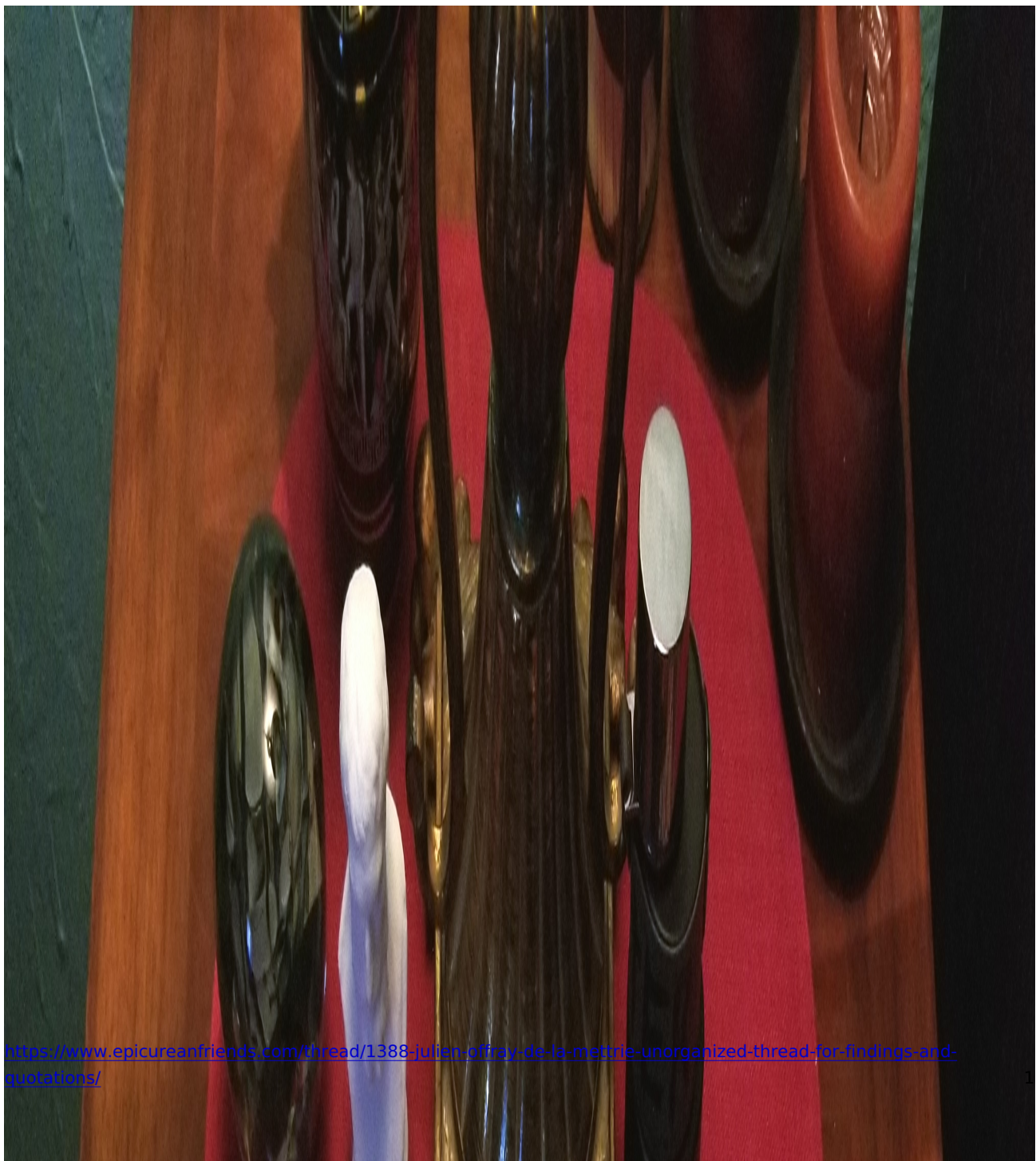


Julien Offray de la Mettrie - Unorganized Thread for findings and quotations

Post by "Charles" of January 21, 2020 at 6:06 PM

I'll edit this thread later as I have a violin lesson very shortly from the time of this entry. But my library of Mettrie's works came in today after much delay. Much like my glossary thread, I will detail the smallest of details regarding Mettrie here as well as provide pdf's, citations, and quotes that are of importance.





Post by “Charles” of January 21, 2020 at 6:24 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1388-julien-offray-de-la-mettrie-unorganized-thread-for-findings-and-quotations/>

Kirk Watson's: "A Hazardous Materialist", italics denote titles from Watson, quotations mark sub-headings of letters and entries that are primary sources, also named by Watson.

