JARED DIAMOND

# UPHEAVAL

## HOW NATIONS COPE WITH CRISIS AND CHANGE

‘Invigorating, bold, wide-ranging and original’

*SUNDAY TELEGRAPH*

PENGUIN BOOKS

# UPHEAVAL

'Jared Diamond is an undisputed global star of comparative history . . . He finds intellectually stimulating and unusual examples that provide much food for thought . . . he's done us a great service' Andrew Marr, *The Times*

'Diamond writes so well, and his frame of reference (across disciplines and languages) is so considerable, that almost everything he describes comes across as fresh . . . having a guide like Diamond is something to be grateful for' *Evening Standard*

'Jared Diamond's *Upheaval* shows how in times of catastrophe nation states – just like individuals – need to rely on their ego-strength to survive . . . vivid, interesting' Anatol Lieven, *Prospect*

'A fascinating globe-hopping study' Tim Stanley, *Daily Telegraph*

'It is hard to imagine that the renowned environmental historian Jared Diamond's new book *Upheaval* could have arrived in the UK at a more timely moment' Anthony Andrew, *Observer*

'It probes large and important questions. Unlike most social scientists, Diamond can write invigorating prose that carries the reader along with its sweep . . . It deserves to be widely read and pondered' Vernon Bogdanor, *Sunday Telegraph*

'As a meditation about a world on edge, it is well worth reading' *The Economist*

'Jared Diamond is one of the deepest thinkers and most authoritative writers of our time – arguably of all time – and *Upheaval* proves his prescience in analysing historical crises within nations at a time when national crises have erupted around the world. No scientist has ever won the Nobel Prize for literature. Jared Diamond should be the first' Michael Shermer, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and author of *Heavens on Earth*

'In *Upheaval*, I find eye-opening lessons about the political and psychological forces that lead to crisis and then resilience, how individuals and nations experience trauma in similar ways, and what that suggests about our future and the world's. Wise and beautiful' Diane Ackerman, author of *The Zookeeper's Wife*

'Persuasive . . . runs refreshingly counter to conventional wisdom' Peter Coy, *Bloomberg*

'*Upheaval* is a brilliant, gripping, personal account of nations in crisis, informed by how people respond to crisis. It's an especially timely read today, when nations are stressed and have much to learn about how to survive big challenges. I urge you to read it' Paul Ehrlich, author of *Jaws: The Story of a Hidden Epidemic*

'Vintage Diamond' Kirkus Reviews

'Captivating . . . Diamond is an endlessly engaging writer, and the experience of reading Upheaval is similar to taking a college course from a professor who's as charming as he is polymathic . . . Anyone with an interest in history, psychology, or the future of the country will find much to admire in Upheaval' *NPR*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jared Diamond is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the seminal million-copy-bestseller *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, which was named one of Time magazine's best non-fiction books of all time, *Collapse*, a No. 1 international bestseller, and *The World Until Yesterda*y, among other books. A professor of geography at UCLA and noted polymath, Diamond's work has been influential in the fields of anthropology, biology, ornithology, ecology and history, among others.

JARED DIAMOND

# Upheaval

## *How Nations Cope with Crisis and Change*

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in the United States of America
by Little, Brown and Company 2019
First published in Great Britain by Allen Lane 2019
Published in Penguin Books 2020
001

Copyright © Jared Diamond, 2019

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–141–97778–2

www.greenpenguin.co.uk

FSC
www.fsc.org
MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C018179

Penguin Random House is committed to a
sustainable future for our business, our readers
and our planet. This book is made from Forest
Stewardship Council® certified paper.

*I dedicate this book*
*to the memory of my parents*
*Louis and Flora Diamond,*
*and*
*to the future*
*of my wife Marie Cohen*
*and of my sons Max and Joshua Diamond*

# Contents

Prologue: Legacies of Cocoanut Grove 3

Two stories — What's a crisis? — Individual and national crises — What this book is and isn't — Plan of the book

## PART 1 | INDIVIDUALS

Chapter 1. Personal Crises 27

A personal crisis — Trajectories — Dealing with crises — Factors related to outcomes — National crises

## PART 2 | NATIONS: CRISES THAT UNFOLDED

Chapter 2. Finland's War with the Soviet Union 57

Visiting Finland — Language — Finland until 1939 — The Winter War — The Winter War's end — The Continuation War — After 1945 — Walking a tightrope — Finlandization — Crisis framework

**Chapter 3. The Origins of Modern Japan** 101

My Japanese connections — Japan before 1853 — Perry — 1853 to 1868 — The Meiji Era — Meiji reforms — "Westernization" — Overseas expansion — Crisis framework — Questions

**Chapter 4. A Chile for All Chileans** 141

Visiting Chile — Chile until 1970 — Allende — The coup and Pinochet — Economics until "No!" — After Pinochet — Pinochet's shadow — Crisis framework — Returning to Chile

**Chapter 5. Indonesia, the Rise of a New Country** 179

In a hotel — Indonesia's background — The colonial era — Independence — Sukarno — Coup — Mass murder — Suharto — Suharto's legacies — Crisis framework — Returning to Indonesia

**Chapter 6. Rebuilding Germany** 217

Germany in 1945 — 1945 to 1961 — Germans holding judgment — 1968 — 1968's aftermath — Brandt and re-unification — Geographic constraints — Self-pity? — Leaders and realism — Crisis framework

**Chapter 7. Australia: Who Are We?** 255

Visiting Australia — First Fleet and Aborigines — Early immigrants — Towards self-government — Federation — Keeping them out — World War One — World War Two — Loosening the ties — The end of White Australia — Crisis framework

## PART 3 | NATIONS AND THE WORLD: CRISES UNDERWAY

Chapter 8. What Lies Ahead for Japan? 293
Japan today — Economy — Advantages — Government debt — Women — Babies — Old and declining — Immigration — China and Korea — Natural resource management — Crisis framework

Chapter 9. What Lies Ahead for the United States? Strengths, and the Biggest Problem 325
The U.S. today — Wealth — Geography — Advantages of democracy — Other advantages — Political polarization — Why? — Other polarization

Chapter 10. What Lies Ahead for the United States? Three "Other" Problems 357
Other problems — Elections — Inequality and immobility — So what? — Investing in the future — Crisis framework

Chapter 11. What Lies Ahead for the World? 383
The world today — Nuclear weapons — Climate change — Fossil fuels — Alternative energy sources — Other natural resources — Inequality — Crisis framework

Epilogue: Lessons, Questions, and Outlook 423
Predictive factors — Are crises necessary? — Roles of leaders in history — Roles of specific leaders — What next? — Lessons for the future

Acknowledgments 464
Illustration Credits 466
Further Readings 470
Index 485

# UPHEAVAL

## PROLOGUE

# LEGACIES OF COCOANUT GROVE

### Two stories — What's a crisis? — Individual and national crises — What this book is and isn't — Plan of the book

At one or more times during our lives, most of us undergo a personal upheaval or crisis, which may or may not get resolved successfully through our making personal changes. Similarly, nations undergo national crises, which also may or may not get resolved successfully through national changes. There is a large body of research and anecdotal information, built up by therapists, about the resolution of personal crises. Could the resulting conclusions help us understand the resolution of national crises?

