“Encyclopédia. This word signifies chain of knowledge; it is composed of the Greek preposition ἐν, in, and the nouns κύκλος, circle, and παιδεία, knowledge. Indeed, the purpose of an encyclopedia is to collect knowledge disseminated around the globe; to set forth its general system to the men with whom we live, and transmit it to those who will come after us, so that the work of preceding centuries will not become useless to the centuries to come; and so that our offspring, becoming better instructed, will at the same time become more virtuous and happy, and that we should not die without having rendered a service to the human race.”

-- from “Encyclopédie,” an entry in Diderot’s Encyclopedia
Diderot @ 300
Making Knowledge in the Eighteenth-Century

With “Diderot @ 300,” we celebrate French thinker Denis Diderot’s tricentenary, and his imprint on the greatest interdisciplinary achievement in intellectual entrepreneurship of the Enlightenment: the Encyclopédie (1751-1772). A collaboration between Lewis & Clark College students and faculty funded by a grant from the Mellon foundation, this exhibit will be on display from August 28 to December 20, 2013 in the Atrium at the Aubrey R. Watzek Library.

Enlightenment homme de lettres extraordinaire, Diderot (1713-1784) was featured in the New York Times as an “American exemplar” (Jan. 24, 2013). In this op-ed piece, Andrew S. Curran, eighteenth-century scholar, Professor of French and Dean of the Arts and Humanities at Wesleyan University, reminds us that “thumbing one’s nose at the establishment has been central to our own cultural and political traditions since, well, Diderot’s time. After all, that’s how we became Americans in the first place.” Diderot certainly did so at the peril of his own freedom and livelihood. Along with fellow homme de lettres Jean le Rond d’Alembert, Diderot co-edited the grand dictionnaire. The Encyclopédie started out as a commissioned translation of Ephraim Chambers’ two-volume Cyclopaedia, and greatly influenced by English empiricism (Bacon, Locke, and Hume), publicized in part by Voltaire’s Letters Concerning the English Nation. Diderot and d’Alembert’s vision for the Encyclopédie was no less than to revolutionize the way people commonly thought (See: the Tree of Knowledge) At the center of the exhibit, we dedicate an entire wall to the Encyclopédie’s schematic Tree of Knowledge, inspired by Bacon’s own. Our rendering of it displays the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of knowledge-making in the 18th-century. Branching out into Memory, Reason, and Imagination, human understanding, or entendement is featured as the subversive key to accessing, critiquing, and creating knowledge through the disciplines emerging from these faculties – including philosophy, history, and the literary and creative arts.

This collaborative project comes to life in the heart of Lewis & Clark’s liberal arts environment at Watzek Library, an eminent repository of existing knowledge past and present, but also a strategic and dynamic space where knowledge constantly circulates and evolves: we come here to explore, to ask, to research, to read, to discover, to encounter, to learn, to examine, to challenge, to create, to discuss, to write, to organize, to articulate, to workshop, to type, to print, and to disseminate knowledge. “Diderot @ 300” could not have come to existence without liberal access to and use of the ARTFL project database hosted by the University of Chicago in collaboration with the French government, and available online at Lewis & Clark. All our textual and visual references to the Encyclopédie are to the ARTFL database. This exhibit, then, emanates from, and replicates, the idea at the core of our liberal arts institution: the making of knowledge is a collaborative undertaking that results from interdisciplinary endeavors and cross-referencing, and a creative process that bears on the sciences as well as on the humanities. Reflecting this idea, the team draws on the expertise of the
Library’s Special Collections, Associate Professor of French and Diderot scholar Isabelle C. DeMarte, as well as Schuyler Adkins ('14, French Studies / History), Sara Balsom ('14, French Studies / English), Hillary Kugler ('14, Foreign Languages French/Spanish), and Brandon Stilson ('14, Philosophy). We hope you enjoy following Diderot and your own thoughts throughout the exhibit and invite you to share them with us on the guest-book available by the doors to Special Collections.

Entendement (Understanding)

Human understanding in the tree of knowledge

The *Encyclopédie*’s system of human knowledge positions *Entendement* (Understanding) as the trunk of the Tree of Knowledge. From this metaphorical foundation in nature, there grow the boughs of Memory, Reason, and Imagination, three categories of *Logique* (Logic). Man then uses these God-given faculties, via the arch-disciplines of History, Philosophy, and Poetry, so as to apprehend and discriminate between the various objects he perceives through the general faculty of Understanding. Eventually, he draws his own conclusions and participates in the making of knowledge rather than receiving it from a higher, religious, authority. Organized around man, this broad distribution of knowledge is presented in Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s *Discours préliminaire* (Preliminary Discourse), and elaborated on in the “Explication détaillée du Système des Connaissances Humaines” [Detailed explanation of the System of Human Knowledge] at the end of the *Discours* (p. xlvij). In this descriptive presentation of understanding, the “intellectual faculty” in the entry “ENTENDEMENT” exemplifies the subversive ways in which the *Encyclopédie* flouts the influence of religion over knowledge and its origins, acquisition, and distribution.

