Darwinizing the Federalist Papers
Table of Contents

03 Authors
04 Preamble
06 On the Origin of Socialist Darwinism
08 More Perfect UNIONS Must Regulate Their Parts
10 The Human Social Organism and a Parliament of Genes
14 Morality Regulates Our Social Physiology
16 The Darwinian ‘Struggle for Existence’ is Really About Balance
18 Self-Interest, Rightly Understood, is Social
19 Why Socialism Fails
21 Why Capitalism Fails
23 We Are All Socialists, Globalists, Democrats, Capitalists, Environmentalists, Technologists, and Scientists
26 Epilogue
Authors:
Publius

In the spirit of the Federalist Papers, Publius is a collective pseudonym for the group of people organizing this collection of essays.

Illustrations:
Julia Suits

Julia Suits is a contributing cartoonist for The New Yorker and other publications. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Suits received a BFA in painting from Beloit College and an MFA from Ohio State University.
Preamble

The Federalist Papers sought to convince the citizens of New York to adopt the newly written American Constitution. This would create a UNION (a word that they capitalized) capable of accomplishing more than any state alone and would showcase America’s Enlightenment experiment as an example for the rest of the world.

Today, that UNION is in such disarray that the effectiveness of democracy itself is being doubted. Everyone knows the system is broken but no one seems to know how to do better.

Until now, and from an unexpected source: The current incarnation of Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Many people link evolution with Social Darwinism, the idea that competition is the law of nature and deserves to shape human society. This view misses the point that cooperation is often the fittest strategy. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin described how we, as a social species, survived only in interdependent cooperative groups, not as individuals. He wrote: “Selfish and contentious people will not cohere, and without coherence, nothing can be effected.”

A science of society built on the biological necessity of cooperation can be called “socialism” in the truest sense of embodying our inalienable social nature. Hence, we call the toolkit of ideas outlined in these papers “Socialist Darwinism”. Historically, the Socialist Darwinian focus on cooperation actually preceded the Social Darwinist focus on competition, and the former fits the latest evolutionary science better.
Socialist Darwinism, suitably updated, provides a practical toolkit for democratic unions, at all scales, from small groups to the planet. We can confidently say that these tools can help you become a better capitalist, or economist, or centrist, or socialist, or whatever-ist, because no -ist or -ism can work well with a false or partial description of human nature and social systems.

A science of society built on the biological necessity of cooperation can be called “socialism” in the truest sense of embodying our inalienable social nature. Hence, we call the toolkit of ideas outlined in these papers “Socialist Darwinism”.

This toolkit doesn’t fit current political categories. It isn’t left, right, center or libertarian. It recognizes that markets are powerful engines of coordination but clarifies when self-interest, rightly understood, can robustly benefit the common good. It focuses directly on the welfare of society while recognizing the limitations of top-down planning and regulations that get in the way. Using the latest science to refine the logic of these two main policy narratives, Socialist Darwinism describes what can work.

One key insight is that societies must function as moral communities. As Darwin knew, without a strong moral system, a human group cannot “cohere” or function well. He called our evolved moral sense our “highest faculty”. The great failing of moral systems, of course, is that they are seldom all-inclusive. But we’ll provide examples of multi-level moral systems that can—in principle—be extended planet-wide.

And evolutionary science can upgrade the old “society is an organism” metaphor invoked by great thinkers such as Hobbes and Aristotle. Today we know that human societies truly can qualify as organisms in the benign sense of cooperative wholes that are more than the sum of their parts (UNIONS) and that nurture their parts—but only under special conditions.

Difficult? Of course. Possible? Yes, with the right toolkit.

These short essays will lay out the history, principles, and applications of Socialist Darwinism’s toolkit. The Federalist Papers argued for the creation of a more perfect UNION based on Enlightenment values that predated Darwin. Here we add 200+ years of scientifically refined thought.
Socialist Darwinism is the idea that natural selection promotes societies that cooperate as moral communities. This concept actually predates Social Darwinism, which later emphasized competition and individualism. Socialists throughout the 1860s-70s praised Darwin’s theory as promoting progressive social change.

As Eric Michael Johnson has documented in *The Struggle for Coexistence* (pdf [here](#)), the earliest consistent application of Darwin’s ideas for human society can be classified as Socialist Darwinism. For these authors, evolution demonstrated that the inequality maintained by institutions of God and State were not facts of nature but were imposed by power and privilege. It was therefore necessary for society to be redesigned from the bottom-up following scientific principles.

