



The Portable Enlightenment Reader

Isaac Kramnick (Editor)

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The Age of Enlightenment of the 18th century, also called the *Age of Reason*, was so named for an intellectual movement that shook the foundations of Western civilization. In championing radical ideas such as individual liberty and an empirical appraisal of the universe through rational inquiry and natural experience, Enlightenment philosophers in Europe and America planted the seeds for modern liberalism, cultural humanism, science and technology, and laissez-faire Capitalism. This volume brings together works from this era, with more than 100 selections from a range of sources. It includes examples by Kant, Diderot, Voltaire, Newton, Rousseau, Locke, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, and Paine that demonstrate the pervasive impact of Enlightenment views on philosophy and epistemology as well as on political, social, and economic institutions.

The Portable Enlightenment Reader Details

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Author : Isaac Kramnick (Editor)

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From Reader Review The Portable Enlightenment Reader for online ebook

Kevin Stilley says

This is the best selection of Enlightenment Readings of which I am aware. I disagree with a great many of the included writings. However, as Aristotle said, the mark of an educated person is the ability to entertain an idea without accepting it.

Chloe Ducluzeau says

i mean its a good collection of enlightenment era primary sources. but its so boring...

Robert McDonald says

A good collection of classic writings. Makes me want to read more Voltaire.

Benjamin Spurlock says

I have never felt such a sense of accomplishment over finishing a book as I have with this one. It's been an on again, off again read for two years, and several times I found myself wondering if it was worth it.

Bluntly, it was and is. The Enlightenment was the most influential intellectual movements in history, and we are still living in the aftermath of Kant, Voltaire, and Smith, among their many contemporaries. To read this book is to read one's own family history, warts and all, and I highly encourage anyone to read this as a part of their own philosophical journey.

On a personal level, as a writer, I found a great deal of inspiration from this selection, and I imagine that some of it will stay with me until the end of my days. I can only hope that others who read this will persevere through the difficult parts, or those they might find tedious. The effort is more than worth it.

Elsie says

Fascinating to peruse their writings in our current political climate. I also enjoyed hearing the adults in the 1600's complain about the lazy, indolent adolescents.

Billie Pritchett says

This book was long and boring, and there were moments when I was so frustrated that I could not wait to get through it. Nevertheless, the book is a decent compendium of Enlightenment thought before and during the 18th century. What is most eye-opening about the book are several paradoxes in argument. Immanuel Kant writes that the Enlightenment is an all-inclusive movement concerned with trusting one's own reasoning faculties, namely in deciding what one wants for herself and in how one chooses to live her life. Yet in a later essay, he argues that women are naturally inferior to men, and that it would behoove a woman to learn geography, for example, as much as it would for her, and here I closely paraphrase, to grow a beard. Also, Kant argues that white people are naturally superior to people of other skin colors. And, Jean-Jaques Rousseau, who has such a rosy view of the human being in the state of nature, prior to civilization, in a time when, he argues, all people are free and equal, later argues that women are naturally unequal, and moreover have the sole purpose of pleasing men, which just completely turns his earlier argument vis-a-vis equality on its head. Like paradoxes abound. What must be remembered, too, is that these sorts of paradoxes, at one turn praising liberty, equality, and human reasoning, and at the next turn entertaining false prejudices, are persistent problems for us children of the Enlightenment, who have not been able to make our philosophical outlooks mesh with our daily lives. To admit in one breath that all people deserve equal treatment and in the next, for example, to agree with one's friends that women should not be treated the same, given that they are so prone to irrational behavior, belies our conviction that human beings are relevantly similar until proven otherwise. Furthermore, even in instances when real differences are shown to exist, for example, between male and females, it does not follow that because of factual dissimilarities there should be normative, unequal means of treatment, since equality is not equivalent to sameness. This would be a good book to own, especially because of its relevance to the Western tradition, and because it reveals that the sorts of paradoxes people face in the post-industrial Western world relative to larger social and political philosophy are not much different than the paradoxes the original thinkers about these issues faced when they were creating these frameworks.

Osman Koyuncu says

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Carlos says

While this book wasn't always exactly a thrill to read, it did serve to quickly introduce the attentive reader to some of the most influential works published during the Enlightenment. By its very nature of being a compilation of tens of works by several authors across almost two centuries, the book can only serve to give the unfamiliar reader through this quintessential piece of modernity. In such a book, then, the goal can be at most to entice the reader to actually go and pick up the works that are excerpted, and in this respect this book accomplishes its goal. Although I can't honestly say that I would have picked up this book had it not been part of a history course, I can say that it has made me curious to dig deeper and what better way can there be to understand the spirit of the Enlightenment than by having your curiosity peaked.

Blair says

In my (academic) formative years I was taught that enlightenment was what drove the modern individual. I agreed. Some time later, I changed my mind, that enlightenment didn't drive us as much as it should, that we

should engage in it more often. These days, I'm not sure about the currency of enlightenment, being the double-edged sword it is. But if you're like me - somehow cynical yet still enjoys inspiring philosophy - this portable reader could, if not should, be literally portable for you. Take it with you, read it in spurts.

Holtmanelevateonline.com says

An excellent read if you are looking for primary source quotes and collaborative materials of the like.

Rick Eng says

Surprising to learn that brilliant minds such as Kant and Hume harbored strong bias toward other races as "stupid and inferior." I guess one has to remember the context of the time and these men were of their times... so much the argument for accepting post-modernism.

Andrea Patlan says

fantastic collection of Enlightenment writers works.

Bevan Lewis says

A good range of Primary source readings and a reasonable introduction to Enlightenment thinking and historiography.

Laurence R. says

This book is filled with really important writings about enlightenment, which I found very interesting. Obviously, some of them are very outdated, but it helped me understand how the 18th century worked. Some of the texts were actually very relevant even in the 21st century, so I liked how similar our thoughts could be.
