

# *Moderate innatism and the political projections of the homeostatic imperative*

## *El innatismo moderado y las proyecciones políticas del imperativo homeostático*

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to offer a critical analysis of the political projections that Antonio Damasio has put forward of his specific conception of homeostasis. By starting from a complex conception of homeostasis, one that focuses not only on the maintenance of life but also on flourishing, Damasio argues that certain cultures are contrary to the homeostatic imperative. I will suggest that, even if we adopt the complex interpretation of homeostasis (rather than the deflated one that is usual in most evolutionary approaches), resorting to the concept of homeostasis would lead to a condemnation of modern capitalist societies, not from an ethical or political point of view, but from a strictly evolutionary one (i.e., a point of view that takes into consideration the preservation of the conditions under which our species can survive in the future).

### KEYWORDS:

MODERATE INNATISM; HOMEOSTASIS; EMOTIONS; POLITICS

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## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es ofrecer un análisis crítico de las proyecciones políticas que Antonio Damasio ha planteado de su concepción específica de la homeostasis. Partiendo de una concepción compleja de la homeostasis, que no sólo se centra en el mantenimiento de la vida sino también en el florecimiento, Damasio sostiene que ciertas culturas son contrarias al imperativo homeostático. Sugeriré que, incluso si adoptamos la interpretación compleja de la homeostasis (en lugar de la desinflada habitual en la mayoría de los planteamientos evolucionistas), recurrir al concepto de homeostasis nos llevaría a condenar las sociedades capitalistas modernas, no desde un punto de vista ético o político, sino estrictamente evolutivo (es decir, tomando en consideración la preservación de las condiciones bajo las cuales nuestra especie pueda sobrevivir en el futuro).

## PALABRAS CLAVES:

INNATISMO MODERADO; HOMEOSTASIS; EMOCIONES; POLÍTICA.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE QUEST FOR AN EVOLUTIONARY explanation of the human mind has kept thousands of psychologists and philosophers awake since the publication of *The origin of Species* (1859) and, particularly, *The Descent of Man* (1871). The idea that most (if not all) of our behaviors could be explained by understanding the evolutionary history that led to the present architecture of the human mind seemed to do away with the last remnants of a long history of mind-body dualism that had forestalled the progress of psychology for nearly 2500 years. After the first decades of reductionist outbursts that plagued the approaches of scientifically informed psychologists and philosophers, it became evident that a more precise theoretical model than that of ‘innate instincts’ was needed in order to explain the complexity and richness of the human mind, and it was the encounter between the evolutionary approach and the thesis of the modularity of the mind that seemed to be able to fulfill the promise of explaining both regularity and diversity. The objections that accumulated over the years that led to the crisis of Evolutionary Psychology (*inter alia*, Buller 2005; Gray et al. 2003; Peters 2013; Rellihan 2012; Richardson 2007; Rose 2000; Smith 2019), however, made it clear that if there was a chance of producing evolutionary informed explanations of the human mind, the only strategy would be to endorse a moderate innatist approach to the human mind.

In the following pages I will focus on Antonio Damasio’s work from the specific angle of his concept of homeostasis and its connection to feelings and emotions. I will not be interested in testing the theoretical soundness of his approach or its empirical validity, and neither will my goal be to assess whether his specific variant of moderate innatism can provide a promising framework from which to explain the putative regularities in human cultures. My aim will be rather to focus on certain socio-political consequences that

might derive from the application of his homeostatic approach as a criterion with which to judge the desirability of different modes of organizing the process of production in contemporary societies. In doing so, I will certainly be going beyond Damasio's stated intentions, since I do not aim to provide an internal analysis of his work, but to put it to the test concerning its explanatory power.<sup>1</sup>

