

## **SOCIAL EVOLUTION FORUM**

### **Blueprint for the Global Village**

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Life consists of units within units. In the biological world, we have genes, individuals, groups, species, and ecosystems—all nested within the biosphere. In the human world, we have genes, individuals, families, villages and cities, provinces, and nations—all nested within the global village. In both worlds, a problem lurks at every rung of the ladder: a potential conflict between the interests of the lower-level units and the welfare of the higher-level units (Wilson 2015). What's good for me can be bad for my family. What's good for my family can be bad for my village, and so on, all the way up to what's good for my nation can be bad for the global village.

For most of human existence, until a scant 10 or 15 thousand years ago, the human ladder was truncated. All groups were small groups whose members knew each other as individuals. These groups were loosely organized into tribes of a few thousand people, but cities, provinces, and nations were unknown (Diamond 2013).

Today, over half the earth's population resides in cities and the most populous nations teem with billions of people, but groups the size of villages still deserve a special status. They are the social units that we are genetically adapted to live within and they can provide a blueprint for larger social units, including the largest of them all—the global village of nations.

### **Groups into Organisms**

The conflict between lower-level selfishness and higher-level welfare pervades the biological world (Wilson and Wilson 2007). Cancer cells selfishly spread at the expense of other cells within the body, without contributing to the common good, ultimately resulting in the death of the whole organism. In many animal societies, the dominant individuals act more like tyrants than wise leaders, taking as much as they can for themselves until deposed by the next tyrant. Single species can ravage entire ecosystems for nobody's benefit but their own.

But goodness has its own advantages, especially when those who behave for the good of their groups are able to band together and avoid the depredations of the selfish. Punishment is also a powerful weapon against

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selfishness, although it is often costly to wield. Every once in a great while, the good manage to decisively suppress selfishness within their ranks. Then something extraordinary happens. The group becomes a higher-level organism. Nucleated cells did not evolve by small mutational steps from bacterial cells but as groups of cooperating bacteria (Margulis 1970). Likewise, multi-cellular organisms are groups of highly cooperative cells, and the insects of social insect colonies, while physically separate, coordinate their activities so well that they qualify as super-organisms. Life itself might have originated as groups of cooperating molecular reactions (Maynard Smith and Szathmary 1995, 1999).

Only recently have scientists begun to realize that human evolution represents a similar transition. In most primate species, members of groups cooperate to a degree but are also each other's main rivals. Our ancestors evolved to suppress self-serving behaviors that are destructive for the group, at least for the most part, so that the main way to succeed was *as a group*. Teamwork became the signature adaptation of our species (Boehm 2011).

Extant hunter-gatherer societies still reflect the kind of teamwork that existed among our ancestors for thousands of generations. Individuals cannot achieve high status by throwing their weight around, but only by cultivating a good reputation among their peers. Most of human moral psychology—including its other-oriented elements such as solidarity, love, trust, empathy, and sympathy, and its coercive elements, such as social norms enforced by punishment—can be understood as products of genetic evolution operating among groups, favoring those that exhibited the greatest teamwork.

## **From Genes to Culture**

Teamwork in our ancestors included physical activities such as childcare, hunting and gathering, and offense and defense against other groups. Human teamwork also acquired a mental dimension including an ability to transmit learned information across generations that surpasses any other species. This enabled our ancestors to adapt to their environments much more quickly than by the slow process of genetic evolution. They spread over the globe, occupying all climatic zones and hundreds of ecological niches (Pagel and Mace 2004). The diversity of human cultures is the cultural equivalent of the major genetic adaptive radiations in dinosaurs, birds, and mammals. The invention of agriculture initiated a positive feedback process between population size and the ability to produce food leading to the mega-societies of today.

Cultural evolution differs from genetic evolution in important respects but not in the problem that lurks at every rung of the social ladder (Richerson and Boyd 2005). Just like genetic traits, cultural traits can spread by benefitting lower-level units at the expense of the higher-level good—or by contributing to the higher-level good. There can be cultural cancers that are no less parasitic

than physiological cancers. For teamwork to exist at any given rung of the social ladder, there must be mechanisms that hold the wolves of selfishness at bay. A nation or the global village is no different in this respect than a human village, a hunter-gatherer group, an ant colony, a multi-cellular organism, or a nucleated cell.

Modern nations differ greatly in how well they function at the national scale (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, Pickett and Wilkinson 2009). Some manage their affairs efficiently for the benefit of all their citizens. They qualify at least as crude superorganisms. Other nations are as dysfunctional as a cancer-ridden patient or an ecosystem ravaged by a single species. Whatever teamwork exists is at a smaller scale, such as a group of elites exploiting the nation for its own benefit. The nations that work have safeguards that prevent exploitation from within, like scaled-up villages. The nations that don't work will probably *never* work unless similar safeguards are implemented.

Accomplishing teamwork at the level of a nation is hard enough, but it isn't *good* enough because there is one more rung in the social ladder. Although many nations have a long way to go before they serve their own citizens well, a nation can be as good as gold to its own citizens and still be a selfish member of the global village. In fact, there are many examples in the international arena, where nations protect their own perceived interests at the expense of the common global future. We will address some of these issues for Norway, which serves its own citizens well by most metrics, and also has ambitions to serve the global village well, but still sometimes succumbs to selfishness at the highest rung of the social ladder.

## **The Norway Case**

Norway functions exceptionally well as a nation, with its high level of equality, social welfare benefits and level of trust (Edlund 1999, Sejersted 2011). Although it is small in comparison with the largest nations, it is still many orders of magnitude larger than the village-sized groups of our ancestral past. Seen through the lens of evolutionary theory, the dividing line between function and dysfunction has been notched upward so that the whole nation functions like a single organism. This is an exaggeration, of course. Self-serving activities that are bad for the group can be found in Norway (Midttun and Witoszek 2011), but they are modest in comparison with the more dysfunctional nations of the world.

Norway's success as a nation is already well-known without requiring an evolutionary lens. Along with other Nordic countries, it scores high on any list of economic and life quality indicators (e.g., Norway led the world in UN Human Development Index (HDI) matrices for five years in a row). The success of the so-called "Nordic Model" is commonly attributed to factors such as income equality, a high level of trust, and high willingness to pay tax, which

is tightly coupled to strong social security (health, education), a blend of governmental regulations and capitalism, and cultural homogeneity. These and other factors are important, but we think that viewing them through an evolutionary lens is likely to shed light on *why* they are important. Our hypothesis is that Norway functions well as a nation because it has successfully managed to scale up the social control mechanisms that operate spontaneously in village-sized groups. Income equality, trust, and the other factors attributed to Norway's success emanate from the social control mechanisms.

Our evolutionary lens also sheds light on Norway's behavior as a member of the global village. Not without reason, Norway prides itself as a "nation of goodness." Norwegian foreign policy no doubt plays a positive role in world affairs, also aiming for a "civilized capitalism," and Norway is the country that has pressed the UN to accept guidelines that make not only states, but also multinational companies, liable for violation of human rights. Also, Norway is currently the world's most active advocate of corporate social responsibility on all international arenas. Hence, in this context, Norway has done a great deal to behave as a solid citizen of the global village. On the other hand, for all its success and wisdom, the management of the state pension fund illustrates that even Norway is sometimes guilty of selfishly feathering its own nest at the expense of other nations, the planet, and, therefore, ultimately its own welfare over the long term.

The Norwegian Government Pension Fund Global (The Government Pension Fund) is by far the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, currently exceeding 800 billion USD, and rapidly growing. The fund is owned by the state explicitly on behalf of current and future generations. It is administrated by the Ministry of Finance, which gives guidelines to the investment branch of the Norwegian State Bank (Norwegian Bank Investment Management, NBIM). A separate Council of Ethics (appointed by the government) serves the role of advising the Ministry on which companies to divest from due to serious ethical misconduct.

The fund has two major ethical concerns: It should provide good returns to future generations and it should not contribute to severe unethical acts. The major emphasis has been on the first goal. A core management issue is the rule of maximum spending (*handlingsregelen*), i.e., that no more than 4 percent of the annual income can enter the annual state budget for public spending. This ensures that the fund will be used for the long-term welfare of Norway, not just short-term gains.

