

Vegan Cervantes: Meat Consumption and Social Degradation in *Dialogue of the Dogs*

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Abstract. Cervantes's *Dialogue of the Dogs* is a preeminent example of a classic that reaffirms its relevance through an ability to present potential readings for new historical circumstances. In the context of the Anthropocene, ecological crisis and animal ethics highlight Cervantes's deep concern for humble human and non-human animals, institutional corruption, and political abuse, thereby turning the Horatian poetics of his *Dialogue of the Dogs* into an effective vehicle to encourage social justice and promote animal rights and vegan attitudes. Cervantes's *Dialogue of the Dogs* questions the exceptionality of humans as posed by the Biblical creation story, defended by Pico della Mirandola's *On Human Dignity* and by Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, and founded in the petrified Western cultural link between language and rationality. Cervantes's dogs think, feel, decide, and learn, while demonstrating a sense of good and evil; and doing their job with honest dedication, through their behavior, they undoubtedly deserve their own rights. Slaughterhouses, meat consumption, and the meat industry in general should vanish from society in order to build a better world, for meat is the origin of greed, evil politics, and social distress as well as a symbol of animal abuse, the deterioration of ethics, political corruption, and colonial tyranny. Aligned to a non-anthropocentric Western tradition, from Plutarch's *Moralia* to Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, a renewed Cervantes is being awakened by contemporary ecological awareness and animal ethics: his *Dialogue of the Dogs* has turned into a reading against human hubris and argues in favor of animal rights, freedom from any kind of oppression, social justice, and vegan sensibility.

Keywords. *Dialogue of the Dogs*, Vegan Studies, Cervantes, Ecocriticism, Animal Ethics

INTRODUCTION

A traditional scholar would consider this chapter an impossible endeavor from its very beginning, for the title leads to a vegan Cervantes that never existed. In a strict reading, this observation is certainly true. In the age of Cervantes, veganism was far from being the dietary issue, philosophical movement, and sociological phenomenon that currently exists. Indeed, veganism has not been a topic of interest in Cervantine literary criticism, and the study of the role of animals in *Dialogue of the Dogs* (1613) has been the closest that literary critics have approached veganism in his works. Animal ethics have not been at the center of attention of *Dialogue*, and studies have mostly been limited to the relationship of the protagonist Berganza, a talking dog, either with the slave Aesop, who was also given the gift of speech, or with the main character's adventures that follow the tradition of the picaresque novel in which the protagonist continually goes from one master and

job to another. Similarly, some of Plutarch's writings offer animals who have served to illustrate moral propositions useful in everyday life or clever strategies in political battles.

There is no assertion in *Dialogue of the Dogs* that leads to an explicit affirmation of veganism, not even a mild vegetarianism. And there is no advocacy of any green diet devoid of products coming from the exploitation of animals. Nothing seems to justify a vegan reading of Cervantes's *Dialogue*, a reading that from the start could be dismissed and considered a misreading full of unforgivable anachronies, historical incoherences, and a variety of capricious inexactitudes. Working with a universal classic of literature, a traditional scholar would assertively argue that Cervantes does not need veganism and that he has already won a permanent place in the history of Western literature; in short, *Dialogue* neither requires "original" readings nor hermeneutical "audacities."

Contrary to its fixed meaning, "permanence" is always changing. No solid argument exists that can support that Cervantes's *Dialogue of the Dogs* is a cultural monument set in stone, maintaining a significance that cannot and should not be found beyond a historicist approach. Nevertheless, *Dialogue of the Dogs* is not only connected to the remote past of the Greek and Latin classics and to its immediate present in Renaissance and Baroque, it is also connected to its future in such a vivid way that it continuously keeps alive the treasure of potential readings. Hans Robert Jauss asserts that these readings emerge in the great works of art once unexpected circumstances and new horizons for their reception arise.

