

## What to tell the sixth form?

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I am doing a talk to sixth formers at lunchtime today. I enjoy these events. Young people have insights that I invariably enjoy hearing. I always hope they get value from what I say, but expect to get at least as much back.

I do, however, always have three concerns when thinking about what say on such occasions.

The first is with offering guidance to those who want to take degrees in economics. My concern is to break the news gently that these are a three year exercise in theoretical mathematical study almost wholly unrelated to the real world at the end of which the student will have learned remarkably little about what I think economics should be about, will have had their empathic capacity reduced, their predatory instincts increased and their inclination to work in the City enhanced, but their social value somewhat undermined. That may be a little harsh, except many such students seem inclined to agree.

Second, there is the need to explain that if you really want to study economics as I think it is then you have to look elsewhere, to political economy, politics, geography, international relations and beyond. That is where the real issues might be found.

Third, there's the imperative of explaining that the subject matter is never as important as the lens through which it is viewed. Whatever the subject and whatever the issue it is personal ethics and what they dictate that really matter, not least because it is a person's ability to live with themselves in community with others that most determines wellbeing. Such ethics are not taught on most degrees.

And that's got to be wrapped up in some narrative. That will be something to think about as this morning progresses.