“I am a Socialist because I am a believer in Evolution,” wrote the women’s rights activist Annie Besant. She saw in Darwin’s work the clearest evidence yet that the status quo was not divinely ordained. Social species had evolved traits for cooperative behavior and humans, the most social of all animals, displayed the most elaborate moral instincts. Because evolution had shaped human physiology, behavior, and mind, Besant concluded, “it was not possible that Evolution should leave Sociology untouched.” Like Besant, many nineteenth-century socialist scholars, scientists, and activists quickly deployed Darwin to challenge the status quo.
The most prominent advocate for Socialist Darwinism was the Russian prince and naturalist Peter Kropotkin. His 1890 papers on “Mutual Aid Among Animals” (later published as the book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* in 1902) synthesized the argument promoted by the “Darwinian Left” over the previous thirty years. In the process, Kropotkin closely hewed to Darwin’s theory of natural selection and demonstrated how the feeling of sympathy could evolve to form the basis of human morality.

The one factor that united diverse Socialist Darwinists across England, Europe, and Russia was a commitment to building on Darwin’s “moral sense.” For group-living species, natural selection had promoted traits that emphasized sympathy and cooperation. They believed it was wrong to ignore what Darwin called “the noblest part of our nature” in our efforts to improve human society.

In contrast, those who would later be called Social Darwinists (the term did not become widely used until the 1940s) claimed that the state of nature was nothing but brutal competition. Thomas Henry Huxley called nature a “gladiator’s show” and denied that morality had evolved in humans. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and Francis Galton differed in their views in important ways, but all believed that natural selection was purely competitive and that society should be organized to ensure that the best rose to the top so the privileged could be protected against the supposed “unfit.”

Modern evolutionary science shows that cooperation is just as important in nature as competition. In group-living species, those traits promoting mutual aid often succeeded over traits promoting individualism. The first advocates of Socialist Darwinism were correct about this aspect of Darwin’s science. Solidarity is a fact of life—even between species.

The first Socialist Darwinists didn’t get everything right. Today we know much more about how cooperation and competition can be blended in the right way. However, the origin of Socialist Darwinism reveals that seeing society through a Darwinian lens does not mean an endorsement of brutal competition. By taking Darwin seriously about “the noblest part of our nature,” we can complete the Darwinian revolution and build upon that which is best in ourselves.
More Perfect UNIONS Must Regulate Their Parts

The Federalist Papers explained how a UNION formed by the 13 states would provide collective benefits that the states could never achieve on their own. Not just defense, but many other collective benefits. It’s right there in the Constitution, which defines “promote the general welfare” along with “provide for the common defense” as critical roles of government.

But those benefits weren’t possible without a central government with the power to constrain and regulate the states. The Federalist’s authors understood that any political UNION must constrain lower-level interests; not only each state wanting to preserve its autonomy, but also commercial interests and indeed anyone who sought to profit from undermining, rather than contributing to the common good.

All nations have the same problem, which is why the influence of the Federalist Papers extends far beyond the USA. But 200+ years of refined thought since the Enlightenment allows us to generalize the main theme of the Federalist Papers beyond anything imagined by its authors, extending to all animal societies and indeed all living processes.
Every animal society experiences the same tension between the need to cooperate to achieve collective benefits and the disruptive pursuit of lower-level interests. In most cases, evolution results in what America would have been like if the Constitution had not been ratified: a degree of cooperation but also a lot of internal strife. In chimpanzees, one of our closest primate relatives, violent clashes to assert self-interest are over 100 times more common than in small-scale human societies. Even cooperation usually takes the form of tiny alliances clashing with other alliances. We would hate to live in such a society, just as we hate to live in human societies riven by internal conflict.

But in some animal societies, evolution results in what America became thanks to the Constitution: A well-regulated higher-level UNION that succeeds by suppressing the potential for disruptive competition and exploitation within its ranks. Examples include the social insects—the bees, wasps, ants, and termites—whose colonies invite comparison to a single organism (or super-organism). We might not want to live in these societies either—who wants to be a worker bee?—but we cannot help but admire their industry and internal harmony and to wish some of the same for our own societies. That’s why “Industry” is the official motto of the State of Utah, accompanied by the symbol of a bee hive.

Astonishingly, every entity that we call an organism, from a single-celled amoeba to the trillions of cells in your body, is a society of lower-level entities that live in harmony because evolution resulted in something like the American Constitution—a set of mechanisms that suppresses disruptive lower-level competition so that the whole can function as a cooperative unit. Life itself likely began as social groups of cooperative molecular interactions.

Although biology confirms the Federalist’s logic in politics, it is ignored by modern-day politicians and economists who portray regulation as categorically bad. Biology teaches us that an unregulated organism is a dead organism.

This is what 200+ years of refined thought adds to the Enlightenment values that informed the American forefathers. The multilevel governance needed to form higher-level, more perfect UNIONS in human society can be understood against the background of evolutionary forces that explain the presence and absence of cooperation in all living processes.
The idea that human society can be compared to a single organism has a long pedigree, from Aristotle’s *Politics* to Hobbes *Leviathan*. Words such as “corporation” (derived from the Latin for “body”) and phrases such as “body politic” reveal how useful this comparison is.

