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The Portable Enlightenment Reader (Portable Library)



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

The Age of Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, also called the Age of Reason, was so named for an exultant 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 the era's classic works, with more than a hundred selections from a broad range of sources - including works 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. Included are seminal discourses on science and religion, on the social contract, on the equality (and inequality) of the sexes and the races, and on economics and markets, as well as homages to nature and sexual pleasure, and poetry and opera librettos that embody the movement's social ideals.

Isaac Kramnick was born in 1938 and educated at Harvard University, where he received a B.A. degree in 1959 and a Ph.D. in 1965, and at Peterhouse, Cambridge. He has taught at Harvard, Brandeis, Yale and Cornell, where he is now Professor of Government. He is married to Miriam Brody Kramnick and lives in Ithaca, New York. Among his publications are *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, *The Rage of Edmund Burke* and numerous articles on eighteenth century topics. He has edited William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, *The Federalist Papers* by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay and, with Michael Foot, *The Thomas Paine Reader* for the Penguin Classics. Most recently he is the author, with Barry Sheerman, MP, of *Laski: A Lift on the Left*.

Perhaps the best of the "Portable" series by Viking-Penguin. The book covers the Enlightenment period from approximately 1650 through 1800, and is superbly edited by Isaac Kramnick. Covering such luminaries as Voltaire, Kant, Hume, Locke, Rousseau, Jefferson, Pope, Montesquieu, Franklin, Paine, Bentham, Adam Smith and a score of lesser known philosophers and writers; the book hits on major elements of the era - religion, politics, liberty, race, gender and slavery - among others. Within these 700 or so pages, the book provides the reader with an introduction to the Enlightenment and does so in such a way that there's an appreciation as to the role of this unique era in the foundation of our modern society. The selection of readings were both famous and obscure, but the reader is not left feeling that they didn't get a fair shake at the real elements of the philosophy that fueled the American and French revolutions, led to the establishment of the modern Western democracy, and continues to serve as a foundation of modern political and ethical thought. If there is one book for every student to read before they leave high school, or certainly college, it is this one. A must read.

Many historical anthologies focus upon a single theme and thus fail to provide their readers with an adequate range of sources. Yet Isaac Kramnick's *Enlightenment Reader* avoids this pitfall. This book will introduce you to the key texts of the period - in addition to many delightful works of which

you may never have heard. Readers looking for pure philosophy will not be disappointed: the anthology contains a fine selection of excerpts from Bacon, Descartes, Leibnitz, Newton, Hume, Kant, and others. But the Enlightenment embodied more than abstract speculation, and Kramnick skillfully arranges sections on science, religion, art, morality, education, history, politics, economics, crime, war, gender, and race. Each topic draws upon a diverse array of authors. This gives the reader a sense of the popularity of Enlightenment thought, as well as its development from the middle of the seventeenth century to the start of the nineteenth. Intellectual giants like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke appear alongside a gallery of lesser-known but fascinating figures: Nicolas de Condorcet, mathematician and revolutionary terrorist; William Godwin, anarchist and lover of Mary Wollstonecraft; Olympe de Gouges, early feminist playwright; John Cleland, author of the scandalous *Fanny Hill* - a vital source for the study of eighteenth-century sexuality, and still hilarious after 270 years. Any collection as ambitious as Kramnick's is bound to have a few faults. The most glaring omission is George Berkeley, whose philosophy of radical skepticism makes no appearance. A few texts from writers outside of the Enlightenment tradition - I'm thinking of Goethe, Herder, and the Marquis de Sade - would have rounded out the reader's sense of the diversity of eighteenth-century thought. That said, I know Penguin has commissioned another volume in this series, on Romanticism, so I expect that some of these 'Counter-Enlightenment' authors will feature in the coming volume. These are all petty quibbles. If you are looking for a fresh and thorough introduction to the Western Enlightenment, Isaac Kramnick's *Enlightenment Reader* is the ideal place to start. This compendium brings to life one of the most important periods in the history of Europe and its colonies: you will find that the great men and women of the eighteenth century were just that - men and women - and yet no less great for their humanity. I am extremely pleased with my purchase, and I am confident that you will feel the same.

More than forty years ago, when I was a college undergraduate, I ran across several lists of books that were recommended reading for anyone who wanted to be truly educated. Those lists invariably included books such as Rousseau's *"The Social Contract,"* *The Federalist Papers*, Voltaire's *"Candide,"* and many other writings from the Enlightenment era (as well, of course, as other time periods). I dutifully noted the titles, and, wanting to consider myself an educated person, fully intended to read all of them. Well now I'm 62, and it's time for me to admit that I'm almost certainly never going to read *"The Social Contract."* This volume is for me and others like me, who are suffering from the *"So Many Books, So Little Time"* syndrome. The book contains a broad selection of writings from the major thinkers of the Enlightenment, which the editor defines roughly from the

1680's to the 1790's. What a marvelous time it must have been to be an intellectual! The barriers erected by the authority of the kings, priests, and classical writers were being shattered. The ability to ask new questions and propose new answers produced an almost intoxicating sense of infinite possibilities for the improvement - even the perfection - of human society. Some of the pieces in this book will seem hopelessly naive to our modern cynical minds; on the other hand, some of the points being made so excitedly and even belligerently are now taken for granted - and we are likely to read them and say, "What's the big deal? Everyone knows that." And then there are the debates about the most fundamental questions - such as the source of knowledge - that have yet to be resolved, and probably never will be. If you read this, you will almost certainly get caught up in the excitement of the exploration of the ideas. You will almost certainly have your own thoughts stimulated, and your own opinions challenged. And you can smugly pretend that you have read Rousseau, Locke, Hume, Kant, and Voltaire - and no one (except real scholars) will be the wiser.

Received as advertised. Excellent transaction!

Great book, had to read for a college course. Learn through history why its important to think for yourself, because one day you just may have to overthrow a king/government. Tyranny has been around almost as long as man has, there is allways man that enjoy living off of other men, they then subdue the "commoners" threw ignorance, our from Kants perspective "self incurred tutelage." Always be vigilant of your tutors!

This was a great read. I had to buy this for a class but I'm keeping it when I'm done because I really love this book. Highly recommended to anyone who would like to know more about Enlightenment Era writing.

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