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Bitcoin, an analysis of the critiques

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People are very open-minded about new things, as long as they're exactly like the old ones.

Charles Kettering, American inventor, engineer, businessman (1876 - 1958)

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher (1788 - 1860)



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Introduction

This report concludes with a refresh of our \$1,700.00 Bitcoin target and a more bullish wave count based on a five wave pattern on a log scale chart. However the main goal of this report is to introduce some perspective on the many criticisms of Bitcoin.

Disruptive Technologies

Whenever something truly new and innovative comes along it will invariably be seen as a threat by entrenched interests. Those who have figured out how best to game the existing system are instinctively opposed to anything that would change that system. Both quotations on the previous page speak to this aspect of human nature.

The really interesting thing is that the process of heaping scorn on a new and disruptive technology reveals peoples fears and insecurities. The fear of the new has its evolutionary purpose. The new is not always better. If a new thing is truly better then it should stand up to the most vigorous of critiques. However one must also evaluate the critiques themselves. Is the critique a fair assessment of pros and cons, or is it only a put-down designed solely to defend the status quo?

In the case of Bitcoin, one thing has struck me again and again. There have been many professional put-downs of Bitcoin designed solely to defend the status quo. And these put-downs invariably ascribe to Bitcoins the very flaws in the status quo that Bitcoin was designed to address.

Valid Critique or Unjust Judgement

In other words, the 'new-thing' becomes unfairly accused of having the most serious flaws of the current system, while the accuser remains completely oblivious to the deep flaws in their argument. Many of the most commonly accepted critiques of Bitcoin are actually extended Freudian slips. The voices of the status quo try to clothe Bitcoin with the most egregious faults in the existing system. And all the talking heads nod in agreement, completely unaware of the completely ludicrous nature of their critiques. I find this extremely interesting, or as Spock of Star Trek might say: fascinating.

I have struggled to find a word in English that adequately describes this process. History is replete with instances of this type of unjust judgement, but no single world in the English language seems adequate to describe it. Perhaps the most widely quoted reference to this process can be found in the Bible, of all places. In Matthew 7:3-5 we find the following (NLT):

"And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

With this context let us see how many of the Bitcoin critiques are objective assessments and how many are hypocritical and unjust judgements.

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The Top Ten Critiques of Bitcoin

#10. Bitcoins Get Robbed

I list Bitcoin robbery at #10 because I see it as the only valid criticim of them all. Despite the best encryption efforts Bitcoins are stolen. And when Bitcoins get stolen the losses in US Dollars have typically been in the seven figures. No organization goes after these bank robbers. And the incentives to steal Bitcoins rise exponentially with the ascent in Bitcoin values. To make such thefts easier very inexpensive 'crime-ware' kits with Bitcoin modules and 'stealer' plug-ins can be purchased on-line.

If there is any 'advantage' to a Bitcoin robbery it is that there is no risk of physical harm. There is an epidemic of ATM related violent crimes that is virtually unreported. Nobody tracks them. Not the FBI and certainly not the banks. In fact banks quickly settle out of court to avoid having to pay for expensive corrective measures. With a Bitcoin theft no one puts a gun to your head. However this is little solace to the victims of Bitcoin robbery. For an encrypted electronic currency to become commonplace the risks of loss from theft and fraud must be better addressed.

The good news here, and news that has been almost completely overlooked, is that Bitcoins are pseudonymous not anonymous. Bitcoins cannot simply vanish like cash stolen from a safe. An upgrade to the Blockchain mechanism should, in theory, make it impossible for a Bitcoin thief to cash in on their loot. However this is a future possibility, not the reality of the present state of affairs.

The reality of the present is that the technology of the Bitcoin burglars have outstripped the encryption efforts of the Bitcoin system. A good example is the ability of tumblers to keep the Bitcoin robbers a step ahead of the block-chain driven recovery efforts. And who are those pursuing these stolen Bitcoins? An unorganized group of volunteers. While I am certain that the most ardent defenders of the Bitcoin system will strongly disagree, at the present moment it seems pretty clear that some type of dedicated, full time enforcement authority is needed. Otherwise Bitcoin will remain stuck in 'wild west' mode where evading theft will be more a function of luck than of the inherent safety of the system.

