

# Replacing the economics of indifference with the econom...

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A good friend of mine has been advising me to breathe deeply of late. He feels it might be good for me, so wide is the range of the issues that are vexing me. He might be right. And on occasion I have taken his advice. I know the value of sometimes sitting quietly and just contemplating.

However good the advice though the issues do not go away. As usual there are two ways of looking at them. There is the superficial, day-to-day view. This identifies the symptom and seeks to address it. There is also the deeper perspective, which demands that the cause be identified. The latter is always the better course of action.

What is vexing? Take this is a list, for starters. Brexit. Political failure. Tax injustice. Climate change. A loss of biodiversity. Misinformation. Indifference to others. Intellectual incoherence on economics and other issues.

Actually, let's start at the end of that list and work from there. Because, and I regret to say that this affords economics more influence than it might justify, this is where I think a great many of our problems lie. Economics has been used as a mechanism to propagate a pernicious myth, which is that all that matters in life is us. And by us I do not refer to a collective noun. I instead use the word to indicate supposedly disconnected and indifferent individuals. Economics has taken an assumption made to make the maths that it idolises simple enough for economists to handle and turned it into an ideology. It has promoted a cult of selfishness. And everything that we are suffering follows from that.

We have Brexit 'because you're worth it' and we ignore the consequences for everyone else as a result.

All the other malaise's could be subject to the same comment.

The essence of my argument is that because all that matters is, supposedly, us - that is, the individual in isolation - literally nothing else matters. And when that's the case abuse follows.

Abuse of the person who is different. Of the tax system. Of the rule of law that can only apply to the 'other'. Of the planet. Of truth, because only our opinion matters. And on, and on.

Does this matter? Very obviously it does. And very obviously that narrative of 'us' in isolation is wrong. It does not reflect the way that most of us live, most of the time, and in which most of us might like to live all the time.

I am writing this sitting in a hotel breakfast room. Simple observation shows that obvious that the assumption that we are indifferent to others is false. People are cooperating over the breakfast buffet. That buffet shows that someone cares - and profit alone cannot explain that. The staff are attentive, and very clearly being respected. The interaction of those within the room is interesting to observe - most especially at the tables where colleagues are meeting before a working day: the interactions are clearly about more than personal gain. There are enquiries made as to well-being that are obviously sincere: the 'other' matters at a level far beyond their utility.

And we all know this is true. And yet we organise our economy as if it is not. And that is the paradox that is laying our society, our well-being and our lives low in the twenty first century.

Until we build an ethos for society and a narrative for economics that is built upon caring for others as much as ourselves (no more, I stress, because that too can be harmful to well-being, but certainly no less) then we cannot create the world we need and so badly want.

We have an economics built on indifference.

We need an economics built on concern.

Nothing less will do.

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PS And it's even possible to make the maths work on that basis. It's such an easy assumption to state that modelling on this basis can be done.