

# To make the best of the decay

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## Abstract

The priorities of national and global risk management are questioned since both politicians and planners mainly focus minor issues. We lack a useful attention to some of the major problems, especially to those coming from combinations of causes. In the meantime the signals indicating a global discordance are not listened to. The world could do better even if in many ways it is too late. I raise the question whether any kind of a fair deal would be possible in this global process of a proceeding decay.

### Key words:

Apocalypse 1, Priorities 2, Timing 3.

## A dilemma

Some major dangers are well known. The TV producer Arte lists and ranks some of them<sup>2</sup>:

1. **Biologisk krigföring.** Inom ramen för vad som kallas biologisk syntes eller biologisk arkitektur skapas och lagras nya mikrober som kan sättas in mot både människor och all annan biologi. Spridningen kan sedan bli ohämmad bortom all kontroll. Som ledande forskare inom området nämndes ryssen Sergej Popov.
2. **Robotique/artificiell intelligens.** Risken är att de numeriska systemen börjar leva sitt eget liv och även ta makten över vår jord. Det är då inte fråga om synliga monster utan om mekanismer, typ virus, som kan vara osynligt integrerade både i samhällens förvaltning och i enskildas vardagsliv. TV-programmet använde uttrycket att mänskligheten inte får en andra chans.
3. **Nya vapen.** En diversifierad vapenindustri kommer fortfarande att ägna sig åt allt grövre kärnvapen och skadan av dessa handlar inte bara om strålning och fysisk förstörelse. För mänskligheten som helhet kan askmoln och annan förstöring av atmosfären vara allvarligare. En radikal nyhet är nanovapen d v s makromolekylära agenter som kan förstöra levande organismer. Huruvida nanotekniken skulle kunna vara en väg in mot artificiellt liv med fortplantning nämndes inte.
4. **Klimatet.** Med utgångspunkt i Shackeltons upptäckter av fossilt trä i Antarktis talade man om möjliga stora klimatförändringar. Ingen överraskning.
5. **Kärnfysiken.** Den ger andra risker än kärnvapnen. Dess experiment skulle kunna förrinta hela jorden genom att skapa ett svart hål som sedan fick uppsluka allt.
6. **Infektioner.** Även utan bioingenjörernas artefakter kan mikroberna slå till med allt tyngre kraft. Ebola och olika influensor är redan aktuella hot. En antibiotikaresistent pest/digerdöd talar också den medicinska vetenskapen om.
7. **En intelligent invasion från yttre rymden.** Först på sjunde plats men dock som en seriös möjlighet nämndes möjligheten av besök/invasion från andra världar. Konsekvenser av

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<sup>2</sup> French télévision Arte 2012 12 21.

sådana är snarast oroande. Sannolikheten för trivsamt och uthålligt intressegemenskap kan inte vara stor. Det är redan trångt på jorden.

8. **Seismiska fenomen.** Med eller utan stimulans från solen kan vi vänta oss både vulkanutbrott och storskaliga skjorbävningar. Det totalt förstörande kan då vara atmosfärens förmörkning just som efter ett kärnvapenkrig.

9. **Kometer.** Att mindre kometer landar är vi vana vid men det kan också bli större kollisioner. Det var så dinosaurierna mötte sitt öde tillsammans med stora delar av det dåvarande ekologiska systemet. Liknande kan hända igen och det arbetas seriöst med förvarning och avvärjande. Kanske kan här kärnvapnen komma till nyttig användning.

En överblick av detta slag är värdefull som underlag för att diskutera åtgärdsprogram. Beroende av vem som för tillfället är uppdragsgivare kan man dock komplettera. Den givna bilden är väldigt naturvetenskaplig. Frågor om moral och kultur, det som Romain Laufer kallar symbolvärlden, får nog då bli ett första tillägg för de flesta sammanhang. Mer konkret kommer man då in på de ekonomiska kriserna, kriminalitet och krigsutbrott.

Den så skissade översikten är som så mycket annat inom risk management Cartesianskt uppdelad i separata fack. Företaget Secana är fortfarande ganska unikt i att studera samspelseffekter och det har skäl att fortsätta på den vägen. Marknaden för seriös behandling av sådana stora risker är ganska ledig.

What should be added are especially some cultural factors and the possibility of combined disasters as well as the dynamic non-linear character of most scenario.

Any serious analysis of such major events leads into disasters which are not only unbearable in themselves but also tough to discuss, touching upon religion and unsolvable ethical dilemmas. The world seems to move in an apocalyptic direction however and decisions are more and more taken in such milieus so it is tempting to speak about remedies and attenuation. Can preparations help or will they only make things worse creating panic and egoism?