However even in this completely valid critique of Bitcoin some historical context may help put things in perspective. In the 6th century BC one Lao Tsu wrote the following sutras in chapter nine of the Tao Te Ching:

<u>Nine</u>

It is difficult to carry a cup filled to the brim. An oversharpened blade dulls more quickly. Amass a store of wealth, and no one can protect it. Fame and honors bring arrogance, and then disaster. When you are finished, transcend. This is how the universe works.

Amass a store of wealth and no one can protect it. This not an issue new and unique to Bitcoin. This is the nature of physical things. There is no safe store of wealth. There are only different types of risk.

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#9. Gold is Safer than a Bitcoin because Gold has inherent value.

The revelatory phrase here is "inherent value." Gold only has 'inherent value' if we collectively agree to grant it. In fact, nothing in the physical realm has inherent value other than the importance that we as a society decide to give it. We ourselves imbue things with value and there is nothing inherent in this process.

Throughout history the objects that were deemed safe stores of wealth were selected on the basis of their relative scarcity. And whenever the scare became abundant the 'store of value' quality quickly fell to zero. Then everyone marvelled at how the now worthless object ever had any value at all. A good example of this is the wampum of the American Indians. It seems quaint to us now that sea shells could make a currency.

The weakness of Bitcoins is that they all go poof if the electric grid ever goes down long enough to wipe all computer memory banks clean. Of course if that happens we will all have much bigger problems than our Bitcoins. The strength of Bitcoin is that there will only ever be twenty-one million of them. The Bitcoin has scarcity built into its design.

However, as Bitcoins were never intended to replace Gold the criticism that Gold is safer than a Bitcoin is a bit irrelevant. Bitcoin was designed as an electronic currency. Bitcoins compete with fiat currency, not with Gold. Bitcoins and Gold are very different tools for very different tasks.

Gold

- Physical reality
- Naturally existing asset
- Anonymous
- · Store of Wealth
- Central banks are always the last buyers in a Gold bull market and the last sellers in a Gold bear market. Central banks are thereby the unwitting amplifiers of Gold volatility.
- Apples

Bitcoin

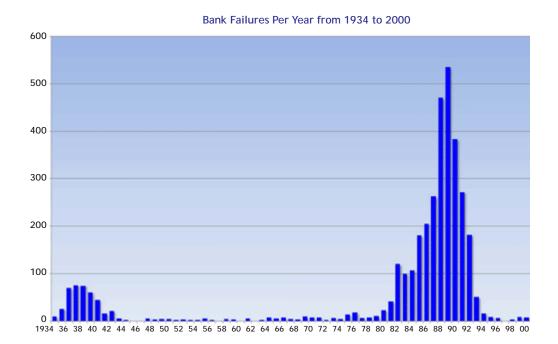
- Virtual reality
- Man made encrypted electronic asset
- Pseudonymous
- Medium of Exchange
- Bitcoins cannot be pushed, pulled, influenced, or inflated by the central banks
- Oranges

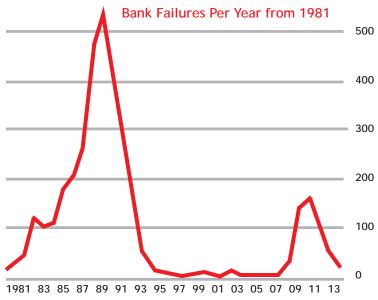
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#8. There is no FDIC to protect Bitcoin investors

The argument here is that if a traditional bank fails a depositor is protected for up to \$250.000 per insured bank. The FDIC became necessary because so many banks failed during the great depression. However that was only the warm up for the great S&L debacle. After seeing these charts the first question that must be answered has nothing to do with Bitcoins. The first issue that must be addressed is why, after thousand of years of civilization, we still cannot run a stable banking system. The argument that banks are usually stable has no merit. It reminds one of the argument that nuclear power is safe only until something bad happens





Bitcoin exchanges haved failed and as already noted, Bitcoin wallets have been pick-pocketed. And there is no guarantee there will be no further failures and thefts. So a buyer of Bitcoins needs to do their research on which Bitcoin exchanges to use and on where one should park one's Bitcoins. But to critique the Bitcoin system because there is no FDIC seems just a bit mendacious. The real issue is why is our banking system is so fragile that an FDIC is so necessary. After the events of the last twenty-five years, would anyone trust any of their savings to any US bank without the FDIC?

