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Caroline Warman, *The Atheist's Bible: Diderot's Éléments de physiologie*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020. X + 428 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.95 U.S. (hb) ISBN 9781783748976; \$32.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781783748969.

Response by Caroline Warman, Jesus College, Oxford University.

I would like to thank Shane Hockin for his review and *H-France Review* for inviting me to “enrich the scholarly conversation” by responding to some of the questions he raises. There is one which seems to offer a particularly fruitful avenue for enquiry, which is whether d’Holbach’s *Système de la nature* (1770) ought to have been more prominent within my book or indeed had a better right to its title, and I would like to consider this question in some detail.

An initial, obvious, but disappointingly unenriching answer might simply be that *The Atheist's Bible* is not about D’Holbach’s *Système de la nature* but about the second part of its title, the *Éléments de physiologie*. Nonetheless, there’s clearly a view that something called *The Atheist's Bible* ought to be about the *Système de la nature*; this would make, as Shane Hockin explicitly puts it, “a better candidate to be labeled ‘The Atheist’s Bible.’” That may well be the case, but then again, titles are not copyrighted, and this is not a competition with more or less qualified contestants. One might also point out that there were very many books with the title *Éléments de physiologie* written during the eighteenth century.

One of the key aims of my book is to give the *Éléments de physiologie* some concentrated scholarly attention, make it better known, and establish it as an important text within the materialist atheist corpus. To write at the same time about a very well known and well established landmark within the same landscape would have distracted from this aim rather than furthered it. I do, of course, agree that d’Holbach’s *Système de la nature* is very important in itself and had immeasurably greater public visibility and hence impact than the *Éléments de physiologie*. Another one of the key aims of my book is to explore why Diderot’s work did not have much impact while also carefully establishing that it did have some not none, but again, this is not a competition in which Diderot is the loser and d’Holbach the winner, it is about trying to understand the very many factors operating to prevent Diderot’s work coming out in the 1790s. Hence, as Olivier Ritz has put it, “en suivant les *Éléments de physiologie* de 1790 à 1802, Caroline Warman développe donc *une* histoire intellectuelle et littéraire de la période.” [1] The indefinite article seems helpful here: this is *a* history of the period, from a very particular point of view, not *the* history. Perhaps my book should have been entitled *An Atheist's Bible* instead, but it would not have sounded very snappy. This is my second, slightly more substantive response to Shane Hockin’s point.

My third is perhaps to suggest that it is specifically because we can now see Diderot's *Éléments de physiologie* as worth taking seriously in its own right that we can even begin to think about comparing it to D'Holbach's *Système de la nature*. The proof of this is in the fact that this is what I started doing about a year ago, serendipitously but quite separately from Shane Hockin's review, when I tackled the topic of D'Holbach and physiology for the conference on "New Approaches to d'Holbach's *Système de la nature*" organised by Ruggero Sciuto in March 2022.[2] In this paper, I looked at whether physiology is present in the *Système de la nature*, either as a direct topic of discussion or in the form of passing references, and I discovered that it—as a body of knowledge with its own traditions, approaches and specialist vocabulary—is only present at a generalised, almost abstract level. Despite the constant evocations of the body, its organisation, and the many modifications and variations which affect a person's state of mind or health or illness or perception, those states are often pluralised and despecified. The *Système de la nature* is the culmination of a certain materialist discourse, as Maria Susana Seguin argued at that same conference last March [3], and it therefore conforms to the rules of that discourse, focusing on general patterns of flux, variation and transformation, and not on specific aspects of the body, or on problems or cases. It was fascinating to discover how far apart in some ways the *Système de la nature* and the *Éléments de physiologie* are, despite their shared materialism, and despite the fact that Diderot along with Naigeon had, as is well known, a helping hand in revising D'Holbach's text. There is no suggestion that these close intellectual relationships led D'Holbach to reciprocate, helping Diderot write or revise the *Éléments de physiologie*, but it is, by contrast, very intriguing to consider how fluidly Naigeon, the third member of their writing team, treats the boundary between authorship and editorship when it comes to the mosaic version he produces of the *Éléments de physiologie* and *Rêve de d'Alembert* in his *Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot*. This is the subject of the final chapter (chapter twelve) in *The Atheist's Bible*, and its analysis is supported by the partial edition of the *Mémoires* that accompanies the book.[4] The research presented at the conference on *New Approaches to D'Holbach's Système de la nature* will appear in due course in Brill's *Studies in Intellectual History* in a volume edited by Ruggero Sciuto.