## II. DAMASIO'S APPROACH TO MODERATE INNATISM

Antonio Damasio's work can be regarded as an attempt to provide (among many other things) a moderate account of innatism, an account that explains the process through which evolution endowed *homo sapiens* with certain «innate instruments of survival» (1998, p. 262) that are not only universal but also phylogenetically older than our species. It is a *moderate* approach to innatism in that it provides a conceptual framework from which to explain the relation between nature and culture that leaves ample room for a plurality of responses in the interaction between organism and environment in the case of *homo sapiens*. But it is innatist nevertheless in that it stipulates the existence of certain psychological mechanisms that have been preserved by natural selection throughout the lineage that leads to the emergence of *homo sapiens* because of their adaptational value, and that help explain (at least partially) certain elements of human culture and society that non innatist approaches would reject as evolutionarily grounded, such as philosophy, the arts, poetry, theater, and the way we organize our societies from a political perspective. What is more, by grounding his perspective on the concept of homeostasis, Damasio's approach allows us to shift from a merely descriptive account of human cultures or social organizations to a prescriptive one: the different types of societies that humans have built throughout their history can not only be explained in evolutionary terms; they can also be graded in terms of their contribution to the maintenance (and flourishing) of life. As was the case with Spinoza or Nietzsche, Damasio's work is ultimately a political one – or it can be. And, as also was the case with both philosophers, the notion of homeostasis is not only concerned with the mere preservation of life, but also with its *flourishing*. As we shall see later, this is a particularly relevant clarification, given that it provides an additional perspective from which to judge what kind of interactions with the environment and what kind of social organizations are compatible with homeostasis and which are not.

<sup>1</sup> The following pages can be considered in this regard as a continuation of questions that I raised in Braicovich 2022 concerning J. Haidt's moderate innatism and returned to in Braicovich 2024.

### III. EMOTIONS AS REGULATORS OF HOMEOSTASIS

At first glance, Damasio's characterization of emotions as regulatory devices shaped by natural selection to assist the organism in maintaining life might seem to equate them to Evolutionary Psychology's modular psychological mechanisms: Damasio's very first characterizations of emotions, after all, define them as «biologically determined processes, depending on innately set brain devices, laid down by a long evolutionary history» (1999, 51), which can bypass consciousness and operate in a completely automatic and stereotypical manner. If we compare this definition with any standard account of (Fodorian) modules, the differences seem to be only nominal: as (Simpson et al. 2007) define them, for example, modules are «innate, *mandatory*, *fast*, [...] subject to characteristic patterns of development and breakdown [...] and [...] are informationally encapsulated: their internal processes are impervious to influence from other parts of cognition». If we take Prinz's (2006) re-assortment of Fodor's modularity features, we might say that Damasio's emotions are mandatory, fast and *shallow*, that they are *ontogenetically determined*, and that they might even exhibit central inaccessibility and informational encapsulation (but see Majeed 2020 on this last feature).

Although one can find a few passing (and sometimes approving) references to sociobiology and evolutionary psychology in his work (Damasio 1998, p. 177, 2003, p. 160, 2010, p. 210, 2019, pp. 67, 107), it is clear, however, that Damasio's approach to innateness is a far more flexible and underspecified one than Wilson's, Tooby's, Cosmides' or Pinker's: rather than trying to stipulate the precise, discrete psychological mechanisms that humans are born with which might have an evolutionary origin and rationale, Damasio's interest centers around the concept of *homeostasis* and the question of what kind of processes lead to it. This approach has, from the very beginning (Damasio 1998, p. 177), led him away from the need of finding modular psychological mechanisms that would be exclusively human and adaptively tailored to the present or ancient evolutionary landscape of our species. That is why the Fodorian feature that is most notably absent in Damasio's emotions is the element of *domain specificity*, and that is where Damasio and Evolutionary Psychology seem to definitely part ways – at least concerning the descriptive and predictive features of each approach: unless we understand the idea of domain specificity in a weak manner (which, as Prinz 2006, pp. 27–28, suggests, is too trivial to be relevant for the goals of Evolutionary Psychologists), such a concept entails that the relevant psychological mechanisms (be they modular adaptations or emotions) are only triggered by a restricted set of stimuli or, in Fodor's terms, that they are designed to provide answers only to a restricted «range of questions» (1983, p. 103). But while modular mechanisms in Evolutionary Psychology were

tailored by natural selection to respond in an adaptive manner to certain (types of) situations or scenarios that were recurrent in the evolutionary landscape, Damasio's mechanisms are not restricted in that fashion, and can be triggered by *any* situation where the maintenance (and flourishing) of life is (perceived to be) at risk. Against the most fundamental tenet of Evolutionary Psychology, then, the innate devices that natural selection has furnished us with are not fine tuned to deal with specific scenarios that were recurrent in our pleistocenic evolutionary landscape; they are strategies that deal with the general problem of life regulation.

This conclusion is particularly relevant for Damasio's attempt to put his conception of homeostasis to a political use: contrary to what we may find in other innatist approaches (such as Steven Pinker's or Jonathan Haidt's), there is nothing in principle in Damasio's homeostatic approach that would either bar *a priori* certain modes of political organization as contrary to human nature, or favor a particular one as the most suited to our innate psychological constitution. This does not mean, as we will see, that humans will be able to thrive and flourish under any mode of social organization, but the way to establish which societies are and which are not conducive to homeostasis will be a much more flexible one.

