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978-1-107-04500-2 - The Pragmatic Enlightenment: Recovering the Liberalism of Hume, Smith, Montesquieu, and Voltaire

Dennis C. Rasmussen

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The Pragmatic Enlightenment

This is a study of the political theory of the Enlightenment, focusing on four leading eighteenth-century thinkers: David Hume, Adam Smith, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. Dennis C. Rasmussen calls attention to the particular strand of the Enlightenment these thinkers represent, which he terms the “pragmatic Enlightenment.” He defends this strand of Enlightenment thought against both the Enlightenment’s critics and some of the more idealistic Enlightenment figures who tend to have more followers today, such as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Jeremy Bentham. Professor Rasmussen argues that Hume, Smith, Montesquieu, and Voltaire exemplify an especially attractive type of liberalism, one that is more realistic, moderate, flexible, and contextually sensitive than most other branches of this tradition.

Dennis C. Rasmussen is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Tufts University. He is the author of *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith’s Response to Rousseau* (2008), which received an honorable mention for the Delba Winthrop Award for Excellence in Political Science.

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DENNIS C. RASMUSSEN

Tufts University



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[More information](#)

Contents

<i>A Note on the Citations</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	I
HEGEMONIC UNIVERSALISM?	25
1. Morality in Context	27
2. Pragmatic Liberalism	80
BLIND FAITH IN REASON?	133
3. The Age of the Limits of Reason	135
4. The Perils of Political Rationalism	191
ATOMISTIC INDIVIDUALISM?	231
5. The Social and Encumbered Self	233
6. Negative Liberty for a Positive Community	260
Conclusion	294
<i>Bibliography</i>	303
<i>Index</i>	329

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A Note on the Citations

Because I hope this book will find an audience beyond specialists in Enlightenment thought, I have wherever possible cited widely available English translations of the works of Montesquieu and Voltaire, rather than the critical French editions. Where reliable translations are not available, I cite standard French versions; in these cases, the translations are my own. In some instances I have also made small alterations to the existing translations for the sake of a more literal rendering.

For some of the more frequently cited texts, I use the following in-text abbreviations. Where appropriate, I include references to volume, book, part, chapter, and/or paragraph numbers in addition to the page number.

Works of David Hume

EHU	<i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1748] 2000).
EMPL	<i>Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary</i> , ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1741–77] 1987).
EPM	<i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1751] 1998).
HE	<i>The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688</i> , six volumes (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1754–62] 1983).
THN	<i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1739–40] 2007).

Works of Adam Smith

LJ *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and
 P. G. Stein (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1762–66] 1982).
 TMS *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L.
 Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1759–90] 1982).
 WN *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of
 Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd,
 two volumes (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund [1776], 1981).

Works of Montesquieu

Pensées *My Thoughts*, trans. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty
 Fund, [c. 1720–55] 2012).
 PL *The Persian Letters*, trans. George R. Healy (Indianapolis:
 Hackett, [1721] 1999).
 SL *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller,
 and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University
 Press, [1748] 1989).

Works of Voltaire

EM *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, ed. René Pomeau,
 two volumes (Paris: Garnier, [1756–69] 1963).
 LCE *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, ed. Nicholas Cronk
 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1733] 1994).
 PD *Philosophical Dictionary*, trans. Theodore Besterman
 (London: Penguin, [1764–69] 2004).
 TM *A Treatise on Metaphysics*, in *Voltaire: Selections*, trans. Paul
 Edwards (New York: Macmillan, [1736] 1989).

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