I therefore thank Shane Hockin for raising this interesting question, and would like to turn to a couple of other points. The first involves the question of fragments and the second my claims about the *Éléments de physiologie*'s number of readers and influence.

Starting with the first point, Shane Hockin states that in part one of the book I explain "why the work in question appears so fragmented," arguing that "the fragmented nature of the work mirrors that of Pascal's work." I do not argue that Diderot's *Éléments de physiologie* is or appears fragmented: I argue the opposite, spending some time (most of chapter one, but arguably the book as a whole) describing it as a "substantial materialist treatise" (p. 11). In chapter two, I explain how the notion that it was fragmentary arises from a mystificatory claim in its own forward. I propose that this claim was an implicit allusion and challenge to Pascal's famously fragmentary *Pensées*, whose own challenge to show unbelievers they were wrong is met and contested by the *Éléments de physiologie*.

The second point concerns what I do and don't claim about the *Éléments de physiologie*'s readers and reach. Let me recap my argument. I say that the general critical view is that no one read the *Éléments de physiologie*, apart from Naigeon who, it is accepted, quoted it in his *Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot*, which was published in 1823, thirteen years after Naigeon's death. I counter this view with careful analysis (in chapters eight and nine)

of the published lectures delivered in 1795-1797 by those philosophers who became known as the Ideologues, Garat, Destutt de Tracy, and Cabanis. I also track the progress (in chapter seven), insofar as I can, of a now-lost manuscript copy gifted to the Comité d'instruction publique in 1794 which made its way into the property of a Freemason, Jean-Pierre Moët, who died in 1806 and in whose effects it is recorded. So, assuming that Moët read the manuscript he owned, that means altogether I am naming five readers. Catherine II may also have read her early draft manuscript version (published in the Assézat-Tourneux edition of Diderot's *Œuvres complètes* in 1875), and so may have Diderot's daughter Angélique and her husband; it is their copy in what is now known as the Fonds Vandeul in the Bibliothèque nationale de France that gave us what we know as the *Éléments de physiologie*, first published by Jean Mayer in 1964. So, eight readers. I talk about how the works of Garat, Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis seem to have been using the *Éléments de physiologie*, and hence how some of its ideas did indirectly reach many readers. I also talk about how Naigeon repeatedly hinted at its existence during the 1790s.

It is at this point that Shane Hockin gets the wrong end of the stick. He thinks I go beyond this to claim that the *Éléments de physiologie* had "possible influence on the French Revolution" and was "one of the most important and influential works of the eighteenth century and perhaps beyond". He then finds it curious that I "even half-heartedly admit" that not many people did read it, and hence that my argument "weakens and appears overstated." The charge that I "half-heartedly admit" what I spent so many pages trying to establish was startling. I am not half-hearted about my argument, and if I am cautious about my claims for its influence on the Ideologues, then that is not the same as being half-hearted. I do not address the French Revolution in general or make any claims about the influence of the *Éléments de physiologie* "on" it. Indeed, Shane Hockin knows this, as he expresses the wish that I had tackled this wider area, commenting that "Diderot's ideas posed as a potential influence on revolutionary thought would have been an interesting discussion." I do argue, to repeat my earlier self-quotation, that the *Éléments de physiologie* was "a substantial materialist treatise" but that is not the same thing as claiming it was widely read or impactful. As a clandestine unpublished manuscript, it had an odd history, just as did other clandestine manuscripts such as Jean Meslier's famous *Mémoires des pensées et des sentiments*. What this odd history was is the subject of the second half of my book.

I am happy to read that, setting aside these overstated claims that I do not make, he considers that the book does "an excellent job of showing the unique publishing history of Diderot's work," that the chapters on the Ideologues are "fascinating bits of evidence that certainly illustrate Diderot's importance," and that the publishing history around Naigeon's *Mémoires* "is an intriguing tale and important for understanding what happened to the *Éléments de physiologie*, and why so few people seem to know about it."

NOTES

[1] Olivier Ritz, "Diderot et la Révolution: l'histoire d'une non-publication," *Littérature et Révolution* (18 May 2022), <https://litrev.hypotheses.org/2365>.

[2] See: <https://www.mfo.ac.uk/event/conference-new-approaches-holbachs-systeme-de-la-nature>.

[3] Maria Susana Seguin, 'Le Système de la nature dans la tradition de la littérature philosophique clandestine', paper, <https://www.mfo.ac.uk/event/conference-new-approaches-holbachs-systeme-de-la-nature>.

[4] See: <https://naigeons-diderot.mml.ox.ac.uk>.

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