

Debate Ammunition: Stand and Stare

Published: June 13, 2026, 6:13 am

The Richard J Murphy YouTube Channel

Debate Ammunition

The need to stand and stare

Funding the Future | June 2026

Today's topic

We need to learn to stand and stare if we are to innovate.

The video that this Debate Ammunition [supports is available here.](#)

The Core Argument

We have built a culture in workplaces, schools, universities, charities, and government that treats constant activity as a virtue and reflection as idleness. This is a serious and costly mistake: great ideas emerge from observation and contemplation, not from relentless busyness. Until the UK stops repeating failed approaches and takes the time to question its assumptions, ask what actually matters, and redesign what it does, it will remain trapped in the consequences of its own unexamined decisions.

The Argument Structure

Step 1 — The Cultural Diagnosis: We have been taught to equate activity with value and reflection with laziness. The instruction to stop staring out of the window is not incidental; it is a foundational message of our working and educational culture, and it is wrong.

Step 2 — The Poet's Evidence: W H Davies's poem 'Leisure' poses the question that organises the entire argument: what is a life worth if it is so full of care that there is no time to stand and stare? The poem celebrates observation, contemplation, and the slow

noticing that makes ideas possible. Richard uses it not as decoration but as evidence that this concern is neither new nor eccentric.

Step 3 — The Institutional Damage: The same anti-reflective bias appears everywhere: employers demand measurable outputs, funders require predetermined targets, even universities reward activity over thought, and charities are driven by performance metrics. The consequence is that experimentation is discouraged, assumptions go unchallenged, and mistakes are repeated because no one has the space to ask whether the rules themselves are right.

Step 4 — The Political Prescription: Politicians are the most extreme case: trapped in constant action, blundering between issues, accepting inherited rules without question, and never stopping to explore whether something better exists. Richard's prescription is direct: the UK must stop, reflect, look out of the window, ask what really matters, and redesign. Without that, there is no chance of genuine change.

Their Argument → Your Rebuttal

They Say Your Response

Organisations and governments have to produce results. They cannot pay people to stare out of windows. Accountability requires measurable outputs. Accountability for measurable outputs is exactly how failed policies keep being repeated. When you cannot pause to ask whether the targets themselves are right, you optimise efficiently for the wrong ends. The result is not productivity; it is institutionalised error.

In competitive markets, businesses and nations that pause to reflect will simply fall behind those that keep moving. This is the logic that has produced fifteen years of austerity, a broken public realm, and stagnant productivity. Constant motion without reflection is not a competitive advantage; it is how you run into the same wall repeatedly at increasing speed.

This is a nice idea, but it is a luxury. Most workers, and most governments, simply do not have the time. The absence of thinking time is a political choice, not an economic necessity. We find time for endless reporting, targets, and performance management. The question is whether those activities are actually more valuable than thinking, and the evidence strongly suggests they are not.

Poetry and personal anecdote are not a policy prescription. What specifically is being

proposed? The prescription is explicit: stop repeating failed approaches, ask whether current rules are right, and redesign what we do. The fact that this requires defending against charges of vagueness is itself evidence of the problem. We have so entirely lost the habit of questioning assumptions that the suggestion to do so sounds impractical.

The One-Liner

“We keep repeating failed approaches because we have forgotten how to stop, question our assumptions, and ask whether what we are doing makes any sense at all.”

Further Reading

Post Date What it covers

[Thinking](#) February 2026 Argues directly that slow, reflective thinking is being crowded out by a culture of instant reaction and that the consequences for democracy and economic policy are severe.

[Leisure](#) April 2025 Richard shares the W H Davies poem that anchors this video and explains why its sentiments remain urgent.

[Think it possible that you may be mistaken](#) March 2025 On the Quaker practice of pausing to question one's own certainties: directly relevant to the case for building reflection into political and economic life.

[Thinking time](#) January 2026 Richard explains why he needs time to gather his thoughts before reacting to fast-moving events, and how prior reflection enables better analysis under pressure.

[The politics of care in 2026](#) January 2026 Sets out the broader intellectual project of which this video is a part: creating space for free thinking as a precondition for political and economic renewal.

[Neoliberalism is dying: what comes next?](#) January 2026 Argues that the failure of constant-action, targets-driven neoliberal governance is now visible and that the only route forward requires rethinking foundational assumptions.

[Reflecting](#) July 2025 Personal reflection on the need for downtime, endorsed by the blog community, illustrates why Richard practises what he preaches on the value of standing and staring.