

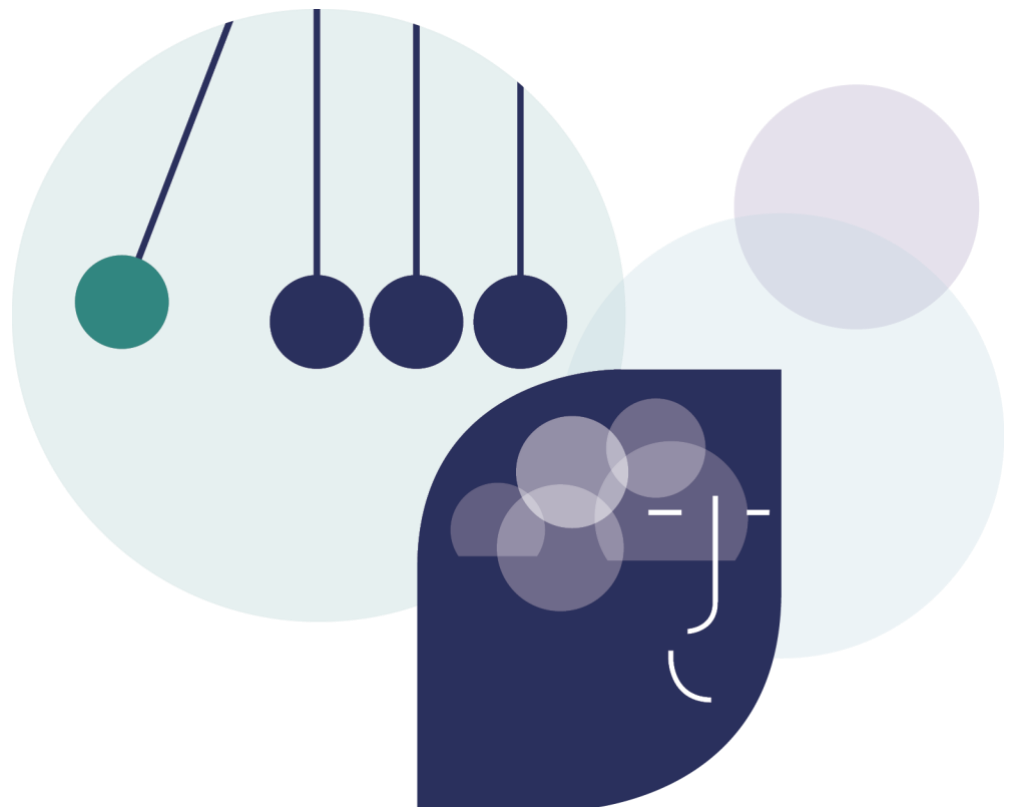


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# The Pendulum and the Prediction Error

How the Human Organism Evolves Through Crisis

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We often treat the emergence of dangerous autocrats and toxic dominant leaders as aberrations—anomalies that threaten the otherwise sane progression of history. But what if these figures are not intrusions into the system, but expressions of it? What if the rise of self-serving leadership in a time of global volatility is not a sign that the world has gone wrong, but that it is correcting—albeit violently—for a deeper imbalance?

In an attempt to understand our current moment, we must resist the lure of simplicity. The world is not governed by linear cause-and-effect chains alone—it is shaped by the principles of *living systems*. Complex, adaptive, resilient, and yet vulnerable, these systems—like the human body, the brain, or ecosystems—respond to disruption not by returning to stasis, but by constantly evolving. And like any biological system under pressure, humanity today is navigating the space between adaptation and collapse.

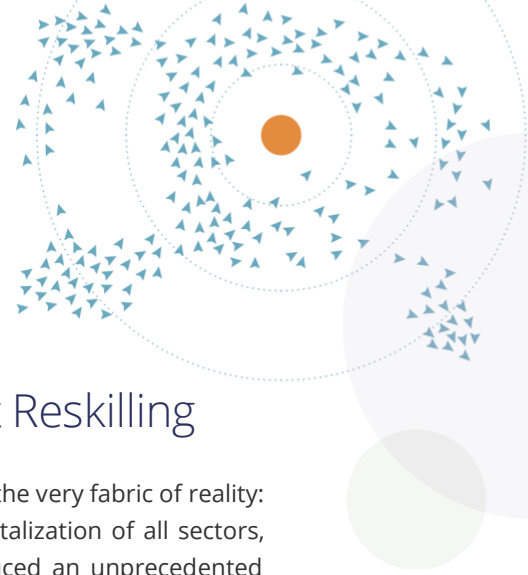
We are witnessing a global *allostatic* process—a recalibration of our collective physiological, psychological, and political balance. In this context, the narcissistic leader is not a rogue agent, but an exaggerated signal from the system itself—a warning of excessive prediction error and unresolved internal contradictions.

## The Living System of Humanity

Biological systems don't pursue stasis; they pursue equilibrium through *adaptability*. This is the essence of **allostasis**—a dynamic process by which living organisms maintain stability through change and learning. Unlike homeostasis, which aims to preserve a setpoint, allostasis allows for new baselines in response to stress, context, or environmental shifts.

In that light, humanity can be viewed as a *single, very complex organism* composed of billions of individuals—each like a living cell constituting the 'human organism', each with a role. Leadership, then, becomes a matter of regulating this distributed intelligence. And the system inevitably experiences tension—caused by the gap between expected reality and experienced reality—this is what neuroscientists call the **prediction error**.

