



The Animality of Animalism: Animals/ Humans in Spanish America's Fin- de-Siècle Culture

La animalidad del animalismo: animales y humanos
en la cultura de fines del siglo XIX en Hispanoamérica

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| Abstract: In this essay, I will analyze how “animalismo” became a crucial concept, intersecting the debates about race and gender which inspired the ideas of Spanish American intellectuals during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. I will start by explaining how this concept became associated with scientific debates related to Darwinian evolutionism, and how the derived ideas fueled a new gendered racial normativity that gave rise to a crisis by the 1900s. In the second part, I will analyze how race, gender and sexuality became intrinsically related to animalism, and the problems that the association between humans and animals posed for political ideas about the nation.

Keywords: Animalism; Darwinism; Race; Gender; Argentina.

| Resumen: En este ensayo analizaré cómo “animalismo” se convirtió en un concepto crucial en el proceso de transformación de las ideas de raza y género durante el cuarto final del siglo XIX. El ensayo comienza explicando cómo los intelectuales de Hispanoamérica asociaron “animalismo” con los debates científicos relacionados con el evolucionismo darwinista, y cómo las ideas que se generaron a partir de este intercambio de ideas originaron normativas raciales y de género que culminaron creando una crisis socio-cultural para el comienzo del siglo XX. En la segunda parte, se analiza cómo las contradicciones que surgieron a raíz de la adopción de la idea de animalismo cambiaron las ideas de raza, género y sexualidad, lo cual afectó el entendimiento de la identidad de la nación a partir del comienzo del siglo XX.

Palabras clave: Animalismo; Darwinismo; Raza; Género; Argentina.

According to Eric T. Olson, “there is certain human organism, and that organism is you. You and it are one at the same” (2003, 318). This view has been called “animalism” and this concept is as debated today as it was by the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, very little progress has been made in forging an agreement about the meaning of humanity as a species of animal. While there is little disagreement about the fact that we are human beings, and that the latter are a kind of animal, the association of these two categories remains controversial. “Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, and Hegel” all denied animalism, Aristotle and his followers being an exception; so much so that “it is hard to find a major figure in the history of Western philosophy who thought that we are animals (Olson 2003, 318).” This view is also resisted in non-Western traditions. Today “animalism” is “a thesis about the kind of thing that we, human persons, are. Whether it is or entails a thesis about anything else—like what the conditions of our persistence through time are, or whether we are wholly material things—depends on facts about the persistence conditions of animals and whether they are wholly material” (Thorton 2016, 515). Animalism “implies materialism (animals are material things), but not vice versa”, and implies, as we will see, specific philosophical views about nature (Olson 2003, 319).

In the context of modern Spanish-America, the relationship between animal and human species became relevant during the 1870s. The Darwinian revolution introduced new elements to the discussion of human evolution, and of the materiality of the human body, which led to a new materialism that challenged human exceptionalism. At the same time, the ascendancy of scientific ideas over political philosophy merged human, social and animal evolution and, as a consequence, the division between animals and humans became blurred. All existing beings evolved under the same mechanistic rules that operated under one logic, survival. As such, animalism was understood as a crucial concept to explain social formation, and nation building increasingly meant a reflection on the workings of natural selection.

By the end of the nineteenth century, thoughts about the animal in Spanish America were connected to the European philosophical tradition, but addressing the particular needs that existed in the region, which explains how and why “animalismo” intersected the debates about race and gender that were at the center of modern ideas in the region by this time. This article analyzes this dynamic and starts by explaining how animalism became associated to scientific debates related to Darwinian evolutionism in order to explain social evolution. In the second part, I will analyze how race, gender and sexuality became intrinsically related to animalism, and the problems that the association between humans and animals posed to prior ideas about the nation. It is important to clarify that while each of the countries that emerged from the Spanish colonies developed ideas that responded to its own context, the intellectuals that participated in the debates about animalism all shared the same ideological framework. The reason for the common context is that the meaning of the animal became in the second part of the 19th century the result of Darwin’s evolutionism, which created a common reality for those interested in science both in the Americas and Europe. This

essay explains how this scientific environment confronted the new meaning of what it was to be human.

MATERIALISM, DARWINISM, AND ANIMALISM

Scholasticism understood man as a rational animal, attributing to humans a dual nature with a body-animal that was different from the soul, the realm of the spiritual. These two different parts remained relevant in the philosophical discussions of the 18th century, though a radical materialism attempted to eliminate the spiritual altogether. In Spanish America, this materialist position became the political foundation of the radical republicanism that emerged in the early 19th century. Taking on the philosophies of Locke and Condillac, “feeling” and “sensation” were viewed by these philosophers as manifesting both in animals and humans. This association emphasized the need for education, since the latter accelerated the differentiation of what was defined as civilized humanity. In the absence of other-worldly reasons, or metaphysical forces, there was a need to develop a theory of moral and political sciences, which was Destutt de Tracy’s *Ideology*. This was the science of ideas that would develop education and morality and “the greatest of arts, for whose success all the others must cooperate” in order to regulate society (Kennedy 1979, 355). Republicanism and progress rested on ideology, which introduced order among humans through the replacement of religion by a scientific form of social organization. This meant that education was central to the concurrent replacement of a morality based on religion or, in general, on metaphysical beliefs. This was a project for a new elite formed by those who were assumed to be prepared to rule the new political system.

