

The storm which I call progress

This should be the time to support each other more than ever; this is the time to take a step back and slow down; this is the time to stick together.

Around 400 BC in ancient Greek, it was the father of medicine Hippocrates who taught the people that “wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity.” More so, he declared that “to do nothing is also a good remedy.” A similar point of view appears in Erasmus’ writing (1500): “desperate times calls for desperate measures.” It feels like these sentiments are still perceptible these days. During the past couple of weeks, there has been only one topic that took over all the news reports, the causes of anxiety and social distancing and the discussions over the dinner table. And that is not without any reason. It took the Black Death in the 14th century 200’s years for Europeans to recover to its previous population level. And yet, the Netherlands is slowly getting back to the new ‘normal’, with restaurant and cafés opening on the first of June. Didn’t we recovery too fast? Are we already forgetting the people who we have lost and still are able to lose? The curtain has dropped without the play even ended.

I have been wondering how my own values and mindset are being revalued during this period of time. How a big shift like this might bring and has brought, not only on a global level but also on a personal one. I can only imagine how a difficult period like this can help individuals and nations to grow, to rethink themselves over, forcing to prioritize what is important again. To eventually see, that a storm that is passing by, is helpful to sustain the *voyage*.

It is called a crisis. But the definitions of crisis itself are contradictory: on the one side it is the time of intense difficulty or danger. But on the other side it is the time when a difficult or important decision should and can be made. Which one to choose? Is result making not the consequence of being put into danger? Is there a way to react correctly to a a crisis and how to know when the finish line is near? I question my own decision making at a daily basis, putting it in perspective with the risk I am taking for the people around me. Am I doing the right time, am I keeping myself happy enough, is this how it should be done in quarantine? I am sure that I am not the only one who questions him or herself during this trembling time.

In Greek mythology, Elpis was a young woman, carrying flowers and jar in her hands according to Hesiod’s poems.¹ In contrast with her desperate appearance, she personalised the spirit of hope, and was known to be the extension of suffering. The word ‘hope’ would have been better translated as ‘expectation’ according to Hesiod’s Works and Days.² Hope and suffering, stayed unchangeably in the jar of Pandora, “Thus it is not possible to escape the mind of Zeus.”³ The urge to action during a crisis, stays at the centre of this eternal mythological subject debate, without knowing what to ‘expect’.

Nowadays, the box of Pandora is not only powered by God or Pandora, but by everyone. The actions I take and how I react are the only two matters I have a grip on. Radical transformation and crises have always pushed individuals to take action, to search for safety and stability and which enables growth. The Second World War ended the scourge of mass unemployment in the United States, gave nations as India and Nepal the opportunity to come out of clutches of tyranny and opened the doors to new opportunities. Big global changes, are the consequences of unstable and risky situations and the springboard for further development and growth.

Maybe it is the crisis that has permitted for me for example, to be comfortable to boredom, to acknowledge enforced slowness and to unproductive activities. To create a breathing space and take the opportunity to recharge, disconnected from the outside world. That this is the time to observe that there is nothing left to chase.

But inevitably, this peaceful thinking is not the case for 213 countries, with a 50 percent rise of hospital patients, in an estimated 170,000 hospitals worldwide. I should not forget about the hugh pressure that the virus is putting on the global medical sector.

¹ https://archive.org/stream/importanceofpand00mosc/importanceofpand00mosc_djvu.txt

² <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5290>

³ <http://faculty.fairfield.edu/rosivach/cl115/hes.%20wd%2059-105.htm>

With all of this being said, crisis might as well be composed of two elements, combined together as risky opportunity. An opportunity to cherish new values, to strengthen the relationships close by, to put a stop to what the world can manage. Hippocrates might have been right after all: we must take appropriate steps in order to cure this situation, but sometimes by doing nothing at all on a personal level, and by doing all we can for humankind. By sticking together, more connected than ever while the storm is slowly passing by. The unpredictability of the situation might unveil new opportunity for the future. And that is something what, as refreshing as a crisis is, is only what I will salute for now.