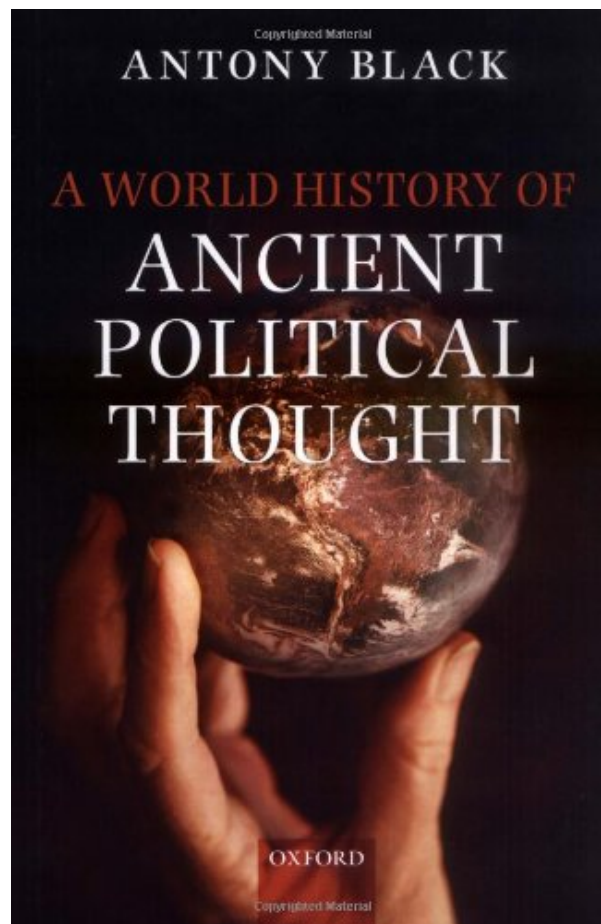
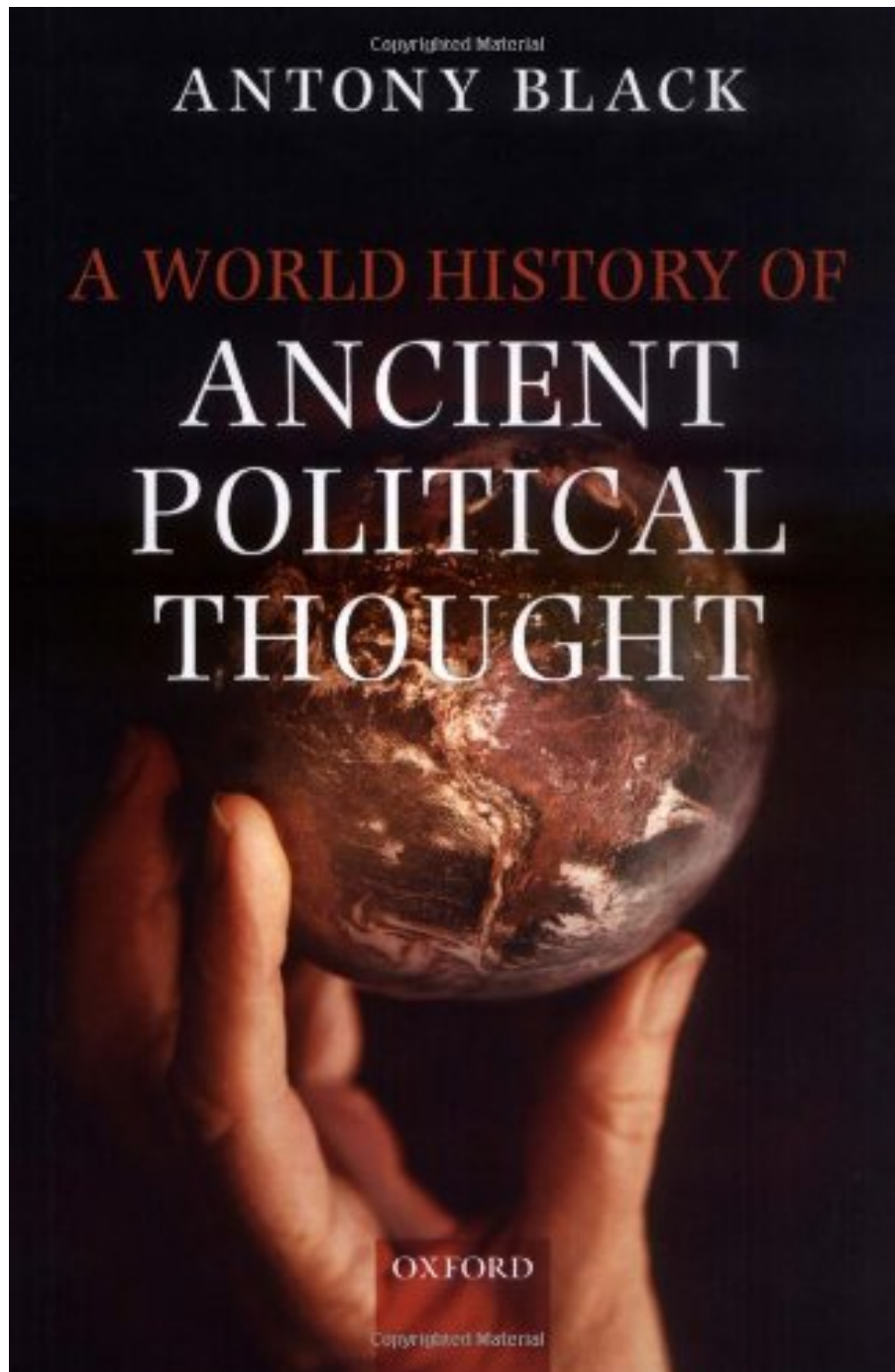