This materialism was also reinforced by a physiology developed by George Cabanis, which connected the political with psychology. “A reformed physiology would be the basis for a new science of mankind – a dream shared by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy, Degerando and others associated with the philosophy of Ideology” (Tresch 2012, 195). Destutt and Cabanis “launched a project for a science of man that would synthesize medical, historical, physiological, and zoological considerations” (Tresch 2012, 158). Cabanis believed that “there was a continuity between humans and other animals, with a difference only of degree between thought and the sensitivity and irritability inherent to organic tissue. This view was also supported in the phrenology promoted by Gall” (Tresch 2012, 158). In the Restoration, “physician Joseph-Victor Broussais used the notion of matter’s intrinsic irritability as the basis for a militant assertion of the metaphysical continuity between humans and animals and between thought and matter” (Tresch 2012, 158). Maine de Biran, disciple of both Cabanis and Tracy, developed these ideas even further, “recognizing that the mental activity he highlighted was only half of psychic existence. Alongside it, bodily conditions exercised a strong and even commanding influence over consciousness”, which emphasized the role of the material in mental processes (Seigel 2005, 254).

This philosophical and scientific understanding became very influential in Spanish America. The belief that philosophy, science, and education were tools to civilize men subjected to a primitive environment allowed intellectuals to imagine the transformation of humans into enlightened creatures that were more separated from the animal brutality that was typical during colonialism. In 1823, the Colombian writer Juan García del Río (1795-1856) wrote an article about musical education in *Biblioteca Americana* that expressed the importance of feelings, perception, and the education of the senses in developing a new humanity, which was called “civilization”.

En resumen, no viene a ser este sistema otra cosa que una aplicación, hecha a la ciencia música, de la marcha analítica i filosófica trazada por Bacon, Locke, J. J. Rousseau, Condillac, Destutt Tracy, Cabanis, &c.; la misma que, por fortuna, se va adoptando en todas las ciencias i artes para facilitar su estudio, i acelerar sus progresos (75).

The work of the Ideologues was contradicted in the 1830s by the philosophies of Victor Cousin and Auguste Comte, both promoters of systems that introduced a more conservative approach, as opposed to the materialism of Destutt and his followers. As was the case in France, in Spanish America the chaos that political radicalism had triggered by the 1830s favored the search for a more “natural” political development that did not fuel political extremes. In Argentina, for example, Marcos Sastre (1808-1887) gave a speech in 1837 that addressed how his country’s republicanism had ended in a dictatorship, and asked for a more measured understanding of nation formation. As with Cousin, there is here a spiritualized notion of nature that served the purpose of regulating social transformation and progress according to natural design.

Las costumbres, la ilustración son progresos del espíritu, y para los progresos del espíritu se necesita orden, paz y tiempo. Este es el buen camino, la marcha directa. Esta es la que sigue la naturaleza en todas sus obras: ninguna violencia, ningún salto, nada repentino; todo es lento y progresivo en la naturaleza. Afortunadamente la experiencia ha revelado al pueblo esta verdad (Sastre 1837, 16).

This notion of a chain of being became renewed by the 1870s with the spreading of Darwinian ideas, which seemed to corroborate a more conservative approach to politics. Natural law was applied to all species and made animal, human, and social evolution the result of an organic process unfolding over time. Humans were subject to the same laws that determined all species, thus making animalism an important part of evolutionary debates. This new perspective began to be discussed in 1859 with the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origins of Species*, but with the publication of his *Descent of Man* in 1871 the animalization of man, and, indirectly, the humanization of animals, triggered many debates. According to the English naturalist the “early progenitors of man were no doubt once covered with hair, both sexes having beards; their ears were pointed and capable of movement, and their bodies were provided with a tail having the proper muscles” (Darwin 1871, vol. 1, 206). As Darwin himself

recognized, if “man had not been his own classifier, he would never have thought of founding a separate order for his own reception” (1871, vol. 1, 191). Citing Huxley, he concluded “that man in all parts of his organization differs less from the higher apes, than these do from the lower members of the same group.” Consequently, there was “no justification for placing man in a distinct order” (1871, vol. 1, 191). In this view, while there were differences between humans and animals, they were differences in degree, and not usefully construed as differences in kind.

Darwin recognized that it was “often difficult to distinguish between the power of reason and that of instinct”, but few thinkers disputed “that animals possess some power of reasoning” (1871, vol. 1, 46). Animals may constantly be seen “to pause, deliberate, and resolve”, which indicated that an animal could somewhat think, and, in the same way, humans could act on pure instinct, which made it difficult to establish clear limits between how both operated (1871, vol. 1, 46). Morality became then, a category that separated human beings from other animals, particularly when associated with the development of human civilizations. This meant that the social instincts, “including sympathy,” always served “as the primary impulse and guide”, which denied that “the most noble part of our nature” was based on selfishness (1871, vol. 1, 98). “Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is humanity to the lower animals,” seemed to the English naturalist a recent moral acquisition, and it was apparently “unfelt by savages, except towards their pets” (1871, vol 1, 101). For example, the very idea of humanity, “as far as I could observe, was new to most of the Gauchos of the Pampas” (1871, vol 1, 101). Using the examples provided by “moralists of the derivative school and by some intuitionists,” he affirmed that “the standard of morality has risen since an early period in the history of man” (1871, vol. 1, 103). Nature favored the perfecting of species, which meant that over time things would change, though the timescale was not universal and change happened at different times and rates.

ANIMALS & GENDER

The reception of *Descent* immediately identified the problem of animalism in Darwin’s theory and its consequences for the political and social order. For example, a book review published in *The Examiner* on March 4th of 1871, explains that the conclusion at which Darwin had arrived was not agreeable to the “natural man;” and it offended, or seemed to offend, “that sense of dignity which redeems the lowest savages from mere animalism and which ever [sic] remains the most precious safeguard of virtue.” There was no objection “to the degradation of men to animals, but the reverse operation” was “bitterly resented” (“Mr. Darwin’s *Descent*”, 233). At the time, there were several ways to clearly demarcate the differences between man and animals, “such as that man is the only progressive animal, or that he alone possesses language, or has self-consciousness, or a sense of beauty, or any religion,” except for religion, all the other characteristics were also found in some degree among lower animals, and not all

men believed in religion (“Mr. Darwin’s Descent”, 233). As the article concluded, it is recognized that while there was evidence for “the vast superiority of the mental power of man,” there were not many human beings “capable of distinguishing themselves” from animals that could learn to resolve new problems (“Mr. Darwin’s Descent”, 234). This broached the discussion of human ancestry and the plasticity of the human form, which was not accepted by all scientists.