A vegan Cervantes flourishes with energy in *Dialogue of the Dogs* when contemporary thought arises regarding animal ethics, climate change, overexploitation of natural resources, abuse of the poor, and the political ills of the global dimension of a market economy. Every issue involved in the concept of the Anthropocene, and veganism is no doubt one of them, revitalizes *Dialogue of the Dogs* and upgrades its Horatian poetics, thereby making it again *dulce et utile* for the contemporary reader. Indeed, all of the above mentioned topics are explicit or implicitly touched on by *Dialogue of the Dogs*, and all the conflicts they entail are figuratively incarnated in the role of meat and in the extreme desire to possess and consume it, which is a driving force seen in many characters of the *Dialogue*. Without a doubt, meat is the most profitable commodity in *Dialogue of the Dogs* and, consequently, greed is the primary subject of concern.

To justify a vegan reading of Cervantes's *Dialogue of the Dogs* in a way that will be acceptable to both open-minded readers as well as those of a more conservative attitude, such a

reading will not only be supported by the horizon of expectations of contemporary environmental circumstances and sensibility towards animals and ecological issues, but also be founded on the *auctoritas* of Plutarch, one of the Hellenistic classics, and on a subterranean cultural flow that questions the division of language and rationality between humans and animals. This cultural flow becomes visible when Plutarch and the Cynic School are immersed in a wider non-anthropocentric Western tradition, from Maimonides to St. Francis of Aquinas, from Spinoza to Montaigne, Feijoo, and Wordsworth, from Stuart Mill to Thoreau and Whitman, from Richard Ryder and Peter Singer to Arne Naess and the Deep Ecology Movement.

A vegan Cervantes does not come out of a capricious personal reading of *Dialogue of the Dogs*; rather, it arises as the result of a strong connection with a tradition that has been marginalized by the dominant currents of Western thought and reaches the present time. A renewed Cervantes is being awakened when fully installed in not only what Jorge Bergua Cavero calls the “intense debate that was unleashed throughout Europe during the seventeenth-century and part of the eighteenth-century based on the thesis of Descartes according to which animals are automats [...] deprived completely of thought and reason” (Plutarco 258), but also in the animal ethics of Reagan, Singer or Coetzee and contemporary debates about meat industry practices and their relationship with the domination in politics of capitalism and market economy.¹ *Dialogue of the Dogs* goes deep into most of the topics that are pertinent to contemporary veganism, from the fundamental rejection of any kind of exploitation and cruelty to animals in slaughterhouses, to a more general concern against the “consumer mandate of capitalism,” which in the words of Laura Wright, promotes interest in “examining the ways that oppressions—of peoples, of nature, of animals—are enmeshed and reinforcing” (728, 729).

AESOP AND THE PICARESQUE TRADITION

All beings belong to the same ecosystem and all play a role in the homeostasis of life. The social recognition of this fact has prevented maltreatment of animals, and the vindication of their rights has been framed in what Subercaseaux calls “emergent human rights,” a new generation of rights that Subercaseaux considers “akin to alterity and difference; that is, the right of autodetermination of the original people [of America] and ethnic minorities, reproduction rights, sexual minorities rights [and] animal rights” (42). With this conceptual frame at hand, it is curious that studies about

¹ All translations are my own and Ellen Skowronski-Polito.

the role of the dogs in the Cervantine *Dialogue* have not gone further than establishing relationships between *Dialogue of the Dogs* and those literary metamorphoses in which humans are transformed into animals (*The Golden Ass*) or mute people are given the gift of speech (*Life of Aesop*), the protagonists of the picaresque novel who are constantly changing work and master (figures like Lazarillo, and Guzmán de Alfarache), and animals that appear in Polyantheas and treatises of emblems from the Renaissance. Read under the light of “emergent human rights” and with an ecocritical perspective, those relationships can lead much further than formal coincidences and moral lessons about temperance, valor, and patience in everyday life and politics, to a challenging reading that turns the Cervantine story into a text in favor of animal rights and vegan attitudes. As *dulce et utile* as always, the Horatian poetics is now attuned to the animal ethics and environmental awareness of the current time.

