

What we need is an economy that embraces and values car.

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I wrote a tweet this morning as an Easter reflection.

<https://twitter.com/RichardJMurphy/status/1249226738879643649>

My own relationship with Easter is complicated. I was brought up by apparently deeply Christian parents. However, I never really worked out what impact that had on their lives. I guess it must have done, but as far as I could tell at the time, and in retrospect, their faith did not make their lives noticeably different from those of many others who appeared to profess no faith at all. I never did as a result learn from them what their faith was about.

I was, then, surprised when in my 30s I re-explored faith. Maybe we don't quite ever get over our parent's influence. But what I appreciated by then was that the form of faith was inconsequential to me: what mattered was its substance. I suspect that's why I found the Quakers. I have been a member for twenty or so years now.

Sometimes that membership is more important in my life, and sometimes less. But that is precisely the point: the form of attendance can be useful, but it is not what being a Quaker is all about. Action is. The Quaker view is that what people believe in is not as important as the action it gives rise to. After all, how can we ever really know what another person thinks when we usually struggle to be sure of that ourselves?

In that case the so-called Quaker testimonies, to peace, equality, simplicity and truth, to which some now add the environment although I tend to think it implicit in the others, matter a lot. And what happens outside the Meeting is at least as, if not more important than, what happens within it.

Hence, when I thought about my own tweet after I'd sent it, I needed to find my own interpretation of what it means and why I feel that way.

I believe that the economics of neoliberalism is about a war between some - the supposed owners of capital - and the rest of the world, represented both by labour and the physical world we all live in, which those owners of capital think a 'free gift of

nature' to be despoiled at will.

In this world view capital is scarce. It is only deserved of by some. The proof that they are worthy is to be found in the market place. No another exchange matters. And their spoils are not just theirs to keep, they are also to be protected from all claimants, including the state.

This is a deeply antagonistic state of being. The aggression implicit within it does, I very strongly suspect, reflect the insecurity of those who subscribe to this worldview. I suspect they know how limited it is. But power - over people and resources - has let them preserve it for the decades.

The outcome is anything but peaceful. Inequality is rife as a result of it. The mechanisms for control are far from simple. And every day the truth is denied to preserve the supposed merits of this system. The Quaker testimonies are then, in themselves, sufficient criteria to make clear why neoliberal capitalism is such a flawed basis on which to build a society. Nothing that is dependent on false selection criteria, oppression and destruction of the support system (the planet) that sustains us all can survive. Neoliberalism can't. It either changes, or we die with it.

And so I became a campaigner, because I believed something better was possible.

But I didn't give up my belief in markets: fair bargains can be made. They benefit us all. But the emphasis is on 'fair'.

And I didn't suddenly think equality was sameness. In fact, if anything I realised it means valuing all our differences as if each is important (so long as they are not abusive).

Simplicity is hard, and yet many right now are finding some merit in it. What we are living through is far from optimal, of course. And yet there are things we have learned. I sincerely hope I see as many people walking together as families and friends after this is over, for example, as I do now. That's a pleasure that is hard to replicate.

And as for truth? Has it ever mattered more?

I am not saying there is a perfect solution for this world anywhere. There isn't. Out complexity requires continual adaptation to circumstances. But there are some things that seem worth recognising as the basis of the society that we need if we are to survive the transition to the sustainable world we have no choice but create if we are to survive, which is a challenge much bigger than they one we now face.

We must base our society on non-aggressive structures, from top to bottom. That way there is enough for all.

We must value difference - so long as it is not oppressive.

We must live within our means.

And we must tell the truth about this.

All of which requires something that is almost wholly absent from the world of neoliberal economics. That missing thing is balance.

Neoliberals would say balance is the state of equilibrium. But they would also claim that is achieved when profit is maximised.

I would suggest that is the antithesis of balance. There's nothing wrong with profit. But maximising anything is at the cost of balance. And the result is always instability.

The neoliberal world's pursuit of profit at all costs has left us where we are. We are unstable and unable to deal with quite basic needs when it comes to care. This crisis has exposed that fact.

What we need is balance that embraces and values care. Then we will find our way forward.

That's what my alternative is.

And that's why we need to change economics.