

What Is Entrepreneurial Thinking?¹ Ten Theses and Provocations

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Abstract: This paper offers "ten theses on entrepreneurial thinking" to highlight personal, institutional, social, and methodological aspects that characterize an entrepreneurial approach to economic and social problem-solving. Ranging from the self-evident to the more challenging, the ten theses claim that entrepreneurial thinking (ET) is (or should be) characterized by the following attributes:

1. ET is hopeful thinking.
2. ET is melioristic thinking; it wants to make something better
3. ET is holistic thinking, in the sense of connective thinking.
4. ET is action-oriented and team-oriented; it has a multiplier effect.
5. ET enables leadership, by embracing possibility.
6. ET is emancipatory thinking – a force against alienation.
7. ET is social and ethical thinking.
8. ET is heuristic and dialectical thinking; it rejects the hubris of certainties.
9. ET is utopian thinking.
10. ET is about *connective* problem-solving.

Expanding beyond the confines of business and economics, ET can become a transformative force for the common good.

I. Defamiliarizing the Subject: A Fresh Look from a Humanistic Perspective

As a student of cultural and environmental practices, I approach this topic with a view from the margin: the questions I ask about entrepreneurship are different from those usually raised by scholars and practitioners working within the circle. Marginality, however, has this advantage: it

enables you to see different things, or see the same things differently. In literary and cultural studies, this is known as the phenomenon of “defamiliarization”: a way to take a fresh look.

To ask “What is entrepreneurial thinking?” has never been more timely: the economic and political crises around the world, and the looming environmental collapse of the planetⁱⁱ have led us to question many of the assumptions on which business and business education have rested since World War II, and many people look to entrepreneurship to provide not only new jobs, but also new ideas for the future, and solutions to the world’s most pressing problems. President Obama, who has been called “entrepreneur-in-chief” on *Wall Street Journal’s* “Market Watch,” gave a speech to Congress during his first term in which he invoked “the imaginations of our entrepreneurs” to help solve the nation’s problems. So many hopes and expectations are getting pinned on entrepreneurship that some have begun to wonder: is the academic discipline of Entrepreneurship, is the economic practice of entrepreneurs, is the mindset we loosely call “entrepreneurial thinking” able to deliver all those new solutions, or are we imagining a panacea that is bound to disappoint?

In two earlier papers, I looked at entrepreneurship for its emancipatory potential, at some of the conditions under which such a potential can unfold, and at some of the writers in the English-speaking tradition, Adam Smith and Benjamin Franklin, who articulated a vision for a “commercial society” in which individuals would be able to refashion themselves, socially and morally, through participation in market exchanges that would foster responsible behavior. I sought to find a root for our modern concept of entrepreneurship in the ideas and practices of the transatlantic Enlightenment, with its faith in rationality and education, and its hope that a proper understanding of enlightened self-interest would lead us to create a more humane world in which there would be no contradiction between doing well and doing good, between looking out for oneself and looking out for one’s neighbor; a world of opportunities for all, in which we could re-invent ourselves to overcome the obstacles put in our way by accidents of birth and fortune, race and gender, location and language. Entrepreneurship broadly defined, I suggested, could be the new way to fulfill the Enlightenment’s promise of economic self-realization, the way to revisit a question so unsatisfactorily addressed by history’s hostile twins of socialism and unfettered market capitalism: how can we create a world in which individual imagination and achievement are recognized and rewarded, while the fruits of such efforts also benefit the many?

What would a world be like in which we manage to avoid the two dead ends of economic individualism and economic collectivism?

In my second paper, I talked about the college at which I teach, which claims to have made entrepreneurship its “way of life,” and I talked about the challenges of transforming an educational institution in the light of this vision. I argued that “Entrepreneurship needs to be connected to values and vision if it is to inspire. It is not enough to connect it to the personal desire for wealth; economic individualism by itself is a dead end” (12). But I also said that “I believe that in this world of ours, the elements of hope and courage associated with entrepreneurship are sorely needed, on the collective as well as the individual level” (13).

In this essay, I build on these two papers to discuss entrepreneurial thinking not exclusively -- or even primarily -- as an attribute of business entrepreneurs, nor do I limit the term “entrepreneurship” to the domain of business. I offer my **ten theses** in a spirit of exploration and provocation, arranging them in ascending order, from the most self-evident to the most controversial.

