

Thinking

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Bertrand Russell was brutal, but he was also honest when he reputedly said:

Most people would rather die than think; many do.

What he revealed was also true: thinking is hard. He was not the first person to say it. He won't be the last. We all know it.

We understand what Bertrand Russell said when we try to understand the government's accounts, a budget speech, or a newspaper claim that “we cannot afford social security”. We are challenged.

We also appreciate the comment when we try to reconcile our experience of life with the stories politicians tell us about growth, deficits, and the need for austerity.

The reason is simple: thinking is an act of resistance.

Thinking resists our biology. The brain is designed to conserve effort. Genuine analysis takes energy. It requires us to hold competing ideas in our minds, to test evidence, to admit doubt. That is tiring. So we fall back on habits and stories. We reach for metaphors like the household budget myth I have referred to in this morning's video because they are easy. They require no effort. They feel true. But they are wrong. A currency-issuing government is not a household, and pretending it is has done immense damage to the UK by justifying cuts to public services that people rely upon. This claim is thoughtless.

Thinking also resists identity. When we think seriously, we risk discovering that we are mistaken. Worse, we risk discovering that our tribe is mistaken, or that our favourite newspaper has misled us, and that "our" party told us what turned out to be comforting lies. It could also be that we discover that our own interests may conflict with fairness. That is painful. So we avoid it. We defend what we already believe.

This is why bad economic ideas persist. It is easier to blame migrants, or claim that public servants are lazy, or insist that growth will fix everything, than to confront the

reality that inequality is structural and that policy choices created it. It is easier to believe that public spending must be cut than to accept that the real issue is who benefits from our economy and who does not.

Thinking also resists certainty, and humans crave certainty. We want the world to be simple. We want clear answers. We want reassurance that everything will be fine if only we do whatever we are told. Reality does not oblige. Reality is messy. It is uncertain. It demands judgement in conditions of incomplete knowledge.

That is why people reach for slogans. “There is no money left.” “We must live within our means.” “Growth will solve all our problems.” Those phrases shut down thought. They offer emotional closure. They remove doubt. But they also remove truth.

Thinking resists power. That is because institutions very rarely reward those who question their assumptions. Media rewards outrage and simplicity. Politics rewards confidence over honesty. Neoliberal economics thrived not because it described reality but because it offered convenient stories for those who benefited from them. It told us markets are always efficient, governments are always wasteful, and inequality is the price of progress. Those ideas were repeated until they felt natural. And when people tried to question them, they were dismissed as unrealistic.

Thinking also demands moral courage. To think seriously about political economy is to ask who benefits and who pays. It is to ask whether we care about people we do not know. It is to recognise that economies exist to sustain life, not the other way round. That means maintaining the capital that really matters: human, social, environmental and physical. It means accepting that social security is not charity but a collective guarantee that none of us is abandoned. Those are moral choices. And they are uncomfortable.

Thinking is slow as well. It requires time, reflection, and revision. But we live in a culture that rewards instant reaction. Social media demands opinions before facts. News cycles last hours. Politicians talk in slogans. So careful thought is crowded out by noise.

And yet thinking is essential. Without it, we drift into the politics of hate, where easy answers replace honest analysis, and blame replaces care. Without it, we accept the myth that public services must decline because “there is no money”, even while wealth accumulates in the accounts of the wealthy. Without it, we accept stagnation as inevitable when it is the product of policy.

So what should we do?

We could make thinking easier to do. We might teach critical reasoning. We can explain how government money actually works. We should tell better stories about what an economy is for. We are capable of building institutions that reward honesty and care.

Facilitating these processes is why I spend time on the Funding the Future glossary.

It is why I talk about sectoral balances, capital maintenance, and the myths of taxpayers' money.

None of this is because jargon is clever, but because understanding liberates us. It shows that alternatives exist, that austerity was a choice, and that investment in people, homes, health and the climate is possible, meaning that a politics of care is practical.

Thinking is hard. But refusing to think is harder still, because it leaves us trapped in systems that do not work and stories that are not true. The anger we see in Britain today is, in part, the result of years of not thinking honestly about how our economy operates and who it serves.

If we want a better future, we must do the difficult thing. We must think, not as an academic exercise, but as a moral commitment to each other because only when we understand our world can we change it, and only when we care about each other can that change be worth having.