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BY

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It's too easy to rant about this nonsensical Orwellian "sharing" economy and the technology businesses that created it; too easy to snark about the fawning media and complicit users. But why bother? Nobody listens: you're all paging Uber cars or preparing to weekend in somebody else's house.

So what if the whole idea of "sharing" is perverted but nobody notices? The verb "to share" has meant *to use and take responsibility for something with others* in the sense of dividing that thing among people. Typically, it is not associated with a use/time fee. As a noun, the word refers to the *allotment of a thing* or to the allotment itself, as in the share of a company. But that's just Oxford and they'll come around.

How is it not loopy that if I let you stay in my empty apartment for the night and you pay me $100, I am sharing? Yet if I own a licensed building with the express purpose of lodging you for the night, I'm not. If I pick you up outside your office and take you to the airport in my car for a fee based on the distance, I'm sharing. Force me to have a license to do that and I'm a taxi or livery.

I hear "sharing is better." More disruptive; better service; better experience. Yadda, yadda, yadda. That may be true. Maybe. Still, the only thing I see being shared is the transaction fee due to the vendor… with Uber and AirBnB, et al.

There's no point illuminating these facts because if they aren't ignored and I dismissed as regressive, the conversation gets repointed at the *user experience* for which there's no rational discussion. Or, those who follow such things will bring up the market valuation of Uber, under the implicit presumption that it's relevant to this commercial hoax. As if either of these were important or even the only considerations to make.

So instead, I join the bandwagon. I come to praise Uber not to bury it.

You have to admire the underlying technologies these businesses, particularly Uber, created. They have capitalized on digitization as it should be capitalized upon. They have an elaborate and sophisticated dispatching system that marries many independent sources of supply with many independent sources of demand. This is not trivial. There are a lot of moving parts. And the challenge gets more complex with each selection variable offered to those making the demands.

Forget the gibber jabber about ride sharing. Even if it was sharing, it's just a market toe-hold and proof point. Think about what such technological capability could do in the Internet of Things. Think about what can and will happen to supply chains and such when *everything* is online, tracked, and talking. All the breathless braying about the wonders of the IoT imply technologies that will do *something* with all these interconnected things. After the obvious, low hanging fruit are exploited, more than anything else, the implied capability is a multi-variable, multi-dimensional dispatching system. Precisely what Uber has in two dimensions at the moment.

Also, know that Uber the ride sharing service could disappear tomorrow having served a valuable purpose to society and the economy. Without conceding to it being anything more than a technology-driven taxi service dressed up in doublespeak, Uber has succeeded where no politician or commercial interest could before. Its successful "sharing" has gone around the sclerotic arteries of municipal governance and blasted the malignant tumor of entrenched taxi industries. In North America, the taxi business in every major city has been an unassailable fief immune to competition, governance, or oversight. The taxi industry has been more closed that the mob.

While customers suffered (justifiably) surly cab drivers and decaying cars, nothing had an effect. Nothing sufficiently incented or threatened the livery barons to change their hostility toward their masters and customers. They flagrantly ignored political pressure and were immune to competition. Until, of course, Uber showed up. Customers saw it was possible to have better service and demanded it. They voted with their apps. Governments couldn't stop it. So the taxi industry had to come into the 21st-century (kicking and screaming). Municipal governments are revisiting the industry. Taxi rolling stock is slowly being upgraded. Drivers are more polite. (Perhaps because they're getting treated better by the taxi barons?) All because of Uber.

So, praise be to Uber. I await its evolution beyond this sharing economy nonsense, which is bound to happen since we continue to share our money with them.

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