Yet, the analogy is deeply ambivalent. It is alluring to be part of something larger than ourselves, with a higher purpose, to which we can both contribute and be nurtured by (like the UNION the Federalist Papers offered). But it is threatening to be expendable for the common good, like our bodies routinely sloughing off skin cells or citizens being compelled to fight wars for kings.

Either way, society as an organism is no longer just a metaphor. Everything that we call an organism is a highly cooperative society of lower-level elements, so much that we see the whole more than the parts. In modern evolutionary biology, the concepts of “society” and “organism” have truly merged.

This degree of cooperation requires mechanisms to suppress disruption from within, which are never completely effective. Even multicellular
organisms, after hundreds of millions of years of natural selection, remain vulnerable to cancers that spread at the expense of the common good and ultimately lead to their own demise. Indeed, our own destructive behaviors, which benefit lower-level units at the expense of the global common good, are the societal equivalent of cancer.

Can a human society be an organism in the benign sense while avoiding the dark side? Yes, and there’s an argument for why the human social organism must be that way. Biologists distinguish between two types of organism. In one type, called fraternal, the lower-level units are genetically highly related, such as the cells in our body. Highly self-sacrificial behaviors routinely evolve in these organisms, such as programmed cell death.

In the other type, called egalitarian, lower-level units are not necessarily genetically related. The only way for them to cooperate is to ensure that the benefits and costs are fairly distributed. Nucleated cells evolved in this way—as symbiotic communities of unrelated bacterial cells. The genes in our bodies strictly regulate their expression for the common good and their fair transmission to the next generation. Biologists even call this regulation a “parliament of genes”.

The human social organism is of this variety. In our distant ancestors, the members of groups were not necessarily close kin. Productive cooperation depended upon being very good at enforcing fairness. That was the original human “Constitution”, which turned tiny groups of hunter-gatherers into UNIONS, capable of outperforming less cooperative groups or thriving better in harsh environments.

Everything that we call an organism is a highly cooperative society of lower-level elements, so much that we see the whole more than the parts. In modern evolutionary biology, the concepts of “society” and “organism” have truly merged.

Nearly everything that is distinctively human is a form of cooperation made possible by enforced fairness.

But evolution doesn’t automatically make everything nice. Our fairness-enforcing moral instincts are adapted for small groups and can fail in larger groups. The suppression of disruptive self-serving behaviors is never complete. Leaders are prone to abuse their power. And cooperation within groups can become a form of collective selfishness in battles against other groups.

Ten thousand years of cultural evolution has impressively expanded the scale of human cooperation to levels that could not have been imagined by our distant ancestors. But that only expands the scale of destruction as nations, giant corporations, and other leviathans battle for dominance, heedless of their cancerous effects on the whole earth. Achieving the final rung of cooperation, a UNION that encompasses the whole world, will require becoming wise managers of cultural evolution.
Much of our way of life is built on a faulty model of human nature. Both Darwin and Adam Smith would disavow the use of their names to describe people as entirely motivated by self-interest. Both wrote a lot about morality and about how our evident “moral sense” evolved. In Chapter 3 of *The Descent of Man*, Darwin declared our “moral sense or conscience is by far the most important” difference between us and other species.

No scientifically accurate view of humans can ignore our social and moral natures. Intriguingly, Darwin referenced Adam Smith on sympathy and called any human lacking in social/moral inclinations an “unnatural monster.” Drawing upon an updated concept of society as an organism, we can fruitfully think of what Smith called the moral sentiments as a key part of the regulatory system of cooperative groups.

Darwin knew humans can’t survive or thrive individually. Indeed, the relation between people and groups is akin to that between genes and bodies. Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* famously defined genes and bodies as replicators and vehicles, and that concept can be extended to our survival-enabling groups.
(tribes/communities/cities/nations etc) that are our “extended vehicles.”

It’s clear and uncontroversial that genes generating behaviors that harm their bodies/vehicles don’t fare well. Likewise, for people whose habits hurt the welfare of their groups (or extended survival-vehicles). The twist that, unlike genes, people can move to a new group/vehicle only adds to the importance of preventing or suppressing “parasitic” group-harming behaviors.

That’s precisely what a well-configured moral psychology does. It prevents or suppresses self-serving group-damaging traits. And as the authors of the Federalist Papers knew “social physiologies,” or UNIONS, that don’t limit that specific sort of self-interest aren’t fit to survive for long (they’ll be exploited and abandoned).

This logic, regularly rediscovered by evolution, sets hard limits on the idea that it’s natural and rational for humans to be self-interested. Any “self-interest rightly understood” (to use Tocqueville’s phrase) must maintain nested viable vehicles (from the local community right on up to the globe).

As Darwin put it, the “moral sense is identical with social instincts” and it would be absurd to speak of these as developed from selfishness.

As Darwin put it, the “moral sense is identical with social instincts” and it would be absurd to speak of these as developed from selfishness.

