



**DENIS  
DIDEROT**  
(1713-1784)

# Diderot

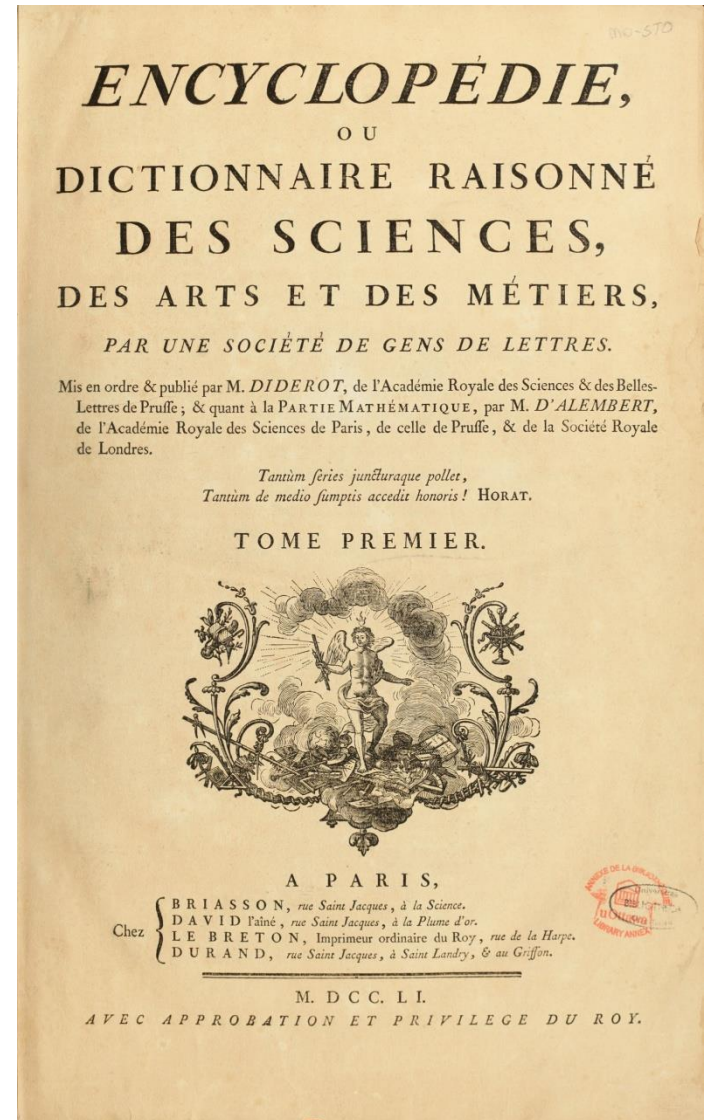
- French philosopher, art critic, writer.
- Master of Arts degree in Philosophy.
- Disowned by father who wanted him to study medicine or law while his interest lay in literature.
- Married Antoinette Champion in 1743, but has affairs with other women.
- Translated English books in 1740s which began to gain him notoriety.

# Famous works

- Co-founder, chief editor and contributor to the *Encyclopédie* along with Jean le Rond d'Alembert.
- Translated Shaftesbury's 'Inquiry on Merit and Virtue' into French.
- Published 'Pensees philosophique' (1746), a work that criticized both atheism and Christianity, but was still burned by the Parisian parliament.

# Encyclopédie

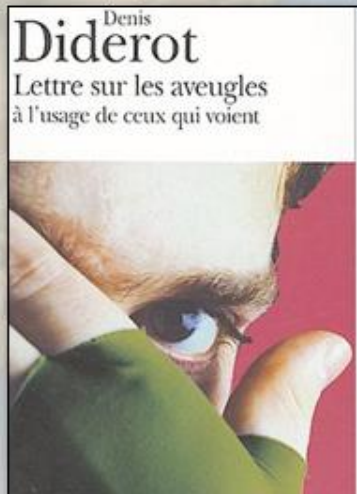
- First encyclopedia to include contributions from many named contributors.
- First general encyclopedia to lavish attention on the mechanical arts.
- Encyclopédie's aim was "to change the way people think".
- He wanted to incorporate all of the world's knowledge into the Encyclopédie and hoped that the text could disseminate all this information to the public and future generations.