In Spanish America, the new evolutionary ideas were discussed in a similar way. On one side, “animalidad” became an important concept to explain the universality of natural law; on the other, the perfection of the human species was also praised and defended. For example, Alfonso Francisco Nogués (?-1895), a French geologist who was the President of the Chilean Scientific Society, concluded one article by affirming these two ideas.

Pues bien, ya que el transformismo es jeneralmente aceptado como la esplicacion de la filiacion de los seres organizados ¿por qué no habríais de aceptarlo vosotros para la jenealogía de este organismo complejo que se llama el hombre, cuya estructura anatómica i morfológica i cuyas funciones fisiológicas i psíquicas son semejantes a las de los animales. [...] Aceptando el transformismo como la doctrina filosófica, biológica, naturalista que explica la descendencia de los organismos de formas sencillas a formas mas perfectas, deberíamos sacar de ella la conclusion final, la consecuencia lójica de que el hombre, el mas perfecto de los seres organizados descende tambien de una forma antecesora que se relaciona con los animales mas proximos a nuestra especie (Nogués 1893, 179).

In addition, evolutionism began to be related to reproduction and mating practices that were described in similar terms for animals and humans. Analogies that transcended species, and applied the same reasoning to explain procreation, became commonplace in challenging past ideas about the formation of the family and society. The Venezuelan writer José Gil Fortoul (1861-1943), a defender of science, made clear that apes and humans participated in similar sexual unions, and argued that they were part of social evolution, something that certainly contradicted Catholic orthodoxy.

En los monos existe la misma diversidad de uniones sexuales que en el hombre: el *Macacus silenus* no tiene más que una hembra y le es fiel hasta la muerte, – ¡ideal del indisoluble matrimonio moderno! El *Gorilla gina* forma pequenias hordas dirigidas por un solo macho adulto, como sucede en los primeros rebaños de hombres.

La familia humana, bajo su aspecto patriarcal, es efecto de una larga evolución social (1890, 6).

The explanation for mating and sexual attraction became linked to beauty and aesthetics, which according to pre-Darwinian ideas was in humans connected to morality. This meant that sexual selection, where the choosing of a mate was related to the attraction to something beautiful, such as color or voice, became the favorite mechanism to address unions among humans.¹ In this sense, the new evolutionary understanding

¹ For more about sexual selection in Latin America, see: Novoa and Levine (2010); Levine and Novoa (2012).

of mating provided another connection between animals and humans, since sexual attraction among humans was explained by analogies to animal courtship, such as the role that plumage and singing had among birds. In a translation of *L'origine du Language* (1879), a popular book written by the French Anthropologist Sigismund Zaborowski-Moindron (1851-1928) and published in Bogota in 1884, these ideas are used to explain how language had emerged among humans due to the need the “male had to enchant and excite the female” through beautiful sounds and singing (Zaborowski-Moindron 1879, 81). Mating, and mating rituals, were essential to human evolution and were at the center of Darwin’s understanding of race as the result of aesthetic preference. In this view of animalism, females were courted by anxious males who needed to continue their lineages. In addition, among modern humans, intelligent choices could be used to overcome simple instinct, which meant the cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility to promote more rational and moral unions.

Darwin reminded his readers in the conclusion of *Descent of Man* that man scanned “with scrupulous care the character and pedigree of his horses, cattle, and dogs” before matching them; but when he came to “his own marriage he rarely, or never,” took “any such care” (1871, vol. 2, 402). In fact, in choosing a spouse, he was “impelled by nearly the same motives as are the lower animals when left to their own free choice,” though he was in “so far superior to them” that he highly valued “mental charms and virtues.”

Sexual needs and desires were the most popular subject for the expression of animalism in scientific and popular literature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century (1871, vol. 2, 402-403). Intentionally or otherwise, the English naturalist’s attention to the importance that sexual unions had for the improvement and preservation of lineages turned mating into a matter of politics and policy to promote national development. He warned that man “by selection [might] do something not only for the bodily constitution and frame of his offspring, but for their intellectual and moral qualities” (1871, vol. 2, 403). Also, he recommended that “both sexes ought to refrain from marriage [with mates] in any marked degree inferior in body or mind;” though he acknowledged that “such hopes [were] Utopian” and impossible to realize until the laws of inheritance were thoroughly known. The future understanding of “the principles of breeding and of inheritance” would mean we might no longer “hear ignorant members of our legislature rejecting with scorn a plan for ascertaining by an easy method whether or not consanguineous marriages are injurious to man” (1871, vol. 2, 403). Matrimony should not work as it did among animals, but be the result of reasoned decisions taken for future improvement of a group.

This emphasis on the politics of mating among humans enhanced over time the importance of exercising control over female bodies. In 1918, in Chile, Benjamín Vicuña Subercaseaux (1875-1911) criticized the naturalist philosophy circulating in Europe and the Americas, because it was “nihilist” and it contained certain ideas said to be “scientific and prophetic”, with the intention to “erase from all legislation any remaining sentimentality”, particularly regarding courtship and mating. Scientific re-

quests to give women more say in education and awareness of social issues was related with the role they had in choosing mates, but Vicuña rejected any kind of social reform because it meant “the destruction of society and the return to the primitive animalism that led to free-love.” Women, according to this view, were “weak, without rights and freedom,” but, at the same time, they had “an immense power that they could lose if they were emancipated: the power of love that in the old legend always placed the king dominated by the slave” (1918, 147).² This mysterious and spiritual power was the “natural” expression of the differences between the two sexes and should be preserved in society.

