

Mindfulness and change within civilization. Rethinking Nature, Earth and Eros from Hesiod

Paulo Borges¹

Abstract

We seek to investigate whether the contemporary environmental crisis and some ecological reactions to it do not come from a same dominant model of reality perception, in which Nature and Earth appear as an object, to explore or defend, before the human subject. For this, a rethinking of Nature and Earth is made from the first three instances of the theocosmogony of Hesiod - Chaos, Gaia and Eros - and we propose that only a contemplative and non-dualistic opening of awareness can lead to a real civilizational shift.

Keywords: Nature, Earth, Eros, awareness, civilization

Abertura da Consciência e Mudança de Civilização. Repensar a Natureza, a Terra e Eros a partir de Hesíodo

Resumo

Procuramos investigar se a crise ambiental contemporânea e algumas reacções ecológicas a ela não procedem de um mesmo modelo dominante de percepção da realidade, em que a Natureza e a Terra surgem como um objecto, a explorar ou a defender, perante o sujeito humano. Para tal, procede-se a um repensar da Natureza e da Terra a partir das três primeiras instâncias da teocosmogonia de Hesíodo - Caos, Gaia e Eros - e propõe-se que só uma abertura contemplativa e não-dualista da consciência pode originar uma verdadeira mutação civilizacional.

Palavras-chave: Natureza, Terra, Eros, consciência, civilização

¹ University of Lisbon / Philosophy Center of the University of Lisbon. Email: pauloaborges@gmail.com..

**Apertura de la conciencia y cambio de civilización.
Repensar la Naturaleza, la Tierra y Eros desde Hesíodo**

Resumen

Tratamos de investigar si la crisis ambiental contemporánea y algunas reacciones ecológicas ante ella no provienen del mismo modelo dominante de percepción de la realidad, en el que la Naturaleza y la Tierra aparecen como un objeto, a explorar o defender, ante el sujeto humano. Para ello, repensamos la Naturaleza y la Tierra desde las tres primeras instancias de la teocosmogonía de Hesíodo -Caos, Gaia y Eros- y proponemos que sólo una apertura contemplativa y no dualista de la conciencia puede conducir a una verdadera mutación civilizatoria.

Palabras-clave: Naturaleza, Tierra, Eros, conciencia, civilización

Never before, as in the case of the so-called current Anthropocene, when a massive extinction of biodiversity caused by human causes, so much has been said about an environmental crisis and the urgent need to preserve Nature and the Earth. As a reaction to a cycle of civilization that looks at Nature and the Earth as an inexhaustible reservoir of resources exploited to meet the needs, interests and desires of human beings, ecology and environmentalism have emerged bringing forth the aim of protecting both from exploitation, either to preserve human beings from their harmful consequences, as in superficial or anthropocentric ecology, or to preserve the natural and earthly world to which intrinsic value is recognized, which is the case for deep ecology, according to the distinction established by Arne Naess (1973).

It is necessary, however, to ask whether the reaction to the extreme consequences of a cycle of civilization is not yet part of the same cycle of civilization and if it does not prevent it from being a new beginning. It is also necessary to question whether a cycle of civilization does not always presuppose a cycle of consciousness and culture, that is, a predominant way of perceiving the so-called reality, and whether the ecological reactions to the exploitation of nature by industrial and technoscientific capitalism civilization move in another regime of consciousness and reality that inaugurates the possibility of a new culture and a new civilization. It is thus necessary to start by questioning what is in fact this Nature and this Earth which some consider legitimate to exploit and take profit for the benefit of the human species or the world capitalist economy, while others consider imperative to protect and safeguard its intrinsic value, as well as human beings in so far as they can not be separated from it, without suffering the consequences of a predatory activity, endangering the species survival due to climate change, depletion of natural resources, pollution of soil, water and air, as scientific reports have repeatedly warned.

In such understanding of Nature and Earth, that, simultaneously, presupposes something to explore or protect, a strangely common idea of Nature and Earth as an object, that is, something out there, like an entity existing in and by itself, launched against the subject who perceives it as distinct? Is there not a duality here inscribed in the habits of perception and consequently in the action plans of the thinkers and activists who strongly reject such duality, as is the case of the adepts of deep ecology? What, then, can Nature and Earth be, that may be escaping both to its aggressors and to its defenders? Let us take support, in our reflection, in one of the founding texts of Western culture, the Theogony of Hesiod, from the 8th century BC.