To illustrate personal and national crises, I'll begin this book with two stories from my own life. It's said that a child's earliest datable firm memories are laid down from around the age of four years, although children also retain indistinct memories of earlier events. That generalization does apply to me, because the earliest memory that I can date is of Boston's Cocoanut Grove fire, which happened just after my fifth birthday. Although (fortunately) I was not at the fire myself, I experienced it second-hand through the frightening accounts of my physician father.

On November 28, 1942, a fire broke out and spread rapidly through an overcrowded Boston nightclub called Cocoanut Grove (the owner's spelling), whose sole exit became blocked. A total of 492 people died, and hundreds of others were injured, by suffocation, smoke inhalation, or being trampled or burned (Plate 0.1). Boston physicians and hospitals were overwhelmed — not just by the wounded and dying victims of the fire itself, but also by the fire's psychological victims: relatives, distraught that their husbands or wives or children or siblings had died in a horrible way; and the fire's survivors, traumatized by guilt, because they had survived while hundreds of other guests had died. Until 10:15 P.M., their lives had been normal, and focused on celebrating the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, a football game, and wartime leaves of soldiers. By 11:00 P.M., most of the victims were already dead, and the lives of their relatives and of the survivors were in crisis. Their expected life trajectories had been derailed. They felt ashamed that they were alive while a dear one was dead. The relatives had lost someone central to their identity. Not only for the fire's survivors but also for Bostonians remote from the fire (including me as a five-year-old), the fire shook our faith in a world of justice. Those punished weren't naughty boys and evil people: they were ordinary people, killed through no fault of their own.

Some of those survivors and relatives remained traumatized for the rest of their lives. A few committed suicide. But most of them, after an intensely painful several weeks during which they could not accept their loss, began a slow process of grieving, reappraising their values, rebuilding their lives, and discovering that not everything in their world was ruined. Many who had lost spouses went on to remarry. Even in the best cases, though, decades later they remained mosaics of their new identities formed after the Cocoanut Grove fire, and of their old identities established before the fire. We shall have frequent opportunity throughout this book to apply that metaphor of "mosaic" to individuals and nations in whom or in which disparate elements coexist uneasily.

Cocoanut Grove provides an extreme example of a personal crisis. But it was extreme only in that bad things befell a large number of victims simultaneously — in fact, so many victims that the fire also provoked a crisis demanding new solutions in the field of psychotherapy itself, as we'll see in Chapter 1. Many of us experience individual tragedy first-hand in our own lives, or second-hand through the experiences of a relative or a friend. Yet such tragedies that strike only one victim are as painful to that victim, and to his or her circle of friends, as Cocoanut Grove was to the circles of its 492 victims.

Now, for comparison, here is an example of a national crisis. I lived in Britain in the late 1950's and early 1960's, at a time when it was undergoing a slow national crisis, although neither my British friends nor I fully appreciated it then. Britain was world-leading in science, blessed with a rich cultural history, proudly and uniquely British, and still basking in memories of having had the world's largest fleet, the greatest wealth, and the most far-flung empire in history. Unfortunately, by the 1950's Britain was bleeding economically, losing its empire and its power, conflicted about its role in Europe, and struggling with long-standing class differences and recent waves of immigrants. Things came to a head between 1956 and 1961, when Britain scrapped all of its remaining battleships, experienced its first race riots, had to begin granting independence to its African colonies, and saw the Suez Crisis expose the humiliating loss of its ability to act independently as a world power. My British friends struggled to make sense of those events, and to explain them to me as an American visitor. Those blows intensified discussions, among the British people and British politicians, about Britain's identity and role.

Today, 60 years later, Britain is a mosaic of its new self and its old self. Britain has shed its empire, become a multi-ethnic society, and adopted a welfare state and high-quality government-run schools to reduce class differences. Britain never regained its naval and economic dominance over the world, and it remains notoriously conflicted ("Brexit") about its role in Europe. But Britain is still among the world's six richest nations, is still a parliamentary democracy under a figurehead monarch, is still a world leader in science and technology, and still maintains as its currency the pound sterling rather than the euro.

Those two stories illustrate this book's theme. Crises, and pressures for change, confront individuals and their groups at all levels, ranging from single people, to teams, to businesses, to nations, to the whole world. Crises may arise from external pressures, such as a person being deserted or widowed by his or her spouse, or a nation being threatened or attacked by another nation. Alternatively, crises may arise from internal pressures, such as a person becoming sick, or a nation enduring civil strife. Successful coping with either external or internal pressures requires *selective* change. That's as true of nations as of individuals.

The key word here is "selective." It's neither possible nor desirable for individuals or nations to change completely, and to discard everything of their former identities. The challenge, for nations as for individuals in crisis, is to figure out which parts of their identities are already functioning well and don't need changing, and which parts are no longer working and do need changing. Individuals or nations under pressure must take honest stock of their abilities and values. They must decide what of themselves still works, remains appropriate even under the new changed circumstances, and thus can be retained. Conversely, they need the courage to recognize what must be changed in order to deal with the new situation. That requires the individuals or nations to find new solutions compatible with their abilities and with the rest of their being. At the same time, they have to draw a line and stress the elements so fundamental to their identities that they refuse to change them.

Those are among the parallels between individuals and nations with respect to crises. But there are also glaring differences that we shall acknowledge.

* * *

How do we define a "crisis"? A convenient starting point is the derivation of the English word "crisis" from the Greek noun "krisis" and verb "krino," which have several related meanings: "to separate," "to decide," "to draw a distinction," and "turning point." Hence one can think of a crisis as a moment of truth: a turning point, when conditions before and after that "moment" are "much more" different from one another than before and after "most" other moments. I put the words "moment," "much more," and "most" in quotes, because it's a practical problem to decide how brief should be the moment, how different should be the changed conditions, and how much rarer than most other moments should a turning point be for us to label it as a "crisis," rather than just as another small event blip or a gradual natural evolution of changes.

The turning point represents a challenge. It creates pressure to devise new coping methods, when former coping methods have proved inadequate to resolve the challenge. If an individual or nation does devise new and better coping methods, then we say that the crisis has been resolved successfully. But we'll see in Chapter 1 that the difference between success and failure in resolving a crisis is often not sharp — that success may just be partial, may not last forever, and the same problem may return. (Think of the United

Kingdom “resolving” its world role by entering the European Economic Community (precursor of the European Union) in 1973, and then voting in 2016–17 to leave the European Union.)

Let’s now illustrate that practical problem: how brief, how major, and how infrequent must a turning point be, to warrant applying the term “crisis”? How often in an individual’s lifetime, or in a millennium of regional history, is it useful to label what happens as a “crisis”? Those questions have alternative answers; different answers prove useful for different purposes.

One extreme answer restricts the term “crisis” to long intervals and rare, dramatic upheavals: e.g., just a few times in a lifetime for an individual, and just every few centuries for a nation. As one example, a historian of ancient Rome might apply the word “crisis” to only three events after the foundation of the Roman Republic around 509 BC: the first two wars against Carthage (264–241 and 218–201 BC), the replacement of republican government by the empire (around 23 BC), and the barbarian invasions leading to the Western Roman Empire’s fall (around AD 476). Of course, such a Roman historian doesn’t consider everything else in Roman history between 509 BC and AD 476 as trivial; he just reserves the term “crisis” for those three exceptional events.

