

Annotations on Jane Jacobs' Systems of Survival

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Oct. 2003

In her lively discourse, "Systems of Survival," Jacobs identifies a division between the two ways in which humans make their living. She contends that all working people throughout history make a living either by "taking" which she calls the "guardian" syndrome or "trading", the commercial syndrome.

After reviewing these characteristics, I agree with her that there are two, and only two, syndromes, however I think in the modern context there are additional entities that could be considered as anomalies

As put forward by the character Kate on page, 53, "My hypothesis is that we have two contradictory ways of getting a living; therefore we have two contradictory moral syndromes, one to suit each way and is derivatives."

In brief, Jacobs further contends in her summation on (pg 214) that "mutual support of morally contradictory trading and taking; tames both activities and their derivatives." This symbiosis occurred originally through a de facto "social contract" (pg. 73), which implies that the guardians protect and regulate society, while fostering the promotion of economic activity. In return, the commercial sector in turns funds the guardians through

taxes, but only as much as the commercial world agrees, “Insurrections and revolutions are among the hazards,” says Armbruster in Chapter 12.

Jacobs agrees that there are anomalies in the occupational world. On page 27, “I must admit, I found a few anomalies – some occupations firmly associated with both lists instead of one.” Her list includes law, medicine and agriculture. I think all are valid as anomalies. I think lawyers act as “translators” or “ambassadors” between the two syndromes. Doctors are obliged by professional oath to help all no matter the gain or consequence, and agriculture is an anomaly by virtue of government assistance to ensure supply of a critical commercial product.

Besides the aforementioned, artists and media over history swayed between syndromes are self-manage their decisions depending on the context. Jacobs discusses this conflict inherent with commercial media on page 208, “at the top must be a producer who know what both left and right hands are doing and can help them both.” Jacobs discusses the role of artists somewhat discussing that the perceived differences in “commercial” or “pure” are due to the traditional guardian patrons pursuing the leisure and dispensing largess but commissioning artwork. She mentions specifically the communist regimes very enthusiastically supporting arts in their countries. I think artists, regardless of their commercial success, are producing products for sale or trade thus belong in the commercial syndrome despite

There is fine a line between anomalies and “monstrous hybrids” which develop when these syndromes are mixed inappropriately. Indeed, our modern society is littered with the carcasses of inefficient or illegal public private dealings gone sour. Indeed nothing seems to inject cynicism to the populous then the government duplicity in dealings with commercial firms featuring backroom partnerships, kick backs, favored contracts or

contracts with no competition as Jacobs mentions in reference to The Pentagon on page 148, “I emphasize “highly engineered” because of the subsidiary corruption in contracts they make with the military.”

I thought about some organizations or entities that mix the two syndromes in some “shade of grey.” Specifically, I considered if any such entities which seemed efficient and effective despite of their intermingling of syndromes so they would be considered anomalies rather than monstrous hybrids. Here are some brainstormed examples with brief comments:

1. Tribal casinos –The guardian tribal leaders partner with corporations to create enterprises for commercial gain – however, tribal leadership is “watered-down” as a real guardian.
2. Some hospitals – The modern commercial hospital industry seems a ruthless racket of corruption and greed – however hospitals run by “charitable” or religious organizations should be somewhat different though they do require payment (and will send you to collections – believe me, I know).
3. USPS – This oft-maligned, guardian-run agency uniquely compete in the open marketplace against powerful purely-commercial competitors - but does the USPS stay relevant only because of government assistance?
4. Private schools – While schools are traditionally a guardian enclave, private schools are selling education for commercial gain while maintaining a guardian-like attitude. Similarly, public-funded colleges and universities compete for donor money and desired student using commercial advertising procedures and some school allow media and other vendor access to students to sell products.
5. International sporting federations – The Olympics is a colossal money maker for advertisers and broadcasters plus a superlative economic engine for the regions

which host the events. However, the athletes participating are traditionally “amateur” and competing under the auspices of their national flags.

In closing, I feel that Jacobs’ two moral syndromes indeed reflect the only ways to work in contemporary society, as well as throughout history though it is prudent to be cognizant of the fine line between undesirable, monstrous hybrids and useful, genuine anomalies.