

Study Questions 8**Reading for Week 9****Nov 10 Human rights**

[First, some clarification of the chronology: Diderot's article *Natural Rights* and Rousseau's on *Political Economy* were both published in the 1755 edition of the *Encyclopédie*. D'Alembert's *Dream* was written by Diderot in 1769, and revised by him in 1776, but not published until 1830. Voltaire's *Candide* came out in 1759, and Condorcet's *On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship* was published in 1790, his *Sketch* posthumously in 1795.]

DIDEROT, Natural Rights

1. What is the "state of nature"? Why does Diderot insist that it is in this state that the question of natural rights must be tackled? Voluntary actions not to be confused with free ones. What is the difference?
2. Diderot posits the man bound by no moral obligations to others. "I am not so unjust as to insist on a sacrifice from another person that I do not wish to make for him". What is that moral precept normally known as?
3. What is Diderot's conclusion to his discussion of the "violent reasoner"?
4. "Particular wills are suspect: they can be good or evil, but the general will is always good: it is never wrong." Does this apply to non-reasoning animals? "The general will determines the limits of all duties." "I am a man and I do not have any other truly inalienable rights than those of humanity." But where is the general will located?
5. Diderot says the general will is "a pure act of the understanding that reasons in the silence of the passions about what man can demand of his fellow man and what his fellow man can rightfully demand of him". He says it is "particular to the society of which he is a member"; legislatures ought to depend on it; but also that "the nature of *natural rights* ... is always related to the general will and to the common desire of the entire species". Which, then? Is the general will the will of particular societies, of governments of nations, or of the human species?

ROUSSEAU, Political Economy

1. "The body politic, therefore, is also a moral being possessing a will." Does this indicate a debt to Diderot for the idea of the general will?
2. Is a will that is general for a society's own members also general for members of other societies? The general will of the whole world "is always the law of nature", and from this we can "judge whether a government is good or bad and in general the morality of all human actions". But how?
3. "The voice of the people is in fact the voice of God". How does this differ from Diderot's conception of things? *Freedom* is first necessary: the securing of *property, life and liberty* of each member is what motivates people to form societies. Does this remind you of anything? US declaration of rights?
4. "How is it possible that they all obey and yet no one commands? ... These wonders are the work of the law." "It is this celestial voice that dictates to each citizen the precepts of public reason..." Does this indicate a religious foundation for the law?
5. How do you make the particular wills agree with the general will? "When the guardians of public authority sincerely apply themselves to the fostering of that love by their own example and concern..." Who are these guardians?
6. "Patriotism cannot exist without liberty, nor liberty without virtue, and certainly not virtue without citizens; If you create citizens, you will have everything. Why is patriotism so important for Rousseau?
7. "If there are laws for the age of maturity, there ought to be laws for infancy and childhood, teaching obedience to others ...we should so much the less abandon the education of children to the understanding and prejudices of their fathers, as that education is of still greater importance to the state than to the fathers..." What does this tell us about Rousseau's views on education?
8. "The right of property is the most sacred of all rights of citizens and more important in some respects than liberty itself..." Influence?

Extract from [CONDORCET's *The Future Progress*](#)

1. Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (September 17, 1743– March 28, 1794), “the last of the philosophes”; Condorcet was a pioneer of social choice theory, Women’s Rights, and the abolition of slavery; Monsieur “Anti-Trump”?
2. Condorcet’s *On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship* was published in 1790. It was “widely opposed on the grounds that women possessed distinctive natures, which perfectly suited them to the fulfillment of their domestic duties” (SEP, Joan Landes); cf also [Declaration of the Rights of Woman](#), by Olympe De Gouges, 1791, and Diderot’s [“Sur les femmes”](#) (1771), for other writings in favour of women’s rights.
3. Some other things to note about Condorcet: His 1781 work *Réflexions sur l’esclavage des nègres* [Reflections on Black Slavery] helped incite the abolitionist movement in France”; and “He proposed occupational training rather than incarceration for prostitutes, opposed police harassment of prostitutes and homosexuals, and denounced barbaric laws and practices against homosexuals, such as France's burning of homosexuals alive and the English resort to mob violence.” (both from the SEP article on Condorcet by Joan Landes).
4. What role does Condorcet see for mathematics and science in human progress? What are the causes of inequality, according to him? How does Condorcet propose to go about eradicating inequalities of wealth? How does his attitude to education differ from Rousseau’s?
5. How reasonable are Condorcet’s views on the rights of women? How insightful are his views on the limitation of resources on the planet?