Evolution has shaped individual organisms as “vehicles” of selection, so that most gene “selfishness” takes the form of cooperation (within bodies/vehicles). We’ll explain in another essay more about the confusion over evolution being all about “selfishness” vs cooperation.

Sadly, Darwin was too optimistic in declaring there was no cause to “fear that social instincts will become weaker.” Worse yet, his own name is now used to describe precisely that weakening. Mislabeled “Darwinian” forms of unregulated individualism threaten our way of life (and our planetary vehicle).
The Darwinian ‘Struggle for Existence’ is Really About Balance

Darwin’s emphasis on the “struggle for existence” as the basis for natural selection is one of the most misinterpreted ideas he ever developed. Darwin had made it clear that his use of this Malthusian term was not one to be taken literally as meaning only competitive struggle but should rather be understood “in a large and metaphorical sense.”

As he explained in On the Origin of Species – and at greater length in his unpublished Natural Selection from which Origin was an abbreviated version – this term was to be understood as a metaphorical concept that incorporated multiple meanings. These included “dependence of one being on another,” animals that “struggle with each other” over limited food resources, plants that “struggle for life against the drought” and that “struggle with other fruit-bearing plants, in order to tempt birds to devour and thus disseminate its seeds.”

Darwin’s concept was therefore an umbrella term that he utilized to describe three unique forms of struggle: 1) Cooperative mutualism between individuals in the same species as well as between different species, 2)
Competition between individuals in the same species or between one species with another, and 3) Strategies that enhance fitness when confronted by harsh environments. Any of these forms that led to greater fitness, which Darwin defined as “success in leaving progeny,” or reproductive success, would therefore be vital to understanding natural selection.

The overall theme of Darwin’s discussion on this metaphorical struggle can be understood through his example of a “tangled bank” in which there were overlapping layers of struggle and dependency between one species and another. For example, as Darwin explained, a parasite may depend on a certain host species for their survival and would suffer along with their host. Therefore, if the parasites were to seriously injure their animal host, or climactic changes caused their host’s primary food source to diminish, those parasites that could not survive in the changed circumstances could perish as well.

Darwin saw no better example of this complicated interrelationship between species than that of the “Misseltoe.” This hemiparasitic plant depended on specific tree species for support, specific insects for fertilization, and specific birds for the diffusion of their seeds. But there would also be a struggle over which plant produced the most seeds with the most tempting pulp for the birds, which seeds grew best if several were dropped close together, and a struggle between mistletoe and tree since the latter would suffer if they became host for too many.

It was here that Darwin clarified his metaphorical meaning of the term “struggle for existence” and also made it clear he was making a rhetorical choice rather than adopting what he considered to be a more accurate scientific description. As he wrote in Natural Selection (p. 187): “In many of these cases, the term used by Sir C. Lyell of ‘equilibrium in the number of species’ is the more correct but to my mind it expresses far too much quiescence. Hence I shall employ the word struggle.”

This concept of “equilibrium” was a common feature of early nineteenth-century economics and natural science and had Darwin employed what he deemed to be the more correct expression, the political debate over Darwinian theory may have manifested quite differently.
Failing to distinguish between varieties of self-interest can be deadly.

In the previous section, we showed that competition in evolution can refer to “nature red in tooth and claw” but it can also mean a struggle against the elements or individuals—even different species—cooperating to achieve collective goals.

Similarly, the idea of self-interest can refer to benefitting oneself no matter what the harm to others, but it can also mean a more “enlightened” form that aligns personal, societal, and environmental goals.

The Federalists knew this, seeking “public happiness” by describing “the true interests of the community” which required “regulation of...various and interfering [self-]interests.”

Their socially and civically viable vision of self-interest was working well in 1835, when Alexis d’Toqueville wrote “How the Americans Combat Individualism by the Principle of Interest Rightly Understood.” The idea and word “individualism” were newly minted and Tocqueville marveled that “an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts [Americans] to assist each other, and...willingly to sacrifice...[for] the welfare of the state.”
This variety of self-interest knows it needs a thriving community and doesn’t seek to gain at the expense of it. Weakening what you depend on, slowly weakens your more enlightened self-interest (it’s a win-now-lose-later strategy). Similar logic animates Pericles’ funeral oration: “It does not matter whether a man prospers as an individual: If his country is destroyed, he is lost along with it.” Even Ayn Rand, the high priestess of selfishness, distinguished between what she called rational and irrational forms.

Sadly, what passes for “rational” self-interest today is often so unenlightened that it undermines rather than promotes the common good. The economics profession is largely to blame, relying upon ideas that would be utterly foreign to the Federalists. Specifically, the economic concept of self-interest is centered purely on the maximization of individual welfare, without regard to others. The invisible hand of the market is supposed to align self-interest with the common good, but this is a fiction.

Evolutionary theory affirms that the pursuit of self-interest leads to pathological outcomes unless oriented toward a higher common good.

As Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz says, the “reason that the invisible hand often seems invisible is that it is often not there.” As a result, in modern life, the pursuit of “rational” self-interest leads to tragedies and dilemmas, such as the overexploitation of resources (the Tragedy of the Commons) and competitive races to the bottom (the Prisoner’s Dilemma). In all of these, the economics-framed logic mislabeled as “rational” is a win-now-we-all-lose-later move.

Evolutionary theory affirms that the pursuit of self-interest leads to pathological outcomes unless oriented toward a higher common good. Even Richard Dawkins, the high priest of selfishness in evolutionary biology, made this point when he distinguished between selfish genes and vehicles of selection. Selfish genes evolve into cancers unless the individual organism is the vehicle of selection. Likewise, the unregulated pursuit of individual self-interest leads to social, civic, and political cancers unless “the true interests of the community” are made the vehicle of selection in cultural evolution.

The Federalists broadly shared Adam Smith’s view of human nature as not entirely selfish. Nevertheless, they wisely knew that a system of government cannot rely entirely on our virtuous side. Checks and balances must align self-interest with the common good and prohibit pathological self-seeking.

Toqueville visited America during a time that historians have dubbed the Era of Good Feelings, but it was not to last. Next came the Civil War, The Gilded Age’s extreme inequality, economic collapse, and widespread social unrest—all due in large part to self-interest wrongly understood. A partial recovery took place during the New Deal era, only to be plunged back into the extreme inequality, economic uncertainties, and social unrest of our current times.

The bottom line is that self-interest must always be enlightened enough—which means regulated enough—to protect and “promote the general Welfare,” which the Constitution lists as a key role of government. Otherwise,
the pursuit of narrow self-interest, wrongly understood, will fail the logic of Pericles, the Federalists, Tocqueville, and evolutionary theory.

The checks and balances built into the U.S. Constitution and the invisible hand of the market are not sufficient. They must be supplemented by 200+ years of refined thought, including the insights of evolutionary theory.
Why Socialism Fails

Evolutionary theory leads to a conception of socialism—governance for the common good—that works. It also explains why many attempts at socialism in the past and present have not worked.

Many attempts at socialism have made two gigantic mistakes. The first is the mistake of centralized planning, as if a group of experts can formulate and implement the best way to run society. It turns out that societies are too complex to be governed in this way. There are almost always unforeseen consequences to a given policy, requiring a more humble and experimental approach to policy formulation. The second is the mistake of concentrating power in the hands of an elite few. It is almost inevitable that the elites will eventually govern for their own benefit and not the benefit of society as a whole.

These two gigantic mistakes explain the failures of many socialist efforts at the national scale, from Soviet Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century to Venezuela today. They also explain the failure of socialist efforts at smaller scales, including efforts that no one associates with the word "socialism".

It is ironic that many heads of corporations, who regard themselves as capitalists and scorn the idea of socialism, are little different than socialist nations in how they run their
own organizations—command and control by a small group of elites. And the results are the same. Even a moderately sized corporation is too complex for any group of experts to formulate and implement a grand plan. Research shows that most "command and control" change efforts fail. And to the extent that they succeed, it is to enrich the elites rather than all members of the corporation or society as a whole.

**Evolutionary theory affirms that the pursuit of self-interest leads to pathological outcomes unless oriented toward a higher common good.**

The nineteenth-century socialists who were the first to seize upon Darwin’s theory of evolution—took small-scale human societies as their model of what governance should be like at a larger scale. As we have seen, this model is one that demands fairness, equal participation, and bottom-up control of elites. If socialist experiments of the twentieth and twenty-first-century failed to include these features, then their failure is not a statement about socialism, properly understood.

Moreover, there are experiments at the national scale, which go by names such as “Democratic Socialism” and “Social Democracies”, that work remarkably well and rank at the top of social and economic performance indicators. The joining of the words “social” and “democratic” hints at why these nations work well—because they have succeeded at scaling up the essential ingredients of fairness, equal participation, and bottom-up control of elites that characterize small-scale societies. They are the models of socialism, rightly understood, which all nations should try to emulate and improve upon.

Just as socialism, wrongly understood, exists at the scale of corporations in addition to nations, so is socialism, rightly understood. An abundance of research shows that the best performing corporations—indeed, organizations of all sorts and sizes—have converged upon the structure of social democratic nations, by successfully implementing the ingredients of small-scale societies that were the inspiration of the original socialists.

We end this installment with a caution about labels. Labels such as “Socialism” and “Capitalism” are extremely unreliable, in large part because they are used to gain political advantage. We must look past the labels to appreciate the underlying principles that make societies succeed or fail at any scale. That is what Darwin’s theory does so well, extending even to other species in addition to all human societies.
Socialism is usually contrasted with Capitalism, a system that allows individuals to keep the rewards of their own efforts. But Capitalists have not abandoned a vision of a good and just society. Their claim is that Capitalism is the best way to create such a society. Anyone who tried to defend a form of Capitalism that leads to widespread human suffering and the degradation of our planet would be just plain immoral.