Invoking the Muses to tell him how the gods and all things were born, "starting at the very beginning," the poet's inspired word states, in what we propose to interpret as a vertical story of the constitution of the world as a whole:

"First of all, it was Chaos; then Gaia with wide flanks, a safe foundation forever offered to all living, and Eros, the most beautiful among the immortal gods, the one who dissolves the limbs and that, in the chest of all god as of all man, dominates the heart and the wise willing"² (Hesiodo, 1986, p. 36).

The three original instances, which are suggested to have appeared successively, are Chaos, Gaia, and Eros. However, such succession may not be horizontal and temporal, but rather vertically, timelessly and at every instant.³

As for Chaos, its nature is ambivalent and can be interpreted as the first and foremost term of a series. In the first case, it would be the designation of primordial and timeless nature, prior to all manifestation, while in the second case it would indicate the first figure of a manifestation suggested as a progressive genesis from something completely unknown. In any case, *Kháos*, in Greek, carries the meanings of the abyss, of what is completely open, of what is vast and empty, deriving from the proto-Indo-European root *ghai, which refers to yawning, wonderment, gawk and gape.

Chaos suggests in Hesiod's work an empty and immeasurable space, before assuming the negative sense of "Universal confusion", which was assumed by the Stoics (Vernant, 1990) and Aristotle (1072), and which also appears in *The Metamorphoses* of Ovid, designating the "unique" and indistinct appearance of "nature", before the differentiation of the "sea", "land" and "heaven", as "a shapeless and confused mass" and "accumulation in one and the same of disparate germs of the elements of things, without links between them," rather than "a god, aided by the progress of nature", to separate, distinguish, and order these elements, thus giving way to the cosmos (Ovídio, 1966, p. 41). It is the sense of chaos, as confusion, that is established in the European languages from the seventeenth century, also under the influence of its theological use in the *Genesis*, from the *Vulgata*, to translate the Hebrew *tohû bohû*, the state of a desert and empty land when being created by God, before the further differentiation and ordering of the world by the divine spirit (*Genesis*, 1, 2).

Chaos in Hesiod is not, however, confusion, which presupposes a mixture of previously existing elements with distinct natures, but an infinite opening, an empty space without boundaries or contours. This is what shows its etymology, similar to

² We follow the translation of Paul Mazon, except for the designation of the three initial instances, where we kept the Greek terms, instead of "Abyss", "Earth" and "Love" (Hesiodo, 1986, p. 36).

³ For a subtle interpretation of this succession, which we partly follow, but not in the identification of Chaos with the "void" as "pure negativity" (Vernant, 1990, pp. 116-121).

that of Sanskrit kha, which means empty space and zero (Rendich, 2014). Kha, in the Rig-Veda, is concretely the empty center of the wheel where the axis is inserted (Coomaraswamy, 2001). Of it, and of the good insertion of the axis in it that joins the wheels, depends the good movement of the car. Since the wheel is a universal symbol of the movement of life (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1990), which expresses its experience as a path or a journey, one understands that in the same Indian, Hindu and Buddhist tradition, sukha, that is, the good insertion of the axis in the empty center of the wheel, designates happiness, and dukha, bad insertion, signifies suffering. By analogy, a life well-adjusted to, or well centered on, the empty space and therefore infinite is a life that goes well, whereas an ill-adjusted or poorly centered life in that same space is a life that goes wrong.

Kha, in Sanskrit, also means zero, whose invention, with the consequent revolution of calculation, occurred in India. Among other Sanskrit words that also mean, zero are *nyā*, *p*, *r*, *nā*, *k* and *ā* and *ananta*, meaning empty, fullness, space, and endless. Just as zero contains all possible numbers, so emptiness implies the fullness of all possibilities. The space without center or periphery is the infinite, the hollowness (Coomaraswamy, 2001; Borges, 2018). It is from this *k* and *ā*, the primordial space, without dimensions, from which, according to the *Chāndogya Upanishad*, all beings are originated, and it is to it that they return to. According to the same text, that is why such infinite space is "the purpose of this world" (*Chāndogya Upanishad*, 1992, p.105). This infinite space, the matrix of the whole cosmos, is not however external, but rather the "space within the heart" in which "everything is concentrated", the entire macrocosm (*Chāndogya Upanishad*, 1992, p.155).