This is admirable management of common goods and can serve as an example of how natural resources can be managed for the benefit of an entire nation (Holden 2013). At the opposite extreme, consider Equatorial Guinea, which allocates almost the entire income from its oil to the benefit of a single family (the president and his close relatives). For the rest of the population, the life expectancy is 51 years, and 77 percent have an income of less than 2 US

dollars per day. Most other oil-producing nations direct at least some of their revenues to collective goods, but much of it is diverted to political and corporate elites and/or short-term spending. In this context, the Norwegian Pension Fund is quite unique with its long-term investments.

However, if we go further and ask whether the investments are to the benefit of the long-term welfare of the global village, the answer is very close to a “No.” The main goal of the fund is maximum return, and although Norway has set up to 3 billion NOK aside for preservation of rainforests, it has also (at least up to now) invested heavily in logging companies replacing rainforest with palm oil. There are also heavy investments in mining industries, coal and oil companies, and other activities that do not contribute to a sustainable future. There is no overall “green,” sustainable, or ethical profile for evaluating investments. There is however the Ethical Council that advises the Ministry of Finance, which decides whether or not the bank (NBIM) should divest in certain companies that perform major, unethical practices. Such divestments are made public, so at least they are open to the gaze of Norwegians and the rest of the world—no doubt increasing their impact. The problem is, however, that the investments *per se* are guided almost solely by the principle of maximum returns, not by principles of long term, environmentally and morally sustainable investments that would benefit the global village—as well as Norway. So, if even Norway fails to recognize the long-term benefits of a strategy beyond narrow national self-interest, what kind of mechanisms can be invoked to the benefit of the global village?

## **Organizing the Global Village**

Norway’s double standard at the highest rung of the social ladder is typical of most nations. Around the world, politicians talk unashamedly about pursuing the national interest as if it is their highest moral obligation. Double standards easily trigger a feeling of moral indignation. How could persons or nations be so hypocritical? But wagging fingers at nations is not going to solve the problem. A smarter approach is to understand why moral indignation works at the scale of a village, why it doesn’t work at the scale of the global village, and how it can be made to work with the implementation of the appropriate social controls.

Imagine living in a village and meeting someone who talks unabashedly about her own interests as if no one else matters. As far as she is concerned, the other villagers are merely tools for accomplishing her own ends. How would you react to such a person? Speaking for ourselves, we would be shocked to the point of questioning her sanity. We might entertain similar thoughts, but we wouldn’t be so open about it. Moreover, our selfish impulses are tempered by a genuine concern for others. Empathy, sympathy, solidarity, and love are as much a part of the human repertoire as greed. We would probably

experience the same feeling of moral indignation welling up in us that we feel toward Norway's questionable behavior. Even if we remained dispassionate, we would avoid her, warn others, and feel moved to punish her for her antisocial ways. As would most of the other villagers, so despite her intentions of self-promotion, she would probably not fare very well.

Moral indignation works at the scale of villages because it is backed up by an arsenal of social control mechanisms so spontaneous that we hardly know it is there. The most strongly regulated groups in the world are small groups, thanks to countless generations of genetic and cultural evolution that make us the trusting and cooperative species that we are.

The idea that trust requires social control is paradoxical because social control is not trusting. Nevertheless, social control creates an environment in which trust can flourish. When we know that others cannot harm us, thanks to a strong system of social controls, then we can express our positive emotions and actions toward others to their full extent: helping because we want to, not because we are forced to. When we feel threatened by those around us, due to a lack of social control, we withhold our positive emotions and actions like a snail withdrawing into its shell.

This is why people refrain from unethical acts—to the extent that they do—in village-sized groups and why cooperation is accompanied by positive emotions such as solidarity, empathy, and trust. The reason that nations and other large social entities such as corporations openly engage in unethical acts is because social controls are weaker and are not sufficient to hold the wolves of selfishness at bay. This is why politicians can talk openly about national self-interest as if nothing else matters—even though a villager who talked in a comparable fashion would be regarded as insane.

Understanding the nature of the problem enables us to sympathize with the plight of Norway when it chooses how to invest in the global market. Like a snail, it might want to emerge from its shell and support the most ethical enterprises. But to do so might be too costly in a market environment that rewards naked selfishness. Norway might be required to shrink into its shell and make selfish investments to survive. After all, snails have shells for a reason.

A third option is available to Norway and all other nations, which is to create the same kinds of social controls at a large scale that curtail selfishness in smaller groups. This is also costly, like investing in ethical enterprises that don't yield the highest profits, but it has a more lasting benefit because once a social control infrastructure is in place, it is the ethical enterprises that yield the highest returns. Norway has come a long way to employ this principle in its official foreign policy, but it is clearly lagging behind on the global business scene when it comes to own investments.

There is evidence that village-like social controls are starting to form at larger scales without the help of governments. In the United States, a nonprofit

organization called B-lab (B stands for benefit) provides a certification service for corporations. Those that apply for certification receive a score on the basis of a detailed examination. If the score exceeds a certain value, then the company is permitted to advertise itself as a B-Corporation. Xiujian Chen and Thomas F. Kelly at Binghamton University's School of Management recently analyzed a sample of 130 B-corporations and compared them to a number of matched samples of other corporations. The samples were matched with respect to geographical location, business sector, corporation size, and other variables. In all cases, the B-corporations were either as profitable or more profitable (on average) than the corporations in the matched samples (Chen and Kelly, in press). Engaging in ethical practices did not hurt, and might even have helped, their bottom lines.

More analysis will be required to pinpoint why B-corporations do well by doing good. One possibility is that they have become like villages in their internal organization so there is less selfishness from within. Another possibility, which is not mutually exclusive, is that consumers are increasingly adopting a norm that causes them to prefer to do business with ethical companies and to shun unethical companies, exactly as they would prefer and avoid people in a village setting. Certification as a B-Corporation makes it easier for consumers to evaluate a company's ethical reputation. Knowing someone's reputation comes naturally in a village setting, but work is required to provide the same information at a larger scale. Adherence to other codes performs a similar function, such as the UK Stewardship Code (FRC 2012), the International Corporate Governance Network's Code (ICGN) or the Singapore Code of Corporate Governance Statement on the Role of Shareholders (SCGC) to mention a few.

There are even indications that the corporate world is becoming more village-like without requiring formal certifications. As an example, Apple chief executive Tim Cook was recently criticized by the National Center for Public Policy Research (NCPFR) for failing to maximize profit for its shareholders by investing for the benefit of the climate and the environment. Cook became strikingly upset and advised those with such narrow self-centered goals to sell their stocks. He was behaving precisely as a good villager would behave—and if his reaction became the norm among large corporate entities, the global village would become more like a real village without the need for formal certifications.

It might seem too good to be true that consumers and the corporate world are spontaneously starting to hold the wolves of selfishness at bay by implementing the same kinds of social control that we take for granted at a village scale. If this did come to pass, then Norway would no longer be faced with difficult choices in how to invest its vast wealth in the global market, because the most ethical companies would also be the most profitable. But if

this is happening at all, it is still in its initial stages. At present, it is still the case that some of the most profitable investments are of the cancerous variety.

Therefore, Norway is faced with a difficult moral choice similar to that of most investors. It can remain in its shell and make the most profitable investments to maximize short-term returns for its shareholders (in this case, the Norwegian population) without regard to worldwide ethical concerns, or it can emerge from its shell, live up to its ideal standards in domestic as well as foreign policy, and join with other right-minded individuals, corporations, and nations to help create the social control system that can make ethical practices most profitable. The crucial point is that this is a win-win situation in the long term because, ultimately, we are all in the same boat, and what is good for the world, in a long-term sustainability perspective, will also be good for Norwegians.

## **A New Narrative**

In this essay, we have sketched a surprisingly simple solution to the apparent conflict between self-interest and mutual benefits at all hierarchical levels. We are suggesting that the social dynamics that take place naturally and spontaneously in villages can be scaled up to prevent the ethical transgressions that routinely take place at a large scale. Why is such a simple solution not more widely known and discussed? Although we immediately realize this solution when it comes to cell-organism relationships or individuals within villages, we do not realize that the same principles also hold for companies or nations. One reason is because of an alternative narrative that pretends that the only social responsibility of a company is to maximize its bottom line. Free markets will ensure that society benefits as a result. This narrative makes it seem reasonable to eliminate social controls—precisely the opposite of what needs to be done. Governments have been under the spell of this narrative for nearly 50 years despite a flimsy scientific foundation and ample evidence for its harmful effects. We can break the spell of the old narrative by noting something that will appear utterly obvious in retrospect: The unregulated pursuit of self-interest is cancerous at all scales. To create a global village, we must look to real villages.