Includes:

Introduction

La Mettrie's Chronology

Eulogized by a King

- "A Eulogy for La Mettrie"

In His Own Words: La Mettrie's Autobiographies

- "Preliminary Discourse"
- "A Response to a Libel Against the Author"
- "Pleasure is Prophylactic"
- "Writings Home from Exile"

A "Persecuted Philosopher" In The Prussian Court

- "From the King to Maupertuis"
- "From Maupertuis to the King"
- "From the King to Maupertuis"
- "La Mettrie's Letter of Introduction at the Prussian Court"
- "From the King to Maupertuis"
- "From Maupertuis to the King"
- "La Mettrie in Voltaire's Correspondence"

Dissecting the Late La Mettrie: Post-Mortem Depositions

- "A Letter from King Frederick to His Sister Wilhemine"
- "The Haller-Maupertuis Exchange"
- "Letter from Mr. Haller,"
- "Maupertuis's Response to the Preceding Letter"
- "A Sympathetic Letter from a Friend at Court"
- "Diderot Attacks La Mettrie"
- "D'Argens 'Sacrifices' La Mettrie"

An Anecdotal Atheist

- "At Ease with The King"

- "A Ridiculous Materialist in the Court"
 - "Anecdotes from The Court"
 - "Further Late Anecdotes from The Court"
-

Post by “Joshua” of January 21, 2020 at 8:43 PM

This is a treasure trove unlooked-for, Charles. Much pleasure to you in the mining—and should you double it by bringing forth gems, we'll treble it with fellowship!

Post by “Charles” of January 21, 2020 at 11:43 PM

Oh, and something to bear in mind when reading about Mettrie, he used the words "pleasure" and "voluptuousness" in the exact same regards, sometimes using both in the same sentence. Kirk Watson also denotes that "voluptuousness" can be translated as "pleasure"

Post by “Cassius” of January 22, 2020 at 6:03 AM

[Quote from Charles](#)

They are all soul, ignoring their bodies; let's be all body, ignoring our souls. They act like they don't care about pleasure and pain; we'll stride ourselves on feeling anything whatsoever

Wow there is a lot of good stuff already Charles. However i hope he did not go too far in the direction quoted here because "let's be all body, ignoring our souls" sounds to me to be further than Epicurus would have stated it. It will be very interesting to see how this develops.

Post by “Joshua” of January 22, 2020 at 6:46 AM

That's an excellent note on "voluptuousness". The Latin for pleasure used by Lucretius is "voluptas".

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2020 at 7:12 AM

i think it would be interesting to dive into the latin etymology of "voluptas." The core seems to be related to "desire" of some kind, does it not, rather than strictly "pleasure"? I need a better online reference for the Latin because most of the discussions don't go into the roots of the Latin itself - they site the latin final forms which mean pleasure, but don't discuss the latin root forms from which it is composed.

<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/voluptas#Latin>

Post by "Joshua" of January 22, 2020 at 12:55 PM

You know, after I posted that this morning Cassius I got to think about the similarity between voluptas and voluntas ("wish" or "desire").

Post by "Cassius" of January 22, 2020 at 2:27 PM

Yes I am thinking there is a root concept of will/wish/desire that probably is at the core, which is why "desire" and "pleasure" seem so interchangeable even today in many contexts

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2020 at 1:02 PM

Charles this question comes up in my mind due to our posts today about Voltaire. Have you been able to pin down where La Mettrie stood on whether the universe was supernaturally

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created - i.e. whether he was a "deist?"

There's also a related question of whether he makes any direct statement on life after death.

No doubt there's a great deal to be learned from anyone who is writing about Lucretius, but as I think about it and as we explore these writers from this period, these are probably among the first questions we ought to ask about them, and post it early in our threads as we discuss them, to put them in context.

Otherwise, like Ninon, we may be ending up diverting ourselves into foundation-less assertions about ethics (even those discussing "happiness" or "pleasure") which ultimately are not of tremendous use since they would rest on our deciding to accept the assertions of the author rather than being grounded back in a world view of the fundamental nature of the universe.

Note: It might be better if we end up moving La Mettrie out of this "Leaders In Epicurean Philosophy" subforum into the same subforum as Voltaire. That's probably a better place for people who had lots of important things to say about Epicurean philosophy, but who seems to have been essentially a Deist. At this point without knowing the answers to these questions about La Mettrie's positions I am not at all sure.

Post by “Hiram” of January 25, 2020 at 2:30 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

There's also a related question of whether he makes any direct statement on life after death.

He does not mention god as far as I have seen. He says soul is natural and mortal.

Post by “Charles” of January 25, 2020 at 2:45 PM

I plan on finishing a transcription of The System of Epicurus tonight to share with everyone, I have guests coming over in about half an hour, so it won't be until much later. But to answer your question [Cassius](#), yes he does, he denies life after death and only mentions god in the sense of figure of speech and expression. Though he refers to the universe as "nature" and personifies nature as a woman (Mother Nature, but not "Earth" with a following grammatical gender, an important distinction), but I think this is due to his slight poetic flair or method of

describing the laws of movement in an easy and frank manner to his readers.

There are a few works that missed the inclusion in the collected works that I recently purchased. I'll continue to search, but so far I have only identified two: "The Avenged Faculty: A Comedy in Three Parts" and "The Penelope Works". I have the first in French in a pdf, and the latter is only found in a 1923 reconstruction format that I believe was published by Knopf, but is rather pricey given how much I spent for everything else in one package.