The entry “ENTENDEMENT” in the *Encyclopédie*

Any entry makes linear the arborescent pattern of a heading (or trunk), which further branches out into one or more descriptors, and further yet into several definitions depending on the disciplinary field of its use. “ENTENDEMENT” appears in the fifth volume of the *Encyclopédie* in 1765 (See: “ENTENDEMENT” in the Tree of Knowledge). The entry is grossly undeveloped, however, despite its role in the process of knowledge-making. The way it is organized in the context of the whole work shows the workings of Diderot and d’Alembert’s mission “to change the way people commonly thought.” (See: “ENCYCLOPÉDIE” in Tree of Knowledge) Strategically placed, the very opening of the entry and cross-references invite further, subversive, connections (See Case: Distribution of Knowledge). The beginning of the entry reads like this: “UNDERSTANDING, masc. n. (Logic.) is nothing but our soul itself, as it conceives of, or receives ideas. [...] I do not imagine that of which I speak under any corporeal form. The capacity that we have to think in this way is called understanding, or the intellectual
The important concept of the “âme” (soul) is presented as being synonymous with “understanding.” It is not cross-referenced, however, by the capital letters conventional to cross-references in the *Encyclopédie*. An implicit cross-reference, the 20-page entry “Âme” penned by Diderot in the very first volume of the *Encyclopédie* in 1751 contrasts starkly with “ENTENDEMENT”. “Âme” features various, diverging, philosophical accounts of the origin of the soul, from Greek and Roman Antiquity (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero) to contemporary thinkers (Leibniz and Spinoza), mentioning along the way Christianity’s Augustine only to underscore the difficulties inherent in defining the soul’s origin. The debatable dimension of that origin carries over to its nature: is it physical or metaphysical; material, or immaterial? Put differently, the synonymous relationship between understanding and the soul becomes a gateway for discussing other concepts and stances concerning knowledge: mind, matter, rationalism, empiricism. In addition, while “ENTENDEMENT” is classified under “logique,” the entry “Âme” is classified under the encyclopedic distribution of knowledge: “Encyclopedia: Order: Reason: Philosophy or Science of Spirits, of God, of Angels, of the Soul.” This classification recalls the Encyclopedic Tree of Knowledge, in which Reason is positioned centrally, and further channeled by the arch-discipline of Philosophy. In turn, Philosophy branches out into three main sciences made equivalent by their juxtaposition: the science of “Nature,” the science of “Man,” and the science of “God.” By classifying the “Soul” under Reason and Philosophy, on the one side, and under the “Science of Spirits, of God, of Angels, and of the Soul” on the other side, Diderot undermines religious and spiritual questions by challenging them to the level of a sub-category of human understanding, however much God may have endowed man with reason.

— Isabelle DeMarte

Entendement

“La puissance que nous avons de penser ainsi, s’appelle l’entendement, ou la faculté intellectuelle. À la vérité, dans le temps même que l’entendement pur s’exerce & s’applique sur ses idées, l’imagination présente aussi ses images & ses phantômes: mais bien loin de nous aider par ses soins, elle ne fait que nous retarder & nous troubler. Il faut donc mettre une grande différence entre les idées de l’entendement, & les phantômes de l’imagination.”

“The power that we have to think in this way is called understanding, or the intellectual faculty. In truth, at the same time that pure understanding applies itself to our thoughts, imagination presents its own images and phantoms to our mind: but far from helping us, this only troubles and confuses us. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between understood ideas, and imagined phantoms.”

— From the entry on “ENTENDEMENT” [Understanding]
Raison

« ... cette faculté naturelle dont Dieu a pourvu les hommes, pour connaître la vérité, quelque lumière qu’elle suivre, & à quelque ordre de matières qu’elle s’applique. »

“This is a natural faculty which God has bestowed upon man in order for him to know the truth; it follows a certain light and applies itself to a certain order.”

— From the entry on “Raison” [Reason]

Mémoire

MÉMOIRE, SOUVENIR, RESSOUVENIR, RÉMINISCENCE, (Synonymes.) ces quatre mots expriment également l’attention renouvelée de l’esprit à des idées qu’il a déjà apperçues…. La mémoire & le souvenir expriment une attention libre de l’esprit à des idées qu’il n’a point oubliées, quoiqu’il ait continué de s’en occuper … Le ressouvenir & la reminiscence expriment une attention fortuite à des idées que l’esprit avait entièrement oubliées & perdues de vue…

“Memory, remembrance, recollection, reminiscence, (Synonyms.) these four words also express the renewed attention to the mind on the ideas it has already seen .... Memory and remembrance express attention freely on the ideas that the mind has not forgotten though it has discontinued to deal with... Recollection and reminiscence express casual attention to ideas that the mind had completely forgotten and lost sight of.”

— From the entry on “Mémoire” [Memory]

Imagination

“Peut-être ce don de Dieu, l’imagination, est-il le seul instrument avec lequel nous composons des idées, & même les plus métaphysiques.”

“Maybe a gift from God, imagination is the only instrument by which we compose ideas, even the metaphysical.”

— From the entry on “Imagination” [Imagination]
Quick Facts about the *Encyclopédie*

To give an idea of the enormous size of the project and the level of investment required by all its contributors, we present you with some interesting facts concerning the *Encyclopédie*:

The *Encyclopédie*, co-edited by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert was begun in the year 1745 and completed in 1772, a project spanning 27 years, during which a team of over 150 collaborators wrote articles.

One such man, Louis de Jaucourt, wrote 17,266 articles himself; about 8 a day for 6 years.

This amounted to about 25% of the *Encyclopédie*.

In comparison, Diderot himself wrote over 6000 articles, and d’Alembert wrote over 1000.

The *Encyclopédie* itself was comprised of over 20,000,000 words, making up over 18,000 pages of text.

These were published in 17 separate in-folio volumes containing 71,818 articles and 11 in-folio volumes of 2,885 plates.

In total, 25,000 copies were made on a Gutenburg press, of which about half went to France.

The volumes were sent to a total of 4500 subscribers.

After its initial printing, 5 subsequent editions were published in Switzerland and Italy, and 7 additional volumes were completed by Charles Joesph Panckoucke.
The legal right to publish in 18th century France was called a *privilège*. The *privilège* was granted to publishers by the King and registered through administrative offices of publishing, printing, and bookselling. This *privilège* gave the publisher exclusive rights to print a text, and in that sense foreshadowed modern copyright laws. Since the *privilège* was granted directly by the King, it signified a royal stamp of approval on a text, allowing it to be reproduced in France. For this reason, any text that the King did not agree with, or which was not in line with the values the King held for his nation, was likely to be censored. Books that had had their *privilège* revoked risked being sentenced to burn, and books that never made it to the legal stage were forced underground or diverted to foreign publishing markets. The *Encyclopédie* was lucky enough to escape these measures by publishing discretely and under the name of a falsified foreign publishing house, but was still subject to censorship and legal actions. Diderot utilized the cross-references and the “System of Human Understanding” to insert his more blasphemous opinions into the *Encyclopédie* unnoticed. For instance, the entry for “RELIGION” is couched under the arch-discipline of “PHILOSOPHY,” subverting knowledge of the divine to a branch of knowledge created by man. By pointing the reader in a certain direction with cross-references, Diderot may have had the intention to influence his reader’s opinion on select subjects. These sorts of things, along with statements made in the front matter about man’s independence from state and religion in his quest for knowledge, were what put the *Encyclopédie* on the black list for publishing in France.

