

Innovation, Like It or Not

Innovation is the fuel that makes a better world possible. Thanks to entrepreneurs seeking out new and better ways to satisfy human needs and desires, the modern world and all its wonders have enriched the lives of every person on the planet.

But society doesn't always make it easy for these innovators. Often, the push for creative new solutions runs up against legal and social norms that seek to stymie change and preserve the status quo. Those who rebel against this "permission society" are the subject of Adam Thierer's latest book for Cato, *Evasive Entrepreneurs and the Future of Governance: How Innovation Improves Economies and Governments*. A senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center, Thierer continues to explore many of the themes in his 2016 book, *Permissionless Innovation: The Continuing Case for Comprehensive Technological Freedom*,

expanding beyond the digital realm and highlighting many real-world examples.

The list of disruptive technologies keeps getting longer, and the opportunities for technology-driven civil disobedience are growing accordingly. Smartphones, ubiquitous computers, and the global information revolution have brought about radical new methods of bypassing established mechanisms of control. Gatekeeping has never been harder. Three-dimensional printing presents new challenges to government efforts to control and prohibit certain physical goods, most notably and immediately firearms. Blockchain technology

and end-to-end encryption make government efforts to control the flow of information and money increasingly futile.

As Thierer explains, "we should tolerate—and even embrace—a certain amount of evasive entrepreneurialism and even a fair amount of technological civil disobedience." Thus, we should defend not only individual instances after the fact, but also the process that leads to these innovations. For instance, who could have foreseen that software companies using smartphones would disrupt the ossified taxi cartels and render obsolete decades of protectionist licensing schemes?

Entrepreneurs take risks—and often not just financial ones. Shattering norms and pushing the boundaries of the law can come at a steep price. But when they pay off, we all benefit and should be grateful for the rebels who make it happen. ■

PURCHASE PRINT OR EBOOK COPIES OF *EVASIVE ENTREPRENEURS* AT RETAIL AND ONLINE BOOKSELLERS AND AT CATO.ORG/BOOKS.



Cato News Notes

BOAZ, PILON PARTICIPATE IN ARENA STAGE CIVIL DIALOGUES

Both David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, and Roger Pilon, director emeritus of the Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies, recently participated in the Civil Dialogues series at Washington's award-winning Arena Stage, moderated by Amitai Etzioni of George Washington University. Pilon debated the question, "What is the proper role of government in our economic and social life?" Boaz addressed the question, "Have we privatized too much?"

CATO STUDIES CITED IN NYT EDITORIAL

The *New York Times* editorial board cited two Cato studies in its February 4, 2020, editorial responding to President Trump's expansion of his travel ban to six additional countries. "Extreme Vetting of Immigrants: Estimating Terrorism Vetting Failures" (Policy Analysis no. 838) by David Bier notes the lack of justification for the president's "extreme vetting" policy. "Do Immigrants Import Terrorism?" (Working Paper no. 56) by Andrew C. Forrester, Benjamin Powell, Alex Nowrasteh, and Michelangelo Landgrave examines the overstated risk of immigrants committing acts of terrorism.

P. J. O'ROURKE NOW WASHINGTON POST COLUMNIST

P. J. O'Rourke, one of America's leading political satirists and commentators as well as an H. L. Mencken research fellow at the Cato Institute, has joined the *Washington Post* as a regular columnist.