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#7. Criminals use Bitcoins

I hate to break such disturbing news to defenders of the status quo, but the world reserve currency for criminals is the US Dollar. Greenbacks are completely untraceable and utterly anonymous. There are no block chains for tracking US Dollars. And any criminal who wants to move their ill gotten gains beyond the reach of anti-money laudering restrictions need only buy art. The big criminals use art auctions, not Bitcoin exchanges.

What is found at the scene of every major drug bust? Huge quantities of physical of US Dollars. To call Bitcoin 'the virtual currency of choice for criminals' is yet another disingenuous argument. Criminal organizations from local to international grow and thrive because of the sheer abundance and completely anonymous Benjamin Franklins that are in such wide circulation.

If usage by criminals is grounds for rejecting a currency then we had all better find an alternative to the US Dollar. But of course there is zero chance that the US Dollar will be discontinued because criminals find them so convenient.

Finally, no discussion of criminals and currencies is even half complete without covering what the Federal Reserve has done to the purchasing power of the US Dollar. We cover that issue in point #2.

\$207 million in cash at scene of a Mexican drug bust, 2007



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#6. Bitcoin are too volatile to ever become widespread

From this point the critiques of Bitcoin begin to graduate from the merely disingenuous to the truly ludicrous. The argument here is that Bitcoin prices are too volatile to ever be an integral part of our financial systems. Hmmm. I wonder what the critics mean here by 'too volatile?'

Might they mean like when the S&P 500 Index rallied from 605.88 in 1996 to 1552.87 in 2000, then fell to 768.63 in 2002, then rallied to 1576.09 in 2007, then fell to 666.79 in 2009, and has since rallied to an 1813.55 high? Or maybe by 'too volatile' Bitcoin denigrators are thinking of the Nasdaq rally from 1,000 in 1996 to 5,100 in 2000, then the dive to 1,100 in 2002, then the rally to 2,800 in 2007, then the drop to 1,300 in 2009, and now the recent rally back to the 4,000 level.

Or by "too volatile" might Bitcoin critics mean like when Corn prices rallied from \$1.86 in 2005 to \$7.62 in 2008, then fell to \$2.90 later that same year, then rallied to \$8.32 in 2012, and are now about to break below the \$4.00 level. Or maybe what Bitcoin gadflies had in mind as too volatile is the world's reserve currency - the US Dollar. Perhaps Bitcoin critics were thinking of when the US Dollar rocketed up to 165.00 in 1985, then collapsed to 78.00 in 1992, then roared back up to 121.00 in 2001, then fell back down to 71.00 in 2007. Could this be what the Bitcoin critics mean by 'too volatile?'

By 'too volatile' the critics are probably also riled by the fact that fiat currencies always eventually go to zero, and that people are slowly figuring this out, and that the markets are starting to value Bitcoins accordingly. And by attacking Bitcoins as too volatile the critics are undoubtedly overlooking the 'race to the bottom' among the major central banks. Every government wants to have the cheapest currency in the world to spur exports. What Bitcoin critics undoubtedly find most irritating by all this is that Bitcoin inflation is beyond the reach of all such governments.

So what the Bitcoin denouncers probably really mean by 'too volatile' is the fact that Bitcoins are soaring in value, unlike anything in their fiat world of the status quo. Bitcoin is a new and unique currency in its IPO phase, and the world markets have just begun the task of trying to figure out what a Bitcoin should be worth.

Bitcoin critics are likely most irked by the fact that Bitcoin is a well conceived and executed medium of exchange unlike any other in that the total number of units is capped at 21 million Bitcoins. Over at the Federal Reserve they make 21 million US Dollars every few seconds just by tapping a few keys on a computer. Ditto for the Bank of Japan and the Yen. The same can be said for Draghi at the ECB and his stated willingness to 'do whatever it takes.'