II. The Purview and Promise of Entrepreneurial Thinking: Ten Theses

Thesis 1: Entrepreneurial thinking is hopeful thinking.

On the one hand, this is a commonplace, even trivial, notion, since entrepreneurs of any sort would not start their projects if they did not hope for success. On the other hand, if we extend the concept of hopefulness beyond the venture itself to the people involved in it, it acquires new significance. Entrepreneurship involves an act of self-creation and self-expression, self-invention or re-invention, a stepping out not only beyond the known boundaries of the self, but potentially also beyond the social forms in which the self is housed. It also requires that you invest hope in other people, both your collaborators and the audience or clientele whom your venture or project addresses, and in a somewhat orderly world that you hope will recognize and reward your efforts. Entrepreneurial thinking is different from management thinking and from the thinking that has pervaded traditional business education, in which an undercurrent of cynicism co-exists uneasily with faith in human nature. In entrepreneurial thinking, faith in human potential, including the human potential to behave rationally and decently, tends to have the upper hand.

Thesis 2: Entrepreneurial thinking is melioristic thinking; it wants to make or do something better.

That entrepreneurial thinking always aims at improving something would also appear to be self-evident, except when we begin to define “entrepreneurship” in very broad terms, far beyond business applications. This is exactly what needs to be done. This broader focus leads us right away to

Thesis 3: Entrepreneurial thinking is holistic thinking, in the sense of connective thinking.

It “thinks things together”; it connects knowledge from various domains; it connects people; it connects the short with the long term; it connects the means with the ends; it connects causes to effects.

This is not as simple as it sounds: what belongs together? What is to be included or ignored? When, for instance, we consider the consequences of externalizing environmental costs in so many of the world’s extractive and manufacturing industries or in industrial agriculture (consequences that include ruined landscapes, poisoned waters, species extinction and climate disruption), or of outsourcing production in ways that externalize social costs, the term “holistic” implies responsibility for “the whole,” for all the connections that we touch. Entrepreneurial thinking in this sense becomes thinking that embraces responsibility and rejects denial.

Thesis 4: Entrepreneurial thinking is action-oriented and team-oriented; it has a multiplier effect.

It starts from a need to act on something – a problem, an idea, an opportunity. And it brings people together around a project. When you see the word “entrepreneur” on a French building site, it refers to the “entrepreneur en bâtiment” or general contractor, someone who organizes people around a project, not a person who starts a business. In this sense, an entrepreneur is someone who forms partnerships, who makes something happen with the aid of others.

An entrepreneur is a person who does or undertakes something. In a review of the word’s history, Robert Hébert and Albert Link came up with a list of twelve overlapping definitions,

whose commonality is that they all speak of an action to be undertaken. Action orientation, a determination to have agency in this world, is of course a property characteristic of *commerce* per se, a property famously praised by Henry David Thoreau, the Transcendentalist philosopher and author of the book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854). “Every path but your own is the path of fate,” he says and praises commerce for “its enterprise and bravery”: “It does not clasp its hands and pray to Jupiter,” but it is “confident and serene, alert, adventurous, and unwearied.” Entrepreneurial thinking wants to make things happen.

But entrepreneurial thinking also implies a readiness to see possibilities where many see only problems, and to empower others. Hence:

Thesis 5: Entrepreneurial thinking enables leadership, by embracing possibility.

The Art of Possibility is the title of a book by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander – a psychotherapist and an internationally known conductor, respectively. They point out the obvious: that many of our frameworks for action are really inventions. (Schumpeter would have said that many of our frameworks for action are really just *conventions* waiting to be creatively destroyed. That, of course, raises the question which conventions exactly should be the target of entrepreneurship.) But the Zanderses’ book, published by the Harvard Business School, is really about leadership, addressed both to actual and potential leaders, and to individuals working in organizations. How can the individual find fulfillment while contributing to the whole? If a large part of entrepreneurial thinking is creative self-expression, how can this be maintained by individuals other than the founder of an enterprise? Can everyone be an entrepreneur, even if she works for someone else? This, too, calls for a transformation of conventional thinking.

