[Commentary] Clinamen and the Established Order

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Abstract

The word "clinamen", which means "deviation", was introduced by the Greek philosopher Epicurus to oppose the atomic determinism of Democritus. What is the relationship between clinamen and notions such as freedom or slavery? In other words, what who were the founding fathers of Western civilization? In fact, the issue of freedom and slavery can be traced back to the proto-Indo-European civilization (PIE), which appears to have emerged around 3500 BC. Here we propose that in order to integrate clinamen, it is absolutely necessary to be open and tolerant of new ideas. This also means that one must be careful not to confuse science with technology or spirituality with religion.

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Developments in the world since the 2020s have never been so uncertain. This should come as no great surprise, since as the philosopher Karl Marx noted in 1841 in his doctoral thesis: "the clinamen is inherent and not external" [1]. Karl Marx reminds us in this thesis that the word clinamen, which means "deviation", was introduced by the Greek philosopher Epicurus to oppose the atomic determinism of Democritus [2]. In short, atoms and the vacuum exist, but in full accordance with the teachings of quantum physics, there is always a "clinamen" within matter, i.e. a small deviation from the expected behavior that makes the world colorful and happy instead of grey and sad. The problem with clinamen is that it inherently challenges any established order that provides security and comfort. And that's what worries us today, because it brings us right back to the distressing question posed by the Belgian poet Jean Émile Louis Scutenaire: "Does the slave who loves his life as a slave have a life as a slave? [3] For where there is an established order, there is necessarily slavery. The issue of freedom and slavery can be traced back to the proto-Indo-European civilization (PIE), which appears to have emerged around 3500 BC in a temperate forest habitat, most likely in a region known in antiquity as Scythia or Sarmatia. This civilization of horsemen from the Pontic steppe is thought to have colonized Europe around 3100-2900 BC, imposing their way of life and view of the world on the peoples they colonized. The PIE origins of our modern society are attested to by our language, French, and the words we use link us to other European countries that underwent the same colonization, as well as to the countries of the world colonized by modern Europeans.

Although we all know who our parents and grandparents were, only a few eminent linguists can tell us who the founding fathers of Western civilization were. We know that this PIE society was hierarchical, with free people and slaves, who were generally prisoners of war or people with a debt to pay. Because the whole society was structured around the notion of exchanging goods and mutual trust, where those who gave necessarily expected something in return. Goods were of two types: mobile wealth on 2 feet or 4 legs and immobile wealth (objects, land, habitats). If the exchange was not reciprocal, it could only be temporary, as there was then a debt that had to be honored in the more or less near future, possibly committing future generations. The encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes in Homer's Illiad is a perfect example of the importance of this principle of reciprocity. Any violation of this principle was immoral and sacrilegious, constituting a legal offence. However, there were as yet no police or courts, and everyone had to deal with disputes in their own way. Here too, a rereading of the Iliad will refresh your memory. Free men were divided into 3 elite groups: kings (governance), warriors (military) and priests/poets (religious). The rest of the population of free men had a fertility function (peasants and craftsmen). Society was based on strict patriarchy, where a man was worth more than a woman. Women were obliged to live with their husband's family. The most highly valued profession was that of singer/poet, as this implied a mastery of words, which was essential if cultural heritage was to be passed on to future generations in the form of poems or songs. As words played a key role in any PIE society, each person had to have a name, which was assigned in a meticulous ritual. Religion was polytheistic, with multiple gods in the sky and human beings living on the earth. Heaven was masculine and earth feminine, with a pair of divine twins providing the link between heaven and earth. Two great antagonistic principles were at work in the cosmos: fire, which was animate, and water, which was inanimate. The most important animal was the horse, an attribute of the divine twins, which was sacrificed when a king was consecrated, with or without ritual copulation of the king or queen with the horse. Tombs were individual and often covered with earth or stones to form tumuli. The souls of the dead had to cross a stream of water that symbolized universal memory, resulting in oblivion or great wisdom, depending on the person concerned. Three practices were recognized: the use of magic through spells or incantations, the use of sharp tools and the use of medicinal herbs. The passage from adolescence to adulthood was symbolized by the fight against a dragon or any other monstrous animal symbolizing chaos, with the ritual phrase "He (she) has killed the serpent". Order could only be established once the animal had been killed. Access to knowledge was symbolized by the theft of a fire. The PIE knew the wheel and practiced agriculture and animal husbandry. Houses had doors that could be locked with a variety of objects. Cooking techniques included baking and fermenting. The PIE wore clothes made from textile fibers and practiced sewing. Their metallurgy was based on copper and silver.

This is the entire value system of the so-called Western world, handed down to us over more than 5 millennia by poets and other troubadours, leading to a well-established order with its free men in developed countries and its slaves in emerging countries. The order is so old that we are almost certain that it has always existed and that it can only be the best of orders. But the clinamen of Epicurus or Marx, which is inherent in the system and not external to it, cannot be avoided, and the five-thousand-year-old established order has to come to terms with this clinamen, which is conveyed these days by the internet and social networks. Our future will depend on how the rulers of today's Western world integrate the clinamen into the established order. Rejecting it by force would be suicide. But what does integrate clinamen actually mean? Quite simply, it means being open and tolerant of new ideas and, above all, of other non-PIE societies that

do not necessarily have a king/president and where we can give without necessarily expecting anything in return. Integrating clinamen means understanding that women are not necessarily inferior to men and that the two sexes can live together harmoniously while recognizing their differences. Integrating the clinamen means admitting other ancestral medical practices that have been tried and tested for thousands of years. Integrating clinamen also means respecting animals and, by the same token, the air, water and soil that allow them to survive. In short, it is because we reject clinamen instead of integrating it that the established order is out of breath and disintegrating. The crisis is, of course, very deep-rooted because it is ancestral, but we have the means, thanks to scientific tools, to be able to clearly identify its origin. For it is by understanding the origins of things and fighting against all forms of single-mindedness, the expression of an established order that sees itself as legitimate, that we can move towards unity in diversity.

Finally, we must be careful not to confuse science with technology. For while technology needs science to exist, science exists independently of any form of technology. For the same reason, we must be careful not to confuse spirituality with religion. Here too, while there can be no religion without spirituality, spirituality exists independently of any religion. And while the notion of clinamen can affect any technology or religion, it does not affect science or spirituality. For it is through diversity of opinion and not through a single thought that science progresses. Similarly, spirituality is best expressed by recognizing that each individual is unique and therefore precious, and not by submitting to a dogma that is the same for everyone. It is therefore crucial to realize that we are currently going through a technological and/or religious crisis, not a scientific and/or spiritual crisis. To emerge from this crisis, we can confidently rely on both science and spirituality. For if we ever lump science and technology together with spirituality and religion, there will be no way out other than hell and chaos. Similarly, it's important to be able to tell the difference between a technocrat who claims to be a scientist and a true scientist, for whom technology takes second place. The danger of confusion is even greater with a religious person who claims to be spiritual and a true spiritual being who recognizes no particular god. Let's be vigilant and all will be well…

References

1. ^Peter Fenves, Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1986), pp. 433-452
2. ^Lucretius, « De rerum natura », Book II, 216-219.
3. ^Louis Scutenaire, « Mes Insciptions ».