If the Greek *Kháos* of Hesiod and the kha of Indian sacred texts have the same origin, the chaotic image of Chaos, opposed to that of the cosmic order, dissipates to unveil an unlimited primordial space which is the bottomless bottom of all that in it and from it emerges as the spontaneous expression of all the virtuosities contained in it. Chaos reveals a "Chaosmos", a masterful expression coined by James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*. Chaos is a fertile, exuberant emptiness of the "ten thousand beings," that is, of all beings, who continuously emerge and return to it, as it is said in the *Tao Te King* of Lao Tzu (Tse, 2005). Such Chaos does not withdraw as synonymous of what other traditions designate by God, when we consider *The Book of the XXIV Philosophers*: "Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia vero nusquam" ("God is the infinite sphere whose center is in all the side and the circumference anywhere") (*Le Livre des XXIV Philosophes*, 1989).

It should be noted that Ovid identifies Chaos with "nature" in the primordial state. The Latin *natura* corresponds to the Greek *physis*, which is the central theme of pre-

-Socratic thought and which, in an Orphic hymn, stands out as "immortal, original", "self-engendered" and "creator of all things," being "eternal life" that is renewed by its "shape changes ". Only she is "everything" for only she produces everything (Hino X, 1987). The physis of the early Greek philosophers is generally interpreted as having three related meanings: (1) primordial or principial substance, *arché*; 2) process of emergence/growth or *génésis*; 3) internal organizing and structuring principle (Peters, 1977). Physis comes from the verb *phuein*, with the meaning of "growth" or "to induce growth" . Heidegger (1985) saw it as a process of self-expansion, of manifestation and openness, of appearance. As such it configures the way by which "being" was thought at the dawn of Western philosophy, being that same opening, or "outbreak in the open", but that simultaneously retracts and withdraws - "Physis likes to hide itself," says Heraclitus (1987) -, which in Greek was designated as *a-létheia*, truth, un-veiling, a process thus originally inherent to the being and not to human knowledge (Heraclito, 1987). It is nevertheless through this process that everything is constituted and upon which everything depends, even the activities of the *homo sapiens* and the *faber* that most seem to oppose nature, such as techno-scientific civilization and culture with the capitalist economy and the new religion of labor, of production, of consumption and unlimited economic growth.

The *Kháos* in Hesiod, the empty and infinite space, can be seen as the physis itself, the primordial nature in its opening of the genesis, and this in its turn as the being in its un-veiling tension, in its manifestation yet concealing, for when manifested it assumes multiple forms that are configured in the shapeless bottom of non-manifestation which in this way tends to cover up and conceal, insofar as the consciousness perceiving is fixed in the contours that apparently individualize, distinguish and separate them from each other and do not see that in all of them the emptiness always appears. meaning, as in the example of *Tao Te King*, the form of a vessel is made as much as from matter - *yu*, that which exists - as of the inner and outer emptiness - *wu*, that which does not exist - in which it is constituted, and which gives it the functionality of a container (Tse, 2005). As the *Buddhist Prajna Paramita Sutra* says: "The forms are empty; the emptiness, itself, are the forms; emptiness is not different from the forms; the forms are not different from emptiness" (*Soûtra du Coeur de la Connaissance Transcendante*, 2001). The cosmos is a *chaosmos*.

But what is the appearance that appears at the bottomless bottom of the *Kháos*? Hesiod's text is clear: "So, first of all, it was Chaos; then Gaia with wide flanks, a safe foundation forever offered to all living (...)" (Hesíodo, 1986). The first epiphany of the *Kháos* is Gaia, the Earth, which represents the infinity of a support base and sustenance for all life forms. Gaia is the form of the infinite and thus the form of all

