

Words Poorly Used #1 — Chaos

Senator Sam Hayakawa was a man of many hats, but his principle claim to fame was as a linguist. I learned semantics from Professor Hayakawa. “If you see in any given situation only what everybody else can see, you can be said to be so much a representative of your culture that you are a victim of it.” Chaos is one of the words used for cultural victimization. We are threatened in the mainstream every day by wanton abuse of the idea of chaos, where the word is given the twist of violent, out-of-control, abysmal disaster. In its fundamental use (its primary intentional use), however, chaos is only a precedent to order, or a **transition from one order to another**. I put the emphasis heavily on the second phrase — the first is the long gone base case, while the second is the non-zero to infinity case. Chaos is merely the dynamic movement from one static case to another. Humans see things in states, mostly in the immediate present, whereas we are poor at seeing the transition from a prior state (history) and we are perplexed by guessing what may be consequent states (the future). We gloss this over by referring to chaos as a destruction of stable situations. In truth chaos is just unexplained change. And since change is constant, then chaos is constant, whereas stasis is the thing that we cannot control. Voluntarism is, in a sense, the rational letting go of the desire to control stasis and the painting of chaos as a negative agent.

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