Scathing reviews were written against the *Encyclopédie* by its most passionate opponents in the conservative party. The death of the *dauphin*, or crown prince, and the expulsion of the conservative religious group, the Jansenists, from France came at a fortuitous time for the *Encyclopédie*, and allowed the remaining volumes to be published uninhibited in 1766. The most outspoken opinions against the *Encyclopédie* were published in a review called the *Journal de Trévoux*, the members of which were primarily Jesuits. The editor of this review during Diderot’s work on the *Encyclopédie* was Guillaume-François Berthier. He held the post until 1762, when the Jesuits were banished from France. The criticism in the journal was generally solid, intelligent, neutral and in good taste, written by educated men who avoided excess, even in their criticism of enemies such as Voltaire. However, the journal attacked the writings of the *philosophes* when they attacked religion. The journal members believed Catholic orthodoxy to be received truth, treating religious texts with greater respect than academic writing. Once the *Encyclopédie* was marked as a dangerous text, it was an ordeal to keep the project
afloat, and to protect the manuscripts from being burned under decree of the King. *De l’Esprit [Essays on the Mind]* was a contemporary work to the *Encyclopédie*, and was tried at the same time. The work attracted immediate attention and aroused formidable opposition, especially from the dauphin Louis, son of King Louis XV. The Sorbonne condemned the book, while the priests persuaded the court that it was full of the most dangerous doctrines. The negative publicity garnered by this book affected the *Encyclopédie*, as it spread the fear of atheism through the court. The religious authorities wanted to suppress this modern way of thinking very quickly, and made these texts a scapegoat.

**Intellectual property in 18th-century France**

Printing in the 18th century was an arduous process which required a fine attention to detail and many workers operating a single workshop. For this reason, manuscripts were expensive, and printed copies of books were only available to the very wealthy. Realistically, the readers of the *Encyclopédie* were primarily white, upper-class males who could pay for a subscription to the volumes. The 25,000 copies made of the *Encyclopédie* was an enormous number for its time. For a comparison, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* sold 120,000 copies at its peak in 1990, when modern publishing, advertising, and the rise of capitalism had made books much more widely consumed and distributed. The 27-year project became one of Diderot’s greatest achievements. The idea of owning intellectual property was still new in the 18th century, and many things that could be called plagiarism today, at the time were seen as inspiration or influence. The Enlightenment Period has been seen as “the pivotal period in which classical traditions of imitation gave way to a new valorization of originality and sincere self-expression”. Following a tradition where artists’ apprentices were expected to copy their masters, and value was given to authority and tradition rather than novelty, the Enlightenment gave birth to the concept of the individual, his original thoughts and autonomy. This gradual change in thinking meant changes in the laws governing textual and intellectual ownership. Our modern laws and ideas on the ethics of borrowing ideas from someone else don’t accurately describe the complex textual relationships of the 18th century. In the world of 18th century printing, once an author sold his work to a press in order to be published, that work no longer belonged to him at all, but to the printer. In the *Encyclopédie*, many articles are unsigned, and we can only assume that they were written by Diderot. The murkiness surrounding the idea of intellectual property makes the idea of plagiarism, as we understand it today, almost obsolete. What can be said about Diderot’s works accused of imitation and plagiarism is that they were subversive and therefore under intense scrutiny. His imitation of Bacon’s tree of knowledge in the front matter makes a very distinct change from the original: theology, containing all branches of religious thought, is nested under the larger branch of philosophy. This takes the idea of god out of the celestial realm, and essentially claims that god is the invention of man himself. This controversial decision turned quite a few heads in the French courts and intellectual circles, and was a source of many of the legal problems encountered by the *Encyclopédie.*

— Sara Balsom
Diderot: Beyond the *Encyclopédie*

His life beyond his work

Denis Diderot was a person who defied social norms, his family’s expectations, and helped revolutionize a way of thinking. He was born to a middle-class working family of five in the town of Langres, in Eastern France on October 5, 1713. As an adolescent, Diderot was a great lover of novels, literature, and women. In 1732, Diderot earned a “maîtrise-ès-arts” or Masters of Arts degree in Philosophy at the University of Paris. He was expected to enter the clergy or a learned profession, as his father had done. Diderot started law school instead, but this did not last long. As a student of the liberal arts, Diderot was more inclined to follow an intellectually stimulating career he was passionate about, like writing. He defied his parents and society, and in the process was disowned by his discontented father. For the next ten years Diderot lived a “bohemian” existence by jumping between tutorships, writing and editing jobs, and at one point worked as a bookseller’s hack. Diderot fell in love with a woman named Antoinette Champion, whom he wanted to marry. Diderot’s father was so dissatisfied with the matrimony that he had Diderot locked up in a monastery. In 1743, Diderot escaped by climbing out the window, and fled to Paris to marry Antoinette despite his father’s wishes. Antoinette Champion was uneducated, the fatherless daughter of a poor shirt-maker. Their marriage was happy for a time, and they had a little girl named Angélique, who was named after Diderot’s late sister and his mother. The happiness in their marriage did not last, and he found love and companionship in two paramours. These Parisian women were Madeleine de Puisieux, who was a writer and feminist, and Sophie Volland, an educated woman. Sophie Volland was Diderot’s inspiration and soul mate, and they spent almost thirty years in correspondence. Their letters provide some of the most insightful and intriguing writing about the philosophical world in Paris at that time, although only Diderot’s letters remain. They are full of his views on art, literature, politics, and his love for Mademoiselle Volland. Some say that they are the quintessence of the French Enlightenment *esprit*. Though Diderot’s affection for his wife waned away, he remained very dedicated to his daughter Angélique. In order for him to gather sufficient funds for Angélique’s dowry, he sold his entire library to the Russian Empress Catherine II. She had heard about his financial troubles and benevolently commanded the library be held in Paris until she requested it. She further helped by making Diderot the paid librarian of her new library. In February 1784, Diderot had a stroke. Shortly thereafter, Sophie Volland died, followed by Diderot’s eleven year-old granddaughter. Because of his fragile state of mind after the Sophie’s death, Diderot was not told about his granddaughter’s death until later. Diderot then moved to a comfortable hotel room provided by Catherine II where he died of gastrointestinal issues on July 31, 1784.