forms. Gaia is the mythopoetic expression of the universal background of being, the Grunt of the mystique and metaphysics of Master Eckhart, who, while inscribed or un-founded in the primordial Chaos or Infinity, is himself Abgrund, abyss, or Ungrund, not deep, without ceasing to be Urgrund, primordial fund (Eckhart, 2008). Gaia, the Earth, is the form of the formless and the bottomless bottom or the unsupported sustenance of everything, being inseparable from Chaos where it arises and from all the living of which it is the matrix and mother. Gaia, the Earth, "with wide flanks," is the most archaic figure of the sacred and the divine, before the Indo-European imaginary had conceived the gods and God - according to its etymology in the Indo-European root *dei-*, which designates "all that shines" - akin to the brightness of the open sky or the stars (Vallet, 2007; Silva, 2008) and with male form. Gaia, the Earth, is the figure of the archaic Great Mother Goddess who generates, welcomes, sustains and nourishes "all the living" (Gimbutas, 1991). Not a transcendent principle that governs a hierarchical universe, as in metaphysics and Indo-European matrix theologies, but an immanent bottomless bottom that equally embraces all forms of life, without creating or considering any species as closer to itself or to its "Image," and "resemblance," as the biblical God regarding humanity (Genesis 1: 26-27). Gaia is not a constitutive principle that regulates being in a certain mode, function, and position, but a matrix that leaves everything that from it emerges, such as the "great Tao" in which "all beings lean on (...) to live "and never intends to be" their master" (Tse, 2005) . Having as arché the Kháos, the chaosmos is an anarchic order, that emerges spontaneously of the autopoiesis of the living ones.

Another version of verses 118 and 119 of Hesiod's Theogony can be read as illustrative of the scope of Gaia in designating it as "a safe foundation forever offered to all the Immortals, masters of the snowy Olympus, and the Misty Tartar, even deep in the ground of great ways" (Hesíodo, 1986). Gaia is the seat of "all living", from the divine inhabitants of Olympus to those who dwell in the chthonic depths of the Earth. Gaia is the soil and the root of everything, that in her unify and commune from limitedness, for they emerge from a Chaotically cosmic (chaos + cosmos) Earth, whose innermost being is Chaos, the infinite space, empty and formless, without beginning or end.

Children of Chaosmos, all living beings are equally Chaotically cosmic. Rooted in the bottomless bottom, in the infinite, contain in themselves all the infinite possibilities that are implicated in it and are manifested or explained in the infinity of the multiverse or apparent cosmos. In this sense, they are micro-chaosmos that also contain the macro-chaosmos, parts that not only insert in the whole but also contain it in itself. They are hólons, in a different sense from that conceived by Arthur

Koestler (1982), for they are not just a wholenesses integrated into more inclusive entirenesses, but also include, insofar as their primordial nature is the infinite, the macro-totality. Each living being thus assumes an infinite dignity, being an icon of the infinite and the totality.

If the Kháos is Nature and Gaia is the Earth, this Nature and this Earth are obviously not reducible to the "Nature" and the "Earth" objectified by the natural sciences, as well as to the "Nature" and the "Earth" object of the predatory intentions of the adepts of the infinite economic growth or of the good safekeeping intentions of most of the ecologists and environmentalists. Kháos / Gaia or Nature / Earth are more than the natural world and the planet where we most immediately and obviously inhabit, which are only their objectifications by the mind that is limited by ignoring that their deep nature is the primordial space itself and by imagining it is a subject that thus becomes self-centered as an observer who places himself outside of what he sees, by creating, in function of his conceptual apparatus, objects fictitiously separated from each other and that to the same extent fails to see in everything, including himself, the infinite and the totality. However, in addition to the ever-limited perspectives of living organisms that differently perceive and objectify them, the inseparable polarities of the Infinite are open in all their experiences and manifestations. Kháos/Gaia or Nature/Earth are Hidden Life and patent in all lives. To this Life, Hesiod calls Eros.

Eros is for the Greek poet the most beautiful of divinities and the one that dominates all living beings, even those who, being gods or humans, enjoy the "wise will," that is, a rational will. Hesiod says that Eros "dominates the heart" and "dissolves the limbs" of all, strong expressions of his power to dissolve, from the intimate, not only the tendency of each living for self-centering but also its own individuation and internal unity. Eros is par excellence the power of Love that moves from the same to the other and from the identical to the different (Han, 2014), the power of change and metamorphosis, the power that dismembers, disorganizes and opens the lives that are intended to cloister, subverting the desire for conservation, safety, control and consumption in the opening to what appears as unknown, dangerous, unpredictable and inconsistent. Eros, emerging after Kháos and Gaia, is the irruption of the infinite and Chaotical cosmic nature of all living beings to impel them to live in the great openness with no outlines, subverting the temptation to imagine themselves centers of the space that does not have it, and thus become closed in the form of individuation and in the false comfort and safety of the finiteness.