Here “the art of possibility” overlaps with the action orientation of entrepreneurial thinking, as the Zanderses argue that transformation happens not through argument or even persuasion, but through practice -- and through translating a shared vision into shared leadership. “How much greatness are we willing to grant people?” (73) This question, pertinent for any organization, is magnified in the entrepreneurial enterprise: how do you harness people’s energy, make each of them a leader? This undertaking calls for new forms of connectedness: not only must all the *individuals* in an organization accept leadership responsibility of some sort, but the *official leaders* must also define themselves as servants in a larger cause and embrace, in their

relationship with others, what Robert Greenleaf has called “servant leadership” (Greenleaf 1977). The democratic potential of this concept and its applicability to the political and social realm is striking.

Of course there are two sides to this coin. On the one side, if everyone is enabled, everyone has some degree of agency. Günter Faltin (2013) has coined the term “citizen entrepreneurship” to elaborate on the idea that “everyone can be an entrepreneur,” as Muhammad Yunus has phrased it. But the term “citizen entrepreneur” also alerts us to the other side of the coin: everyone has responsibility, too -- responsibility for the whole entity of which you are a “citizen.” This is difficult and far-reaching. When we talk about “corporate social responsibility,” for instance, we do not necessarily connect it to questions of agency and leadership at the individual level; in the business world, this responsibility may in fact be delegated to specialists. Entrepreneurial thinking, however, involves leadership and agency in individuals at every level: it means “thinking like a citizen,” not like an employee, not like a bureaucrat, not even like a “stakeholder.” A stakeholder may be passive; a citizen must practice the agency citizenship provides. The rewards are many.

Thesis 6: Entrepreneurial thinking is emancipatory thinking -- a force against alienation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Personal agency is also an antidote to alienation. The concept of alienation has a long tradition and carries a variety of meanings, all somehow connected by the notion that in an alienated life, a person is prevented somehow from becoming his or her “true self.” In the Marxist tradition, alienated work is the result of the division and commodification of labor, through which the individual worker loses all the pleasure that could come from creative and meaningful work. In his posthumously published Critique of the Gotha Program of the German Social Democrats (1875), “Kritik des Gothaer Programms,” Marx famously envisioned a communist society in which this pleasure would once again be possible, in which “labor has become not just a means for life, but the foremost desire in life.”^{iv} This, of course, also describes the condition of the entrepreneur, for whom work is fulfilling and transformative, and for whom work can become a form of happiness.

In an interview, the British historian Eric Hobsbawm emphasized the sense of powerlessness that many people feel in a global economic crisis. Where can they turn for hope

and guidance? What can they do to change their lives? For Hobsbawm, the demise of Socialism means that there is no “Gegenentwurf,” no counter-vision to the precariousness of a market capitalism that constantly needs to be rescued from itself. Could it not be that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking, broadly defined, have the potential to generate such a counter-vision of the world? A world in which the problems facing us can be managed and in which individuals get a chance to overcome their sense of powerlessness?

To the philosopher Rahel Jaeggi, alienation is such a sense of powerlessness as Hobsbawm describes. But there is more: alienation is a *disruption of connectedness*: “An alienated human being is one whose relationship with self and world is disturbed. Such a person feels estranged from his own life, his actions or his desires; she is disconnected from the social world, but also the world of things, by which she is surrounded.”^v

Entrepreneurial thought and action, as a specific way of being in the world, may have the potential to provide a counter-vision. “To be un-alienated,” according to Jaeggi, “marks a certain way of directing one’s own life. This would be a life in which one pursues one’s projects in a self-defined way, projects one makes one’s own and is able to identify with.”^{vi} But she also warns us to be realistic: “Non-alienation is not a condition of harmony, free of conflicts, nor is it identical with what some call ‘happiness,’ but perhaps it is the only thing we can or should say about the good life.”^{vii}

