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HIERARCHY OF RACES,  
HIERARCHY IN GENDER:  
ANTÉNOR FIRMIN  
AND CLÉMENCE ROYER

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ABSTRACT. In 1885, Anténor Firmin, a barrister, politician, and philosopher from Haiti, published the book *Equality of Human Races*, where he criticizes the racist theories of the anthropologists of his time. He shows the frailty of their arguments and opposes to them his own conceptions on the dignity and perfectibility of humankind. Incidentally, he questions the standpoints on inequality that Clémence Royer, the first translator of Darwin's *Origin of Species* to French, exposes in her preface and in other texts. Paradoxically, Firmin, a defender of human rights, attributes Clémence Royer's errors of judgment to the fact of being a woman. Symmetrically, Clémence Royer's ideas on what will later be called "eugenics" and on what will become "Social Darwinism", contrast with her defense of women's equality with men. Firmin and Royer were members of the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris, where they took part in ideological and scientific debates. We can learn from these controversies that the twists and turns of scientific theories emphasize the incompleteness of science, as well as its dynamism, and that the wrong tracks of ethics are an appeal to support the link between ethics and liberty.

KEY WORDS. Equality, race, eugenics, social Darwinism, feminism, anthropology, perfectibility, degeneration, human rights, Haiti, gender, normative foundation.

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By giving us some clear notions about our true origin, does not Darwin's theory pose a challenge to so many philosophical, moral and religious doctrines, and to so many utopian political systems, generous but certainly false constructs aimed at achieving some impossible, harmful and unnatural equality among all human beings? Nothing is more obvious than the inequalities that exist among the different human races; nothing is more evident than the sharp inequalities among individuals of the same race<sup>1</sup>.

These words are Clémence Royer's, in her preface to her translation of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, first published in 1862. This statement is quoted and criticized in a book called *De l'égalité des races humaines*, published in 1885. The author, Anténor Firmin, comments Clémence Royer's assertion as follows:

Clémence Royer is a scholar and a scientist, but she is a woman. There are problems of such complexity that they can be properly studied only by men, for only men, because of their education and their temperament as males, can see them from every angle [...]. It is well known that women have a natural tendency to embrace current ideas and to perpetuate accepted notions<sup>2</sup>.

While Clémence Royer's moral and political ideas on the inequality of races are supposed to be deduced from the laws of evolution, Firmin defines the inferior intellectual status of women by their biological constitution. In both cases ethics is naturalized, in different ways, perhaps at different degrees and for different purposes. But Firmin's and Royer's will to bring their cause to victory is equal. Firmin is a militant of the black cause and equality of races and is considered a pioneer of Pan-africanism; Clémence Royer is a feminist who denies the inequality of genders, and thinks progress will come from the continuation of selection in the social state. The meeting of the contrasting ideas of these two authors can throw light on the relationship between ethics and natural sciences in the nineteenth century debates.

#### CAN REALLY DARWIN'S THEORY LEAD TO SOCIAL DARWINISM?

Clémence Royer is seen as the person who both popularized Darwinism in France and contributed to the development of social Darwinism. It is argued to what degree she betrayed Darwin's intentions (Yvette Conry 1974, 1983, 1987; Patrick Tort 1992, 1997; Sara J. Miles 1989; Claude Blanckaert 1982, 2003; Geneviève Fraisse 1985; Jean-Marc Bernardini 1997). In fact, Royer asserted that nearly all Darwin was contained in Lamarck, and that Darwin had not dared to assume the consequences of his principle of natural selection. In the first edition of her translation she had modified the title of Darwin, introducing the idea of progress (*De l'origine des espèces ou des lois du progrès chez les êtres organisés*, Paris, Guillaumin, 1862), but restored a more accurate formula in the second (*De l'Origine des espèces par sélection naturelle ou des lois de transformation des êtres organisés*, Paris, Guillaumin, 1866<sup>3</sup>). Her long preface of 1862 (more than fifty pages) was republished in all the editions of her translation<sup>4</sup>, with new forward pages where she justified her ideas. It means Clémence Royer was very attached to her interpretation of Darwin's notions; she thought the criticism he had done to her text was only "an exaggeration of a light feature" and that her success in popularizing Darwin was moved by her love of truth<sup>5</sup>. In her "Avertissement aux lecteurs de la quatrième édition" (1882) she claimed that since 1862, she had anticipated Darwin's assertions on man, which were made more explicit in his *Descent of Man* (1871) published after her own *L'Origine de l'homme et des sociétés* (1870).