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## Commentaries

Nina Witoszek. *The Beauty of “Getting to Norway”*: Comments on David Sloan Wilson and Dag’s Hessen’s essay “Blueprint for the Global Village”

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In the acclaimed study, *The Origins of Political Order* (2011), Francis Fukuyama describes the project of building an exemplary social democracy—with a generous welfare state, individual rights, and the rule of law—in terms of “getting to Denmark” (sensu Prichett and Woodcock). For people living in genocidal or troubled parts of the world, Denmark has become a mythical place symbolizing democracy, peace, and stability. “Everyone would like to figure out how to transform Somalia, Haiti, Nigeria, Iraq, or Afghanistan into ‘Denmark,’” Fukuyama writes—and sets out to answer exactly that very question. He has two conclusions: 1) there is not one route, but many ways of “getting to Denmark,” and 2) studying these routes is a tricky business because it has to include historical accidents and contingent circumstances that cannot be duplicated elsewhere.

The pioneering essay “Blueprint for the Global Village,” written by David Sloan Wilson and Dag Hessen, can be placed within the Fukuyama-esque framework of an inquiry into the mainsprings of peaceful, inclusive, and stable democracies. There are, however, three new components in their proposed anatomy of social wonderlands. The first part is shifting focus (rightly) from Denmark to Norway: today the richest and most egalitarian social democracy on the planet. The other, more substantial novelty is a synergic perspective on the mechanisms of Norway’s success: one which draws on a combination of evolutionary biology and the social sciences. The third innovation lies in posing a radical challenge to the world and to Norway itself: the choice is between growing up and becoming an improved, ecologically enriched model of existence or perish.

Sloan Wilson and Hessen’s piece is less the result of full-fledged research and more an intellectual teaser—an invitation to brainstorm the solutions to the current manifold crises, including climate shift—which are tearing the world apart. It is also an adventurous attempt to propose a synergic, interdisciplinary study of a rich society which has succeeded in creating accountable political institutions, a high level of social justice, and avoided the “Dutch disease” by a relatively equal distribution of wealth among its citizens.

From Fukuyama's socio-political perspective, some of the success of welfare states like Norway or Denmark can be explained by such factors as broad peasant literacy during Reformation, early enfranchisement and social mobilization of peasants and workers, no prolonged civil war, no enclosure movement, no absolutist tyranny—and sheer luck. From Sloan Wilson's evolutionary perspective, Norway can be treated as a template for the global village because it has successfully combated "lower level selfishness" with "higher level welfare." The signature of small village communities has been cooperation and teamwork, which, according to Sloan Wilson, proves to be more advantageous for a community than sheer rivalry. In short, if Norway has become a social-democratic El Dorado, it is because social control mechanisms functioning in a village community have been successfully projected into a "national village." Sloan Wilson and Hessen write: "Today, over half the earth's population resides in cities and the most populous nations teem with billions of people, but groups the size of villages still deserve a special status. They are the social units that we are genetically adapted to live within and they can provide a blueprint for larger social units, including the largest of them all—the global village of nations." Can Norway provide such a blueprint? Not yet, is Wilson and Hessen's conclusion. To do so, petroholio Norway would need to stop protecting its own selfish interest at the expense of the common global future. In short, it would need to dramatically reorient its oil economy towards building a more sustainable future based on renewables, and think of the benefits of its legendary oil fund less in terms of Norwegian future generations and more in terms of contributing to the planetary good.

Is this too difficult an agenda? Wilson and Hessen's propositions are as exciting as they are provocative. The idea of small communities owing a general allegiance to their government—but beyond its effective intrusion—and compelled to rely on their own initiative seems to have worked in many successful countries. Clearly, much can be said for it in accounting for the original social circumstances of American democracy. But although the ideal of self-reliance was gradually married to a fiercely competitive ethos in the US, in Norway, it was enriched by a *dugnad*: a deeply rooted tradition of social cooperation and self-help. Further, it was reinforced by the emergence of a consensual society, in which various political elements among the population accepted systematic methods of compromise in order to avoid majoritarian despotism or a minoritarian plunder. Thirdly, while in the US the state is regarded as a "necessary evil," in Norway, it enjoys a dramatically high level of social trust, even in the aftermath of the dramatic security failures which enabled Anders Behring Breivik to kill 77 people in the terrorist attack on July 22, 2011.

Wilson and Hessen's emphasis on cooperation as one of the conditions of evolutionary success is certainly a compelling aspect of their analytical framework. As Richard Sennett argues in his bestseller *Together* (2012), one of

the problems of globalization is that it has perverted cooperation in the name of solidarity. Solidarity—the Left’s traditional response to the evils of capitalism—is as attractive as it is illusive. Its perverse power lies in the “us-against-them” mentality, which is indeed mobilizing but also exclusive and occasionally even aggressive. By contrast, cooperation is a form of interaction which transcends dichotomies and lives with difference in the name of work for the greater good. In most (neo)liberal democracies, social cooperation has been thwarted by the new forms of capitalism, detached from government control—and from responsibilities to others on the ground—especially during times of economic crisis. Norway has not entirely escaped the ravages of this process. But the idea of cooperation—or *dugnad* thinking—has remained an enduring cultural premise on which much of its political and economic success relies.

For a cultural historian, the begging question in the Wilson-Hessen approach is their implicit idealization—no, not of Norway (here they remain sober)—but of small communities as having an evolutionary advantage over rivalry-driven tribes. Historical experience tells us that small communities are not just about the blessings of *dugnad* and egalitarianism. They are very often marked by gentle authoritarianism: what the Irish writer Brinsley MacNamara called, “the Valley of the Squinting Windows” syndrome. The village is strong both on cooperation and on inquisition: the squinting, judging eyes that stifle your individuality and creativity. The Norwegians have their own name for this repressive process, coined by Norwegian-Danish writer Axel Sandemose. They talk about *Jantelov* (The law of Jante), whose first commandment, “thou shalt not think thou are anybody” (Sandemose, 1933), suppresses innovation and punishes outliers. The result is that the creative “deviants” move to bigger, more metropolitan communities which allow them to compete and become masters in their field. The logic of cultural advancement is not necessarily compatible with that of biological evolution: something that Wilson is aware of, but seems to glide over.

The second interesting question—and one which certainly needs further research—would be to define if, and which, Norwegian structures and social strategies can be projected onto a global village. It does not seem very plausible that extremely poor or chaotic countries could expect to put into place complex institutions in short order, given how long such institutions took to evolve. Moreover, institutions are underpinned by the cultural values of the societies, and it is not clear if Norway’s political order can take root in very different cultural contexts. Another question which haunts in the background is to what extent a society so close to a social ideal can survive in the many crises which lie ahead. The unrest in other parts of the world, coupled with the socio-economic decline in Europe and the challenge of climate shift, make Norway, and indeed the rest of Scandinavia, extremely vulnerable to an “evolutionary disruption.” A sceptic would say that sooner or later millions of refugees will be

knocking on the doors of the rich Nordics. Will the result be a “Fortress Norway,” the opposite of an inclusive and fair society? And will the intrusion of the other tribes shake the Norwegian model to its foundations?

With these qualifications, the type of research that Wilson and Hessen advance is important and appealing at least for two reasons. Firstly, it aims to overcome the “two cultures” apartheid that has bedeviled the natural and the social/humanist sciences since the nineteenth century. Despite the promotion of interdisciplinary studies, academic disciplines continue to live happily in their own ghettos—something which has effectively blocked finding solutions to current crises. Such solutions cannot be just technological fixes; they have to be based on solid anthropological and cultural studies and more effective synergy and dialogue between the sciences. The second benefit of Wilson and Hessen’s “template” vision is that it presents humans as innovative actors rather than social and ecological victims, trapped and helpless amid growing injustice and diminishing resources. It gestures towards the work of the Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom, who studied forests in Nepal, irrigation systems in Spain, and mountain villages in Switzerland and Indonesia to prove that small communities can counteract the tragedy of the commons by drawing up sensible rules for the use and monitoring of common-pool resources. Ostrom, with whom both Wilson and Hessen have collaborated, has argued that the success of such projects depended on neighbors agreeing to set out clear boundaries and cooperate rather than compete for scarce resources. If such reciprocal and mutual schemes have worked for centuries, it is mainly because they were not imposed from above, but instead by a decentralized structure, where people talked face to face and based their actions on trust.

