

Study Questions

Reading for Week 6

Oct 20 Molyneux's Problem

Extracts from LOCKE and LEIBNIZ on Molyneux's Problem

1. Why did Molyneux expect a negative answer to his question?
2. Given Locke's empiricist principles (that all our ideas come from the senses or from reflection), why do you think he agreed with Molyneux?
3. Who was Monsieur de Réamur, what was the point of the operation he was performing, why was Diderot interested in it, and why was he not impressed with the conduct of the experiment?

DIDEROT, *Letter on the Blind* ([Jourdain](#) (117-141))

1. Why does Diderot say it would be better to postpone an operation of the kind Réamur was performing? What other conditions does he insist on if the experiment is to be revealing of anything meaningful? He has not read Leibniz's response to Molyneux's Problem. But do you see any common ground between their responses?
2. What extra contributions does Condillac make to understanding the problem, according to Diderot? Diderot criticizes participants in the debate for taking it for granted that the person would be able to see immediately on regaining their sight. Did Leibniz? Does his claim that "Experience alone can teach me whether there be an analogy between sight and touch" agree with Locke or with Leibniz?
3. Does what Diderot reports of the operation performed by Dr. Cheselden refute Leibniz's view? Diderot says that he is not convinced that the eye is incapable of learning by itself. Who else said something similar?
4. Would Saunderson have been able to distinguish the sphere from the cube, according to Diderot? So what are his final conclusions?