#### IV. SICK CULTURES

*The natural process of life regulation orients living organisms  
so that they operate within the range of parameters  
compatible with life maintenance and flourishing. [...]*

*When organisms are forced to operate outside the well-being range  
[...] they drift into disease and toward death.*

(Damasio 2019, p. 69)

As I suggested earlier, the concept of homeostasis has a twofold function: on the one hand, it defines the range of particular interactions with the environment that are compatible with the maintenance and flourishing of life of an organism; on the other, it provides us with a criterion by which to judge whether certain cultures are conducive to the maintenance and flourishing of the life of the individuals of that community. Certain cultures or social organizations will allow individuals to thrive by maximizing well-being, joy, hope and other pleasant feelings; others will lead to a 'homeostatic decline' by systematically forcing the individuals in the community to encounter situations of pain, suffering, loss, and eventually death. Nazi Germany, the Stalinist Soviet Union, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and Mao Zedong's China are four examples that figure prominently in Damasio's work as examples of

«sick cultures» (Damasio 1998, p. 178) that run counter to the homeostatic imperative. In the specific case of Marxist inspired social organizations, Damasio insists on a couple of occasions on the contrast between the original intentions of Marxism of creating a fair world (a goal which was «laudable» in itself; 2003, p. 177), with the human tragedy of the societies that claimed to be built on the socialist principles put forward by Marx and Engels, societies which turned out to be «in frequent clash with well-established mechanisms of automated life regulation» (2003, p. 177).

But what is it about those societies that made them contrary to homeostasis? If we adopted a minimal, deflated account of the concept, it would be logical to evaluate societies and cultures according to variables such as physical health of the individuals and life expectancy. That, however, would render Damasio's condemnation of the Soviet experience contradictory with his homeostatic approach for two reasons: on the one hand, and setting aside the understandable parentheses of the two World Wars, the history of the Soviet Union showed a steady and steep increase in life expectancy: in the seven decades that stretched from the October Revolution in 1917 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the average life expectancy of the Russian people rose from 33 to 69 years (a tendency that began to drop after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and has only recently begun to rise again).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, after the Revolution the Russian health care system was completely overhauled in order to guarantee free access to highly qualified medical services. Despite the fact that the integrated and centralized health care network provided by the state could never fully live up to its promises of insurance for all workers and all kinds of disabilities, full compensation in the event of disabling accidents, etc., the fact remains that if we take the health of the individuals in the community as an index of homeostasis, we would probably have to consider the Soviet experiment a homeostatic success. Whatever one may want to say about the Soviet experience, in sum, both the health and life expectancy of its citizens benefited notably from the centralized organization of the society, in full compliance with a deflated homeostatic imperative.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041395/life-expectancy-russia-all-time/>

<sup>3</sup> Although I believe that a crucial (and too often neglected) distinction should be made between the first decade of the Russian revolution and the Stalinist (and post-Stalinist) period when trying to assess its social and cultural merits or demerits (a distinction that becomes clear in accounts such as those of Broué 1963, Grant 1997, or Trotsky 2014), it is not my aim here to vindicate the Soviet experience either as a whole or in part. I am merely pointing out that resorting to a deflated conception of homeostasis to condemn that historical process is somehow to shoot oneself in the foot, considering the parameters I have mentioned.

By the same token, the adoption of the deflationary account of homeostasis would probably lead us to deem capitalist societies as a bigger threat to the homeostatic imperative than socialist ones, if we consider, for example, the «deep and increasingly complex health emergencies» that, according to the UN and the WHO, linger in the horizon as a result of the interaction of the present global economic crises, political and military conflicts, economic instability and the climate crisis that capitalism has led us to since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>4</sup> Global pandemics, systematic and structural breakdowns of the health care systems of developed countries, rises in death tolls due to otherwise easily preventable diseases, among others, are enough to suggest the fact that homeostatic benefit and a capitalist organization of society are far from being synonyms when one adopts a global perspective rather than focusing on the «success stories» of Nordic countries.<sup>5</sup>

