

Lesson 3: Power to Think: Habits of Excellent Thinking

PURPOSE

To acquire excellent habits of thinking.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of using the power to think in an excellent way.
2. Recognize conditions for correct thinking and examples of the most common fallacies.
3. Recognize the fallacies in Nazi propaganda.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Five Fallacies table
- Joseph Goebbels, “Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose”
- The Fallacies Exercise
- [Video](#): Introduction to Propaganda

VOCABULARY

- Propaganda: communication based on biased or misleading information, which aims to deceive the audience to promote a certain, often political, agenda

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Recall how societies can either treat persons as subjects or as objects. Consider examples of how both prisoners and guards treated others as either subjects or objects in the concentration camp.

Step 2: Recall that the power to think is a specifically human power which distinguishes humans from all other beings. Human beings use this power in different areas of everyday life: in education, work, decision making, and action. However, it is good to be aware of the fact that sometimes, people can be wrong in their judgments and can be convinced of things that are not true. Many times in life, one faces doubt of whether something is really true or whether it simply appears to be true. This happens when one holds an opinion, and their friend thinks the opposite is true; or, when someone believes they are good at something, but maybe their sibling disagrees. Other times, it is common to be confronted with a difficult decision and to be unsure about what to decide.

Introduce a quote by the Scottish writer Samuel Smiles to analyze the importance of the power to think:

Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
 Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
 Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
 Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.³

Ask the students to comment on the quote and share their thoughts on it.

Explain that how one uses the power to think influences almost all other aspects of their lives, from their actions to decisions to habits, and finally, their “destiny” as Samuel Smiles calls it. The far-reaching effect of the power to think well is itself a testament to how important it is.

Step 3: Explain that using our power to think excellently, should reflect two conditions:

It has to be based on true facts.
 It has to be logically consistent.

If either one of these conditions is not satisfied, one’s thinking will result in error. Show the following diagram to help students visualize conditions of excellent thinking:

		LOGIC	
FACT		Logically coherent/ correct	Logically incoherent/ incorrect
Factually correct/ true	Factually & Logically Correct	Factually Correct & Logically Incorrect	
Factually incorrect/ untrue	Factually Incorrect & Logically Correct	Factually Incorrect & Logically Incorrect	

There are many possible errors one can make when thinking that can hamper the very process of thinking well. These errors are called fallacies. Hand out the Five Fallacies Table with students so they can follow along with the explanations.

3 Stephen R. Covey: 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 2004.

Below, some of the most common fallacies.

1. BASING THINKING ON MERE OPINION, RUMOR OR PREJUDICE:

For example, this type of fallacy would occur if someone argued that women shouldn't have the right to vote since they are clearly inferior. This is an error in reasoning since there is no proof that women are inferior to men, and because of this, it is an ungrounded opinion.

2. APPEAL TO EMOTIONS (*AD PASSIONES*):

This fallacy often occurs when one tries to arouse strong emotions in their listener in the place of offering arguments based on sound evidence. For example, when someone argues that some reasoning is false since no one should hold such horrible views.

3. APPEAL TO MASSES (*AD POPULUM*):

This happens when one invokes "everyone" or "almost everyone" to prove something. It occurs, for example, when someone references the fact that everyone knows that the Sun revolves around the Earth as evidence that it is true. Even if all people believe something to be true, that fact alone does not make it true.

4. ATTACK THE PERSON (*AD HOMINEM*):

This type of fallacy occurs when one attacks another person instead of their argument as a way to discredit their argument. For example, this could happen if someone argued that since another person is a terrible person, everything they say is a lie. This is not necessarily true, as even a person who acts terribly can tell the truth or make a sound argument.

5. HASTY GENERALIZATIONS (*SECUNDUM QUID*):

This fallacy often occurs when one tries to come up with a conclusion or underlying explanation for all members of some groups, even though there are most likely to be exceptions. The problem is that reaching such general conclusions on the basis of a handful of examples often results in rational error. A typical example of this type of fallacy is when one argues, “all members of the Orange Party are narrow-minded, so because of that, no one should listen to them.” Often, people who make these conclusions do not take every case into account.

After explaining each fallacy, ask the students if they can give some examples of fallacies they have seen or heard in the media, popular culture, or in their surroundings.

Step 3: Hand out [The Fallacies Exercise](#) to the students and ask them to fill it in. After they finish, ask them to share their results and discuss with the class. Help the students analyze the cases using the Answer Key as a guide.

Step 4: Divide students into groups and give them the [speech “Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose”](#) by Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. Propaganda was a key factor in the promotion of totalitarian ideologies, including Nazism. In 1926, Adolf Hitler wrote that propaganda’s “task is not to make an objective study of the truth, insofar as it favors the enemy, and then set it before the masses with academic fairness; its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly.”⁴

Ask the students if they can compare Hitler’s explanation of the task of propaganda with Socrates’ understanding of the purpose of speech? Explain that Hitler argues that the purpose of propagandistic speech is neither the study of truth nor presenting it with fairness, while Socrates argues that people should use speech to communicate what is true and to communicate it in a good and fair way.