Eros, more than being a living, is the loving dynamics of chaosmos, the force of the infinite that circulates in all living beings and moves them in a passionate desire, conscious or unconscious, of opening to the Infinite of the possible that each one brings, for each one, insofar as it resides in the Kháos, contains within itself all other

living beings and all possibilities of manifestation and fulfillment. Eros is the loving power of the formless void that overcomes its own distortion in the self-centered, egocentric and possessive desire, revealing in the form of each living being an impetus of truth, that is, of un-veiling the infinite that exists in itself, in constant self-transcendence and metamorphosis. Everything is Eros, because Eros - the wide-open eyes and wings of his first iconography in classical culture (Panofsky, 1995) - is the festive exuberance of the Infinite or primordial Kháos, without what or why. By self-recognizing, the desire opens wings to the superabundant infinite that he is. Not recognizing himself, he imagines himself to be a vulnerable individual, distinct from this infinite, who nevertheless seeks to satisfy himself infinitely in finite objects and experiences, which make him more and more insatiable, as through them he can only desire more than he can find, since without knowing it he only wants the infinite that he is. Recognizing himself, Eros is Life without fear, the experience open to the Infinite in all possible forms and modalities, to be and "feel everything in every way" as in Fernando Pessoa / Álvaro de Campos (1986). Failing on self-acknowledging himself, Eros becomes the blindfolded and a short wings cupid, all the more fascinated by the dominion and possession of a world of objects as more dominated by the fear of himself, the fear of the Infinite that is.

The self-ignorance of Eros-Love and its mutation in possessive desire is what dominates the gods, titans, and humans in the world which history Hesiod continues to describe, with the ages of human decadence narrated in *The Works and the Days* (Hesíodo, 1986). This world is ours, this story is ours. This world, of blind and confused desire, in which infinite space, devoid of center and periphery - Aristotle (1072) notes that "the infinite has no center" - is populated with self-centered subjectivities dominated by possessive desire, corresponding to the one which Luís de Camões (1970; Borges, 2010) described as a "rebellious world" against Love, for what governs it are the "great errors" of loving "things that have been given to us, / Not to be loved, but used" . But ethical-moral intentions and discourse, not to speak of juridical-political-economic measures, although positive and desirable, are always powerless or insufficient to reverse this situation. A situation, which is at the root of the contemporary environmental and civilizational crisis, since the root of this perversion of desire by its avid attachment to finitude is the loss of the sense of the primordial Eros that, as we have seen, is the passion of the open life in the " chásma méga ", the bottomless "great abyss" of Hesiod (1986), in infinity. In fact, the mere reaction to the environmental and civilizational crisis only extends it, in so far as it is at its narrow level and, not foreseeing it on a wider context maintains a clouded consciousness that thus prevents itself from becoming a new beginning. While it is

necessary to preserve what can be preserved of the natural world, Earth, biodiversity and natural resources, what really urges, even as a condition for it, is a change of civilization and this can only come from a radical change of consciousness or the regime of experience and perception of the so-called reality.

