

# "D'Argens 'Sacrifices' Le Mettrie" - A posthumous attack on La Mettrie's Epicureanism

Post by "Charles" of May 25, 2020 at 7:34 PM

I think what's notably significant here is Boyer's position and especially, his interpretation of Epicurus, simultaneously venerating him while Boyer himself wrote Libertine novels and was highly critical of the Church and of spirituality in general.

These letters with the following text from Ocellus Lucanus (Boyer came into contact with the Pseudo-Ocellus Lucanus) dates back to 1761 and yet his reading of Laertius seems to follow the absence of pain perspective that we have come to recognize as misleading. I'm not sure if Boyer was genuinely an Epicurean as determining his views is difficult enough as it is without looking past attacking La Mettrie to defend himself. It should be known however, that Epicurean Philosophy was thriving, more or less in France throughout the early to mid 1700s, though at the time of this writing Boyer was the Royal Chamberlain for Frederick's Court (In Berlin) and had been for quite some time for 19 years.

There's no question that this text contains an immense bias and Watson is quick to disclaim that there are plain contradictions within what Boyer wrote when sourced back to verifiable information about La Mettrie. But still, it remains an interesting read and proof of some of the accessibility of the Epicurean texts during the Enlightenment, having at least: Epicurus' Will, 4 Letters, The Principle Doctrines, the biography itself, and of course, Lucretius.

Despite the site at Herculaneum having been rediscovered in 1709, it wouldn't be until a year after La Mettrie's death in 1751 would the papyrus scrolls be recovered, and even then I doubt even the first models of the unraveling machines would've produced anything groundbreaking besides fragments of Philodemus.

Going off topic for a conclusion, when d'Argens was working on Ocellus Lucanus, its worth knowing that Charles Batteux also published a translation on the Pseudo-Ocellus Lucanus' On The Nature of the Universe. We know Charles Batteux as "Abbe Batteux" who Ive recorded on this forum for having written a moral defense of Epicurus and of Epicureanism from various attacks.