Write the definition of propaganda on the board:

Propaganda: communication based on biased or misleading information, which aims to deceive the audience to promote a certain, often political, agenda

4 Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf, 1926.

Provide the following context on the speech the groups will read: This is one of the most famous speeches of Joseph Goebbels delivered on 18 February, 1943, to a large and carefully selected audience in Berlin, after the serious defeat of the German army in the battle of Stalingrad. Goebbels wanted the speech to arouse enthusiasm among the people for the “total war”, or mobilization of all resources of the country for war purposes. The audience loudly applauded and approved Goebbels’ speech.

Ask the students to read the speech in groups and answer the questions associated with the speech. After the groups finish reading and analyzing the speech, ask them to share their conclusions with the rest of the class. Lead the class discussion on the basis of the Answer Key provided with the speech and help students to assess the text.

The teacher can expand the discussion by asking if students can recognize any widespread lies that appeal to a large number of people and influence many other people, today?

Step 5: Summarize. Recall the conditions for correct thinking as well as the five logical fallacies. Explain how these were used in the speech by Joseph Goebbels.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

[Video:](#) Introduction to Propaganda

FIVE FALLACIES TABLE

FALLACY	EXAMPLE	EXPLANATION
Basing thinking on mere opinion, rumors or prejudice	"Women should not have the right to vote since they are clearly inferior."	There is no proof that women are in any relevant way inferior.
Appeal to emotions	"No one should be allowed to hold such horrible views!"	This is not an argument. It does not explain why one should not hold such views.
Appeal to masses	"Literally everybody knows this is true!"	Even if everyone believed the same thing, this still wouldn't necessarily make it true.
Ad hominem	"This position is clearly false since it is held by such a bigot."	Even the worst person could say something which is true.
Hasty generalization	"Cannabis helps with some illnesses. So, everyone should smoke cannabis."	If it helps with some illnesses, that does not mean it is healthy for everyone.

THE FALLACIES EXERCISE

EXAMPLE	FALLACY	WHY IS IT FALLACY?
<p>“Mark said that? Why listen to him? He’s a nobody who is failing in almost every class!?”</p>		
<p>“I should get an A on the English exam because the whole class knows I’m the best at English.”</p>		
<p>“I have literally seen a black person steal something from a shop several times. Black people are criminals.”</p>		
<p>“Arguing that students should be admitted to college based on their knowledge and skills is such a hateful thing.”</p>		
<p>“I heard from Rose that our new teacher actually got fired from her last teaching position. She must have done something really bad.”</p>		

Answer Key for the teacher

EXAMPLE	FALLACY	WHY IS IT FALLACY?
<p>“Mark? Why listen to him, he’s a nobody who is failing almost every class!?”</p>	<p>Ad hominem</p>	<p>Attacking Mark’s character does not resolve his argument. Even if he failed almost every class, he still can be right about some things.</p>
<p>“I should get an A on the English exam because the whole class knows I’m the best at English.”</p>	<p>Appeal to masses</p>	<p>Even though he may be the best at English, that does not mean that he should get an A on the exam.</p>
<p>“I have literally seen a black person steal something from a shop. Black people are criminals.”</p>	<p>Hasty generalization</p>	<p>Even if one has witnessed an example of a crime, this is not evidence to draw a conclusion about an entire race of people. This generalization is a racist one.</p>
<p>“Arguing that students should be admitted to college based on their knowledge and skills is such a hateful thing.”</p>	<p>Appeal to emotions</p>	<p>It is reasonable to admit students to a college based on their knowledge and skills. Saying that it is “hateful” is a means of swaying opinion, not necessarily a good reason to conclude that such an approach is bad.</p>
<p>“I heard from Rose that our new teacher actually got fired from her last teaching position. She must have done something really bad.”</p>	<p>Thinking based on rumors</p>	<p>There is “actually” not sufficient proof that the teacher was really fired from her last position, other than hearsay from Rose.</p>

Joseph Goebbels: excerpt from the speech *Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose*⁵

“My third thesis is that the danger is immediate. The paralysis of the Western European democracies before their deadliest threat is frightening. International Jewry is doing all it can to encourage such paralysis. During our struggle for power in Germany, Jewish newspapers tried to conceal the danger, until National Socialism awakened the people. It is just the same today in other nations. Jewry once again reveals itself as the incarnation of evil, as the plastic demon of decay and the bearer of an international culture-destroying chaos.

This explains, by the way, our consistent Jewish policies. We see Jewry as a direct threat to every nation. We do not care what other people do about the danger. What we do to defend ourselves is our own business, however, and we will not tolerate objections from others. Jewry is a contagious infection. Enemy nations may raise hypocritical protests against our measures against Jewry and cry crocodile tears, but that will not stop us from doing that which is necessary. Germany, in any event, has no intention of bowing before this threat, but rather intends to take the most radical measures, if necessary, in good time (*After this sentence, the chants of the audience prevent the minister from going on for several minutes*).”

“Total war is the demand of the hour. [...] The danger facing us is enormous. The efforts we take to meet it must be just as enormous.”

