

Ensayo

Essay

Health in gaseous societies**Salud en las sociedades gaseosas****María Noel Lapoujade***Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México**The only way to resolve the crisis of our civilization is by harmonizing ourselves with the order and the energy of the cosmos.*

Taisén Deshimaru (1996, p. 194)

Crisis

My starting point is an obvious observation: we live in a period of crisis. The general crisis touches philosophy itself. In 1992, with this preoccupation in mind, I laid out the subject in an article called: *Philosophy as knowledge in crisis* (Lapoujade, 1993). Out of honesty, and to clarify, I quote the first page as the starting point of my current reflection.

My central intent –as stated in the title– is showing that philosophy is knowledge in crisis. But what does “crisis” mean? As Wittgenstein (1981) observed: “sometimes it is necessary to remove an expression from language and have it cleaned then we can put it back into circulation” (p. 76). And that is what we will do.

Etymology reminds us that originally “crisis” means “judgment” as the result of a process, the decision about a case, and, in general, the ending of an event. Thus, the word “crisis” appears associated with the final decision of an event and, as consequence, implies a change, favorable or not, a “*decisive swerve*”. A turn of this nature makes a situation difficult, thus the word implies: a dangerous phase in an

occurrence; uncertainty and risk are traits of novelty.

A crisis in an illness indicates the decisive point, the moment of sharp manifestation after which a favorable or unfavorable outcome is awaited. By extension, we speak of political crisis, gubernatorial crisis, ministerial crisis, economic crisis... Finally, philosophers speak as well of “crisis”. The crisis of philosophy, of esthetics, of metaphysics; the crisis of rationalism, the crisis of consciousness...

To say that philosophy is in crisis is not to say anything because philosophy is *knowledge in crisis*. Crisis is inherent, consubstantial to philosophy. **Philosophy is the history of all of its “radical swerves”.** **A philosophy not in crisis is its own negation, or, a dogmatic philosophy, which is equivalent. Building itself as a body of knowledge always in transition is the mark of philosophy’s inevitable job. No “solid”, consolidated philosophy exists. Philosophy is produced in a “liquid state” or is not** (Lapoujade, 1993, p. 29).

About my thoughts of 1992, today I think and

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Correspondence: María Noel Lapoujade. Correo electrónico: maria.noel.lapoujade@gmail.com

it is the subject that I will develop in this article: *first*, the meaning of crisis that denotes all types of crisis is still current.

Second, nowadays crises have come to the point that Karl Jaspers called “limit situations”: limit of the earth, of life in the planet, of the human species, of human societies.

Third, as a consequence I have radicalized the metaphor of a liquid philosophy that I used in 1992. Philosophy as re-flection about the world, life, and our species, has transited through diverse modes, rhythms and speeds of becoming (Sp. *devenir*, Fr. *devenir*, Ger. *das Werden*).

I found that in 2000 Zygmunt Bauman used the same metaphor of a “liquid state” that I had introduced in 1992; but from the sociology of his thinking, he focuses on: “a liquid modernity”, “a liquid love” to analyze notions of transience, changes, and instability of social and human relations in our days.

The coincidence and affinity of the metaphor astonished me, albeit developed noticeably differently by Bauman, and, in my recent article *Life imaginaries in the current landscape of generalized destruction*, of April 2017, I held the thesis that from a social perspective, we have left the “liquid state” behind, and we have transitioned to societies in a “gaseous state”. The present article develops other sides of this notion, based on the same thesis (Lapoujade, 2017b).

2017: Gaseous societies

Heraclitus’ rhythmical river, in which “we bathe and we don’t bathe in the same river”, and in which —and with whom— we flow within the benign limits of the shores that canalize it’s flowing, has folded into a bucolic geography (Heráclite, 1964). Today, social developments are more appropriately adapted to a description of the gaseous states of matter.

Thesis: In 2017 societies function as gaseous societies

Today’s predominant social relations manifest their *gaseous state*.

On one hand, the comfortable coordinates of space and time in plain geometry give a bi-dimensional image, a surface, a blueprint in which solid bodies are reduced. In art, it corresponds

to painting. Tri-dimensionality incorporates the volume (width, height, depth) and studies rigid bodies. In art, it corresponds to sculpture. The fourth dimension incorporates time in the space-time continuum in which bodies are observed. In art, it corresponds to dance, theater, filmmaking, and performance.

If bi-dimensional measures are reduced imaginarily to their minimum, that is, into points and instants, then, in a fourth-dimensional framework, they become the instantaneous points by which we can describe the movement of molecules and atoms, the nucleus of energy in which physical reality is decomposed. Music is the art that focuses on instants and in which time is prevalent. I am thinking about musical notes, nucleus of energy, about the moments of silence that separate and unify them, and about their assembly into a resultant musical piece. This analysis proposes a geometry that is embodied in art (Lapoujade, 2008b).

On the other hand, the observation of the behavior of these instantaneous-points or punctual-instants of physical geometry, a geometrical reduction of the molecules and atoms in gases, is extremely fruitful to complement —through this metaphor— the analysis of the most salient traits of societies in this 2017.