Do we have to bother? The end is far away; probably well beyond the life time of anyone now living including our children. I have heard expressions like: *Each generation has got to tackle their own problems*. The existence and the ethics of such views is my present research issue.

### **A view from the natural sciences**

The world is used to catastrophes, by the Bible, by the prediction of the Inkas, by the Havamal of the Vikings and by several others and, on a smaller but more realistic scale, by our daily news reporting. Realities become tougher: The climate has already changed and the ugly sides of international commerce amplify. Our fantastic biosphere with oxygen and life came to being during a period of four billion years. Now we *rush* back in strangely few years, by our pollutions, to where we started. And the thermodynamic law of entropy is still there promising an end in disorder Klemenc, A. (1951). The scientists see this process already and we all can see the same but as a pollution in land, water and air. Social and economic factors accelerate rather than slow down the decay by an impossible attachment to the idea of eternal growth. Organized crime worsens the predicament.

## Actors and action

However, risk management prospers both as an activity and as a profession. There are even laws about it. In Sweden the principle is that risks are to be dealt with by the lowest possible administrative levels. Individuals are to care for themselves in a way that partly violates the myth of Swedish welfare. Enterprises and municipalities have clearly expressed responsibilities. The State and the regions push responsibilities down in the hierarchy. I shall not bother my international audience more with the details of Swedish risk management but it may be of a general interest to note that this decentralization is accompanied by a sectorisation.<sup>3</sup> Risks are treated piecewise in a way that would have completely satisfied Mr René Descartes. This fragmentation is enforced by a logic that for the well-being of society we must be optimists; amend where possible and not bother too much about the rest!

There are exceptions however. The climate sector of the Think Tank Global Utmaning writes about *risk multipliers*, mainly with a reference to Pentagon, meaning that one risk can invite another. The climate change for example provokes heavy migrations and armed conflicts. It also makes the scarcity of energy resources more severe. In films and fiction we see more complete catastrophes than in the real planning efforts. In the real society the severe of the case is hidden by the visible and dominating efforts to improve sector-wisely; so public attention is diverted. The well-known hypocrisy of politics also helps to hide realities.

## Views from management science

Management science is mostly used for smaller organizations not for the total international community, and of course an amplification of scale means changed assumptions. But let us still try to learn and apply to the bigger, more important context. Global governance needs improvement and management science indicates some new ideas about how to run societies of all sizes.

Goddard et al (2002) however quotes the Bruntland report in a chapter devoted to a global apocalyptic reflection: The world should have a sustainable development *which answers to the needs of the present without jeopardizing the possibilities for future generations to cover their needs*. Agreeing on this and having no objections to their approach *precaution proportionnée* I still claim a difference with their view of apocalypses. To me that is not a question of if but of how. Maybe now, ten years later, the year 2012, they are also ready to face possible ends of humanity more frankly.

In the journal, the Projectics, Larrasquet et al (2012) give the very timely advice to reconsider the formats for design and innovation of complex systems. They do not put a limit to the size of organization which could profit from their results so their advice should be valid also for the most complex system of all: our Earth. They use and advice the nice expression of *epistemological tool* for a model to use in an on-going reflection and innovation together with their well-known philosophy of participations and involvement. (Larrasquet 1999). A reference to Morin & le Moigne (1999) specifies the kind of dialogue which should be possible for such deliberations. A very concrete description of possible such dialogues is offered by the Lund University project LUCRAM /FRIVA. They use *scenario* as their main epistemological tool with some efforts to attribute probabilities with those. More interesting are their requirements specifications: *to help cooperation, for transparency both with results and with assumptions*.

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<sup>3</sup> More details from Sweden were given at the Strömstad science Festival 2012-06-14—15. [www.stromstadakademi.se](http://www.stromstadakademi.se).

The theme of dialogues is further developed very conveniently for our actual case of an on-going escalation in the LUCRAM doctoral thesis of Johan Bergström. His cases are from a medical world but he indicates a possible generality for his findings. His first and prime advice for the actors in an escalating course is to understand the reciprocal character of the dialogues with the World. He specifies the nature of this dialogue under the headings of *complex interactions, relations, narrativised identities, goal conflicts* and *local practice*. Suggesting this of course he rejects simpler rationalisms as expressed by concepts of best practice, compliance and workarounds. Referring to Ross Ashby JB also argues for a rich variety of *response repertoires*. *Joint cognitive systems theory* should be applied rather than psychological approaches and blunt compromises.