Marrero Henríquez (2018) has highlighted two features of the picaresque mode that have been a common ground in the philological studies of the relationship of *Dialogue of the Dogs* with the classics, and these two points are both of special interest to show the animalist and vegan pedagogical potentials of *Dialogue*. The first one is the autobiographical character of the *Life of Aesop* and of the Spanish picaresque tradition (*Lazarillo*, *El Buscón*, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, *Periquillo sarniento*). The second is that, at the beginning of his life, Aesop was a mute slave who, through a metamorphosis, acquires “magically the gift of talking, and afterwards [procedes] to work for different lords as a servant, philosophical interlocutor and solver of all kinds of problems” (Carranza 142).

The autobiographical nature of Berganza’s narration, who as if by magic is given the gift of speech, suggests that, just like Aesop the slave, Berganza and his dog friend Cipión already had the intellectual and sentimental qualities that they demonstrate as talking servants before they were given the ability of speech. With this possibility, Cervantes is implicitly making a challenging separation of intelligence and reasoning from the possession of natural language. Appealing to readers’ affection, the autobiographical character of *Dialogue* acts in favor of such challenge, for emotion invites readers to see *Dialogue of the Dogs* not only as a dialogical autobiography of Aesopic inspiration, but also as the personal allegation of a dog in favor of animal ethics and rights based upon a series of relevant facts in both the context of *Dialogue* and in real-life: Dogs communicate and talk figuratively; they are faithful and have memory; they decide, have feelings, learn, and do their work with precision and honesty; they plan and foresee according to their

experience and contribute to the social wellbeing. These qualities are without any need of further justification in the so called “argument of the marginal cases”.²

PLUTARCH AND CERVANTES’S “GOSSIP DOGS”

It is unknown what books formed a part of Cervantes’s library, and it is not clear whether Cervantes was able to read the original works in Greek or Latin; nonetheless, he surely had knowledge of Plutarch by one or all of the three channels at his disposal: the direct reading of primary fonts, the reading of secondary sources (translations, partial translations, and miscellany) and the common knowledge of his time. Not only was Plutarch a favorite reading of the Christian Humanism (Vega 263), Cervantes was educated with López de Hoyos and the Jesuits; and as Muñoz Gallarte brings to light, the Jesuit studies of *ratio studiorum* included Plutarch in the fourth course in which Plutarch was studied in relation to the moral teachings of the patristics (197).

Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* was well known in Spain through Alfonso López de Palencia’s romance version published in 1491 in Seville and re-edited in 1508 and 1592. There is documentation on the translation by Juan Castro de Salinas (1562) and of other partial versions with interpolations and personal commentaries by Francisco de Enzinas in *El primero volumen de las vidas de los ilustres y excelentes varones griegos y romanos* (1551) and by Francisco de Quevedo in his *Vida de Marco Bruto* (1644). There are also several Latin and romance translations of *Moralia*, one of them, by Diego Gracián, counts with two editions close to Cervantes, the first one in Alcalá de Henares (Juan de Brocar 1548) and the second one in Salamanca (Alejandro de Cánova 1571).³

The *Dialogue*’s relationship to some of the texts found in Plutarch’s *Moralia*, namely “On the Intelligence of Animals,” “Animals are Rational or ‘Gryllus’,” and “On Meat Eating” will serve as the impulse needed to give a step forward from animal ethics into a vegan Cervantes. Criticism has pushed this possible reading of Cervantes and this Plutarchian connection to the side and has instead focused on the influence of those texts from Plutarch that have a presence in treatises of education of princes. In these texts

² This argument is based on the idea that if all human beings have the same rights, including those that were born with intellectual or physical abilities extremely lessened, then animals of superior intelligence should also enjoy those rights. For this issue see Íñigo de Miguel Beriain (2009). On the development of a justice inspired by animal ethics see Pablo Lora Deltoro (2003).