Ostrom remained sober of the applicability of her model. Smaller institutions, she cautioned, might not work in the same way in every case. As she travelled the world, giving out good and sharp advice, she cried: “No panaceas!” (Ostrom et al., 2007). Today’s Norway is an anomaly—rather than a rule—in the world. But is it a panacea? In the past decade, the country has become a fast-changing, increasingly complex society which offers no universal solutions. But it would certainly be fascinating to understand better the manifold—biological, cultural, political and economic—mechanisms which have made it into an example of a “great good place on earth.” The world today does not need any more doomsday stories. It needs inspiration.

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Wilson and Hessen's essay has many true and useful ideas, but the first part of their essay seems to argue against the final part. In the natural world, as they correctly point out at the beginning, selection at lower levels of organization generally wins out over selection at higher levels. Very occasionally, groups evolve mechanisms that suppress competition at lower levels and create new levels of organization. The cases are so rare that John Maynard Smith and Eörs Szathmáry counted them in 1995 as the dozen or so major transitions in evolution.

Near the beginning, they also point out that humans have proven much better at cooperation than most other kinds of organisms. Some of us argue that the reason humans cooperate so well is due to group selection on the cultural variation between groups. Cultures with strong institutions tend to outcompete ones with weaker institutions. The dark side of this process is that culturally different groups often have troubled relationships with one another and cooperation among culturally different people is hard to organize. Humans have proven adept at expanding the scale of their polities to match increases in population density and increases in mobility over the last 11,000 years or so. However, it has been a slow and bitter affair, driven as much by warfare as by gentler mechanisms. For prolonged periods, the most effective military technology has been in the hands of roughneck barbarians, for example Central Asian horse archers or European naval powers, who honed their fighting skills on each other before erupting to cause chaos on the continental and global scale. The industrialized World Wars of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were terrible episodes, and we have improved weapons of mass destruction immensely since then.

Then, at the end of the essay, Wilson and Hessen say that they have sketched a simple solution to scaling up social cooperation from the village to the global scale, using Norway as an example of how to do it. I'm an admirer of the prosperous, effective, egalitarian, and enlightened states the Scandinavians

created in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but I don't think that Norway illustrates a simple solution to creating the global village. After all, Norway has unique features that do not characterize most nations, much less a global village. As Wilson and Hessen note, Norway is a rather small country (about 5 million people). Norway is also a comparatively homogeneous country; 86 percent of the population is of Norwegian descent. Norway's relations with the indigenous Sami minority and with its recent immigrants from such countries as Pakistan have not been without their tensions. It ended its Union with Sweden in 1905. It has stayed aloof from what is perhaps the world's most ambitious attempt to bring the European nation-state under some sort of rational control, the European Union.

The global village would be more than 1,000 times more populous than Norway and perhaps 6,000 times more diverse (using languages as an index of cultural diversity: one strongly dominant language in Norway, about 6,000 in the rest of the world). The trials and tribulations of the EU project illustrate how hard it is to overcome the problems of scale and diversity in building just a sub-continental village. Norway, I'm tempted to say, illustrates how hard it is to make progress toward a global village, not how easy.

Our current policy dilemma is stark. We have a number of global commons issues that require urgent, coordinated global action. Nuclear arms and nuclear proliferation could lead to an unimaginable holocaust, even if only used on a limited scale. Global warming of alarming proportions seems all but inevitable. Impacts of human activities on biodiversity alarm many. Rising inequality might lead to dangerous political developments even in what we generally assume to be stable democracies. Unresolved issues of justice and respect inherited from European colonialism create deep distrust between the West and the Rest. We do not currently have global village institutions or levels of trust anywhere near a level sufficient to deal efficiently with these problems the way Norway can.

Currently, we are acting as if we're going to let natural selection deal with these problems. Of course, we all know, or should know, that letting nature take her course regarding contemporary global commons problems is quite risky. At the individual level, reckless optimism and an inability to learn from mistakes are traits exaggerated in psychopaths. In the modern world, they are common in practices of large organizations like nations. Even if you are skeptical about the most extreme scenarios laid out by people who may or may not be mere alarmists, they should give us pause. The future, as always, is highly uncertain. The IPCC's successive reports on anthropogenic climate change probably represent the best that current science can do in reducing uncertainty about a potentially major global problem. But the IPCC scientists are far from reducing the uncertainty to zero. The climate science community is very worried in part because of the uncertainty. What you can't predict should be at least as scary as what you can. But policy makers have made

essentially no progress. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change has resulted in the IPCC process and annual meetings with global representation, so far with alarmingly modest results in reducing carbon dioxide emissions given the risks that climate change poses. We are behaving collectively as reckless optimists ready to let natural selection decide our case.

We attempt to use science to help make rational collective decisions in order to evade natural selection, to evolve new strategies and policies without suffering the death, destruction, and misery that generally accompanies natural selection. The global village would require something like a Global Village Council to make such decisions. We do have such a council in embryonic form in the United Nations, but it lacks the power and legitimacy to trump the often psychopathic European style nation-state, which remains the dominant type of political actor on the world stage. Still, in the work of the UN on all the major global commons problems, we can see the ghostly outline of how a Global Village Council might operate.

Other kinds of organizations and situations provide models for how a strong global village might be built. Some great cities such as London, New York, Amsterdam, and Los Angeles are fairly large and culturally diverse. Few European style nation-states are pure examples of Wilsonian one people-one polity organizations and some are notably diverse. The Swiss Confederation has four official languages and 26 rather independent Cantons. The Republic of South Africa has 11 official languages. India is the second largest country in the world (1.2 billion people) and its constitution recognizes 21 official languages. It is probably the world's most culturally diverse polity. None of these organizations is perfect, though the four cities and Switzerland approach Nordic levels of competent governance and prosperity. South Africa seemed destined for carnage until Mandela's and de Klerk's peace negotiations resulted in the achievement of a multi-ethnic state by statecraft, not war. India's progress since independence is palpable despite its size, cultural diversity, and the poor initial state of its economy. Other types of large, diverse, yet functional organizations are worth mentioning, such as multi-national businesses, multi-ethnic religions, and international sports competitions. Some successful large-scale integrating institutions have no overarching organization, such as the world's diplomatic corps and the international scientific enterprise.

Four principles seem to underlie the success of such large scale, diverse organizations. The first is status based on achievement. Technical and social competence are sources of status that culturally different people can appreciate even though other sources may dominate their lives. Competence of a high order is also required to operate large scale, diverse institutions and organizations. The leadership of international scientific enterprises is almost entirely based on achieved status (which is not to say that achieved statuses in science are always or entirely acquired by excellence in scientific work).

The second is tolerance. Individuals differ from one another and people from different cultures sometimes differ rather dramatically. People tend to be strongly wedded to their cultural identities, not to mention their personalities. People belonging to dominant cultures are often surprised when others don't want to assimilate to their obviously superior culture. This superiority is generally only obvious to the dominant culture. Recall Gandhi's quip when asked what he thought of Western Civilization: "That would be a good idea!" In a large, diverse organization, you can't afford to find inevitable individual and cultural differences uncomfortable.

The third principle is respect. You have to tolerate scalawags, incompetents, and culturally limited boors because such people are common in every large organization. But the real work is going to be done by people and groups who respect one another. At the level of contending nations and ethnic groups, it is a myth that distinctive cultural groups always hate one another. In the mid-1970s, Marilyn Brewer and Donald Campbell studied ingroup and outgroup attitudes among 30 East African ethnic groups. They found a great deal of variation in both attitudes, including cases where individuals in two groups both had strong average positive ingroup regard but also strong positive evaluations of each other. Journalists, translators, anthropologists, cross-cultural psychologists, ecumenical religious folk, and travelers often get enough insights into other cultures to be able to explain them to us in sympathetic terms. Often, getting to know another group well leads to respect. Most people find it especially hard to respect their enemies. Yet, in the long run, struggles end, and the protagonists must make peace. In the meantime, respecting your enemies is liable to make the real or metaphorical fight less brutal and end sooner. Respecting enemies makes it easier to understand them and thus to avoid some fights and win the ones you can't avoid. The US fought four long, brutal wars after WWII against Communist and Islamicist Third World forces it disrespected. At best, it could only win stalemates in them. Military and political innovations by the insurgents and governments of poor countries in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century allowed them to impose sufficient costs on European powers, even in highly asymmetric contests, to bring the colonial era to an end. The US, the last superpower standing, has been the slowest to learn the lesson.