It could be asked whether she developed a social Darwinism or a *social Royerism*. Anyhow, it can be admitted that the natural selection principle potentially includes some social application, though *potentially* does not mean *automatically*.

In Darwin's *Descent of Man*, some considerations could reinforce Clémence Royer's assertions. In the general summary, Darwin says: "Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication; and if he is to advance still higher, it is to be feared that he must remain subject to a severe struggle <sup>6</sup>."

Darwin thinks that it is not good if the more gifted men can't be more successful in the battle of life than the less endowed. However, he also conceives man as confronted to some kind of dramatic contradiction: In spite of the "sympathy" which man feels for "the most debased", even if the "benevolence" extended "not only to other men but to the humblest living creature", that is, in spite of "all his noble qualities", "man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin <sup>7</sup>."

Clémence Royer is much more radical in her conclusions and her love for what she calls "progress"—her well-known conclusion of the preface is "je crois au progrès"—leads her convictions. She defines progress as the increase of intelligence, skill and happiness of mankind, which can only be attained by neglecting inferior people, who will then gradually disappear. Thus she both attacks Christianity and Socialism for their egalitarian and humanist principles. In 1883 this appeal to the improvement of the human race will be called "Eugenism" by Francis Galton <sup>8</sup>.

In reply to Clémence Royer's convictions, Firmin questions: "Does the theory of transformism itself authorize such conclusions regarding the inequality of human races <sup>9</sup>?" He considers Darwin was more interested in the general developments of his theory than in a special study of ethnology, though Darwin himself showed not to be completely indifferent to such question in his *Descent of Man* and at the end of the *Origin*, when he states that he sees "open fields for far more important researches <sup>10</sup>" with psychology based on a new foundation—well established by Herbert Spencer, he added in further editions. For Firmin, Herbert Spencer's conceptions of inequality are not as strong as Clémence Royer's, who appears more determinate in such a belief. His violent attack against Royer as a woman takes place in the moment of his reflection when he deals with the perfectibility of human races (chapter XI). For Firmin, Darwinism rather induces the idea of a constitutional equality of races. The influences of the environment are determinant for natural selection and adaptation. Civilization and education are more important than the race, and so human perfectibility is possible. Instead of eliminating inferior people, says Firmin, it is possible to lead them to progress.

## MEETINGS IN THE SOCIÉTÉ D'ANTHROPOLOGIE DE PARIS

Firmin's convictions on the equality of races deal with the importance he confers to cultural elements in his analysis. His conceptions are quite original for his time and contrast with most of the scientist anthropologists he met in the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, founded in 1859 by the physician Paul Broca. Anténor Firmin was a member of the *Société* since 1884<sup>11</sup> and Clémence Royer since 1870, where she had been very active in its reunions<sup>12</sup>, very often discussing or giving lectures. Anténor Firmin was more rare in his interventions (he did not reside always in France). We don't really know whether Firmin and Royer met each other, but from the *Bulletins* it appears that they attended the same sessions on April 7th and 21st, 1892, though there is no evidence of any dialogue between them.

Anténor Firmin was twenty years younger than Clémence Royer, and such an age difference can partially explain why he quoted her works while she did not quote his. Other reasons can also help us understand such a dissymmetry. Clémence Royer was quite well-known in scientific circles—though not always held in high regard—while Anténor Firmin was better known as a politician in Haiti—a quite important politician in view of the fact that a political democratic movement in Haiti had been called “Firminism”—than in France as a barrister-philosopher interested in sciences and arts. His political activities compelled him to exile several times from Haiti<sup>13</sup>. In fact, his political activities were not separated from his epistemological interests. The destiny of Haiti and more widely of Negroes in the world was his main concern.

In July 7th 1892, he expressed himself several times at the *Société*. The discussion was on the influence of geography, mountains in particular, on differentiation and separation between *superior* and *inferior* races. While Clémence Royer makes some precisions about a precedent research she made on the subject, Firmin contests the terms employed: When the expressions *superior* or *inferior population* are used, he says, it only deals with some populations compared to others stationed at a primitive state because they did not have the possibility to develop. Races in the center of islands stay the same, but on the shore, thanks to the easiness of communication, populations can progress<sup>14</sup>. Continuing with this thesis, he pleads the Negroe cause, saying that when environment changes “as it happened to himself and to other Haitian Negroes, his fellow countrymen, then the black race demonstrates that it is not unable to reach a superior level of intellectual development which is equal to the other races already civilized<sup>15</sup>.”