³ See Adrián J. Sáez and Israel Muñoz Gallarte for further information on Plutarch editions in the Spanish Golden Century.

are found the examples from *Parallel Lives* that offer models of moral and political virtue to the clergymen and Erasmist and intellectual counter-reformers, committed to the education of princes and governors [and also examples from] *Moralia*, a work with a broad cultural spectrum dominated by pedagogical, theological, philosophical, ethical, religion and apothegm essays or dialogues, as appropriate for gender as for the didactic pretensions of its cultivators. (Pérez Jiménez 2003a: 176)⁴

Cervantine criticism has not considered *Dialogue* relevant for vegan studies, and it has discarded the influence of the texts about animal rationality and meat consumption in favor of other texts from *Moralia* and biographical examples from *Parallel Lives*. In fact, all of the twelve references to Plutarch (far fewer than Virgil's ninety four) with no translation *ad litteram* that Barnés Vázquez (28-39) finds in *Don Quijote* are related to figures found in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, and the moral lessons of *Dialogue of the Dogs* relate to the group of twenty-two biographies from relevant historical figures from Greece and Rome that shape *Parallel Lives* (Sáez 152). Nonetheless, there are compelling reasons to consider that specific texts from Plutarch's *Moralia*, such as "On the Intelligence of Animals," "Animals are Rational or 'Gryllus'," and "On Meat Eating," are of great relevance in *Dialogue*. Berganza the dog is intelligent and has feelings. Not only does his story begin in a slaughterhouse, but relevant episodes of his life's adventures revolve around meat as an object of greed, which leads to oppression, and individual and social corruption.

Berganza was born near the "Door of the Meat," in a slaughterhouse in Seville. His first owner, a butcher named Nicolás el Romo, teaches him how to bite bulls and perform other cruelties. Berganza is in charge of carrying stolen pieces of meat in a basket to Nicolás's concubine. When a woman steals Berganza's meat, Nicolás believes that the dog had illicitly eaten it, and his violent reaction prompts Berganza's wandering life and varied stories with different owners and jobs, which Berganza later relates to Cipión, his dog friend. Indeed, not only is meat the narratological motive that originates the dialogue between Berganza and Cipión, but meat is also a main *leit motiv* embodying the issues of greed and social corruption that are of the most relevance in *Dialogue*.⁵

Especially pertinent in two episodes of Berganza's life, meat plays an integral role when he works for a group of shepherds and again when he serves a sheriff. Just after Berganza runs away from Nicolás el Romo and the slaughterhouse of Seville, destiny leads him to a group of

⁴ See also Pérez Jiménez 2003b,c; 2005a,b; and 2006.

⁵ Economic and social values of meat make of it a nutritious product of symbolic wealth. See Negrín de la Peña for a study on gastronomy and on the role of food in the picaresque novel in the context of the economic history of Spain during XVIth and XVII centuries.

shepherds who adopt him and name him Barcino. His new task is taking care of a flock and defending it from wolves. Several attacks occur, and the shepherds order him to search for the wolves; however, Berganza always returns without finding one. One night, Berganza discovers that it is the shepherds themselves who are killing the sheep, stealing the best part of its flesh, and then blaming the wolves. Ignorant of their devious trick, the owner of the flock orders that the dogs be punished, and Berganza decides to flee. Later on in his narrative, Berganza begins to work with a sheriff who recognizes him because he was a friend of his first owner, Nicolás el Romo. Corrupt and allied with a group of thugs who take advantage of multiple robberies and frauds, the sheriff bribes the judges with meat.

Meat is the reason why the shepherds kill the sheep and falsely accuse wolves of the offense. Meat is the object that is stolen in the slaughterhouse and the commodity that the sheriff uses to bribe court clerks, lawyers and judges. Murderers and thieves go unpunished with the complicity of lawyers and judges who are bought by stolen meat. Indeed, every criminal has a “guardian angel in St. Francis Plaza, gained with loins and tongues” (283). The plaza, located in Seville, is where, as Mariano Baquero Goyanes affirms, the center of justice is found, for there were “the halls of the Cabildo and of the Court” (283). Meat incites a corruption that takes possession of every element of the social body, from the most humble to those that possess the judicial, political and social power.

