Funding the Future

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*I had hoped to post chapter 4 of the Quantum Biology series this morning. However, for all sorts of good reasons, we have decided to refine it before doing so, mainly because we see it as pretty fundamental to our economic arguments. So I offer a Quantum Essay instead, or at least one related to the Quantum series. It so happens it links fairly well with another post this morning.*

*Like others in the Quantum Essay series, this one arose from discussions between my wife, Jacqueline, and me.*

*Other essays in this series are noted at the end of this post.*

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***What if Darwin was wrong? The case for the survival of the wisest***

Darwin's theory of evolution is one of the most influential ideas in human history. But what if the story we have told about it is wrong, or, more precisely, incomplete?

The popular interpretation of Darwin's work suggests that the world is driven by the survival of the fittest. Yet what if it is really driven by the survival of the wisest, who are those who cooperate and not compete to adapt and endure?

For generations, the metaphor of the struggle for existence has been misused to justify greed, inequality, and ruthless competition. It has been embedded in economics as much as in biology. Markets, we are told, reward the strong, the clever, and the efficient. That assumption became the ideological backbone of neoliberalism. But biology, and increasingly, modern genetics, tells us that this story is not true.

***Cooperation, not competition***

Recent research into epigenetics* shows that what we inherit from our parents is not a fixed genetic destiny but a flexible system shaped by environment, stress, diet, and social context. The genome provides potential, but it definitely does not prescribe outcomes. In that sense, it mirrors society itself. We are each born into systems,

whether economic, political, or cultural, that influence what we become, but those systems can change if we act collectively to change them.

Cooperation, therefore, is not a sentimental alternative to competition. It is the mechanism by which both life and society adapt. The most successful species and civilisations are those that share information, distribute resources, and protect one another from risk. Ant colonies, coral reefs, and even human cities depend on precisely this dynamic balance: diversity and interdependence, not dominance and exclusion.

Economics has ignored this lesson for far too long. Markets that reward only individual gain and punish cooperation are systems in decline. Like an organism trapped in an evolutionary dead end, such systems consume their environment until collapse becomes inevitable. Our current model of capitalism, with its fixation on profit, is such a system.

### *The economics of wisdom*

If we replace “fitness” with “wisdom” as the measure of survival, everything changes. Wisdom is not about dominance. It is about awareness of self, of system, and of consequence. It is, in effect, the social and intellectual equivalent of epigenetic adaptation**. A wise society learns from feedback; it recognises that survival depends on maintaining the conditions that make life possible. An economy that exhausts its people and its planet is not wise. It is, in effect, democidal*** because such an economy can only exist with the consent of the government that chooses to let it operate.

In that light, the argument for cooperative economics, whether from public health to environmental stewardship, and to fair taxation, becomes not moral but biological. The systems that endure are those that self-regulate through care and reciprocity. In evolutionary terms, they are alive because they maintain low entropy: they keep order within complexity, using energy wisely to sustain themselves. When the drive for private accumulation replaces collective wellbeing, entropy increases, socially, economically, and ecologically.

This is not some vague metaphor. It is a real description of what we now face. Inequality, ecological collapse, and social fragmentation are all symptoms of a system that mistakes short-term strength for long-term survival. The market may reward the predator, but the ecosystem survives because of cooperation between its parts.

### *Rethinking destiny*

What follows from this is clear. If genes do not fix our fate (and it now seems certain that they do not), neither does our economic inheritance. The DNA of neoliberalism, expressed as its belief in competition as virtue and greed as necessity, is not immutable. Like the human genome, an economy can be reprogrammed by epigenetic signals: our laws, institutions, and collective choices could lead us to abandon

neoliberalism and make a better choice of economic architecture for our state, motivated by our desire for survival. In this sense, tax policy, social welfare, education, and environmental protection are the epigenetic regulators of society. They determine which traits, whether they be greed or generosity, exploitation or empathy, are expressed.

We therefore face a choice. Do we continue to build an economy designed for the fittest, which ultimately destroys the conditions for its own survival? Or do we choose to become an economy for the wisest, grounded in cooperation and care? The science of life itself now suggests that only the latter path is viable.

Darwin didn't get everything wrong, but those who interpreted him to justify competition certainly did. Evolution never meant a war of all against all. It meant adaptation to circumstance, and today that adaptation demands wisdom above all else. If we are to survive as a species, we must remember that cooperation is not weakness. It is the very essence of life.

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***Notes***

* See ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epigenetics***

** ***Epigenetic adaptation is the process by which a population or organism becomes better suited to its environment through heritable changes in gene expression, rather than changes in the DNA sequence itself. These environmentally induced modifications, such as DNA methylation or histone modification, alter the accessibility of genes and can be passed down through cell division and across generations, providing a rapid, non-genetic way for organisms to respond to and adapt to fluctuating conditions.***

*** ***Democide is a term coined by R. J. Rummel to mean the murder of any people by their government or state. It is an umbrella term that includes acts like genocide (mass murder of a specific group), politicide (murder of political opponents), and other forms of government-perpetrated killing and mass death, even if caused by neglect or criminal omission.***

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***Other essays in this series:***

* ***The Quantum Economics series (this link opens a tab with them all in it)***
* ***The Quantum Essays: Observing and Engaging***
* ***The Quantum Essays: Quantum MMT: The wave function of sovereign spending***

* ***The Quantum Essays: Is equilibrium only possible in death?***
* ***The Quantum essays: Economics, the Big Bang and Rachel Reeves***
* ***The Quantum Essays: Quantum economics, discounting, and the cost of inaction***
* ***The Quantum Essays: Schrödinger, entropy, equilibrium, and the lessons for society***
* ***The Quantum Essays: The meaning of life, negentropy, and the politics of staying alive***
* ***The Quantum Essays: Democracy as negentropy: why fascism is the politics of death***
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