A third person from Lund University should be mentioned in this context: Per Becker. In good agreement with the others mentioned above he makes a profile by specifying a general framework for analysing risk. He also specifies the conditions of explicitness necessary for cooperation about complex issues. He is specific about temporal scales – a delicate issue for the study of a possibly quite distant apocalypse. He also specifies what should be there in an analysis:

- What is important to protect (for each and every stakeholder),
- Dimensions of time and space,
- Initiating events,
- Consequences and influences,
- The stakeholders,
- A transparency in order to facilitate a mutual comprehension between levels and between sectors in their cooperation about safety and risk.

These references framed and structured my studies of the approaching grand crisis. They led me to draw cognitive maps by available software: Decision Explorer and Prezi which made visible opinions about casual relations between initiators, consequences and more ultimate values. Ad hoc workshops were organized to test the methods and to get some impression of possible scenario. A major difficulty remained however about how to simplify these epistemological tools, so that human brains and human policymaking would be able to digest the information offered. Normally the implementation of the tools mentioned would not cause problems since they make visible a most common kind of casual logic and there are nice ways of transforming the cognitive maps into sensible responsibilities. In this case however the images by time grew both large and chaotic. Supplementary means, for simplification, were called for.

Several ways to the necessary simplification could be employed for the analysis. Ian Mitroff (1993), J-L le Moigne & Edgar Morin (1999) all work very freely with selected and adapted perspectives. You may select subjectively focus and limitations, they say, as far as you know what you do and as long as it serves the strategy of your action. The latter reinvent the expression of *clarté opératoire*. This is an opposite to corruption, I dare say, as far as the political choices are made transparent in a democratic context. One way to control your perspective is to look for what the military call *the center of gravity*, your own as well as that of your opponent. *The key point* says Clausewitz synonymously. This latter one is not necessarily a geographical place. It may as well be a resource or a moral qualification. It would be the point from which you may shake your adversary's equilibrium. From a methods point of view I also want to mention Michael Porter (1990) who reduces a mess of civilian competition between nations to a *diamond* of four determinants not *one*.

Theories about centers of gravity specifically for moral equilibriums are developed by Claude Riveline (2004), who speaks about *myths and rites*, and Romain Laufer (1993) who brought forward a hidden *symbolic world* controlling the action of men and society. When John P. van Gigh (2003) writes that *the metamodeller models the design process* he is in complete agreement, just more abstract and general. He is less extreme than any of the others in his efforts to find the one center of gravity but he does offer simplifications of the initial chaotic causal mappings. The scientists mentioned in this are all epistemologists. And there is no question about it that all levels of society act and interact. Thus, in my own search for controls in a decaying world it may seem natural to look for things like moral centers of gravity without too much slowing down the competing efforts of more immediate and visible improvements already mobilized in society.

