

Funding the Future

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<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2025/10/24/the-moral-case-for-tax/>

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We're told tax is a curse and even "theft." That's wrong. Tax is how we build a fair society. It plays an essential role in the funding of education, healthcare, and economic stability and justice. It's how we express our shared responsibility. The real immorality lies in avoiding tax. In this video, I explain why tax is not a burden but the foundation of democracy itself.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UXpnRL3WVE?si=bDIC023VVS5CxXt1>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=bd8ha-19a08a3-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

There is a moral case for tax.

I'm bored by hearing people say that tax is a curse or even theft. It's a refrain I hear often from right-wing politicians, and it's wrong because tax is not a punishment; it is the price of civilisation. It is how we express our shared responsibility for one another. Without tax, there is no functioning democracy or fair society.

So the case for tax is not just an economic one; although tax is fundamental to the management of the government's macroeconomic cycle, it is a moral one.

Politicians claim tax is a burden as if it takes something from us. In truth, that's not the case. What it does is return to the government what the government spent for our benefit. They spent for our benefit, in the form of education, healthcare, safety, and social trust. Tax does not, then, destroy freedom. It creates the conditions for it by letting the government manage its spending. Calling for lower taxes has become a straightforward shorthand for the government shirking its responsibilities, when the truth is that spending more usually enhances the well-being of most.

What tax really does is rebalance wealth and power within society.

At the same time, it shapes behaviour, it encourages us to do the right things and to not do the wrong things.

It curbs inflation, and it funds public purpose by assisting that macroeconomic cycle.

Tax may not directly pay for anything that the government has to pay for. That's true. But unless tax can be recovered, that spending can't take place. And we have to understand that as well. And in the process, tax anchors democracy by making the powerful contribute to the common good.

Tax, then, is not about taking money. It's about defining fairness amongst those who have benefited from what the government does. And that makes tax a moral obligation.

So, a just society asks for more from those who have gained most from what the government does, and that is the wealthiest. They, after all, do not make their wealth single-handedly. They might like to think that they did everything by themselves and that they are self-made men or women, but there has never been such a person in the history of society. They've always stood on the shoulders of others.

Others who were educated by the state.

Others who are fit and healthy because of the state.

Others who can afford to take the risk of working for them because the state underpins a social security system, or at least a sort of social security system now, because the one that we used to have and cherish has now gone.

And they can afford to work for that employer because that employer is now forced to make payment into a pension fund for them.

So, wealth is never created alone. It relies both on us, the people who work for those with wealth, and on public infrastructure and stability.

Paying tax then acknowledges the debt we owe to society itself. Refusing to contribute is a moral failure, not clever accounting. Tax avoidance might be celebrated by the rich as financial sophistication in that case, but in truth, it is a form of theft of opportunity

from everyone else, and that has an enormous moral cost attached to it.

Meanwhile, secrecy jurisdictions, which is what I prefer to call tax havens, and the loopholes that they create, erode democracy and trust as if they were the aircraft carriers of the far right sitting offshore from our democracy, lobbing the occasional missile in our direction to undermine the purpose of government itself.

A society that tolerates avoidance cannot claim to value fairness. Decades of neoliberalism have tried to teach us that tax is inherently bad. We have to unlearn that now. We need new stories about tax. The media and politicians portray taxation as loss and not investment, but that narrative disempowers citizens and strengthens elites.

What we must do is reclaim the language of tax so that we can, in turn, reclaim democracy itself, because the two walk hand in hand with each other.

Tax is how we say we are all in this together. A progressive tax system builds cohesion and legitimacy. Those with wealth, privilege, and power must shoulder the greatest responsibility as a consequence. And despite claims made, they don't.

That often rolled out claim that the wealthiest 1% in the UK pay 28% of all income tax is nonsense because it ignores the fact that income tax is only one of many taxes, and they don't pay much of anything else. In fact, they pay less than they should do because they use companies to reduce their tax rates, capital gains to reduce their tax rate, and they use allowances and loopholes more than anybody else in society. Without fair tax, democracy becomes a marketplace for influence, and that is what the wealthy try to make it.

Tax is then not merely an economic tool. It is a moral statement. It expresses who we are, what we value, and how we live together. To defend tax is to defend civilisation itself. And of course, the corollary is true, to attack tax is to attack civilisation itself.

The moral case for tax is the moral case for society. You can say you don't like tax, but what you are really saying by doing so is that you want to live outside society, and we should say that loud and clear. Those who don't want to pay their tax can clear off because we don't need them here, because they don't want to be part of our society, or to support it, or to nourish it, or to develop it for the sake of everyone, themselves included.

The case for tax is that we're all in this together, and we should all contribute according to our means.

What do you think? Do you think the wealthy should pay their fair share of tax? Do you think they are? Do you think they should pay more? Do you think you should pay less because you are paying too much in proportion to the wealthy?

Let us know. There's a poll down below, and we've offered you some options, but add

some comments if you want as well. They are valuable to us. They do influence how we make future videos.

Poll

[poll id="235"]

Taking further action

If you want to write a letter to your MP on the issues raised in this blog post, there is a ChatGPT prompt to assist you in doing so, with full instructions, [here](#).

One word of warning, though: please ensure you have the correct MP. ChatGPT can get it wrong.

Comments

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