Such a large view is both helpful and challenging: alienation, Jaeggi argues, disrupts our sense of connectedness to other people and to the world in general (*and* to the extent that the self is socially defined and manifested in action, our connection to ourselves and our potential for agency). If we want entrepreneurial thought and action to provide an antidote to alienation, we need to say: if entrepreneurship only rests on economic individualism, its ability to restore such connectedness is extremely limited. If, however, it agrees to define itself as connected to others, it must look at the whole picture, both the means and the ends of economic activity; it cannot avoid, for instance, the question of what the good life is (which economics avoids, leaving the regulation of wishes to the market). However, if you don’t just leave that project to market forces, you automatically enter the realm of ethics. Entrepreneurial thought and action, if seen in this light, inevitably lead us back to ethics, which asks: how shall we live? How shall we relate? What is at the same time good for us as well as for everyone else?^{viii}

This, crucially, is one of the factors that distinguish entrepreneurial thought and action from mere “innovation”: innovation in business tends to focus on a specific product or market, whereas entrepreneurial thinking needs to keep a larger picture in focus. While innovation can pretend to be value-neutral, entrepreneurial thinking cannot, and should not even try.

Thesis 7: Entrepreneurial thinking is social and ethical thinking.

In a path-breaking study of women minority entrepreneurs, Mary Godwyn and Donna Stoddard have discovered a different model for entrepreneurial motivation and activity: the women they studied “reject the narrow model of business owner as self-interested actor making decisions that prioritize individual wealth and shareholder power at the cost of public good, environmental health, family, and emotional attachments. That is yesterday’s model that has proven unsustainable, even disastrous today.” By contrast, these women’s vision “represents a new paradigm of equal commitment both to social and environmental, and to personal and economic good” (26).

Writing from a perspective of sociology and gender studies, Godwyn and Stoddard emphasize the inherently anti-normative impulse of entrepreneurship: “Inherent to entrepreneurial enterprise is the valuation of change, novelty and difference; therefore, **entrepreneurial vision is by definition a minority perspective** residing outside of the norm” (24; emphasis in the original). In the case of the twelve entrepreneurs they studied, they find that these women uniformly “[apply] their labor to social reconstruction” (30). “Their entrepreneurial process is part of a meaningful association with other people as well as a central element of their personal identities and access to the economy ... Their values are community-focused rather than self-interested, and do not prioritize profit over social impact, but instead illustrate how both can be, and perhaps must be, held in equal balance” (30-31). They “do not deploy the philanthro-capitalist model” in which “profit comes first and ... philanthropic ends might be developed later; nor do they conceive of their businesses as a zero-sum game where one interest wins because another loses” (31). Godwyn and Stoddard find it most significant that “these women do not imagine that business has its own separate rules, discreetly removed from the social sphere where morality, ethics and human relationships reside. Instead, for them, business is always situated within and guided by social and moral objectives” (31). Taking their cue from

Muhammad Yunus's observation that women are better *borrowers*, the authors "conclude that **minority women are uniquely positioned to solve social problems through better business**" (31; emphasis in the original).

One example from among the twelve stories in Godwyn and Stoddard's book must suffice here: it is the story of the Legacy Bank in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, founded in 1999 by Margaret Henningson with her partners Delores Sims and Shirley Lanier, "the first bank in the United States founded by African American women" (129). It was started with the express purpose of serving a population that could not get loans to buy homes or start businesses and that, in many instances, could not even open bank accounts because of past financial troubles. This is the difference the bank makes: "While most banks turn away those who have had trouble, Legacy reaches out to them" (132) through its First Accounts Financial Liberty program, a financial education program in partnership with social service agencies, in which potential customers learn the fundamentals of keeping a bank account and managing their money. "The policies of Legacy Bank are not only socially responsible," write Godwyn and Stoddard, "they are socially conscious: they heal wounds endured by low-income, marginalized people. [Yunus's] Grameen Bank reaches out to those people banks declare un-creditworthy, and Legacy reaches out to people other banks deem untrustworthy. Legacy invests in a socially and economically disadvantaged population, and the risk has paid off" (133).

Examples like this are needed to restore the legitimacy and credibility of business leadership. "To regain society's trust," the authors of a *Harvard Business Review* wrote in 2008, "business leaders must embrace a way of looking at their role that goes beyond their responsibility to the shareholder to include a civic and personal commitment to their duty as institutional custodians. In other words, it is time that management finally became a profession" (70). In the article, the authors argue for a new code of conduct, a kind of Hippocratic Oath for business managers, as well as higher standards for business education based on "a coherent body of formal knowledge" (74). This is hardly a new idea,^{ix} but indicative of a desire among management professionals for meaning and social acceptance. That a code of conduct will solve the problem is doubtful; that the social embeddedness of business practices is being highlighted is helpful. Entrepreneurial thinking, I would argue, must take that larger view from the start.

