

# **For a Queer and Revolutionary Science**

**An Anti-Dogmatic Essay**

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## A century of looking without seeing anything

When the Europeans arrived in the interior of Africa, they were quickly amazed by its landscapes and, most notably, by the animals that inhabited them, the creatures that would soon inhabit the imagination of all the generations that followed: lions, elephants, gazelles, zebras and giraffes. Alongside their soldiers, armed with their modern rifles with which they would conquer the continent, came their biologists and naturalists, armed with an even more phenomenal weapon: the scientific method.

Sir William Cornwallis Harris would be a pioneer of this adventure, establishing in 1836 the institution of the safari, the journey into the wild interior of Africa, to observe the landscapes, map the terrain, take note of the fauna, shoot it and send the specimens to museums in Europe, where their magnificent skins are still on display today. Over the next century, this method of doing things would march into Africa, armed with the rifles of the empires' soldiers. At the same time as entire nations were enumerated, conquered and decimated, the species they coexisted with were catalogued and hunted, sometimes to extinction.

During the period of imperialist domination in Africa, the study of its fauna was always an object of passion for the scientific elites of the old continent. The bodies and behavior of the animals that inhabited the continent were scrutinized relentlessly, in order to decipher all the mystery that captivated them in these animals, seeking to know their marriage rituals, their social habits, the way they raised their children<sup>1</sup>. After that century of study, our knowledge of the natural world and, consequently, of our own human world, was undoubtedly much better developed (the discovery of Darwinian principles says as much). Scientists in Europe had done extensive work on the biology and sociology of the animal kingdom. Of course, the only thing that escaped their attention was the rather common and ostentatious existence of homosexual behavior in various species of animals, which in fact is not even mentioned in their writings.

In fact, among the favorite animals of European scientists of that era, the previously mentioned elephants, gazelles, zebras and giraffes, sex and even homosexual relations are common (especially compared to us humans, who clearly still have a lot to learn). 45% of sexual relations among Asian elephants are homosexual; among lions, 8% of sexual relations are between males, and females also show common homosexual behavior; and giraffes, frankly, could be adopted as a symbol of queer sexuality, with one study putting up to 94% of their sexual relations as being between males.

As one might expect, animals didn't wait until the end of Victorian modesty to start having more inappropriate sexual relations in front of human beings; these behaviors have always existed among them and European scientists will have observed these behaviors, and not catalogued them as such. And in fact, when reading the records of that time, one quickly discovers that, in fact, the behaviors that we record between animals as same-sex relations (which are not exactly inappropriate, given that they involve copulation or friction until ejaculation), were generally considered to be "disputes". At the same time, it was noted that these observers were writing off as examples of heterosexual sex any interaction between male and female more intimate than one sniffing the other.

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<sup>1</sup> And of course, the same was done to the African peoples they encountered who, in imperialist logic, were little more than another animal from the African savannah

In fact, to say that no European scientist took note of homosexual behavior among animals would be unfair; there is actually an exception to the rule that helps the argument: Ferdinand Karsch was a German entomologist and anthropologist who wrote the first study on homosexuality among animals in 1900, undoubtedly a pioneer in the field, a visionary even. Karsch also happened to be homosexual, and to have lived openly as such, which would lead to his work being denigrated by the rising Nazis at the time of his death. The only explorer who seems to have noticed the obvious homosexuality among animals was one who was himself homosexual and proud of it.

## **Erased from the books**

Karsch's work, although pioneering and ahead of its time (recognition of homosexual behavior among animals would only appear in the 1960s and a genuine review of previous studies would only appear in the 1990s), cannot be said to have "discovered" anything about animal behavior. Particularly since the ancient authors make it quite clear that they were aware that homosexuality was as common among animals as it was among themselves. Aristotle describes same-sex couples of pigeons, partridges and quails, and the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD author. Horapolo mentions hermaphroditism among hyenas (a common myth, due to the structure of the females' genitals, but one that nevertheless illustrates comfort with animal queerness).

In fact, this erasure of queer existence by science, in its broadest sense as the accumulation of human knowledge, is not just confined to natural history, but also to human history, to the history of Aristotle and Horapolo, whose attitudes to sexuality were, although different from ours, queer in the sense of not being heteronormative.