Ideas of this kind were debated between those who saw love as a spiritual force and those who reduced it to a biological and animal impulse. In literature, this theme was very important, and it was connected to the dispute that was taking place between those who supported spiritualist and materialist philosophical ideas. In one story by the Argentine writer Emilio Gouchon Cané (1860-1912), published in 1917, for example, one character explained that he viewed love “from a biological point of view” (1917, 92). A “mysterious attraction of the sexes, based on common laws followed by all beings,” explained the formation of romantic relationships (1917, 92). His friend reacted in frustration, saying that in taking this stand he was “preaching the animal life, like those of cats and dogs”, and this was known as vulgar animalism by those who defended love as a spiritual and elevated force that only applied to humans (1917, 92-93).³

Animalism became simultaneously a positive force when it helped men to demonstrate a strong sexuality that affirmed their power in the struggle for existence that derived from natural selection, but, at the same time, it could also signal a dangerous regression to a primitive past in which reason was dominated by instinct as was the case with lower animals. It is for this reason that animalism had simultaneous meanings that made its use very contradictory. In 1916, Dr. Paulina Luisi (1875-1949), a feminist and defender of negative eugenics⁴ in Argentina and Uruguay, delivered a lecture to defend the need to teach sexual education in schools in order to “educate the youth in the ways

² Original text: “Andan por Europa, en la filosofía mui avanzada i, por lo tanto, algo nihilista, ciertas ideas que se dicen científicas o proféticas: barrer de la lejislación los resabios sentimentales; devolverle a la mujer sus derechos i su libertad, etc., etc. Estas ideas no significan otra cosa que la destrucción de la sociedad, i la vuelta al animalismo primitivo: rematan en el amor libre. Quitarle a la lejislación lo que llaman ‘resabios sentimentales’, es quitarle la moralidad i el orden. Devolverle a la mujer sus ‘derechos i libertad’, es ponerla en condición de luchar con el hombre de igual a igual, i ser vencida, por lo tanto. Esto ni siquiera sería galante... La mujer, sér débil, sin derechos ni libertad, tiene un poder inmenso; poder que perdería si se emancipara: el poder del amor que en la leyenda antigua pone siempre al rei dominado por su esclava.”

³ Original text: “Biología, pura biología. Misteriosas interacciones de los sexos, basadas en leyes comunes a todos los seres, desde las primeras manifestaciones de vida organizada hasta el hombre que, en su infinita e imbécil vanidad, se cree la meta de las perfecciones... [...] – ¡Oh! ¡Oh! No digas eso, Marcelo. Me hace daño que hables así! Predicas la vida animal.” Emphasis in the original if not otherwise indicated.

⁴ For an understanding of eugenics in Latin America and Argentina, see: Stepan (1991; 1992); Miranda (2014); Vallejo and Miranda (2014); Barrancos (2006); Reggiani (2010a; 2010b); Kopelovich (2018).

to exercise their sexuality instead of leaving the latter abandoned to the irrational impulses of the instinct” (1916, 15).⁵ This introduction to “*sexual discipline*” in the youth meant to awaken the “*genesis feeling*,” the feeling of “family and race” that resided in each person’s moral being (1916, 16). Girls needed to be educated early with their dolls to develop their maternal sentiments, and, in the case of boys, “the paternal feeling” often expressed in the “spirit of domination” over the youngest students needed to be promoted. The goal was to develop “*responsibility when facing race*” (1916, 16-17).⁶ Hygiene was an important consideration at a time in which venereal diseases were growing.

In this regard both men and women needed to be educated; the latter should know not only about sexuality, but also about everything related to maternity in order to better fulfill “the function that determined the creation of our sex” (Luisi 1916, 22). In addition, animalism needed to be constrained by awareness of the social ramifications of becoming sexually active.⁷ In conclusion, Luisi proposed that since the eugenic instinct was under the control of the “disciplinary action of the will” sexual education should be part of moral education. In addition, in the schools attended by teen-agers and pre-teen students “the sexual education was *needed urgently* to fight sexual diseases and the degeneration of race” (1916, 24).⁸

⁵ Original text: “Moralistas y sociólogos están de acuerdo en que ha llegado el momento de la educación sexual, es decir, de la educación del instinto genésico: es necesario educar en los jóvenes el ejercicio de esta función en lugar de dejarla abandonada a los empujes irreflexivos del instinto, favorecidos aún por la ocasión.”

⁶ Original text: “Se trata, pues, de una simple cuestión de educación, esto es, de *disciplina sexual*. La experimentación apoya estas afirmaciones cuya verdad es innegable. [...] Es necesario, para esto, que la educación sexual entre a formar parte como rama de la educación, física en cuanto orgánica, y sobre todo moral en el ejercicio de su acción volitiva y coercitiva. Esta parte se refiere preferentemente al sexo masculino. Es en la adolescencia y en la juventud cuando estos hábitos de disciplina podrán ser eficazmente adquiridos; pero es necesario que la acción educadora de la escuela se extienda aun más allá, buscando la educación del sentimiento *genésico*, si así puede llamarse ese sentimiento de la familia y de la raza, que vive y per dura a través de todas las deformaciones que la vida pueda imprimir al *ente* moral de cada uno. – Se traduce en sentimiento de protección para el pequeño; tanto mayor cuanto mayor es la diferencia de edad entre uno y otro; en sentimiento maternal en la niña que comienza a ejercerlo con su muñeca; sentimiento paternal en el varón que se revela muchas veces en un espíritu de dominación sobre el más joven. Hay que despertar y vigorizar todos estos sentimientos que tienen atingencia con el porvenir de la raza y que, dormidos aún en el corazón del niño, deben ser cultivados con esmero; el joven aprenderá a sentir las responsabilidades que le incumben respecto a la especie, que confía en él la tarea de continuarla. Todos estos y otros sentimientos concomitantes contribuirán eficazmente a fortalecer la educación del sentimiento sexual y de la disciplina de la voluntad sobre el instinto generador, por exigir la *responsabilidad frente a la raza*.”