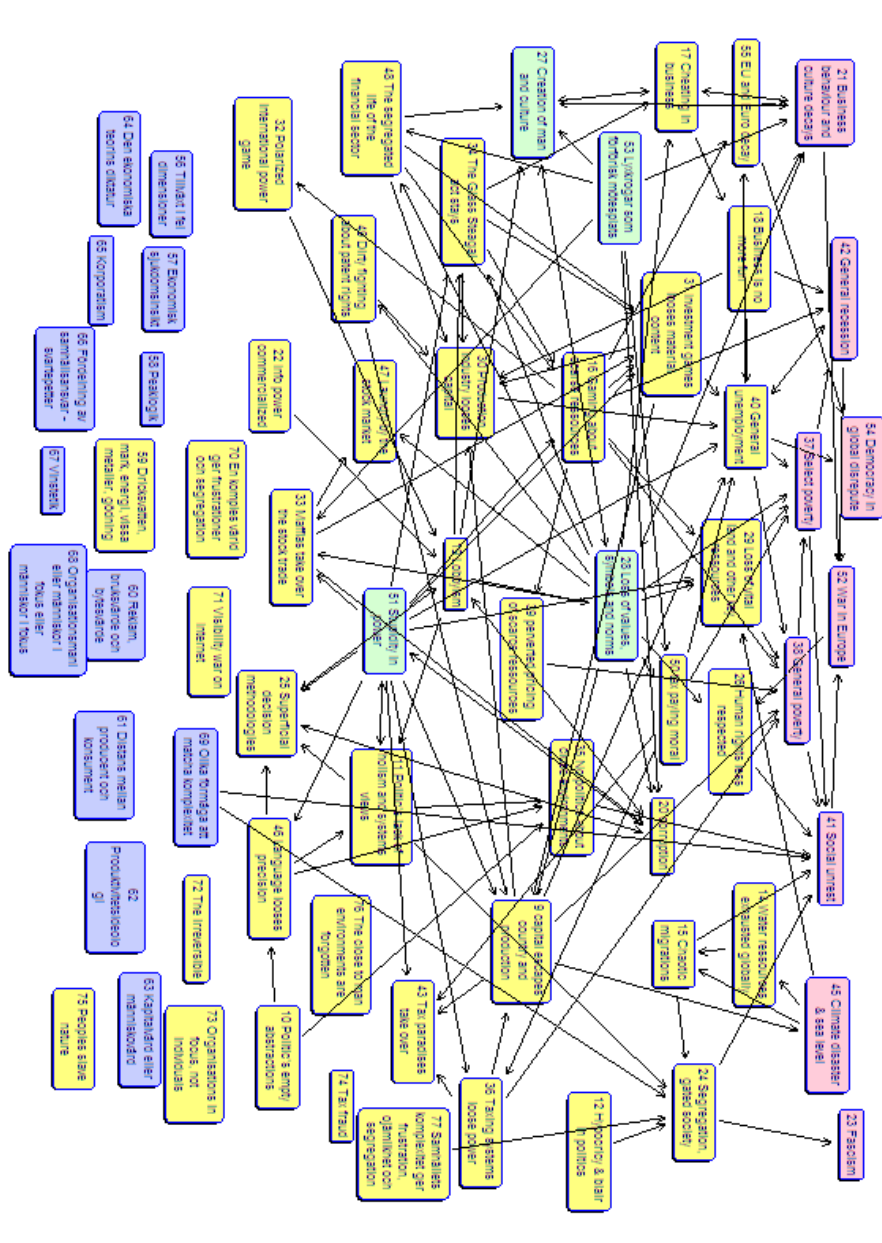
We have also a set of rapporteurs and common sense philosophers who with less of a backing tries to help us approach our Apocalypse. Amusingly, if you wish, we have the Dark Mountain group from Oxford pleading for a happy life while we can. They believe: *in the age of ecoside the last taboo must be broken – and only artists can do it*. Europe today rather denies the coming total apocalypse, with Sweden for example which stays blind by the blair of systematic care for less important accidents and by Greece which has got a more complex problem of governance.

Our casual mapping exercises yielded a never ending series of pictures relating initiating factors to consequences and more ultimate values; the latter concentrated to the top of the picture. We may note the role of the following couples of factor and consider them in the framework of the graphics.

- Criminality and banking,
- Financial baming about key resources,
- When the sacred *financial groth*, sustainable or not, have no more material base,
- Manners and moral in recession business,
- Climate and migration,
- Egalitarian issues in complex societies with drugs,
- War and criminality.

The factors enforce each other and they oppose together what was expressed as a common view of desired global societal values. They are not the only combinations possible to distinguish. Triples of synergetic coincidences appear and we see directly the apocalypse when many enough of the factors mobilize.

## Results



### A more personal view

The picture shows two important characteristics of our risk landscape: The *general complexity* and the central role of the factor “*values, symbols and norms*”. Joining the methodologists mentioned who look

for *centers of gravity* and similar key issues I find that this piece of psychology would be something to discover more thoroughly. And later to influence! We see by the factor *values, symbols and norms* in the diagram a great collection of influences in all directions and we know from other sources about an extreme variety of its expressions in terms of human crisis behavior.

Some questions of time perspective must be taken seriously. What time lags are in play for different combinations of disaster and positive efforts? What trade-offs should be considered so that we do not unnecessarily accelerate the apocalyptic advances. What choices with respect to time and quality of life do we honestly have? Which conflicts of interest are the most important ones to consider? Can the world strike or develop enduring balances in space and time. This is the analytic perspective not always appreciated these days (year 2013).

The modern alternative is the cooperative turn with the risk of superficial views and an exclusion of non present stakeholders. Staffwork can have advanced qualities however. Analysis must not be accompanied by a dictatorial or a fascist political framing. Pieces and collections of analysis may be offered to political bodies who then have the opportunity to make sense of those in agreed political framings. This is the Swedish turn. Would this one be possible on a global scale?

The work for true and relevant such analyses could continue both as participative processes and as conventional scientific endeavors, the latter perhaps to restrict the partial lobbyism but more so to produce some kind of epistemological arbitration. This is a challenge, but the real difficulty would come when we tried to make sense in a real international political context?

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