Firmin's formula seems quite strange. He assimilates the paradigm of Negroes trying to become as intelligent as what anthropologists called “Caucasians”. It must be reminded that these words may be somehow enhanced (though perhaps involuntarily) by the secretary who wrote the

account of the session. But Firmin, though antiracist, doesn't deny there are superior and inferior people, as far as this doesn't mean the latter can't evolve. Even so, that is one of the limits to his approach on the issue of races.

In another session three weeks later, the 21st of April, the members of the *Société* discuss on the physical type of Spanish Canarians and the native Guanches. The thesis is that Canarians look like Guanches because of the mixing of races, which drew back the physical type to the original one. Some other remarks are made on the possible evolution of physical features. Firmin then insists again on the influence of environment, and defends the idea that African Negroes cannot evolve as well as the Asiatic ones. One of the members then asks Firmin whether he has a white origin in his family which could explain his intelligence. Firmin thus quietly answers that it is not impossible, but that he doesn't think it could be the cause of his intelligence. Then Léonce Manouvrier, though one of the less inegalitarian anthropologists<sup>16</sup>, asks Firmin if he would accept to have his skull measured, and if he could convince his compatriots living in Paris to do so. The account of the session doesn't register Firmin's answer<sup>17</sup>.

#### RECEPTION OF A BOOK

Léonce Manouvrier was the author of one of the only two reviews which were made on Firmin's book on the equality of races; it was published in 1886, in the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, founded and edited by Théodule Ribot<sup>18</sup>. The other one, anonymous, was published in 1887 in the journal *L'Homme*<sup>19</sup> edited by Gabriel de Mortillet. There was no review in the *Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*; the book was on the list of new publications, in October 1885, without any comment.

Manouvrier's article is quite laudatory. He reminds Firmin is not an anthropologist but a barrister and he salutes the quality of the information and analysis, as well as the courage of the author. "Anthropologists should meditate with this book—says Manouvrier—because the critics on inegalitarian theories are interesting even if they sometimes contain a few light errors." He sums up Firmin's thesis by saying that the collation of all the hierarchic systems in classifications of men allow to assert that there is a natural equality of all the races; this equality gives up when one of the races develops to a point the others have not yet been able to attain; all races begin with ignorance, weakness, immorality and ugliness, but they gradually evolve and become better; only social evolution can explain the different moral and intellectual complexions; all actors are equal in a perpetual moving, through which the first places are regularly exchanged. So Manouvrier wonders whether the black race will recover the first place it once had in ancient Egypt.

Indeed, political Haitian problems are included in this reflection, which is so much linked to the fight against racial ideologies. A militant such as Firmin, in order to prove that black people are not inferior, develops in a long chapter the thesis of an African origin of Egyptian ancient culture. A lot of arguments are gathered, with numerous and serious sources, related to linguistics, arts and history (prefiguring in a certain way the controversial thesis Cheikh Anta Diop developed in the twentieth century <sup>20</sup>). Manouvrier concludes that anthropology cannot give any evidence of Firmin's thesis, which does not mean that it can give evidence of the opposite thesis. For Manouvrier, the truth is that by fighting against inegalitarian theories, Anténor Firmin has attacked real prejudices and deserved well of white and black people at the same time.

The anonymous review in *L'Homme* rather emphasizes the rational aspect of the book, but it stresses the same main ideas, indicating the quality of the sources, as Gabriel de Mortillet's thesis on the black origin of Egypt, and recalling Firmin's will that Haiti should be the hope and the model of all black people wanting to evolve.

#### GENDER PREJUDICE AND STRATEGY

Firmin's book thus met a rather discreet reception in France, without any severe criticism. On the contrary, Clémence Royer's preface was very controversial. The story of the events around it has been widely studied. Her controversy with Darwin above all concerned the consequences she claimed from the idea of natural selection. Darwin first disapproved of Royer's conclusions, yet was quite amused by the way she wanted to explain everything (morality, nature of man, politics) with such concept. In 1867, after the second edition of Royer's translation, Darwin asserts that her introduction has probably injured his book in France. That is why he preferred to break off relations with her when a third edition with a new commentary was being prepared, where she pretended Darwin had stolen Lamarck's and her own ideas <sup>21</sup>. She developed the same reduction of Darwin's contribution to evolutionism in another long text, published in 1880, the article "Darwinism" in the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences médicales* <sup>22</sup> which, in spite of its title, approaches Darwin's theory only after forty pages. The paradox is that while she pretends to go further than Darwin, she minimizes his role. This gives her more liberty for her own interpretation because she doesn't feel obliged with any orthodoxy.