Capitalism avoids the errors of centralized planning and—at least initially—the concentration of power in the hands of a few elites. That gives Capitalist societies a kind of vibrancy that Socialist societies, wrongly understood, lack. If nothing else, Capitalist societies are good at changing. But are they good at changing in a direction that benefits the common good?

That depends upon how the pursuit of individual interest is regulated. Small-sale human societies provide a model for Capitalism, no less than Socialism. There is plenty of individual striving but it requires cultivating a good reputation, which in turn requires aligning one’s self-interest with the common good. Naked aggression and other disruptive forms of self-interest are quickly detected and punished—never entirely, but to an impressive degree. Small-scale societies are the most highly regulated societies in the world.

The great challenge for Capitalism, as with Socialism, is how to scale up the alignment of self-interest with the common good. One form of
Capitalism attempts to do this primarily through the adjustment of prices in a free market. The logic of this approach is that everything of value can be represented as a monetary value and the laws of supply and demand provide what people are most willing to pay for. Thanks to the “invisible hand” of the free market, there need not be a deliberative process of aligning self-interest with the common good. Greed becomes good and traditional moral systems become obsolete.

This form of Capitalism is profoundly mistaken and directs change toward extreme inequality, widespread human suffering, and degradation of the planet. However, other forms of Capitalism can be just as powerful as change engines and do a better job of aligning self-interest with the common good. These forms of Capitalism work, not by replacing traditional moral systems with a price system, but by scaling up the essential elements of traditional moral systems. A higher good (e.g., national welfare) is kept explicitly in mind and markets, along with other incentives, are constructed to become aligned with the common good, like a reputational system writ large.

These more enlightened forms of Capitalism go by many names, reflecting independent historical derivations. They broadly converge with enlightened forms of Socialism, which explicitly begin by focusing on the common good but also appreciate the power of free enterprise, appropriately regulated.

The authors of the Federalist Papers had a far more nuanced understanding of Adam Smith than his cartoon “invisible hand” portrayal today. They knew that governance in all its forms, from the U.S. Constitution to the organization of its economy, requires aligning self-interest with the common good. The idea that a free market can accomplish this alignment all by itself is a nineteenth and twentieth-century invention that has no scientific warrant and has failed in practice.

Thanks to 200+ years of refined thought since the Federalist Papers, we can begin to drop oppositional terms such as “Socialism” and “Capitalism” and function more like scientists, framing and testing hypotheses on forms of governance that provide what all of us want—justice and sustainability at all scales, from small groups to the planet.

The great challenge for Capitalism, as with Socialism, is how to scale up the alignment of self-interest with the common good.
We Are All Socialists, Globalists, Democrats, Capitalists, Environmentalists, Technologists, and Scientists

This series of short articles updating the Federalist Papers stands on a strong foundation of theory and evidence that has accumulated since Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote their founding document for a more perfect UNION of colonies. Today, the whole world can become united around these principles.

We are all Socialists

Socialism is not a particular political ideology among others. It is a commitment to create a society that works for the benefit of all within the society. All political ideologies share this commitment, at least when defended in public on the world stage, and merely differ in their conception of how to achieve the good society.
We are all Globalists

Gone are the days when the UNION could consist of a handful of colonies, states within a nation, or even nations within a geographical region of the earth. Our impacts upon each other and the planet are global, which requires the UNION of governance to be global. This does not mean the abolition of lower-level scales of governance, but it does require lower-level governance to be coordinated with the global good in mind. This has happened many times before at intermediate social scales, so there is nothing, theoretically, preventing us from achieving the final rung of multi-level governance for the global common good.

We are all Democrats

We would never have become such a cooperative species at the scale of small groups without democratic governance, in which all members take part and protect each other from self-serving bullying behaviors. Our instincts for democratic governance are literally embedded in our DNA. The necessity of democratic governance doesn’t change as societies increase in scale, but cultural mechanisms are required to interface with our genetically evolved mechanisms. The evidence is unequivocal that inclusive societies work better than societies controlled by elites for their benefit. Governance at all scales must be democratic to achieve a society that works for the common good.

We are all Capitalists

The positive change that we crave requires the identification and rapid implementation of new practices that work, compared to our current practices that don’t work. This is competition in the large and metaphorical sense meant by Darwin and it requires the vibrant spirit of entrepreneurship associated with the best of Capitalism. However, it also requires the social construction of markets that contribute to the global common good and avoid the negative externalities associated with the worst of Capitalism. Markets that are managed for the common good are not new. Examples abound at intermediate scales of society that can be taken to the global scale, as soon as we see the problems in the right way.

