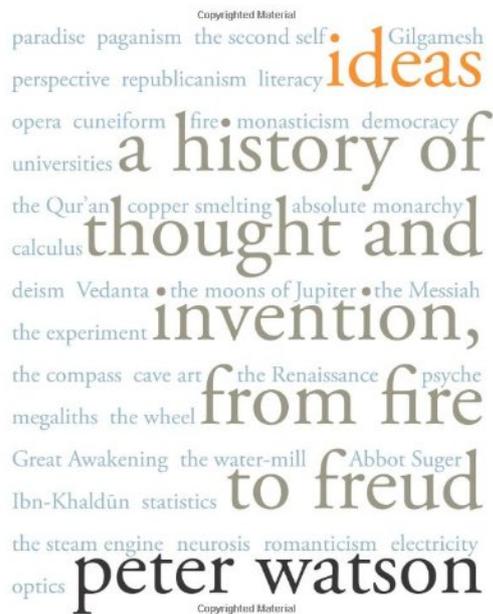


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From Publishers Weekly

Watson's (The Modern Mind) hefty tome distills history's greatest ideas and inventions into an impressive discourse on history's driving forces, enlivened by anecdotes and made approachable by Watson's casual, nearly conspiratorial, tone. Watson presents a vast amount of information, but his greatest strength lies in his ability to make an immensely varied body of material coherent and digestible. The author asks the reader to approach his history "as an alternative to more conventional history-as history with the kings and emperors and dynasties and generals left out," and assumes "readers will know the bare bones of historical chronology." Central to Watson's approach is his belief that the scientific experiment, as it took root in medieval Europe, forever changed history's intellectual landscape. (Watson goes as far as labeling the scientific method "the purest form of democracy there is.") Whereas the non-Western world once dominated intellectual spheres (The author notes that the Hindu mathematician Aryabhata calculated the value of pi and the solar year's length, determined that the earth revolved around the sun and discovered the cause of eclipses nearly a thousand years before Copernicus), Watson points to a grand-and specific-shift that changed that dynamic: "The eleventh and twelfth centuries were a hinge period, when the great European acceleration began. From then on, the history of new ideas happened mainly in what we now call the West." This analysis is indicative of Watson's scholarship, and the result is a rich tapestry of intellectual and cultural life through the ages.

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From Booklist

Pegging his narrative to three ideas--the soul, Europe, and experiment--Watson surveys intellectual history for a popular audience. Departing from the earliest indications of abstract thought--tools fashioned by ancestral human species--Watson highlights the crucial efflorescence of artwork 30,000 years ago, followed by the agriculture revolution. Watson then assesses classical Greece as the crucial incubator of ideas, incomparable to any other situation in history. This is the origin of his inclusion of "Europe" as one of his three organizers of a massive sweep of material: while Watson covers the important intellectual influences emanating from Islam, India, and China, he maintains Europe is where the cogitational action has been. Eurocentrism has been a field of fierce academic contests, traces of which bubble up in Watson's consideration of the main phases of Western thought. Judaism, Christianity, the Renaissance and Reformation, the scientific revolution, and the Enlightenment--Watson enfolds changing conceptions of the objective, material world, and of the subjective world of the human psyche in a confident, accessible presentation. Gilbert Taylor

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## Review

“This is a grand book...The history of ideas deserves treatment on this scale.” (Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, Evening Standard (London))

“A superior specimen, with numerous interesting factoids...thought-provoking short essays.” (John Derbyshire, New York Sun)

“A masterpiece of historical writing.” (John Gray, Professor of European Thought, London School of Economics, New Statesman)

“[An] extraordinary new book....This is the history of ‘ideas’ as it has never been presented before.” (Noel Malcolm, Sunday Telegraph (London))

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