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ALBERTO LUIS-LÓPEZ

ABSTRACT

Cornelius de Pauw was very well known in the last decades of the eighteenth century for his Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains. That work was developed on a naturalist hypothesis that asserted that nature conditioned all living beings. From this, he analyzed and compared American nature, including its animals and inhabitants, and concluded that it was degenerated and inferior in all fields to that of the Old World. This article contends with an author that represents a central link in the eighteenth-century process of indigenous dehumanization. For doing this, the article first points out de Pauw's context and influences. Second, it expounds his description of American nature and then, as the outcome of this, his characterization of the indigenous "natural" condition. After that, the article considers his reasoning regarding indigenous non-adaptation to Western way of life as a case of moral disengagement. Finally, the author reflects about the type of work de Pauw wrote and stresses his role in promoting the dehumanization and annihilation of the indigenous Americans.



Introduction

The majority of philosophers and naturalists from the second half of the eighteenth century already did not consider nature from a theological point of view, that is, as a system created by God as part of a divine plan. They considered it in a more secular and scientific way, as a physical environment that formed part of a single world and had a direct impact on humans; it was a determining element that configured their being. Cornelius de Pauw (1739–99), who lived in the age of Enlightenment and faced the economic, political, and conceptual problems of a global world, assumed that naturalist conception in *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains*. In that work, he contrasted one hemisphere