

A. Le Grand's Divine Epicurus

Post by “Don” of June 19, 2021 at 6:23 AM

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A50012....1;view=fulltext>

Wasn't sure if there was a link to this text anywhere yet.

The divine Epicurus, or, The empire of pleasure over the vertues compos'd by A. LeGrand ; and rendred into English by Edward Cooke. Le Grand, Antoine, d. 1699., Cooke, Edward, fl. 1678

Post by “Cassius” of June 19, 2021 at 7:17 AM

I am totally unfamiliar with that work, so thank you!

So this is originally French or something else translated into English?

And the text is prose, although from the looks of the page it's formatted to match the original -- it's not a poem or free verse?

The page source kind of looks like there should be a link to an image of the original, in part because there are errors in the transcription, but I don't see such a link.

I skipped back to the section on Justice which ends the book, and it seems exclusively Christian rather than mentioning Epicurus. The opening, however, does seem like a fairly standard christian-influenced view of Epicurus.

I would like at the very least to get an idea who this writer was and where they might fit in a chain of popularizing Epicurus in that period.

Post by “TauPhi” of June 4, 2026 at 9:20 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2063-a-le-grand-s-divine-epicurus/>

I'm sorry to resurrect this thread after 5 years of inactivity, but if anyone's interested in this 350 years old book, I've restored it and prepared a modern PDF version.

The original book contains around 50 marginalia, mostly in Latin. I've moved these into footnotes and I've provided rough English translations. The marginalia aren't essential to the text and they serve mostly as reinforcements of discussed topics. I've also added interactive table of contents. Other than that, I've tried to be as faithful to the original as possible. The original scan of the book is available at archive.org (link below).

[Cassius](#) : You can add this to the files section if you find it worthwhile. Everything is in public domain as indicated at the end of the PDF. The book is not particularly valuable as an educational resource, but I think it's historically interesting.

Archive.org link:

[The divine Epicurus, ... 1676 : Le Grand, Antoine. : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

The divine Epicurus, ... 1676..Digitized from IA40313710-08.Previous issue:...
archive.org

Info about the author:

[Antoine Le Grand \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

[Antoine Le Grand - Wikipedia](#)

The restored version:

[The Divine Epicurus v1.0.0.pdf](#)

Post by “Cassius” of June 4, 2026 at 9:31 PM

Thank you Tau Phi!

Post by “Bryan” of June 5, 2026 at 1:37 AM

Yes, thank you! This is *new* to me.. but, now that it is actually accessible, hopefully we all can dig in!

Post by "Cassius" of June 5, 2026 at 5:59 AM

I have scanned over about 50% so far. Couple of comments:

1. I am not able to get the link in Don's original post to work anymore. Not sure what's up with that.
2. It's difficult to read because of its archaic constructions and flowery language, much worse than the sections of Frances Wright that I also find overly-flowery. (As we are discussing "suavity" in another current thread, I'll say that if this kind of floweriness were what was meant by "suavity" I would be in favor of banishing it from the face of the earth. But I don't think *this* is what is meant by "suavity.")
3. I definitely think this is historically useful. As in my original comment above this seems to be a Gassendi-like attempt to blend Christian morality with Epicurus, and I am seeing long sections that are sort of "conventional morality" that don't make much effort to tie back to Epicurus at all.
4. At the moment my reaction is that this work may constitute a milestone in the "corruption" of Epicurus into something that the Christian world could find acceptable. Parts of it are no doubt ok, but it seems to contain lots of material such as the following from page 45 of the PDF:

Quote

Almighty God, who wrought this Miracle, fetch'd the Woman from his side during his Extasy, that so those two Persons should make but one and the same All, that their Bodies should be but one and the same Flesh, and that their Minds should aspire but to one and the same felicity. Marriage is an image of the Divinity, the Unity does not Derogate from the plurality of their Persons, they are but one though they be two, and though they are of a different Sex, they still have the same Nature. This advantage heightens the glory of Marriage, and there is no person but would boast that he resembled his Creator, if he was not pursued with so vast a retinue of Miseries, and if there was not an absolute necessity to be Miserable, because he was of the Number of those that were Married.

The Wife is as it were, the bought Servant of her Husband, she loses her Liberty in becoming his Spouse, and she obliges her self to serve and obey him, from the time that she promises her self to be faithful to him.

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My main thought is that this is going to be very useful in tracking down the process of "dumbind down" Epicurean philosophy over the centuries. In what I've read so far there's no mention of Epicurean Physics and Epicurean Canonics and so what's left is being massaged - with many words and flowery phrases - into something very meek and mild that anyone of any philosophical position could accept.

