

The 5 Rs of tax

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2012/03/26/the-5-rs-of-tax/>

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:11 pm

On the Moral Maze last week I was asked why I thought we should tax. I was going to offer five reasons, but by the time I'd done four my right wing questioner was bored and I never got to offer the fifth. So these are the five reasons, otherwise called the 5 Rs of tax:

1. Raise revenue;
2. Reprice goods and services considered to be incorrectly priced by the market such as tobacco, alcohol, carbon emissions etc.;
3. Redistribute income and wealth;
4. Raise representation within the democratic process because it has been found that only when an electorate and a government are bound by the common interest of tax does democratic accountability really work; and finally to facilitate:
5. Reorganisation of the economy through fiscal policy.

Alex Cobham, now of Save the Children wrote the first 4; I added the fifth.