In spite of the relevance of meat as a vehicle of corruption and a symbol of animal abuse, criticism has not taken into account the influence of topics like animal rationality, meat consumerism, and veganism that are present in Plutarch’s *Moralia* in Cervantes’s *Dialogue of the Dogs*. For example, Adrián J. Sáez highlights the relationship of *Dialogue of the Dogs* with the episode of Alcibiades’s dog that appears both in *Parallel Lives* and *Moralia*. Alcibiades was a valiant soldier but also a traitor who sometimes saved Athens and on other occasions favored its destruction. He bought a beautiful dog for a considerable amount of money and immediately after cut off his tail to set him free in the city so that people could gossip about the dog instead of going into more serious subjects about Alcibiades. Sáez considers that Alcibiades’s dog is a primary influence on the dogs from the *Dialogue*, for both Cervantine dogs, Berganza and Cipión, not only talk about the ills of seventeenth-century Spanish society, but also talk about the vice of gossip itself (151).

To justify the vegan reading of *Dialogue of the Dogs*, it is crucial to mention two facts about the way Cipión and Berganza understand the word ‘gossip.’ First, *Dialogue* warns against gossip, but on a significant number of occasions while the Cervantine dogs discuss gossiping they refer to the breaking of the story-line and how digressions work against well-structured storytelling. Berganza the dog might lose his capacity to talk at any time and his friend dog Cipión advises him not to waste his time with gossip but rather guard against talking about his life before it might be too late. Although Sáez rightly considers that “the principal vice that Alcibiades attacks is the gossiping, [...] one of the scourges of seventeenth-century Spain, as depicted in *The Dialogue of Dogs* and in many other contemporary texts” (155), far from a minor extent, gossiping in *Dialogue* refers to digressions that disturb the order of a story. When Berganza tells the story of his adventures with the shepherds who name him Barcino, he is resting looking for the flock and “occupied my memory by recalling many things, especially the life I had in the slaughterhouse [...] Oh, what I could tell you now from what I learned in the school of that butcher, my master’s wife! But I’ll shut them up, why don’t you ignore me and consider me a gossip” (306).

A similar reflection occurs at the beginning of chapter XLIV in the second part of *Don Quijote*, a beginning that Marrero Henríquez has characterized as “errata sheet,” for it is here that the translator of the original text by Cide Hamete considers that the interpolated novellas that appear in the first part of *Don Quijote* not only distract the reader from the adventures of Don Quijote and Sancho, but also do not receive the attention that they, by their own qualities, deserve. Thus, the translator, with great ability and intelligence to discuss the whole universe, decides to keep the narration close to Don Quijote and Sancho’s adventures and asks the reader “to praise him, not for what he writes, but for what he has left unwritten” (II, 367).⁶

Most relevant for the vegan reading of *Dialogue of the Dogs* is the fact that the term “murmurador” [“gossiper”] is also related to the exposition of uncomfortable truths and to the challenging thinking of the Plutarchian Cynical tradition. Cynics were identified with dogs for two main reasons: they barked at people and said exactly what they thought, without fear or favor, and they rejected conventional values and lived in accordance with nature, having the most basic necessities covered. Cervantes’s dogs Berganza and Cipión are conscious of this Plutarchian canine descendancy. Berganza affirms that “they sin just as much, the one who says *latines* in front of the one who ignores Latin and the one who says them ignoring [Latin, and declares that he has

⁶ See Marrero Henríquez (1990) for a study of this and other structural preoccupations of Cervantes in *Don Quijote*.

heard] say a foolishness in Latin as in a Romance language and [that he has seen] silly lawyers and heavy grammarians [that with their Latin lists of words...] very easily can annoy the world not once, but many times” (318-319). Cipión then warns him that these commentaries not only distract from the line of the story, making it seem like an octopus “as you go adding tails” (319), but they are also dangerous for people can give them the name of “Cynics, which is to say gossiping dogs” (319).

