

New Approaches to d'Holbach's *Système de la nature*

14-15 March 2022

Online conference organised by Dr Ruggero Sciuto (St Edmund Hall, Oxford)
with the technical support of the Maison Française d'Oxford

In the year 1770, a most dangerous book swept like a storm across Europe. Its title was *Système de la nature*; its author – although few people in the eighteenth century knew it – was baron Paul Thiry d'Holbach. Inspired by a profound dislike of superstition and religious belief, this book argued vehemently against both the existence of God and substantial dualism, putting forward, instead, a thoroughgoing materialistic and deterministic philosophy. Animated by a strong desire to enlighten the common people, free them from oppression, and set them on a path towards independence and happiness, it did not eschew violent criticisms of either religious or political authorities. In the space of only a few years, the *Système de la nature* elicited dozens of refutations, including two by the likes of Voltaire and Frederick the Great of Prussia, and evidence suggests that it was still frequently quoted and discussed in the Age of Revolution.

Organised by Dr Ruggero Sciuto (St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford) and generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust, the Voltaire Foundation, the Maison Française d'Oxford, and the British Society for the History of Philosophy, this two-day conference hopes to shed new light on one of the most important texts of the Age of Enlightenment. It will be held on Zoom on 14 and 15 March 2022 (see provisional programme below). To register, please click on the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/conference-new-approaches-to-holbachs-systeme-de-la-nature-tickets-250202671927>

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14-15 March 2022

14 March 2022

09:00-09:15 – Welcome; Introductory remarks

09:15-11:00 – Panel 1: The Origins of the *Système* – Chair: Ruggero Sciuto

Emmanuel Boussuge (Sorbonne Université, CELLF 16-18), 'Nouveaux éléments pour une chronologie de la campagne holbachique'

Cameron J. Quinn (Merton College, Oxford), '« La somme des vérités que renferme le Code de la Nature »: Morelly, Diderot, and the *Système*'s controversial final chapter'

Maria Susana Seguin (Université Paul-Valéry de Montpellier/ENS de Lyon), 'Le *Système de la nature* dans la tradition de la littérature philosophique clandestine'

11:00-11:15 – Break

11:15-12:45 – Panel 2: *Les Entrailles de la terre* – Chair: Laura Nicolì

Rebecca Ford (University of Nottingham), 'Mineralogy and materialism in the *Système de la nature* and the *Encyclopédie*'

Jenny Mander (Newnham College, Cambridge), 'Deep time, earthquakes, and “mother” nature: underground connections between Diderot, d'Holbach and Raynal'

12:45-13:30 – Lunch break

13:30-15:00 – Panel 3: Between Atheism and Christian Orthodoxy – Chair: Hasse Hämäläinen

Charles Develennes (University of Kent), 'Spiritual atheism: d'Holbach's not so systematic disbelief'

Laura Nicolì (Fondazione 1563 per l'Arte e la Cultura, Torino/Voltaire Foundation, Oxford), 'Religion and other Catastrophes. D'Holbach as Historian of Religion from *La Contagion sacrée* to the *Système de la nature*'

15:00-15:15 – Break

15:15-16:45 – Panel 4: Forms of Materialism – Chair: Gerhardt Stenger

Charles T. Wolfe (Université de Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurés), ‘« Le plus et moins de la machine » : mechanistic and vital materialism in La Mettrie, d’Holbach and beyond’

Mladen Kozul (University of Montana), ‘Le *Système de la nature* et le néo-matérialisme: de la matière au politique’

16:45-17:00 – Break

17:00-18:30 – Keynote Lecture

Alain Sandrier (Université de Caen), ‘L’annotation du *Système de la nature*: analyse et enjeux’
– introduces: Caroline Warman (Jesus College, Oxford)

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15 March 2022

09:00-10:30 – Panel 5: The Self and the Body – Chair: TBC

Hasse Hämäläinen (Jagiellonian University in Krakow), ‘Self-interested self-sacrifice: D’Holbach’s contribution to the theory of moral virtue’

Caroline Warman (Jesus College, Oxford), ‘D’Holbach and physiology’

10:30-10:45 – Break

10:45-12:15 – Panel 6: Afterlife – Chair: TBC

Avi Lifschitz (Magdalen College, Oxford), ‘Frederick II’s critique of d’Holbach’s *Système de la nature*’

Ruggero Sciuto (St Edmund Hall, Oxford), ‘Fighting or Reflecting the Light? Jacob Vernes’s *Confidence philosophique*’

12:15-13:00 – Digital D’Holbach presentation

13:00-14:00 – Lunch break

14:00-15:15 – Keynote Lecture

Alan Charles Kors (University of Pennsylvania), ‘Meeting d’Holbach in the 1960s’ –
respondent: Gregory Brown (University of Las Vegas/Voltaire Foundation, Oxford)

15:15-15:30 – Concluding remarks