

Ervin Laszlo's Chaos Point: A Look at Systems Theory and 2012 as Humanity's Crossroads

By Mary Desaulniers -- May 23, 2009

In his book *Chaos Point: The World at the Crossroads* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2006), Ervin Laszlo specifies several discontinuities that are brewing in the current global situation: violent political upheavals in the Middle East; climate change producing geophysical disasters; international terrorism gaining access to nuclear weaponry; pollution getting out of hand, global epidemics.

What can one make of the current crises?

Applying systems theory, in particular chaos theory, to the global situation, Laszlo has produced a comprehensive analysis of the world at chaos point — that window in which minor fluctuations in human action could make the world succumb to destabilizing forces or break through to new stability.

Systems Theory and Chaos Dynamics

Chaos theory is a form of systems theory. Chaos theory examines particular systems that are destabilized in order to locate an underlying order within random fluctuations. Meteorologist Edward Lorenz was the first to discover what is known as the "butterfly effect" - the ability of minuscule changes in the environment to trigger a major effect in living and dynamic systems on the edge of chaos.

Though a popular metaphor, the idea behind the butterfly, however, is valid: the flap of a butterfly wing can be an essential part of the initial formation of a tornado.

The chaos point is reached when a system reaches its limits of stability and becomes unusually responsive to small fluctuations which can flip the system towards devolution and breakdown or evolution and breakthrough.

Chaos Dynamics and 2012

Laszlo identifies four phases in the transformational dynamics of society.

- *The Trigger Phase* is characterized by hard technologies (tools, machines) that foster man's manipulation of nature. According to Laszlo, this phase took place between 1800 and 1960 when the Industrial Revolution of machines and tools made way for innovations in chemical and electrical power.
- *The Accumulation Phase* is the result of the Trigger Phase; as technological innovations change the dynamics between man and nature, the impact of man's resource production and population growth on both social and natural

- environments becomes more controversial. Laszlo specifies that this phase took place from 1960 to 2005.
- *The Decision Window* is characterized by man's questioning and challenging the value of this impact which in turn makes society unstable and vulnerable to fluctuations. Laszlo specifies the window as a seven year period between 2005 and 2012 in which man experiences destabilizing forces in the political, economic, environmental and social arenas.
 - *The Chaos Point* is 2012 when society becomes so critically unstable, it has to flip one way or the other.

Th choice could be devolution in which rigidity and lack of foresight lead to unsustainable stresses and the world degenerates into global anarchy and violence.

Or the choice could be evolution in which the mind-set of a new system evolves in time, shifting the world towards greater adaptability and flexibility. With change comes improved order; the result is that the economic, political and ecological aspects of the system become stabilized in a new mode.

Laszlo identifies 2012 as the world at crossroads, where it can either devolve towards untenable disaster or become the "gateway" to a "new epoch of planetary development" and the birth of a "radically new kind of consciousness." If it is indeed the latter that is borne out, he sees this new world flourishing by 2025.

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