



Ideas That Changed the World

By Felipe Fernandez-armesto

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Authoritative, compelling, and provocative, Ideas That Changed the World presents the big themes in philosophy and history, and reveals how certain ideas have shaped our civilization. One of the most respected historians writing today, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto offers an unashamedly personal analysis on a wide range of ideas -- from the afterlife to taboo foods -- that will keep readers enthralled.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"Ideas are at least as powerful agents for change as material exigencies, economic needs, environmental constraints, and all the other proposed determinants." So writes noted Oxford historian Fernandez-Armesto in this overview of scores of ideas dating back to prehistoric times. The ideas examined are not always soothing or progressive: cannibalism ("typically...human and cultural"); a revival of interest in ancient Egyptian magic during the Renaissance (useful because ultimately "alchemy fed into chemistry, astrology into astronomy"); and anti-Semitism. The book is culturally inclusive: the Zen concept of Mu (the way masters "baffled their pupils into enlightenment") is here, as is jihad. Each idea is examined in a generously illustrated two-page spread, with suggested readings and links to other ideas in the book. This wide-ranging volume offers great browsing and a panoply of ideas for consideration.

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From [Booklist](#)

This copiously illustrated book begins more than 30 millennia ago and portrays human history as the product of a series of intellectual and conceptual discoveries. The author shows how our ancestors pulled themselves out of prehistory by realizing that symbols could be used to express ideas; by grasping that what we see is not necessarily what is--by, in short, having the big idea that the world operates according to rules that can be understood. By extending the history of ideas to prehistory (most histories of ideas "start late in the day, with the invention of writing"), Fernandez-Armesto offers a wealth of insights and new ways of looking at human evolution. That's not to say, however, that he doesn't cover more modern ground. Key intellectual moments in the development of science, government, society, and religion are all surveyed in accessible prose and with hundreds of fascinating illustrations. This is obviously not the last word on the history of ideas, but it makes a fascinating place to start. *David Pitt*

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About the Author

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto is a member of the Faculty of Modern History at Oxford University and has held posts as visiting professor at several institutions in the United States and Europe. He is the author of more than ten books, including *Truth: A History and a Guide For the Perplexed* and *The Times World Atlas of Exploration*.

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