The fourth is justice. People remember past grievances for generations. In violent conflicts, both sides are often guilty of atrocities. The trials of German and Japanese war criminals after WWII provided a measure of justice to their victims and helped to further the re-integration of these nations into the world community. Efforts in that direction have continued with the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Those guilty of injustice typically build elaborate theories to justify their misbehavior. For example, former US President George Bush famously explained that Al Qaeda attacked the US on 9/11 "because they hate our freedoms." Bin Laden's justification for the attack,

that Middle Easterners widely detested American policy in the region, seems like a more plausible explanation. Extensive polling in the Middle East certainly points to Bin Laden's explanation. In recent decades, Truth and Reconciliation restorative justice projects have been conducted in a number of countries that have experienced bitter internal conflicts. Often, these are in situations where the parties responsible for the worst behavior retain considerable political power. They do provide a forum where apologies can be aired and the false theories used to justify atrocious behavior can be delegitimated.

Thus, I think we know the basic principles we need to build a functional global village. In the century following WWI, many smart, hard-working people have aspired to build it, and their accomplishments are many. It has been hard, slow work and there have been terrible setbacks. Yet by historical standards, their progress is impressive. Our current problem is that new, urgent risks to the collective well-being of the global community emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and older ones still persist. Progress in building global institutions has not kept up with demand. We need to up our game.

Darwin opined in *The Descent of Man* that progress in civilized times depended upon natural selection only in subordinate degree. Trumping natural selection were such things as a good education, the example of the best people, good institutions, and the force of public opinion. Let us hope it proves to be true.

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Lars Trägårdh. *Nordic Magic and the Paradox of Asocial Sociability: Comments on David Sloan Wilson and Dag Hessen's Essay "Blueprint for the Global Village"*

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The Nordic Model was largely declared dead in the water around 1990, when Sweden and the other Nordic countries experienced serious economic crises. Critics, who had long predicted the collapse of the welfare state, celebrated the victory of a more hard-headed capitalism along neo-liberal lines. Today, some 25 years later, the Nordic Model is back with a vengeance, and this time its fans include not only the friends of the Socialist International but also World Economic Forum, Financial Times, and the Economist; the latter published a 14-page special report on "The Next Super-Model: Why the world should look at the Nordic countries."

The very fact that today, the Nordic Model is no longer exclusively the darling of left-liberals should give pause to those who identify, too strongly perhaps, the Nordic Model with cooperation, community and solidarity. In these comments, I will attempt to balance this narrative on the Nordics as especially altruistic by highlighting the other side, namely that the Nordics are not simply masters of solidarity and cooperation but also, as Nina Witoszek notes in her comments on Wilson and Hessen's essay, winners in the global, competitive game of capitalism.

Let me start with a long quote from one of the greatest of our philosophers, Immanuel Kant, as he seeks to grasp the nature of antagonism in human affairs in *Ideas for a universal history with cosmopolitan intent*:

I mean by antagonism the asocial sociability of man, i.e., the propensity of men to enter into a society, which propensity is, however, linked to a constant mutual resistance that threatens to dissolve this society. This propensity apparently is innate in man. Man has an inclination to associate himself, because in such a state he feels himself more like a man capable of developing his natural faculties. Man has also a marked propensity to isolate himself, because he finds in himself the asocial quality to want to arrange everything according to his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance everywhere, just as he knows of himself that he is inclined to resist others. This resistance awakens all the latent forces in man that drive him to overcome his propensity to be lazy, and so, impelled by vainglory, ambition and avarice, he seeks

to achieve a standing among his fellows, whom he does not suffer gladly, but whom he cannot leave. Thus the first steps from barbarism to culture are achieved; for culture actually consists in the social value of man. All man's talents are gradually unfolded, taste is developed. Through continuous enlightenment the basis is laid for a frame of mind that, in the course of time, transforms the raw natural faculty of moral discrimination into definite practical principles. Thus a pathologically enforced coordination of society finally transforms it into a moral whole. Without these essentially unlovely qualities of asociability, from which springs the resistance that everyone must encounter in his egoistic pretensions, all talents would have remained hidden germs. If man lived an Arcadian shepherd's existence of harmony, modesty and mutuality, man, good-natured like the sheep he is herding, would not invest his existence with greater value than that his animals have. Man would not fill the vacuum of creation as regards his end, rational nature. Thanks are due to nature for his quarrelsomeness, his enviously competitive vanity, and for his insatiable desire to possess or to rule, for without them all the excellent natural faculties of mankind would forever remain undeveloped. Man wants concord but nature knows better what is good for his kind; nature wants discord. Man wants to live comfortably and pleurably but nature intends that he should raise himself out of lethargy and inactive contentment into work and trouble and then he should find means of extricating himself adroitly from these latter. The natural impulses, the sources of asociability and continuous resistance from which so many evils spring, but which at the same time drive man to a new exertion of his powers and thus to a development of his natural faculties, suggest the arrangement of a wise creator and not the hand of an evil spirit who might have ruined this excellent enterprise or spoiled it out of envy.

Here, Kant echoes Adam Smith and his observation that the many acts of selfish individuals seeking to maximize their own gain and glory add up, at the aggregate level of society, to enrich the "wealth of the nation." Along these lines and according to a similar logic, we must not, in our admiration for the official, almost propagandistic representation of the Nordic Model, be altogether deluded by the wholesome talk of social democracy, cooperation, and *dugnad*. Instead, we should venture further into if not its "heart of darkness," then at least into a more complex dynamic and logic that far from being antithetical to selfishness and greed stands in a rather harmonic relationship to the principles of (neo)liberalism. In my view, it is necessary to have two balls in the air while

pondering the magic of the Nordic Model: the Nordic social contracts are at the same time projects for individual freedom, autonomy, and sovereignty. All of these projects embrace the individual's desire to "arrange everything according to his own ideas" and are an expression of the other side of the Kantian paradox, namely a particularly successful attempt to take those "first steps from barbarism to culture" and to thus realize the "social value of man." In this perspective, let me make a few observations.

1. Historically, this coincidence of individual freedom and a good society is linked to the singular freedom of the Nordic peasants, who elsewhere were enserfed or otherwise subjected to feudal oppression. In Sweden and Norway in particular, they retained civil rights and property rights. In Sweden, they even retained their political standing as a fourth estate in the parliament alongside the nobility, the clergy, and the priests. By the end of the 17th century, they owned more than half of Swedish real estate. This meant several things. On the one hand, collective and cooperative practices such as *dugnad*, the commons, and *allemansträtten* (every man's right to access to nature, no matter who formally owns it) endured. This is in contrast to the enclosure movements that elsewhere lead to the privatization of commons—and anticipated the neo-liberal cult of exclusive private property and the related abhorrence of the common (the tragedy of the common). But on the other hand, it also left a lasting legacy with regard to the centrality of property rights and land ownership. I have argued that it is this paradoxical co-existence of social values, expressed in high level of social trust and respect for the law and the common institutions, and a legacy of individual freedom linked to the peasants' ability to retain their civil, political and property rights ultimately explains the strange fact that the Nordic countries (Nordic Model/Nordic Culture) score so high when it comes to *both* individualistic and social values. They are socialists who like to own stuff, individualists who see the state as an ally, and egalitarians who value personal freedom and autonomy (Berggren and Trägårdh, 2011).

2. An often-noted threat to social cohesion in the Nordic countries is linked to what some argue is a legacy of cultural, social and religious homogeneity that is currently facing rapidly building pressures in the age of migration and diversity. Can high levels of social trust, social cohesion, a politics of solidarity institutionalized in the welfare state survive as society becomes pluralized and diversified—as well as less equal? One can find empirical evidence that supports both a yes and no answer to this question. On the one hand, Sweden is one of the most "generous" with respect to both refugee and labor immigration. And surveys also show that it is comparatively one of the least xenophobic countries. Other data indicate that Swedes today are more tolerant of diversity and immigration than ever before. Yet at the same time, the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats party is growing. There is a debate in Sweden

about the extent to which a preference of those who are like yourself—in terms on race, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc.—is natural and rooted in our evolution or whether it is “merely” a “socially constructed” phenomenon. Linked to this is the debate on increasing inequality—in the age of Picketty (Trägårdh, 2013).