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#5. Bitcoin Values are a Bubble

It may be true that Bitcoin prices are forming a bubble, and that the bubble will burst, and that Bitcoin prices will then correct lower. However this is absolutely NOT sufficient grounds to dismiss Bitcoin. For over ten years now I have been arguing that we are living in the golden age of the speculative bubble, and that in this golden age everything will have its chance to blow up into a bubble, and then burst.

- The Japanese economy formed a bubble from 1984 into 1989, and that bubble burst. Did everyone then evacuate Japan?
- There was a Dot-com bubble into 2000, and that bubble burst. So did they then close the Nasdaq exchange?
- There was a housing bubble that we forecast from the 18 year real estate cycle that was due to burst from 2005, and burst it did. So did everyone then give up on housing and move into tepees?
- When the credit bubble burst did everyone give up on banks?
- There was a broad based stock market bubble that burst in 2007. So did they shut down the NYSE?
- An enormous commodity market bubble burst in 2008. Did people then abandon trying to price commodities?

There are presently bubbles in Chinese housing, the US stock market, the junk bond markets, and the art market... to name just a few. in this age everything will get its chance to be a bubble.

The task here is not to simply identify bubbles and trade accordingly. There is no victory in identifying Bitcoin as a likely bubble. The real task is to identify what has created and is presently maintaining this golden age of the speculative bubble. While it is extremely easy to identify the real culprit, it is considered impolite to point out what is really going on here. The real culprit is not the housing market, or internet stocks, or the commodity markets, or the Bitcoin exchanges. The real culprits are the central banks and their relentless efforts to debase their currencies.

To keep an unstable and unsustainable global debt load from keeling over into a deflationary depression every major central bank feels it is necessary to continue printing vast quantities of their fiat currencies. It is thought that the country with the cheapest currency will sell the most exports, and thereby be the first to crawl out from underneath their terrible debt loads. Bitcoins are merely the latest, temporary beneficiary of this despicable excuse for economic theory. The housing markets, the stock markets, the various commodity markets, and now the Bitcoin market are all victims here of misguided central bank policies.

Investors think they will be safe and the financial markets will be stable as long as the Fed and other central banks are stimulating the markets with excess liquidity. However it is excess liquidity that has created and is maintaining this golden age of the speculative bubble.

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#4. The Bitcoin market is unregulated and therefore more dangerous

To make it into the top four of our ranking the critique has to be really ludicrous and this point definitely meets that high standard. The basis of this critique is the assumption that an unregulated market is more dangerous than a regulated market. It takes no effort at all to debunk the preposterous notion that regulated markets are safer. All we need to do is ask a few simple questions.

Where were the regulators that were supposed to protect savers and investors from the banking debacle that was the S&L crisis? Where were the bank regulators that were supposed to guard against the credit bubble and outright fraud of the CMOs that inflated the housing bubble? Where were the regulators at the CFTC when the commodity bubble was inflating to the bursting point? Where were the regulators that were supposed to protect us from conflicts of interest in the rating agencies? Which regulators warned investors that Madoff was running a ponzi scheme?



We see no choice but to conclude that regulators are the pacifiers of the financial markets. They give the illusion of security and protection when in reality they provide none of either. Yet I have been told that we are better off having regulators, even if they fail to do their job.

Regarding regulation, I have been told by the experts that it is better to try and fail to protect investors than to not try at all. That is not my conclusion. And I do not think it is the conclusion of the millions of Americans that were defrauded out of their homes. And I do not think it is the conclusion of the over 10,000 investors that lost big time in the Madoff scandal. And I do not think it is the conclusion of those defrauded by MF Global. If the regulators are clue-less at their job then any attempt to give the illusion of protection is itself a fraud. Giving someone fake protection when they ask for the real thing does not do anyone any favors. The notion that regulated markets are safer than unregulated markets is a dangerous fantasy. It gives investors a false sense of security and so unnecessary risks are taken that lead to unexpected losses.