⁷ Original text: “Es, pues, necesario que en la adolescencia, ella, que ya en la familia suele hacer un aprendizaje forzado de su futuro oficio, reciba nociones prácticas de maternología y puericultura, complemento imprescindible de su educación e *instrumento necesario* para el mejor cumplimiento de la función para que ha sido creado nuestro sexo.”

⁸ Original text: “2. Estando sometido el instinto genésico a la acción disciplinaria de la voluntad, la *educación sexual* debe formar parte de la *educación moral*. 3.” En las escuelas frecuentadas por prepúberes y adolescentes, y en las de jóvenes y adultos, la instrucción sexual es *necesaria y urgente*, como medio de defensa social contra las afecciones sexuales y la degeneración de la raza.”

In another conference, delivered in 1919, Luisi mentioned Darwin's views on marriage in *Descent of Man*. She insisted on the importance of “**negative eugenics**” since natural selection assured the survival of the fittest, and sexual selection “the survival of those who were most able” (1919, 5-6).⁹ Luisi naturalized sexual desire according to social gender norms, so men had the active role while women were sexually more passive by nature; both needed to pick the moment to conceive carefully because everything that happened could affect the health of the embryo. This was linked to the uses of substances that impaired reason, such as alcohol or drugs, a preoccupation that was pervasive both in the Americas and Europe. It is for this reason that campaigns against alcohol, for example, were explained in the context of racial protection. In 1909, the health manual *Salud y Hogar* published an article on narcotics and alcohol that included a reference to a publication in the *Pacific Medical Journal* that affirmed that beer promoted “deliberate crime without provocation” (“Los estimulantes”, 119). It was even worse than distilled liquor because it was the drink that “animalized the most” (“Los estimulantes”, 119).¹⁰ Control of those social activities that the masses enjoyed became a state priority in order to avoid the descent of society into animalism.

ANIMALISM & RACE

In *Descent of Man*, Darwin argues that while “it seems at first sight a monstrous supposition that the jet blackness of the negro has been gained through sexual selection; but this view is supported by various analogies, and we know that negroes admire their own blackness” (1871, vol. 2, 381-82). This meant that skin color did not originate as an adaptation for survival, but as a preference for what was considered beautiful to help in the process of mating. Race then, was a function not of natural law, but of access to females, which resulted in larger progeny due to the possession of certain

⁹ Original text: “Por desgracia, estas hermosas ideas permanecen aún en el campo de las soñadas utopías no porque, como afirmaba el sabio inglés, ellas “no podrán realizarse mientras las leyes de la herencia no nos sean completamente conocidas” sino porque nadie se ha preocupado todavía de llevarlas al campo experimental; porque no se ha tenido aún el valor de introducir en el espíritu de las masas ciertas nociones perfectamente conocidas y de trascendental importancia como lo son, por ejemplo, las normas de la **eugénica negativa**, cuyas nociones es de urgente necesidad vulgarizar entre el pueblo.” “En la naturaleza, la selección de los reproductores más aptos a perpetuar y mejorar la especie se verifica, por una parte, con la supervivencia de los más fuertes en la lucha por la vida, es decir de los más sanos, de los mejores, y por otra parte, con la desaparición de los más débiles o peor dotados. La selección sexual, agrega sus efectos a los de la selección por la supervivencia de los más aptos. La concurrencia natural y la libertad de la elección traen el acoplamiento de los animales más hermosos, más vigorosos y más fecundos, asegurando así la perpetuación de los caracteres de superioridad de los genitores, dentro de la especie.”

¹⁰ Original text: “Hablando de la cerveza, el *Pacific Medical Journal* dice: ‘De todas las bebidas embriagantes, es la que mas animaliza. Embota la naturaleza moral é intelectual y alimenta la naturaleza animal.’”

aesthetic attributes. Over time, confusion grew as to how to understand natural and sexual selection in the context of the formation of the nation's population.

Paradoxically, while Darwin's ideas were dismantling the notion that species were fixed and had permanent features, or that they were real at all, human races were invoked to ascribe permanent qualities to certain groups of individuals. Everywhere, discussions of race began to measure degrees of separation between individuals due to evolution, making the lower races closer to higher animals in the natural ranking. For example, in 1873 the Harvard professor John Fiske (1842-1901) popularized Darwin's evolutionary ideas while also affirming the superiority of the Semitic and the Aryan over all the other races. His praise of the Anglo-Saxon over other races became the most popular racial view at the time. He explained how those who belonged to the "Malay and American families" were "almost wholly incapable of progress, even under the guidance of higher races. The most that can be said for them is, that they are somewhat more imitative and somewhat more teachable than any brute animals." More importantly, in the presence of the Aryan, "even under the most favorable circumstances," they tended to "become extinguished, rather than to appropriate the results of civilization which there is no reason to suppose they could ever have originated" (1873, 255). This determinism and hierarchical classification made racial difference the result of natural selection despite explicit arguments to the contrary in *Descent of Man*.

Fiske's views meant that those who were of indigenous or had African ancestry in the Americas were closer to animals than those who belonged to the races more agreeable to progress. In Spanish America, this characterization confirmed what the elites who favored a modern culture believed about Indians and those of African ancestry, but the novelty was that by the 1870s Latins also fell on the weaker side of humanity, though they ranked higher than the other groups mentioned. It was for this reason that animalism became a political and cultural problem that occupied most governments of Latin America by the last quarter of the century. Those considered inferior were not only racialized, but also animalized in order to create a separation from those who were better and had an evolutionary future.