However, the above-mentioned mutation can only emerge from the reorientation of our experience into the infinite, recognizing it as the open and common nature of all beings and phenomena, the bottomless bottom that we are before the cleavage of experience in self and other or subject and object (Trungpa, 2002), the root of all fear, possessiveness, and aggression. This is the great alternative to the socially dominant culture, transmitted by families, pedagogical institutions, companies and the State, which is the culture of normose, the pathology of normality (Weil, Leloup & Crema, 2011), in which consciousness self-conditioned by the fiction of the self-separated from the world by identifying itself with the form and the image of the body and with the sensations, emotions, and thoughts driven by fear, possessiveness, and aggression that induce the feeling of separation. But instead of fighting, the alternative is to positively promote a culture of consciousness as the unlimited and fruitive space of experience where all seemingly subjective and objective phenomena can manifest. A reoriented culture, according to Rilke in the "Eighth Elegy", from "Form (Gestaltung)" to "Open" (Offene), for this "pure space" that does not restrict itself to the "world" of entities and objects for which education draws us back, moving us away from the "Open" of which the poet saw closer the animal, the child, the lovers, and those who die (Rilke, 2002). Instead of a cloistered culture in a substantial, monadic, entified, reified and objectified conception of the real, of self and the world. It is a matter of promoting a culture of the so-called experience of reality as a shapeless and open, Chaotical cosmic, erotic and osmotic, interdependent and interpenetrated, polymorphic, proteinic and metamorphic, which, in the sphere of selfness, echoes Bernardo Soares's question in *The Book of Disquiet*: "Does anyone know the boundaries of his soul, so that he can say - I am?" (Rilke, 2002, p. 823). Regarding the contemporary environmental situation, axis of the civilizational crisis, the alternative is to remove the consciousness of the fixation in an ideal about what the world should be and consequently in the apparently negative aspects of the state of the natural world and the Earth, which reflects still the human expectation that reality adapts itself to our desires and interests as individuals supposedly separated from the process of the world, to open it up to the same infinite Chaotical cosmic space envisioned by Hesiod that is that of Nature and the Earth manifesting themselves as they are, regardless of the perspectives and interests of any individual, psychophysiological organism, human or nonhuman. Consciously aware of that space that is of its own

bottomless bottom, it can be recognized and experienced that Chaos/Gaia, that is, Nature/Earth, are a process of mutation and erotic metamorphosis where everything interdepends and is interpenetrated by the mutations and metamorphoses of each and all living beings, and is therefore as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and indomitable as these. Following this line of thought, everything that emerges in the immensity of Chaos or Primordial Nature is inseparable from it and transcends all concepts and judgments, such as those of good and evil, which only arise with the transgression of the prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, generating the obfuscation or exile from the Edenic state of consciousness (Genesis, 3, 1-7).

What Hesiod designated as Chaos is the all-encompassing Infinity that the spiritual traditions of mankind designate in diverse but convergent ways. A contemporary Buddhist master suggests it: "(...) a vast opening which is not a thing in itself, but rather an infinite and uncharacteristic bottom against and through which galaxies, stars, planets, animals, humans, rivers, trees, etc., appear and move. (...) The emptiness, or infinite possibility, is the absolute nature of reality. Everything that emerges from emptiness - stars, galaxies, people, tables, lamps, clocks and even our perception of time and space - is a relative expression of the endless possibility, a momentary appearance in the context of infinite time and space (Mingyur, 2009). A contemporary Christian master follows the same script, using another language, when he says that "the experience of this identity - bottom that is one with God will be recorded in our perception, if indeed it is recorded, as an experience of no particular thing, a great and flowing abyss, a bottomless bottom. For those who only know the discursive mind, this may seem like a terror that deals with death or spinning vertigo. But for those whose minds have been enlarged by a heart-mind, it corresponds to an overflowing encounter with the flow of the vast and open emptiness that is the bottom of everything. Such "no-thing" ["no thing"], such emptiness, is not an absence, but an overabundance" (Laird, 2009).

If emptiness encompasses everything as its manifestation, and if emptiness in manifestation is the chaosmos and the original Nature-Earth, this includes what in the present cycle of the human mind is conceptualized, distinguished, and often opposed as nature and culture, nature and civilization, humanity and the world, humans and animals, wisdom and technoscience, communitarianism and capitalism, preservation and destruction of the environment, etc. This includes Anthropocene, climate change, destruction of biodiversity, pollution and resource depletion, etc., as well as other epiphanies of a Kháos-Gaia in constant mutation and metamorphosis interdependent of the actions of the living. All this takes place in the immense space that we are, all this is what we are and grow into every moment. Protect yourself and

preserve what you can protect and preserve, in the name of the relative and always impermanent good of the living species, not only of the human, but above all protect yourself and preserve our wide, trans-conceptual and non-judgmental experience, and the awareness that, whatever happens on a relative level, on an absolute level everything is always well, for chaosmos is the Great Perfection that untimely unifies and transcends all opposites, which is the inviolable nature of each and every living. To such Great Perfection always point the eyes and wings of the illuminated Eros.

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