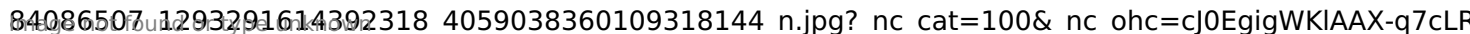


Voltaire

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2020 at 12:50 PM

"Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum" (So great the evils to which religion could prompt!)

Do we have any Voltaire experts who would know where to get the complete quote where Voltaire wrote that this famous line from Book 1 of Lucretius would last as long as the world? I am looking for the full quote with context in a work of Voltaire. I see it referenced several places but I can't find the original version despite a long session of googling. This clip is from Martin Ferguson Smith's edition of Lucretius:



Charles:

While not entirely relevant, I found a paper from Catherine Wilson about Lucretius' influence on the Enlightenment, Voltaire wasn't mentioned in the abstract or introduction, but he was included in my key word search, so clearly he's mentioned. Sadly its behind an academic paywall.

Cassius:

Yes Charles I am seeing many references to Voltaire writing to Frederick the Great about this too, but I am not finding the precise original text where Voltaire describes this as a line that "will last as long as the world."

Charles:

A short praise of Epicurus and Lucretius from Voltaire can be found here as well. <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/voltaire/volfinal.html>

Don't worry, it's well into the public domain

Cassius:

From that link you posted, Charle, I see this below. I did not realize that Voltaire was a deist, and that lowers my estimation of him significantly -- plus it's probably not a coincidence that his characterization here of Epicurus ethics is also truncated and insufficient:



Cassius:

Charles that sounds like that will be something to check in your reading of La Mettrie and the others you are pursuing -- if they were "deists" then they clearly were rejecting a central foundation of Epicurean philosophy and I would not even call them "Epicureans" at all. For some reason I do not have the impression that Frederick the Great was a deist, but I am not at all sure on that.

Although it's probably always a good idea to be careful in saying a person "is an Epicurean" or "is not an Epicurean," in my mind I have little doubt that in general terms the classical Epicureans would never have considered anyone to be a true Epicurean who did not rule out the creation of the universe by supernatural forces. And that would rule out most of the "Deism" movement, including people like Thomas Paine, who didn't specifically embrace Epicurus like Thomas Jefferson or Frances Wright did.