In Spanish America, readings of and about Darwin were mediated by translations that were less than faithful to the original, and popular interpretations of science distorted the ideas coming from the English naturalist. For example, in 1871 the Spanish company José Astort published in Mexico the second of a two-volume edition of very popular scientific books. This book was Enrique Leopoldo de Verneuil's translation of the 1864 French translation of *Der Mensch*, originally published in 1863 and written by Carl Gottfried Wilhelm Vollmer (1797-1864), who used the pseudonym W. F. A. Zimmermann. *L'Homme* was a popular book because it attempted to synthesize the most known ideas about the origins of man, including the more recent ones, but without providing any original idea. It defended the idea that climate was one of the main influences in the emergence of the different races, and also provided a contradicting narrative of the racial development of the American continent. In this translation of a translation, Vollmer/Zimmerman attacked Darwin for his defense of

animalism, which he connected not only with the assimilation of man to primates, but also with the association between animals and humans considered racially inferior. This argument was relevant to those members of the Spanish American elites that were combatting representations of the region's racial inferiority as related to the animality of their countries' population.

En otro tiempo se ha comparado al idiota con el animal, solo por el hecho de que tenia deprimido el cerebro, alegándose, que puesto en el cráneo de aquel infeliz era semejante al del mono, debía tener, así como este, muy limitada la inteligencia. El error es grave... A uno y á otro les falta razon, pero el instinto, tan desarrollado en el primero, apenas existe en el segundo, el cual carece de todo carácter exterior que denote vida intelectual;... (Zimmermann 1871, 44).

This account makes a clear separation between humans and animals, and in doing so affirmed that not even those considered degenerate, or less evolved, at the time could be closer to animals. At the same time, it affirmed the superiority of certain races over others, and idealized certain human groups according to a hierarchy that placed Anglo-Saxons as the most developed type of humans. A large section included an analysis of racial mixing and its consequences, and described different Latin American nations. The latter were depicted as less interested in racial purity and more cognizant of the humanity of the population that had African ancestry. While in North America it was believed that black individuals were also animals, and as such naturally separated from humans, Latins are presented as not able to establish such a dramatic distinction.

...para los franceses de Guadalupe, así como para los portugueses y españoles establecidos en otros puntos, un negro es un hombre, y al contrario de las señoras americanas de origen anglo-sajon, que se dejan servir en el baño por los negros, sin duda porque su pudor no se ofende ante un animal, las mujeres de los pueblos citados no les conceden nunca semejante confianza (439).

This account made the America colonized by Latins a place where racial mixing resulted in a new population that was not degraded and could aspire to self-improvement, a view shared by Spanish American intellectuals. But, while Zimmermann argued against animalism and slavery, he made clear that the white Anglo-Saxon population was superior to other races. This contradictory approach made his book popular throughout the region, in the 1870s. In the case of Argentina, *L'Homme* is mentioned with the Spanish translation published in Mexico in the report of the Commission for the Protection of Popular Libraries [Comisión Protectora de las Bibliotecas Populares] that came out in 1872. Both books were purchased and sent to different provinces together with Darwin's *Origins*, Lyell's *Geology*, and Royer's *Origine de l'Homme* among many others (*Boletín*, 229-230). Over time, French emphasis on soft inheritance and the importance of the environment over society and individuals became known as

neo-Lamarckianism, which clearly contradicted the selective, racialized assimilation of humans to animals in certain nations.¹¹

The already mentioned José Gil Fortoul, developed similar ideas when he addressed animalism, claiming that race, “was not the only influence that had determined the special character of the South American man” (1896, 30).¹² It was for this reason that the previously held idea that the progress of civilization would take all human societies in the same direction began to be questioned. According to this author, universal history demonstrated that that “social evolution did not result” in all races following the same trajectory at the same speed. In fact, he understood the differences among races as the result of the different way in which each of them civilized people (1896, 5).¹³ But, against the racial characteristics of a nation, the “moral and intellectual influence of the most advanced people” had started to neutralize and modify the animalistic characteristics that came from racial primitivism (1896, 30).¹⁴

Following this type of thinking, in 1900, the Argentine Darwinian Carlos O. Bunge (1875-1918) published an article on education, which addressed the key to improving the country’s population, including those like himself. Bunge expressed his admiration for ideas that came from Greek antiquity regarding “the cult and satisfaction of the body” together with “the contempt for the mystical,” and the “eternal ideal of ‘eternal beauty’ as the supreme goal of humanity” (1900, 56). The first characteristic was for him “animalism,” and education as a whole intended to give “the body and the spirit all the beauty and strength that they could receive” (1900, 56). In contemporary society, Bunge translated this example as “to give the muscles, nerves and all forms the plasticity and vigor that an animal of good race had; and to give the spirit all that it needed to reason with clarity and truth” (1900, 56).¹⁵

In 1903 Bunge expanded his ideas on the subject in a corrected edition of his book on education, and defined “naturalism” as “that philosophy of slavery and war, and al-

¹¹ See: Perazzi (2011); Márquez Bretón (1982); Glick, Ruiz, and Puig-Samper (1999).

¹² Original text: “Además, sería incurrir en un error evidente atribuir á la raza sola todas las influencias que han determinado el carácter especial del hombre sudamericano y los aspectos particulares de su historia.”