“Again, let me say that the heavier the sacrifices the German people must make, the more urgent it is that they be fairly shared. The people want it that way. No one resists even the heaviest burdens of war.”

“The front shares our desires. The entire German people agrees passionately. It is no longer willing to put up with efforts that only waste time and resources.”

“The present day has a remarkable resemblance for every genuine National Socialist to the period of struggle. We have always acted in the same way. We were with the people through thick and thin, and that is why the people followed us. We have always carried our burdens together with the people, and therefore they did not seem heavy to us, but rather light. The people want to be led. Never in history has the people failed a brave and determined leadership at a critical hour.”

⁵ Joseph Goebbels: excerpt from the speech *Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose*, German Propaganda Archive, Calvin University, available at <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb36.htm> (last visited Nov 11, 2022).

"I am happy to reveal this plan for victory (*Stormy applause*) to the German people. They not only accept these measures, they have demanded them, demanded them more strongly than ever before during the war. The people want action! It is time for it! We must use our time to prepare for coming surprises."

"To make the truth plain, however, my German comrades, I want to ask you a series of questions [...] I have invited to today's meeting, a cross-section of the German people in the best sense of the word. (*The minister's words were accompanied by stormy applause that increased in intensity as he came to the representatives of the army present at the meeting.*)[...] No class, no occupation, no age remained uninvited. I can rightly say that before me is gathered a representative sample of the German population, both from the homeland and the front. Is that true? Yes or no? (*The masses spring to their feet. A hurricane of thousands of voices shouts yes. The participants experience a spontaneous popular referendum and expression of will.*) You, my hearers, at this moment represent the whole nation. I wish to ask you ten questions that you will answer for the German people throughout the world, but especially for our enemies, who are listening to us on the radio. (*Only with difficulty can the minister be heard. The crowd is at the peak of excitement. The individual questions are razor sharp. Each individual feels as if he is being spoken to personally. With full participation and enthusiasm, the crowd answers each question [...] a single shout of agreement.*)

"Fourth: The English maintain that the German people is resisting the government's total war measures. It does not want total war, but capitulation! (*Shouts: Never! Never! Never!*) I ask you: Do you want total war? If necessary, do you want a war more total and radical than anything that we can even imagine today?"

"Fifth: The English maintain that the German people have lost faith in the Führer. I ask you: Is your confidence in the Führer greater, more faithful and more unshakable than ever before? Are you absolutely and completely ready to follow him wherever he goes and do all that is necessary to bring the war to a victorious end? (*The crowd rises as one man. It displays unprecedented enthusiasm. Thousands of voices join in shouting: "Führer command, we follow!" A wave of shouts of Heil flows through the hall. As if by command, the flags and standards are raised as the highest expression of the sacred moment in which the crowd honors the Führer.*)"

"I have asked; you have given me your answers. You are part of the people, and your answers are those of the German people."

“Now we must and will succeed! I stand before you not only as the spokesman of the government, but as the spokesman of the people.”

“Now, people rise up and let the storm break loose!”

(The minister’s final words were lost in unending stormy applause.)

QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:

Is this speech true? Why? Does it contain any of the 5 fallacies we mentioned? Highlight the sentences in which they can be found.

Is this speech good? Does it respect human dignity?

If you lived in Germany at this time do you think you would share or support this speech? Why or why not?

Answer Key for the teacher

1. Is this speech true? Why? Does it contain any of the 5 fallacies we mentioned? Highlight the sentences in which they can be found. Goebbels' speech is not based on truth, but on prejudice, mere opinion and fallacy. For example, there is no proof that Jews are "a direct threat to every nation". There are several other fallacies evident throughout the speech:

- Hasty generalizations: "International Jewry is doing all it can to encourage such paralysis."; "We see Jewry as a direct threat to every nation."
- Ad hominem: "Jewry once again reveals itself as the incarnation of evil, as the plastic demon of decay and the bearer of an international culture-destroying chaos."; "Jewry is a contagious infection."
- Appeal to the masses: the entire paragraph beginning with "Again let me say..." e.g. "The people want it that way.", "The entire German people agrees passionately.", "The people want to be led."; "The people want action!"
- Appeal to emotions: in the paragraph starting from "To make the truth plain...", instead of offering proofs and arguments to justify his demands of "total war", Goebbels arouses the audience by asking them ten quick yes or no questions, and appeals to their emotions, saying, "You, my hearers, at this moment represent the whole nation!", etc.

2. Is this speech good? Does it respect human dignity? The speech is not good since it disrespects the dignity of one group of people (Jews) and motivates hatred and violence towards them. The speech will bring more harm and destruction to Jews and also to Germans and other soldiers on the war front. It does not support the excellence of the people hearing it, but the contrary – it motivates freedom of indifference and arouses the lowest emotions without critical thinking.

3. If you lived in Germany at this time do you think you would share or support this speech? Why or why not? The students will likely offer different thoughts on this question, but it is important to highlight how hard it would be to resist the influence of group thinking, appeal to emotions, mass hysteria, and widespread societal prejudice to just "go along". For someone surrounded by this propaganda, it would require great strength of character and critical thinking to see through the lies of Nazism.