**‘Do we ourselves not cease to feel compassion when distance or the smallness of the object produces the same effect on us as lack of sight does on the blind?’**

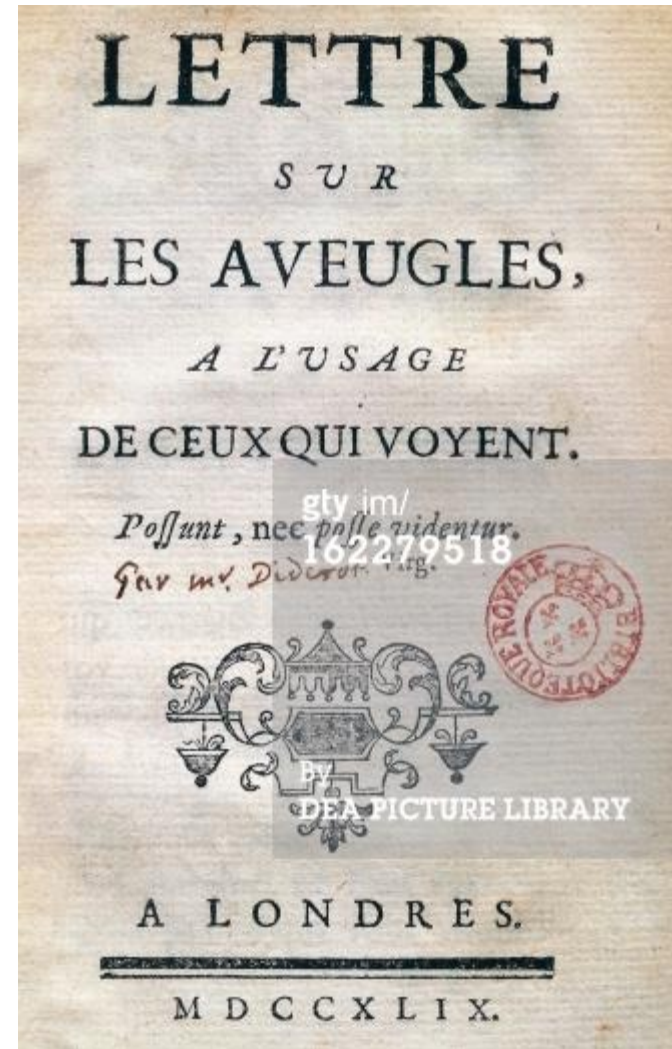
**‘... I feel quite sure that were it not for the fear of punishment, many people would have fewer qualms at killing a man who was far enough away to appear no larger than a swallow than in butchering a steer with their own hands.’**



Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749)

# ‘Letter on the Blind’

- Published in 1749
- It is a discussion of the interrelation between man's reason and the knowledge acquired through perception (the five senses).
- The title also evoked some ironic doubt about who exactly were "the blind" under discussion.



# Contributions to literature

- His work, *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master*, is influenced by Tristram Shandy.
- It challenges conventions regarding novels, their structure and content, and also examines philosophical ideas about free will.
- Wrote the imaginary conversation *Rameau's Nephew*, upon which many articles and sermons about consumer desire have been based.