This rough basic explanation of the complex processes of the fragmentation of space-time in instantaneous points can be applied metaphorically to individuals in current societies. In particular, the activity of these atomic and molecular instantaneous-points in gases allows a general description of people’s evolving lives in our current societies. Individuals are these instantaneous-points floating in societies with scarce, almost non-existent cohesion.

The gaseous state

J.B. van Helmont introduced the term gas, inspired by the Greek word chaos “empty space” (Diegel & Kwiatkowski, 1987). Matter in the gaseous state is formed by an aggregation of molecules in between which the attraction force is so lax, so weak, that this matter shows neither a determined form, nor a constant volume. Pressure, temperature and volume determine and change the gas (Diegel & Kwiatkowski, 1987).

In the gaseous state, particles that compose

the gas present molecules and atoms that are very separated from each other, in other words, there are in low density, and the force that attracts them to each other is almost inexistent. Particles moving at high speeds and in whichever direction can cover long distances without order or organization. In consequence, gases do not have a fixed form or volume, and they diffuse or can be mixed with other gaseous, liquid or solid substances.

Meaning of the metaphor of gaseous societies

Contemporary societies and interpersonal relations can be described with the gaseous societies metaphor. Contemporary societies are very different, inhabited by more diverse ethnicities, in diverse geographies, in diverse cultures and diverse political, religious, educational systems, etc.

Although different gaseous societies show distinctive ways of living their gaseous state, they all share the same chaotic condition, with a scarce and problematic social cohesion, with majority groups and heterogeneous minorities in turmoil, aside from the alarming number of murders, attacks, rapes, tortures, and diverse cruelties committed by the “rational” species—an unhinged humanity. Everywhere around the world the scenarios are of particles moving, not by the force of attraction, but by the forces of repulsion; of unstrung individuals in diverse stages of disintegration.

From the perspective of time, the succession of chaotic *instants* (Bachelard) has, in every sense of the word, blurred *duration* (Bergson) (Lapoujade, 2011). Everything is ephemeral in its vertiginous apparition and disappearance: things, interpersonal relations, and the “operation” of social institutions.

Atoms in gaseous societies are those space-time corpuscles that can be reduced to the metaphor of instantaneous-points or individuals, singularities that are diverse, dispersed, loose, isolated, without cohesion (Lapoujade, 2008b).

Earth unfolds a scenario of war, attacks, bloody repressions, murders, violence and cruelty within explosive gaseous societies.

Without reaching those “limit situations” (paraphrasing Karl Jaspers), atomic and molecular movement, chaotic, in whichever direction, without form, with acute instability, very adequately characterizes relations –institutional, working,

sentimental, relationships between couples and families, etc.— and concern especially the younger population strata, although other strata are not completely immune. Likewise, general political, religious, and educational positions, and very emphatically, ethic and aesthetic values are subjected to fluctuations and abrupt changes, and the absence of authenticity. It is a chaos in which any posture seems to fit in, and everything seems to be equally “valid”. Philosophically, I think that we are confronted by the inheritance of postmodernity.

Movement of the balance

Gaseous societies inhabit a world whose balance, in the most diverse subjects and meanings, is in a high-risk disequilibrium.

In the 5th century Acreages, a city that was as hospitable and pacific as its weather and without enduring our current planetary threat, lived Empedocles, physiologist, physician, astronomer, and esoteric, who gave a radically current poetic world view to humanity.

According to Empedocles (1964), the cosmos, with everything that exists in it, is made out of four elements: earth, water, air (ether) and fire, and its movement unfolds in a binary rhythm, alternating and cyclical. Two antagonistic forces determine this cosmic rhythm: Friendship and Hate. Friendship, Love is the force that unites the elements, it attracts them (in physics: attraction force) it bonds them together to give life to everything that inhabits the cosmos: plants, animals, stones, men... Friendship is the creative force. When the peek of Friendship wanes, the cosmos goes through a period of transition until the empire of fatal Hate arises, the force of dissolution, separation (in physics: repulsion force,) and destruction. The rotation of creation-destruction is present in all bodies of the cosmos, including the human body, who, in the prime of life is ruled and bind together by Friendship, Love; but who, in old age, disintegrates, disaggregates with the incursion of discord and Hate. Societies –says the philosopher-poet– exhibit the same kind of nature, meaning, cosmic nature.

Must we infer the topicality of his thinking for gaseous societies in 2017?

In our days, the balance is sinking under the weight of Hate.

The letters exchanged by Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, both figures that assemble their

exceptional scientific contributions with their life experiences of the anti-Semitic hate, explain in 1932-1933 the horror of war as inherent to human nature.

Einstein (2005) sent a letter to Freud inviting him to participate in the heated discussion about the “scourge of war.” Einstein maintains that each human being has an inherent need of hating and destroying. It remains latent in normal times, but it is usually activated with ease in unusual periods.

