

Funding the Future

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As I have noted in response to comments elsewhere on this blog, I was in Wales last week, on something that some people call a holiday, but which I prefer to think of as a change of situation. That is very largely because it would appear that wherever I am, my brain refuses to stop creating new ideas at a rate faster than I can use them here, on YouTube, or in the National.

The simple fact is that, much as I enjoy being away, and spending more time every day as a consequence doing what I normally think of as weekend activities, I rarely, if ever, take weekends off, and as a result, nor am I very good at stopping on holiday.

However, there was a very strange aspect to this holiday which made it quite different to any other I can recall since I was probably a teenager. What I realised during it was that on my return, there was not going to be an overwhelming pile of other tasks to undertake, into which I would also need to try to fit blogging, making videos, and moderating comments. Instead, it finally dawned on me that those activities are now what I do.

That said, I did, with colleagues at Copenhagen Business School, have a paper accepted by a four-star accounting journal just before I went away, and I have a tiny amount of checking on that to do, now I am back, just to keep them happy.

I also have a little work to do on the project on tax transparency that I have been working on for some time, which looks as though it might now be used as training material in multiple developing countries on at least three continents.

I've also volunteered to do a little more on the Accounting Streams project, but add all these things together, and they are, at most, minor distractions and not major tasks. I even have most of my own accounting up-to-date, whilst the pile of admin that I had to deal with, having decided to end paid employment and my grant-based research activities, appears to have largely come to an end.

The result is that I generated a whole pile of ideas whilst away, many of which have a good chance of seeing the light of day, if I want them to do so.

One of those opportunities is to write a book, and there are now multiple publishers interested in me doing so. If others want to get in touch, please feel free to do so.

Another is to develop my YouTube channel, somewhat, as I mention in today's video. There are masses of ideas there, because I am finding this whole process of social media publishing absolutely fascinating.

But that then led me in another direction, which was to realise that I really do need to properly understand AI, and how to use it. I have, as a result, been reading quite a lot about this, and appreciate that even so, I am only scratching the surface of this issue.

I also admit that I have had to think about the ethics of all this, but realised when doing so that choosing to ignore AI now would be like an accountant choosing to overlook the spreadsheet revolution that began in the early 1980s, and which transformed the way in which almost all accounting departments, and accounting and business decision-making, took place. I embraced this change from the outset and acquired my first computer capable of running Lotus 1-2-3 in 1983 and never looked back. In the end, I wrote accounting packages based on spreadsheets and sold them. Whilst I would not do the same thing now, when I did, they revolutionised the productivity of my firm and the quality of its work. AI, I now realise, has the same capacity to revolutionise how I work if I correctly understand it.

The best of many videos that I watched on this issue last week (which I cannot find again right now), featured a French woman who suggested that, as was the case with spreadsheets, one percent will really take advantage of the opportunities that this technology creates and put it to really constructive use, whilst 99% will, at most, use it to slightly alter their existing workflow. This latter group might do this by, for example, using AI as a slightly more advanced search engine on the internet, or to generate highly standardised email responses, which will remove from them the requirement to engage in any thought when undertaking these processes.

The key point was the last one. You can either use AI to give up thinking to the greatest possible degree, or you can use it to liberate your thinking. That is a choice that everyone has available to them.

It is my intention to use AI to liberate my thinking. I cannot think of any good reason why I should not, even taking into consideration climate issues. I am more than willing to give up other forms of consumption to compensate for this.

This, however, requires an intelligent use of the technology. Some of what we are already doing uses AI. For example, we use AI to correct small mistakes in videos so that we do not have to re-record if they occur. A voice clone within our software can do that, and the time saving is enormous.

We also use AI to now analyse a video's performance, and we are planning to keep

doing so because it appears capable of suggesting content that will appeal to audiences, and ways to write thumbnails and titles that work on YouTube, which is a decided skill. We use dedicated AI tools for this purpose, and it seems to be working.

More specifically, I have recently added some references to the bottom of some posts, suggesting similarly themed posts that might be of interest on the blog to the one it has just been posted on. Plenty of other media have been doing this for a while, and it would appear to make sense to do so here. However, as I have yet to define the prompt for this entirely appropriately, I will not regularly use it until I have. Comments on whether this is useful or not would be appreciated. The time involved will be very limited if I get the prompt right, but these things are quite complicated. In particular, this one requires an instruction to ChatGPT to write the necessary listing code, and that is a decidedly new departure for me, but again, something that is quite fun.

Another option that I'm looking at is including ChatGPT prompts in some posts here. In particular, I'm developing prompts that will turn the content of a blog post into a letter that you might then be able to send to your MP. All you would need to do is add your name and address, because MP will not respond unless you do so, plus the URL of the post, or better still the text of that post, copied and pasted from this blog, and then point that information into ChatGPT, and it will produce a letter. Trials with this look to be very good. If this works, I will be writing other posts on this very soon.

Variations on the prompt would also produce letters to local newspapers, for example, or blog posts based on my own for use on other blogs.

Given that my goal is to get the ideas created here out into the wider world, these things seem to make sense to me whilst helping turn people from readers into active campaigners, which has to make sense. That is why I might also include prompts to create social media posts. None of these prompts will, of course, remove the need to both check and to refine the material created, but from what I've seen so far, the output from this process can be very good and worth using.

It is, however, by having thought through the entire process in advance, and having worked out what AI is really meant to do, which requires a prior thinking process, that it can really deliver.

Finally, and I am already doing this, I am using ChatGPT to assist research on blog writing. I like writing, but cannot see why asking AI for an opinion on the data to use in a post, and even how to structure it, is very much different from using Google these days, and I have used that resource for blog writing ever since I began writing here, 19 years ago. So, whilst I have absolutely no plan to use AI to write blog posts (although I have discovered that I can train it to write them in a style that is remarkably similar to my own, and which sounds like me) I will, undoubtedly, be using it as a focused research tool and I am planning to develop yet more AI prompts to achieve this goal.

Finally, if anyone is interested in how I might write those prompts, I might, in due course, make videos on that subject. These types of videos appear to be popular on YouTube at present, but they might become part of the member-only materials that we are thinking about publishing.

I hope that makes sense.

Comments are welcome.