Thesis 8: Entrepreneurial thinking is heuristic and dialectical thinking; it rejects the hubris of certainties.

Saras D. Sarasvathy has argued that there is “a distinct form of rationality” that characterizes entrepreneurial thinking, “that can be applied across space, time and technology” (2). She calls this “effectual reasoning” and sets it up as the opposite of “causal” reasoning. Causal reasoning is “predictive,” like its sister, “creative causal reasoning.” By contrast, effectual reasoning “does not begin with a specific goal. Instead, it begins with a given set of means and allows goals to emerge contingently over time from the varied imagination and diverse aspirations of the founders and the people they interact with” (Sarasvathy 2).

Unlike causal reasoning, which proceeds from planning to execution, “effectual reasoning lives and breathes execution,” during which plans are constantly changed and adjusted. Here are some of Sarasvathy’s images for this process: “at any given moment, there is always a **meaningful picture** that keeps the team together, a **compelling story** that brings in more stakeholders and a **continuing journey** that maps out uncharted territories” (emphasis mine). Surprises are not deviations but the norm in entrepreneurship. (3) The underlying logic rests on a different notion about the future: “Causal reasoning is based on the logic, *To the extent that we can predict the future, we can control it.* ... Effectual reasoning, however, is based on the logic, *To the extent that we can control the future, we do not need to predict it*” (6). The future, while uncertain, is “learnable” and “becomes predictable over time” (7).

Lest we think that this is unproblematic, Sarasvathy sets up some conditions for this to work:

- (1) “enduring human relationships that outlive failures and create successes over time” (7). This means that people involved in a new venture need to be emotionally invested in it; they need to believe “that the effects they create will embody their deepest passions and aspirations while enabling them to achieve their best potential” (8);
- (2) The “affordable loss principle”: markets are reached with minimal resources. In fact, the very definition of “market” is adjusted: people create markets – “markets are in essence stable configurations of critical masses of stakeholders who come

together to transform the outputs of human imagination into the forging and fulfillment of human aspirations through economic means” (7).

- (3) The effects created may reflect “ignorance and cupidity” as well as beneficent aspirations. Hence, “the role of entrepreneurs and the market system” needs to be examined for the effect it has “in shaping our future as a species” (8).

This last point, yoked to Sarasvathy’s key concept, the unknowability of the future, links her discussion to the critique of our economic system that has been developed by environmental thinkers for the last half century. In recent years, the notion that the future is indeed controllable and that economic growth (relying on the planet’s resources) can and will continue forever has been attacked by a growing chorus of writers from varying disciplines. I will only mention two here, neither of whom is an economist. The scientist Tom Wessels has argued that, because of these faulty premises, “our current global economic system is behaving in a way that is absolutely contradictory to the way all natural complex systems function” (Wessels 108) and that we need to re-think the complex social system we call “the economy.” The writer Wendell Berry has blasted the hubris governing the notion of a “limitless economy” because it also fails to understand that humans are “limited creatures in a limited world” (Berry 44). Economists, increasingly concerned about the costs of climate change, have also been re-thinking their premises. One of them, Herman E. Daly, wrote an introduction to Berry’s collection of essays on economics, *What Matters? Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth* (2010), in which he criticizes the analytic thinking dominant in his own discipline: “Analytic thinking requires a reality that is like a number” (Daly xii-xiii), but since reality is not like a number, what is required is “clear-headed reasoning with dialectical concepts about what matters” (xiii). Dialectical thinking, a concept first developed by Aristotle, has the virtue of being able to “accommodate qualitative change” but also requires good judgment “in handling contradiction” (Daly xii). Where neither analytic nor dialectical thinking suffices to solve a problem, Daly tells us to follow Berry’s advice that we need to be “more at home with ignorance and mystery” (xiii). Only by admitting our ignorance can we think beyond what we know.

Thesis 9: Entrepreneurial thinking is utopian thinking.