¹³ Original text: “En efecto, aun suponiendo con Locke que el hombre ha sido el mismo, en cuanto á dotes naturales, en todos los tiempos, ó con Turgor, que las capacidades primitivas obran de un modo idéntico en los pueblos salvajes y en los civilizados, y aun admitiendo sin discusión el postulado de que todos los grupos de pueblos, cualquiera que sea su raza, son civilizables, la historia universal demuestra que los diversos grupos de pueblos se civilizan por modos muy diferentes, y que la evolución social no sigue en todos ellos la misma trayectoria ni se verifica con igual rapidez. De suerte que, desde el punto de vista sociológico, el concepto de raza puede fundarse en las evidentes diferencias que se observan en la manera de civilizarse las distintas agrupaciones étnicas.”

¹⁴ Original text: “La influencia moral é intelectual de los pueblos más civilizados empieza á neutralizar ó á modificar las primitivas influencias de la raza.”

¹⁵ Original text: “[Platón] Define como objeto de la Educación, dar al cuerpo y al espíritu toda la belleza y la fuerza de que sean susceptibles. Traduciríase este pensamiento á nuestro idioma moderno en estas dos preposiciones: dar á los músculos, á los nervios y á las formas toda la plasticidad y el vigor de un animal de buena raza; dar al espíritu todas las facilidades para razonar con claridad y verdad.”

most free love, that concurs with human nature,” which in its sexual phase was known as “animalism”. Animalism recognized that man possessed “an organism that was so richly endowed for procreation” that like in the case of “other mammals” led to “polygamy and promiscuity” (1903, 24). According to this analysis, the Catholic church had denied this characteristic and others related to natural differences. The ideas of “equality” and “dignity” were an invention of Christianity to defend “the weak,” against a law of nature that divided men into “strong and weak,” or “oppressors and oppressed”. Stronger individuals were “naturally sensual, for the instinct of preservation” which was something denied by “an idealist philosophy that was against nature, and twisted the meaning of nature to adopt an ideal that could not be realized, because it assumed that men were equals, charitable, and chaste...” (1903, 24).¹⁶ For Bunge, animalism was “a sexual phase of naturalism,” because the Greeks did not ignore that man possessed “an organism that was very well endowed, as in the case of other mammals, for the procreation that impelled him to polygamy and even promiscuity” (1903, 24-25).¹⁷ This animality should not be repressed since it was a natural characteristic of manhood and a defense against the degeneration of a race.

Bunge emphasized physical strength and virility, together with the formation of a morally superior stance for humans. He also saw in spiritualism and idealism a defense of weakness, a perspective that was also shared at the time by the scientific materialists. They promoted the need to control human populations in the same way that a breeder took care of his animals, which in other countries was expressed in eugenic policies. For example, in 1909, an article written by the Nietzsche scholar Maximilian Mügge (1878-unknown), and published in the Galton Institute’s *Eugenics Review*, explained that the “Eugenic ideal, the dream of a Superman, was ever present with men”, but in the civilized nations “the racial instinct has been counteracted” by the confusing ideas circulating at the time. The problems created by animalism, for example, had triggered a resurgence of the spiritualization and intellectualization of the animal, which had brought an “over-estimation of Spirit and intellect that was reflected in the decline of the “Eugenic Instinct”” (1909, 187). This weakening of the desire to separate those who should not procreate was dangerous for the future of man, according to the article.

¹⁶ Original text: “Ese NATURALISMO: esa filosofía de la esclavitud y de la guerra y del amor casi libre, que concuerda con la naturaleza humana, porque la ‘igualdad’ y la ‘dignidad’ humanas son una invención ó convención ideal del Cristianismo, para defensa de los débiles; porque los hombres son egoístas y distintos entre sí; porque se dividen naturalmente en fuertes y débiles, ó sean opresores y oprimidos; porque los opresores, cuando obedecen á la naturaleza sin traba alguna, imponen todos sus caprichos, toda su inmoralidad (desprovista de ‘moralina’ cristiana); porque son naturalmente sensuales, por el propio instinto de conservación; porque sólo una filosofía antinaturalmente idealista, que tergiversa la naturaleza por un ideal irrealizable, puede suponer á los hombres iguales, caritativos y castos...”

¹⁷ Original text: “*En animalismo* (o sea fase sexual del *naturalismo*): porque la teología y la moral de los cristianos desprecian la “concupiscencia”, y el espíritu griego no desconocía que el hombre posee un organismo tan ricamente dotado para la procreación, que lo impulsa, como á los demás animales mamíferos, á la poligamia y hasta á la promiscuidad...”

It was clear that animalism was dangerous to national union because it created natural divisions that contradicted the pre-Darwinian universal foundation of republicanism, splitting a country's population in dangerous and irreparable ways. At the same time, it was viewed positively when used in the context of reproductive strategies and civilized sexuality. In a thesis defended in Lima in 1897, Clemente Palma (1872-1946) commented on the lives of those of African ancestry in Peru and concluded that "the pure animal life" of the black man "had destroyed his mental activity (if he ever had it) making him unsuited to civilized life" (1897, 21). In spite of this comment, Palma indicated that "within the limits of his own inferiority," the black race "presented less resistance to the civilized action of the Indo-European races." The members of this race shared a sensuality, lust, and a "blood that had the ardor of the sun that burnt deserts" (1897, 22).¹⁸ In addition, "among those of inferior race" certain "very superficial physical traits that indicated androgyny" were evident and caused by the environment. In America, "many indigenous tribes barely showed signs of differences between men and women," while by contrast, among the superior races "women wanted to assimilate to the psychic and social lives of men," which showed that "the feelings and ideas of men and women were not incompatible," so much so that "the creation of the androgynous was possible," particularly among the women of the Anglo-Saxon race (1897, 45-47).¹⁹ Palma's embrace of androgyny indicated the future evolutionary path of humanity, and while race was moving in a direction that enhanced the existent differences, separating the animal from the most advanced humans, the two genders were merging into a single one, erasing the more animalistic conceptions of sexual difference.