Although one could argue along these lines for a homeostatic condemnation of capitalism and the acquittal of the Soviet experience (although not so of the remaining examples of Cambodia, China and the Third Reich), it is clear, however, that Damasio's approach is not built on the deflated concept of homeostasis, but, as I mentioned earlier, on a more complex one (perhaps originally inspired by Spinoza: *TP* 5.4-6, 6.4). The proposed approach takes into consideration not only objective variables such as health and life expectancy, but also reported well being, reduction of stress, beneficial sociality, and/or maximization of the opportunities of experiencing pleasurable feelings like «the happiness caused by love and friendship» (Damasio 2019, p. 50).<sup>6</sup> Damasio's systematic insistence

4 <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-health-emergency-appeal-2024>  
<https://www.unocha.org/news/un-relief-chief-warns-global-health-under-threat-never>

5 The success of the so called 'Nordic model' is possible only because the lithium which is essential to the digital industry is extracted in third-world countries like Bolivia or Argentina for less than nothing (when we consider the environmental liabilities that its extraction generates for those countries), because pharmaceutical companies are able to test newly developed drugs and vaccines in impoverished populations in India or Sudan, or because a large share of the goods Nordic countries rely on are manufactured in sweat shops in China or Thailand. There are not, in other words, 'Nordic economies'; there are Nordic countries which take part in a zero sum capitalist global economy that distributes roles and benefits unevenly, and that needs to ensure the losses of some players to guarantee the success of others. The ecological crisis we are facing, unfortunately, has shown us that such «success» is only apparent, given that the harm done to the environment impacts directly on all the players, to the point that we have to face the fact that there might not be anyone left to play in the not so distant future.

6 I am not suggesting with this distinction that Damasio introduced the notion of flourishing in order to make room for feelings in his conception of homeostasis. My point is rather that, given that «feelings are accurate indicators of the homeostatic state of an individual» (Damasio 2019, p. 95), they let us glimpse into aspects of our homeostatic state that the criteria of physical health and life expectancy fail to grasp.



on the notion of «life maintenance *and flourishing*» expresses precisely this shift away from a Hobbesian reduction of the goal of life to mere preservation and towards an account of homeostasis that can include the conquests of human culture as an extension of the same natural process that lead humans, dogs and maggots to seek nourishment:

Homeostasis is the powerful, unthought, unspoken imperative, whose discharge implies, for every living organism, small or large, nothing less than enduring and prevailing. The part of the homeostatic imperative that concerns «enduring» is transparent: it produces survival and is taken for granted without any specific reference or reverence whenever the evolution of any organism or species is considered. The part of homeostasis that concerns «prevailing» is more subtle and rarely acknowledged. It ensures that life is regulated within a range that is not just compatible with survival but also conducive to flourishing, to a projection of life into the future of an organism or a species. [...] Homeostasis has guided, non-consciously and non-deliberatively, without prior design, the selection of biological structures and mechanisms capable of not only maintaining life but also advancing the evolution of species to be found in varied branches of the evolutionary tree. This conception of homeostasis, which conforms most closely to the physical, chemical, and biological evidence, is remarkably different from the conventional and impoverished conception of homeostasis that confines itself to the «balanced» regulation of life's operations. (Damasio 2019, p. 17)

Although the rejection of the 'impoverished' conception of homeostasis applies to all living (and thriving) organisms and species, in the case of *homo sapiens* this is deepened by an additional factor: the emergence of self-consciousness and the «drama of the human condition» (Damasio 1999, p. 316). Despite the fact that consciousness and self-consciousness were probably selected by evolution because of their adaptive nature, self-consciousness in particular also 'gifted' us with the curse of knowing about the risks and dangers of life, leading us more often than not to be disturbed by their mere possibility; it led us to wonder about the origins and meaning of life and it burdened us with the uncertainty that can come from that quest; it gave us the capacity not only of understanding the potential for pleasure and pleasurable feelings, but also the capacity to experience their absence. In a somewhat dialectical manner, evolution led, via the emergence of self-consciousness, to the homeostatically demanded emergence of culture. Not just scientific development, then, but philosophy and art can be seen as tentative solutions to the homeostatic imperative:



The case for the homeostatic function of the visual arts—which begin with cave paintings—and for the tradition of oral storytelling in poetry, theater, and political exhortation, is not difficult to make. These manifestations often referred to the management of life–food sources and the hunt, for example, the organization of the group, wars, alliances, loves, betrayals, envies, jealousies, and, quite often, the violent resolution of the problems faced by the participants. Paintings, and far later texts, provided signposts and pauses for reflection, warning, play, and enjoyment. They provided attempts at clarifications for what must have been confusing confrontations with reality. They helped sort out and organize knowledge. They provided meaning. [...] Philosophical inquiry and science developed from the same homeostatic cloth. (Damasio 2019, p. 72)

