

Study Questions 9**Reading for Week 10****Nov 17 Enlightenment anti-colonialism****Sankar MUTHU, "Diderot and the Evils of Empire"**

1. Who was the nominal author of the *Histoire des deux Indes*? How much of it did Diderot write? Why did he publish his views in this way? What were the two "Indies" of the title?
2. Muthu writes "For Diderot, however, the figure that most embodies an unmasked human is the European imperialist." What does he mean by that?
3. What difference does Muthu see between Diderot's concept of the general will and Rousseau's application of it (78)? What is Diderot's implicit criticism of Rousseau's application of the idea of a "state of nature" (79)?
4. Is Diderot a moral relativist? On what grounds does he make moral judgements concerning the practices of other societies, according to Muthu (80-81)? Is he a primitivist (83-84)?
5. What is Diderot's view of the effects of British rule in India and Bengal, and of modern European imperialism in general? Why is patriotism so important for Rousseau? Why didn't Spain simply engage in a mutually dependent trade with an independent Mexico and Peru (92)?
6. Was Diderot's worry that Africa might become "the scene of our cruelties, as Asia and America have been, and still are" (92) well founded? What was his view of the property rights of Amerindians (93-94)? How does Diderot's view of patriotism (95) differ from Rousseau's?
7. What is Diderot's analysis of the motivations and causes of imperialism (97-104)? What effects does colonialism have on the imperial powers themselves (104-108)? What are Diderot's views on the slave trade? Does he disapprove of slave revolt (109-111)?
8. What did Diderot think of the role religion plays in all this (111-117)? Is there a connection with the views he expresses here and his depiction of the life and practices of the Tahitians in the *Supplement*?

DIDEROT, selections from the "*Histoire des Deux Indes*" (sections 1, 6, 7, 14, 18, 19, 29 only)

Section 1: "Introduction" (169-170).

1. Is Diderot attributing the enlightenment of nations to the effects of commerce?

Section 6: "Principles of Colonization" (175-177).

2. What are the "three ethical principles of colonization" discussed by Diderot at the opening of Book VIII?

Section 7: "National Character at Home and Overseas" (177-179).

3. What does Diderot mean by saying that the "mask" of the coloniser becomes the weaker the further he is from his home country?

Section 14: "'Slavery and Liberty" (185-188).

4. What effect do you imagine this moving analysis of the slave trade might have had on the readers of the *Deux Indes*? Might Diderot have underestimated the power of moral outrage to affect politics?

Section 18: "The Character of Primitive Man" (191-193).

5. In this fragment, Diderot is relying on contemporary accounts of Canadian aboriginals as hunter-gatherers not living in societies to make some original points against moralists who see their contemporary society as the natural condition of mankind.

Section 19: "The Character of Civilized Man" (193- 197).

6. What contrast does Diderot draw here with the life of civilized man? ("Everywhere masters, always humiliations.") Does this not sound more like a hymn to primitivism, Diderot's protests to the contrary? (Compare pp. 205 ff.)

Section 29: "Conclusion" (212-214).

7. Is Diderot being unduly pessimistic, or simply realistic, in thinking that the colonizing impulse will persist??