At the opposite extreme, my UCLA colleague David Rigby and his associates Pierre-Alexandre Balland and Ron Boschma published a fine study of “technological crises” in American cities, which they defined operationally as periods of sustained downturn in patent applications, with the word “sustained” defined mathematically. According to those definitions, they found that an American city undergoes a technological crisis on average about every 12 years, that the average such crisis lasts for four years, and that an average American city finds itself in a state of technological crisis for about three years in every decade. They found that definition to be fruitful for understanding a question of much practical interest:

what enables some but not other American cities to avoid technological crises defined in that way? But a Roman historian would dismiss the events studied by David and his colleagues as ephemeral bagatelles, while David and his colleagues would counter that the Roman historian is neglecting everything that happened in 985 years of Roman history except for three events.

My point is that one can define "crisis" in different ways, according to different frequencies, different durations, and different scales of impact. One can usefully study either rare big crises or frequent small crises. In this book the time scale that I adopt ranges from a few decades to a century. All of the countries that I discuss have experienced what I consider as a "major crisis" during my lifetime. That isn't to deny that all of them also experienced more frequent smaller turning points.

Both for individual crises and for national crises, we often focus on a single moment of truth: for instance, the day when a wife tells her husband that she is filing for divorce; or (for Chilean history) the date September 11, 1973, when the Chilean military overthrew Chile's democratic government, whose president committed suicide. A few crises do indeed arrive out of the blue with no antecedents, such as the December 26, 2004 Sumatra tsunami that suddenly killed over 200,000 people, or my cousin's death in the prime of his life when his car was crushed by a train at a railroad crossing, leaving his wife widowed and his four children orphaned. But most individual as well as national crises are the culmination of evolutionary changes extending over many years: for example, the divorcing couple's prolonged marital difficulties, or Chile's political and economic difficulties. The "crisis" is a sudden realization of, or a sudden acting on, pressures that have been building up for a long time. This truth was acknowledged explicitly by Australia's Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, who (as we'll see in Chapter 7) launched a whirlwind program of apparently major changes in 19 days of

December 1972, but who downplayed his own reforms as a “recognition of what has already happened.”

* * *

Nations aren’t individuals writ large: they differ from individuals in many obvious ways. Why is it nevertheless illuminating to view national crises through the lens of individual crises? What are the advantages of this approach?

One advantage, which I often encounter in discussing national crises with friends and students, is that individual crises are more familiar and understandable to non-historians. Hence the perspective of individual crises makes it easier for lay readers to “relate to” national crises, and to make sense of their complexities.

Another advantage is that study of individual crises has yielded a road-map of a dozen factors that help us to understand the varying outcomes. Those factors provide a useful starting point for devising a corresponding map of factors to understand the varying outcomes of national crises. We shall see that some factors translate straightforwardly from individual crises to national crises. For instance, individuals in crisis often receive help from friends, just as nations in crisis may recruit help from allied nations. Individuals in crisis may model their solutions on ways in which they see other individuals addressing similar crises; nations in crisis may borrow and adapt solutions already devised by other nations facing similar problems. Individuals in crisis may derive self-confidence from having survived previous crises; so do nations.

Those are among the straightforward parallels. But we’ll also see that some factors illuminating outcomes of individual crises, while not straightforwardly transferable to national crises, still serve as useful metaphors suggesting factors relevant to national crises. For instance, therapists have found it helpful to define a quality of individuals termed “ego strength.” While nations don’t have psychological ego strength, that concept suggests a related concept important for nations, namely, "national identity." Similarly, individuals often find their freedom of choice in resolving a crisis limited by practical constraints, such as child-care responsibilities and job demands. Of course nations aren't limited by child-care responsibilities and job demands. But we'll see that nations do experience limitations on their freedom of choice for other reasons, such as geopolitical constraints and national wealth.

Comparison with individual crises also brings into sharper relief those features of national crises lacking analogues for individual crises. Among those distinctive features, nations have leaders but individuals don't, so questions about the role of leadership arise regularly for national crises but not for personal crises. Among historians, there has been a long and still on-going debate about whether unusual leaders really changed the course of history (often termed the "Great-Man" view of history), or whether history's outcome would have been similar under any other likely leader. (For instance, would World War Two have broken out if a car accident that came close to killing Hitler in 1930 actually had killed him?) Nations have their own political and economic institutions; individuals don't. Resolution of national crises always involves group interactions and decision-making within the nation; but individuals can often make decisions by themselves. National crises may be resolved either by violent revolution (e.g., Chile in 1973) or by peaceful evolution (e.g., Australia after World War Two); but lone individuals don't commit violent revolutions.

Those similarities, metaphors, and differences are why I have found comparisons of national crises and individual crises useful in helping my UCLA students to understand national crises.

* * *

Readers and reviewers of a book often gradually discover, as they read, that the book's coverage and approach aren't what they

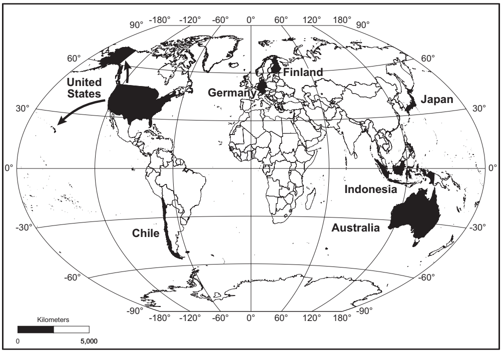

FIG. 1 *Map of the World*

expected or wanted. What are this book's coverage and approach, and which coverages and approaches do I not include?

This book is: a comparative, narrative, exploratory study of crisis and selective change operating over many decades in seven modern nations, of all of which I have much personal experience, and viewed from the perspective of selective change in personal crises. Those nations are Finland, Japan, Chile, Indonesia, Germany, Australia, and the United States.

Let's consider, one by one, each of these words and phrases.

This is a *comparative* book. It doesn't devote its pages to discussing just one nation. Instead, it divides those pages among seven nations, so that those nations can be compared. Non-fiction authors have to choose between presenting single case studies and comparing multiple cases. Each approach has different advantages and different limitations. In a given length of text, single case studies can of course provide far more detail about that single case, but comparative studies can offer perspectives and detect issues that wouldn't emerge from studying just a single case.

Historical comparisons force one to ask questions that are unlikely to emerge from a case study: why did a certain type of event produce result $R_1$ in one country, when it produced a very different result $R_2$ in another country? For example, one-volume histories of the American Civil War, which I love reading, can devote six pages to the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg, but can't explore why the American Civil War, unlike the Spanish and Finnish Civil Wars, ended with the victors sparing the lives of the defeated. Authors of single case studies often decry comparative studies as oversimplified and superficial, while authors of comparative studies equally often decry single case studies as unable to address broad questions. The latter view is expressed in the quip "Those who study just one country end up understanding no country." This book is a comparative study, with its resulting advantages and limitations.

