

Background Info

La Mettrie was influenced by, cartesianism, epicureanism, Contra-Galenic, and Herman Boerhaave

He was a materialist about the mind and didn't not believe in pure reason

Philosophy and Medicine

According to La Mettrie, philosophy and medicine had a shared goal: therapy for the body/mind

The philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza, and Hellenistic philosophers formed the basis of science and provided an ethics which could both be applied to the practice of medicine

Medicine researched the mind-body interaction, and formed both an empirical basis for natural philosophy and a counteract against speculation. All of which could be applied to philosophy

The Soul

According to La Mettrie, the soul is physical
He claims that facial features can explain your character and give a view of one's soul (physiognomy)

the soul is also not divine, it is just the part that thinks. -> He sees the soul as a spring, like that of a clockwork mechanism

It is the quality and quantity* of the brain that determines the soul

-> thought can be strengthened through education and disposition

* according to Him the brain seems to grow in relation to one's docility

Life

Beings are....

according to many modern authors, beings are what we can see (causa efficiens), and animals can be understood as machines

La Mettrie, claims that if the animal's soul is a machine, so is that of human beings

Life (cont)

-> Man is a machine constructed in such a way that it is impossible first of all to have a clear idea of it and consequently to define it*

-> diseases can affect the way our mind works

* the mind is constructed in a way that it cannot think about itself in ways of which it works, meaning that we have no idea how we work and what we are

Scala Naturae

According to La Mettrie, Man is not special. Thinking is a function of a machine, and it does not matter whether there is a God or not.

Often colonialism was justified by biblical and biological notions, according to La Mettrie, however, there was no biological difference.

He claims that there is both a hierarchical and non-hierarchical structure in the universe:

-> hierarchical in the way that man is the most perfect one, as he is the only substance in the universe

-> non-hierarchical: in the way that thinking can be taught and thereby is not better than instinct, hence it cannot make on creature better than the other.

Ethics

According to La Mettrie, the law of nature tells us that "it is a feeling which teaches us what we should not do, by what we would not like to be done to us"

-> in other words, we do not need God for religion (and tell us what is good), we need experience, a feeling (e.g. guilt)

He is a hedonist and thus claims that doing good feels good. He also is unreligious
According to La Mettrie animals are better than humans:

Ethics (cont)

- animals behave according to the law of nature on instinct

- they have more desires because their lives are less flat (they have less everyday habits and their lives changes more)

- human choose to act bad, but suffer from their conscience

-> because disease can affect one's mind, ill human beings can be less ethically responsible

man and animal differ in degree of education

He claims that there is no ethical separation of man-animal

God

La Mettrie was both a Pyrrhonian and a sceptic: "I don't know if god exists, but maybe it is better if He doesn't"

He also claimed that religion was destructive and hence it was better not to believe in God

Knowledge

Knowledge comes from instinct and Imagination.

Knowledge starts from simple connections between sound and image

then a separation of parts of the world is made

later a connection between these is made a practised combination of imagination and education allows for mathematics

*example process knowledge forming:
a monkey sees a bottle and makes the sound "ha", when he sees fire he makes the sound "hi". other monkeys follow his example; bottles are now known as "ha" and fire as "hi"*



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