Diderot’s works beyond the *Encyclopédie*

Diderot, though known primarily for the *Encyclopédie*, was an accomplished writer whose works influenced his era and those that followed. His other works were generally fiction – plays, short
stories, novels and his notorious *Lettre sur les aveugles* [*Letter on the Blind*] that landed him in prison for three months (*See case: Diderot and Republic of Letters*). Diderot’s writing was revolutionary for his time, daring to go where many feared to go to in the past by satirizing the government in very public ways. One of the best examples of this is *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* [*The Indiscreet Jewels*], which was published anonymously in 1748. In this novel, King Louis the XV is portrayed as Mangogul, the Sultan of Congo, bored with life and craving amusement. This novel is a satire of the government and society, but was actually so tactfully done that it took years for Diderot to be reprimanded for it. In 1746 he wrote *Pensées philosophiques*, and he added to this a short complementary essay on the sufficiency of natural religion (*See posters on the Enlightenment Philosophers*). Diderot’s celebrated “*Lettre sur les aveugles à l’usage de ceux qui voient*” (“Letter on the Blind”) written in 1749, introduced him to the world as a daringly original thinker (*See Case: Diderot and the Republic of Letters*). A later essay, “*Lettre sur les sourds et muets*”, considered the case of a similar deprivation in the deaf and mute. After signing a letter promising never again to write anything prejudicial against the Church, Diderot was released from the dungeons of Vincennes fortress after three months imprisonment (*See: the Timeline of the Encyclopédie*). He wrote the sentimental plays, *Le Fils naturel* [*The Natural Son*] and *Le Père de famille* [*The Father of the Family*]. His art criticism was also highly influential, and he introduced the world of theatre to the idea of a “fourth wall.”

— Hillary Kugler

4. An illustration from “*Les deux amis de Bourbonne*”

5, 6. Illustration from “*Les bijoux indiscrets*”
Diderot and the Republic of Letters

According to cultural historian Dena Goodman in *The Republic of Letters*, the eighteenth-century Parisian intellectual scene became a state within the state. *Philosophes* and *salonnières* – the latter being ladies of fashion hosting the former in their “salons” at home – created “a network of intellectual exchange” perpetuated through “letter exchanges [and] correspondences, [and] continued by the public itself.” The letter form straddled the private and public realms, whether as a means of communication or as one of creation, as attested by the explosion of epistolary novels and the growing phenomenon of self-expression throughout the European literary market. As a radical outcome of this, “writers and readers” were brought together “to interact on equal footing,” and that “equality could have [deeper] meaning [and] political consequence.” (137-138). As the *philosophe* who dreamed that the knowledge disseminated by the *Encyclopédie* would one day be at anyone’s fingertips, and as one of the most prolific letter writers of the age alongside Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu, Diderot made ample use of the epistolary medium for private and public purposes alike (*See case: Diderot: Beyond the Encyclopédie*). In several open letters written in the early days of the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot found a radical new form of expression and a new way to depict the making of knowledge as a dynamic process involving one’s senses in a systematic and reflective exploration of the world around.

“La Première Lettre d’un Citoyen Zélé” (“The First Letter of a Zealous Citizen”)

By the middle of the 1740s, Diderot was already known by the Parisian police who were working closely with censorship bureau officers in the *Librairie* (Book Trade department) to track anti-state and anti-clerical writings (*See Case: Distribution of Knowledge*). He had been involved in several translation projects, including the Earl of Shaftesbury’s *Inquiry Concerning Virtue* and Robert James’ *Medicinal Dictionary*. The latter’s emphasis on practical knowledge afforded Diderot first-hand exposure to applied English empiricism, and lead to the inclusion of “crafts” in the final title of the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des arts, des sciences et des métiers* (Encyclopedia, or A Systematic Dictionary of the Arts, Sciences and Crafts). In addition, it fostered his deep-seated aversion for the compartmentalization of knowledge through rival guilds.

In 1748, he publicly took part in the long-standing ideological feud between physicians and surgeons. In the “First Letter of a Zealous Citizen, Who is neither a Surgeon nor a Physician, to M. D. M. …, Master Surgeon, […] Where a Proposal is made to Appease the Long Standing Trouble Dividing Medicine and Surgery,” Diderot staged a conversation between two professionals in the knowledge-making industry. He hid behind an acronym allegedly referring to his new position as one of the editors of the *Encyclopédie* project. This semi-anonymity afforded him a way to engage in a highly controversial yet circular debate with the highest of political authorities in two innovative ways. First, his general-
ist’s approach overlapped symbolically with that of anyone interested in bridging the intellectual gap between theory and practice in sciences concerning human life and the human body. Second, it allowed him to explore an innovative channel, contrasting with traditional scientific discourse. In a visually striking manner, he wove his anti-dogmatic sentiment through characters representing ideas via an allegorical fable of body parts and physicality: everyman unable to journey on through life with his legs stuck in a swamp; the sharp-eyed but arm-less physician able to diagnose his ill but unable to free him; the strong-armed but blindfolded surgeon likewise unable to free him; and finally the unimpaired traveler able to combine a good eye and strong arms to pull him out of the swamp and let him live happily ever after.