Today we know that the classical world was one that challenged our society's moral perspectives on sexuality, but this was something that was simply ignored until it couldn't be ignored anymore (the debacle starting in 1907), with the same treatment applied to biology being applied to classical history and literature: Achilles and Patroclus, undoubtedly the best couple in the Iliad, whose sexuality Plato made a point of discussing in some detail, were branded as simple, virtuous comrades, an image that, until recently, was the one that marked their cultural portraits. When translating stories about Socrates' life from Greek, the word eros, whose meaning leaves little to speculation, was translated as friend, mentor, as if that made any sense. Translations that continue to be used today, moreover, which he never bothered to revise properly, accepting the wisdom of the Victorians.

If the truth has come out, it's because it's impossible to write human history without including us in it. However much they erase us, however much they ignore us, however much they translate their texts around us, as long as they ignore us, their narrative simply suffers from contradictions and cannot make sense. Over the last two centuries, the authors who studied the Iliad, convinced of Achilles' heterosexuality, had no way of explaining why the character had reacted so deeply emotionally to the death of his companion Patroclus, an anguish so profound that Homer had to get Zeus to intervene to mediate on his honor and prevent Achilles from breaking down the gates of Troy at that very moment and breaking the prophecy that dictated the city's late fall; in Hellenic cosmology, a prophecy was something so strong that not even Zeus could move it, but Achilles, and his love for Patroclus, were able to break the most powerful force in the universe. It is impossible to fully understand the Iliad without accepting the existence of queer people.

Today, homosexual behaviour has already been observed in 1500 species; we look at classical civilization, and all the civilizations on this Earth, and we can see the permanent existence, more or less accepted, of queer people, and their place in history. But even so, this is a work that is incomplete. We need to revise our biological precepts, now that homosexual behavior is accepted; we need to reiterate the stories, now that we have no reason to avoid the subject of our historical existence; we need to re-translate the texts, now that we know that homoeroticism is not a misinterpretation.

In a sentence: **sometimes science is a lie.**

## The damage of that lie

The effects that the erasure of natural and human history, of queerness, have had on our community could be summed up in one sentence: they have made us feel unnatural. It's in the term queer itself, the sense of strangeness, of absurdity. With historical and natural queerness erased, all that remained to be analyzed was contemporary queerness, our will and desire to love and be loved, which we knew to be different from those of the majority of our companions (something that in itself causes alienation), but which, when we studied the history of the world, we saw surrounded by a dizzying sea of apparent heterosexuality.

History and integration with nature are the pillars of any community. They are what ground us and give meaning to our rituals. With the erasure of our history that we suffered, the pioneers of our community in modern times found themselves without any foundations, a condition that seemed to give reason to the argument made by the scientific authorities of the time: that what we had was nothing more than a disorder, something perverse and dangerous, to be remedied or punished by the common good.

I was born almost a century after Karsch's work, more than thirty years after Stonewall, at a time when history had long admitted that the Hellenes were indeed queer and when science had already catalogued many species as exhibiting intriguing sexual behaviors. And yet, I grew up thinking that homosexuality was a very rare, perverse and completely unnatural behavior, with no examples in the animal world or in history, being the most recent degeneration of a world going off the rails. So I kept my head down. I really didn't want to cause any problems, either for myself or for anyone else.

I think the first historical figure who I knew to be queer was Michelangelo. That brought me some comfort. Then I went on to learn about more Renaissance people, the Greeks (Alexander the Great in particular has always brought me great joy), and all the other peoples of this world. When I read the Epic of Gilgamesh, I couldn't help but think that the "friendship" between the heroes seemed a bit suspicious. At the same time, I was learning about penguins, goats and giraffes, all these animals known for their sexual versatility, and I came to understand what the right side of this issue really was. Even so, it was easier for me to accept the world than to accept myself. To do that, I had to really understand that there are so many of us... And the saddest part is that we certainly still lack a lot of people who have the courage to join our community.