In short, in terms of the structure of the narration, the main vice of the *Dialogue* is gossiping (understood as a digression) and, in moral terms, gossiping means the exposition of plain and uncomfortable truths. Gossip is far from being the main topic of the *Dialogue*, for it is greed incarnated in meat ownership and consumption, which is a central issue of the *Dialogue*. Along these lines, the Plutarchian texts that are most relevant for a vegan reading of *Dialogue of the Dogs* are to be found not in *Parallel Lives* but instead in *Moralia*, especially in the essays about the intelligence of animals and on flesh eating.

CERVANTES’S *DIALOGUE OF THE DOGS* AND PLUTARCH’S *MORALIA*

As María Luisa Barcallet Pérez affirms when referring to Plutarch's work, in *Dialogue of the Dogs*, Cervantes not only “transgresses [...] our comfortable prejudices regarding the animal, [he also] calls into question the very way we usually contemplate the world, know it and systematize it” (24). For Barcallet Pérez, like Plutarch, Cervantes's *Dialogue* answers the question of “why have we given the place that we have given to animals” and why does animality have the place it has as a mere defense of “human particularity against the undifferentiated” (24), in a kind of work of “anthropogenesis” (25) based on the definition of the human against the animal “to find an essential and permanent nature of the human” (25).⁷

Cervantes’s *Dialogue of the Dogs* invites the reader to an ethical reflection on the status of the animals and about our relationship with them, and like Plutarch's *Moralia*, Cervantes affirms the idea that the animals feel, remember what they felt, try it if it was pleasant, avoid it if it was unpleasant, show expectation or fear in the face of events, they flee if necessary and participate in reason, not, however, in the same way as humans, because animals do not require in their reason detours, theories or abstractions. Like Plutarch, Cervantes finds in animals the example to follow

⁷ For the origin of this thinking on animality see Elisabeth de Fontenay.

for the human being "in what prudence, courage, love, continence and sociability refers" (Barcallet Pérez 26) and does not hesitate "to make the animal an example of virtue, of courage, loyalty and continence, and despite recognizing the imperfection of the animal in terms of thought, it does not hesitate to find in animal reason a more natural element, more attached to the *logos* expressed in the cosmos" (Barcallet Pérez 28) .

Both Cervantes and Plutarch put into question defective dichotomies like rational / irrational or sensation / reason and point out that there is no opposition or disparity between animals and human beings. On the contrary, when participating in reason, animals cannot be debased, devoured, or tortured with impunity. Just as Plutarch affirms in "Gryllus" and in Berganza's autobiographical testimony, man can be considered "the most miserable and calamitous of so many animals that exist in the world" (Barcallet 28). In Plutarch and Cervantes, the good savage of Rousseau exists because in both "the animal already points to a return to a nature alien to the corruptions of civilization and education" (Barcallet 29).⁸

TOWARDS A VEGAN CERVANTES

Animals talk

Defended by Pico della Mirandola in *On Human Dignity* (1486) and Descartes in *Discourse on the Method* (1637), the relationship of speech and reasoning as an exceptional nature of the human being is confronted by Berganza who suggests the possibility that dogs can possess understanding without having speech. He has "heard great prerogatives being said [...] that we have a different nature, so alive and so sharp in many things, that it gives indications and signs of missing little to show that we have an *I-don't-know-what* understanding, which is capable of discourse" (280). Figuratively stated, Berganza admits that perhaps the animals "speak" even though they do not have articulated language and, in doing so, *Dialogue* makes problematic the relationship of humans' ability to speak with the rationality and intelligence attributed to them and distances them from animals. Moreover, it presents the idea that speaking is not a guarantee of correct moral and social behavior. Nothing is evident, Cervantes seems to say, neither the intelligence and rationality of the human animal, nor the unconsciousness and mechanism without reflection of the non-human animal.