“La Lettre sur les aveugles” (“The Letter on the Blind”)

In 1749, Diderot wrote the most famous of his philosophical letters. Published anonymously – though not for long – the “Lettre” landed him in prison and jeopardized the onset of the Encyclopédie venture. A letter campaign by the publishers of the great dictionary in support of Diderot led to his release. (See: The Timeline of the Encyclopédie, and the ARTFL project for archived letters). The Lettre sur les aveugles examined the scientific and religious implications of sense knowledge. It explored the popular sense-knowledge problem posed by William Molyneux, and taken up by John Locke in his Essay on Human Understanding. Molyneux asked the question of whether a blind individual recovering sight might be able to distinguish between a sphere and a circle or a cube and a square without external help. Through the voice of blind English mathematical genius Nicholas Saunderson, the “Lettre” dramatized the atheist implications of empiricism. In a most controversial scene, Saunderson – whose visual impairment literally and figuratively embodies atheist sensualism – appears in a deathbed conversation with pastor Holmes – whose robe literally and figuratively embodies organized religion. Saunderson’s argument against the existence of God famously rests on his inability to see nature’s wonders or to touch God: “If you want me to believe in God, you must make me touch him.” Additionally, Saunderson wonders why God might have let a “monstrous misfit” like him live, reinforcing his opposition to Holmes’ conventional visual argument for the existence of God. Holmes’ tearful reaction speaks to the heart and the mind all at once. This novel-like scene invites all readers, including the religiously inclined, both to empathize and identify with Saunderson’s plight, and also to be convinced by and agree with his forceful stance. In reverberating the conversational tone of Diderot’s epistolary style, this animated debate provides the reader with a portable model of knowledge acquisition. In line with the search for new ways to convey new knowledge that defined Diderot’s role at the head of the Encyclopédie, the open-letter form became an easier tool for anyone to engage on his or her own terms in conversations with others about science, religion, and the different ways to approach knowledge distribution. From an economic standpoint, such popularity in the expanding literary market evidenced the power gradually acquired by individuals, turning the letter form into a mechanism that acted as a companion to the Encyclopédie for exchanging information and disseminating knowledge.

— Isabelle DeMarte
A concise and inclusive definition of the Enlightenment and Enlightenment ideals is elusive; the broad range of actors and ideologies that played a significant role in this eighteenth-century movement precludes any easy labels. However, there are certain common elements in this intellectual movement that span nationality and are philosophically bent. It is illuminating to consider the Enlightenment as a group of strands, which run along a similar route, but also exist separate of one another. The Age of Enlightenment denotes remarkable cultural and intellectual movements during the 17th and 18th centuries. This epoch was decidedly different than previous eras as the majority of works emphasized, either directly or subversively, the reformation of society using reason, challenging dogmatic notions of faith and religion, and using the scientific method to advance knowledge. The Enlightenment saw an unprecedented promotion of scientific thought and skepticism, which was coupled with an opposition of superstition and miracles, intolerance, and abuses of power.

7. “Un diner des philosophes” by Jean Huber

Historical Context of the Enlightenment

In the eighteenth century, as nobility became more powerful within the government as ministers and parliamentarians, the concept of divine right was no longer considered inherently true. Rule by divine right centered around the idea that a monarch had a God-given, absolute right to the throne and ruled by providence. However, beyond this small shift in power, those of noble birth had no reason to question the status quo, as their privileges were ingrained in that aristocratic tradition.

During the Seven Years War, fought between 1756 and 1763 over colonial holdings in Canada and India, many European governments had massive debt and needed to find a new source of revenue to cover their losses. As monarchies increased taxes and began to alienate their traditional sources of support, which consisted of the clergy and the nobility, questions of political sovereignty and the limits
to a monarch’s power came up in discussions across the continent. The educated but unprivileged, or those who were well-read and formally trained, but lacking noble blood or titles, began to protest against the oligarchical governments whose power and influence were derived from traditions. These articulate, middle-class citizens (unlike the nobility) had every reason to question the status quo, and are some of the primary constituents of the Enlightenment. It is no wonder that certain historians attribute the French Revolution – and other political upheavals of the nineteenth century – to the rise of these ideals, propagated by the philosophes as well as the common man.

**Enlightenment and Nationality**

While there certainly existed a “Republic of Letters,” it is important to consider that the Enlightenment happened within a national context. Although elite intellectuals were able to communicate and collaborate across borders, language barriers and an increasing sense of national identity prevented this movement from being completely pan-European.

**Women and the Enlightenment**

The primary role of women during the Enlightenment was passive. They were not considered full-fledged citizens, and sometimes, Enlightenment ideals were invoked to continue their suppression. Rousseau’s work in particular was often used to support clear demarcations between genders, which left women definitively boxed into their domestic roles.

**Enlightenment and Religion**

The subversive nature of many Enlightenment ideals is well-known. It should be noted, however, that a philosophe actively decrying religion (or even Christianity) was extremely rare. Anticlericalism was a major element of Enlightenment thought and publications, and it was with this that conservative religious sects, like the Jesuits and Jansenists, took issue. Enlightenment thinkers were comfortable criticizing the church and its structure and excesses, but couldn’t (due to personal belief or fear of repercussion) seem to wholeheartedly attack religious sentiment.

— Schuyler Adkins
Enlightenment Philosophers

Voltaire (November 21, 1694 - May 30, 1778)

“It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong.”

Voltaire, né François-Marie Arouet, was a French Enlightenment writer, historian and philosopher who wrote more than 20,000 letters and over 2,000 books and pamphlets and produced works in almost every literary form. Voltaire was infamous for his wit and civil rights advocacy, which, combined with his criticisms of government and religious dogmas, landed him in prison or in exile from France on several occasions.