#### V. CAPITALISM AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

If we move past a deflated conception of homeostasis and argue for a more complex (vitalistic) one that focuses on «achieving viable, unregulated life states that tend to produce flourishing» (Damasio 2019, p. 24), are we in a better position to assess the merits of a given social organization or mode of production? Perhaps we are: despite their health and life expectancy rates, it would seem difficult to argue that the Stalinist Soviet Union or Mao Zedong’s China were fertile terrains for the flourishing of the regular citizen. Intellectual oppression, suppression of free speech, policing of everyday life and the blurring (or total dismissal) of the limits between the private and public sphere, are features that cannot have made it easy to pursue a satisfying life project sustained on joy, hope and pleasurable feelings.

However, it would be equally difficult to argue in favor of the homeostatic benefits of the totalitarian regimes of Iran or Saudi Arabia, or even of democratic societies as Haiti, Syria, South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, all of which are capitalist countries that might be seen as incarnations of Hobbes’ state of nature, where individuals live in «continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’ (*Leviathan*, 1.13.9). On the basis of those examples, it would be wrong to suggest the existence of an exclusive link between a socialist or communist mode of production and homeostatic decline, since capitalist countries too can become a threat to the possibility of human flourishing. It could be argued, to be fair, that I may be cherry picking examples of underdeveloped, third-world countries, and that if we redirected our look to modern industrialized countries, things would look much different. One cannot deny the fact that Europe and North America have reached unprecedented peaks in technological developments, and that their literacy rates have never been higher in those two regions. Contrary to the promises of the Enlightenment, however, those variables have not led to a systematic and stable increase in well-being.

Quite the contrary: the demise of the Soviet Bloc during the 1990's and the unbridled expansion of the forces of free market have led, among other things, to a mental health pandemic the consequences of which we are only beginning to grasp. According to the estimates of the World Health Organization, more than 300.000.000 individuals suffered from chronic depression from 2008 to 2017 (which represented an increase of more than 18% compared to 2005-2015). As the dates show, this tendency cannot be blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic (which only worsened an existing trend), and the causes should be sought in the flexibilization and precarization of the working conditions of the labor force, as well as the decline in their general living conditions, all of which have led to a «burnout society» (Han, 2022) with rising rates of suicide, depression, anxiety, chronic stress, sleeping disorders and substance abuse (Berardi 2003; Borowy 2017; Büchs & Koch 2019; Hamilton & Denniss 2005; Kasser 2002; Maté & Maté 2022). One could argue that events like the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermaths or the opioid crisis are temporal and/or geographically isolated events that may not recur in the future. But the general trends tell against that idea, and seem to support the notion that the decline on working and living conditions will only be worsened as the climate crisis deepens, and as the developments in AI assisted technological developments produce more unemployment and precarization of the working conditions.<sup>7</sup> Among the grimmest descriptions of the living conditions to which we have been led in the last decades is, Incidentally, Damasio's analysis of the «cultural crisis» that liberal democracies are currently undergoing:

Although scientific and technical literacy have never been higher, the public spends little time reading novels or poetry, still the surest and most rewarding way of gaining entry into the comedy and drama of existence and having an opportunity to reflect on who we are or may be. Apparently, there is no time to be spent on the nonpractical matter of just being. A part of the societies that celebrate modern science and technology and that most benefit from them appears to be spiritually bankrupt, in the secular and religious sense of the term spiritual. Judging from their unconcerned acceptance of problematic financial crises—the 2000 Internet bubble, the 2007 mortgage abuses, and the 2008 banking collapse—they appear to be morally bankrupt as well. Intriguingly, or perhaps not so, the level of happiness in the societies that have most gained from the remarkable progress of our time is either stable or declining, assuming we can trust the respective measurements. (2019, p. 84)

7 On the side of conflict and violence, the new arms race between China (and Russia) and the USA (and NATO) is enough to debunk Pinker's (otherwise grossly ethnocentric) *dictum* that we may be living in the most peaceful era in history (Pinker 2018, p. 19).

Given that, in Damasio's own words, this situation leads us to ponder the «the prospect of ungovernable societies» (2019, p. 84), the 'maintenance and flourishing of life' does not seem to be what capitalist societies hold in stock for us.

