

The hands-on anti-crisis guide

Why and how to prepare oneself for crisis?

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Why prepare oneself for crises?

Chaos is a friend of mine.
Bob Dylan

It is important to understand why a crisis or more precisely crises are typical of a chaotic world.

Also, it isn't just about one crisis but many crises we are going to confront in the different sectors (economic, social, climatic, ecological), often simultaneously and in a systemic manner. And so, a crisis in a particular sector triggers and aggravates crises in others.

A slight detour into the theories of chaos will show us why.

Let us take a classic example used in the theories of chaos to understand the evolution of turbulent or chaotic systems: that of running tap water. Do the experiment at home (it is more obvious while doing it with a river but somewhat bothersome to carry out in an apartment!)

If you open a tap very gently, you can get a regular and apparently immobile flow of water. We call this the stationary or linear or also laminar state. If you keep opening the tap very carefully and slowly, you may notice a gentle regular pulsation of the column of water. This state is called "oscillating" or "periodic". If you continue opening the tap the pulsation will become irregular, then on opening even further, the flow becomes totally turbulent. Keep opening and at a certain point, the stream of water will turn into a torrent that is completely chaotic. This is the *turbulent* or *chaotic* state. It is chaos!

But don't stop there! If you go on increasing the release of water, a surprising phenomenon will occur. Whirlpools appear. Order emerging from chaos, order appearing in disorder!



We can illustrate these phenomena in a simplified way with the following diagrams.

A system can be stable, in equilibrium (symbolized here by a straight line): it does not move, it does not change or evolve.



System in equilibrium

Then after a certain time, the system can start oscillating, like the tap water described above or like a swing that has just been pushed. It is represented by a sine curve in the diagrams below. In this part, the system is still under some sort of control. There are effects of “negative feedback”. It is like a thermostat: if the heat goes beyond a certain temperature, the heating gets cut off. In the same way, if the temperature comes down too much, the heating gets reactivated. In the case of the swing, mechanical resistance brings it to equilibrium if we stop pushing it. And it continues to swing as long as we keep pushing it.



Oscillating system

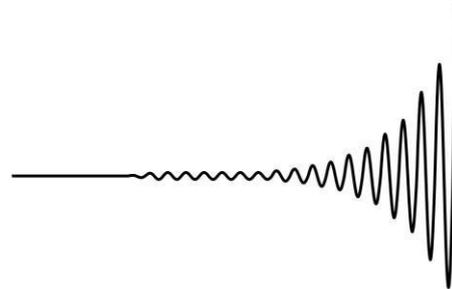
Beyond a certain threshold called the “Tipping Point”, the system can come out of equilibrium. The oscillations go on increasing. The theories of chaos tell us that once this point is crossed, the system will never be able to return to the preceding equilibrium. There is what is called “*positive feedback*”. The phenomena keeps on amplifying by itself.

The higher the temperature, the more heating is applied! There are numerous examples of positive feedback in physical, biological and social systems.

Positive feedback is then at the origin of our birth: the pressure of the baby’s head on the neck of the womb triggers contractions of the uterus. The contractions push the baby’s head further through the neck of the womb which in turn causes more contractions. Positive feedback thus causes the foetus to be pushed out of the uterus.

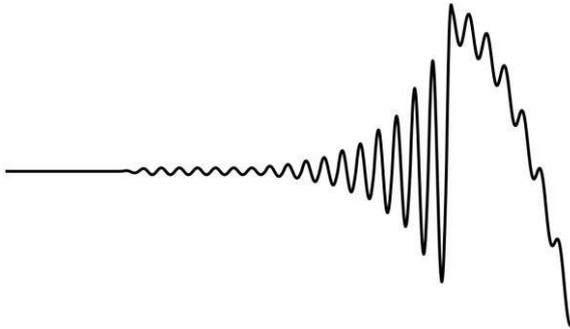
Let us observe also the creation of a social network like Facebook. If few people use it, few people want to be part of it. On the contrary, the more your friends use it, the more you are tempted to join it. The more there are people who use it, the more there are people who want to use it and the more there are people using it... and so on and so forth.

Positive feedback, then, is an amplification, an acceleration of a process by itself and on itself: demographic growth, thermonuclear reaction, capital deposited on compounded interest, economic depression, crowd panic, etc. In current language, we use the term vicious or virtuous circle, depending on whether we like or dislike the acceleration of effects.