She sustains her own theory on *diversity* which she immediately interprets as *inequality*. And the inequality she believes in is racial and social but not gendered. When she treats the gender issue, the physiological dimension is not the one she applies on; in this matter she rather focuses on social issues. For instance, during the lessons of *Philosophy for Women* she gave

in Lausanne in 1859, she explained that social and educational causes accounted for the difficulties in understanding between men and women; the two halves of humanity speak two different dialects as a consequence of such big a difference in education<sup>23</sup>. Giving lessons like *Philosophy for Women* is a way to modify social inequalities by taking social actions. It seems that in Royer's theory the women issue is far beyond biology.

However, Firmin's position on women doesn't seem to come from a very elaborate theory. His prejudice on women is rather linked to traditions which automatically reproduce stereotypes. His violent diatribe against Royer is that of a tactical maneuver of a barrister to convince his male colleagues and to destabilize his female adversary positions. He knew very well that men can have the same defaults in thinking as those he stressed in Royer's assertions, still he referred to her with positive comments (he quotes her ten times in his book). By his antifeminist argument, he shows at last that he is imbued in the prejudice of the time. He gave lectures in Paris, in 1891 and 1892, where, under the guise of gallantry, he described women as very poor-minded; the presence of women has a charming influence on men, he said, by maintaining the dynamism of mind, because one needs to be very witty in order not to annoy them<sup>24</sup>.

Anyhow, it is clear that Firmin doesn't build a real theory of inferiority of women. He only shares a common prejudice.

#### CAN PROGRESS BE DEDUCED FROM THE LAWS OF NATURE?

On the other hand, Firmin's critical position toward racist conceptions is based on a real analysis and a deconstruction of biological arguments. His *Equality of Human Races* is a book where, in 665 pages, he theorizes the issue of racism in detail.

After anthropology in chapter I, he deals with classifications in chapter II to VI. In the following ones he attends to the comparison of human races (chapter VII), with the effects of mixing races (chapter VIII), and unto chapter XX, the last one, he tackles the historical, political and ethical aspects of the problem (Egypt, Hindus and Aryan, perfectibility of all human races, including the black race). Firmin posits Haiti as an evidence of the possible emancipation of black people and a hope for the future.

Although Firmin wrote his book quite hastily while in Paris, he kept being a barrister making a plea for equality; his refutations against the theory of racial inequality build a real philosophy of anthropology, with a methodological as well as an ethical analysis. The title he chose is an answer to Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*<sup>25</sup>. It is also a sort of tribute to Louis-Joseph Janvier, his compatriot, who had introduced him into the *Société d'Anthropologie* and who had written, the year before,

a short essay of 32 pages on the same subject of the equality of races<sup>26</sup>. The subtitle of Firmin's book, "Anthropologie positive," emphasizes his intention to develop a scientific and philosophical reflection.

He first exposes what anthropology means and what are the origins of this science, quite new but already full with theories and inheritor of old debates, such as the question whether anthropology is a philosophical reflection or an anatomical and physiological research. His own conception of anthropology wants to be free from the faults of extreme positions. He doesn't think man can be studied like an animal, but his definition includes physical features, to which he adds intellectual and moral ones, trying to see how they interact:

What is the true nature of man? To what extent and under what conditions does he develop his potential? Are all the human races capable or not to rise to the same intellectual and moral level? If not, which races seem more particularly endowed for a higher development of the mind, and what are the biological traits which ensure such superiority<sup>27</sup>.

Through these questions, Firmin prepares his criticism. He knows that many of his colleagues at the *Société d'Anthropologie* would answer that not all human races can progress, and that they cannot be all at the same intellectual and moral level. By asking which organic particularities can explain such a supposed impediment to the progress of "inferior races", he suggests that their answer will be so full of pitfalls, that the question might turn to be irrelevant. Indeed, he says, in such an issue hierarchy of races should not be arbitrary, and in order not to be arbitrary it should be sustained on a rigorous, strict classification, which means the ethnical categories will have to be exact. Yet the possibility that science, in its actual state, could build such a precise classification is quite doubtful.

When he deals with the classification issue, he presents the conception on man being anatomically proximate to apes as a commonly accepted idea. Firmin's rhetoric strategy consists in recognizing, with laudatory comments, the pertinence of some conceptions of his adversaries. Paul Broca<sup>28</sup>, the famous physician who discovered the area of language in the brain and who founded the *Société d'Anthropologie* in 1859, is particularly one of his concerns.