To have lived through the past decade and still maintain that regulated markets are safer requires willful blindness on a grand scale. The claim that Bitcoin markets are more dangerous because they are unregulated is ludicrous. A false sense of security is dangerous. A situational awareness of marketplace risk is safer than the unwarranted assumption of no risk.

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#3. Bitcoin is a Ponzi Scheme

A ponzi scheme is a centrally organized 'pump and dump' scam where new income is diverted back to earlier investors in order to give the illusion that a productive investment is yielding real returns. Investors think they have a piece of a dynamic enterprise. The reality that they are only paying each other off is kept secret from them. Like Madoff funds.

Or like social security. The Social Security system is an involuntary and completely legal Ponzi scheme. A SS payment is not an investment return. There is no underlying investment. A SS check is a transfer payment from later contributors to the system to earlier contributors. If you do not get enough new contributors the whole system will collapse.

Bitcoin is an electronically encrypted medium of exchange with a fixed number of exchange units. It is a currency that is completely decentralized, completely transparent, and completely voluntary. Free markets like Bitcoin are not Ponzi schemes. There are no transfer payments from later to earlier participants when a currency rises in value. Bitcoin is a new currency that is still in its price discovery IPO phase.

So how exactly is a Ponzi scheme like the Madoff funds or Social Security related to a currency market? It is a truly ludicrous comparison. This critique is a classic example of trying to maintain the status quo by associating a disruptive technology with a deep flaw in the status quo.

#2. Bitcoins will be hoarded, so are deflationary

This is beyond ludicrous. If it were not such a damning indictment of the present system of fiat currency I would find this criticism hilarious. This critique has been pursued by Paul Krugman, among others. The argument is that because the total amount of Bitcoins is fixed, they will hold their value too well. This argument maintains that Bitcoins will be such an assured store of wealth that they will be hoarded instead of transacted. This critique maintains that no one will want to buy anything with their Bitcoins because nothing that can be bought with a Bitcoin can possibly hold its value as well as a Bitcoin. And Krugman blasts the recent sharp rise in Bitcoin values as a deflationary disaster.

This is the deplorable state of economic thinking on the 100 year anniversary of the Federal Reserve. It has reached the point where a serious economist cannot imagine a currency that actually holds its value. Prior to the Federal Reserve the US Dollar was a secure store of wealth. The US Dollar maintained its purchasing power for many decades. Dollars were transacted not hoarded. But that was over a hundred years ago and no proponent of the status quo wants to remember that age.

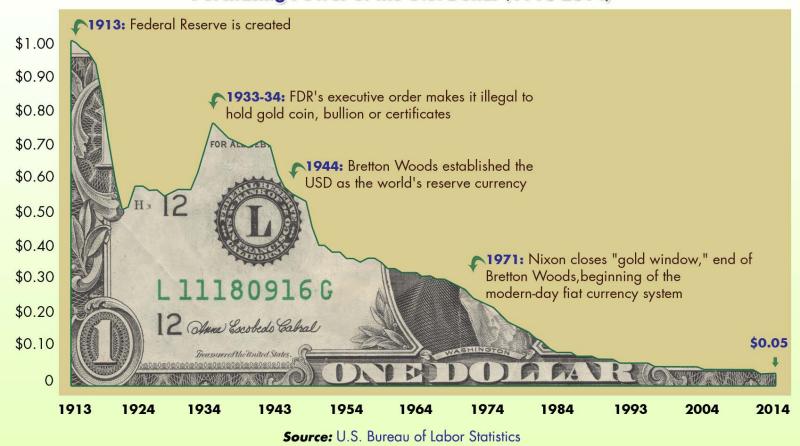
The next page shows a crime scene. The crime is theft on a massive scale, theft masquerading as economic policy. The Federal Reserve has robbed the US Dollar of over 95% of its purchasing power. The victims are anyone who has ever held a US Dollar for more than a few minutes.

