

Lyft and Uber Rides are the New Marketplaces for Ideas

There aren't many physical places left in this world where philosophical conversations happen between philosophical opponents. The Internet has made it easy to hole up into our own echo chambers, or to get into shouting matches.

It would seem there is no more agora, no more of the marketplace where Socrates once confronted his fellow citizens about questions of justice and truth.

But what if I told you that the marketplace of ideas has found a home with Lyft and Uber?

Lyft and Uber bring different people and different cultures together. And they also bring together different ideas in a one of a kind environment.

Lyft and Uber create special conditions that make dialogue easy. Both sides have an incentive to be polite (Lyft's ratings apply to both drivers and riders). They provide an easy exit option for both rider and driver, since drives are time-bound. They provide relative anonymity - you're never going to see your driver or rider again (probably) so you might as well speak your mind. And finally, because of the rating system, both sides have an implicit trust in each other to be 1) financially good for the ride and 2) not a crazy ax murderer. All of these things together allow for open, honest, and friendly conversation about big questions.

It's interesting to watch (and participate) in what can happen in a philosophical or political conversation on one of these rides. I had a conversation yesterday with someone who casually confessed to me that he was a democratic socialist. I perked up when I heard that. It's not every day you meet a self-confessed socialist. In the short time we had for our ride, I was interested in putting in a few questions from the libertarian perspective.

We ended up going longer than we needed in his car, I think in part because we were having such an interesting conversation. We left disagreeing but mutually respectful. The driver and I both enjoyed the conversation. We both learned new things about each others' perspectives: me about the fault of many liberty advocates in not identifying the powerless minority's perspective, and him (I hope) that a belief in freedom does not entail a lack of compassion or a desire for the status quo.

What's interesting is that I don't believe these interactions are isolated. I think thousands of people every day are having serious (or semi-serious) and civil political and philosophical conversations in Lyft rides. And they probably aren't having them anywhere else.

Consider engaging with a stranger on something that matters. But instead of starting the conversation from your Twitter app, start with a ridesharing app instead.