

# Bringing People Back to Nature. Paul Thiry d'Holbach

People need to know the truth

By [Dr. Rudolf Hänsel](#)

Global Research, November 02, 2022

Theme: [History](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

\*\*\*

*"Man is unhappy only because he misjudges nature. His mind is so contaminated by prejudices that one could believe he is condemned to error forever: he is so firmly grown together with the veil of views which is spread over him from childhood that he can only be released from it with the greatest difficulty." (1)*

This was written some 250 years ago by the French Enlightenment philosopher and encyclopaedist Baron Paul-Henry Thiry d'Holbach in the preface to his book System of Nature or of the Laws of the Physical and Moral World, which was discredited by the French clergy as "blasphemous and seditious". D'Holbach died on the eve of the French Revolution in 1789.

While people in the Middle Ages still lived in a magical world in which natural processes were apparently subject to supernatural powers, a decisive change in European life and thought began with the dawn of the modern age: people became aware of themselves and began to recognise and shape their position in the world as a whole. The authority of the Bible – until then the only source of wisdom – receded more and more into the background and researchers began to question nature itself, to read the great book of nature.

At first, it was bold individuals who paved the way for research and sometimes paid for the independence of their thinking with their lives. This is why d'Holbach's books "System of Nature" (1770) and "Common Sense or the Religious Testament of Father Meslier from

Étrépigny" ("LE BONS SENS DU CURE MESLIER") (1772) were published under fictitious authorship (2).

With his works, d'Holbach says he wants to lead man back to nature, to restore respect for reason and reverence for virtue, and to dispel the shadows that hide the only path that can lead him safely to the happiness he seeks. He pursues no other intention than the happiness of his fellow men. Out of ambition he also wants the applause of "the small number of partisans of the truth" and of "righteous people who sincerely seek it". (3)

## Man is only unhappy because he misjudges nature

In the preface to the key work of the militant-bourgeois Enlightenment, *System of Nature*, published in 1770, d'Holbach writes:

"Man disregarded the study of nature in order to run after phantoms which, like the will-o'-the-wisps which the wanderer sees at night, frightened him, dazzled him, and led him away from the simple path of truth, without which he cannot attain happiness.

It is therefore important to endeavour to destroy the dazzling works which are only capable of misleading us. It is time to draw remedies from nature against the evils that enthusiasm has brought upon us: reason, guided by experience, must finally get to the root of the prejudices to which the human race has so long fallen prey. It is time for reason, which has been unjustly disparaged, to abandon the pusillanimous tone that makes it complicit in lies and madness.

There is only one truth: it is necessary for man, it can never harm him, its invincible power will reveal itself sooner or later. Therefore, it must be revealed to the human race; its charms must be shown to it, (...).

Let us try, then, to dispel the mists which prevent man from advancing with a sure step on his path of life, let us instil in him courage and respect for his reason; let him learn to recognise his nature and his legitimate right; let him ask the advice of experience and renounce the prejudices of his childhood; let him base his morality on his nature, his needs, his real advantages which society affords him; let him dare to love himself, let him work for his own happiness by promoting that of others; in a word: let him be sensible and virtuous in order to be happy here on this earth, and do not occupy himself with dangerous and useless reveries!

If he needs fantasies, let him at least allow others to spin up their own, which are different from his own; finally, let him convince himself that it is very important for the inhabitants of this earth to be just, charitable, and peace-loving, and that nothing is more trivial than to think about things inaccessible to reason." (4)

## Showing people the truth

In his book "The Common Sense of the Reverend Meslier", published two years later – in 1772 – d'Holbach already writes in the introduction (orthography, punctuation and sentence order have been adopted unchanged):

"It is a vain effort to try to cure people of their vices if one does not begin by curing their prejudices. They must be shown the truth, so that they learn to know their dearest

interests and the true motives that lead them to virtue and their true happiness.

The teachers of the people have long enough raised their eyes to heaven; would they at last turn them to earth! Bowed down by incomprehensible theology, by ridiculous fables, by impenetrable mysteries, by childish ceremonies, let man at last concern himself with natural things, with intelligible objects, with visible truths, with useful knowledge ! Remove the vain chimeras which hold men in bondage; and sensible thoughts will, as it were, take root of their own accord in the minds of which one believed they were destined for eternal error.

(...)

To discover the true principles of morality, man needs neither theology, nor revelation, nor God; he needs only a sound mind; he has only to look within himself, to investigate his own nature, to consider his advantages, to consider the purpose of society and of all its members, and he will easily come to the conclusion that virtue makes happy and vice makes unhappy.

Let us tell men to be just, charitable, temperate, and sociable, not because their gods demand it, but because one must seek to please one's fellow men; let us tell them to abstain from sin and vice, not because one will be punished in another world, but because evil already punishes itself in this life. (...).

Truth is simple; error is complicated, uncertain in its course and surrounded by deviations. The voice of nature is intelligible; that of falsehood is ambiguous, enigmatic, mysterious. The path of truth is straight, that of deceit is crooked and dark. This truth is necessary to all men, and is felt by all the righteous. The teachings of reason are for all those who are of an honest mind. Men are unhappy because they are ignorant; they are ignorant because everything conspires against their enlightenment, and are bad merely because their powers of thought are not sufficiently developed." (5)

\*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

*Dr. Rudolf Lothar Hänsel is a teacher (retired rector), doctor of education (Dr. paed.) and graduate psychologist (Dipl.-Psych.). He taught and trained professionals for many decades. As a retiree, he worked as a psychotherapist in his own practice. In his books and educational-psychological articles, he calls for a conscious ethical-moral values education as well as an education for public spirit and peace. His motto in life (after Albert Camus): Give when you can. And not to hate, if that is possible.*

*He is a regular contributor to Global Research.*

## Notes

(1) d'Holbach, P.-H.T. (1978). System der Natur oder von den Gesetzen der physischen und der moralischen Welt. Frankfurt am Main, p. 11

(2) d' Holbach, P.-H. T. (1976). The common sense of the priest Meslier. Critical thoughts on religion and

its effect on cultural development. Vita Nova Publishers. Zurich

(3) d'Holbach, P.-H.T. (1978). System of Nature or of the Laws of the Physical and Moral World. Frankfurt am Main, p. 13

(4) op. cit., p. 11 ff.

(5) d' Holbach, P.-H. T. (1976). The common sense of the priest Meslier. Critical thoughts on religion and its impact on cultural development. Vita Nova Publishers. Zurich, p. 4 ff.

*Featured image: Paul Heinrich Dietrich Baron d'Holbach (Photo by [Alexander Roslin](#), licensed under the Public Domain)*

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Dr. Rudolf Hänsel](#), Global Research, 2022

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Dr. Rudolf Hänsel](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)