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CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

Purchasing Power of the U.S. Dollar (1913-2014)



CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

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#2. Bitcoins will be hoarded, so are deflationary (continued)

What is the economic purpose of the Feds relentless efforts to gut the Greenback? The goal is to stimulate economic activity. As the dollar buys less and less people must work harder and harder to maintain the same standard of living. And to keep pace with the falling purchasing power of the dollar consumers must buy sooner rather than later. And they must buy more rather than less. In this environment consumers quickly figure out that the only way to cope is to go in debt. When whatever you buy holds its value better than the currency itself, those who wrack up the largest debts and buy the most are the biggest winners. The losers are the savers. Weak US dollar policy rewards reckless speculation and penalizes responsible financial stewardship.

However the Federal Reserve does not actually tell us that it exists to empty the the US Dollar of its value. What the Fed tells us is that the economy needs stimulus to survive. What the Fed tells us is that quantitative easing is necessary to avoid certain disaster. What the Fed tells us is that letting inflation fall below a certain threshold is dangerous.

What the Fed does not tell us is that the ever rising prices created by the ever falling purchasing power of the US Dollar creates only the illusion of wealth. What the Fed does not tell us is that it long ago became addicted to creating the illusion of wealth because it long ago forgot how to foster actual wealth creation.

Once everyone has accumulated massive debts in an attempt to counterbalance falling US Dollar purchasing power, anything that might actually strengthen the US Dollar becomes a very real threat to the status quo. If the Dollar were to actually gain in value all those debts would quickly become unsustainable. Taking on debt to buy things only works if you borrow stronger dollars and repay the loan over time with weaker dollars. If you must borrow weaker dollars and then repay the loan with stronger dollars you will end up in bankruptcy court. And bankruptcy is deflationary because it wipes out the very dollars that the Fed is trying so hard to multiply.

The other risk to the status quo from a currency that actually holds its value is that consumers will no longer fee compelled to buy early and often. A currency that actually gains in purchasing power is a nightmare for the illusion makers at the Fed. Once consumers figure out that prices will fall and not rise, consumers will then quickly figure out that they are better off buying later rather than sooner.

This criticism of Bitcoin revels just how deplorable the status quo has come to be. This critique of Bitcoin reveals the flaws of the fiat currency system, and it expresses the fears of those who have figured out how to game the current system. The points of this particular critique of Bitcoin are actually a powerful indictment of Federal Reserve policy.

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#1. Bitcoins are only worth what people say they are worth

I saved the most ridiculous attempt to attack Bitcoin for last. The subtext of this critique is that Bitcoin values are solely a creation of the Bitcoin marketplace and are therefore some sort of collective delusion. To be perfectly honest I find this dismissive sneer to be highly entertaining.

Back in 2000 all the technicals in the known universe were signalling that the Dot-com bubble had burst in March. The pattern was unambiguous. The rally into July was a bear market correction and the last opportunity to exit before disaster ensued. However trying to convince anyone long the Nasdaq that a collapse was dead ahead was a fruitless endeavor. Yet the ridiculous nature of tech stock valuations were obvious to anyone not long a heap of tech stocks. When home owners were riding the rocket rally in real estate prices into the 18 year cycle high due into 2005 - 2006, all attempts to warn them of a bubble fell on deaf ears. But the bubble was pretty clear to anyone not long a pile of real estate. Trying to get crude oil producers to hedge their output into the 2008 commodity bubble was another difficult task. Crude oil producers are always the most bullish into major tops and 2008 was no exception.

Several important lessons can be learned from all of this, and the lessons have to do with popular delusions, the madness of crowds, and the 'sour grapes' response of those that missed the rally.

No one long a rocketing rally is eager to believe that they are riding a bubble that will invariably burst. Yet the ephemeral nature of powerful rallies are trumpted by anyone who missed the rally. Those inside a bubble, those long the roaring market, can never see the bubble. Those who missed the rally view the rally as exclusively a collective delusion.

The reality is that the price of any market at any time is solely a creation of the marketplace. Any price of any market is only worth whatever everyone chooses to agree it is worth. Every market price at every moment is only the collective opinion of what that object should be worth. And as the opinions trend so do the prices. This is how all markets work. And this is not merely the nature of markets. Markets reveal the nature of collective human behavior. All markets are the play and display of all the aspects of human nature. And this is why the tools of technical analysis work for all markets across all time.