Because this book divides its pages among seven nations, I'm painfully aware that my account of each nation has to be concise. As I sit at my desk and turn my head, I see behind me, on my study's floor, a dozen piles of books and papers, each up to five feet high, one pile for the material of each chapter. It was agonizing for me to contemplate condensing five vertical feet of material on post-war Germany into one chapter of 11,000 words. So much had to be omitted! But conciseness has its compensations: it helps readers to compare major issues between post-war Germany and other nations, without becoming distracted and overwhelmed by fascinating details, exceptions, if's, and but's. For readers who want to go on to learn more fascinating details, the concluding bibliography of this book lists books and articles devoted to single case studies.

This book's style of presentation is *narrative:* that is, the traditional style of historians, going all the way back to the foundation of history as a discipline developed by the Greek authors Herodotus and Thucydides over 2,400 years ago. "Narrative style" means that arguments are developed by prose reasoning, without equations, tables of numbers, graphs, or statistical tests of significance, and with only a small number of cases studied. That style may be contrasted with a powerful new quantitative approach in modern social science research, making heavy use of equations, explicit testable hypotheses, tables of data, graphs, and large sample sizes (i.e., many cases studied) that permit statistical tests of significance.

I've learned to appreciate the power of modern quantitative methods. I used them in a statistical study of deforestation on 73 Polynesian islands,[1] in order to reach conclusions that could never have been extracted convincingly from a narrative account of deforestation on a few islands. I also co-edited a book[2] in which some of my co-authors ingeniously used quantitative methods to resolve questions previously debated endlessly and without resolution by narrative historians: for example, whether Napoleon's military conquests and political upheavals were good or bad for the subsequent economic development of Europe.

I had initially hoped to incorporate modern quantitative methods into this book. I devoted months to that effort, only to reach the conclusion that it would have to remain a task for a separate future project. That's because this book instead had to accomplish the task of identifying, by a narrative study, hypotheses and variables for a subsequent quantitative study to test. My sample of just seven nations is too small for extracting statistically significant conclusions. It will take much further work to "operationalize" my narrative qualitative concepts such as "successful crisis resolution" and "honest self-appraisal": i.e., to translate those verbal concepts into things that can be measured as numbers. Therefore, this book is a narrative *exploration*, which I hope will stimulate quantitative testing.

---

[1] Barry Rolett and Jared Diamond. Environmental predictors of pre-European deforestation on Pacific islands. *Nature* 431: 443–446 (2004).

[2] Jared Diamond and James Robinson, eds. *Natural Experiments of History.* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2010).

Among the world's more than 210 nations, this book discusses only *seven* familiar to me. I've made repeated visits to all seven. I've lived for extended periods, beginning as long as 60 years ago, in six of them. I speak or formerly spoke the languages of those six. I like and admire all of those nations, happily revisit all of them, have visited all within the last two years, and seriously considered moving permanently to two of them. As a result, I can write sympathetically and knowledgeably about them, on the basis of my own first-hand experiences and those of my long-term friends living there. My and my friends' experiences encompass a sufficiently long period of time for us to have witnessed major changes. Among my seven nations, Japan is the one of which my first-hand experience is more limited, because I don't speak the language and have made only briefer visits extending back in time for only 21 years. In compensation, though, for Japan I have been able to draw on the lifelong experiences of my Japanese relatives by marriage, and of my Japanese friends and students.

Of course, the seven nations that I selected on the basis of those personal experiences aren't a random sample of the world's nations. Five are rich industrialized nations, one is modestly affluent, and only one is a poor developing nation. None is African; two are European, two are Asian, and one each is North American, South American, or Australian. It remains for other authors to test to what extent my conclusions derived from this non-random sample of nations apply to other nations. I accepted that limitation and chose those seven because of what seemed to me the overwhelming advantage of only discussing nations that I understand on the basis of long and intense personal experience, friendships, and (in six cases) familiarity with the language.

This book is almost entirely about *modern* national crises that occurred within my lifetime, permitting me to write from the perspective of my own contemporary experience. The outlier, for which I discuss changes before my lifetime, again involves Japan, to which I devote two chapters. One of those chapters discusses Japan today, but the other discusses Japan of the Meiji Era (1868–1912). I included that chapter on Meiji Japan because it constitutes such a striking example of conscious selective change, because it is still in the recent past, and because the memories and issues of Meiji Japan remain prominent in modern Japan.

Of course, national crises and changes have also occurred in the past, and posed similar questions. Though I can't address questions of the past from personal experience, such past crises have been the subject of a large literature. Well-known examples include the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian Era; the rise and fall of southern Africa's Zulu empire in the 19th century; the 1789 French Revolution and subsequent reorganization of France; and Prussia's catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Jena in 1806, its conquest by Napoleon, and its subsequent social, administrative, and military reforms. Several years after I began to write this book, I discovered that a book whose title refers to similar themes (*Crisis, Choice, and Change*) had already been published by my own American publisher (Little, Brown) in 1973![3] That book differs from mine in including several case studies from the past, as well as in other basic respects. (It was a multi-authored edited volume using a framework called "system functionalism.")

Research by professional historians emphasizes *archival studies*, i.e., the analysis of preserved written primary documents. Each new history book justifies itself by exploiting previously unutilized or underutilized archival sources, or by reinterpreting archival sources already utilized by other historians. Unlike most of the numerous books cited in my bibliography, my book is not based on archival studies. Instead, its contribution depends on a new framework derived from personal crises, an explicitly comparative approach, and a perspective drawn from my own life experiences and those of my friends.

---

[3] Gabriel Almond, Scott Flanagan, and Robert Mundt, eds. *Crisis, Choice, and Change: Historical Studies of Political Development.* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1973).

—

This is not a magazine article about current affairs, intended to be read for a few weeks after its publication, and then to fall out-of-date. Instead, this is a book expected to remain in print for many decades. I state that obvious fact just to explain why you might otherwise be astonished to find nothing whatsoever in this book about the specific policies of the current Trump administration in the U.S., nor about President Trump's leadership, nor about the current Brexit negotiations in Britain. Anything that I could write today about those fast-moving issues would become embarrassingly superseded by the time that this book is published, and would be useless a few decades from now. Readers interested in President Trump, his policies, and Brexit will find abundant published discussions elsewhere. But my Chapters 9 and 10 do have a lot to say about major U.S. issues that have been operating for the past two decades, that are now claiming even more attention under the current administration, and that are likely to continue to operate for at least the next decade.

—

Now, here is a road-map to my book itself. In my first chapter I shall discuss personal crises, before devoting the rest of this book to national crises. We've all seen, by living through our own crises and witnessing the crises of our relatives and friends, that there is much variation among crisis outcomes. In the best cases, people succeed in figuring out new and better coping methods, and they emerge stronger. In the saddest cases, they become overwhelmed and revert to their old ways, or else they adopt new but worse coping methods. Some people in crisis even commit suicide. Therapists have identified many factors, of which I'll discuss a dozen in Chapter 1, influencing the likelihood that a personal crisis will be successfully resolved. Those are the factors for which I'll explore parallel factors influencing the outcomes of national crises.

