

POP!

In partnership with MSU Special Collections,
SIRO (Studies in Radicalism Online), and the Laurence
Porter Colloquium Series, RCS presents:

MORALITY NATURALIZED IN LA METTRIE'S /MACHINE MAN/ (AND VIOLATED BY SADE)

Dr. John Grey (Philosophy) | Thursday, January 21st | 4:30 - 5:50 pm

Materialism had a bad reputation in eighteenth century Europe. Many held that materialist philosophy would, via the slipperiest of slopes, lead its proponents into degenerate, immoral, and irreligious behavior. Materialist authors in this tradition responded to such criticism by developing naturalistic moral theories; typically, these were theories according to which humans are by nature inclined toward some canonical moral virtues, and by nature averse to some moral vices. Materialists who pursued this strategy, like Julien Offray de la Mettrie, had a nice reply to their critics? moralizing: there are purely natural forces causing humans to tend toward virtue and away from vice, so recognizing that humans are merely biological machines will not lead to moral decay. But this argumentative strategy has an interesting flaw. It requires us to draw a line between those passions that nature dictates we act on and those that nature dictates we resist. Yet (as the writings of the Marquis de Sade suggest) philosophical naturalism, drawn to its logical conclusion, makes it difficult to draw such a line in any non-arbitrary way.

All guest lectures in the Green Room – MSU MAIN Library

Refreshments will be served | contact: vdenzel@msu.edu

