's call him Thinkie—is griping: a form of thinking especially popular among army men.

"I wish this crazy genius would hurry and finish his statue. Either that or put a little coal on the fire. It's drafty in here and I have to sit around here naked. Besides I'm hungry—and I'm getting pretty tired of sausages every day. Anybody who thinks a model's life is a model life is just plain nuts." On the other hand, Thinkie may be a dreamer; a fashioner of ideas that are not necessarily true.

Thinkie may be a disciple of Lasalles—a Socialist attracting much attention in Germany. In which case he may think bitterly: "There you have the lousy capitalist system. Here I sit, day after day, freezing and hungering, and for what? A few sous—sausage money. But the great Rodin—he is the famous artist—they stuff him with the most expensive foods. Only the finest wines are fit for him. But where do I come in? Does anyone care whose body made *The Thinker* possible? Does anyone ask my name? No! All I do is the disagreeable work while he, the genius—the bloated exploiter of free Frenchmen—he chisels his marble, and plays with his clay. Just wait until I get my models' union organized!"

Such mental energy accomplishes nothing, and discovers no accurate answers. Reasoning, on the other hand, does. With reason, scientists have discovered many of nature's most cleverly hidden secrets, and have harnessed many of her forces. While man is the only animal that



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

is able to reason, not very many of us want to. Perhaps it is because reasoning is too much like hard work. Unless it is watched carefully, pulled back into line whenever it goes off on a day-dreaming or guessing spree, the mind will scamper off from one idea to another with all the abandon of a child turned loose in an unguarded toy store.

Such erratic thinking, generally known as going off on tangents, is Reason's Enemy Number One because it makes us appear to be bigger dopes than we really are. Anyone who has ever been present at an advertising conference, or has listened in on a discussion over the bar in the corner saloon, is certainly familiar with the tangent.

"Say, you're a lawyer—what do you think of the 'Minimum Perspiration Bill' that Congress just put through? Do you think it'll really stop perspiration?"

"Well-I-I. It's just old-fashioned politics."

"It's a slap at the big interests. The soap and deodorant manufacturers won't like it."

"I don't know about that. Did you ever stop to figure out the profits on a dime cake of soap? Four-tenths of a cent!"

"The mark-up on corn-cob holders is even worse. And yet, according to a friend of mine whose father runs one of the biggest corn farms in Kansas, corn will be sky-high this year."

"Well, what do you expect? With all the subsidies and cartels . . ."

"Yeah—those cartels especially. Just how do those cartels work?"

"Don't you know? Well, I'll explain it. It's just like—well, it's like Malcolm Floop wrote in his column—a couple of weeks ago."

"Oh, I never read Floop anymore. He's terrible."

"Who, Floop? He's got a terrific circulation. They even read his column in Boston."

"Boston. What a town that is. I paid twenty-four for a dinner there and when I got to the hotel I was sick as a dog. That's Boston."

"I don't know. You can't beat Boston for seafood. We used to get a whole lobster, coffee and pie for seventy-five cents—including the tip. Of course that was some time ago."

"Oh—that was before the war. Looks like we might have war with Russia."

It may indeed be said that those who took part in the discussion were not pretending to solve momentous problems—that they were just ordinary people with nothing in particular to solve. But anyone who has listened to the various "forum" programs, such as Town Meeting of the Air or Town Hall will agree that those who participate in these programs—Congressmen, newspapermen, labor-union leaders, industrialists—are just as scatterbrained as ordinary people.

Traipsing off on a tangent is only one enemy of clear reasoning. Enemy Number Two is our instinctive love for double-talk: for meaningless words. An example of our strange love for words—even those that are absolutely meaningless—is the number of students who have memorized "Jabberwocky" from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.

Another type of meaningless words that found favor with intelligent humans was the recent double-talk as it was developed on Broadway, such as, "How soon do you think it will be before Bob Hope sacatans a prymus before he ferry dads?"

But the truth is that we take many forms of double-talk seriously; and not all of it is harmless fun. We cannot deny that our Congressmen, and members of state legislatures, are supposed to be doing important work; work that has to do with the welfare, prosperity, and often the life and death of the people. And yet, if we turn to any page of the Congressional Record at random, we are unlikely to find a paragraph of anything but double-talk. We forgive our statesmen because we have long ago realized that Congressmen do their best.

Economists are great double-talkers. Recently some of the country's best-known business leaders and economists formed themselves into the National Planning Association. After spending some months with their heads together—to solve the world's economic problems—they came up with a report. One sentence, at least as intelligent as any other portion, states: "If orderly price reductions do not become more general, business must share the blame for the slump that is sure to come."

The only difference between these words from the lips of our economists and "Twas brillig, and the slithy toves" from *Jabberwocky*, is that the economists used words with which we are more familiar. So far as meaning goes, there is little difference. For example what does "an orderly price reduction" mean?

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If it means everyone reducing prices at the same time, that can only be done by a business depression—or "slump." What, exactly, did the economists mean by the word "business?" Does it mean the neighborhood radio store, the tool maker, and Radio Corporation of America; the big chain super markets and the corner grocery store; the huge sugar refineries and the little ice cream parlor; the big distillers, the moonshiner and Joe's Bar and Grill? And if it is true—and the records say it is—that the "slump" causes the "orderly price reductions" how can it be the other way around as the economists imply? And how can business be blamed for a "slump that is sure to come"?

The Communists and the Socialists are expert at double-talk. They used to run around yelling "down with the capitalistic system." What is the capitalistic system? Obviously it is a system of producing goods with the aid of capital. Since capital includes factories, farms, machinery and tools, we might think that the Commies meant to do away with such things; but they didn't. In Russia they are very fond of capital; so much so that at the end of World War II they moved whole factories and machines out of conquered Germany and into Russia. What they really meant was — down with the idea that the people who produce capital should own it; it should belong to whichever government has enough power to grab it. "Down with the profit system" is another popular slogan. Here again, the phrase doesn't mean that Communists are against profits. It is merely a question of who shall have them; the many who produce the profits, or the self-appointed prophets who enslave the many.

Our "democratic" statesmen and industrialists use double-talk just as capably. What do they mean when they speak of "free enterprise"? Do they mean, as the words suggest, business that is free? Do they mean a business man should be free to buy and sell wherever he pleases — the buyer and seller to agree upon prices — government bureaucrats to keep their noses out of it?

That would mean free trade: no tariffs! Also no subsidies to farmers, no patents for industry, no pegging the price of silver and of gold; no price controls; and especially no taxes, because the power to tax is the power to control. If that is free-enterprise we may be sure our statesmen and the Association of Manufacturers do not want any part of it; and yet all "democracies" insist they believe wholeheartedly in "free enterprise."

There are many other well-known examples of double-talk. We hear them at labor union rallies and at Chamber of Commerce dinners; at political meetings and at trade conventions. The Republicans' "Protective tariffs mean prosperity;" the Democrats' "Production makes high wages;" the Socialists' "You have nothing to lose but your chains;" and the economists' "If capital doesn't provide 60 million jobs, government must"—are all just as meaningless as "Jabberwocky." The only probable difference is that "Jabberwocky" doesn't pretend to make sense.

Even when a boy whispers "I love you" into the willing ear of the lady of his heart, he is using double-talk. If he isn't, and the girl understands, why does she always answer, "Do you mean you want to marry me—or what?"