If one were to believe that the current trends in unemployment, precarization of labor and living conditions, mental health issues, substance abuse, etc. did not derive *more geometrico* from the premises on which capitalism is built (i.e., free market and private ownership of the means of production), one could escape the most pessimistic conclusions concerning the homeostatic decline of modern industrial capitalist societies. To do so, of course, one would have to assume, among other things, that a capitalist structuring of society is compatible with the *flourishing* (and not just the maintenance) of life *for all*. In other words, one would have to still believe in the possibility of a sustainable capitalist world system where every one of its citizens is not excluded from the possibility of pursuing a flourishing life – a scenario that would be contrary to the economic interests of the owners of the means of production. The reason why capitalism cannot be defended from the perspective of homeostasis by focusing on the wealth, literacy or equality rates of a selected cluster of countries, in other words, is that those rates are made possible by the destruction of the resources of other countries and the exploitation of billions of individuals in underdeveloped countries who provide the cheap labor force that is necessary to sustain the level of wealth of the former.

In order to ponder the homeostatic merits of a given society, it is not enough, therefore, to extrapolate on the basis of the situation of a selected subgroup; one must take into account not only the whole of that society, but also the situation of the societies with which it is structurally linked from a productive point of view. (Not to do so would be tantamount to, for instance, celebrating the merits of a society that outsourced its processes of production to an enslaved one). And it is this same global perspective that one should adopt when pondering the homeostatic benefit of Stalinism, Nazism or Maoism: if we focused on the working and living conditions of the bureaucratic elite after the rise to power of Joseph Stalin, one would perhaps be tempted to conclude that it enhanced their conditions for flourishing; and the same could be said about an important number of the citizens of the Third Reich: provided that you were not Jewish, gay, a communist or gypsy, *and* did not have any qualms about the torture and extermination of all the latter groups (among others), the Nazi regime must have proven to be a perfect place for flourishing, both from a health and survival perspective as well as from a cultural viewpoint.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the previous pages I have tried to show that Damasio's approach to a moderate version of innatism is not merely a descriptive endeavor, but also a political one, in that it proposes an enriched conception of homeostasis with which to evaluate the merits and pitfalls of different cultures or societies. I have also suggested that Damasio's focus on emotions as the innate vehicles of innate mechanisms which natural selection has furnished us with in order to survive, thrive and flourish, has allowed him to stay away from modular conceptions of innatism which have sometimes been used to charge certain forms of societal organization as contrary to human nature. His moderate account of innatism only commits him to the claim that certain forms of political, cultural and social organizations may clash with the homeostatic imperative.

Is Damasio's enriched conception of homeostasis a good criterion by which to *predict* the thriving and demise of cultures and societies? I believe not: the degree of compliance with the homeostatic imperative does not function adequately as a good predictor of the fall or endurance of societies: on the one hand, there are numerous examples of empires built upon the enslavement of the vast majority of its inhabitants that lasted for centuries; on the other, and concerning the two cases to which Damasio returns systematically, the causes that led to the fall of the Stalinist and of the Nazi regime have nothing to do with the living conditions that they fostered, but rather with the dynamics of power they created with other world powers. Lastly, were it for the failure to promote conditions for flourishing, we would be forced to predict that capitalism must be reaching the point of implosion – and that hardly seems to be the case.

That does not mean, nevertheless, that homeostasis cannot function as a useful criterion by which to evaluate those societies. But in order to do so, two difficulties need to be addressed. In the first place, a more precise account of what counts as homeostatic benefit must be produced: the current account we can garner from Damasio's work is lacking in specification as to what counts as conducive to flourishing in complex organisms such as ourselves, and one is often forced to work on the basis of analogies. In the second place, an evaluation of the homeostatic merits of a given society must be done from a global, integrated perspective, one that takes into account the whole of that society *and* the individuals that live in the societies that the former is structurally linked to from the point of view of production.

An additional dimension should be added, however, to the globality requirement, a dimension that biologists, ethologists and historians had rarely considered necessary to take seriously into consideration until some decades

ago: if we wish to evaluate the viability of a given social organization, we should not only include in our assessment its impact on the whole of its citizens and of those who are economically linked to it; we must also take into consideration the impact it has on the environment where those individuals live. If the way a certain society is organized from the point of view of production threatens the very same existence of the environment it is supposed to inhabit, it seems safe to say that it has become a homeostatic menace. Unfortunately, not even the fact that a mode of production is (or has become) a homeostatic menace is enough to predict its demise, and the destruction of the environment is as just as possible (or so it seems for the moment) as the fall of that mode of production.

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