3. Universalism vs. particularity. Another paradox of the Nordic social contract is that it tends to simultaneously speak in terms of Nordic exceptionalism and in universal terms (values such as equality, freedom, solidarity, autonomy, etc.). Given that one may want to ground a project such as that presented by Wilson and Hessen in universal terms, allowing the Nordic model to be a point of inspiration for others, it becomes crucial to grasp and analyze this tension between claims of particularity, such as the greatness of the Nordic countries, and claims of universality, including the claim that these social contracts are simply particularly successful instantiations of universal dilemmas—not least how of all, how to reconcile the lust for individual freedom and sovereignty with the necessity to live in society. This conflict is human nature as Kant describes it: a fundamental “asocial sociability.” Furthermore, if the aim is to join cultural and evolutionary perspectives on the Nordic Model, this fusing of the universal (evolution) to the particular (culture) again becomes central.

The key here might be that the Nordic societies are characterized by an internalization of social norms and formal laws that support a both a smoothly functioning social order (with low transaction costs linked to high levels of trust) and a great deal of individual autonomy and freedom along with a high degree of social equality.

4. Kant and Hegel; I have already invoked Kant—let me also take note of Hegel. If the Nordic countries can be said to be examples of a productive resolution of the Kantian paradox—that man appears to strive for maximum individual freedom while having to live in society with others—it is also true that they appear to be Hegelian. What I mean here is that the modern expression of the ancient commons, the State, is viewed positively in the Nordic countries to an extent that is unusual in a comparative perspective. We see this paradox clearly if we consider the dynamic that has ruled relations between state and civil society (civil society in Hegel’s terms, i.e., including the market). Hegel viewed civil society as the arena where we strive to satisfy needs and wants, individually and in groups. The market is the modern and most efficient mechanism for this. Hegel, following Smith, saw this as good for creating personal and national wealth. But it remained limited by its restriction to the particular or private interest; it could never solve the problems that a free civil society itself created (inequality, chaos, etc.). A second principle addressed these issues—the universal interest—embodied by the State and its neutral agents. The Nordic political system is built around what we can think of as a

neo-Hegelian principle, embracing a vibrating market and a vocal civil society but balancing this with a State that creates the institutions where particular needs and interests are mediated under the overarching idea of the primacy of the universal or national interest—including ideals such as equality, solidarity and individual autonomy (Trägårdh, 2010).

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Victor W. Hwang. *What’s The Unit of Analysis for Building Villages?*

*T2 Venture Creation*

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Quick, think of a village. What do you see? Each person’s mind creates a distinct picture. Perhaps you imagine storybook timbered houses clustered around a town square? Maybe you recall scenes from your childhood hometown? We each have a personalized notion of the concept of *village*.

But what if our brains are fooling us? What if the village of our minds—a physical place—is not the same as a village in an economic sense? Maybe “economic villages” should not be geographical places, but something else. When thinking of economic villages, I believe it helps to shift our unit of analysis from villages based on *geography* to villages based on *ideas*.

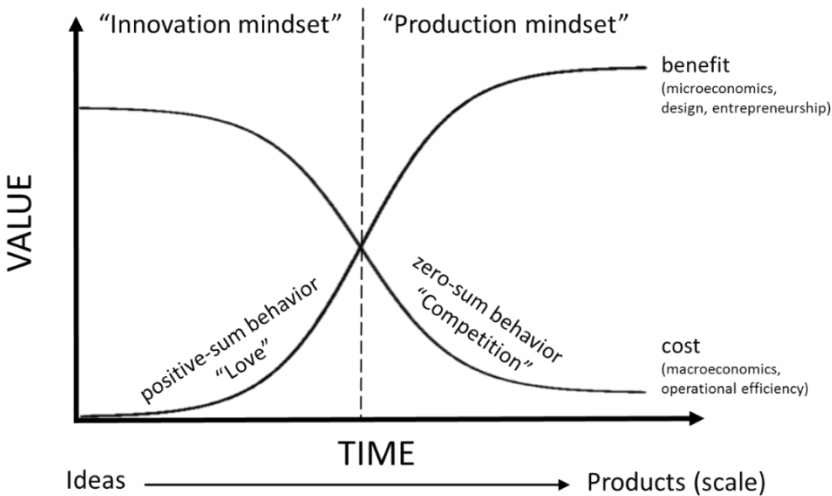
The thoughtful articles in this series from Wilson and Hessen, Witoszek, Richerson, and Trägårdh examine Norway and Denmark—physical places—as models for a global village. I’d like to offer a different perspective. I’m not a scientist like these talented scholars. Instead, I build startup companies

tackling tough challenges, and I help dozens of cities and countries building their own “economic villages.”

What have I learned in my work? Simply this: all new economic value is created by human beings organizing around ideas. Every single product, service, solution, or organization today was originally birthed, shared, and brought to life by people based on a starting notion. That idea turned into a vision which increasing numbers of people rallied around, with their valuable contributions of talent, capital, resources, and complementary ideas. And that vision, through hard persistence and collaborative risk-taking, eventually became something useful and real. Entrepreneurs and innovators are like builders of “flash villages”—custom-built, organizational networks to turn ambitious ideas into useful reality.

Yet the process of turning ideas into villages is hard. Ideas take time to spread. Innovation is a form of socialization. Think of the entrepreneurial process itself, not in the abstract, but in the mundane tedium of day-to-day labor. It’s an entrepreneur pitching the hundredth investor to take a leap of faith. It’s a salesperson trying to persuade the fiftieth customer to take a chance on a new, untested product. It’s a team of engineers trying to invent a product to challenge a large company, but with only a thousandth of the resources. These are typical startup stories. Ask any veteran entrepreneur, and they’ll tell you that a huge amount of time is spent story-telling, pitching, recruiting, rallying, motivating, convincing, selling, encouraging, and arm-twisting others. In short, village-building.

Here’s a visual way to look at this process:



I call this the *Rainforest Curve*—it's my attempt to unify what I've observed in my empirical work in a single diagram. As ideas grow into products, from left to right over time, their beneficial value increases. The process of value creation is driven by positive-sum behaviors, like love, openness, serendipity, play, and diversity. You see this work manifested in real life by entrepreneurs, designers, inventors, artists, and the like. As ideas grow, however, they confront the cost curve, which exerts constraints on the realization of ideas. The cost curve is driven by zero-sum behaviors, like competition, excellence, dependability, precision, and loyalty. The intersection, where the curves meet, is usually a brick wall. The norms are in conflict with one another. The resources are finite. Most new ideas die on the left. Most aging institutions die on the right. The crossover is the hardest part. That is where evolutionary fitness happens.

Entrepreneurs cannot build villages by leapfrogging the process from left to right. One has to go through the journey, heartaches and all. But fortunately, we know today that the process *can* be accelerated. There are more and more proven techniques—such as mentoring, design thinking, role modeling, startup incubation, prototyping methods, measurement tools, online communities, and leadership development—for accelerating the innovation curve.

But doesn't geography matter? What about the Nordics? Yes, geography still matters, but not as an end in itself. Geography matters because physical proximity can breed trust, speed the adoption of norms, and accelerate the flow of resources. To build economic villages, we should focus on building those trust and norms, but not necessarily correlated to geographical units of analysis. Think of an economic network that has strong trust and norms without physical proximity. You already know many. For instance, when you step onto a United Airlines flight in a faraway land, have you actually built face-to-face trust with the hundreds of people to whom you have now entrusted your life? Countless thousands of people are working every day to provide you beneficial things, based on a collective idea of what you need, how to fulfill that need, and how to make the solution tangible and deliverable to you. That sounds like a global village to me. We should make new such villages easier to build.

So what's the big deal with changing our unit of analysis, from geography to ideas? What are the implications?

One, it gives us a better angle of attack for interventions. Changing the culture of communities, cities, and countries is hard. But to start, creating a network of entrepreneurs and innovators with a shared culture and a collective desire to create new organizations to tackle big problems is definitely doable. Those networks can indeed be local, and they can grow quickly. It's often more effective, say, to support entrepreneurs working to expand access to clean drinking water bottom-up than it is to change global water policy top-down.

Two, it provides clarity for understanding. Abstract concepts like *village* or *country* or *company* can get in the way. They are manifestations of human organization, but they are not the true thing that drives the creation of economic value. What really matters are the countless, invisible interactions every day consisting of people chatting, sharing, transacting, and building together that form an economic web across the human race. Entrepreneurs and innovators are the builders of new, valuable strands that strengthen the web.

Three, it tells us what to measure. If we know that economic value is generated at the level of human-to-human interactions, as individuals organize together to form firms that create products and services, then we need to measure those interactions better. The stronger the trust and norms that foster such interactions, the faster the innovation process, the faster the building of villages.

