

Funding the Future

Article URL

Published: January 12, 2026, 6:37 pm

I have posted this comment on this blog this morning [in response to a comment](#) made by a father of a daughter with autism, and with another who is suspected of having ADHD.

Most comments on this blog are published quite quickly and require little response from me. This one was an exception, triggering a whole series of thoughts that I think are worth sharing more widely, which is why I have shared them here.

Hi Chris,

My apologies for taking time to get to your comment, but some comments demand that I take time to think about the right thing to say, and how I consider the subject, and yours was one of those.

You touch on a great many issues of concern to me.

Firstly, I am glad that your daughter has a diagnosis. I am aware of some of the complications around the issue, most especially if the state is being relied on, and what the alternative costs are.

You and I also appreciate some of the complexity around the process of diagnosis (or discovery, as I think many prefer to call it, because it is questionable as to whether this is a medical condition), but at the same time, do you think that more consideration should be given to self-diagnosis? I have little doubt that many of those who have ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and other neurodivergent conditions are aware, in the majority of cases, that they are “different” from a very young age. Just as I discovered that our younger son was left-handed within hours of his birth, because it was his left thumb that went into his mouth, so many of the characteristics of these conditions do become apparent when children are quite young. By the time children reach secondary school age, I imagine that any process needs to put powerful weight on the child’s own perceptions, if, of course, they are able to offer them, and I am aware that some are not.

What I thought to be my first real experience with an autistic child came when I was in the sixth form, and volunteered at a special school, one afternoon a week, as a way of getting out of playing rugby. I remember being asked to work with a girl aged seven or eight. I suspect that she was considered a good person for a young volunteer to work with, because she was undemanding in some ways, looked completely normal, but was totally unable to verbally communicate, and yet her joy when taking part in repetitive gameplay, and most especially being pushed on a swing, was very obvious, and rewarding if you were a 17-year-old wishing to think that you might be doing something useful with your afternoon. I remember thinking, even then, how hard it must have been for her to be locked in without being able to communicate clearly what she wanted. Although the vast majority of people with autism are not in that situation, I've never forgotten the fact that communication is profoundly difficult for many people, and regrettably, much of what our government does is only making that more difficult, with bigger barriers to achieving this goal being created all too often, including preventing much face-to-face human interaction that is, with a little sensitivity, able to interpret what a person is trying to communicate in a way that an online form never will.

I also think that there is a particularly important issue considering late diagnosis of these conditions, which Chris Packham highlighted in his programme earlier this week. This is a real issue, especially with regard to women, where so many went undiagnosed because it was simply not accepted that girls could be autistic for a very long time, and they successfully learned to mask their condition, but then had to live with all the consequences of not having the help and recognition (the latter very often being the most important thing) that they needed.

A number of thoughts occur to me as a consequence.

The first is a very strong suspicion that the neoliberal political system is deeply antagonistic to neurodivergence. The closer that we all are to being little round pegs that can be put into little round holes, where we can be kept happy with bread and circuses, the happier our masters are. The last thing that they want is anyone who does not think in a standard way, most especially if they use that ability to challenge the neoliberal status quo, which is set up as the great goal of economic policy. I seriously wonder whether this is the reason why it is made so hard to secure a diagnosis, and why that process is so dramatically under-resourced.

There is, of course, the possibility that diagnosis is also under-resourced to reduce the amount that schools, and so local authorities or other funding agencies, have to spend on SEND issues. The first speciality that I took on when becoming a school governor around 40 years ago was SEN (the D was not in the mix at that time), and I have retained my interest ever since. I profoundly regret the fact that the government does not take such education seriously.

There is also a possibility that the limited resources provided for the diagnosis or discovery of neurodivergence is deliberate, with the intention of implying that this is so

rare that only limited resources need to be provided. If neoliberalism wants to imply that the neurotypical mind is not just normal, but is what is desirable, and I think that is the case, then those promoting that ideology are bound to want to understate the number of those who might be neurodivergent. It is in their interest to pretend that this non-typicality is so rare that those who are neurodivergent can be treated as being exceptional, meaning that their positions need not be considered. I would prefer not to think that this is their aim, but I also think it is likely that it is, even if estimates suggest that at least one in seven people in our society might be neurodivergent in some way.

Finally, with regard to this series of thoughts, it is important to note that neurodiverse thought is a very obvious challenge to neoliberalism. Neoliberal philosophy is perverse, and even paradoxical, in promoting the idea that competition can provide all required answers to the best allocation of resources, and yet it has simultaneously been used to oppress all alternative schools of economic thought, at least in most universities. It is now believed that around 92% of all economists working in universities subscribe to neoliberal views, and the prospect of anyone now securing an appointment in such a department is incredibly low if they do not do so. Total monopolistic control of economic teaching is, therefore, their desire.

That means that any challenge to their rigid and unrealistic views is repugnant to them, and such a challenge is almost inevitably going to come from those who are neurodivergent because, by their very nature, neurodivergent people challenge accepted patterns of thought, and can create alternatives in a way that most neurotypical people cannot. To deny resources to the education of neurodivergent people is, then, consistent with the oppressive demands of neoliberal thinking, and so neoliberal politics, which is what all the UK's mainstream political parties (excepting maybe the Greens, Plaid Cymru and parts of the SNP) promote. Neurodivergence is where the challenge neoliberalism might come from, which is why neoliberals are frightened of it.

Thanks for triggering these ideas.

Richard