I'd like to know more about this Le Grande so we could place him in context with Gassendi.

So again thank you very much Tau Phi!

I will add this to the files section.

Post by "Cassius" of June 5, 2026 at 6:15 AM

The file section thread is linked below.

As part of his Wikipedia biography I see that LeGrande was highly religious and (sarcasm) a real prince of a guy:

Quote

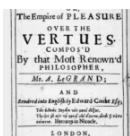
Le Grand argued against [animal rights](#) and authored *Dissertatio de carentia sensus et cognitionis in brutis* (On the Lack of Sense and Cognition in Brutes) in 1675 which defends the Cartesian idea that animals are mere machines.^{[3][4]}

I'm getting a highly negative impression of LeGrande and this work but let me emphasize that I am very appreciative to Tau Phi for preparing this because I think there's a lot to be learned by dissecting it. Had he not done so I might never have found out any more about it.

This kind of contribution by Tau Phi is a great contribution to the forum and example of what we can accomplish working in an online community.

File

[LeGrande - The Divine Epicurus](#)



Digital transcription by Tau Phi



Cassius

June 5, 2026 at 6:03 AM

Post by “Cassius” of June 5, 2026 at 6:27 AM

I would suggest that a representative sample of the Christianization of this work is the "Third Discourse" on Celibacy starting on page 45 of the PDF. Yes indeed this represents a species of modern Epicureanism, but i can't imagine Epicurus taking considering what this chapter contains to be generally wise advice. It gets worse after the passage I quoted above.

Here' are more examples:

Quote

Marriage is the partage of those who are either Incontinent or Slaves, and that person must needs lose his Liberty, or his Reason, who will ingage himself to it, without an unavoidable Necessity.

Quote

But the reasons that are brought to forbid a second Marriage, are but little better then insignificant and Non-sence, to give Epicurus satisfaction; This Philosopher condemns it in all his Writings and though he believes it may be permitted, yet he neither judges it honest or reasonable. He can never persuade himself that a Woman had any Affections for her former Husband, who ingages her self to another, and he accounts her Infamous every time that she proves unfaithful to him. He instances to us in heathenish Women, who have preferr'd Death to the bonds of Marriage, and chosen rather to burn in the Fire, then to lose their Liberty a second time. 'Tis to be ignorant of the miseries of her first condition, to aspire at the same again, and to be insensible she has ever been unhappy to entertain the Addresses of her new Votaries after she has once been released from the grievances of Marriage. But peradventure her first Affections have been very Fortunate, and she found in the person of her Husband rather an Amorous Gallant then a Domineering Master: Who then can assure her that he who shall succeed him, will have the same passion for her? Since that which ought to feed

it, will be dying dayly, her Charms will diminish, her Beauty languish, and all the Pains she can possibly be at to conserve it, have not power enough to keep her from growing Old. A Husband looks not upon another's leavings but with Disgust, and he without any Regret can see that Face decay, of which he has not cropt the Flower. If her Marriage has been Unfortunate, dares she venture her Person a second time, and run the risque of being miserable all the days of her life? Surely she must have lost her Sences that is in love with Slavery, and purchase the pleasure of a Beast at the expence of her Liberty.

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Quote

How happy then is the Caelibate Life, if compared to Marriage, and how redevable are those persons to the goodness of Heaven, who are exempt from those Frailties which ingage even the greatest part of Mankind to it! For if Virginitie be a Grace, Continence is a Vertue, it is an aspiring to that Sanctity that prefers the Spirit to the Flesh, and to contemn the Inhabitants of the Earth, to pursue the intelligences which the Heav'ns are imploy'd in.

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Here's a real gem:

Quote

Envy has its beginning from the Eyes, and could never torment the base and unworthy, but that the Sight furnishes them with occasions for their torture. In short, most Sins would not have the vogue and sufferage of Mankind, were they but blind; and they would be obliged to acknowledg the mercifulness of Nature, for having deprived them of a good which is the beginning of all their evils.

It cannot but be a great satisfaction to be deliv'ed from those things that are prejudicial to us, to be disingaged from any farther concern with those guides that have betray'd us, and to have the loss of those lights that have led us into places of darkness. Vertue has no need of light to produce its self, and if we will believe the Poets who have described

them, even the most excellent among them all are blind. Faith sees not but by the Ears, Hope has no other Organs but the Hands. Love knows nothing but by the means of the Heart; and if Justice its self had eyes, they ought to be hard bound down with a fillet, to oblige its Lovers to despise the things of the Earth, and to exalt their thoughts to those of Heaven. If Nature has deny'd us the use of Sight, it is to make us of the household of God, to rank us in the number of the Vertuous, and to make us partakers of the glory of happy Souls.