He agrees with Broca on the unsatisfactory qualities of the diverse classifications. Firmin evokes the debate between *polygenists*, who think there are various origins of man and so various species, and *monogenists* who think there is only one human species, composed of different varieties or races. Actually, Firmin argues, the debate between polygenists, like Broca and Bory de Saint Vincent, and monogenists, like Cuvier, or Armand de Quatrefages, is not really that important. It is not sufficient to recognize



only one species of man to agree on his origins, and it is not enough to think that man is composed of various species to agree on their organization. Firmin says that it doesn't matter if men form one or various species; the taxonomic distance is without importance concerning moral matters.

The very definition of species is debated through the arguments concerning hybrids. The problem was to decide whether hybrids were fertile or not, considering that species was defined by the fertility of the descendants. If some hybrids were fertile, it could mean that the notion of species was not well defined, or that the supposed hybrids actually were issued from two individuals of the same species.

In fact, the point at which Firmin separates from Broca is not the latter's polygenism, but his conclusions on the inferiority of some categories of men. He ironically pretends that he is not angry with what Broca says about Negroes: "Yet, however ugly a picture of my race the erudite polygenist has painted, I hold him no grudge<sup>23</sup>," he says, after having exposed Broca's description:

Besides, it must be said that Broca took great delight in imagining himself of an altogether different species than those repulsive beings he describes in these words: *The physiognomy of Negroes, besides their complexion, is characterized by a narrow and sloping forehead; a flattened nose with flared nostrils; bulging eyes with a brown iris and a yellowish sclera; extremely thick lips hanging forward and outward; and finally, prominent snout-like jaws supporting long, slanting teeth. Such are the main traits which give the Ethiopian face its very special cache* (Broca, *Mém. d'anthr.*, t. III, p. 393<sup>30</sup>).

Such a depreciatory description leads Firmin to ask: "Is this an accurate description?" and he exclaims, in Latin, borrowing some of Lucretius's words which he slightly transforms: "*O miseris hominum mentes! o pectora seca!*" (O miserable souls of men, o dry hearts), instead of "*o pectora caeca*" (o blind hearts). The pitiless connotation of "*seca*" instead of "*caeca*" shows that he might be not completely sincere when he says he holds Broca no grudge...

This very inegalitarian conception of Broca is however associated to humanist opinions, to which Firmin does not explicitly refer. Broca thinks polygenism is less humiliating to inferior races, because inequality is a neutral fact when due to biological innate characters, unless it is defamatory when due to a degeneration, which is the case if there is a primordial unity of mankind. For Broca, monogenism justifies slavery more than polygenism does, because it seems to be a legitimate punishment for the people who have degenerated. On the contrary, if there are different species, each of them is *the king of his country*, and the oppression of one on another appears to be the effect of force and violence, and so will be condemned<sup>31</sup>.

In fact, both polygenism and monogenism are linked with hierarchical conceptions. For instance, Armand de Quatrefages, in spite of not being extreme in his positions, defends as a normal fact both the unity of mankind and the inequality of races. Claude Blanckaert aptly states that all the anthropologists of this time agreed with the anthropometrical paradigm, in other words, that they believed in the inequality of men and in the power of numbers<sup>32</sup>.

#### THE FIGHT AGAINST FALSEHOOD AS A MORAL PRINCIPLE

In his book, Firmin gathered some rough falsehoods in order to cancel them. For instance, he examines the idea developed by Julien-Joseph Virey in his *Histoire du genre humain*<sup>33</sup> (1801) on the skin of the Negroes. The author pretends the skin of the Negroes exudes a black oil. Very patiently, Firmin says that the epidermis of this category of humans has nothing peculiar. He describes the anatomy of dermis and epidermis, he explains the chemical origin of the color and the role of melanin, referring to medicine books<sup>34</sup>. Another example is the supposed blinking membrane of the eye of black people, evoked by Broca.

This imaginary fact was taken seriously only to make it possible to draw this conclusion so favored by the erudite anthropologist: *The physical configuration of the Negro is intermediate between that of the European and that of the ape* (Broca, *Loco citato*, p. 397<sup>35</sup>).