We are all Environmentalists

From the very beginning of our history as a species, it was possible for human societies to exploit their local environments and move on to new horizons. Those days are gone forever, requiring us to create sustainable economies and act as stewards for the rest of life on earth.

We are all Technologists

Global governance requires the capacity for rapid global communication that didn’t exist before the Internet Age. However, this does not mean that the global brain self-organizes. It must be constructed with the global good explicitly in mind. Once we absorb this fundamental truth, then we can proceed to realize the best of the Internet Age while avoiding its current toxic manifestations.
We are all scientists

Genetic evolution has been frugal in endowing us with our abilities to sense and act in the world. We can see only a narrow slice of the light and sound spectrum, can barely smell at all compared to our canine companions, and have no ability whatsoever to sense electronic and magnetic forces that other species rely upon extensively to navigate their worlds. Even what we sense is processed in a way that contributes to survival and reproduction but often distorts rather than apprehending factual reality. Perceiving the universe that exists apart from human existence and acting for the common good on the basis of this information requires the cultural institution of science in all its forms, including the instruments that enable us to go beyond our genetically evolved perceptual abilities and the social processes that result in the accumulation of factual knowledge and its use for the common good.

Our instincts for democratic governance are literally embedded in our DNA. The necessity of democratic governance doesn't change as societies increase in scale, but cultural mechanisms are required to interface with our genetically evolved mechanisms.

Combining these social identities into a UNION can result in a transformation of politics. Every reader of these words can start by learning more about the 200+ years of refined thought since the publication of the Federalist Papers, using this brief introduction as a guide. The more you learn, the more it will become a new Common Sense for you, to invoke another founding document of the American Revolution by Thomas Paine.
Epilogue

The essays in this collection have been kept short and non-technical, in keeping with the original Federalist Papers, but they rest upon a strong scientific foundation based on the modern study of human society from an evolutionary perspective. This epilogue provides key references for you to deepen your knowledge, including the academic literature, a rapidly expanding genre of books accessible to the general reader, and authoritative online content.

Preamble

Why is it new to revisit the theme of the Federalist Papers from an evolutionary perspective? In large part because the study of evolution became narrowly focused on genetic evolution for most of the 20th century, leaving the study of cultural evolution to other disciplines. More recently, evolutionary thinkers have gone back to basics by defining evolution as any process that includes the three ingredients of variation, selection, and replication. These developments are covered in books such as *Evolution in Four Dimensions* by Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb, *This View of Life: Completing the Darwinian Revolution* by David Sloan Wilson, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* by Joseph Henrich, and *Darwin’s Unfinished Symphony: How Culture Made the Human Mind* by Kevin Laland. An abundance of free and authoritative content is available in the online magazines *This View of Life* (TVOL) and *Evonomics*.

On the Origin of Socialist Darwinism

This essay documents how the earliest consistent application of Darwinian ideas to society occurred among the political left (i.e. socialists, communists, anarchists, and other social reformers). Only later did Social Darwinism emerge in opposition to Socialist Darwinism. The most systematic treatment of this can be found in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of *The Struggle for Coexistence* (pdf [here](#)) by Eric Michael Johnson. Other scholars have looked at specific time periods or regions such as pre-Darwinian evolution in *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London* by Adrian Desmond, the United States in *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* by Mark Pittenger, Germany in *Darwinism in Germany: 1860 to 1900* by Ted Benton, England in *Socialist Darwinism: The Response of the Left to Darwinian Evolutionary Theory, 1880-1905* by Caroline Ogilvie, and a more general overview in *The First Darwinian Left: Socialism and Darwinism: 1859-1914* by David Stack. For a thorough overview of Social Darwinism see *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* by Mike Hawkins. Also see the Evonomics articles "Ayn Rand vs. Anthropology," by Eric Michael Johnson, “Economists Forgot Smith and Darwin’s Message: Society Cannot Function Without Moral Bonds,” by Geoffrey Hodgson, "How Bad Biology is Killing the Economy" by Frans de Waal, and the TVOL publication *Truth and Reconciliation for Social Darwinism*. 
More Perfect UNIONS Must Regulate Their Parts

This essay introduces the concepts of Multilevel Selection (MLS) and Major Evolutionary Transitions (MET). MLS theory shows that cooperation within any given social group requires a process of between-group selection and tends to be undermined by selection within groups. Most social species are a mosaic of cooperative and disruptive self-serving traits, depending upon the balance between levels of selection for each trait. However, the balance between levels of selection is not fixed but can itself evolve. A MET occurs when mechanisms evolve the largely (but never entirely) suppress the potential for disruptive within-group selection, so that between-group selection becomes the dominant evolutionary force for most traits. For MLS theory, *Does Altruism Exist? Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others* by David Sloan Wilson provides a concise book-length account and there is an abundance of online material on TVOL and Evonomics (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4). For MET, we recommend *The Major Transitions in Evolution* by John Maynard Smith and Eors Szathmary, and a new series of TVOL interviews titled “Evolving A Major Transition in the Internet Age.”

