

“Process philosophy of entrepreneurship and spiritual innovation”

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Vincent Blok (2018) has recently argued for a thorough philosophical reflection on the concept of innovation, especially in regards to its now-normative technological and economic connotations. Blok (2018) takes Schumpeter’s ‘Faustian’ theory of creative destruction as the leading theoretical platform for further philosophical thinking on the assumptions of innovation. Demonstrating how Schumpeter’s idea of creative destruction has been developed towards a life-affirming philosophy of entrepreneurship (Weiskopf & Steyaert, 2009), the purpose of this paper is to inquire how process philosophy of entrepreneurship (Hjorth, 2015) can contribute to the philosophical understanding of innovation. In particular, I explore how an archetypal understanding of entrepreneurship can lead to a paradigm shift from an external-technological to an internal-spiritual understanding of innovation. The common grounds of process philosophy and archetypal theory are identified in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Recent philosophical discussions on entrepreneurship as a process draws our interest towards the imagination and narratives (Gartner, 2007) and ethico-aesthetic politics (Weiskopf, 2007), calling for a *becoming*, rather than being, philosophy to understand the proto-organizational dynamics of entrepreneuring (Hjorth, 2015; Steyaert, 2007). This view challenges traditionalist readings of entrepreneurship fixated on acts that begin and end in the economy; as process philosophy of entrepreneurship seeks to understand the mundane in entrepreneuring (Rehn & Taalas, 2004), it is an ongoing criticism of overeconomic readings of life. Likewise, it raises doubts over the entrepreneur as a mythic savior of the economy (Sørensen, 2008).

Process philosophy of entrepreneurship tends to focus on how entrepreneurship is “connected to social change and societal transformation”, labelling it “a process based on the course of social change” (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006, p. 1). The phenomenon has thus been given the umbrella term ‘social entrepreneurship’. The philosophical underpinnings of social entrepreneurship have emerged mainly from poststructuralist interpretations of Nietzsche (Hjorth, 2015). Nietzsche (2005) saw the fall of Christianity as the need for man to craft their own myths to replace institutional ones. Reliance on old symbols would prove corrupting and degrading to the human spirit, when therein the purpose of mankind would be to reach for a higher state of being, transcendence through the destruction of the old. Achieving this would presuppose a high level of creative work from the individual. Nietzsche’s own example was his philosophy, which he presented in an opaque mix of symbolism, poetry and parable.

Although one should be wary of equating the creativity Nietzsche was calling for with the innovative practices entrepreneurs are commonly affiliated with, both are nevertheless similarly affective processes enabling transcendence (Hammershøj, 2018). Appropriately, Weiskopf & Steyaert (2009) have suggested that Nietzsche’s parable of transformation can be used to focus on entrepreneurship as an affirmation; a becoming activity that says a perpetual ‘yes’ to everything that increases possibilities in life. This does not mean to treat entrepreneurship only as ‘success’, but to understand how everyday practices can become creative and how symbolic parables are actually carried out. ‘Success’ being a metaphysical term and a source of confusion (Sørensen, 2008), process philosophy takes interest in how entrepreneuring and innovation can be thought of as dormant in the mundane. Entrepreneurship and innovation, when understood in this way, are *transformative* at heart.

While much of process philosophy of entrepreneurship focuses on the political and social aspects in postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche, archetypal theory (Jung, 1991) seeks to understand how the individual can make use of mythic creativity to psychological benefit. C. G. Jung (1989) saw Nietzsche’s personal demise as an almost martyrial sign of how mankind would have to

craft new, more personal myths, but, unlike Nietzsche, become well aware of their inevitable linkage to historical myths of the world and thus avoid social isolation. Therefore, archetypal theory refuses to see religion as something to be avoided; rather, it seeks a qualitative change in religious beliefs and practices. Drawing from the basic philosophical insights of archetypal theory, the heroic savior myth of entrepreneurship (Sørensen, 2008) becomes something not to be debunked, but understood in all its theological and mythological connections and philosophical assumptions in order to develop it towards a more profound change in the subject. Archetypal theory adds to process theory a metaphysical structure, one that is unattainable but from which panhuman representations of heroes, shadows and other archetypes emanate. Through an archetypal understanding of entrepreneuring, an everyday subjective innovativeness can be espied without following Nietzsche in falling into “depths far beyond himself” (Jung, 1989, p. 103).

Alfredo Sfeir-Younis (2002) has called this shift in focus ‘spiritual entrepreneurship’. While social entrepreneurship seeks to enhance the social core, commercial entrepreneurship economic performance, institutional entrepreneurship political goals, spiritual entrepreneurship seeks a development of the spiritual core of the subject (Shinde & Shinde, 2011). Spiritual entrepreneurship shifts focus from external innovation to an internal transformation of attitudes, not reliant on outside measures as guides for decisionmaking, but developing the inner moral core of the individual towards a sound basis for ethical action (Sfeir-Younis, 2002). Verily, a spiritual focus in entrepreneuring can serve as a potent catalyst for innovative behavior (Nandram, 2016; Srinivasan, 2012) with transformative effects towards common good (Virmani & Lépineux, 2016). With all its commercial, technological, social and institutional power, entrepreneuring can not only change the world but the practitioner as well: spiritual entrepreneurship seeks union of the inner and the outer in order to realize the full potential of the creative agent (Mukherjee, 2007). This is precisely the purpose of Jung’s (1991) archetypal theory. The application of archetypal theory with a spiritual focus to processual

understanding of entrepreneuring can, therefore, enrich our understanding of how innovative entrepreneurship can transform the subject towards a more profound affirmation of life.

All the while mainstream entrepreneurship research gains ever new knowledge on the market function of the innovative entrepreneur, we know remarkably little about how entrepreneurs themselves experience innovation and are lacking in philosophical reflection on how entrepreneurial innovation could be thought of as an inner transformation of the subject. It may not be a certainty that a more intrinsically-regulated entrepreneuring leads to more responsible innovation, but a shift in focus towards it can surely pave the way for a more tolerable social application of entrepreneurship before public intervention (Petersen, 2008).

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