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Creativity, entrepreneurship, innovation: threats and opportunities
Keynote speech at 2nd International Conference on Entrepreneurship
and Innovation

Philosophy contains insights into creativity and how it comes about. While deductive logic and rhetoric generally narrow the scope of discussion, (although rhetoric involves the listener in the process of understanding), it is in *mimesis* that we find pointers to creativity and in the use of language, most evidently in poetic language, that we find the creation of surplus of meaning. This is characteristic of all language that invites interpretation. It works by enabling new worlds to be envisioned, and by inviting hearers to act in those worlds. Such creative interaction comes about in dialogue which, in turn, is the key to the policy issues raised by the conference.

Thessaloniki is the city of Aristotle, one of the fathers of European philosophy.

Aristotle might be expected to have provided us with tools with which to address the issues of innovation and creativity.

Logic narrows the field

In his *Analytics*, Aristotle gave us the syllogism.

The concept is simple:

- A major premise; followed by
- A minor premise; from which follows
- A conclusion.

So

all humans are mortal; (major premise)

Aristotle is a human; (minor premise)

Therefore Aristotle is mortal.

The conclusion of a syllogism can be no broader than the premises.
Syllogisms narrow the field - from mortal beings, to humans, to Aristotle.

Creativity calls on us to open up the field, not to narrow it.

Not to define, refine and so confine, but
to suggest, to stimulate the imagination and to project new views.

...although rhetoric admits inference from the listener

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle sets out the rhetorical equivalent of the syllogism, the enthymeme.

The purpose of rhetoric is to persuade.

Exhaustive reasoning in speech can be tedious. Far from being persuasive, it can provoke resistance. I read that the philosopher Emerson said that arguments convince nobody: that to say something in so many words is far less effective than to suggest it. This is of course well understood by poets, who are masters of suggestion.

Aristotle understood this and warns orators against being too rigorous in an argument. Otherwise they become tedious, lose the sympathy of the audience and invite rebuttal.

An enthymeme leaves part of the argument unstated.

The listener is invited to fill the gap, and so is co-opted into the line of reasoning.

Advertisers and publicists use the enthymeme.

Hungry? Have a Twix!

The major premise, that *Twix bars will fill hungry gaps*, is not stated. If it was, we might not agree.

Mark Twain said that *since there is no law against composing music when one has no ideas whatever, the music of Wagner must be considered perfectly legal*.

The enthymeme never says that Wagner has no artistic ideas.

Had Twain said that, we would have dismissed him as ridiculous.

But he left it to us to draw the inference, so we just smile.

The enthymeme associates the listener in the conclusion.

But it is still deductive, and narrows the field.

***Mimesis* reveals reality by simplifying it; by distancing us, enables us to learn**

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle draws attention to the importance of *mimesis*, which can be loosely translated as imitation. He sees *mimesis* in literature, in music, dance, painting, sculpture and believes that it is fundamental to the way we learn.

One of the ways *mimesis* works is by simplifying experience.

So when Aristotle says that art imitates nature, he means that in doing so, it simplifies reality. But by simplifying reality, it also reveals it.

Painting reconstructs reality on the basis of a limited set of conventions.

In doing so, it reveals reality. It yields more by handling less.

An unskilled photograph captures everything, but yields nothing.

A line drawing by Picasso yields far more.

Part of its secret is that it engages the viewer to fill in the detail.

Tragedy is *mimesis*. It presents someone's undeserved misfortune and evokes our pity. But *mimesis* provides a narrative structure that distances us from the painful experience and so enables us to draw knowledge, consolation and insight from it.

Mimesis brings us close enough to reality to empathise, but keeps us sufficiently distanced to be able to observe it and reflect on it with detachment.

It is in the use of language that we create scope for surplus of meaning

Here is something fruitful. For *mimesis* points to the creative possibilities of language.

We express our identity, our self-awareness, and develop our creativity in language.

We do so not just in words and sentences, but in narratives, stories, histories and even in fictions; and we use figures of speech, metaphors, symbols.

In doing so, we have the capacity to develop new meaning.

Paul Ricoeur, the leading French philosopher, has pointed out how language can lead to surplus of meaning, can be creative of new understanding.

Rather than reducing the field of understanding, as the syllogism or the enthymeme, language can open it.

We can see this most clearly in the use of **poetic language**.

Take as an example our use of the **metaphor**.

A metaphor juxtaposes two concepts in a way that leads to the transfer of information from one to the other.

If I say that I saw my friend come down the hill on his bicycle as fast as a bullet, that would be a simile. It tells us that he was coming fast, but does not add to the meaning.

But if I say that my friend on his bicycle is a bullet, that is a metaphor. It invites the listener to transfer meaning from the idea of a bullet to their picture of my friend. So the listener could understand that he was going fast; that it was dangerous, even potentially lethal, to get in his way; that there was little hope of him turning corners; that I did not hear him until after he was past. In fact, the transfer of meaning is limited only by the listener's capacity for invention. My friend received a terrific push at the start and then was in free flight; he was spinning as he came...

That is what Ricoeur means by a **surplus of meaning**.

The meaning is not limited to the information put in by the speaker.
The listener extracts and builds meaning independently of the speaker.
There is meaning on the side of both speaker and listener.