In one more example, *Europeans* (or *Caucasians*) and *Ethiopians* (or *Negroes*) are always the two so-called “extreme types” which are chosen for the comparative analysis with lots of imaginary descriptions, which are widely conveyed: According to the opinion of Louis Figuier<sup>36</sup>, nervous centers (brain and spinal cord) are more developed in white people, and nerves are more developed in black people; the blood is darker and thicker (more viscous) in black people, the arterial system more developed in white people, and venous system more developed in black people. It could be argued to Firmin that Figuier was not a scientist but a popularizer. However, the theories of scientists do not lack surprising ideas. Firmin thus emphasizes some strange notions about the size of the Ethiopian’s penis which is said by Broca—quoting another author<sup>37</sup>—to be so big that the sexual act between a black man and a white woman is painful for her. This is said to explain the supposed often sterile union between a white woman and a black man. A controversy goes on with Paul Topinard who thinks that “the Negro’s penis is longer and more voluminous in a flaccid state than the White man’s” and that “the reverse is true when it is in a state of erection<sup>38</sup>.” Firmin states that such differences are not racial but individual characteristics.

As to the prejudice about a special smell coming from skin of black people, he reminds that some white people have an unpleasant smell, and that it is not a question of race, but a social or cultural question, linked to the possibility or not to be clean, or to traditions of covering the body with grease. As he stresses these sorts of absurdities and preposterousness with a sort of suffering irony, Firmin also points out some methodological failures: confusion between individual and collective analytical levels, as well as confusion between biological and social and cultural causes.

All these physiological discussions are crowned by the anatomical researches on measuring skulls, the distinction between *prognathism* (prominent jaw) and *orthognathism*, between *dolichocephale* (with a narrow skull) versus *brachicephale* (with a wide, and consequently more developed one) and so on. Firmin quotes a lot of measures, and reproduces and compares tables in an attempt to show the contradictions and the negligible determinative power of all these measures <sup>39</sup>.

Though the ideas of anthropologists on races are most of the time unsustainable, we can say even grotesque, they also make use of subtle methodologies, and are full of nuances which confer them the appearance of scientific researches. When Paul Broca died, in 1880, the importance he had given to physical characteristics was widely criticized and considered a useless sophistication <sup>40</sup>. Anthropometrical measures showed that the proportion between intelligence and cerebral development was not regular. As for Topinard, he shared the inequality ideas of Broca but confessed he could not conclude anything from the weight of the brain. At the end of the nineteenth century, anthropometry could not be used any longer to establish the hierarchy of races, only for studying the variety of characters.

#### TWISTS AND TURNS OF RESEARCH

It is difficult in such subjects as the studies of man or societies to regard ancient theories with the serenity which the so-called *symmetry principle* would demand. Ethics cannot bear easily relativism. Anthropological theories of the nineteenth century have often been called *scientific racism*. It does not mean that racism can be supported on scientific evidence; it means only that science can deal with racism. The temptation would be to conclude that such theories are not scientific. It can be more constructive to admit that science is not a guarantee against ideologies.

There is great complexity in all these theories. For instance, Broca's racism was tinged with some humanist considerations, and it was different from Gobineau's. Broca did not agree with Gobineau's pessimism nor with his principle of degeneration. In other respects, polygenism was not the cause of racism since monogenists were also racist...

Firmin tried to demonstrate that the project of sustaining racism on science was impossible. Anyhow, he tried to establish, in reverse, antiracism on science, which is still to confuse epistemology and ethics. The only possible move is to show that ethics cannot be deduced from science. Firmin is partly aware of this idea when he separates the effect of natural selection from the development of societies, and says that societies can develop and progress by culture, history, politics. Nonetheless, his antifeminism, though not really theorized, is a flaw in his argument.

Clémence Royer doesn't doubt that natural history can be a guide for ethics. But she is less interested in ethics itself than in social organization. Her racism does not lead her to approve of all anthropometry, and Firmin approves her criticism on what she calls the "skeletomania" of anthropologists who neglect "man's moral and intellectual dimensions"<sup>41</sup>.

The twists and turns of scientific theories emphasize the incompleteness of science, as well as its dynamism. And the wrong tracks of ethics are an appeal to support the link between ethics and liberty.