In any case, the myth of our naturelessness has had disastrous consequences for our community. From this myth comes all the justifications given for the massacre we have suffered over the last century. Armed with a self-proclaimed scientific understanding of our condition, they have placed on it the stigma of a mental disorder and devised 'therapies' with the aim of trying

to 'cure' it, therapies, castrations, lobotomies, electric shocks, which are in fact forms of torture, which only accentuate the feeling of alienation and often lead to suicide.

It is common to point to religious dogma as the source of this oppression, and there is no doubt that the reactionarism of religious authorities has had and still has an impact on our history of suffering, but in the last two centuries, the erosion of the authority of this dogma in favor of the weight of scientific dogma has meant that this dogma has been important in the justification given to our suffering. Developments in science were used to formulate oppositions to homosexuality that went beyond biblical condemnation, which was losing meaning as a social force. Social Darwinists relied on the still very underdeveloped ideas of natural selection to demonstrate our alleged degeneration.

The logical end of this treatment of our condition by the scientific authorities was carried out by the fascist regimes, who, in their modernist eagerness, built their entire platform of hatred on the detestable theories that passed as scientific at the time, and which had the weight of dogma backing them up. The Holocaust was not driven by religious fervor; it was the result of conclusions reached by men who read the scientific texts of the time, those immutable scientific truths, and drew from them a plan for a logically better society. A society in which our illness no longer existed.

This view of our existence as a disease would have damaging effects during the AIDS crisis, which has always hit the gay community particularly hard and which, before receiving its current name, was known as GRID (gay-related immunodeficiency), a name that reveals an important prejudice from the early years of its treatment: the homosexuality of many of the patients affected by it was seen not as a social condition, but as a risky pathology, similar to how being HIV-positive makes a person more vulnerable to infectious diseases. And it also contributed, of course, to the silence and lack of support in fighting this pandemic, which was allowed to devour so many of our communities for years before they recognized it as the threat it was. There's no doubt about it: the political leadership of our society was more than willing to be satisfied that there was a natural mechanism for carrying out our slaughter. If not God, it was nature that came to correct our imperfection.

As I have already said, the myth of our unnaturalness, although it is beginning to be deconstructed in the natural sciences and in human history, is still alive in our culture; I have certainly suffered from it, and I know that the same is true of others. Even among medical professionals, the belief that homosexuality is a disease remains alive among many, and several texts still used affirm this deconstructed theory. There are many therapists, who should be responsible for ensuring our well-being and helping us on the path to understanding, who do everything they can to reassure us that something is wrong with us, that we should try to be different, that we are pathological. This is true when it comes to homosexuality, but it's even more pertinent when it comes to the trans members of our community, who often receive, as an initial reaction from health professionals regarding their experience, disbelief, rejection and attempts to "cure" them.

For two centuries, scientific dogma served as a tool of our oppression. Its method was used to demonstrate our pathology, to alienate us and treat us like demented people who needed to be cured, controlled or, to no avail, purged from this world by an act of God or Man. And we also know that this scientific oppression was not only our responsibility, but also that of so many other communities with which we intersect: phrenology and its cranial measurements were used to give scientific vigor to the racism that has permeated these two centuries; psychology and

psychiatry served as weapons against neurodiverse people, evolutionary biology was used to justify all kinds of social reactionaries regarding the position of women in society.

Today, to cleanse their hands of this disgrace, it is common to apply the term “pseudoscientific” to all these ideas that are being overtaken; but it is worth remembering that when they emerged and were applied, they did so following the precepts of the method and the wisdom of scientific dogma. We are not dealing here with marginal theories popular among renegades; these were all methods and ideas agreed upon by the scientific community and agreed upon by its great masters. The inventor of lobotomy, that greatest of medical disasters, was awarded a Nobel Prize and his name is still commemorated in his home country with a hospital in his honor in Lisbon!

Indeed, the fathers of the science of our oppression are the fathers of all science. Their work is still the basis of what we study today. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to learn that their damage has been perpetuated to this day.

## **Subjective blindness**

That the only observer contemporary to the great European naturalists of the imperialist era who noticed homosexual behavior among the animals he observed, Ferdinand Karsch, was himself homosexual, is not surprising, any more than it is that Aristotle, whose methods and tools for observing the world were much weaker than those of modern scientists, was able to notice these behaviors, while those scientists suffered from an apparent case of selective blindness for an entire century.

