

Order and Chaos

Look at any system from a certain angle and it appears to be nothing more than chaos; look at it from another angle and it appears to be order. If we stand back far enough everything appears to be working in unison as if preordained. It doesn't require more than an average amount of intelligence to see that order may devolve into chaos, but can we see chaos evolving into order? Can we look past common sense to see that systems in chaos may order themselves according to laws? Or do we remain stuck working our faulty logic without applying this chaos principle to social systems.

While it does appear to fly in the face of our sense to say societies in chaos may require that instability to eventually reach a higher state or order, or that ordered societies will fall back into chaos if they remain ordered for too long. Examples of these concepts are readily visible and understood by taking a look at our colorful past. But before we do that we should lay down the framework for this chaos principle as it applies to social systems.

First off, applying chaos to an already overly chaotic system is the same as putting more boiling water into a full pot. It does nothing but create an even bigger mess that requires extra work to fix and return to the original level; we can't always know what the tipping point is but every chaos fed system has one and great care should be taken to ensure that we don't go past it or else there is no hope or reaching order. Unfortunately, we lack divine foresight so we do not always know when to stop adding boiling water and simply stand back and let the concoction simmer; we are stuck relying on fate and experience to guide us. Just as enough chaos leads to order, too much chaos leads to an uncontrollable maelstrom which destroys everything caught inside it and ruins any hope for calm.

Secondly, an ordered system must be periodically thrown into chaos or else it will naturally throw itself past the tipping point into madness. This may not make sense at first but it is something that we have seen over and over like a bad rash in our history. Just as no good deed goes unpunished no good society stands upright for an extended amount of time under the weight of its concealed burdens. Not only does an outwardly good society have its hidden weights to worry about but its gradual descent into sloth and moral degradation. Anyone who has had a comfortably boring job can attest to the mind numbing stupor it creates and how it breeds agitation and anger within us the longer we are forced to endure it. Just as it excites in us a kind of rage and depression, such self-indulgence in society leads to self-mutilation, misdirected narcissism, and eventual collapse.

With the groundwork in place lets start off by looking back at examples of how chaotic systems were fed just enough disorder to order themselves but not enough to fall into the chasm of anarchy. Most of us are familiar with the ancient Greek experiment with democracy but we never seem to credit their political ingenuity to their inherent social instability. General resentment towards the Athenian nobility – a coalition of four tribes – and the social turmoil that arose caused the leadership to appoint Solon to create a new constitution in 594 BC. Had there been no chaos, no oppression, no inequality, then none of this may have happened.

Look at it too closely and the Greek system appears to be nothing but utter chaos but pull back far enough and you see what the chaos was achieving. The periodical wars between the myriad cities created and fostered a sense of being and obligation in the citizens – in this case, free males – that was kept from withering by forced personal involvement in the affairs of the state. These wars prompted the forced involvement by the sheer fact that no one will continually put his life on the line for his home and not be given a stake in its future. Livy was not off the mark when he said that “a great

struggle arouses great passions...” The internal chaos that the Greeks enjoyed ultimately manifested itself in both an ordered political system and external stability when the threat of invasion reared its head. Had the Greeks not practiced their chaos and instead lived in harmony with each other then there is reason to assume that they would have fallen apart at the first strike to their foundation. It was precisely because of the social upheavals, the constant warfare, and the chaos in their social democracy that their society was able to evolve into a more ordered and powerful form.

Fast forward to the end of the eighteenth century and we see the same pattern repeat itself in both the independence of the British colonies and the formation of a solid federal government. Consider the chaos of the colonies' fight for independence and what it achieved. Viewed through our standard lens of peace and order we do not see how chaos was the agent of order in these situations but look slightly to the side and we can make out the hazy outline of instability guiding social evolution. The chaos brought forth by the opening shots at Concord and Lexington aided the solidification of nationalism and individual involvement in ways reminiscent of the ancient Greeks.

The social ruckus instigated by the Crown's mistreatment of the Colonials helped to cement the colonies' perception of themselves as a whole against a foreign aggressor. Much like the constant infighting of the Greeks forced them to take a more active role in their government the colonial mindset of “us versus them” forced them to take up arms and cooperate in the face of tyranny. Their cooperation, however, also lead to further chaos when they realized that individual involvement entails major differences of opinion which cannot always be soothed over with words of peace and compromise. This internal chaos supplemented the external chaos by virtue of weeding out the weak, inefficient, and overly self-interested – the desired effect of chaos. It should be no surprise that our greatest leaders, thinkers, and virtues are born during the fires of war and domestic unrest; chaos of any variation is the single greatest tool available that we can use to weed ourselves and separate the refuse from the treasure.