⁸ See Bernat Castany Prado for a study on the influence of the Cynics in the building of the good savage.

Dogs are faithful and remember

Berganza shares a wide range of qualities with people, and with respect to many of them, he even proves to be at an advantage, such as with the case of faithfulness and memory. The dog is an animal that stands out for its “great memory [and for] gratitude and great fidelity” (280) so much so that it is painted as a symbol of friendship and “in the alabaster graves, where lie the figures of those who are buried, they put a dog figure between husband and wife at their feet, as a symbol of the friendship and faithfulness that were inviolable in life ” (280). In Berganza the dog, memory and fidelity are united, one quality of intellectual character and the other moral in nature. Without a doubt, judging by the social fresco that Cervantes paints in *Dialogue*, the dog is at this point very superior to the human beings with whom he interacts.

Dogs make decisions based on their experience

Wandering from one place and master to another does not happen by chance because Berganza makes multiple decisions. The first, which gives rise to his autobiographical account, is the decision to abandon Nicolás el Romo, his first master, not only because el Romo tries to stab him when he discovers that the meat he had stolen for his concubine did not reach its destination, but also because Berganza, of good nature, does not feel comfortable among butchers because “all those who exercise butchery [are] people lacking conscience, heartless, fearless of the King or his justice; most of them living in sin; they, birds of prey, butchers, keep from their friends what they steal” (282-283) and he prefers to find a better place and company with whom to live.

Dogs have feelings

After leaving Nicolás el Romo and spending a night in the open, "another day's fate brought him a herd or flock of sheep and rams" (285). The owner of the flock appeals to Berganza's feelings to get him to stay and he tells a shepherd to "pet him, because he loves the herd and stays with it" (286). Although motivated by interest, the shepherds treat him well and then properly feed him and name him Barcino, and, in return, in his new job he looks "well fed and happy, [appearing] solicitous and diligent guarding the flock ”(286). Berganza matches the attention that shepherds give him and decides to stay there on his own accord and responsibly perform his job there.

Dogs learn

Extremely versatile and adaptable, on one of his adventures, Berganza finds a company of soldiers and decides to stay with them. With the drummer, Berganza gives proof of his understanding and learns “to dance to the sound of the drum and to do other endearing things” (316). His new owner calls him “the wise dog” because Berganza is extremely intelligent:

In less than fifteen days, with my good ingenuity and the diligence of the one I had chosen as my patron, I learned how to jump for the King of France and not jump for the bad tavern, he taught me how to prance like a Neapolitan horse and walk around as a grain mill mule, among other things that, if I did not think about not showing them, he would have wondered if I were a demon in a dog-figure that did these things. [...] I also learned to imitate the Neapolitan steed. He made me some covers of embossed leather and a small chair that I carried on my back, and on it he put a light figure of man with a ring runner and taught me to run straight to a ring between two sticks. (316-317, 318)

Berganza is versatile, capable not only of carrying out the trades of his domestic nature, such as grazing and guarding livestock, but also of urban and artistic crafts. Not surprisingly, as the days go by, he finds a theater company and becomes an actor. In a month, he says, “I left a great skit actor and a great faker of silent figures” (341).

Dogs do their job well

Berganza is a good shepherding dog, excellent guardian, attentive caretaker, accomplished artist and rehearsed actor. Solicitous in all his jobs, he is always skilled and, if in the end he has to leave his post, it is not because of his clumsiness, but because of the hand of the man who threatens him. He is guided more often than not by circumstances in which some moral vice like greed or envy play a role. These vices foster distrust and are the sin that Cipión considers incompatible with social welfare because “it is impossible for people to have a good life in the world if they do not trust and confide” (291-292).

