



Think, Blink and the Big Stink:

A Review of Michael LeGault's *Think!*

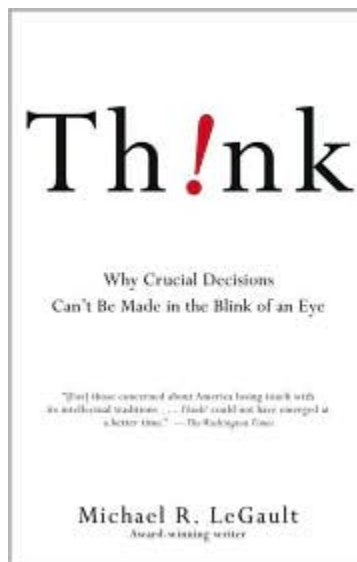


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This article also appears on, www.22cplus.blogspot.com

Michael LeGault's *Think* is quite a readable book. Its strength is the very personable voice of the author, and one is never left in any doubt about his viewpoint. There are no politically- correct half-truths here! Indeed, one of LeGault's favourite criticisms is of politically-correct culture itself, which prevents genuine critique of particular subject areas. Multi-perspectivism grants the illusion that all worldviews and opinions have an equal value, or an equal degree of truth. This is clearly not the case.



LeGault also argues that the internet is encouraging sloppy thinking, because it permits the expression of poorly thought-out information and opinion, with little need for the discipline of research and rational thought. This is a perfectly valid point, and one that I'm sure many of us would agree with. It is also perfectly true that there is a need for careful and systematic analysis in a wide variety of domains, and that sometimes this does not happen, or is not permitted to happen.

The upshot of *Think* is that western liberal democracies are allowing a proliferation of “free thinking”, but much of it is poorly thought out. This includes the immediate intuitive decision making, epitomised by Malcom Gladwell’s bestselling *Blink*. Any decision of real worth emerges from careful thinking, argues LeGault, and Gladwell’s philosophy is just part of the increasingly lazy thinking that is bedeviling America today.

With any public policy, there will often be numerous opposition groups coming forward, and with each having an equal right to protest, it makes progress extremely problematic. As an aside, this is one of the prime arguments being put forward for those who are trumpeting the recent success of Chinese authoritarianism. Largely free of the hassles of democratic accountability, Chinese authorities can proceed to do as they wish with little need, as the system is extremely hierarchical, and the public often has little power to protest. Personally, I’d prefer the clumsiness of the democratic system to the inhumanity of authoritarianism.

One of the prime weaknesses of this book is LeGault’s failure to distinguish amongst the differing functions of intuitive, emotional and logical/rational cognition. The author uses the label “intuitive” to cover a host of mental processes, many of which are actually quite different. These include emotional ranting, shoot-from-the-hip loud-mouthing, lazy thinking, opinionated thinking, politically correct thinking, and gut feelings. These are not the same thing that Malcolm Gladwell writes about in *Blink*. Gladwell presents a case that the self-organising function of mind can be employed in some circumstances to

circumvent the need for thinking through a problem. For example, Gladwell refers to “thin-slicing”, where the mind takes a snapshot of a situation, and unconsciously extrapolates the big picture. This occurs unconsciously for all of us; and it is true that some decisions can be made while employing this fuzzy approximation tendency of the human mind.



Michael R. LeGault

Of particular interest to me are the cognitive functions surrounding holistic and mystical perception, which have been well-recorded for thousands of years. This is what I refer to as “Integrated Intelligence”, where the mind connects with domains of information beyond its physical limits. It grants a kind of immediate, non-linguistic, non-rational perception which ostensibly operates the same way as Gladwell’s intuitive thinking. This may not be mainstream scientific thought, but there is vast anecdotal evidence for it, and a host of evidence from fringe areas of science as well. While I am not surprised that neither LeGault or Gladwell discuss the *application* of this kind of intuitive thinking, it does concern me that they fail to address it in any way. Integrated Intelligence forms a crucial component in the history of thought in both eastern and western traditions - not to mention Middle Eastern, Indigenous and other cultures right across the world. LeGault’s (and Gladwell’s) failure to understand this aspect of intuitive “thinking” is a case of western paradigm blindness.

Intuitive modes of thinking, whether they be Gladwell’s more mundane “blinking”, or the more mystical Integrated Intelligence, have their legitimate domains; just as logic, analysis and empirical enquiry have their legitimate domains. The key is appreciating which way of knowing to use in which situation. LeGault appears to be completely unaware of such distinctions.

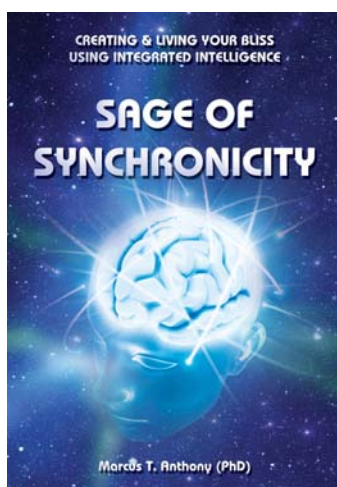
In the end, it can be seen that LeGault’s presentation is heavily biased. It is quintessentially male (feminism is one of his favourite targets), western and Anglo in predisposition. It thus fails to convince. LeGault does not rise above the emotive

polemic of the very thinking he critiques. He gets caught in the heavily binary thinking of dominant western thought, and is so busy attacking and defending, that he leaves little time for genuinely novel perception of the problem, nor to examine the issues at a greater depth. A more nuanced approach would permit a critique of western logic systems, and especially what Edward de Bono refers to as “the thinking trap”. Perhaps a better way forward from the current impasse of multiple competing voices in developed cultures, is not to beat each other over the head, but to find a place within ourselves to be able to observe the machinations of thought without become heavily attached to them. This is somewhat Buddhist, but would allow us to put away the blunt instruments which we have used to beat each other over the head, and begin to see things with greater detachment.

Though I found it entertaining, and LeGault correctly indentifies the limitations of certain kinds of emotive and lazy thinking, his book *Think* does not take us forward; but rather backward to a less reflective time, when the strong white man ruled the landscape

(and I say that as a rather big white guy). *Think* fails to be deeply reflective of the nature of thought itself, nor does it appreciate the limitations of “thinking” as defined by dominant white culture. Unfortunately for Michael LeGault and conservative thinkers everywhere, the world has changed far too much for us to return to the narrowly-defined rationalism of mid-twentieth century western civilisation. And the changes will only keep coming. Just look East, and you’ll see a whole civilisation is emerging to challenge the west; and I can only hope the thinking which takes place on either side of the divide will feature genuine depth.

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Have you ever felt you had a greater calling, but been unable to put your finger on what it is?

Marcus T. Anthony's Sage of Synchronicity is now available. Find out more about the book at

www.sageofsynchonicity.weebly.com .

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