The Human Social Organism and a Parliament of Genes

This essay elaborates on implications of MLS and MET. The idea that cancer is a form of disruptive selection among cells within multicellular organisms is elaborated in *The Cheating Cell: How Evolution Helps Us Understand and Treat Cancer* by Athena Aktipis and this TVOL interview with Aktipis. The concept of human society as an organism has long history as a metaphor but only now can be treated as a serious scientific hypothesis. Human cultural evolution is a multilevel process, no less than genetic evolution, and METs have occurred repeatedly in the past, resulting in increases in the scale of cooperation by many orders of magnitude over the last 10,000 years. However, this has not been a continuous process and many reversals and collapses have also occurred. And the achievement of a global superorganism, while theoretically possible, is still in the future. A sample of books include *Darwin’s Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* by David Sloan Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, by Edward O. Wilson, and *Ultrasociety: How 10,000 Years of War Made Humans the Greatest Cooperators on Earth*, by Peter Turchin. A TVOL video conversation with Peter Turchin is available here.

Morality Regulates Our Social Physiology

Moral philosophers don’t agree on much, but they do agree that morality is inherently about the welfare of others and society as a whole—at least among those who are defined as being inside the moral circle. It goes without saying that morality as practiced is seldom universal—nor that it should be expected to from an evolutionary perspective. A universal morality is theoretically possible but it must be socially constructed, which is the whole point of this series of essays. The many books on this subject include *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* by Christopher Boehm, *A Natural History of Human Morality* by Michael Tomasello, and *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* by Joshua Greene. A good place to begin is this TVOL special issue titled *This View*...
The metaphor of the “struggle for existence” has been treated at length by many scholars and historians. Darwin’s understanding that this struggle involved cooperation as well as competition was largely overlooked by his contemporaries. Useful books exploring this issue are Gregg Mitman’s *The State of Nature: Ecology, Community, and American Social Thought*, 1900-1950, Daniel P. Todes’ *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought*, Piers Hale’s *Political Descent: Malthus, Mutualism and the Politics of Evolution in Victorian England* and Mark Borrello’s *Evolutionary Restraints: The Contentious History of Group Selection*.

As this essay documents, when the concept of self-interest emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries, its enlightened forms were oriented toward the welfare of society as a whole. For over half a century, however, the concept of self-interest has been dominated by a particular economic worldview that portrays the unbridled pursuit of individual and corporate wealth to robustly benefit the common good, as if led by an invisible hand. This conceptualization of self-interest has had toxic consequences and a modern evolutionary perspective offers a superior conception of the interplay of competition and cooperation in a well-functioning society. Books include *The Origin of Wealth: The Radical Remaking of Economics and What It Means for Business and Society* by Eric Beinhocker, *The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good* by Robert Frank, and *The Gardens of Democracy: A New American Story of Citizenship, the Economy, and the Role of Government* by Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer. The online magazine *Evonomics.com* includes many authoritative yet accessible articles on this topic, including this one titled “Why New Economics Needs a New Invisible Hand” by David Sloan Wilson.

In order to evolve forms of socialism that work, it is necessary to clearly acknowledge forms of socialism that don’t work. An excellent book on this topic is *Is Socialism Feasible?: Toward an Alternative Future* by Geoffrey Hodgson, who is also a foremost scholar of Darwinism in the history of economic and social thought. The Nordic countries come closest to a form of socialism that works, as discussed in *Sustainable Modernity: The Nordic Model and Beyond* co-edited by Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun (open access). An accessible TVOL essay on the Nordic Model from an evolutionary perspective is “Blueprint for the Global Village” by David Sloan Wilson and Dag Hessen.
Why Capitalism Fails

In order to evolve forms of capitalism that works, it is necessary to clearly acknowledge forms of capitalism that don't work. Extensive documentation is provided by *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Pikkety and *Rebooting Capitalism: How We Can Forge a Society that Works for Everyone* by Anthony Biglan. Biglan also has a series of TVOL essays titled "The Cultural Evolution of Social Pathology," which documents the toxic effects of poorly regulated capitalism for the tobacco industry, the arms industry, the food industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the financial industry, the fossil fuel industry, and rampant inequality.

We Are All Socialists, Globalists, Democrats, Capitalists, Environmentalists, Technologists, and Scientists

The final essay leaves the reader with a new vision of how to work together to create a more perfect UNION at a global scale. A new TVOL series titled "Evolution, Complexity, and the Third Way of Entrepreneurship" explores the new vision in conversations with twelve thought leaders, with opportunities for personal engagement.
This View of Life is the online magazine of the non-profit The Evolution Institute, which provides science-based solutions for today’s most pressing social issues in order to improve the quality of life.

Consider joining the TVOL1000, a group that supports the magazine, helps to shape its content, and otherwise works to establish “this view of life” as a worldview for accomplishing positive change.