

Toby Young - tax avoidance without a moral compass

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Toby Young is, I admit, not a left wing favourite, for all sorts of reasons, including his dedication to opening a supposed 'free school' meaning the eviction of a great many charity organisations from their premises in Hammersmith, which is sure indication of his belief in the 'Big Society'.

He was never, therefore, going to provide an objective review of Nick Shaxson's book 'Treasure Islands', [but he's written one for the Mail on Sunday all the same](#).

The title gives much of the game away about what he thinks of tax avoidance. It's entitled "Why the super-rich deserve their tax holiday". But he then provides no evidence to support the claim. It appears that his best evidence that tax avoidance is legitimate is that:

"If you buy fresh squeezed orange juice the price includes VAT. If you buy standard concentrated orange juice there is no VAT. So if a key reason you buy concentrated orange juice is that it is a bit cheaper, you are avoiding paying VAT. Is that wrong?"

No. It's simply the wrong question. In simple economics no one makes that choice on a tax motivated basis. They do so on the basis of price, and the most it reveals is that on occasions the boundary between zero rated foods and standard rated foods is a little arbitrary. So what does that prove? Only that in any legal system boundaries have to be drawn and sometimes there are slight price distortions as a result. It's a price society deems worth paying, and rightly so.

But does that justify the rich opting out of society, as he is saying is permissible, and that they do so through supposedly legitimate but morally dubious activity that clearly abuses the spirit of the law - something all our Big Banks have suggested they can clearly identify in the last week? No of course it doesn't.

In which case what does Toby Young's inane justification prove? Well, I'll suggest three things. First it suggests he has no moral compass. Second, he has no idea about the subject on which he is pontificating. And thirdly he is the last person I'd want to entrust

a child's education to.