Here is a major power source of entrepreneurial thinking: to think beyond what seems possible, as well as beyond our individual selves. All of us have a desire to create something larger, more

enduring than our physical selves; to create something meaningful that, however briefly, outlasts us. People contribute money to causes like hospitals and universities not only because of a tax advantage; they start enterprises not only to create wealth for themselves, but also to leave a mark on the world. This is a utopian impulse, which seeks not only to find the good life, but also to face up to our mortality. And it is not just the good life it seeks; it is also the meaningful life, in which we know we are cherished and remembered, however briefly, for a contribution we have made.

The term “utopian” is commonly used as a term of opprobrium, relying on the commonly understood etymology of “u-topos,” the “nowhere place,” in the tradition of Thomas More’s famous book (1516). “Utopian” is something that can never happen. But in the Anglophone world, the world’s English pronunciation has always implied a homophonic pun: the Greek word “eu-topos,” meaning the “good place,” can become “eutopia,” pronounced the same way as “utopia”; the two meanings, the good place and the no-place, are acoustically conflated. So in this rendering, when we say “e/utopian,” we emphasize the usefulness of the vision; we embrace the necessity of hope; we affirm “utopia” as working fiction that can help us create a reality that is better than what we have right now. (In literature, utopian fiction generally has the function to critique an imperfect reality.)

The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), in his three-volume book entitled *The Principle of Hope (Das Prinzip Hoffnung)*, drafted during exile in the United States and first published in communist East Germany during the 1950s, categorizes designs for utopian societies according to their content and means, as well as their temporal or geographical remoteness from the unsatisfying reality of their authors’ time and place. “Zukunftsutopien” or “utopias of the future” constitute one such category. Bloch sought to retrieve the concept of utopia from the Marxist doghouse while remaining in the Marxist fold himself (an all but impossible task),^x developing a philosophy called “concrete utopia.” Bloch advocates a “militant optimism” in the face of an always fallible and disappointing reality, which is necessary to keep that vision of a better future alive.

“The root of history,” he writes, “is the working, creating, transforming and revising human being. Once humanity has got a grip on itself and founded its life in real democracy without loss and alienation, something is created in the world that shines up in everyone’s childhood, a place where no one has yet been: home” (Bloch 1628).^{xi}

That vision of a better future, I argue, is – or should be – at the core of entrepreneurial thinking.

What that vision is *not* is a fantasy of omnipotence, as in mantras like “everything is possible” or “you can be anything you want to be.” To the extent that it is a fantasy, it is one of transformation, romantic and powerfully enabling, but rooted in reality and parsed by practicality. Useful as a cultural critique – a critique of bureaucratic stodginess and arrogance, of entrenched practice and privilege --, it invites critique in turn if it ignores reality and participates in what Wendell Berry has called “our disease of limitlessness” (Berry 51). Entrepreneurial thinking, as and like “utopian” thinking, can – and should – give us a better understanding of our world and, ultimately, of ourselves.

Thesis 10: Entrepreneurial thinking is about *connective* problem-solving.

The term “connective” can be applied in many different contexts. In entrepreneurship (as opposed to “entrepreneurial thinking”), drawing together already existing, disparate pieces of information, different experiences and skill sets, can be a creative act that generates new solutions to old problems, or better ways to do things. Günter Faltn’s suggestion for creating startups from pre-existing technological and experiential components, rather than developing everything from scratch, is a well-known example of that “connectivity” (Faltn 2008).

In a very large sense, the term “connective” also points to the fact that many of the problems we face in the world today are the result of disconnection. It is obvious that a problem like climate change has no individual solutions, only individual contributions to possible solutions. What is less obvious is that economic problems are the result of disconnection as well. Many critics have pointed out the contradictions between the social values that govern our everyday relationships with people we live and work with, and those “values” (if we want to call it that) that seem to govern the marketplace (e.g., Felber; Godwyn and Stoddard; Berry). Adam Smith envisioned no such contradiction: the “invisible hand” was the visible and conscious connection between participants in the marketplace, whose moral or immoral behavior would determine commercial success as well as social reputation and standing in the community. Self-regulation of markets, for him, depended on the visibility and the palpability of the social network in which the individual participant was embedded (Muller 48 and *passim*), and self-

interest was always already “enlightened” self-interest: your own well-being is contingent on the well-being of the community you live in and do business with.

