

Study Questions 7**Reading for Week 8****Nov 3 Mores and Morals 1****MANDEVILLE, [Fable of the Bees](#) (read the Introduction and poem only)**

1. [From the Introduction, it is only necessary to get some sense of who Mandeville was, when and why he wrote the *Fable*, and what significance it had. In the poem, there are some anachronistic spellings, e.g. “South-sayer” for “soothsayer”, “Murther” for “murder”, etc.]
2. First verse: “No bees had better government”: what kind of government did they have? What kind of society does Mandeville describe? Is everything fair and just? How does he describe the personified “Justice”?
3. “Thus Vice nurs’d Ingenuity, /Which join’d with Time and Industry, /Had carry’d Life’s Conveniencies.” What is Mandeville saying here?
4. What big change occurs in the affairs of the bees? (“*Good Gods, Had we but Honesty!*”). What effects do these changes have? So what is Mandeville implying? What is the moral of the fable? Is it just a pitch in favour of laissez-faire politics and economics, or does it also provide a challenge to conventional moral philosophy?

DIDEROT, *D’Alembert’s Dream (Sequel)* (Rameau 166-175)

1. What is the main topic of the Sequel? What is the relevance to this of all this discussion of masturbation and incest? Is ‘Bordeu’ suggesting that there’s nothing wrong with them?
2. Is anything known about genes in this period? So how would you argue against the possibility of interbreeding between species. If this is biologically licensed, does that make it morally permissible?
3. What is “a case of the vapors” (170)? Does ‘Bordeu’ anticipate Freud in his diagnosis? What scandalous “remedy” does he propose?
4. —to what use does ‘Bordeu’ put this Spinozist doctrine?

5. Diderot has 'Bordeu' say that "Nothing that exists can be either against nature or outside of nature" (172). Society, on the other hand, is another matter. Is Diderot suggesting that morality is merely conventional? Or does it have a basis in nature?
6. What "sustained experimentation" is 'Bordeu' proposing? Does he anticipate moral scruples? (174)? Who else proposed eugenics? How serious do you think this suggestion of breeding fauns and satyrs is supposed to be? Is Diderot merely being provocative?
7. In treating such scandalous topics—even to us—Diderot is raising these questions in a stark fashion. It is in fact a very scientific approach: instead of just observing, one tweaks nature in order to gain insight into its normal functioning. But is he suggesting that it is only our moral scruples that prevent us from performing these experiments on interbreeding?

DIDEROT, *Bougainville's 'Voyage' (Rameau 177-228).*

Preface and *Critique of Bougainville's voyage*

1. This was written in early 1772, and grew out of a book review intended for Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire*. The Jesuits were expelled from Paraguay in 1768. Where is Patagonia? Grimm had severely criticized Bougainville for denying the truth of the claims that the Patagonians were giants; Diderot supports Bougainville; perhaps this explains why Grimm rejected Diderot's review.
2. What does the still extant review reveal about Diderot's attitude towards "primitive" people? Does he idolize or romanticize primitivism? Remember, he only has Bougainville's account to go on for the idyllic nature of the customs of the Tahitians—he does not know of their custom of infanticide, etc. But what does he say about infanticide in the *Sequel to D'Alembert's Dream*?

The Old Man's Farewell (187-194)

3. Does Diderot use the old man's speech to good emotional effect? Is he extolling the virtues of the "primitive" existence of the Tahitians, or castigating the European

- colonists for their arrogance and false feeling of superiority? What crime does he accuse the colonists of having committed against his people (189-190)?
4. Did Bouganville “suppress this fragment” (193) containing the old man’s speech?

Conversation between the Chaplain and Orou (194-216)

5. What is Diderot implying about the basis for the Chaplain’s moral standards? How does he portray the basis for the Tahitians’ moral beliefs? Does this mean that he is arguing for a moral relativism (morals are relative to one’s culture), or just a moral naturalism (morals that are contrary to nature are artificial, and should be replaced by morals based on one’s nature as a human being)?
6. What about the criticism that the Chaplain’s morals are “contrary to reason” (198)? Do you find any other criticisms of the priesthood in the *Supplement*? (e.g. on p. 212) Why do you think Diderot portrays Orou as unable to understand the meaning of the words “*fornication, incest, and adultery*” (208)?
7. “Do you know a more better [rule of judgement] than general welfare and individual utility?” (208). Is this utilitarianism *avant la lettre*? How is this compatible with the idea that morals should be based on self-interest (210)?
8. How does the discussion of incest (208-209) compare with what Diderot wrote in the *Sequel*? To what purpose does Diderot report Franklin’s story of Polly Baker from Boston (214)?

Continuation of the dialogue (216-228)

9. What do A and B conclude about the relationship between religious law, civil law and natural law (218)?
10. What points of interest do you find in B’s summary on p. 223? What is the point of the discussion of Calabrian society (225)? And Venice (226-227)? Is there an implicit comparison with Rousseau on p. 226:: “men become more wicked and unhappy the more civilized they become”? Or is the reference to Venice a sarcastic undercutting of Rousseau and his love for Geneva?