

On the middle class

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I know I'm not meant to be blogging, [but this letter from two people I like and admire](#) and with whom I have co-authored was in the Guardian this morning and too good not to share:

In deciding who are the middle class ([Letters](#), 18 December), one crucial source of information is the Office for National Statistics data on household incomes. This shows that in 2011-12, the top 10th of households with the highest incomes received 27% of all income both gross and after tax. (The UK has for households what amounts to a flat tax system other than for the poorest tenth of households who pay a higher proportion of their income in tax than any other decile.) This was far more than the next 10th down, who received about 16% of all gross and net income. The decile below that, the eighth highest, received about 13% of gross and net income. From the lowest 10th to the ninth decile, the difference in income levels rises in a smooth line, but between the ninth and 10th deciles incomes rise by nearly 70%. It is precisely these very much higher incomes, post-tax as well as pre-tax, which fund most private education in the UK, the main route by which the privileged pass on privileges to their offspring.

So if we think about household incomes, then we have an upper class of plutocrats who do not really appear in the relevant data set and who by the way pay very little tax because of their systematic use of the tax avoidance industry, a middle class of those in the top decile of households we know about, although they also often legally avoid tax, and the rest of us below them.

This is very much a return to the way in which the 19th century thought about a middle class, not as a statistical average but as a group between the great owners of property and the rest of the population. These days the middle class understood as the 10th of households with the highest incomes we know about contains those who assist the plutocracy by managing the rest of us on lower pay and conditions in work, and pensions and benefits when out of work, across the whole of the public and private sectors.

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I have a strong suspicion that this analysis correctly explains behaviour and as such resonates.