

Study Questions**Reading for Week 2****Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, Letter XIV, pp. 109-121**

1. What do you think the point is of Voltaire's contrast between what is believed in Paris, and what in London? Do you see any sarcasm here?
2. Why would the English be offended at the comparison between Descartes and Newton? Is Voltaire's portrait of Descartes sympathetic? What lesson is he trying to convey to his compatriots in France?

D'Alembert, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, Letter XIV, pp. 109-121

1. "We owe all our ideas to our sensations." To whom does d'Alembert ascribe this view? Does he see this as compatible with the doctrine of innate ideas? To whom do you think d'Alembert is indebted for his account of the origin of knowledge?
2. Does d'Alembert follow Descartes in attributing our warrant for the existence of the external world to the work of the Supreme Being?
3. To what does d'Alembert attribute the origins of society? What does he mean by "the natural law within us"? Does this constitute a naturalistic account of the origin of morals? How strong is his account of why we should believe in the existence of God?
4. What is the main difference of d'Alembert's account of matter from Descartes's?
5. What is the reduction that d'Alembert calls "the true systematic spirit"? Why is he doubtful that this can be achieved for the properties of the magnet?
6. The Enlightenment is often seen as antithetical to revealed religion. Do you see d'Alembert subscribing to such a view?
7. What is d'Alembert's philosophy of art? Is art just imitation?
8. What view of the mechanical arts is portrayed here? Is it sympathetic?

9. What form of tree of knowledge does the *Encyclopedia* adopt? (N.B. A sketch of the the tree is not reproduced here.) To whom is it indebted?
10. Why does d'Alembert say that "imagination deals only with purely material beings"? Does this show that he means by it something different from what we do?
11. What are the Encyclopedists' chief debts to Bacon?
12. What advantages does d'Alembert see in Descartes's vortex theory of planetary motions? How was Newton able to overthrow his errors?
13. What merit does d'Alembert grant there to be in Descartes's metaphysical work? Why does he think Newton did not dare to publish a metaphysics?
14. What does d'Alembert mean by "the experimental physics of the soul", and to whom does he ascribe it? What conclusion does d'Alembert draw from his discussion of his philosophical predecessors?