What I find so entertaining about this particular critique is that is so clearly the 'sour grapes' response of those who missed the Bitcoin rally. Arguing that something is only worth what everyone says it is worth is never the argument of someone long in a bull market. This critique is born of pure petulance. It has no substance.

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Conclusions

The future is the unknown. The future contains our unresolved fears and our unfulfilled hopes because we put them there. We project our hopes and fears onto and into the future. Those with more hope than fear are optimistic about the future. Those with more fear than hope are pessimistic about the future. The changes that transforms the present into the future normally occurs in stealth mode. The typical pace of change is incremental enough that it does not stir up our hopes and fears. However the sudden onset of a radically new and disruptive technology roils the emotional waters that flow from the present into the future. Whenever that happens clear headed objective assessments of the new technology are typically crowded out by deeply felt emotional reactions.

Those feeling stuck in the present will place unjustified hopes on the new technology. Those who are overly optimism about the future will see the new technology as the something that will change everything. Those fearful of the future will see every new technology as the next step down into a Borg-like hell where resistance becomes futile. When something new roils the waters like this it can be nearly impossible to make an accurate assessment of the viability of the new technology. However there is that old proverb 'when one door closes another opens.' The untrustworthy nature of the critiques of a disruptive technology can provide a window into the hopes and the fears that dominate our lives in the present and our perceptions of the future.

Collective emotional reactions to the disruptively new provide insights into our collective hopes and fears. This is a rare opportunity that should not be squandered. Yet it is an opportunity that is almost always lost. The ranks of the futurists are typically so agog over the technical details of the newly disruptive thing that they miss the opportunity to assess the collective mood that is the real force that shapes our future. At the most fundamental level what shapes the flow of the present into the future is not the collection of objects that we live with, but the collective mood that humanity and all its objects are immersed in.

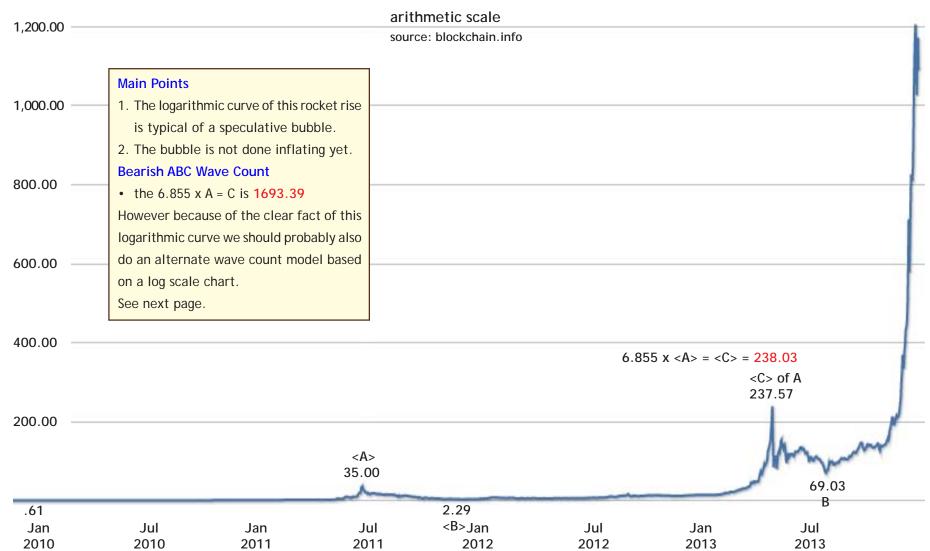
An analogy may make the point better. The quality of life a fish in the ocean and its prospects for the future are not a function of the objects scattered around the ocean floor. The future for fish in the ocean is purely a function of the quality of the water. If the trend is one of increasing pollution then all the wonderful objects in the ocean will not help. And of course a fish does not even realize that it is swimming in an ocean. The fish feels weightless, not wet. The collective mood of a nation is the ocean that we are all immersed in. And just like the fish, it is an ocean of which we are largely oblivious. We collect objects in the hope that it will improve our future. However if the collective mood is turning sour then all the gadgets in the world will be unable to protect the future from a bear market, a great recession, or worse.



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Bitcoins in US Dollars



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