What differentiates Karsch and Aristotle from the European scientists of the modern era is that they were aware of the existence of homosexual behavior among humans, and didn't see it as something particularly alien; therefore, when they observed same-sex attraction behavior in animal species, it wasn't difficult for them to imagine what it was, they had experience of what it was and didn't need to do any mental gymnastics to fit this new observation into those they had already made in their own day-to-day lives. Karsch's contemporaries, on the other hand, were either totally ignorant of homosexuality and the behaviors associated with it, or were predisposed, by social and religious norms and the scientific dogma inherited from their academic ancestors, to associate it with a human disorder, something unnatural that was inconceivable to find in the African jungles, where there was freedom from the degeneration of men.

This demonstrates the weakness of the scientific method, which depends on the objectivity of the observer for it to work. His theory is based on the assumption that if a human observer treats only the data provided to them by precise materials and measurements, and sticks to these and these alone for their conclusions, then they will arrive at a true result. What this century of subjective blindness to homosexuality in the animal kingdom demonstrates is that the observer and measurer of this data has no way of detaching themselves from all the prejudices they bring, from their condition as a social creature. They observe not objectively, as the method presupposes, but with all the prejudices that their experience has given them. In the case of the naturalists of the imperial era, one of these prejudices was that they were unable to conceive of interactions between animals of the same sex as having the character of sexual attraction.

Objectivity, the idea that a human observer can extract from their senses, through their reason, knowledge untouched by their subjectivity, their prejudices, is a pillar on which the scientific method rests. And it's a pillar that, frankly, should collapse. I think that the experiences described

so far show that, in fact, human beings have shown themselves to be more than incapable of being genuinely objective in their treatment of the natural world, bringing to their observation of it all the prejudices of their society.

But if that had been the legacy of this error, if it had been limited to a poor understanding of the social behavior of giraffes, it would have been less bad. But scientific dogma, that vaunted accumulation of human knowledge, is not just theoretical and academic; it has its purpose, and often its motivation for being collected, of a political nature. Abdullah Öcalan, in the chapter on epistemology with which he opens his Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, warns: *“Objectivism is not an innocent scientific concept, far from it”*. As we saw when discussing the harms of lying, data collected from nature, claiming the authority of objectivism but carrying with it the prejudices of its observer’s society, was presented as scientific proof to confirm in his society the same prejudices that had already been present in its genesis. As Öcalan puts it: *“If you investigate objective legality in depth, you will see that it is the modern version of the ancient word of God. In this objectivity you hear the echo of the voice of forces that transcend nature and society and, if you tune your ear even more, you will come to the conclusion that this voice derives from the domain of the tyrant and the abuser.”*

The scientific method served as a tool for the oppressive society to justify itself and the oppression it caused. What other justification could there have been for phrenology? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we began to realize the terrible reality that Nietzsche proclaimed—that God was dead, and that divine authority would no longer serve to justify our prejudices. And, as Nietzsche also prophesied, due to human nature, its shadow would live for millennia in caves; with the end of divine authority’s power as justification for the oppression of human life, new and imaginative forms of justifying oppression would emerge, and they indeed did in the century that followed the death of divine authority. Among these justifications came that of the scientific method: instead of a priest interpreting divine texts that fell from the sky, we have a scientist interpreting observations from right here on Earth!

Nietzsche indeed said it: his 19<sup>th</sup> century would not be characterized by the victory of science, but by the victory of the scientific method over science. Armed with the simplest of fallacies, that of scientific infallibility, these explorers set out into the jungle, in search of new and exciting truths. And to the surprise of no one paying attention, they returned with nothing more than reformulations of the old lies.

Taking up Nietzsche one last time, the shadow of God, of divine authority, of the prejudices it cast over us, still lives on, in the caves of humanity. And it is our mission to destroy that shadow as well.

## What to do

The intention of this essay is not to dismantle the human pursuit of truth; I still long to know more, to understand more, to do more, to seek in this world a truth that warms my spirit. I have no enthusiasm for abandoning this pursuit, or for succumbing to nihilism, to the unhappy realization that there is no meaning in this world, and that nothing can be done to create it. What I want is to tear down the scientific dogmas that have been apotheosized under the light of scientific objectivism.



