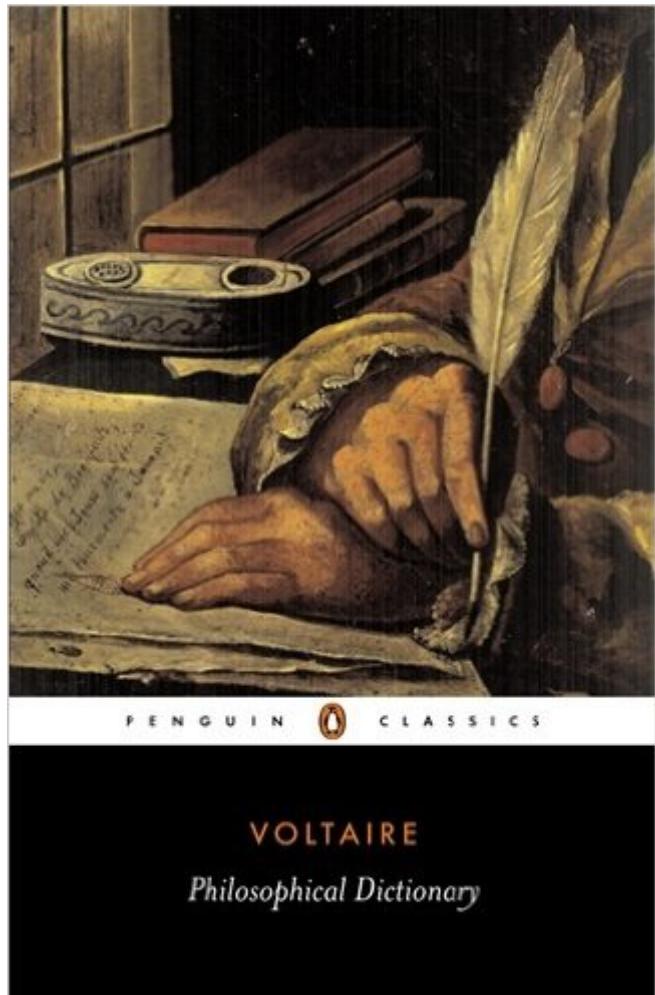


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Philosophical Dictionary (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary, first published in 1764, is a series of short, radical essays - alphabetically arranged - that form a brilliant and bitter analysis of the social and religious conventions that then dominated eighteenth-century French thought. One of the masterpieces of the Enlightenment, this enormously influential work of sardonic wit - more a collection of essays arranged alphabetically, than a conventional dictionary - considers such diverse subjects as Abraham and Atheism, Faith and Freedom of Thought, Miracles and Moses. Repeatedly condemned by civil and religious authorities, Voltaire's work argues passionately for the cause of reason and justice, and criticizes Christian theology and contemporary attitudes towards war and society - and claims, as he regards the world around him: 'common sense is not so common'.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have kept this book by my bedside at many points in my life. I should first acknowledge that I also refer to the Bible occasionally, so I tend to draw strength and inspiration from disparate sources. Voltaire was one of the true intellectual giants of his age, as well-read, erudite and witty as any personage in literary history. This book represents a distillation of all his writings, his "encyclopedic" entries, his treatises, his histories, etc. Reading these musings, you will well understand his occasional need to flee France for more liberal principalities (Prussia and Geneva, primarily). Voltaire (the pen-name for Francois-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), like Gibbon, is no champion of Christianity. As a case-in-point, the Emperor Julian, who attempted unsuccessfully to