To anyone who groans in dismay, "A dozen factors are a lot to remember, why don't you reduce them to just a few?" — I reply: it would be absurd to think that the outcomes of people's lives, or of nations' histories, could be usefully reduced to just a few catchwords. If you should have the misfortune to pick up a book claiming to achieve that, throw it away without reading any further. Conversely, if you have the misfortune to pick up a book proposing to discuss all 76 factors influencing crisis resolution, throw that book away also: it's the job of a book's author, not of a book's readers, to digest and prioritize life's infinite complexity into a useful framework. I found that using a dozen factors offers an acceptable compromise between those two extremes: detailed enough to explain much of reality, without being so detailed as to constitute a laundry list useful for tracking laundry but not for understanding the world.

That introductory chapter is followed by three pairs of chapters, each pair on a different kind of national crisis. The first pair concerns crises in two countries (Finland and Japan) that exploded in a sudden upheaval, provoked by shocks from another country. The second pair is also about crises that exploded suddenly, but due to internal explosions (in Chile and Indonesia). The last pair describes crises that did not explode with a bang, but that instead unfolded gradually (in Germany and Australia), especially due to stresses unleashed by World War Two.

Finland's crisis (Chapter 2) exploded with the Soviet Union's massive attack upon Finland on November 30, 1939. In the resulting Winter War, Finland was virtually abandoned by all of its potential allies and sustained heavy losses, but nevertheless succeeded in preserving its independence against the Soviet Union, whose population outnumbered Finland's by over 40 to 1. I spent a summer in Finland 20 years later, hosted by veterans and widows and orphans of the Winter War. The war's legacy was conspicuous selective change that made Finland an unprecedented mosaic, a mixture of contrasting elements: an affluent small liberal democracy, pursuing a foreign policy of doing everything possible to earn the trust of the impoverished giant reactionary Soviet dictatorship. That policy was considered shameful and denounced as "Finlandization" by many non-Finns who failed to understand the historical reasons for its adoption. One of the most intense moments of my summer in Finland unfolded when I ignorantly expressed similar views to a Winter War veteran, who replied by politely explaining to me the bitter lessons that Finns had learned from being denied help by other nations.

The other of the two crises provoked by an external shock involved Japan, whose long-held policy of isolation from the outside world was ended on July 8, 1853, when a fleet of American warships sailed into Tokyo Bay's entrance, demanding a treaty and rights for U.S. ships and sailors (Chapter 3). The eventual result was the overthrow of Japan's previous system of government, a consciously adopted program of drastic wide-ranging change, and an equally conscious program of retention of many traditional features that leave Japan today as the world's most distinctive rich industrialized nation. Japan's transformation during the decades following the U.S. fleet's arrival, the so-called Meiji Era, strikingly illustrates at the national level many of the factors influencing personal crises. The decision-making processes and resulting military successes of

Meiji Japan help us by contrast to understand why Japan made different decisions in the 1930's, leading to its crushing military defeat in World War Two.

Chapter 4 concerns Chile, the first of the pair of countries whose crises were internal explosions resulting from a breakdown of political compromise among their citizens. On September 11, 1973, after years of political stalemate, Chile's democratically elected government under President Allende was overturned by a military coup whose leader, General Pinochet, remained in power for almost 17 years. Neither the coup itself, nor the world records for sadistic tortures smashed by Pinochet's government, had been foreseen by my Chilean friends while I was living in Chile several years before the coup. In fact, they had proudly explained to me Chile's long democratic traditions, so unlike those of other South American countries. Today, Chile is once again a democratic outlier in South America, but selectively changed, incorporating parts of Allende's and parts of Pinochet's models. To U.S. friends who commented on my book manuscript, this Chilean chapter was the most frightening chapter of my book, because of the speed and completeness with which a democracy turned into a sadistic dictatorship.

Paired with that chapter on Chile is Chapter 5 on Indonesia, whose breakdown of political compromise among its citizens also resulted in the internal explosion of a coup attempt, in this case on October 1, 1965. The coup's outcome was opposite to that of Chile's coup: a counter-coup led to genocidal elimination of the faction presumed to have supported the coup attempt. Indonesia stands in further contrast to all of the other nations discussed in this book: it is the poorest, least industrialized, and least Westernized of my seven nations; and it has the youngest national identity, cemented only during the 40 years that I have been working there.

The next two chapters (Chapters 6 and 7) discuss German and Australian national crises that seemingly unfolded gradually instead of exploding with a bang. Some readers may hesitate to apply the term “crisis” or “upheaval” to such gradual developments. But even if one prefers to apply a different term to them, I have still found it useful to view them within the same framework that I use to discuss more abrupt transitions, because they pose the same questions of selective change and illustrate the same factors influencing outcomes. In addition, the difference between “explosive crises” and “gradual change” is arbitrary rather than sharp: they grade into each other. Even in the cases of apparently abrupt transitions, such as Chile’s coup, decades of gradually growing tension led to the coup, and decades of gradual changes followed it. I describe the crises of Chapters 6 and 7 as only “seemingly” unfolding gradually, because in fact post-war Germany’s crisis began with the most traumatic devastation experienced by any of the countries discussed in this book: Germany’s ruined condition as of the date of its surrender in World War Two on May 8, 1945. Similarly, while post-war Australia’s crisis unfolded gradually, it began with three shocking military defeats within the space of less than three months.

The first of my two nations illustrating non-explosive crises is post–World War Two Germany (Chapter 6), which was simultaneously confronted with the issues of its Nazi-era legacies, of disagreements about its society’s hierarchal organization, and of the trauma of political division between West and East Germany. Within my comparative framework, distinctive features of crisis resolution in post-war Germany include exceptionally violent clashes between generations, strong geopolitical constraints, and the process of reconciliation with nations that had been victims of German wartime atrocities.

My other example of non-explosive crises is Australia (Chapter 7), which has remodeled its national identity during the 55 years that I have been visiting it. When I first arrived in 1964, Australia seemed like a remote British outpost in the Pacific Ocean, still looking to Britain for its identity, and still practicing a White Australia policy that limited or excluded non-European immigrants. But Australia was facing an identity crisis, because that white and British identity conflicted increasingly with Australia's geographic location, foreign policy needs, defense strategy, economy, and population make-up. Today, Australia's trade and politics are oriented towards Asia, Australian city streets and university campuses are crowded with Asians, and Australian voters only narrowly defeated a referendum to remove the Queen of England as Australia's head of state. However, as in Meiji Japan and Finland, those changes have been selective: Australia is still a parliamentary democracy, its national language is still English, and a large majority of Australians are still British by ancestry.

All of these national crises discussed so far are well recognized, and have been resolved (or at least resolutions are already long underway), with the result that we can evaluate their outcomes. The last four chapters describe present and future crises, whose outcomes are still unknown. I begin this section with Japan (Chapter 8), already the subject of Chapter 3. Japan today faces numerous fundamental problems, some of which are widely recognized and acknowledged by the Japanese people and government, while others are not recognized or even are widely denied by the Japanese. At present, these problems are not clearly moving towards solution; Japan's future is truly up for grabs, in the hands of its own people. Will the memories of how Meiji Japan courageously and successfully overcame its crisis help modern Japan to succeed?

