

### Invisible Engines

“Just as the internal combustion engine led to the formation of the modern automobile industry and ended up driving so much else in the economy... invisible engines are now powering the vast post-industrial economies in which we live and work,” writes Om Malik in a *Wall Street Journal* book review of *Invisible Engines*, by David S. Evans, Andrei Hagiu and Richard Schmalensee.

These “engines” aren’t engineered by engineers like they were in the old days. They are developed by developers. And what these developers develop is not just software but strategies that create “their own thriving economic ecosystems.”

Perhaps the best example of an invisible engine is, yes, the iPod.

Apple sold “nearly 62 million” of those babies over the “past two fiscal years.” But what Apple also created was a platform for developers to “keep on inventing devices and accessories (calendars, headphones, even leather jackets) ... The crumbs at the iPod table add up to a mega-billion-dollar iPod economy.”

However, the book’s authors note that a product must achieve somewhere between 40- and 50-percent of market share before it can attract “the interest of spinoff businesses” on a meaningful scale. They also warn that today’s platforms “may not be tomorrow’s: The rise of open-source operating systems, such as Linux, and of related technologies, may make the harvesting of profits more difficult.”

### Fear of Knowledge

A new book called *Fear of Knowledge*, by Paul Boghossian, takes on the difference between truth and belief, and provides “a remarkably clear introduction” to the subject “in just under 100 pages,” writes William Ewald in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Nothing is relative when it comes to “the basic truths of arithmetic or about the advisability of jumping from tall buildings.” But on the other hand, few people are objective “about whether red is truly a better color than green or whether vanilla is objectively preferable to chocolate ...

“... Somewhere between these poles come quantum mechanics and aesthetics and moral theory. The problem... is to say precisely when and where relativism

is appropriate. It’s especially a problem for those who prefer to claim that “everything is relative.”

The problem is the claim itself, because if it, too, is relative, then its advocate must accept that “the view of the objectivist is ‘just as valid’ as the view of the relativist. If it is not, then relativism is false. Either way, the relativist is in trouble.”

Paul Boghossian explores the relativist dilemma by distinguishing “carefully between relativism about truth and relativism about belief, and ... explains the ways in which various forms of sophisticated relativism nevertheless remain vulnerable to variants of the stock objection ... The result,” says William Ewald, “is one of the most readable works of philosophy in recent years ... a book that can be read in an afternoon and thought about for a lifetime.”

### Walt Disney

Roy’s great ambition in life was to stay out of debt ... Walt’s method in life was to keep Roy constantly in debt,” writes Whit Stillman, quoting an associate of the Brothers Disney in a *Wall Street Journal* book review.

The book, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, by Neal Gabler, chronicles Walt’s life and its impact on American popular culture. It’s a big book — 835 pages — that covers just about everything. That would include the relationship between Walt and his older brother, Roy, who was a bank teller, by trade, when Walt enlisted his help.

The Walt/Roy relationship actually was simple in a way: Walt would come up with an idea, Roy would at first try to discourage it, before giving in and somehow finding the money to do it. This proved to be expensive, because Walt was both a visionary and a perfectionist, which put the fledgling studio in great jeopardy.

Walt and Roy ultimately had a falling out over financial matters, but Walt patched things up by sending Roy a peace pipe along with a note that read: “I think ... we have accomplished something — there was a time when we couldn’t borrow a Thousand Dollars and now I understand we owe Twenty-four million.”

Walt died of lung cancer in 1966, leaving behind this bit of Disney wisdom: “I found out that the people who live with figures as a rule, it’s a postmortem, it’s never ahead. It’s always what happened.” He was referring to the people who thought he was crazy to want to make cartoons in color.