DIDEROT

LE

NEVEU DE RAMEAU

SATYRE

*publiée pour la première fois sur le manuscrit original  
autographe*

Avec une introduction et des notes

PAR

GEORGES MONVAL

Accompagnée d'une Notice sur les premières éditions  
de l'ouvrage et de la Vie de Jean-François Rameau

PAR

ER. THOINAN



PARIS

LIBRAIRIE PLON

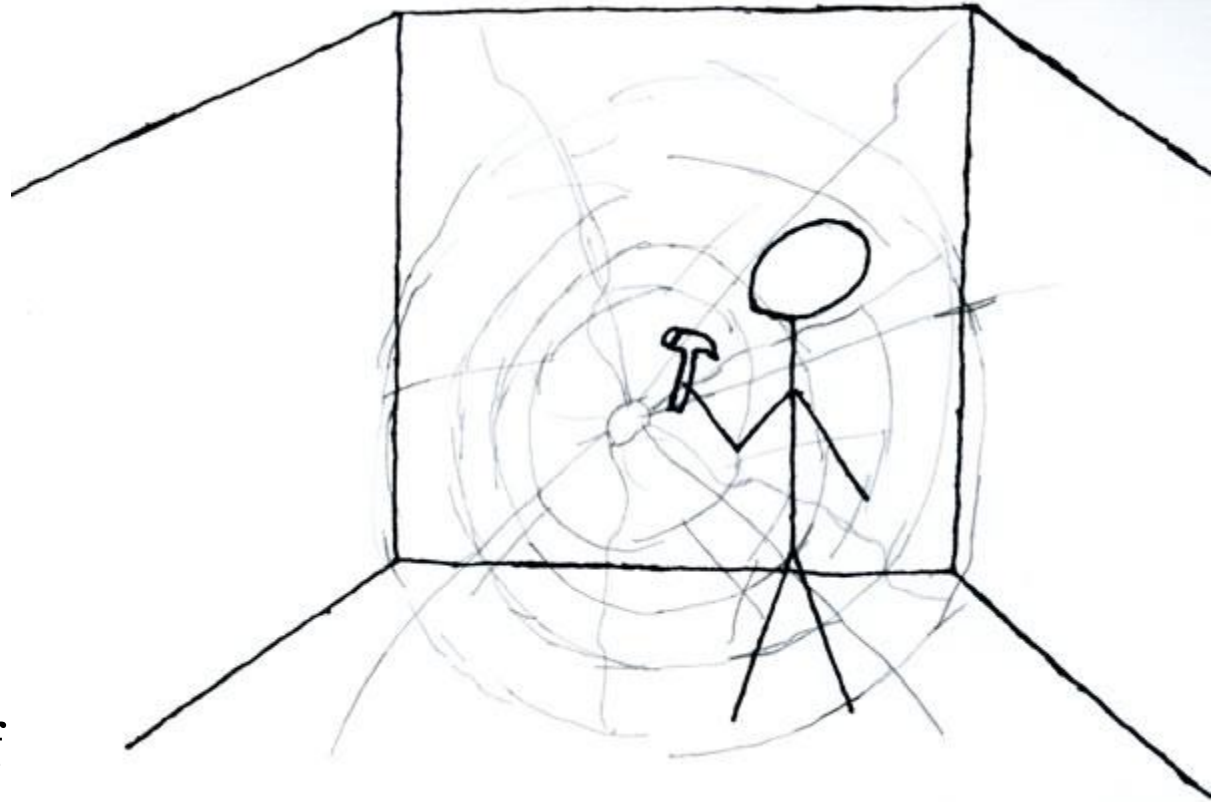
E. PLON, NOURRIT ET C<sup>ie</sup>, IMPRIMEURS-ÉDITEURS

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# The fourth wall

Introduced the concept of the fourth wall, the imaginary "wall" at the front of the stage in a traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theatre, through which the audience sees the action in the world of the play.





# An unsuccessful career

- He could not obtain the bare official recognition of merit which was implied by being chosen a member of the Académie française.
- However Empress Catherine II of Russia commissioned an agent in Paris to buy the library when he planned to sell it.
- She then requested that the philosopher retain the books in Paris until she required them, and act as her librarian with a yearly salary.



Statue of Diderot at his birthplace in Langres

# Death

- Diderot died of pulmonary thrombosis in Paris on 31 July 1784, and was buried in the city's Église Saint-Roch.
- His heirs sent his vast library to Catherine II, who had it deposited at the National Library of Russia.



Monument to Diderot in Paris