Here’s what we have for you this time around: Can you really separate mental health calls from police work? ... Nature is the master of scaling, so why would she choose stability over efficiency? ... And, an introduction to a non-conforming economist with Marxist roots and a conservative vibe.

Defunding the police, what does it mean? Does it mean shifting services that can be done by others, to others – as we might say about medicine, having police officers work at the top of their license? Or does it mean across the board cuts that make no distinction between major crime, like illegal guns and “broken window” minor crimes? While they may be separable in theory, is the same true in practice?

“Thomas Parker was sitting in his police cruiser in a parking lot, sipping an energy drink and trying to wake up one hour into his 6 a.m. Sunday shift when the call came over his radio. “Unknown trouble on Academy Drive,” the dispatcher said.

“Dang it,” Parker said. Unknown trouble typically meant a mental health call, and he’d gotten one every day this week, including one the day before at the same address. The morning shift was supposed to be quiet, but lately it felt like social work duty, cleaning up personal messes instead of doing the job he had signed up for as a patrol officer with the Huntsville Police Department.
His dashboard laptop chimed as the details of the call came in: A woman was ranting and slamming doors at an apartment complex. She was scaring the neighbors. And then the dispatcher was on the radio again, asking if someone with mental health training could head to the scene.”

From the Washington Post, The worst-case scenario [2]

“They built a model to explain why the photosynthetic machinery of plants wastes green light. What they did not expect was that their model would also explain the colors of other photosynthetic forms of life too. Their findings point to an evolutionary principle governing light-harvesting organisms that might apply throughout the universe. They also offer a lesson that — at least sometimes — evolution cares less about making biological systems efficient than about keeping them stable.” [Emphasis added]

In the time of COVID-19, as our society shows fissures of disparity, perhaps we should emulate “nature,” and care more about stability than the efficiencies of scale.

From Quanta, Why Are Plants Green? To Reduce the Noise in Photosynthesis [3]

I’m not sure when I started reading Thomas Sowell, probably in the late ’90s. He was my first real exposure to economic theory as opposed to economic practice. He has so much to offer.

“The more common choice between decision makers pits the government against the market. Yet for Sowell, “the market” is “a misleading figure of speech.” Many “refer to ‘the market’ as if it were an institution parallel with, and alternative to, the government as an institution.” In reality, “the market” is not an institution; it is “nothing more than an option for each individual to choose among existing institutions, or to fashion new arrangements suited to his own situation and taste.” The need for housing, for example, “can be met by ‘the market’ in a thousand different ways chosen by each person—anything from living in a commune to buying a house, renting rooms, moving in with relatives, living in quarters provided by an employer, etc.” Market arrangements may differ, but what unites them—and separates them from government plans—is that those who make decisions experience both their costs and benefits. Their feedback mechanisms are therefore instantaneous.”

I can’t help but feel there is a theme here around the use of masks in these times that goes beyond a singular analysis of politics or ignorance. From City-Journal, a great article on Thomas Sowell, The Nonconformist [4]