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In this ambitious book, Antony Black provides a short and global explanation of ancient political thought. He should be considered one of the greatest and most consistent specialists in medieval political thought, but in this book he shows an impressive comprehension of the sources of ancient cultures ... can be highly recommended. Rafael Ramis Barcelo, *Political Studies Review* admirably ambitious ... This is not a merely encyclopaedic account of ancient thought but a genuinely comparative analysis, with the constant attention to the divergences from basic similarities that creates the exciting sense of a single argument. Richard Seaford, *History of Political Thought*

About the Author

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This book examines the political thought of China, Greece, Israel, Rome, India, Iran, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and also early Christianity, from prehistory to c. 200 CE. Each of these had its own priorities, based on a religious and philosophical perspective. This led to different ideas about who should govern, how to govern, and what government was for.

In most cultures, sacred monarchy was the norm, but this ranged from absolute to conditional authority. 'The people' were recipients of royal (and divine) beneficence. Justice, the rule of law and meritocracy were generally regarded as fundamental. In Greece and Rome, democracy and liberty were born, while in Israel the polity was based on covenant and the law. Confucius taught humaneness, Mozi and Christianity taught universal love; Kautilya and the Chinese 'Legalists' believed in realpolitik and an authoritarian state. The conflict between might and right was resolved in many different ways.

Chinese, Greek and Indian thinkers reflected on the origin and purposes of the state. Status and class were embedded in Indian and Chinese thought, the nation in Israelite thought. The Stoics and Cicero, on the other hand, saw humanity as a single unit. Political philosophy, using logic, evidence and dialectic, was invented in China and Greece, statecraft in China and India, political science in Greece. Plato and Aristotle, followed by Polybius and Cicero, started 'western' political philosophy.

This book covers political philosophy, religious ideology, constitutional theory, social ethics, official and popular political culture.

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Antony Black is Professor Emeritus in the History of Political Thought, School of Humanities, University of Dundee.

Most helpful customer reviews

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Political ideas in Antiquity: wide-ranging splendid overview

By César González Rouco

The synopsis of the book provided by the "" is fairly accurate. Therefore, I will only point out that (a) books on comparative history of ideas seem to be rather scarce; (b) many books entitled "History of ...whatever" only provide information about the West, the rest of the world being almost ignored, but Black's book is different, is truly global.

So when I found this book I decide it to give it a chance, in despite of not finding previous comments on it. I was surprised that no one else had made a comment before to this masterful work, which, in my opinion, is impartial and enlightening. Perhaps, because of the author's style, the book is no very engaging, but it is not dry either. In any event I think that the professional historian and the educated layperson alike can savour it. So I add my review, my rate being between 5 (content) and 3 (pleasure, sometimes falling to 2, sometimes raising to 4). I highly recommend it.

The book is short, less than 240 pages (plus bibliography), and is divided in the following way: Introduction / 1. Early Communities and States / 2. Egypt / 3. Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babilón / 4. Iran / 5. Israel / 6. India / 7. China / 8. The Greeks / 9. Rome / 10. Greco-Roman Humanism / 11. The Kingdom of heaven and the church of Christ / 12. Themes: similarities and differences between cultures / 13. Conclusion.

Other interesting books dealing with the history of ideas that I would recommend would be the following: 1) "The West and Islam: Religion and Political Thought in World History", another excellent book by the same author; 2) "America's Constitution: A Biography" by Akhil Reed Amar; 3) "Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages" by Ellen Meiksins Wood; 4) "God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism" by Leszek Kolakowski; 5) "The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph", by Albert O. Hirschman; and 6) "The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays" by Isaiah Berlin.

Additionally, for those looking for a broad framework to understand the past, I would also suggest reading the following works, whose scope is as amazingly global as Black's: 1. Agrarian cultures: "Pre-industrial societies" by Patricia Crone; 2. Economy: "The world economy. A millennial perspective" (2001) plus "The world economy: Historical Statistics" (2003) by Angus Maddison (a combined edition of these two volumes appeared on December 2007); 3. Government: "The History of Government" by S.E. Finer; 4. Ideas: "Ideas, a History from Fire to Freud", by Peter Watson; 5. Religion: "The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach" by Moojan Momen; and 6. War: "War in Human Civilization" by Azar Gat.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Every page is fascinating, and overall very informative and often relevant to today's politics

By Epictetus (Hong Kong)

A readable, erudite and useful book. It is well organized and wide ranging, but focused on its subject. Three things stand out especially in this author's analysis. First, the power of mere ideas to shape societies and how people think. Secondly, a tendency of the powerful in many places to make the right to worship the god their sole preserve. And thirdly, the inexorable connexion between politics and religion. The bibliography is comprehensive and not confined to political theorists. Gombrich, for instance, is a source. I recommend this book highly, despite the steep price.

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