Science was born a rebel; it was born to question the world and to confront the fanatical authorities who hated it for asking difficult questions about the scheme of things they had built, but that crumbled under the slightest pressure of logic. It came to destroy the wisdom of the wise and annihilate the understanding of the well-informed. It was revolutionary, and it was queer (as were many of its earliest adherents).

But that science, born as a challenge to authority, would itself become the authority to challenge, as a result of the very political and economic transition in Europe from feudalism to capitalism and liberalism. The new bourgeois ruling class, unable to justify its authority through religious precepts like its aristocratic and clerical predecessors, turned to the scientific method as a way of justifying its existence. Hence the French Revolution, the liberal revolution par excellence, also had a strong component of anti-theist revolution in favor of science, reason, and objectivism: in seeking to dismantle the old oppressive fanaticism, they created a new social order, a Cult of Reason, based on values deemed deeply objective and scientific. If God died in the century that followed the French Revolution, he was replaced on his throne by the shadow of his authority, in the form of scientific objectivism, to serve the interests of a new ruling class that, in turn, had usurped the throne of another, slain at the guillotine.

In short, science came to destroy the wisdom of the wise and annihilate the understanding of the well-informed, only to replace them with new wise men and experts, now armed with their own circular logic. This falls far short of what was desired, leaving science in the role of religion: serving as an argument for all the conservatives and reactionaries of this world to justify their hatred and feed their prejudice. All new social discoveries and all great revolutions are subject to a new paradox: by opposing what was previously known, they oppose the infallible dogma, and by their own logic, they are in error.

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Öcalan puts this issue very well:

“I do not intend to propose a new method nor suggest chaos, the complete absence of method. I am aware that there are methods, forms of interpretation, and laws about human life and about nature as a whole, but I must emphasize that, as there is always a certain deterministic essence in method and in laws, the insistence and permanence on them put us at the risk of denying progress and freedom. Nor do I imagine an existence without method or laws, but I do not trust that vision of the universe of Descartes reduced to mathematical order. Logic based on mathematics and laws gives me great doubts, due to the perverse character of those who, wielding them as unquestionable weapons, merely use them to justify their interests.”

It is essential to remember that all dogmas were, essentially, compiled and forced upon society not necessarily by those who believed in them (though that is possible, since humans, as we’ve seen, excel at seeing only what they want), but because they served the interests of those who enforced them. Dogmas are, in their essence, subjective; specifically, they are molded by what it is useful for their actor to have as unquestionable truth. Objectivity is a myth, in Öcalan’s words, a masked god and a hidden king, designed specifically with the goal of justifying the power of the powerful, just as religious dogma had done before it. What other way could there be to justify the outlandish and oppressive interpretations of the cult of Jesus Christ?

So, what should we do? We must abandon all dogmas, and abandon the very idea that it is possible to have a correct dogma. The observations made by science cannot be made just once and considered certain, but must be repeated, again and again, compared with what was obtained before and taking into account the changes experienced by our society and our gaze. The behavior of animals must be reanalyzed, and the translations of old books must be made again and again, to ensure that each generation looks at them more free from the ignorance of their ancestors, yet aware of its own prejudice, which future generations will also have to overcome.

This perpetual cycle of self-reinvention is a reflection of the very nature of queer people, of our constant and shameless change, of our revolutionary energy to transform ourselves, inside and out. It is this spirit that science must also know how to absorb, more than the humility to know it must change, the fiery desire to do so, and to be something different, to see its boundaries pushed and to reach where it has never gone before.

Only this complete abandonment of dogma, in favor of a permanent reinvention of what we know, a constant questioning of everything, a complete disregard for the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the well-informed, can lead us to a science that, if not free from the subjectivity of social prejudices, is at least less inclined to serve as their justification and authority. A science that knows how to evolve and grow with us, as we too become a freer and more democratic civilization.

I will now conclude with a quote from Öcalan, in which he connects the analysis of methodologies of truth with the political work to be undertaken, giving a rallying cry that is in its essence so queer that we should adopt it as our own:

“We are living in a period in which the love of truth brings us closer to free life; the watchword must be: TRUTH IS LOVE AND LOVE IS FREE LIFE!”

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