If that error is **resonant**—if it stays within the adaptive bandwidth of the system—it fuels evolution. The system recalibrates. This is also what drives complex adaptation. We also call this '*resilience in action*'. But what if the prediction errors are so large that they threaten this continuous state of successful adaptation? This leads to perceived **dissonance** and this dissonance may drive the organism to enter into a state of reactive overcorrection: the pendulum swings too far, initiating a cycle of radical shifts, often catalyzed by influential, charismatic, yet destructive figures who embody the fears, rage, or unmet needs of the populist collective.



## Technology, Acceleration, and the Great Reskilling

At the core of the current global tension lies a force that has reshaped the very fabric of reality: the **exponential acceleration of technology**. The rise of AI, the digitalization of all sectors, the compression of time, and the crisis of work identity have produced an unprecedented mismatch between human capacity and environmental demand.

This acceleration has driven a global survival imperative: the need for **collective biological intelligence**—a human equivalent of swarm intelligence. In an era where no individual can grasp the totality of complexity, only *diverse collectives* can generate adaptive responses fast enough to stay on the curve of change. If we don't, we burn out—mentally, emotionally, biologically—explaining the global rise in stress-related disorders and mental health crises.

But this collective intelligence requires not only shared knowledge. It requires **resilience, psychological safety, diversity of thought, and systems of inclusion**. And herein lies the paradox: our response to this demand, rather than cultivating diversity and interdependence, swung toward **homogenization**.

*The pendulum overshot.*

The value reset of the last decade—#Movements, driving equality and inclusion—was crucial. It arose to correct deep systemic injustices. But as the cultural narrative shifted toward *equalization*, the nuance of **diversity as strength** created a narrative and non-adaptive drive towards **sameness**.

The result was a **dissonant prediction error**: identity blurred, boundaries dissolved, and the deep need for differentiated purpose—**core to any living system**—was sidelined in favor of radical inclusion that paradoxically threatened individual identity.

## The Rebound of the System

Biological systems do not tolerate the dissolution of structure. They respond with counterforce.

What we are seeing now, may well be a **rebound effect**—a pendulum swing from boundaryless egalitarianism toward rigid, often regressive, identity politics and nationalism. Populism, protectionism, and a renewed obsession with “us versus them” are not the disease—they are symptoms of a system overcorrecting for perceived disintegration.

The narcissistic leader—autocratic, emotionally dysregulated, projecting confidence while sowing chaos—arises in these vacuums of coherence. Their power is not in their character but in their resonance with a system looking for identity, order, and control. They are the embodiment of a **system under duress**, seeking boundaries, even at the cost of moderation.

*This does not excuse their actions. It contextualizes them.*



## The Call for Moderated Visionaries

If dissonant prediction errors produce autocrats, **resonant leadership** must come from those who can sense the system's needs without exploiting them. What we require are *moderated visionaries*—leaders who understand both the fragility and potential of the system, who act not out of fear or greed, but out of stewardship, regeneration, and clarity of purpose.

These are leaders who don't swing the pendulum in retaliation, but instead anchor it in **resonance**—by setting vision, nurturing differentiated roles, and managing the allostatic load of their teams, organizations, and societies.

They understand that:

- **Fear and greed** are not strategies—they are stress responses.
- **Diversity without boundaries** is incoherent; boundaries without openness are brittle.
- **Prediction error is inevitable**—but how we respond to it determines whether we evolve or fragment.

## Toward a Global Allostasis

So where does this leave us?

It leaves us in a moment of immense possibility.


Yes, we are in the *Crisis phase*—the so-called fourth turning, as Strauss and Howe somewhat plausibly described it. But crisis is not collapse. It is the *opening* for a new configuration of values, identity, and meaning.

If we frame the current chaos not as failure, but as *feedback*, we can begin to move toward collective **allostasis**—a global adaptive state that honors complexity without collapsing into extremism.

This requires:

- **Reclaim identity without erasing difference**
- **Celebrate diversity without dissolving purpose**
- **Define leadership rooted in regeneration, not domination**
- **Design systems where prediction errors inform—not traumatize**

The human organism, like any organism, seeks coherence. Not stasis, not equality in sameness, but **dynamic balance**—the living logic of differentiated parts in meaningful relation, rendering the highest yield/energy ratio.



To arrive there, we must stop vilifying the signals of imbalance and start designing for **resonant correction**. While narcissistic abhorractions require pushback and counter-action, the world doesn't need another big swing. It needs more precise moderation. Not inaction, but **centered action**—the kind that comes from systems visionaries who can read the pulse of the planet as clearly as the pulse of a patient.

The narcissist may be loud. But the future belongs to the resonant, moderator collective.

## Recommended Reading

1. Howe, N., & Strauss, W. (1997). *The fourth turning: An American prophecy – What the cycles of history tell us about America's next rendezvous with destiny*. Broadway Books.
2. Sterling, P. (2020). *What is health? Allostasis and the evolution of human design*. The MIT Press.
3. Friston, K. (2010). *The free-energy principle: A unified brain theory?* Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 11(2), 127–138. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn2787>
4. Capra, F., & Luisi, P. L. (2014). *The systems view of life: A unifying vision*. Cambridge University Press.



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