Dogs contribute to social welfare

Berganza is a faithful dog, even with Nicolás el Romo, his first master the butcher, and he is later with the shepherds, the merchant, the students, the drummer, the actors and with all the masters he serves. His noble attitude, even with those who lack nobility, is of great social utility because mutual trust is essential for the foundation of community welfare. Both in honesty and in the good performance of his tasks, Berganza is superior to the human beings with whom he relates, who, mean and greedy offenders, use good faith for theft and defile justice with extortion and bribery. One can trust Berganza, and his behavior in society is exemplary and worthy of imitation. As

Cipión has already pointed out trust and confidence are a must for having a healthy and happy society (291-292).

MEAT CONSUMPTION, GREED, AND SOCIAL CORRUPTION

Through the character of Berganza, Cervantes is with Plutarch when he, in the character Gryllus in *Moralia*, shows his surprise before “the arguments with which sophists made animals to be considered irrational and stupid with the exception of humans” (Plutarco 367). Plutarch considers that “Nature is rational in its entirety—it is inspired by a universal logos—[and that] animals also will participate in it in greater or minor measure” (Plutarco 365). In front of Ulysses, Gryllus continues in his pig condition.

Berganza and Cipión have a high intellect. They show feelings and are of great social value. They have a dignity shared with humans that turns eating animals into an act of cannibalism. Meat consumption is but a clear symptom of human degradation, for in Plutarch’s words “first, a wild and predatory animal was sacrificed; then, it was a bird or a fish that was dismembered. And, once our criminal inclination was exercised in the tasting of the blood of the aforementioned animals, then came the ox that plows the earth, the meek lamb and, finally, the rooster guardian of the house. And so, gradually, yielding to our insatiable thirst, we have reached crimes, wars and murders” (Plutarco 394-395). Furthermore, for Plutarch, “the ingestion of meat is unnatural not only for the body but also makes the spirit greasy due to satiety and tiredness [...] — because of a numb body, heavy and full of incompatible foods—the light and glow of the spirit [become] weak and confused ”(Plutarco 386-387).

It is not a coincidence that the canine protagonist of the Cervantine *Dialogue* was born in a slaughterhouse of Seville, that his first owner was a butcher, and that some relevant dangers the dog goes through during his life with different masters and jobs come after the greed of the immoral behavior that different characters demonstrate in order to possess and consume meat. Everybody can easily be bought with meat and, as shown above, meat is the currency by which judges and sheriffs are corrupted in Seville. And to delve into the Plutarchian connection, it is certainly significative that the very beginning of *Dialogue of the Dogs* comes after Berganza decides to abandon the slaughterhouse of Seville where he was born and his first owner, Nicolás el Romo, a cruel butcher.

CONCLUSION

Given the figure of Berganza, anthropocentrism and the exceptional nature of the human being are questioned. Neither language nor reasoning can stop the degeneration to which society is directed when arrogance is incapable of sympathizing with the suffering of animals in particular and of the humble in general: of animals that do not speak, or, in other words, of those who speak the unknown language of the colonized slave. Notably, Aesop and Diogenes, who were sold as slaves, guided their owners, and Berganza, who speaks to tell his life from his canine point of view, guides the Horatian potential of the *Dialogue of Dogs* for the benefit of animal rights and, to that end, brings to the forefront the clarity of understanding, sentimentality and social exemplarity of its dog behavior.

In *Dialogue of the Dogs*, there is a vegan Cervantes, a Cervantes that is against the maltreatment of animals and the exploitation of the humble. No doubt the tradition of the Cynics and Plutarch's *Moralia* were an inspiration for *Dialogue*; however, an autobiographical event must have also been of no minor relevance for writing *Dialogue of the Dogs*. Cervantes himself must have felt like an animal, or a "mute" native from the recently discovered America by the Spaniards, like a rational, intelligent, and sentimental animal devoid of language, frequently tied like a dog, when he spent five years, from 1575 until 1580, imprisoned in Argel under the power of the Turkish Empire.⁹

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⁹ See Cervantes (2019).

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