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Post by “Cassius” of June 5, 2026 at 7:01 AM

My verdict is that this book is an abomination, but a highly useful one.

It might deserve the award of being the first "truly modern" book on Epicurus that has led the way toward the numerous watered-down versions of Epicurean philosophy that we have today.

It's best use is going to be the evidence it gives to diagnose how non-Epicurean orientations can latch on to certain aspects of what Epicurus wrote and enlist them for very non-Epicurean goals. This tactic is probably even more clear here than it is in Gassendi. To give Gassendi credit, he paid considerable attention to Epicurean physics and canonics. LeGrande totally ignores them. Now that I've gone through it all I can confirm that there is ZERO physics and ZERO canonics in it.

I would summarize what LeGrande has done as that he has featured the psychological hedonism "everyone pursues pleasure" argument early in the book. This takes the teeth out of pleasure as a philosophical goal and turns it into nothing more than live-simply advice: Isolate oneself from society, shun sex and marriage and children as more trouble than they are worth, and assorted other homespun positions. Then eliminate almost all further reference to Epicurus in favor of a very conventional "eternal wisdom" and "faith"-based virtue-ethics morality. Praise Plato, but not Aristotle, because Aristotle dared to say that strong emotions may sometimes be beneficial.

The final paragraph of the book, which makes no mention whatsoever of Epicurus, but fittingly cites Plato.

Quote

As Love according to Plato, is the bond of the Universe, and causes that good Intelligence to arise, which is observed in each of its parts; Friendship has not its subsistence but through Vertue, it derives all its Glory from its Merit, and ceases being True as soon as it leaves off further Converse with it. The Antients, whose Ignorance and Infidelity had buried them in darkness, had of it but an imperfect shadow, and the cause of its birth, being wanting to them, they could never ingage themselves but into affections that were Illegitimate. But as soon as the Eternal Wisdom dissipated their darkness, that Faith began to cast its beams into their hearts, Friendship was re-established in the World, Men lived in a Community, their thoughts were no more divided then their goods, and all agreeing in one and the same Principle, they discovered in their Republick the image and representation of an Eternal Peace. So that Vertue is the soul of Friendship, it is requisite that the knot which unites the Hearts should be sacred, and derive its Force from Piety, to become True and Real.

FINIS.

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Post by “TauPhi” of June 5, 2026 at 7:05 AM

Your comments about the book sum it up pretty accurately, [Cassius](#). This is not a resource that can be reliably used in a study of Epicurean philosophy by any stretch of imagination. The book is archaic not only in language but the contents as well. I do find it interesting for several reasons, though:

1) It is one of the earliest attempts of introducing Epicurus into English speaking world. It's a highly distorted view of Epicurus but at least it's a start of re-introducing his after a millennium of oblivion.

2) It unintentionally proves superiority of pleasure over virtues. Because the book deals mainly with virtues, and it was written 350 years ago, it makes it obvious to a modern reader that what was once considered virtuous not necessarily is considered virtuous now. The idea of a virtuous woman presented in the book, for example, might be rather shocking to contemporary readers. Virtues are clearly dependant on social contracts and these contracts evolve over time. So do the virtues. If someone chooses to build their lives on the foundation of virtues, builds their

lives on a rather shaky grounds.

3) The subtitle 'The Empire of Pleasure Over the Vertues' and the following dedication where the translator is blowing smoke up the patron's backside by praising his virtuous behaviour without even mentioning pleasure, made my chuckle as it initially looked to me as simultaneous flattery and mockery. (It's not the case. It's just my initial impression.)

Post by “Cassius” of June 5, 2026 at 7:22 AM

I agree Tau Phi.

And thank you again. This is a major contribution here. We have to take the bad along with the good and process it all.

Post by “Cassius” of June 5, 2026 at 7:36 AM

As a reminder of what it means to be Cartesian, which Wikipedia emphasizes LeGrande was, there's this from Wikipedia:

Quote

Cartesians view the mind as being wholly separate from the corporeal body. Sensation and the perception of reality are thought to be the source of untruth and illusions, with the only reliable truths to be had in the existence of a metaphysical mind. Such a mind can perhaps interact with a physical body, but it does not exist in the body, nor even in the same physical plane as the body.