During an 11-month imprisonment in the Bastille – a sentence that he received for a satirical verse about Philippe d’Orléans, who was a member of the royal family of France and Regent of the Kingdom from 1715 to 1723 – François-Marie changed his name to Voltaire and wrote his debut play, Œdipe, which established his reputation. “Voltaire” is an anagram of a Latinized spelling of his surname, “AROVET,” and the Latin letters“LI,” initials of “le jeune” (the young).¹

Voltaire was released from the Bastille on the condition of his exile to Britain for three years. There, he was introduced to the works of William Shakespeare – works that were considered controversial in France at that time. After his exile, he continued to travel across Europe and wrote further on Sir Isaac Newton, history and philosophy. Voltaire also worked with Diderot and d’Alembert on the Encyclopédie, both in writing articles and defending the work from those who tried to abolish it. Voltaire’s large collection and variation of work, along with his travels gave him a broader scope of the world around him. Although there are many who contributed to the Enlightenment, Voltaire was indubitably the most famous writer of the 18th century.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a political philosopher, writer, and composer born in Geneva, Switzerland. His works are famous for having influenced the French Revolution, the Romantic Generation, and the overall evolution of modern political, pedagogical, and sociological thought. Rousseau was a successful composer and musical theorist who wrote seven operas and invented a numerically-based language of music notation, which was rejected after he presented it to the Académie des Sciences.

Rousseau (28 June 1712 - 2 July 1778)

“No man has any natural authority over his fellow men.”

In the philosophical field, after a revelation, Rousseau concluded that the arts and sciences were responsible for the moral downfall of humankind. He posited that mankind was essentially good by nature. However, rather than attempting to argue his position by conventional methods, he opted
for a negative, paradoxical solution, which, due to its controversial nature, brought him recognition from the public and his peers.

Like many Enlightenment thinkers, his books at one point were banned, and he was forced to flee his home. David Hume, a famous Scottish philosopher, “professed no surprise when he learned that Rousseau’s books were banned in Geneva and elsewhere.” Contrary to Hume’s observations, Rousseau believed he was defending religion. After fleeing to Neuchâtel with the help of some powerful protectors, he worked to get his banned books distributed in France by disguising them as other works, using false covers and title pages. Although he was originally buried in Geneva, Rousseau was interred as a national hero in the Panthéon in Paris, in 1794, sixteen years after his death.

**Kant (22 April 1724 – 12 February 1804)**

“Morality is not the doctrine of how we may make ourselves happy, but how we may make ourselves worthy of happiness.”

Immanuel Kant was a remarkable German philosopher whose work still holds major influence over contemporary philosophy. Kant contributed work in fields such as epistemology, the study of the nature and scope of knowledge; metaphysics, the study of fundamental nature and being; ethics, the study of rightness and wrongness; aesthetics, the study of the nature of art and beauty; and political philosophy, the study of politics, property, rights, justice, and law. However, his work in ethics - specifically, the categorical imperatives found in *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* - is what he is most known for today. Kant argued that morality and all moral judgments are derived from rationality and are rationally supported.

**Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?**

Kant declared the Latin phrase *sapere aude* (dare to know) as the motto of enlightenment. He asserted that enlightenment is “man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage.” Nonage, as defined by Kant, is one’s inability to think critically or logically – that is, one “lacks the ability to use one’s own understanding” – without the guidance of another. Specifically, Kant believes that religious nonage is both damaging and dishonororable. He asserted that autonomous thought was of paramount importance.

Kant’s philosophical influence can be found in every subsequent century. His works birthed Kantianism: A term used to describe contemporary positions on epistemology, philosophy of mind, and ethics that coincide with Kant’s.

**David Hume: An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding**

No author of the 18th century better epitomizes the mental paradigm shift to empiricism (the idea that knowledge can only be or is primarily derived from the senses) and atheism than David Hume. Hume was heavily influenced by John Locke and took the notion of empiricism to the extreme.
In doing so, Hume concluded that the only statements that humankind can make about the world are those that place human experience at the absolute center of reality. By placing the locus of knowledge around sense data and human experience, Hume asserted that the idea of god is nonsensical since one cannot arrive at the idea of God through sense data.

In chapter ten of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume further synthesizes his ideas against God by defining a law of nature as “a firm and unalterable experience” that has numerous accounts of testimony by people from different places and times. Considering that a miracle is a singular event with limited and dubious testimony that defies one or several laws of nature, Hume asserts that a wise person, given that the proportionality of proof is insurmountably outweighed by the proof for laws of nature, has no reason to believe any miracle.

According to Hume, there are two ways in which this argument could be negated. First, if there are more witnesses of a miracle than of the natural law. Second, the argument could be negated if a singular person that is 100% reliable witnessed the miracle. Hume claims that no miracle has had enough witnesses of sufficient education, intelligence and honesty. He then lists several reasons why human beings lack complete reliability. First, people are more likely to believe an event occurred if it encourages an agreeable emotion. In the case of miracles, surprise and wonder are strongly evoked. Second, people with strong religious beliefs will attest to false evidence they know is false, “with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause.”

David Hume’s work continues to be extremely influential. One of the main philosophical problems Hume dealt with most of his life: the problem of induction, which recognizes that the scientific method is one built on a fallacy. The induction fallacy states that simply because something happened in the past does not mean that it will happen again in the future.

— Brandon Stilson

8, 9, 10, 11

Voltaire

David Hume

Immanuel Kant

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Denis Diderot: *Pensées Philosophiques*

Diderot’s debut on the Parisian intellectual stage, *Pensées philosophiques* (*Philosophical Thoughts*) appeared anonymously in 1746, and was immediately condemned. It had bypassed the authorized channels of state censorship, which points to both the risks associated with writing and publishing subversive material and the concurrent demand for such material (See case: Distribution of Knowledge). In the era’s search for knowledge and truth, Diderot took a stance for scientific and philosophic relativism and against religious dogmatism. Science and philosophy were synonymous with anticlerical thought. Paving the way for the ambitious goal of the *Encyclopédie*, which was meant to empower every individual with knowledge and Philosophical Thoughts, Diderot called for the reformation of education and of the monopoly of religious institutions, while propounding intellectual and religious freedom in a world wanting relativistic tolerance.