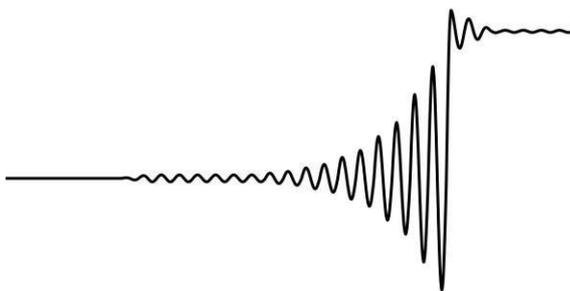
System out of equilibrium after Tipping Point

Even if this is not the primary aim of the present document, let us continue to observe what happens next. After what is called the “decisive point” two possibilities arise: one, the system collapses (which is the second principle of thermodynamics that says “all shall return to dust”)



Collapse of the system

Two, there is a breakthrough or emergence and the system finds a new equilibrium at a higher level of complexity. This is the very principle of the evolution of living organisms and of the universe: from atoms to molecules, from unicellular to multicellular organisms, from the reptilian brain to the brain of mammals and then to the human neocortex, the system integrates what existed before and organizes itself to grow in complexity.



Emergence of a new more complex equilibrium

In several fields, humanity has come out of equilibrium and has entered a turbulent, chaotic phase. Numerous systems (economic, social, climatic, ecological, etc.) have gone beyond the “Tipping Point”.

At first, when a system oscillates while remaining close to equilibrium, we speak of cyclical crises. Disequilibrium is under control and sooner or later there is a return to a form of equilibrium.

But we have seen that after the “Tipping point”, the system comes out of equilibrium. The oscillations increase and every disequilibrium is more serious than the one preceding it. The return to equilibrium is a passing illusion: “all’s fine, American banks are looking up again...”

But we now know that when the “Tipping point” is crossed, the system can no longer return to equilibrium. We have reached the point of no-return. Crises pile up and they are more and more critical. Thus, financial crises lead to economic crises which in turn lead to social crises which once again trigger new economic crises which provoke political crises, etc. So now we can speak of a systemic crisis or a “multi-crisis”

How to prepare oneself for crises?

The theories of chaos show us why we are crossing and will continue to confront serious crises in a number of fields that affect human life. So how does one prepare oneself for these crises, how to confront them and how to emerge from them in a constructive way for oneself, for one's community and for humanity?

It is now well-known that the Chinese ideogram for "crisis" means both danger/risk and chance/opportunity.



How should one act in order to make the best of these economic, social, climatic, ecological crises we are confronting and shall continue to do so in the future?

We need to simultaneously prepare for the risk/danger as well as the opportunity part. A risk needs to be:

- *Measured*: what is its magnitude?
- *Contained* as much as possible
- *Remunerated* or creating opportunities, improvements, progress

And if we say clear-headedly that we are going to cross major crises in the social, ecological, energy, food, health sectors, etc. it is equally important to foresee major social and relational upheavals. Similarly, spiritual questions about meaning and purpose will become more unavoidable than ever before. It is therefore important to measure these risks and to prepare oneself in three domains: material, emotional and spiritual.

It is necessary then to re-assess one's life and to see in which domain we are most vulnerable and then prepare oneself accordingly;

Material level survival: how am I and my dear ones protected and how ready are we to meet the food, ecological, energy and social crises, etc.? How do I ensure my survival, that of my dear ones and of my community?



Survival Kit

It seems important to me that we ask ourselves about our level of autonomy in case of a crisis in a given sector (energy, health, food, etc.) and our capacity of maneuvering (mobility, communication).

The world we live in rests essentially on two pillars: finance (or money) and petrol (or fossil fuels in general). In case of a crisis, these two pillars will be the first to be shaken.

- Money: the smallest bank that totters, even though not known by the public at large, and there is a stampede for the cash points/ATMs! And so no money in them for a few days at least, the time to refill the dispensers again. Now without going as far as stacking one or two million dollars under one's mattress, keeping some reserve of cash at home in order to meet one's daily needs and those of the family is undoubtedly a good idea.
- Petrol: the past has shown it in ample occasions and the oldest among us still remember it: a strike by transporters, one or two refineries somewhere in the world on indefinite shutdown, etc. And here too, there's a stampede at the gas stations. And once again, shortage sets in very fast through a simple mechanical effect. At least until the gas-stations replenish its tanks! And so if one lives out in the countryside, far from everything or that one's work does not allow one to forego the car, stocking at home in complete safety some petrol seems to me a good idea.