## NOTES

- 1 The French text is: « La théorie de M. Darwin, en nous donnant quelques notions un peu claires sur notre véritable origine, ne fait-elle pas, par cela même, justice de tant de doctrines philosophiques, morales ou religieuses, de systèmes et d'utopies politiques dont la tendance, généreuse peut-être, mais assurément fautive, serait de réaliser une égalité impossible, nuisible et contre-nature entre les hommes ? Rien n'est plus évident que les inégalités des diverses races humaines ; rien encore de mieux marqué que ces inégalités entre les divers individus de la même race ». Royer, Clémence (1882), Préface of Charles Darwin. *De l'origine des espèces*, p. XXXVIII, quoted by Anténor Firmin (Firmin, Anténor, 1885, *De l'égalité des races humaines*, p. 399) from the fourth edition of Royer's translation of Darwin. English translation of Firmin's book by Asselin Charles: Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), *Equality of the Human races*, p. 271.
- 2 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), *Ibid.*, p. 271. The French text is: « Madame Clémence Royer est une femme savante mais une femme. Il y a des problèmes dont le caractère complexe ne saurait être bien étudié que par des hommes, car eux seuls peuvent les envisager sous toutes les faces, tant par leur éducation particulière que par leur tempérament de mâle [...]. On sait positivement que la femme a une tendance naturelle à perpétuer les idées reçues et courantes ». Firmin, Anténor (1885), p. 399-400.
- 3 The English title of Darwin's book was: *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.
- 4 The text was the same unless the word "election" replaced by "selection" in the second edition in 1866 and in the following ones (1870, 1882).
- 5 "Avant-propos" of the edition of 1966, p. ix.
- 6 Darwin, C. ([1871] 1874?) *The Descent of Man*, Reprinted from the second English edition, New York, A.L. Burt, 1874, p. 706.
- 7 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, *Ibid.*, p. 708.
- 8 See Pascal Acot (1999), p. 70.
- 9 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 272 (The French text is: « Est-ce la théorie du transformisme qui autorise ces conclusions si affirmatives sur l'inégalité des races humaines ? » Anténor Firmin, (1885), pp. 400-401.
- 10 Darwin, Charles, *On the Origin of Species* ([1859], 2000), p. 488. See also Firmin, Anténor (1885), p. 398, and Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 271.
- 11 He was presented by Dr. Auburtin, Mortillet, and the Haitian anthropologist Louis-Joseph Janvier and he was elected on July 17th 1884.
- 12 At her burial day, the anthropologist René Verneau said she had spoken 130 times at the Société. See André Moufflet (1910).
- 13 He finished his life in the Danish West Indies Island of Saint-Thomas, from where he wrote his *Lettres de Saint-Thomas*, a sort of political, sociological and philosophical reflection. See Firmin, Anténor (1910). Another important text he wrote, was *M. Roosevelt, président des États-Unis, et la République d'Haïti*, Paris, Pichon et Durand-Auzias, 1905. On Firmin's biography, see Pompilus, Pradel (1988).
- 14 *Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, Paris, Masson, Librairie de l'Académie de médecine, Bd. St Germain. Tome troisième. Quatrième série, Année 1892, pp. 235-236 (556<sup>e</sup> séance, 7 avril 1892).
- 15 *Bulletins*, *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- 16 See Blanckaert, Claude (2001), p. 139.

