a spiritual journey
Change is fundamental to the universe.

vs

Stasis is fundamental. God is unchanging and against change.
Hebrew **good** (dynamic/fertile)

vs

Greek **perfect** (static/sterile)
political dynamism (unrest) vs political ideal (stability)
stasis

revolution/reformation

evolution
Adam Smith
1723-1790

An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations
1776
Thomas Malthus
1766 - 1834

Essay on Population
1798
Charles Darwin
1809-1882

Origin of the Species
1859
Karl Marx
1818-1883

Communist Manifesto
1848
I’ve been back from the Galápagos for over about a month now, and I can’t stop pondering the persistent, seemingly bottomless sadness of Charles Darwin’s later years. His sadness could have been clinical depression, written into his genes. It could have been the secondary consequence of some chronic medical condition, the symptoms of which included severe headaches, nausea, vomiting, and flatulence, which made it highly embarrassing for the proper Victorian gentleman to go out in public.

His sadness could have been a father’s grief after the death of some of his ten children, especially his beloved Annie, who died at the age of ten. It could have been the psychosocial drain of thinking differently from nearly everyone around him, of seeing things that they didn’t see—and probably didn’t want to see. It could have been the stress of knowing that his writings would earn him hatred and scorn from those who were piously prone to misunderstanding and misjudgment.
It could have been all of the above, and more.

And the more could include this: Charles may have foreseen—and feared—where his radical new ideas might lead.

He had reason to fear. During the course of his lifetime, a form of exploitive international capitalism known as imperialism was conquering the world, with European empires struggling like bull elephants to dominate markets, rapaciously extracting global resources and exploiting global labor. The result? War, genocide, slavery, oppression, piracy, and environmental plunder across the colonized world, and especially across what we now call the Global South. The colonization process perfectly epitomized the African proverb, “When the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers the most.”

Meanwhile, about twenty miles from Darwin’s comfortable manor in Kent, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels watched from London with moral horror as imperial capitalism concentrated more and more wealth, power, and weapons in the hands of small European super-elites. They knew that such a system of gross injustice and growing inequity could not stand. With the proletariat masses struggling for necessities while the elite upper classes hoarded luxuries, the fall of the house of imperial capitalism would be ugly when its time came. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), they sought to describe the mechanisms by which the upper classes struggled to maintain their regime of advantage and the exploited masses struggled to topple it.
In this way, the struggle for survival and the survival of the fittest framed both capitalism and communism, and defined both the twentieth century and the century that is taking shape in its aftermath: struggle, competition, kill or be killed—that’s the way of nature, red in tooth and claw, and there is no alternative.

That phrase, “nature, red in tooth and claw,” became an unofficial motto of Darwinian thought, even though it was published nine years before The Origin of the Species and was written not by a scientist but by the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson. His artful and agonized poem In Memoriam seethed with both personal grief and the aggrieved spirit of the times.
The truth is, Darwin’s key phrase was neither *the struggle for survival* nor the *survival of the fittest*. Darwin’s interest was descent, or transmutation, or evolution *by natural selection*. *Natural selection* was Darwin’s big idea.

That key phrase only changed when Darwin’s younger counterpart, Alfred Russel Wallace, wrote to Darwin and said he felt it overly personified nature, as if nature were actively choosing or selecting winners and losers. Wallace recommended an alternative phrase used by Herbert Spencer in his writings on economics, *survival of the fittest*, and Darwin, ever humble and open to new data, agreed that it was a better term and began using it (eventually adding it in the subtitle to *On the Origin of the Species*).

Unfortunately, if *natural selection* was open to misunderstanding, so was *survival of the fittest*, but in a more dangerous way. Darwin and Wallace thought of *fitness* like a puzzle piece: something is fit when it fits in with the local environment. The fittest are those who fit into their local environment most harmoniously, naturally, and fully. The subtitle could have been *survival of the most harmonious*. 
But in the hands of both capitalists and Marxists, *fit* came to be understood as athletic, strong, fast, tough, aggressive, powerful, dominating. So the toughest CEO survives. The most ruthless corporation survives. The most vicious and competitive politician wins the election and rules the nation. The most aggressive movement, army, party, ideology, or dictator kills off its competition and survives. A contemporary global strongman perfectly articulated this view in a recent tweet:

The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive. The strong are respected, and alliances are made with the strong, and in the end peace is made with the strong.

