

Human feelings and the “crisis”

Giancarlo Livraghi – January 2013

People around the world are painfully confused by the disorienting noise about the so-called “economic crisis”. It makes sense to be worried about serious facts, but there is a clumsy lack of understanding what the problems really are and which are the effective ways of getting out of the mess.

For years we have been scared by obstinately repetitive threats and prophecies of disasters that didn’t happen – while very scarce, if any, diagnoses were available of the real diseases that still aren’t being cured. (On the role of prevailing media see “ingormation” <http://gandalf.it/offline/ingormat.pdf>)

In recent months there seem to be symptoms of possible improvements. Vague and timid, but not irrelevant. Unfortunately there is a lack of clarity on if and how they can take shape as a coherent and durable development.

There is also a slight beginning of a perception that the situation, worldwide, is deeply polluted by the awful power of financial gambling. Distressingly late (the disease has existed, and has been getting worse, for thirty years) and still too weak in finding, or even looking for, a clear diagnosis and an effective treatment.

In any case, problems (and potential solutions) are still conceived predominantly as being about money. Ignoring, or underestimating, the crucial importance of social and cultural factors. In one word, humanity.

Of course money is important, especially when it’s lacking. Richness doesn’t automatically provide happiness, but poverty destroys it with brutal violence. There is an urgent and growing need to help people who are unemployed, underpaid or exploited. But this isn’t enough.

In many parts of the world (including some “rich” countries) there are awful situations of oppression and injustice, lack of education, cruel violence and fierce repression. But there is widespread, growing and confused fear, anxiety, anger, apathy, disappointment, also where there is a reasonable level of democracy and freedom.

Sadness, uneasiness, depression, perplexity are creeping everywhere, including places and situations where living conditions aren't desperate. In all environments we can find people, families and communities who are able to smile – and act with admirable courage – even in distressing circumstances. While others are perennially unsatisfied and whining though they don't have any really serious problems.

We learn from history that there have always been unbalances of this sort. But there is, at this time, a peculiar bad mood epidemic. Only partly based on real problems.

The confusion is overwhelming – and dangerous. Dramatically severe facts remain below the perception threshold, while pointless or exaggerated anxiety is inflated by the widespread misinterpretation or manipulation of the so-called “economic crisis”.

I can't avoid summarizing here, as briefly as possible, facts that I have been explaining more extensively in past months and years. Such as the false alarms, while ignoring the real problems and possible solutions, in the exasperating distortion of the “crisis” (especially in Europe and in the USA, while it's obviously a worldwide problem).

To make things worse, it's being exploited. The “very rich” and powerful are becoming more so with financial and political manipulation. Also many, with the false excuse of the “crisis”, are cutting jobs, exploiting, oppressing, abusing, paying less and later. And many more are falling into depression, losing hope, missing opportunities, even though they are not seriously damaged or prevented from being active.

There is a painful loss of willingness to be active, to learn, to improve, to experiment, to search, in the distressing perception that it's useless, because any attempt would be frustrated by the “crisis”.

An equally destructive temptation is to “be angry” without any clear objective, in a generic and confused way, “letting off steam” in pointless protest. Sometimes resulting in maniac violence, but anyhow adding mindlessly to the already widespread anxiety and depression.

The victims of nervous anger are often the people closer to whoever is losing temper. Precisely those who deserve and need the most affection, understanding and mutual support.

It would be stupid, of course, to think that an improvement in mood and behavior may be a magic wand that can miraculously solve all problems. But it's a necessary ingredient to change perspective. To switch from passive resignation to a dynamic desire to get something done.

There may be, perhaps, an excess of optimism in pointing out the (many) things that are actually improving. (See <http://gandalf.it/offline/2012.pdf>). But it's a fact that the phase in which we are living is substantially different from all previous human history.

We now have bigger, and more difficult, problems. But we have also opportunities of development and improvement that in the past would have been unimaginable.

The “crisis” apologists and prophets of doom are promoting heartless selfishness and self-punishing dismay. Whining, inertia, depression and disengagement can only serve to worsen the situation. The outcome of a more active and constructive behavior may be unpredictable. But it certainly makes life less boring and more interesting.

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So far, we have been considering the moods and feelings of mentally healthy people. But the situation is dangerously warped also by psychic diseases. As explained in several things that I have been writing. Starting, years ago with *The stupidity of power*, chapter 10 of *The Power of Stupidity*. (Also online – <http://gandalf.it/stupid/chap10.pdf>). It isn’t only a particularly obnoxious form of stupidity, it can also be considered as a contagious infection.

Considerable damage is caused also by the self-defeating, shortsightedly greedy “Harpagon syndrome”. (See <http://gandalf.it/stupid/harpagon.pdf>).

But painfully worse is the clinically defined and pathologically serious condition affecting the people involved with the financial leverage of the world economy. They are precisely identified as «*corporate psychopaths who have a genetically-inherited biochemical condition that prevents them from feeling normal human empathy*». (Pages 8-9 in <http://gandalf.it/stupid/market.pdf>).

In the murky waters of the “crisis” these inhuman monsters «*rise fast, shark-like, and risk killing the world economy*».

The pollution is deeply rooted, but sanitizing isn’t as difficult as it may seem. The psychopathy afflicting financial players is probably incurable, but we don’t need to try to heal them – or lock them up in strict isolation. It’s enough to simply exclude them completely from the game and so prevent them from doing any more harm.

It would also be useful to explore the tax havens where they are hiding an enormous amount of money – to recover, at least in part, the stolen goods. (On the huge size of “hidden treasures” see <http://gandalf.it/offline/paradise.pdf>).

As I said at the beginning, it’s bewildering that for thirty years all the governments and financial control organizations worldwide ignored this growing pathology. Now there are a few glimpses of perception. But scarce and hesitant attempts to solve the problem.

There is a particular concentration of the egotistic and “incapable of empathy” psychopathy in the perverse oligarchy of financial gamblers. But its alarming presence has been diagnosed also in other centers of power – in politics, corporations, all sorts of private or public organizations.

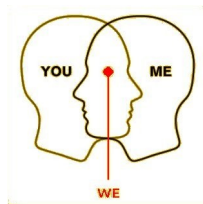
Wherever this disease is in power, it demolishes responsibility, punishes and destroys any spirit of cooperation and all possibilities of motivation. The best human resources are humiliated and sacrificed.

Such mismanaged systems, while they are heading for self destruction, also infect and contaminate the environments with which they have any contact or relationship.

We need to understand that this isn't only a matter of ethics, honesty, fairness, courtesy and civility. Empathy isn't "altruism". It's a necessary and irreplaceable resource for the efficiency and development of every enterprise, organization or human community. It's an abundantly proven fact that it's an intrinsic quality of our species and an indispensable prerequisite for our survival and evolution.

It isn't a naive poetic dream, nor an optimistic delusion, to believe that harmony is at the root of all true progress. It may not be easy to find it and to cultivate it effectively, but it's vitally necessary. Especially in a turbulent and confused phase such as the one in which we are now – exacerbated by an insidious epidemic of depression, disappointment, apathy, dystonia, idiotic hatred and insane conflicts.

These vicious diseases not only worsen the discomfort and suffering, but also make problem solving much more complicated and difficult.



On the importance of empathy see pages 3-5 in <http://gandalf.it/offline/rats.pdf>