Review of: "State crisis theory: A systematization of institutional, socio-ecological, demographic-structural, world-systems, and revolutions research"

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What is a state crisis? Review of Tilman Hartley's*Queios* article "State crisis theory"

Tilman Hartley's "State crisis theory" draws together five theorizations of state crisis – neo-institutionalism, socio-ecological systems, demographic-structural theories, world-systems approaches, and revolutions research – in an effort to systematize their central hypotheses under conditions of scarcity and sufficiency. The systematization establishes a framework for testing the competing but compatible hypotheses. Each strand of research is analyzed with respect to two broad questions: Why do crises take place? Why do crises have different outcomes? The article contains excellent summary tables of the causes and outcomes of state crises. In particular, Figure 2 on references across theories of state crisis is very useful.

Hartley's effort is commendable, as the world has entered an era of chronic polycrisis. Crises have become chronic, as the long lead times of change in global climate and ecosystems will produce more frequent and intense weather events for decades to come (IPBES 2019; IPCC 2018). Complex interactions between natural and social systems ensure that crises together constitute a polycrisis, in which disparate crises interact in ways that make the whole more overwhelming than the sum of the parts (Tooze 2022; WEF 2023). It behooves us to know more about the causes and effects of crises.

Since Hartley's object of study is state crisis, the text makes no reference to the broad literature on crisis governance and management. That literature, to use Hartley's terminology, focuses on "normal crises" as opposed to "state crises". State institutions are designed to manage normal crises, whereas state crises threaten the very institutions of normal crisis management. On the face of it, the distinction makes sense.

Yet the foreseeable reality of chronic polycrisis opens up perspectives for enriching Hartley's analysis. I present them by starting with the article's object of study, namely, state crisis. When formulated as such, the analytical concern is the stability and existence of a state. This would be fine, as long as crises are temporary events that occasionally disturb the normal state of state affairs. But under conditions of chronic polycrisis, this is not the case. If the stability, legitimacy, reproduction, and effectiveness of the state is undermined by constant polycrisis, then crisis itself is normalized. This is a significant concern for normal crisis management of a state, because both practitioners and researchers of crises know that crisis response and management is progressively more challenging if recovery from the previous crisis is still underway (Roe and Schulman 2008). There are good reasons to better understand chronic polycrisis, because it slowly

erodes the resilience of the state. In analytical terms, understanding what happens to states under chronic polycrisis would demand concepts that explain how emergent polycrisis processes re-constitute the state.

Nicholas Rescher's process philosophy (Rescher 2000) offers helpful tools for differentiating between things versus processes as objects of study. A process is a complex of occurrences with distinct temporal phases and structural patterns. Applying Rescher's concepts to Hartley's analysis, the object of study would no longer be state crisis (a thing) and its causes and outcomes, but rather the evolutionary dynamics (a process) through which states are being re-configured during chronic polycrises.

There are good empirical reasons for considering crises from a process perspective. Largely as a reaction to Jared Diamond's (2005) writing on civilizational collapse, McAnany and Yoffee (2010) edited a critical volume questioning collapse. One of their key messages is that societal collapse seldom occurs. Instead, the "overriding human story is one of survival and regeneration" (McAnany and Yoffee 2010:5). While the era of environmentally induced chronic polycrisis is likely to contain tipping points (Armstrong McKay et al. 2022), its long-term pattern may well be best discerned as a process of survival and regeneration (IPCC 2018).

These points do not question the basic tenets of Hartley's analysis. In fact, the article already contains hints of process thinking, for example in the discussion of cascading feedbacks that increase state crisis (Section *What influences the societal response to scarcity crises*, paragraph 7). Thus, the process philosophical perspective could be included in the present manuscript. Alternatively, it could offer seeds for a sequel to the present article.

Finally, a minor point of confusion. Section *What influences the societal response to scarcity crises*, paragraph 5 contains a nonsensical sentence that needs clarification: "from is thought to take fromform of forced and violent globalization, anti-colonial and counter-hegemonic mobilization, and growing competition and conflict between declining core powers and emerging rivals…."

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