It is fitting and a little ironic, then, that the expansion of the “entrepreneurial” concept proposed in this paper should take us back to a moral philosopher who is so commonly mis-read as the founding father of laissez-faire economic liberalism. The recent work that seeks to explore the emancipatory aspects of entrepreneurship (Rindova et al., Verduijn et al., cited earlier) is committed to the same kind of positive change that Adam Smith envisioned. This change cannot be achieved by means of economic individualism but requires what I call a “connective” approach (not to be confused with “collective,” a term overloaded with problematic connotations). This approach conceives of the common good as inseparable from personal self-interest; it re-imagines the commons that neo-liberal theory is said to have destroyed. Instances of connective-problem-solving already exist and are currently proliferating. The women minority entrepreneurs discussed by Godwyn and Stoddard (see Thesis 7 above) provide encouraging stories. Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus’s Grameen Bank continues to be the most famous example globally (notwithstanding the misuse of micro-lending by others and Yunus’s political troubles). In Africa, Wangarai Maathai’s Green Belt movement (for which she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004) is an entrepreneurial venture in connective problem-solving, characterized by many of the attributes of entrepreneurial thinking discussed in this paper. In the United States as well as in Germany, models of connective problem-solving, often taking the form of neighborhood or regional initiatives, are emerging in response to the manifestations of climate change, or the actions of its deniers (as examples for the U.S., see McKibben, *Eaarth*, chapter 4; *Oil and Honey*, passim; Pipher). In addition, older traditions and practices of connective problem-solving are being explored for possible remedies for present problems (as in the writings of Wendell Berry, but also in ethnographic work like Helena Norberg-Hodge’s *Ancient Futures*). An acquaintance with older practices can even give rise to innovative business models, as in the example of Essex Farm in upstate New York, described in Kristin Kimball’s brilliant memoir, *The Dirty Life*.

Connective problem-solving uses entrepreneurial thinking to reduce the distance between Self and Other. Is this a utopian idea? See Thesis 9.

III. Entrepreneurial Thinking and the Teaching of Entrepreneurship

If entrepreneurial thinking represents a new start in our thinking about the world of economics, and beyond that in our thinking about the social worlds we inhabit, how can we build connective problem-solving into the teaching and the practice of entrepreneurship?

A few years ago, a taskforce at my home institution created a white paper in which it conjured a vision of entrepreneurial thought and action by which anchor our pedagogy and curricula. Building on our mission, the taskforce defined “entrepreneurial thinking” as follows:

- “Entrepreneurial thinkers can identify, assess, and shape opportunities in a variety of contexts. They use creative and innovative approaches to develop and act on opportunities to create value for stakeholders and society.
- Entrepreneurial thinkers have the ability to navigate and excel in uncertain or even unknowable environments. Entrepreneurial thinkers create opportunities using a method of observing, acting, reflecting, and learning that is a constant and ongoing process.
- Entrepreneurial thinking does not and cannot exist without entrepreneurial action. Each action generates inputs into the thinking and analysis required to make and find the opportunities that generate social and economic value everywhere” (“Themes” 2).

How this thinking is to be implemented in a pedagogical framework is the subject of ongoing discussions. Getting more of the world’s population to think and act like entrepreneurs, many of my colleagues believe, is vital for its future, and an important task of not just *business* education. It also opens opportunities for our institutions to have agency in the world beyond what we traditionally do.

Where does this situate entrepreneurship education? If it works its way around to thinking of itself as the queen of business disciplines, in the same way that philosophy was often depicted as the queen reigning over the seven *artes liberales* during the Middle Ages, it can be the chief place in business schools where the means and the ends of economic activity are thought together, and where the most interesting and troubling questions are not bracketed, shelved, sidelined, or “externalized,” but urgently addressed, in dialog with academic disciplines beyond business and economics. This is a much larger topic still, but my own, “utopian” hope is

this: entrepreneurial thinking, and entrepreneurial teaching and scholarship, may yet be a place where some of the academic and social renewal is enabled that we so urgently need.

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ⁱ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, on October 4, 2009. Keeping the tone of the original presentation, rather than constructing a more conventional academic paper, has been a conscious decision. I thank Katrin Fischer for her critical comments on this revised and expanded version.