Some excerpts from *Pensées Philosophiques*:

“I hear cries of impiety from everywhere. The Christian is impious in Asia; the Muslim in Europe; the Papist in London, the Calvinist in Paris, the Jansenist at the top of the rue Saint-Jacques, the Molinist at the bottom of the fauxbourg Saint-Médard. What is an impious person? Is every one impious, or no one?”

“What is God? One asks this question of children while philosophers are at pains to answer it. We know how old a child must be to learn to read, to dance, speak Latin, and perform geometry. Only in religious matters do we fail to consider how old he must be to learn. Hardly has he started to exercise his understanding, than he is asked, “what is God?” In the same moment, from the same source, he learns that there exist will-o’-the-wisps, ghosts, werewolves, and a God. He is instilled with one of the most important truths in a way likely to be decried, one day, when his reason examines it. Indeed, it will be no surprise if, upon turning twenty and finding God’s existence confused in his mind with a host of ridiculous preconceptions, he no longer sees it as the truth and comes to treat it as a judge might treat an honest man who, by accident, has become part of a group of scoundrels.”

— Isabelle DeMarte
A Timeline to the *Encyclopédie*

1728: London publication of the first encyclopedia, Ephraim Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia, or an Universal dictionary of arts and sciences*.

**February, 1745:** The French publisher André Le Breton makes an agreement with Gottfried Sellius, a German, and John Mills, an Englishman, to translate Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia* into French.

**August:** Le Breton rejects the draft of his collaborators and their disagreement leads to the dissolution of the project.

**October 18:** Le Breton signs a contract for the publication of a French encyclopedia with three Parisian colleagues, Antoine-Claude Briasson, Laurent Durand and Michel-Antoine David. The project is now an entirely French enterprise.

**January 21, 1746:** The Chancelor d’Aguesseau renews the *privilège* of the *Encyclopédie*. At this stage, the project is to be a translation of Ephraim’s encyclopedia.

**June 27:** A member of the *Académie des Sciences*, the abbé De Gua De Malves, is given editorial responsibility for the work. Writer Denis Diderot and mathematician Jean le Rond d’Alembert are given the assistant task of retranslating certain articles.

**July 7:** The French Parliament condemns *Pensées philosophiques* [*Philosophical thoughts*], an anonymous work by Diderot.

**October 16, 1747:** de Malves is excluded from the project and Diderot and d’Alembert replace him as editors of the *Encyclopédie*.

**April 30, 1748:** A new *privilège* acknowledges changes in the general conception of the work; it is now entitled *Encyclopedia, or universal dictionary of the sciences, arts, and craftsmanship, translated […] with expansions*. Diderot begins technical research for the *Encyclopédie* in Parisian workshops.

**June, 1749:** Diderot hires an artist, Louis-Jacques Goussier, to rework and complete images purchased from engravers for the *Encyclopédie*.

**July 24:** Diderot is arrested and imprisoned at Vincennes for his authorship of *Lettre sur les aveugles à l’usage de ceux qui voient* [*Letter on the blind for the use of those who see*].

**November 3:** Diderot is liberated and immediately begins work again.
January, 1751: In the Journal de Trévoux, Guillaume-François Berthier, a Jesuit, criticizes the imitation of Francis Bacon’s tree of knowledge in the Prospectus.

June 28: Publication of the first volume of the Encyclopédie, with the Discours Préliminaire [Preliminary Discourse] written by d’Alembert.

June: Publication of encyclopedic volumes “A-Azymites.”

October: Violent attacks on the Encyclopédie appear in the Journal de Trévoux. The archbishop of Mirepoix warns the King against the dangerous tendencies of the Encyclopédie; Malesherbes, the new director of the book trade, is required to name three censors who will look over the articles.

December: Voltaire praises the Encyclopédie in the conclusion of his work Le Siècle de Louis XIV.

February 7: A decree by the royal council orders the suppression of the first two volumes of the Encyclopédie.

January, 1752: Publication of the encyclopedic volumes “B-Cézimbra.”

May: The government discreetly authorizes Diderot and d’Alembert to resume their work.

1753: Publication of Volume III of the Encyclopédie, printed in 3,100 copies, with an Avertissement des Éditeurs [Preface by the editors] written by d’Alembert.

October: Publication of encyclopedic volumes “Cha-Consécration.”

February, 1754: New printing of the first three volumes, bringing the total number of copies to 4,200.

October: Publication of encyclopedic volumes “Conseil - Dizier, Saint.”

November: Publication of Volume IV of the Encyclopédie and of d’Alembert’s Avertissement des Éditeurs. The undertaking has taken on national importance. In the article “Droit de copie” [COPYWRITE], planned for Volume V, the bookseller Michel-Antoine David writes that the Encyclopédie “appartient à la France” (belongs to France). D’Alembert is elected to the Académie Française.

November, 1755: Publication of encyclopedic volumes “Do-Esymnete.”

October, 1756: Publication of encyclopedic volumes “Et-Fne.”

August: D’Alembert visits Voltaire at les Délices (the Delights), Voltaire’s home near Geneva. They discuss the article “GÉNÈVE.”

April 21, 1757: An edict by the Parlement prescribes the death penalty or service in the galleys for authors and publishers of “tendentious and clandestine works.”

June 30: Fréron accuses Diderot of plagiarism in his text, Le fils naturel [The Natural Son].

November: Publication of the encyclopedic volumes “Foang-Gythium.” The article “GÉNÈVE,” signed by d’Alembert, draws protest from Genevan pastors.

January, 1758: Discouraged by the opposition the work has encountered and feeling that he is underpaid, d’Alembert decides to abandon the enterprise. Diderot is now the de facto head of the enterprise.

March: The publishers of the Encyclopédie compose “Mémoire sur les motifs de la suspension de l’Encyclopédie” [Essay on the motivations behind the suspension of the Encyclopedia], in which they plead with d’Alembert to retain his position. He accepts reluctantly.