The next two chapters (Chapters 9 and 10) concern my own country, the United States. I identify four growing crises that hold the potential to undermine American democracy and American strength within the next decade, as already happened in Chile. Of course, these are not discoveries of mine: there is open discussion of all four among many Americans, and a sense of crisis is widespread in the U.S. today. It appears to me that all four problems are not currently moving towards solution, but are instead getting worse. Yet the U.S., like Meiji Japan, has its own memories of overcoming crises, notably our long and lacerating Civil War, and our suddenly being dragged out of political isolation into World War Two. Will those memories now help my country to succeed?

Finally comes the whole world (Chapter 11). While one could assemble an infinite list of problems facing the world, I focus on four for which it seems to me that trends already underway will, if they continue, undermine living standards worldwide within the next several decades. Unlike Japan and the U.S., both of which have long histories of national identity, self-government, and memories of successful collective action, the whole world lacks such a history. Without such memories to inspire us, will the world succeed, now that for the first time in history we are confronted with problems that are potentially fatal worldwide?

This book concludes with an epilogue that examines our studies of seven nations and of the world, in the light of our dozen factors. I ask whether nations require crises to galvanize them into undertaking big changes. It required the shock of the Cocoanut Grove fire to transform short-term psychotherapy: can nations decide to transform themselves without the shock of a Cocoanut Grove? I consider whether leaders have decisive effects on history; I propose directions for future studies; and I suggest types of lessons that might realistically be gained from examining history. If people, or even just their leaders, choose to reflect on past crises, then understanding of the past might help us to resolve our present and future crises.

## PART 1

# INDIVIDUALS

## CHAPTER 1

# PERSONAL CRISES

**A personal crisis — Trajectories — Dealing with crises — Factors related to outcomes — National crises**

At the age of 21, I experienced the most severe crisis of my professional life. I had grown up in Boston as the oldest child of educated parents, my father a Harvard professor and my mother a linguist and pianist and teacher, who encouraged my love of learning. I attended a great secondary school (Roxbury Latin School), then a great college (Harvard College). I thrived in school, did well in all of my courses, completed and published two laboratory research projects while still in college, and graduated at the top of my class. Influenced by the example of my physician father, and by my happy and successful experiences of undergraduate research, I decided to pursue a PhD in the laboratory science of physiology. For graduate study I moved in September 1958 to the University of Cambridge in England, at that time a world leader in physiology. Additional attractions of my moving to Cambridge included my first opportunities to live far from home, to travel in Europe, and to speak foreign languages, of which by then I had already learned six from books.

Graduate study in England soon proved far more difficult for me than had been my Roxbury Latin and Harvard courses, or even than my undergraduate research experience. My PhD mentor at Cambridge, whose laboratory and office I shared, was a great physiologist about to study electricity generation in electric eels. He wanted me to measure movements of charged particles (sodium and potassium ions) across the eels' electricity-generating membranes. That required me to design the necessary equipment. But I had never been good with my hands. I hadn't even been able to complete unassisted a high school assignment of building a simple radio. I certainly had no idea how to design a chamber to study eel membranes, no less to do anything remotely complicated involving electricity.

I had come to Cambridge highly recommended by my Harvard University research advisor. But it was now as obvious to me as it was to my Cambridge advisor that I was a disappointment to him. I was useless to him as a research collaborator. He transferred me to a separate lab of my own, where I could figure out a research project for myself.

In an effort to find a project better suited to my technological ineptitude, I latched onto the idea of studying sodium and water transport by the gallbladder, a simple sac-like organ. The required technology was elementary: just suspend a fluid-filled fish gallbladder every 10 minutes from an accurate scale, and weigh the water contained in the gallbladder. Even I could do that! The gallbladder itself isn't so important, but it belongs to a class of tissues called epithelia that include much more important organs, such as the kidneys and intestines. At that time in 1959, all known epithelial tissues that transported ions and water, as did the gallbladder, developed voltages associated with their transport of the charged ions. But whenever I tried to measure a voltage across the gallbladder, I recorded zero. In those days that was considered strong evidence either that I hadn't mastered even the simple technology that would have sufficed to detect a voltage across the gallbladder if there had been any, or that I had somehow killed the tissue and it wasn't functioning. In either case, I was chalking up another failure as a laboratory physiologist.

My demoralization increased when I attended in June 1959 the first congress of the International Biophysical Society at Cambridge. Hundreds of scientists from around the world presented papers on their research; I had no results to present. I felt humiliated. I had been used to being always at the top of my class; now, I was a nobody.

I began to develop philosophical doubts about pursuing a career of scientific research at all. I read and re-read Thoreau's famous book *Walden*. I felt shaken by what I saw as its message for me: that the real motive for pursuing science was the egotistical one of getting recognition from other scientists. (Yes, that really is a big motive for most scientists!) But Thoreau persuasively dismissed such motives as empty pretense. *Walden*'s core message was: I should figure out what I really want in my life, and not be seduced by the vanity of recognition. Thoreau reinforced my doubts about whether to continue in scientific research at Cambridge. But a moment of decision was approaching: my second year of graduate school would begin at the end of the summer, and I would have to re-enroll if I wanted to continue.

At the end of June I went off to spend a month's vacation in Finland, a wonderful and profound experience that I'll discuss in the next chapter. In Finland for the first time, I had the experience of learning a language, the difficult and beautiful Finnish language, not from books but just by listening and talking to people. I loved it. It was as satisfying and successful as my physiological research was depressing and unsuccessful.

By the end of my month in Finland, I was seriously considering abandoning a career in science, or indeed in any academic discipline. Instead, I thought of going to Switzerland, indulging my love for and ability in languages, and becoming a simultaneous translator of languages at the United Nations. That would mean turning my back on the life of research, creative thought, and academic fame that I had imagined for myself, and that my professor father exemplified. As a translator, I would not be well paid. But at least I would be doing something that I thought I'd enjoy and would be good at — so it seemed to me then.

My crisis came to a head on my return from Finland, when I met my parents (whom I hadn't seen in a year) for a week in Paris. I told them of my practical and philosophical doubts about pursuing a research career, and my thoughts of becoming a translator. It must have been agonizing for my parents to witness my confusion and misery. Bless them, they listened, and they didn't presume to tell me what to do.

The crisis reached resolution one morning while my parents and I were sitting together on a Paris park bench, once again thrashing out the question of whether I should give up on science now or should continue. Finally, my father gently made a suggestion, without pressuring me. Yes, he acknowledged, I had doubts about a scientific research career. But this had been only my first year of graduate school, and I had been trying to study the gallbladder for only a few months. Wasn't it really too early to give up on a planned lifetime career? Why not return to Cambridge, give it another chance, and devote just another half-year to trying to solve gallbladder research problems? If that didn't work out, I could still give it up in the spring of 1960; I didn't have to make an irreversible big decision now.

My father's suggestion felt to me like a life-preserver thrown to a drowning man. I could postpone the big decision for a good reason (to try for another half-year); there was nothing shameful about that. The decision didn't commit me irrevocably to a scientific research career. I still had the option of becoming a simultaneous translator after half-a-year.