Post by “Pacatus” of June 5, 2026 at 11:54 AM

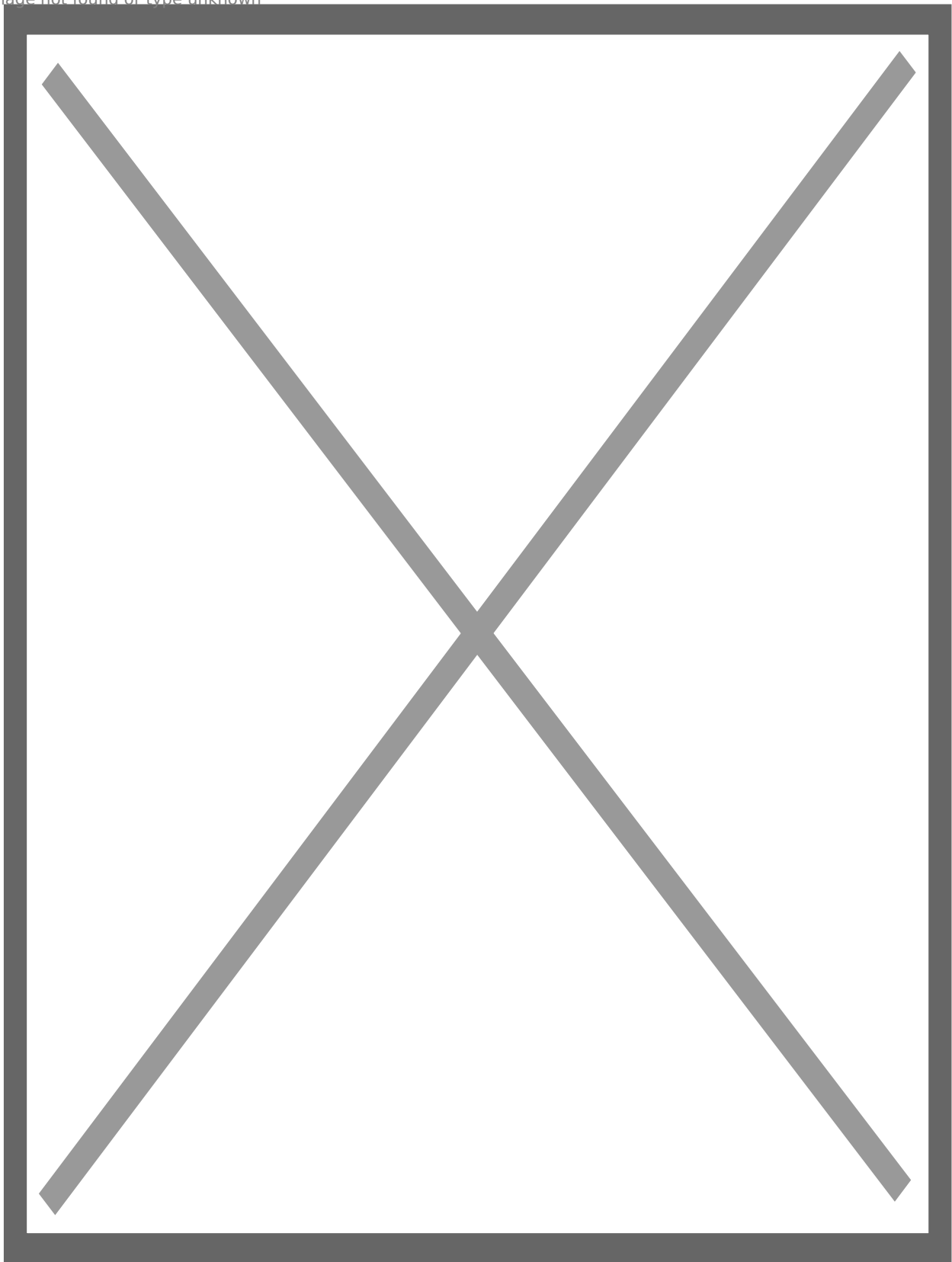
[Quote from TauPhi](#)

The book is archaic not only in language but the contents as well.

It is fun to read the cadences and phrasing of that 17th century English, as well as the contents.



Image not found or type unknown



[Early Modern English - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

Post by “Titus” of June 5, 2026 at 12:59 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

Virtues are clearly dependant on social contracts and these contracts evolve over time.
So do the virtues.

At least this insight is truly Epicurean (last maxims of the [Principal Doctrines](#)). The book shows this to us indirectly, at least hundreds of years later.