But again, we must realize this obsession with superior strength wasn’t what Charles (or Alfred) meant by survival of the fittest. Not even close. Just as capitalistic interpreters read the Bible through capitalistic lenses, so they read Darwin. They see what they want to see. They see the only thing their economics and politics allow them to see: a carte blanche for greed, rapaciousness, unbridled self-interest, and unrestrained competition and pursuit of power.

Medieval Christianity certainly had totalitarian tendencies, but nothing like the totalitarianism of modern capitalism and communism.
It’s true, inter- and intra-species competition does play a role in natural selection. But ruthless kill-or-be-killed competition is neither the only nor the most important component of the process. Instead of *survival of the most ruthless*, we would be truer to Darwin, Wallace, and the biological revolution they unleashed to say *survival of the best adapted*. The individuals and species that are best adapted to their environment, the individuals and species that can live most harmoniously in their environment, they are the ones that live long enough to reproduce, thus ensuring the survival of their kind.
I can’t help but wonder: could our economic systems—whether leaning toward Marx and Engels on the left or Smith and Keynes on the right—have programmed us to reduce Darwin’s rich theory to slogans like the struggle for survival, the survival of the fittest, and nature, red in tooth and claw for their own benefit? Could it be that these systems need us to frame life in those desperate terms of perpetual scarcity, so that we will produce, produce, produce? Isn’t that what all contemporary economic systems need us to do most—like anxious drones, to produce, consume, produce, consume, until we exhaust ourselves and die?
Survival of the Best Adapted
1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
4. Survival of the Most Diverse
1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
4. Survival of the Most Diverse
5. Survival of the Best Organized
1. Survival of the Best Adapted
2. Survival of the Most Adaptable
3. Survival of the Most Attractive
4. Survival of the Most Diverse
5. Survival of the Best Organized
6. Survival of the Most Cooperative
Evolutionary theory now has a bridge to ecological theory, and ecological theory brings us full circle to realize (finally) that human economies are activities that take place in an environment. Any organism that does not fit harmoniously in its environment will end up as a fossil, as dust blowing across a desert—including the people who submit their brains and chain their lives to inflexible ideologies like contemporary Marxism and capitalism.

Both systems, after all, arose in the industrial era, an era that produced short-term wealth measured only in money, first by plundering the long-term and multifaceted wealth of the earth, and second by exploiting the labor of vulnerable people. Even though the two systems differed in their plans for distributing that wealth, they shared more assumptions than they realized, assumptions that may not be adaptable to the postindustrial, ecological civilization that we humans must create if we are to survive.

To fashion that civilization, we must pay increasing attention to long-term environmental health measured in well-being, not just short-term wealth measured in money, and we must learn to cooperate with our fellow humans, our fellow species, and the physical systems of the earth itself for the common good. We can call this new cooperative economy anything we want to: ecological capitalism, reformed capitalism, organic capitalism, organic Marxism. Whatever we call it, if we don’t develop an economy and a civilization that fit our environment, we simply won’t survive.
Perhaps I’m stretching things, but I have to allow Jesus to get a word in edgewise here. I can’t help but hear him say of the dominant and anxious economic empires of our day:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear, or about the GDP, whether it is heading up or down. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing, and well-being more than the value of your stock portfolios? Look at the marine iguanas on the black volcanic rocks; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet the Creator, working through the harmonious and bountiful ecosystem of creation, feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing?
Consider the guineafowl pufferfish of the reef, how she grows; she neither invests in growth funds nor runs her economy on fossil fuels, yet I tell you, even the sexiest movie star, the wealthiest athlete, and the most powerful politician, in all their self-congratulatory glory, aren’t as beautiful as she. Look, if God makes beautiful the fish on the reef, which are alive today and may die in the next El Niño event, will God not much more take care of you—you micro-faiths? So listen: stop worrying, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What is the GDP forecast?” For the economic exploiters and environmental plunderers strive for all these things. But the Creator, through the amazing evolutionary processes that surround you, gave you life and knows what you need.

You need a higher, deeper, and wiser ambition than the competitive drive trumpeted by this suicidal economy. Seek first and foremost to fit harmoniously within the just and bountiful ecosystem of God, and everything you need will be given to you as well.

Really. I mean it. Don’t let anxiety drive you into a life of ruthless competition in the tooth-and-claw struggle for survival of the most aggressive. That game is over. Learn to live in the real world, the world of marine iguanas, Galápagos finches, and guineafowl pufferfish. That’s the way to live, today and always.