Money and petrol apart, habitual rules of prudence are indispensable to meet any emergencies in a time of crisis, be it social (strike by transporters that could prevent food-stores from being stocked up), climatic (which could prevent all movement, even block or damage communication lines), or caused by terrorism, or for technological and health reasons.

Whatever the crisis, it is advisable to have a basic survival kit at home:

- Food for a few days
- Emergency medical kit
- One's usual medicines
- Multi-purpose knife
- Lighter
- Sufficient water for a few days
- An emergency lamp with batteries or rechargeable dynamo
- A radio that runs on batteries or rechargeable dynamo
- Sleeping bags
- And evidently, the entire collection of Harry Potter to keep one's spirits up (or any other book of one's liking)

For further information on the material preparation in the eventuality of a natural, terrorist, technological or health related crisis, a careful study of the site www.ready.gov or www.redcross.org/prepare/ is a must!

In order to take full advantage of the opportunities brought about by crises, one must be able to mobilize at short notice resources to deal with them. This could mean time or money, which means that in periods of crisis, one should have a stock of reserves. Strangely, it is in times of crises that we find ourselves without any reserves. People don't have any longer the time to think, to read, or to observe. They have invested everything in their house, their car, etc. So always keep some time in reserve to be able to seize on opportunities!

Emotional and relational level: which relations do I really wish to preserve? Who are the truly important people for me? Do I give them enough time? Do I have decent civil relations at least with people in my immediate surroundings, my neighbors, my colleagues?

During a stay in New York just after the events of 9/11, I was struck by the 'radical' change of discourse and thinking. It was difficult, nay impossible, for instance, at that time and in that tragically wounded space, to use words that were restrained or introspective. It was indispensable to choose one's camp and to remain faithful to it. Seemingly, while discussing with some friends who had lived through the war in Lebanon, they explained to me how impossible it was to imagine not taking sides, not to be in some camp or another. If one tried to remain restrained or non-partisan between the Christians, Jews and Muslims, one was branded an enemy by all, isolated and deserted by past friends.

In times of crisis, a neighbor's smile can warm up a heart, yours or your neighbor's.

So for preparing oneself for a crisis at an emotional level, one needs to start by asking oneself the following questions:

- Do I know my neighbors?
- Do I have their telephone number? Their email address?
- Have I invited them at least once for dinner?

Besides, crises are also the time when one needs one's close ones the most, one's "true friends". Here too, one must ask oneself before the crisis is upon us:

- Who are the friends I can truly count upon?
- Do I give them enough time and attention?
- Have I told them clearly that they could count on me?

SPIRITUAL LEVEL: what good is it to cross these crises? Why are we here? How can I help the world to evolve? Am I ready to contribute in this cosmic human adventure?

The more mystic among us can see in these crises a gigantic struggle between the forces of good and evil, or between the forces of progress and inertia! Everyone can see in them at least a quest for meaning. So, in order to prepare oneself for these crisis at the level of meaning, entails asking these existential questions before the advent of the crisis, when everything seems fine.

Don't wait for the crisis to start your potential "work on yourself".

The principal grids for decoding that human beings have utilized to understand the world are:

- Religion
- Philosophy
- Science

So in accordance with your interest for each of these grids for decoding, read religious books, read books on the different spiritual paths. Or read books on philosophy or scientific books... but what is fundamental is to read books, any books! Very likely it is the simplest way to prepare oneself for the crises at the level of meaning.

And if you are allergic to books, go on a spiritual retreat, go for long walks all alone through nature... or watch (once more) the film *Matrix* ☺

Conclusion

What does not kill me makes me stronger.
Friedrich Nietzsche

To sum up, if you wish to confront and make the best use of the coming crises, make sure to fill carefully the table below.

Level	Risks	Opportunities
Material & Survival		
Emotional & Relational		
Meaning & Spiritual		

It is essential for you to prepare yourselves. In particular:

- **Keep a stock** of resources, mainly time and money. If you are working too much work less! If you are spending too much, start saving (even a little).
- **Identify the main risks, assess them and contain them.** Prepare yourselves on the material level by following the advice given above and be ready to seize on the opportunities!
- **Know how to keep your eyes open**, cultivate your capacity of wonderment and creativity.

And in conclusion, I would say that in these crises that we are going to confront, the choice that we have is panic, everyone save his skin and each one for himself, or else solidarity, the outstretched hand and the creation of new social organizations, new ways of connecting to ecology and nature, or even to the economy.

As the theories of chaos have shown us, every crisis can be a door to either collapse or an occasion for breakthrough, an emergence of new ways of living, more in harmony with oneself, with others and with the planet.

Be safe! Enjoy life!