- 17 *Bulletins, Ibid.*, pp. 327-330 (557<sup>e</sup> séance, 21 avril 1892).
- 18 *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, Onzième année, XXI (janvier à juin 1886):180-182.
- 19 *L'Homme*, Journal illustré des sciences anthropologiques. Directeur Gabriel de Mortillet, 4<sup>e</sup> année, 1887: 22-23.
- 20 He anticipates the thesis of Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986). See Diop, Cheikh Anta (1954); see also Diop, Cheikh Anta (1988). In her "Introduction" to the English translation by Asselin Charles, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban also evokes Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, and Mary Lefkowitz's *Not Out of Africa*. She also indicates the works of "the great twentieth century Haitian scholar Jean Price-Mars" and "the European historian Basil Davidson."
- 21 See Becquemont, Daniel (1992), p. 37-41. See also Fraisse, Geneviève (1985), pp. 30-31.
- 22 Clémence Royer, « Darwinisme » *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences médicales*, Amédée Dechambre & Jacques Raige-Delorme (Dir.), Paris, Asselin, Masson, 1880, pp. 698-767.
- 23 She says that « Les deux moitiés de l'humanité, par suite d'une différence trop radicale dans l'éducation, parlent deux dialectes différents, au point de ne pouvoir que difficilement s'entendre sur certains sujets et sur les sujets même les plus importants ». Royer, Clémence (1859), p. 9.
- 24 Firmin says: « Je remercie surtout les dames qui ont eu la gentillesse de venir aussi. Le Marquis d'Argenson, rapporte Sainte-Beuve, dans ses *Causeries du lundi*, disait qu'il ne restait jamais une journée entière sans passer même un quart d'heure dans la société des dames. C'est que la présence de la femme exerce sur nous une influence charmante, salutaire : elle nous oblige à avoir du maintien et de l'esprit. En effet il faut beaucoup d'esprit pour causer longtemps sans ennuyer les dames ». Firmin, Anténor (1891), p. 5. See also, in another lecture, a year later, this remark: « Les dames, surtout ne trouveront guère d'attraits dans ces détails arides et je suis vraiment désolé de n'avoir pas un meilleur régal à leur offrir ». Firmin, Anténor (1892), p. 2.
- 25 Gobineau, Arthur de ([1853-1855] 1983).
- 26 Janvier, Louis-Joseph (1884). See also Hurbon, Laennec (1984) and Hurbon, Laennec (1987).
- 27 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), pp. 12-13. The French text is: « Quelle est la vraie nature de l'homme ? Jusqu'à quel degré et dans quelles conditions développe-t-il ses aptitudes ? Toutes les races humaines peuvent-elles s'élever oui ou non au même niveau intellectuel et moral ? Quelles sont celles qui semblent être plus spécialement douées pour le développement supérieur de l'esprit, et quelles sont alors les particularités organiques qui leur assurent cette supériorité ? ». Firmin, Anténor (1885), pp. 18-19.
- 28 Paul Broca, b. 1824 - d. 1880.
- 29 Firmin, Anténor (1885) p. 58; Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 42.
- 30 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), pp. 41-42. The French text is: « Au reste, pourquoi ne pas le dire ? Il était doux à l'esprit d'un Broca de s'imaginer d'une autre espèce que ces êtres repoussants qu'il a ainsi décrits : *La physionomie des nègres (sans parler de leur couleur) est caractérisée par un front étroit et fuyant, un nez écrasé à sa base et épaté au niveau des narines, des yeux très découverts à iris brun et à sclérotique jaunâtre, des lèvres extrêmement épaisses, retroussées au dehors et retroussées en avant ; enfin des mâchoires saillantes, en forme de museau et supportant de longues dents obliques ; tels sont les principaux traits qui donnent à la figure*

- éthiopienne un cachet tout à fait spécial* » (Broca, *Mém. d'anthr.*, t. III, p. 393). Firmin, Anténor (1885), pp. 57-58.
- 31 Broca, Paul (1860), *Recherches sur l'hybridité animale en général et sur l'hybridité humaine en particulier, considérées dans leurs rapports avec la question de la pluralité des espèces humaines*, Paris, Imprimerie de J. Claye, p. 654 (Reprint in Bernasconi, Robert, (ed.) (2003).
- 32 Blanckaert, Claude (2001), p. 97.
- 33 Virey, Julien-Joseph, b. 1775 - d. 1846. See Bénichou, Claude & Blanckaert, Claude (Eds.), (1988).
- 34 Firmin, Anténor (1885), pp. 77-78; Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), pp. 54-55.
- 35 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 57. The French text is: "Ce fait imaginaire n'a été pris au sérieux que pour amener cette conclusion si chère au savant anthropologiste : *La conformation physique du nègre est en quelque sorte intermédiaire entre celle de l'Européen et celle du singe* » (Broca, *Mémoires d'anthropologie*, III, 1877, p. 397). Firmin, Anténor (1885), p. 83.
- 36 The text of Louis Figuier (1819-1894) is *Les races humaines*. Firmin, Anténor (1885), p. 84; Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 58.
- 37 It is Antoine Étienne Reynaud Augustin Serres (1786-1868) who was a physiologist with whom Broca collaborated.
- 38 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 67. The French text is: « Le pénis du nègre est plus long et volumineux dans l'état de flaccidité que celui du blanc ; dans l'état d'érection c'est le contraire ». Firmin, Anténor (1885), p. 98. The text of Broca he quotes is *Mémoires d'anthr.*, t. III, p. 521; the text of Paul Topinard is *L'Anthropologie*, p. 373.
- 39 All these issues are well known nowadays thanks to the abundant researches on history of anthropology. See in Blanckaert, Claude (ed.) (2001) a very complete bibliography.
- 40 Blanckaert, Claude (2001), p. 125.
- 41 Firmin, Anténor ([1885] 2002), p. 12; Firmin, Anténor (1885), p. 17. The reference Firmin gives for these words of Clémence Royer is: *Congrès intern. Des sciences ethnogr. tenu à Paris en 1878*, p. 438.

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