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2020 at 4:44 PM

[Quote from Charles](#)

Though he refers to the universe as "nature" and personifies nature as a woman (Mother Nature, but not "Earth" with a following grammatical gender, an important distinction), but I think this is due to his slight poetic flair or method of describing the laws of movement in an easy and frank manner to his readers.

That would be consistent with Lucretius and therefore probably with Epicurus himself, so it might be we are going to find that La Mettrie deserves the title of Epicurean more so than many of the others we come across.

Do we know if he called himself an Epicurean?

Post by "Charles" of January 25, 2020 at 5:27 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Do we know if he called himself an Epicurean?

Yes, in Paragraph 10 in System of Epicurus he calls out "modern anti-Epicureans", and in Paragraph 41, there are other references but these are the most outward without going any deeper into his work.

10

"If humans have not always existed as we see them today, (what? How could we accept the idea that they sprang into the world fully grown: fathers and mothers, ready to procreate from the get-go!) the Earth must have been a uterus for humans; it must have opened its depths to receive the prepared human seeds so that this superb animal, given certain laws, could be hatched out. **Why, modern anti-Epicureans**, should the Earth, the common mother and wet-nurse of all bodies, deny to the seeds of animals, the favor she grants to the most deformed and harmful of plants? They always find fertility in her inner parts, and this womb can't be all that different, in the end, than what women have." (I've seen this translated and translated it myself as "Why, I ask you modern anti-Epicureans")

41

"So many philosophers have supported Epicurus' views that I've dared to mingle my own weak voice with theirs; besides, like them, I'm only offering a system; which shows us what an enormous task we're really taking on when, hoping to pierce the night of time, we cast our presumptuous glance on things that offer them no clues: for, whether you believe in creation or reject it, the same mystery remains; the same incomprehensibility holds on all sides. How was this Earth, where I live, formed? Is it the only inhabited planet? Where did I come from? Where am I? What is the nature of everything I see? What about all these brilliant phantoms whose illusions I love? Did I exist, before the time when I was nothing? Will I be, when I am no more? What state came before I was aware of my existence? What state will follow the loss of sensation? These are questions that the greatest geniuses can never answer; they will philosophically fight the battle as I have done, will set off the bigots' alarm bells, and we'll learn nothing at all."

I'd put a lot less thought into 41, as he more frequently cites Lucretius than Epicurus at least in this book, but perhaps the remaining sections of Anti-Seneca will be more forthcoming, as it appears to be.

Post by "Cassius" of January 25, 2020 at 7:51 PM

Just glancing at the wikipedia article, I see this, which seems very similar to an exchange that I recently had with Oscar. If I recall the issue that bothered Oscar was whether to use "continuum" or "spectrum" terminology, but the real point that I was interested in was the point Mettrie makes here - **that there is no abrupt transition**.

Man and the animal

Prior to *Man a Machine* he published *The Natural History of the Soul* in 1745. He argued that humans were just complex animals.^[9] A great deal of controversy emerged due to his belief that "from animals to man there is no abrupt transition".^[10] He later built on that idea: he claimed that humans and animals were composed of organized matter. He believed that humans and animals were only different in regards to the complexity that matter was organized. He compared the differences between man and animal to those of high quality pendulum clocks and watches stating: "[Man] is to the ape, and to the most intelligent animals, as the planetary pendulum of [Huygens](#) is to a watch of [Julien Le Roy](#)"

Also, I bet we are going to find that this part of the Wikipedia article is not correct, and that he did not advocate the "unbridled" pursuit of pleasure except in the sense that any Epicurean worth his salt identifies pleasure as the highest goal:

There *La Mettrie* wrote the *Discours sur le bonheur* (1748), which appalled leading [Enlightenment](#) thinkers such as [Voltaire](#), [Diderot](#) and [D'Holbach](#) due to its explicitly [hedonistic](#) sensualist principles which prioritised the unbridled pursuit of pleasure above all other things.^[5]

And also a good chance that we will find this slanderous just as the type of thing aimed at Lucretius:

Death

La Mettrie's celebration of sensual pleasure was said to have resulted in his early death. The French ambassador to Prussia, Tirconnel, grateful to *La Mettrie* for curing him of an illness, held a feast in his honour. It was claimed that *La Mettrie* wanted to show either his power of gluttony or his strong constitution by devouring a large quantity of *pâté de faisan aux truffes*. As a result, he developed a [gastric illness](#) of some sort. Soon after he began suffering from a severe fever and eventually died.^{[3][8]}

Post by “Charles” of January 25, 2020 at 8:04 PM

A misinterpretation on my part today led me to realize that his magnum opus: *Discours sur bonheur*, or "On Happiness" is another title for his "Anti-Seneca", I'm not done transcribing it onto a doc just yet, but I can provide the link where you can view my progress.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1388-julien-offray-de-la-mettrie-unorganized-thread-for-findings-and-quotations/>

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2020 at 9:53 AM

Charles when you get a chance could you set up a separate thread entitled Anti-Seneca (or however it should be designated) within his subforum, and possibly copy to it either what you've pasted above or a link to where you have transcribed what is available?