The separation of humans from a state of animality also implied that those who were poor and lived like animals were also rejected. In an article published in 1900 in

¹⁸ Original text: "Esa vida, puramente animal del negro, ha anonadado completamente su actividad mental (si es que alguna vez la tuvo) haciéndole inepto para la vida civilizada. [...] Como no ha habido desgaste de raza, á pesar de los innumerables siglos que ha visto deslizarse, conserva íntegras las energías pequeñas de que está dotada: es una raza inferior, pero no una raza decrepita, como la india. Por eso, dentro de los límites de su propia inferioridad, la raza negra es más adaptable que la raza india, ó mejor dicho, presenta menos resistencia á la acción civilizadora de las razas indo-europeas. [...] Ese elemento es la sensualidad la lujuria desmedida de esta raza que tiene en su sangre los ardores de ese sol que calcina los desiertos."

¹⁹ Original text: "En las razas inferiores se observan ciertos rasgos físicos muy superficiales de androgynismo, rasgos desde luego debidos no á un trabajo intencionado del hombre, sino á condiciones del medio. [...] Aquí mismo, en América, muchas tribus de indios apenas presentan signos diferenciales entre el hombre y la mujer: las líneas de femineidad han desaparecido completamente de la mujer, por lo menos antes del alumbramiento, [...] En las razas superiores se observa hoy el afán de la mujer de asimilarse [a] la vida psíquica y aun social del hombre; la mujer de hoy es más activa, particularmente en la raza sajona, [...] Quizá en la larga sucesión de siglos que se vayan desempeñando en las fauces negras del olvido, venga alguno que traiga la evolución, ya realizada, de la Humanidad al androgynismo fisiológico y psicológico [...] El representa indudablemente un estado superior, puesto que significa la unión en una entidad de las perfecciones de ambos sexos: es muy posible que la Naturaleza, en su trabajo sordo y lento de evolución, conduzca á la Humanidad hacia la androgynia..."

Argentina's *Archivos de Psiquiatría*, and written by José Ingenieros (1877-1925), the mentality of the "inferior social classes" made the latter "true primitive races living in the middle of modern civilization." Poor people were animalized in the same way in which "the primitive" was, this being the origin of many social policies that attempted to create remedies to improve the health of the population (Ingenieros 1910, 268).²⁰ In Argentina and Uruguay the idea of creating a national race under the careful guidance of the country's scientists dominated cultural and political life. While Paulina Luisi rejected positive eugenics because of the lack of a complete understanding of how inheritance worked, she embraced negative eugenics to "contribute to the perfecting of the race" through "suppressing and avoiding the production" of all those who were defective. She agreed that natural selection and sexual selection were responsible for changes in the population, but promoted the importance of negative eugenics to achieve, as had been done in Sparta, the "perfecting of all races eliminating all the defective units," establishing a rigorous "selection of the products before giving them the right to live" (1919, 27).²¹ Luisi made it clear that scientific knowledge could eliminate the problems brought by animalism, creating a clear distinction between humans and animals.

CONCLUSION

This essay has shown the importance that the concept of animalism acquired after the popularization of Darwin's ideas. As we saw, Darwin undermined the privileged position that man was given in nature, subordinating human beings to the same laws that defined all species. While this understanding of nature sounded fine for nature in general, it did not always fit nicely with the political needs of new nations that had been created in part to celebrate the special status that humans enjoyed in the world. If the reduction of human's importance through evolutionary laws made sense in science, it did not always fulfill the promises of human self-improvement that resulted from the Enlightenment revolution. Man needed to defeat or be above nature in order for republicanism to exist. The revolutionary project of independence expressed men's desire to emancipate themselves from natural determination and authority.

It is for this reason that in the Americas the impact of the concept of sexual selection was even greater than that of natural selection, because it sanctioned a view of

²⁰ Original text: "La prueba de esto la tenemos observando la mentalidad de las clases sociales inferiores, justamente consideradas por Nicéforo como verdaderas razas primitivas vivientes en medio de la civilización moderna."

²¹ Texto original: "Al suprimir o evitar los elementos nocivos, si no se consigue aumentar las mejores condiciones de la generación, se alcanza, por lo menos, una disminución de los malos productos, lo que, en suma, es por otro mecanismo, una contribución al perfeccionamiento de la especie." [En Esparta] Buscaban y conseguían el perfeccionamiento de la raza suprimiendo todas las unidades defectuosas, esto es, estableciendo rigurosamente una selección de los productos antes de concederles el derecho de vivir."

nation building as the result of human actions that designed the future path. Mating defined both the role of men and women, and the secondary characteristics that made possible the differentiation of different races. Over time, policies were developed according to scientific criteria that promised the development of human beings to the highest degree of perfection. But neither the existence of these policies, nor the consensus surrounding the idea of inferior and superior human groups, gave animalism a clear meaning. Humans as animals could mean both good and bad things, depending on the context that was implied, or the political needs involved. The confusing ideas about animalism led some to reject Darwin's evolutionism in order to promote a spiritualism that offered a clear separation of humans from the impositions of nature. Idealist philosophies, religion and spiritual beliefs understood humanity exclusively in relationship to human needs, eliminating the instability brought by the scientific understanding of humanity.

This happened all over the Americas, particularly after World War I. In 1923, for example, the *New York Times* reported on a debate about Darwinism. In it a "wave of animalism" is denounced because of the "corrupting influence upon morals," that "this philosophy of animalism" had and how it was "prostituting and destroying the human race." The origin of this animalism was in a philosophy that had denied "the truth of revelation, thrown the ten commandments on the junk heap, laughed at the principles of Jesus Christ, taken God off the throne, and destroyed the safe principles of the past which lie at the very foundations of our modern life" ("Dr. Stratton", 9). By this time, another cycle of debates about the links between Darwinism and animalism was developing, and only after the conclusion of World War II did limitations to the association between science and race emerge.

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