ⁱⁱ Among the many summaries available, one of the most concise is given at the beginning of Speth's book (1-2), where we also find an illuminating sample "of the 'collapse' books" (5) on the market in 2008. Since then, the number has increased dramatically, as we struggle to comprehend what we have done and what lies ahead. Among the most incisive are Guterl, Hamilton, Kolbert, and McKibben (2010 and 2014). There is also an abundance of blogging on the subject, the best of which is to be found at www.grist.org.

ⁱⁱⁱ In recent years, the concept of emancipation has been developed and critically examined in a number of studies within the discipline of academic entrepreneurship (see, in particular, Rindova et al., and Verduijn et al.). Not surprisingly, Verduijn et al. caution us "that entrepreneurship's emancipatory quest is anything but self-evident; it will constantly be challenged, contained and co-opted by different obstacles and forces" (106). By focusing on aspects of alienation and agency, rather than claims of efficacy, I emphasize the sense of potential immanent in my notion of entrepreneurial thinking.

^{iv} "In einer höheren Phase der kommunistischen Gesellschaft, nachdem die knechtende Unterordnung der Individuen unter die Teilung der Arbeit, damit auch der Gegensatz geistiger und körperlicher Arbeit verschwunden ist; nachdem die Arbeit nicht nur Mittel zum Leben, sondern selbst das erste Lebensbedürfnis geworden; nachdem mit der allseitigen Entwicklung der Individuen auch ihre Produktivkräfte gewachsen und alle Springquellen des genossenschaftlichen Reichtums voller fließen - erst dann kann der enge bürgerliche Rechtshorizont ganz überschritten werden und die Gesellschaft auf ihre Fahne schreiben: Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen!" (*Kritik des Gothaer Programms*, Part I.) All original German texts are given here in footnotes; English translations or paraphrases are mine.

^v "Nach meiner Theorie ist ein Mensch entfremdet, dessen Selbst- und Weltbezug gestört ist. Er fühlt sich fremd seinem eigenen Leben gegenüber, seinen Handlungen oder seinen Wünschen gegenüber, er ist beziehungslos gegenüber der sozialen, aber auch der dinglichen Welt, die ihn umgibt."

^{vi} “Nicht entfremdet zu sein ... bezeichnet eine bestimmte Weise des Vollzugs des eigenen Lebens. Es wäre ein Leben, in dem man selbstbestimmt seine Projekte verfolgt, die man sich dabei zu eigen macht und mit denen man sich identifizieren kann.”

^{vii} “Nicht-Entfremdung ist weder ein harmonisch-konfliktfreier Zustand noch ist es identisch mit dem, was manche Menschen als ‘Glück’ bezeichnen, aber vielleicht ist es das Einzige, was wir über das gute Leben sagen können oder sollten.”

^{viii} In her honors thesis, “Redefining Success: Towards a Philosophy of Entrepreneurship,” in which she connects interviews with entrepreneurs to key philosophical concepts taken from such thinkers as Aristotle and John Stuart Mill, Dana Pansen has concluded that those entrepreneurs “who are successful do consider the effect of their actions on the entire community, even if that stretches as far as the entire world” (Pansen 24).

^{ix} In a 1912 commencement speech at Brown University entitled “Business - A Profession,” Louis D. Brandeis (later known as Justice Brandeis and the man after whom Brandeis University is named) said, “Real success in business is to be found in achievements comparable ... with those of the artist or scientist, of the inventor or the statesman. And the joys sought in the profession of business must be like their joys ...”

^x Because he criticized the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, he was forced to retire from his chair at the University of Leipzig in 1957 and left East Germany in 1961.

^{xi} “Die Wurzel der Geschichte aber ist der arbeitende, schaffende, die Gegebenheiten umbildende und ueberholende Mensch. Hat er sich erfasst und das Seine ohne Entaeusserung und Entfremdung in realer Demokratie begruendet, so entsteht in der Welt etwas, das allen in die Kindheit scheint und worin noch niemand war: Heimat.”

Not surprisingly, Wendell Berry, in our own time, has also emphasized the concept of home; see, among other places, his essay “Major in Homecoming” in *What Matters*” (pp. 31-36) and his magnificent novel *Jayber Crow* (2000).

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