That settled it. I did return to Cambridge to begin my second year there. I resumed my gallbladder research. Two young physiology faculty members, to whom I'll be eternally grateful, helped me to solve the technological problems of gallbladder research. In particular, one helped me to realize that my method of measuring voltages across the gallbladder was perfectly adequate; the gallbladder did develop voltages that I could measure (so-called "diffusion potentials" and "streaming potentials") under appropriate conditions. It was just that the gallbladder didn't develop voltages while transporting ions and water, for the remarkable reason that (uniquely among transporting epithelia known at the time) it transported positive and negative ions equally, and so transported no net charge and developed no transport voltage.

My gallbladder results began to interest other physiologists, and to excite even me. As my gallbladder experiments succeeded, my broad philosophical doubts about the vanity of recognition by other scientists faded away. I stayed at Cambridge for four years, completed my PhD, returned to the U.S., got good university jobs doing research and teaching in physiology (first at Harvard and then at UCLA), and became a very successful physiologist.

That was my first major professional crisis, a common type of personal crisis. Of course it wasn't my last life crisis. I later had two much milder professional crises around 1980 and 2000, concerning changes in the direction of my research. Ahead of me still lay severe personal crises about getting married for the first time, and (seven-and-a-half years later) about getting divorced. That first professional crisis was in its specifics unique to me: I doubt that anyone else in world history has ever struggled with a decision about whether to abandon gallbladder physiological research in favor of becoming a simultaneous translator. But, as we'll now see, the broad issues that my 1959 crisis posed were completely typical for personal crises in general.

—

Almost all readers of this book have experienced or will experience an upheaval constituting a personal "crisis," as I did in 1959. When you're in the middle of it, you don't pause to think about academic questions of defining "crisis"; you *know* that you're in one. Later, when the crisis has passed and you have the leisure to reflect on it, you may define it in retrospect as a situation in which you found yourself facing an important challenge that felt insurmountable by your usual methods of coping and problem-solving. You struggled to develop new coping methods. As did I, you questioned your identity, your values, and your view of the world.

Undoubtedly, you've seen how personal crises arise in different forms and from different causes, and follow different trajectories. Some take the form of a single unanticipated shock — such as the sudden death of a loved one, or being fired without warning from your job, or a serious accident, or a natural disaster. The resulting loss may precipitate a crisis not only because of the practical consequences of the loss itself (e.g., you no longer have a spouse), but also because of the emotional pain, and the blow to your belief that the world is fair. That was true for relatives and close friends of the victims of the Cocoanut Grove fire. Other crises instead take the form of a problem building up slowly until it explodes — such as the disintegration of a marriage, chronic serious illness in oneself or in a loved one, or a money-related or career-related problem. Still other crises are developmental ones that tend to unfold at certain major life transitions, such as adolescence, midlife, retirement, and old age. For instance, in a midlife crisis you may feel that the best years of your life are over, and you grapple to identify satisfying goals for the rest of your life.

Those are the different forms of personal crises. Among their commonest specific causes are relationship problems: a divorce, a break-up of a close relationship, or else deep dissatisfaction leading you or your partner to question continuing the relationship. Divorce often drives people to ask themselves: What did I do wrong? Why does he/she want to leave me? Why did I make such a bad choice? What can I do differently next time? Will there ever be a next time for me? If I can't succeed in a relationship even with the person who is closest to me and whom I chose, what good am I at all?

Besides relationship problems, other frequent causes of personal crises include deaths and illnesses of loved ones, and setbacks to one's health, career, or financial security. Still other crises involve religion: lifelong believers in a faith may find themselves plagued by doubt, or (conversely) non-believers may find themselves drawn to a religion. But, shared among all of those types of crisis, whatever their cause, is the sense that something important about one's current approach to life isn't working, and that one has to find a new approach.

My own interest in personal crises, like that of many other people, stemmed initially from the crises that I've experienced myself or that I've seen befalling friends and relatives. For me, that familiar personal motive has been further stimulated by the career of my wife Marie, a clinical psychologist. During the first year of our marriage, Marie trained at a community mental health center, in which a clinic offered short-term psychotherapy for clients in crisis. Clients visited or phoned that clinic in a state of crisis, because they felt overwhelmed by a big challenge that they couldn't solve by themselves. When the door opened or the phone rang at the clinic reception, and the next client walked in or began talking, the counselor didn't know in advance what type of issue that particular person faced. But the counselor knew that that client, like all the previous clients, would be in a state of acute personal crisis, precipitated by their having acknowledged to themselves that their established ways of coping were no longer sufficient.

The outcomes of consultation sessions at health centers offering crisis therapy vary widely. In the saddest cases, some clients attempt or commit suicide. Other clients can't figure out a new coping method that works for them: they revert to their old ways, and may end up crippled by their grief, anger, or frustration. In the best cases, though, the client does discover a new and better way of coping, and emerges from the crisis stronger than before. That outcome is reflected in the Chinese written character translated as "crisis," which is pronounced "wei-ji" and consists of two characters: the Chinese character "wei," meaning "danger," plus the Chinese character "ji," meaning "crucial occasion, critical point, opportunity." The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche expressed a similar idea by his quip "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." Winston Churchill's corresponding quip was "Never let a good crisis go to waste!"

A frequent observation by those helping others in an acute personal crisis is that something happens within a time span of about six weeks. During that short transitional period, we question our cherished beliefs, and we are much more receptive to personal change than during our previous long period of relative stability. We can't live for much longer than that without *some* ways of coping, although we can grieve, suffer, or remain unemployed or angry for much longer. Within about six weeks, either we start to explore a new way of coping that will ultimately prove successful, or we embark on a new maladaptive way of coping, or we revert by default to our old maladaptive ways.

Of course, those observations about acute crises don't imply that our lives conform to an oversimplified model of: (1) receive shock, set alarm clock for six weeks; (2) acknowledge failure of previous coping methods; (3) explore new coping methods; and (4) alarm clock goes off: either give up and revert, or else succeed / crisis solved / live happily ever after. No: many life changes instead unfold gradually, without an acute phase. We succeed in identifying and solving many impending or growing problems before they ever become crises and overwhelm us. Even crises with an acute phase may merge into a long phase of slow rebuilding. That's especially true of midlife crises, when the initial burst of dissatisfaction and glimmerings of a solution may be acute, but putting a new solution into effect may take years. A crisis doesn't necessarily stay solved forever. For instance, a couple that resolves a serious dispute and avoids divorce may outgrow their solution to the dispute and have to deal again with the same problem or a similar one. Someone who has dealt with one type of crisis may eventually encounter a new problem and face a new crisis, as did I. But even those caveats don't change the fact that many of us do traverse crises with the approximate course that I described.

* * *

How does a therapist deal with someone in crisis? Obviously, the traditional methods of long-term psychotherapy, which often focus on childhood experiences in order to understand root causes of current problems, are inappropriate in a crisis because they are much too slow. Instead, crisis therapy focuses on the immediate crisis itself. The methods were initially worked out by the psychiatrist Dr. Erich Lindemann in the immediate aftermath of the Cocoanut Grove fire, when Boston hospitals were swamped not only by the medical challenge of trying to save the lives of hundreds of severely wounded and dying people, but also by the psychological challenge of dealing with the grief and the guilt feelings of the even larger numbers of survivors, relatives, and friends.

