Disruptive Sharing Pt. 2



A few weeks back we took a look at some of the downsides of our new “sharing” economy. It’s worth taking a look at some of the really positive aspects of the expanding embrace of entrepreneurial enthusiasm.

I know a number of top-cut people who are entrepreneurs. I mean this with absolute sincerity and conviction; these are people who would bail my ass out of a crack without hesitation, people who give back and pay forward as a matter of character and habit. People with greater social compassion and engagement than I have to offer on my best day, and who do it pretty much without a break.

Some of my friends have or will spend their last dime and ounce of energy trying to turn an idea into something real and tangible. This is the core of entrepreneurship: taking an idea from the wisps of neuro-chimera and bringing it into the world in a form that can be seen, felt, heard, touched. Even the most committed democratic socialist can recognize the essential value in being able to take an idea from concept to actuality. Entrepreneurship is about getting things done.

And many of these people have created opportunities for other people to expand their own creative expression, to have jobs that offer both economic return and the chance to make a tangible difference through their work. As someone who spent too many years toiling in large organizations – a constant exercise of pouring from the empty into the void – this is a significant contribution to quality of life in our

communities.

And it ain't easy. Aside from competing entrepreneurs, you have to face a barrage of people telling you, every step of the way, that "that will *never* work".

Same thing in the "arts" – I know any number of writers, musicians, visual artists, &c. who have figured out a way to create a product that people are willing to pay for. Let's go ahead and say that *product* is a value-neutral term. *A Love Supreme* is a product. So is a Don DeLilo novel. The Bitter Southerner is an entrepreneurial project. Hell, even this bloggy little vineyard is an act of entrepreneurship.<fn>However feeble by the prevailing measure of entrepreneurial success.</fn> Whether the impulse to create these products was mercenary or driven by some other urge is irrelevant. Converting these ideas into something tangible was most definitely entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is not in itself a bad (or even good) thing. It's a value-neutral mindset, just as likely to result in a cure for cancer or erectile disfunction as it is to bring us a more effective high-capacity semi-automatic weapon or herbicidal agent that happens to also cause birth defects in birds and mammals.

But if entrepreneurship *per se* is value-neutral, its practice is often anything but. Where one 'trep brings an innovative idea to bear on a long-standing need or problem, too many others use their ingenuity to deliver "disruptions" that are at best merely useless and wasteful; at their worst, too many bright ideas are downright predatory and damaging. (More on this in Part 3.)

It's a current hot fad to tout entrepreneurship as the silver bullet that will save us from everything that ails us. This is where the whole enterprise opens itself up to the schools of remora who are always ready to swarm the hottest new trend.

Worse, the presentation of the "principles" of entrepreneurship are often taught under the guise of value-neutrality despite their inherently value-rich underpinnings.

In Part 1, I linked to an article in *Jacobin* magazine, "The Entrepreneurship Racket", a hard look at higher education's headlong rush into the cult and fad of the entrepreneur. The driving force behind this new branch of academia is a direct outgrowth of decades of free-market propaganda that really took flight under the greed-is-good ethos of the Reagan raj.<fn>Remember…Reagan ruined *everything*.</fn> Under the rubrics of this approach to entrepreneurship, the only thing that matters is the amount of money an idea generates. The insidious aspect of this measurement is that it pretends to value neutrality, while other concerns (e.g., worker dislocation/exploitation, distortions of real estate values and availability, environmental or health issues, &c.) will be disregarded as squishy moral issues, consideration of same being a clear violation of so-called value neutrality. In this paradigm, areas of study that do not generate Return on Investment or produce alumni with abundant incomes that can be tapped for future donations are threatened with extinction under the value-neutral rubrics that are coming to define entrepreneurial higher-ed governance. Anthropology? Classical studies? Worse than useless.

The propaganda program behind the burgeoning entrepreneur fad continues a decades-long campaign against organized labor and any regulation that can be viewed as an imposition against those who would lead us unto the glorious free-market promised land. If you think this is hyperbolic, then you've never read the curricular materials disseminated by pro-business groups like American for Prosperity and the like.

To evangelists of free-market doctrine, it is a matter of fundamental faith that our salvation lies in some sort of Randian utopia in which success and happiness depends solely upon the "value neutral" measure of RoI. The extent to which

this has become accepted as “common sense”<fn>A phrase that generally predicts an impending bullshit shower.</fn> is indicative of the success of a long-term program of indoctrination disguised as education.

The prevailing Gospel of Entrepreneurship is about getting things done that make money.<fn>Notwithstanding the sub-field of Social Entrepreneurship, which urges innovation that provides benefit to a vaguely defined common good. Not that this is bad; neither is it as purely good as its champions might suggest. More in Part 3.</fn> We’ve all but abandoned the critical thinking that lies behind the notion of ‘just because you can, doesn’t mean you should’ and replaced it with ‘if it makes money, just do it’. The boiler room in *Glengarry Glen Ross* is pretty much the naked id of value neutral entrepreneurship.

This is not a blanket indictment of the ‘trep spirit. I know too many good people who approach their business activities with sensitivity to environmental and cultural impacts, people who honestly treat their entrepreneurship as central to their commitment to responsible citizenship. Really good folks who are as unlike this smirking shitstain as water is from fire.



Possibly the most punchable face in America.

If you get right down to it, the only thing Martin Shkreli did wrong was to rub everyone's nose in his steaming pile of "success". His predatory disruptions were right in line with the free-market Gospel of St. Ronald. He's the poster boy for free-market entrepreneurship. He just forgot to use his indoor voice.

If hair metal is the result of too many people not realizing that *Spinal Tap* was a joke, the flood of Shkrelis in our midst may be a result of people not recognizing that Gordon Gekko was a villain, not a role model. Given the overwhelming success of free-market evangelism, this outcome should come as no surprise.

That Uber/Lyft or WalMart or Airbnb or Amazon offer products and services that "we" have enthusiastically embraced does not excuse the very real damage that each of these companies have imposed in the course of their disruptive triumph. There was a

sign hanging in a guitar repair shop I used to visit that said, “Fast. Good. Cheap. Pick two.” As a society, we have chosen. Cheaper, faster…we love that shit. It’s long since past time to take a look at the ‘good’ we are sacrificing.