September: Publication of the first two volumes of “Préjugés légitimes contre l’Encyclopédie” [Legitimate Prejudices against the Encyclopedia].

January 23, 1759: The Parlement examines eight subversive works, including De l’Esprit [Essays on the Mind] and the Encyclopédie. Violent declarations are made against them, claiming their impiety and license.

February 6: De l’Esprit is condemned to be burned. The Encyclopédie escapes this sentence, but will be subjected to a revision committee comprising theologians, lawyers and scholars, all Jansenists.

March 8: The royal council withdraws the privilège of 1746; the distribution and reprinting of the Encyclopédie are forbidden. D’Alembert quits definitively.

July 21: A new decree orders the publishers to reimburse subscribers for the unpublished volumes. No subscribers request this money. The publishers make contact with foreign editors and propose that the printing of the work continue in France tolerated by the government.

November: Adversaries of the Encyclopédie attack from a new front. Diderot is accused of having stolen the illustration plates from Réaumur. The Académie des Sciences investigates and denounces this claim, absolving Diderot of the accusation.
March, 1760: LeFranc de Pompignan gives an acceptance speech at the Académie Française which violently criticizes both the Encyclopédie and its philosophical spirit. Voltaire replies with a succession of pamphlets and, in an effort to avenge Diderot, decides to present Diderot as a candidate to the Académie Française. Diderot, however, declines this offer.

January, 1762: Publication of the first volume of plates.

August 6: The members of the Jesuit order are expelled from France, and so the most passionate adversaries of the Encyclopédie disappear from France.

1763: Publication of Volumes II and III of the illustrative plates. The protector of the Encyclopédie, Malesherbes is replaced as director of the national Librairie by Sartine, a friend of Diderot.

November, 1764: Diderot discovers that, in order to avoid the problems of censorship, the bookseller Le Breton had been falsifying several articles by Saint-Lambert, Turgot, d’Holbach, Jaucourt, and by Diderot himself, for at least two years. Diderot knows it would be impossible to reprint everything and, pressed by his friends, he consents to see his work through to the end.

August, 1765: Diderot writes an Avertissement that will serve as a preface to Volume VIII. His work has been completed, but he remains bitter about the oversights and mistakes made by the printer.

December: The death of the dauphin, or crown prince of France, weakens the devout party, and the booksellers seize the opportunity to offer the remainder of the Encyclopédie to the general public.

January, 1766: Publication of Volume IV of the plates and of the ten remaining Encyclopédie Volumes, H-Zzuéné, plus “Omitted Articles.” The title leads one to believe that the work has been printed abroad.

April 23: The bookseller Le Breton is imprisoned in the Bastille for eight days, guilty of having dispatched several copies of the Encyclopédie’s final volumes to Versailles without authorization. This incident does not prevent Diderot from completing the last plate volumes.

— Compiled from the ARTFL database: artfl-project.uchicago.edu
The Encyclopédie project may have laid the foundations for the liberal arts approach to knowledge. It was a ground-breaking text crucial to the Enlightenment period. Wikis and social media allow the modern student or scholar to work from a foundation which spans several fields of knowledge. One person can inform themselves of many different subjects without much effort, as anyone who has spent hours reading articles on Wikipedia might affirm. This is what Diderot envisioned for his Encyclopédie, and what he attempted to provide his 18th century readers. Articles in the Encyclopédie were cross-referenced in order to situate them within the larger context of the “System of Human Understanding” outlined in the front matter. This system, also called the “Tree of Knowledge,” was an alteration to the preface in Chambers’ Cyclopaedia, in which the reader was given a systematized order to read the articles. Readers were to use this web of interlinked sources of knowledge as a support for their own faculties of understanding and research. The Encyclopédie was meant as a library of information for the 18th century scholar in which he could verse himself in any subject outside of his own field of study. The information provided in the Encyclopédie is actually considerably limited and subjective, by modern standards, for an encyclopedia. The perusal of any entry will show that the Encyclopédie reads more like a collection of essays on diverse subjects than an objective source of information. Diderot and his colleagues recognized this shortcoming, however, with comments made in the front matter:

“Our last resort in such an arduous, albeit so necessary and even so enjoyable an enterprise, is thus to collect as many facts as we possibly can and arrange them in the most natural order; to relate these facts to a certain number of essential facts from which the former are only derivative. If we dare sometimes to go beyond this level, may it be with a sense of precaution which suits so well a view as feeble as our own.”

– Jean le Rond d’Alembert, from the Discours préliminaire [1:vij]

The gens de lettres, or gentlemen, in charge of the Encyclopédie understood the vastness of their enterprise, and the resulting probability of its imperfections. The encyclopedic style of Diderot’s Encyclopédie inspired the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which used the same method of inviting experts in a given field to write entries. Tony Hawk, for example, wrote the current entry on “skateboarding.” This system exists
today, although the *Britannica* has since discontinued its print versions, and most scholars today would agree that any article that gets its information from only one source is not a very well-researched piece of writing. In other ways, however, the style of research encouraged by the *Encyclopédie* was similar to what college students of the liberal arts and other researchers employ today. Many articles were informed from first-hand research by Diderot, who made trips to workshops around France to see how various machines were made and operated, and ideally, a researcher would use many different articles together to form a basis of knowledge on a subject about which he would then draw his own conclusions. Whether or not this style of research holds up to today’s standards, it was a groundbreaking project that influences the spirit of research today. Diderot wished for his *Encyclopédie* to “change the common way of thinking,” encouraging people to rely on information gathered by their senses and by independent research, rather than information given to them by a higher authority. This was what marked the *Encyclopédie* as a dangerous text, and what makes it a most valuable text to us today.

— Sara Balsom

**Image credits:**

1. Enc. Plates (“anatomie,” pl. VIII)
2. Enc. Plates (“anatomie,” pl. II)
13. Frontispiece to the *Encyclopédie*. Engraving by Benoît Louis Prévost.