Finally, it changes the way we think of social good. Social good is not something to be imposed from above. Instead, different concepts of the social good can be decentralized, democratic, and allowed to rise up from below. What is definitely *not* socially good is a rigid system that won't evolve to fit a changing world, one that kills good ideas trying to overcome the cost curve. We should strive to even the playing field so that entrepreneurs and innovators—driven by positive-sum norms, passion for solving big problems, and desire for leaving a legacy in the world—are allowed to flourish and turn their budding ideas into vibrant villages.

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Peter Turchin. *Something is 'Off' in the State of Denmark.*

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Wilson and Hessen wrote a very interesting and thought-provoking article. I am substantially in agreement with the conceptual framework, based on cultural multilevel selection theory, which they employ to make sense of the Nordic model, as well as their consideration of how to improve cooperation on the global scale. Although their emphasis is on the latter, "Organizing the Global Village," I'd like to focus on the question of how sustainable the Nordic model itself is in the face of globalization.

I will use the case of Denmark, with which I am most familiar, having recently lived there while visiting at Aarhus University. Judging by both subjective impressions and objective data from cross-national comparisons,

Denmark is a remarkably cooperative society that delivers a very high standard of living to the overwhelming majority of its members. Yet there are worrying signs. One of them is that economic inequality has been increasing in Denmark (Neamtu and Westergaard-Nielsen, 2013).

The difference between the better-off and the worse-off in Denmark is nowhere near the gulf we see in truly unequal societies, such as many Latin American countries, or even the United States. It has been increasing nonetheless. This is important because both theoretical models and empirical studies show that increasing inequality corrodes the ability of human groups and whole societies to cooperate.

Why has inequality been increasing in Denmark? There is no universally accepted answer to this question for any country, but most often, the finger is pointed at “globalization.” Globalization has many different aspects, including immigration flows, movement of jobs to countries with cheaper labor, and movement of companies to countries which constitute tax shelters, such as Luxembourg.

One underappreciated aspect of globalization is the global spread of ideas, or “globalization of ideology.” Although we tend to think of ideas as “good,” current trends in the global ideological landscape have some troubling implications for the Nordic model and its emphasis on equality and cooperation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the adoption of the capitalist model of development in China has seemingly validated the idea that prosperity is best attained by letting free markets rule, while limiting, or even completely eliminating, the role of government in regulating economy. Untrammelled competition is thought to be an unalloyed good. Any increases in inequality resulting from some members of the society failing to benefit from the fruits of economic growth, are treated as an unimportant side-effect. In more extreme versions of this ideology, the rich are deserving of their riches—by virtue, perhaps, of their hard work or great talent (and the poor, by implication, are deserving of being poor).

Historically, ideas about the importance of competition versus cooperation have changed in a cyclical manner. Around 1900, during the heyday of Social Darwinism, economic inequality in the United States (and such European countries as the United Kingdom and France, shown by Thomas Piketty and colleagues) was at a peak. Then, during the middle of the twentieth century, inequality decreased. From the New Deal until the Great Society (the 1930s to 1960s), the United States experienced a remarkable period of social cooperation between the economic elites (corporate managers), workers, and the state. In fact, during this period, the United States closely approached the Nordic model. But during the 1970s, the ideological consensus, on which this cooperative model was based, unraveled. A harsher ideology extolling individualism and competition gained ground. During the last three decades in

the United States, we have seen a simultaneous increase in economic inequality and decrease in social cooperation between employers and employees, between the state and society, and within the political elites.

The trend reversal of the 1970s in the U.S. indicates that we cannot assume that the trend to greater social cooperation, which has characterized the Nordic countries until quite recently, will necessarily be sustained. In fact, there are reasons to believe that ideologies extolling individualism, competition, untrammled free markets, and, conversely, disparaging cooperation and equality, are diffusing from the United States and other Anglo-Saxons countries (remember Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum that "there is no society") to the rest of Europe, including the Nordic countries.

One possible example of such ideological diffusion is the sale of a stake in Dong Energy by the Danish government to the American investment bank Goldman-Sachs last winter (2013–14). There were many troubling aspects of this deal. It was prepared in great secrecy without any public discussion and implemented rapidly. The great majority of the Danish public was against the deal because the Danes would prefer that Dong was owned by Danish investors. In fact, a coalition of Danish pension funds offered to match the price offered by Goldman-Sachs for the shares (Levring and Wienberg, 2014a), but this offer was summarily rejected by the government.

Goldman-Sachs has a rather unsavory reputation. Many have questioned its role in the financial crisis of 2007–8, or its alleged help to the Greek government to massage its financial figures. One particular worry is that the deal will result in a diminution of taxes that Dong pays in Denmark, because Goldman-Sachs is using Luxembourg, Delaware, and Cayman Islands-based tax haven affiliates (Levring and Wienberg, 2014b) to manage its investment in Dong. Nearly a quarter of the coalitional cabinet walked out—all six Socialist People's Party members. Parliament, dominated by the supposedly center-left Social Democrats, nevertheless ignored the public outcry and the loss of a coalition partner, pushing ahead with the deal.

There are many things that seem to be "off" about this deal. Government officials were unable to explain why the sale was needed, apart from platitudes about economic efficiency, cutting costs, and bolstering investments. They rejected the Danish pensions' bid to buy the Goldman-Sachs share. It almost seemed that they wanted to sell to Goldman-Sachs because that's just what a forward-looking government should do. In this, they were behaving much more like center-right parties of other countries.

We don't know whether the Dong incident represents a single happenstance or a new trend, and we don't know why the Danish government was so eager to push the deal through, despite significant reputational losses. But one possible explanation is the one I mentioned above—the diffusion of free-marketeer ideology, which has now made substantial inroads into the Danish political

elites. If this is correct, then the future of the Nordic model in Denmark becomes very uncertain.

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## David Sloan Wilson and Dag O. Hessen. *The Blueprint of Multilevel Selection: Reply to Commentaries on “Blueprint for the Global Village”*

As part of an ongoing study on social cooperation using Norway as a case study on the benefits of “The Nordic Model,” we recently wrote an essay on the potential role of Norway as a “blueprint for the global village.” The point of departure for this essay was the classical paradigm of the balance between self-interest and cooperation (which, of course, still may be motivated by self-interest). At every rung of the ladder—from genes to communities—there is a potential conflict between the interests of the lower-level units and the welfare of the higher-level units. What’s good for me can be bad for my family. What’s good for my family can be bad for my village. This extends all the way up to what’s good for my nation can be bad for the global village. The question is whether the assumed social benefits of the village can operate at the national level and beyond. In our essay, we addressed both the obvious benefits of the social democracy and spirit of *dugnad* as generally perceived in Norway, but also the cases of national selfishness.

Another intention was to provoke a discussion on the topic. We are grateful for the stimulating set of commentaries and we especially value the diversity of the authors that have responded to our essay. Nina Witoszek and Lars Trägårdh are distinguished cultural historians. Peter Richerson and Peter

Turchin are at the forefront of cultural multilevel selection theory. And Victor Hwang is in a class by himself, creatively applying evolutionary concepts to the study of innovation and entrepreneurship.

The commentators praise our thesis in some respects and appear to challenge it in others. We say “appear” because we agree with most of the challenging comments and see them as supplementary rather than contrary to our thesis. At the end of the day, there is still a blueprint for the global village based not on Norway or villages *per se*, but on a theory of multilevel selection that takes both genetic and cultural evolution into account. Being aware that the perfect society is a utopia, the issue is not to search for the non-existent perfect society, but to search for drivers towards better societies—and also to raise awareness of drivers toward worse societies with increased inequality, more individual or small-group selfishness, social injustice and reduced incentives for cooperation and mutualism, which ultimately leads to “tragedies of the commons” in myriad forms. This blueprint offers a better guide to action than social theories uninformed by evolution.

Here, we address some of the most important issues raised by the commentaries:

*On the dangers of idealizing small groups:* Witoszek and Trägårdh stress that village-sized groups have a dark side: the same monitoring that guards against cheating can also stifle creativity. Trägårdh provides a marvelous passage from Kant to delineate the concept of asocial sociability and the virtues of individuality in addition to cooperation. We do not wish to imply otherwise and Trägårdh’s phrase “egalitarians who value personal freedom and autonomy” is a perfect description of hunter-gatherer society, as described in detail by Christopher Boehm (1993, 1999, 2011), Jared Diamond (2013) and others.