restore the ancient cults in early Byzantium, and opposed the newly state-sanctioned "cult" of Christ, was Voltaire's paragon. For those readers interested in an interesting account of Julian's rule and of this era, Gore Vidal's "Julian" is a very well-written, but slightly flawed (in terms of its scholarship) account of the 4th Century ruler. I particularly love Voltaire's take on "enthusiasm,": "Or was that word enthusiasm, from disturbance of the entrails, first given to that Pythia who, on the tripod at Delphi, received the spirit of Apollo through a part which seems made only to receive bodies?...It is the rarest of thing to unite reason with enthusiasm." No doubt the religious wars and persecutions that were a part and parcel of his era and French history for the preceding two centuries no doubt had some bearing on his analysis. To me, Voltaire is the precursor of Nietzsche. In fact, Nietzsche, though he rarely acknowledges Voltaire, makes practically the identical points that Voltaire makes here in his "The Anti Christ" and "The Twilight of the Idols." They were definitely on the same page in defining faith, vs. skepticism. There are term-papers and research papers galore out there waiting to be explored in this area. In response to my erudite German friend, Nietzsche does in fact speak in glowing terms of Voltaire and even goes as far to say that he is his most admired French philosopher, so my comparison is not inappropriate. This is not the only area that Voltaire investigates in this wide-ranging book. Ever wonder about the account of Gog, Magog, of which you might be only vaguely familiar? Voltaire is here to explain it to you. World Religions, the "Chinese Catechism," "Miracles," "Anthropophages," "Liebniz," "the souls of animals," "the tower of Babel," "Apis," "The Great Flood," and "The Spanish Inquisition;" all are covered and much more. If you do not complete this book marvelling at how truly encyclopaedic a mind you are dealing with (who better, together with Diderot to compile the first truly meaningful one in the Western World?), then you might not be as open-minded as you think. Even though some of Voltaire's statements of fact are dubious in light of subsequent discoveries, one must still marvel at the range of his intellect and curiosity.

This volume is the great culmination of Voltaire's beliefs. The humor, honesty, cynicism, and perspective that Voltaire is noted for comes shining through in this excellent work. It is a series of articles on subjects important to philosophers of Voltaire's time, such as religion, humanism, and ethics. This book is about 350 pages in Penguin's typical trade-paperback format. I treasure my copy of this book, and I think you will too if you at all like philosophical discussion.

This book is about man's freedom: freedom of thought, freedom of worship, freedom of the mental encroachments that make a man think he has the right to despise, oppress, kill a fellow human

being because he is different. This book is about the power of Reason, about the absurdity of racism, war, greed and violence. Voltaire was the father of modern man. His errors were the errors of his age: his wisdom is the wisdom of the better part of man.

I have just finished reading Durant's history of Voltaire and decided that I wanted to read more of his actual writings. I have previously read Candide and some of his letters and really appreciated the biting satire. This version is actually a condensed version of over 300 pages. I found a copy of the original in 6 volumes at over 300 pages each. This work is a 'dictionary' arranged in alphabetical order. The subjects he chooses are seemingly random and include such things as 'beauty', 'corn', 'envy', 'Joan of Arc', and almost any other thing you can think of. I found many of the articles to be dated and not very 'philosophical', but many others were fascinating. I enjoyed his views on the soul, atheism, and free-will. They were clearly philosophical and were probably considered radical at the time. Many of his radical views are now considered mainstream, but some are still bound to offend. His satire was not as biting as some of his other works, but it still probably caused offence to many of his contemporaries. I was somewhat disappointed that this was a condensed version, but I still appreciated the opportunity to read more from Voltaire in a Kindle freebie.

I'm not your typical philosophie reader, being a high school girl who usually prefers pop music to any sort of book, but there is something about Voltaire's writings that appeals to me. Not only are there some great statements made in this book, but clues to what life was like back in his day. Even some of his inaccurate views are valuable because they show how people viewed concepts like Islam. His writing is witty, yet rational and even though sometimes difficult to interpret in modern language, if you read it several times and refer to a dictionary often you will understand what he is saying. Although some of the articles are irrelevant for today's world they are useful in historical context and there are many articles that are and always will be relevant. Don't pass this book off as old fashioned, Voltaire never goes out of style.

While I, too, enjoyed getting a Kindle freebie, this bears little resemblance to the original (I am fortunate to have a first English edition from 1765). I was hoping to have a Kindle version much like the printed copy, but found that many of his more enjoyable and interesting topics (especially religious) were omitted by your editors including Abraham, Angel, Baptism, Beasts, Body, Chinese and Japanese Catachism, Christianity -- the list goes on and on. Why such a different version might have been explained with your translator/transcriber notes in the Kindle version.

One of the best books I ever read. It changed the way I looked at the world. This man was a genius pure and simple. He also had great literary skills and a good sense of humour too.

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