

Finding a better song to sing

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Introduction to this post

I thought I should share the following on this blog because I have done so with a number of my colleagues over the last week or two.

It has become increasingly apparent to me that the time for my work to take a change of direction has arrived and that I also need to reduce the physical demands that I've been imposing on myself.

I stress I am not retiring. I cannot ever imagine doing that. I am, instead, looking to start the third chapter in my career. This post explains what that means.

I let something slip on the [livestream with Steve Keen recently](#), which I think ***probably needs elaboration here.***

I mentioned that it is my plan over the next year to give up almost all aspects of my work except for that on social media, including this blog.

I recently undertook an audit of my own working week and slightly surprised myself when I realised that I was working at least 65 hours a week, on average. Around 30 of those are dedicated to this blog and the associated YouTube channel, and the remainder are spent fulfilling contractual obligations to my employer and the funders of my work.

Reflecting on this, realised that this has been going on for some time, most especially since I:

**** Started writing the [Taxing Wealth Report](#) in the summer of 2023. This became a work of 126,000 words.***

- * Began work on the ongoing [Accounting Streams](#) project soon thereafter. The first sixteen-chapter undergraduate accounting textbook from this project will be published soon. I wrote three chapters and have been heavily involved with my co-editors in the rest.*
- * Commenced work on a video training project for the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency [on tax transparency](#) this year, which has involved me being the main writer and presenter of thirty videos, all of which have been produced this year, and then*
- * relaunched my [YouTube channel](#) in April.*

These, on top of some pre-existing research commitments at Copenhagen Business School on sustainable cost accounting, have meant, as a consequence, that the last year or so has probably been the hardest working of my whole career. The result has been that, as I have sometimes hinted here, I can get pretty exhausted on occasion.

My wife, who is a retired GP, has quite reasonably suggested that working at this level of intensity (and much of it is intense simply because there is so much to fit into the available time) may not now be good for my health in the long term. I have realised my own body is telling me much the same thing. As a result, I have decided that I need to take action to address this situation and restore some balance in my life. I would have found this level of work commitment hard even when I was younger. I am now 66, and it simply feels unwise.

I have enjoyed all these projects and the opportunity to work on them and will want to finish my commitment to them, but the reality is that I now understand that I am coming towards the end of the second phase of my working career.

In the first phase, I was a chartered accountant working in both practice and commerce with a bit of accounting journalism on the side, plus, at the end of that era, the beginning of my association with academia. That period lasted for a bit more than twenty years.

My plan for the second chapter of my career (because there was one of admittedly no more than three pages, but which laid out the high-level objectives that I had) was written in 2000. My aim was to be a thinker/writer working on ways in which society could be transformed to better the lot for most people living in it. I also planned to teach some about these issues.

I could argue that I have achieved a great deal of what I set out to do, but that is not quite true. I met John Christensen and Colin Hines quite separately

in 2002 and have worked with both ever since. As a result, I was a co-founder of the Tax Justice Network with John and the Green New Deal with Colin, and many subsequent campaigns, almost all of which survive, even if I am not involved with them all by any means now. It was not in my plan to be a campaigner, but that is what I became, and even the academic career that I have had on a full and part-time basis over the last decade grew out of that, and in particular, the work that I undertook in tackling tax haven abuse.

I do not in any way regret those campaigns or the enduring friendships that I have created, both with John and Colin and with colleagues, especially now at Sheffield and Copenhagen Business School. Those relationships have been rewarding and an important part of my life. So, too, has what we have achieved been significant, I think.

However, in all this, my time for thinking and writing as I want to do has become decidedly limited, even if my output on this blog might contradict that view in the opinion of some. I have not written a book since 2017, and I have also spent far too little time thinking or reading, which fact is reflected in the stack of books that I wish I had time to read, which is embarrassingly large. Project commitments, which I have willingly entered into, have prevented this more solitary activity, but I think it is time for me to refocus my energies on that goal of thinking and writing, although I would expand that second objective to now include the creation of video content.

This is a long way round of saying that I am now in discussion with all my colleagues in the various projects that I am undertaking to suggest that the time has come to wind down my commitment to them.

As a matter of fact, the Finance for the Future project, which I have been undertaking with Colin Hines and which has influenced much of the output of this blog in recent years as we have sought to find solutions to the problem of funding the future runs out of grant support during 2025, and I have now suggested to Colin that the time has come for us to stop looking for further funding. I will still think about these issues but in different ways.

I have also indicated to my colleagues at Sheffield that I would like to give up my professorship before my contract is due to expire, meaning that I now expect to retire from that post sometime during 2025. Discussions about how to achieve this goal are in progress.

The work that I have also been doing through the Corporate Accountability Network in association with Copenhagen Business School on sustainable cost accounting also reaches a natural break at the end of this year, and whilst all my colleagues there wish to take forward research on this issue because the still to be published outputs from our existing research are, we all think, of

some significance, I have suggested to them that I would only wish to partake as an advisor in future, and not as a full work participant.

I will also be winding down my commitment to other academic-linked projects over the coming year, with some of the work demands from these projects beginning to decline quite soon as some natural breaks in them are approaching.

It could, of course, be said that I am retiring, but as John Christensen suggested when I discussed these plans with him, that is not how he views what I am proposing. Instead, he offered what I think is the correct framing for my plan, which is that I wish to enter the third chapter of my career, knowing that this is bound to be the last.

If I am lucky, I might have 15 or so active years of life left, and after that, everything comes down to the good fortune of continuing good health and continuing cognitive ability. It is my hope that I can use these years to explore the issue that I mentioned on the live stream with Steve Keen, which is how we might reframe the way in which we see our economy so that we really do have a chance of life continuing without undue stress on this planet, which at present seems to be an ever more remote possibility.

We understand ourselves, our relationships, our lives, the world around us, the past and the future through the stories that we tell. What we believe to be true and false is framed by those stories, as is much of what we think to be right and wrong. It is my firm belief that the stories that have been told by neoliberal politicians and economists are profoundly harmful to the well-being of most people on this planet and that we do, as a result, need to reframe the way in which we tell our stories so that we have a chance of doing things better.

As I mentioned during that live stream, something that I often recall is a line in the film 'Educating Rita', spoken by the character that Julie Walters played, when she surveyed the life that she was living and concluded that 'there must be a better song to sing.' I share her view. We need to find a better song to sing, and I now want to spend my time working out what that is and then writing about it.

To conclude, what all this means is that I will, in some senses, be retiring from the work that I have undertaken during the last 20 years, but will be continuing some central core themes of it, but in different ways.

In particular, I have every intention that this blog should continue without interruption.

I have also been genuinely invigorated by the challenge of creating videos. The opportunity that they provide to present ideas is something I want to continue to explore. But, and I will be candid about this, I also want more time to sit and think, stop and stare, and wonder about what it is that makes everything happen as it does. Before I go, I hope to find better answers to that question, and the changes that I am planning are all intended to facilitate that goal.

I am not giving up. I am just changing my focus, but that does mean that some existing activities do have to come to an end. I will, of course, want to stay in touch with all those involved in my existing work for a long time to come. But I think it's time for a change - and to find a better song for me to sing now.