Poetry has the creative power of re-describing our world and then of letting us appropriate new visions of it.

Aristotle says that metaphors are more than just decorative: they teach us new things.

Narrative that points to new worlds

Ricoeur takes these ideas much further. He sees narrative as a logical development of metaphor. Narratives include our personal life-narratives, our recounting of cultural stories, our histories or even our fictions. All of these create surplus of meaning.

A famous example of narrative that generates surplus of meaning is in Jesus' use of parables. Jesus is rarely declaratory in answering questions. He uses parables, and leaves it to the listener to generate the answer. The method has been remarkably successful. People are still drawing fresh insights from his parables 2000 years later and in quite different contexts.

All discourse, whether oral or written, calls for interpretation. We can see this most clearly in poetic text, but it happens elsewhere too.

By empowering the reader to interpret, discourse invites the reader to appropriate new meaning, to open up new worlds that may not have been seen by another.

More, interpretation invites us not just to visualise new worlds, but to want to place ourselves in them.

One of my daughters, when she was about 10 years old, read a famous children's novel *Anne of Green Gables*. She said, with endearing childish transparency, *I wish I was Anne of Green Gables*.

I think we have all shared that experience, of finding language opening up a world that we can envisage and where we say, *I can see myself in that world*, even *I want to be in that world* or better still, *I want to bring that world about*.

This is creativity.

Interaction that enables us to enter into new situations

The interaction between speaker and listener, between author and reader, calls forth new ideas, generated by the listener or the reader, that were not envisaged by the writer or the speaker.

New ideas, new insights, new vision.

New worlds in which I am motivated to take part.

The possibility to enter into experience that otherwise belongs to someone else.

I read in a **journal of nursing** how this can be applied to first person accounts of people living with muscular dystrophy.

This is a progressive wasting disease that affects young people and attacks their motor capacity. They need wheelchairs, they have to have mechanical ventilation.

First person accounts can be emotionally charged and hard to interpret.

By converting them into texts, using poetic language, it was possible for researchers to extract meaning that was beyond the initial communication.

Further, by enabling the researcher to envisage their own participation in the described situation, it enabled them to develop nursing care that more adequately responded to real patient need.

That is a very **practical example** of surplus of meaning.

There is creative capacity in our symbols and metaphors, in our narratives and dialogues, in the stories we tell and listen to, recount and interpret.

Where my experience interacts with your experience, my discourse enables you to gain insight, and therefore both of us to gain, not by mastering you, not by imposing my ideas on you, but by allowing you to draw new meaning from my words, that need not even be the meaning I intended to put there.

Dialogue as creative interaction

What has this to do with innovation and entrepreneurship?

Everything.

Creativity is a key to both.

It tells us that economic creativity does not come from individuals, but from their interaction.

There is a persistent, but false, notion that economic creativity moves in a single dimension.

So that research produces innovation.

Or that government decisions will produce innovation.

Both are fundamentally false,
yet contain a grain of truth.

False, because it is not governments but economic operators who are creative;

it is not government but the market

who decides whether a new product or service will be economically successful.

False, because all the research in the world does not generate a new firm, a new product or service. It is entrepreneurs who do that.

Yet with a grain of truth, because government can set up situations, create spaces and facilitate activities where entrepreneurs and innovators can act. It can also discourage them!

And it is true that research creates technical knowledge that entrepreneurs may be able to mobilise, in a process of dialogue, to meet the market.

Innovation is not action in a vacuum. It is not deductive logic.

Innovation is the result of creative dialogue.

The paradigm of that dialogue is when an entrepreneur sees a need and says, "If I could meet that need, the market would reward me." And then encounters an engineer who says "I could show you how to meet that need." And in their dialogue, they have created something beyond what they held separately.

Now there is more to it, for finance, trained staff, marketing, IP protection are all needed.

But that fundamental paradigm describes the process, the dialogue, that provides the possibility of surplus meaning.

It is when someone who sees an economic opportunity dialogues with someone who can provide the technical solution to make it possible, that innovation can begin.

It is not a one-way exchange.

If the entrepreneur describes his need to the engineer, the engineer interprets what she hears and has the opportunity to increase its value.

When the engineer explains the technical solution to the entrepreneur, he too can increase its value, because in their dialogue their vision of potential new worlds is developed and made more vivid.

Creativity comes in dialogue, not in monologue. Each party's understanding is necessary, but not alone sufficient, to bring about innovation.

It continues to grow as the dialogue spreads to discuss finance, management, marketing and so on.

Creativity depends not just on speaking, but on listening; not just on writing but on reading.

It depends on a sufficient distance between the speaker and the listener that the speaker does not kill the listener's new worlds at birth.

Creative dialogue in policy and in the conference

The conference topics are all on issues with which I have struggled for years. You will now have plenty of opportunity to discuss them.

In doing so, please do not overlook how far all these topics are issues about dialogue and about enabling it to happen effectively. What are clusters if they are not contexts created to enable dialogue?

In your discussions, surplus meaning, creative imagining of new situations and solutions, will happen.

As your discussions develop, do remember that when you put forward a picture in words and symbols you initiate a process, you do not conclude it. It is in letting others be free to interpret your words that creativity comes about; that new visions, new solutions and new motivations will be found.