

Why I write this blog

Published: January 15, 2026, 11:14 am

I was asked recently by a commentator on this blog to explain what motivated me to write it. I have given this some thought and in the spirit of Christmas offer an explanation.

It was some time ago that the [Guardian described me](#) as an 'anti-poverty campaigner and tax expert'. That summarises what many seem to think about my work but it does not get to the core of my motivation. What motivates me is my disquiet with inequality. In saying that I do not just mean economic inequality, however important that might be, but all unequal treatment of people.

I have no doubt as to the origin of this concern. It stems from the fact that fifteen minutes after I was born my twin arrived in the world. I have no idea what it is like to not be a twin: I have only ever been one, and of the many influences on my life I think this fact, and my twin himself, are amongst the biggest.

I have in a very real sense never been alone. I shared a womb (I am wont to call him my 'womb-mate'). We no doubt shared new baby parent attention. We slightly lost our individual identities together, because we were, inevitably, 'the twins'. And I have no problem with any of that. He is, quite literally, my partner in life.

But he also introduced me to the reality of discrimination. We are not identical. We did not share all talents equally: both of us have skills that the other could usefully have had a bit more of. One consequence was that at the age of 11 I went to a grammar school. And my twin did not.

I hated the injustice of that. Overnight I was radicalised. That was in 1969. In the 1970 general election I argued long and hard for the re-election of Harold Wilson so that Labour's commitment to comprehensive education could be delivered. Nothing, in my opinion, could justify the discrimination of the eleven plus and the difference in resources allocated to the future education of each of us, or the constraint on opportunity that for far too many that exam imposed. I saw the hurt it caused. I understood the sense of pain. I also hurt. And I perceived injustice and after that I

would never be the same again.

What was glaringly obvious to me was that my twin and I were of equal worth. I was angry then that anyone might suggest otherwise. I remain angry now whenever it is suggested that some have more innate worth than others. Discrimination in all its forms, as I became increasingly aware of it, was something that cut me to the quick.

I was early on aware of racism and my father's fears about integration because of his Irish background.

I learned of feminism from an early girlfriend who rocked the beliefs on the role of women my mother had taught me.

Prejudice on the grounds of sexual orientation arose close to home - and were immensely difficult in the 70s.

And my parents always made me acutely aware of poverty, and the impact it had on their own childhood's.

Other awareness followed.

Nothing has ever stopped my concern with these issues. Even when I realised that I was fascinated by everything to do with business I was never persuaded that this required me to abandon my principles. I have explained before now that I realised in my first year as an undergraduate that most of what I was being taught about business and motivation was pure drivel - largely because I began working for an accountant during my summer holiday when I was 17 and appreciated that the clients I met and whose accounts I was preparing were not profit maximising and had no idea how they might achieve that. My search for alternatives to the economics I was being taught began then.

That search very quickly led me to the environmental movement. I perceived pretty early on that considering the planet was no more than an extension of consideration for others - which by then was driving my politics. It seemed obvious to me that caring for the environment was simply taking the generations to come into account in the decisions we make, and this concern for others was, I thought, an innate part of being human that only training and indoctrination could overrule.

That belief has also permeated my religious thinking. I rejected the patrician, evangelical views of my parents. I became a Quaker around the age of 40. I have no clue whether there is a life after death. I have almost no concern as to whether or not there was a virgin birth, a physical resurrection or a feeding of the 5,000. What mattered was the radical message of Jesus the teacher - that he came to give good news to the poor and that we must treat our neighbours as ourselves. I stress that I am quite convinced these opinions can be held without religious faith and I seek to convert

no one. But at the same time belief in these fundamental messages is, I think, a matter of faith nonetheless, even if I think that belief evidence based.

There is a significance to both beliefs that defines the way I view the world. I find the selfish isolationism that underpins too much of conventional economic thinking (whatever some conventional economists wish to say) incomprehensible and alien to what I see as the real human condition.

That is why I cannot also accept the view of the rational, profit maximising corporation. I do not believe that the the empathic individual who turns up at work can lose their innately human empathic capacity in the their workplace, at least not without significant strain arising and indoctrination occurring. And I think that to demand either is wrong, and the dictate of a cult (I use that word rather than culture deliberately) that denies the reality of the people we are.

But when it comes down to it, the reason why I do this is that I realise I have never been an individual as such. I have only ever existed in relationship with others. That realisation started with my twin, whose company I still share and enjoy quite often despite the fact that we are very different men. The unfair treatment of him at 11 changed me. I have no regrets about that. It made me realise that for all our differences from all other people - which we are meant to appreciate, cherish and enjoy - we are at heart in this world together with a duty towards each other that we have to fulfil with whatever talent and ability we have to offer at whatever point we are in life.

Of course I do that imperfectly. And I am all too aware that I get things wrong. But my sense that there is injustice that can be put right is what drives me. And when some seek to institutionalise that injustice in ways the reinforce discrimination and prejudice, for whatever reason, then I am incensed. The result is that I wake up every morning thinking that maybe, just maybe, today is the day when things might just get better. And if all I can do to achieve that goal is to write a blog post before breakfast then that's what I will do.