

The Tories just don't care

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I noted an article by Frances Ryan [in the Guardian](#) yesterday in which she referred to a YouGov survey that sought opinion from people in the UK on what levels of consumption those on benefits or low pay should enjoy.

The findings were deeply unflattering to the people of this country. As Frances Ryan noted, around 25% of people surveyed thought those on low pay or benefits did not have an entitlement to enjoy a balanced diet. The same number wondered whether those on low pay should be able to heat their homes.

Others questioned why having a mobile phone was a necessity, even though access to government services is now almost impossible without one. The right to a television was also questioned when that is the most basic means of access to the shared culture that defines our community.

As Francis Ryan correctly noted, much of this is indicative of deeply prejudicial opinion within UK society, with those who think that they have wealth, or who believe that they can aspire to it, being deeply hostile towards those on low incomes. What is curious, however, is that for these degrees of prejudice to be prevalent those holding them must themselves have little more than average income in many cases and they might only be possessed of little more than median wealth, which is vastly lower than that enjoyed by those in the top decile of wealth owners in the UK. Prejudice does, in that case, extend well beyond those with wealth in that case.

When I wrote my book, *The Courageous State*, I spent a lot of time thinking about what it is that creates well-being and how the resulting ideas might be built into economic theory. I admit that remarkably few people seem to have ever paid much attention to what I wrote, but the ideas remain relevant. I suggested that there are four factors that can, broadly speaking, contribute to our well-being, which are:

- * Material well-being
- * Intellectual well-being

- * Emotional well-being
- * Spiritual well-being

Material well-being is, of course, the focus of almost all economics. Material consumption is what economics assumes life is all about, although that is very clearly wrong.

Intellectual well-being is not about membership of Mensa. It is, instead, being possessed of the ability to partake in the society of which a person is a part. Without having a sufficient education, a person is denied this, and that, in my opinion, is deeply inequitable.

I would hope that emotional well-being is easy to understand. It is about having a community of support within which a person lives. This could be a family, but it might also be a network of friends or other people who care. The vast majority of people do I hope, have an awareness of the importance of this for everyone, whoever they might be.

Finally, spiritual well-being is not about having faith, religion, or another such attribute. Instead, I used the term to refer to a person having a sense of purpose, which provides their life with meaning.

I hope that it is obvious to anyone that having these types of well-being is vital for a person's survival. Mental and physical health are prejudiced if they are not available.

It was my suggestion in the theory that I created that these issues are not independent of each other. In other words, if there was an insufficiency of any of these sources of well-being, then the person's well-being as a whole is prejudiced and a surplus in any other area cannot correct for that. Equally, an excess in any of these attributes (which I suggested was only possible with regard to material well-being, which is the only area where I suggest that we can over-consume) does harm the ability to partake of the other sources of well-being because we are finite beings.

This has impact on any approach to low pay, benefits, inequality and much else. There does, of course, have to be access to minimum standards for material well-being for all. But unless there is access to intellectual, emotional and spiritual well-being as well then overall well-being will be denied to those on low incomes.

It would seem that many in our society are quite happy with that. The number appears to, by some coincidence, broadly equate to the base level of support for the Tories. What these people are seeking to do is impose hardship to the point where harm is caused. The obvious manifestation is in their policy on migration and refugees, but the attitude pervades much of their policy.

No wonder we are in a mess. We are governed by a party that does not care and does not care about that fact or the people impacted. We cannot afford the price of this indifference.