Those distraught people were asking themselves why the world had permitted such a thing to happen, and why they were still alive when a loved one had just died a horrible death from burns, trampling, or asphyxiation. For example, one guilt-stricken husband, berating himself for having brought his now-dead wife to Cocoanut Grove, jumped out a window in order to join her in death. While surgeons were helping the fire's burn victims, how could therapists help the fire's psychological victims? That was the crisis that the Cocoanut Grove fire posed to psychotherapy itself. The fire proved to be the birth hour of crisis therapy.

Struggling to assist the huge number of traumatized people, Lindemann began to develop the approach that is now termed "crisis therapy," and that expanded soon from the Cocoanut Grove disaster to the other types of acute crises that I mentioned above. Over the decades since 1942, other therapists have continued to explore methods of crisis therapy, which is now practiced and taught at many clinics such as the one at which Marie trained. Basic to crisis therapy as it has evolved is that it's *short-term*, consisting of only about half-a-dozen sessions spaced out at weekly intervals, spanning the approximate time course of a crisis's acute stage.

Typically when one is first plunged into a state of crisis, one feels overwhelmed by the sense that everything in one's life has gone wrong. As long as one remains thus paralyzed, it's difficult to make progress dealing with one thing at a time. Hence a therapist's immediate goal in the first session — or else the first step if one is dealing with an acknowledged crisis by oneself or with the help of friends — is to overcome that paralysis by means of what is termed "building a fence." That means identifying the specific things that really have gone wrong during the crisis, so that one can say, "Here, inside the fence, are the particular problems in my life, but everything else outside the fence is normal and OK." Often, a person in crisis feels relieved as soon as he or she starts to formulate the problem and to build a fence around it. The therapist can then help the client to explore alternative ways of coping with the specific problem inside the fence. The client thereby embarks on a process of *selective change*, which is possible, rather than remaining paralyzed by the seeming necessity of total change, which would be impossible.

Besides that issue of building a fence that gets addressed in the first session, another issue is also often addressed then: the question "Why now?" That's short-hand for: "Why did you decide to seek help in a crisis center *today*, and why do you feel a sense of crisis *now*, rather than some time earlier, or not at all?" In the case of a crisis arising from a single unanticipated shock, such as the Cocoanut Grove fire, that question needn't be asked because the obvious answer is the shock itself. But the answer is not obvious for a crisis building up slowly until it explodes, or for a developmental crisis associated with an extended life phase such as the teen-age years or middle age.

A typical example is that a woman may say that she came to the crisis center because her husband is having an affair. But it then turns out that she has known for a long time that he has been having the affair. Why did the woman decide to seek help about the affair today, rather than a month ago or a year ago? The immediate impetus may have been a single sentence spoken, or else a detail of the affair that the client held to be the "last straw," or a seemingly trivial event reminding the client of something significant in the client's past. Often the client isn't even conscious of the answer to that question "Why now?" But when the answer is discovered, it may prove helpful to the client, or to the therapist, or to both, in understanding the crisis. In the case of my 1959 career crisis, which had been building for half-a-year, the reason why the first week of August 1959 became "now" was the visit of my parents, and the practical necessity of telling them whether or not I would return next week to the Cambridge Physiological Laboratories for a second year.

Of course, short-term crisis therapy isn't the only approach to dealing with personal crises. My reason for discussing it isn't because of any parallels between the time-limited six-session course of crisis therapy and the course of dealing with national crises. The latter course never involves six national discussions within a short time frame. Instead, I focus on short-term crisis therapy because it's a specialty practiced by therapists who have built up a large body of experience and shared their observations with one another. They spend much time discussing with one another and publishing articles and books about the factors influencing outcomes. I heard a lot about those discussions from Marie, almost every week during her year of training at the crisis therapy center. I found those discussions useful for suggesting factors worth examining as possible influences on outcomes of national crises.

—

Crisis therapists have identified at least a dozen factors that make it more or less likely that an individual will succeed in resolving a personal crisis (Table 1.1). Let's consider those factors, starting with three or four that inevitably are critical at or before the beginning of the course of treatment:

**1. Acknowledgment that one is in crisis**. This is the factor that leads people to enter crisis therapy. Without such an acknowledgment, they would not even present themselves at a crisis therapy clinic, nor (if they didn't go to a clinic) would they begin to deal with the crisis themselves. Until someone admits, "Yes, I do have a problem" — and that admission may take a long time — there can't be any progress towards resolving the problem. My 1959 professional crisis began with my having to acknowledge that I was failing as a laboratory scientist, after a dozen years of uninterrupted successes in school.

**Table 1.1. Factors related to the outcomes of personal crises**

1. Acknowledgment that one is in crisis
2. Acceptance of one's personal responsibility to do something
3. Building a fence, to delineate one's individual problems needing to be solved
4. Getting material and emotional help from other individuals and groups
5. Using other individuals as models of how to solve problems
6. Ego strength
7. Honest self-appraisal
8. Experience of previous personal crises
9. Patience
10. Flexible personality
11. Individual core values
12. Freedom from personal constraints

2. **Acceptance of personal responsibility**. But it's not enough just to acknowledge "I have a problem." People often then go on to say, "Yes, but — my problem is someone else's fault. Other people or outside forces are what's making my life miserable." Such self-pity, and the tendency to assume the role of victim, are among the commonest excuses that people offer to avoid addressing personal problems. Hence a second hurdle, after a person has acknowledged "I have a problem," is for the person to assume responsibility for solving it. "Yes, there are those outside forces and those other people, but they aren't me. I can't change other people. I'm the only person whose actions I can fully control. If I want those other forces and other people to change, it's my responsibility to do something about it, by changing my own behavior and responses.

Those other people aren't going to change spontaneously if I don't do something myself."

**3. Building a fence**. Once a person has acknowledged a crisis, accepted responsibility for doing something to resolve it, and presented himself at a crisis therapy center, the first therapy session can focus on the step of "building a fence," i.e., identifying and delineating the problem to be solved. If a person in crisis doesn't succeed in doing that, he sees himself as totally flawed and feels paralyzed. Hence a key question is: what is there of yourself that is already functioning well, and that doesn't need changing, and that you could hold on to? What can and should you discard and replace with new ways? We shall see that that issue of *selective change* is key also to reappraisals by whole nations in crisis.

**4. Help from others**. Most of us who have successfully gotten through a crisis have discovered the value of material and emotional support from friends, as well as from institutionalized support groups such as those of cancer patients, alcoholics, or drug addicts. Familiar examples of material support include offering a temporary spare bedroom to enable someone whose marriage has just collapsed to move out; thinking clearly, to compensate for the temporarily diminished problem-solving ability of a person in crisis; and providing practical assistance in obtaining information, a new job, new companions, and new child-care arrangements. Emotional support includes being a good listener, helping to clarify issues, and assisting someone who has temporarily lost hope and self-confidence to regain both.

For a client at a crisis therapy clinic, that "call for help" is inevitably among the first factors arising to resolve the crisis: the client came to the center *because* they realized that they needed help. For people in crisis who don't come to a crisis therapy