This treasure was also found after the independence of the colonies as they were busying themselves with the creation of a central government. The political chaos that ensued after their momentous victory ushered in a golden opportunity potential order. Not only were the former colonies reveling in their newfound freedom but they were also experiencing the troubles that come with sovereignty and self-governance, troubles that threatened to rip the fragile confederacy asunder. Caught in the tumultuous area between abysmal chaos and liberating order, the states were forced to turn their gaze inwards and mend broken bonds of fraternity and nip the buds of self-aggrandizement; a dangerous balancing act while trying to create a united front against ever hostile foreign powers. Had the states simply separated and followed their own paths then the chaos necessary for order would never have materialized – the alternative would have been war, which would have pushed the situation past its tipping point – and no federal government come into being. The Constitutional Convention would never have been held, The Federalist papers and its opposing papers would not have been published, and no rebellions put have been put down; the lack of events, which would have tested the resolve of the strong, would have given birth to a weak and spineless nation of powerless farmers.

As it happens, however, the political and social turbulence of the creation and strengthening of the Union allowed supremely gifted individuals and mindsets to rise to the top and distance themselves from the common drudgery. Just as in ancient Greece, we see how chaotic events and climates can coalesce into near perfect images of order; we see how the removal of certain events or too much chaos would have produced drastically different systems and quite likely a far more disordered world.

Now let us examine the other pillar of our chaos principle, the need for chaos to be introduced

into order to preserve that order in the long run. Unlike the first pillar, which states that chaos be introduced into an already unstable system and maintained at a certain level, this principles puts forth the idea that chaos must be introduced into an already long running ordered system or else it risks falling into the uncontrollable chaos that the first pillar attempts to avoid.

A particularly depressing example can be seen with the Roman Empire following the Pax Romana at the end of their republican civil wars, a period spanning roughly 200 years(27 BC to 180 AD) encompassing the heyday of the Empire. By nature a war-like people, the Romans went from waging nearly constant war against their neighbors to merely maintaining their empire and minor expansions. So what happens to a people after such a prolonged period of inactivity? Much the same as a plant that stops getting watered, it begins to wither and eventually die.

Content with their perceived supremacy and assured of protection through their once mighty legions, Roman culture began a slow path to social degradation. No longer held together by the threat of outsiders and pacified at home by the Emperors, the once noble inhabitants of Rome began to lose their national and cultural character; they were beginning to lose the fighting spirit and arrogance that characterized what it meant to be Roman. What Numa started by making religion the “opiate of the masses” the Emperors finished by turning roman life into a series of games and meaningless ceremonies. By fostering religious indulgence and perpetuating the idea of peace by ceremoniously closing the Gates of Janus the people were slowly lulled into a state of banality and slavery to extreme order.

This slavery to order does not apply solely to political systems but to legal systems, as well. During the years of the Republic, the people of Rome contrived to create a body of men that would rule over them and be their lawgivers – lawgivers who could not be appealed! And rule over them they did. This Decemviri ruled with such an iron fist and with such authority(order is nothing but authority, no matter how much maligned) that the populace rose up in anger at such a blatant power grab. And what if they hadn't? The Decemviri's excessive use of power was rapidly leading to subjugation of the Republic by both its foreign and domestic enemies. With enemies such as the Sabines and Aequi banging at their gates, and Decemviri such as Appius Claudius tearing through their foundations what choice did the Romans have but to stir a little chaos into the pot in order to preserve themselves. This chaos, of course, being rising up in rebellion against their overlords and finding their true selves in the ashes of the aftermath.

This slavery to order and reversion to weakness also crept into the national psyche during the imperial age, when the Romans had become so pathetically placid that they began to resort to foreign auxiliary forces to do their fighting for them; we begin to see how the second pillar of excessive stability can lead to the moral weakening of a people and their eventual downfall. Add all these factors together: reliance upon extreme forms of order such as religion, long period of relative peace, reliance upon the power of others, non-involvement in state affairs, and the perceived notion of invincibility, and you have a recipe for the blind jump into the abyss of chaos, which is exactly what happened to the Roman Empire.

Extreme order, over-abundant chaos, the two ends that we cannot seem to find a balance between. The chaos principle works both ways and provides examples of what happens when one of its pillars is disregarded littered throughout history. Fate has heralded golden ages when the first pillar is observed such as in ancient Greece, but it has also ushered in dark ages as followed the collapse of the immortal city when the second pillar is ignored.