On his side, Freud (1981) thinks that the human being is subject to two antagonistic impulses: Eros and Thanatos, the impulse of life and the impulse of death. The death impulse pushes what is alive to its death and destruction. The impulse of life is the force that promotes life, produces it, stimulates, and increases it.

From the point of view of creative imagination as a *sine qua non* determinant of what is human, I developed in my *Homo Imaginans* the subject of creative and destructive imagination, two movements that are inherent to the actions and processes of the act of imagining (Lapoujade, 2012).

Creative imagination can also ‘create’ destructive tools and processes, of extreme cruelty as in Sade, or as the imagination of cruelty in Isadore Ducasse Lautreamont did in his *Songs of Maldoror* (Lapoujade, 2009a; 2011).

In our days the imagination secretes images with which it predominantly builds imaginaries of Hate, extreme violence, destruction of life.

I have undertaken this research about the imagination and the destructive, insane, and literally sick imaginaries, because of the necessity to account for day and night, summer and winter, light and darkness, illness and health, wakefulness and sleep, consciousness and unconsciousness, good and bad, beauty and ugliness, freedom and slavery, war and peace, life and death impulses: human light and darkness.

My Philosophy of the imagination, images and imaginaries, searches for the origin of such functions of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, and brought me to an understanding of man as an imaging being, that I have named *Homo Imaginans*, as the origin of every other process. From my perspective, I have emphasized the luminous, generous, ethic-esthetic aspects of what is human. Which is why my open conclusion to

this work includes a call for a turn towards health, harmony, and life.

In my research, I deliberately highlight the creative aspects of the human species, of imagination as an impulse of life. The compass of my inquisitiveness is human life, free and dignified (Lapoujade, 2009b).

2017, towards a recovered health

A call for health has been made *avant la lettre* by the controversial Baruch Spinoza.

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza (1958) reveals the *conato*: each living being’s impulse of “persisting in its existence,” the instinct to preserve life, to survive, and fight for life. It is an instinct for the health of the species, its conservation, and reproduction.

In these tragic times, man has forgotten that he is a cosmic species. He has forgotten his negligibility, but that his life, which is not really even a speck of cosmic dust, is part of that cosmos. He has forgotten nothing less than the *habitat* that supports his own species, he has damaged and exhausted the planet, his *home* in the cosmos (Lapoujade, 2017a).

Michel Serres (2011) coined the expression “acosmism,” a negation of cosmos. On his side, Joseph Berque (2011) speaks of “an ill cosmos” of today’s humanity.

As for me, I have developed this pressing problem from the perspective of the History of Philosophy, through a journey with stops in essential moments for our intent, from pre-Socratics to the *cogito*, and from the *cogito* to the cosmic man, and I have researched its origins in the transition between *homo imaginans* and the cosmic man (Lapoujade, 2008a; 2010).

Diverse currents of the East’s profound wisdom -from Hindu thinking, ancient Chinese thinking since Lao Tse, Chan and, centuries after, Japanese Zen- engage with lucidity this primordial streak of life.

This is the meaning of Taisen Deshimaru’s epigraph, which, by virtue of its nature, gives the key to the unfolded text.

Hate, generalized destruction in “gaseous societies” should give way to friendship and cohesion, I am thinking about a new “condensation” of the gaseous state.

Final considerations

Amnesic about his own habitat, immersed in the chaotic and disperse movement of today's gaseous societies, man is blocked in his ability to look up into the sky and accept him or herself ruled by its law, which is active at the heart of man's incommensurable cosmic home.

The *sine qua non* condition for humanity to recover health is to recover the lost memory of its cosmic nature.

The "law of the sky" is the core metaphor. The sky symbolizes the cosmos, to look at the sky is to connect with the areas and planetary systems, imagine the galaxies, the spaces, and the black holes, with the help of today's images of high technology.

What does the sky teaches to a layperson?

It teaches order, equilibrium, harmony, and unity with the whole. Interdependent presences that coexist joined by the law of attraction of particles.

It teaches the unavoidable laws of its rigorous mathematical precision. In that same, stunned look, man is in awe with the aesthetic beauty of the mathematical mystery.

Esthetics and science in one single look. Cosmic beauty teaches sciences and arts, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, music, and painting.

Without knowing it, the unwary contemplative individual is impregnated with life by his esthetic commotion in front of the cosmic beauty.

Cosmic beauty teaches Truth and Goodness with its exemplary course. It moralizes by esthetic example. I recall Kant's (1974) valid thought: "beauty symbolizes morality."

It not only symbolizes it, but beauty is morality.

Finally, I assert with Francois Cheng (2008) that:

Each being exudes a presence and is inhabited by the capacity for beauty, and especially by the "desire for beauty" (p.22).

Once more, I reaffirm my call to recover the shuddering experience of the mystery of beauty, as the alchemical "universal solvent" of Hate and discord; beauty as the pleasure of life without threats and without terror; as the powerful magnet to awake universal attraction and a new condensation of the gaseous state.

Beauty as redemption, as Dostoevsky called it, as the ethical-esthetical path to the creative union of human forces, the path to friendship, love, life, and peace.

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