Group selection favors any behavior or institution that causes groups to outcompete other groups. This includes, but is not restricted to, overtly cooperative behaviors. Basing status on reputation rather than coercive power channels self-interest to group-beneficial ends (Henrich and Gil-White 2001), as do other ways of aligning self- and group-interests (e.g., swarm intelligence; Rolling 2013). Individual innovation is good for the group insofar as the benefits of the innovation are shared. Many activities are performed best by individuals and working with others only gets in the way. Group decision-making processes often require a phase where individuals explore on their own and a phase where they compare their insights (Wilson 1997). Finally, a healthy dose of self-regard is required to resist unfair demands by other group members, often in the name of the group. For all of these reasons, we think that Kant’s depiction of asocial sociability is perfectly compatible with our multilevel perspective, and hence captures the essence of the inherent and intuitive dilemma we describe initially.

*On conformity and innovation:* Does enforcing cooperation invariably stifle creativity and innovation? Must small-scale society always be the valley of squinting windows? We think not. If creativity and innovation are recognized as valuable commodities, then they can become the norms of the group and stifling creativity becomes an act of cheating. This is not just a conjecture. In his book *The Rainforest*, Victor Hwang describes Silicon Valley and other successful entrepreneurial cultures as like human hunter-gatherer societies whose members are willing to help each other without insisting on narrow reciprocity (see also Adam Grant's book *Give and Take*). People who don't play by the cooperative rules are excluded or otherwise punished. The reason that efforts to create innovation zones often fail is because they fail to provide a freewheeling-yet-protected culture of cooperation.

If some cultures stifle innovation (at any scale) it might be that innovations are not very important in those cultures. There is a difference between being *well-adapted* to a given environment and being *adaptable to environmental change*. The latter requires a history of cultural evolution in highly variable environments. Many cultures evolved in socioecological environments that didn't change much over the course of generations, placing a premium on sticking to the daily round of life. Hwang describes a similar transition in the life cycle of businesses, where an innovation stage is replaced by a production stage that stifles innovation. The bottom line is that if modern times call for cooperative innovative cultures that are well protected against exploitation, such a culture is within the realm of possibility.

*On the challenges of higher-level adaptation:* Peter Richerson is one of the main architects of cultural multilevel selection so it is important to show that his commentary does not challenge the fundamentals of our own account. To begin, group selection is a significant factor in the evolution of many single traits (crudely, whenever the group term of the Price equation is positive; Okasha 2006). Again it is worth stressing that multilevel selection by no means runs counter to self-oriented interests and mixed traits both among individuals within groups and groups *per se*. An outstanding example recently published in the journal *Nature* concerns the mix of aggressive and docile individuals in social spider colonies (Pruitt and Goodnight 2014). A major evolutionary transition involves the suppression of disruptive within-group selection for most traits. The rarity of major evolutionary transitions says little about the role of group selection in the evolution single traits.

Other points stressed by Richerson, building on the early insights of Darwin, are that warfare was an important agent of cultural evolution in the past and that the challenges of creating a globally cooperative society are daunting. We agree but we don't see anything in his commentary that challenges our account of what is needed. One point to make is that direct intergroup conflict is not the only agent of group-level selection, so its importance in the past says little about its necessity in the future. Clearly, we

need to rely on other forms of group selection such as imitating success and the deliberative selection of policies informed by theory and experiment.

*Is the Nordic Model replicable?* All of the commentators stressed that cultures are products of history and what works for one cannot necessarily be transplanted to another. We agree, but still believe that the village model covers some important cultural universals. We also believe that multilevel selection theory is rooted in evolutionary and cultural universals and is thus insightful on this topic, which also bears upon Trägårdh's distinction between the universal and the particular. Still, there are obvious attributes of the Norwegian economy, social organization, and homogeneity that can rarely or never be transmitted beyond the national level, but which nevertheless may serve as guidelines of better societies.

What's universal is the functional design principles required to coordinate appropriate action and to suppress self-serving behaviors within the group. What's particular to Norway is its implementation of those principles at a national scale, due as much to the vagaries of history as to intentional planning. It pays to examine a successful case study in detail to see what might be transferrable, but it also pays to realize that any particular design principle can be implemented in many ways. If the Nordic model doesn't work, some other model or home-grown solution might. For this reason, it is superficial to point to a given feature such as ethnic homogeneity as an essential ingredient, although it is fairly obvious that in the case of poor integration, increased ethnic (or, rather, cultural) heterogeneity could cause a withering of the societal identity and coherence from within. A strong group identity is the functional design principle. Ethnic homogeneity might make this principle relatively easy to achieve, but it isn't required, as cases such as Switzerland and the United States during its more egalitarian periods discussed by Turchin attest.

All of this calls to mind the work of Elinor Ostrom on groups that attempt to manage common-pool resources (Ostrom 1990, 2010; Wilson, Ostrom and Cox 2013), and this is a core issue from our perspective. At first, she tried to correlate specific institutional arrangements of the groups with their ability to manage their resources, with little success. Only when she grouped the arrangements into functional categories (such as "monitoring" and "graduated sanctions") could she make sense of her data. The reason is obvious in retrospect: if there are many ways to monitor (for example), then correlating only one of the ways with group success will yield low correlations. The same distinction between functional design categories and their many possible implementations needs to be made at a national scale. This distinction underscores the major theme of our target article, which is that the principles of multilevel selection apply at all scales. In the end, coping with, or overcoming the tragedy of the commons is not only the ultimate challenge for societies in a cultural context, but also when it comes to environmental issues.

For example, global warming is a tragedy of the commons from the individual up to the group level (nations), the latter best exemplified by the slow progress in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

*What is a group?* Almost 40 years ago, one of us coined the term “trait-group” (Wilson 1975), defined as the set of individuals that influence each other’s fitness with respect to a given trait. The trait-group for a warning call (other individuals within earshot) can be different than the trait-group for resource conservation (other individuals drawing upon the same resource) even within a single species. A trait-group can be physically bounded and visible to the naked eye (such as caterpillars feeding on a leaf) or physically dispersed (such as mobile individuals communicating from a distance). Hwang makes some of the same points for human social interactions and we love his term “flash village” to refer to people who behave like villagers, no matter how dispersed or for what duration. Spatial proximity will probably always be important but electronic communication enables social interactions among physically dispersed individuals and organizations more easily than ever before. As Hwang notes, it is theoretically possible for social control mechanisms to evolve in a bottom up fashion without the involvement of formal institutions such as governments. After all, that is how social control takes place within villages. We speculated along the same lines in our discussion of corporations that must earn their reputations in the same way as individuals in villages, as long as mechanisms that implement the core design principles are in place.

*On cancerous ideologies:* The iron law of multilevel selection is, “adaptation at level X requires a process of selection at that level and tends to be undermined by selection at lower levels.” It follows that in a multi-tier human social hierarchy, “cancers” that benefit lower-level units but undermine higher-level units are an ever-present danger. Even in cases where the higher-level solution is an evolutionary stable strategy (e.g., locally stable), it can still be destabilized by being knocked out of its basin of attraction. We must be vigilant about preventing, detecting, and removing cancers for the body politic no less than our own bodies.

A cancerous ideology can only be identified by its effects on the welfare of the body politic, not by the claims of the ideology. Most ideologies are framed in ways that seem to promote the common good, so that their proponents feel morally justified and even impassioned. Alan Greenspan, who helped to implement free market policies in the US as chair of the Federal Reserve Board, was by all accounts a good person who thought that he was doing the right thing. During the widely reported congressional hearing that followed the 2008 financial crisis, he was genuinely dumbfounded that the policies he helped to implement led to such disastrous results: “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief.”

Turchin worries that neoliberal policies implemented in the US and UK during the Reagan and Thatcher administrations were cancerous in those countries and are now metastasizing throughout the world, threatening to undermine the comparatively well-functioning body politics of the Nordic countries. We also spoke to the same concern at the end of our target article.

What to do? One step is to recognize that “ideologies extolling individualism, competition, untrammelled free markets, and conversely, disparaging cooperation and equality” (as Turchin puts it) have no scientific justification. An unregulated organism is a dead organism, for the body politic no less than our own bodies. It is also true that regulations are like mutations—for every one that is beneficial, there are many that are deleterious. Multilevel selection theory and examples of body politics that work at all scales serve as useful guides. Our challenge is to winnow the regulations that work from the many that don’t work, and to contribute to a discussion on this from novel angles—which hereby is done.

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