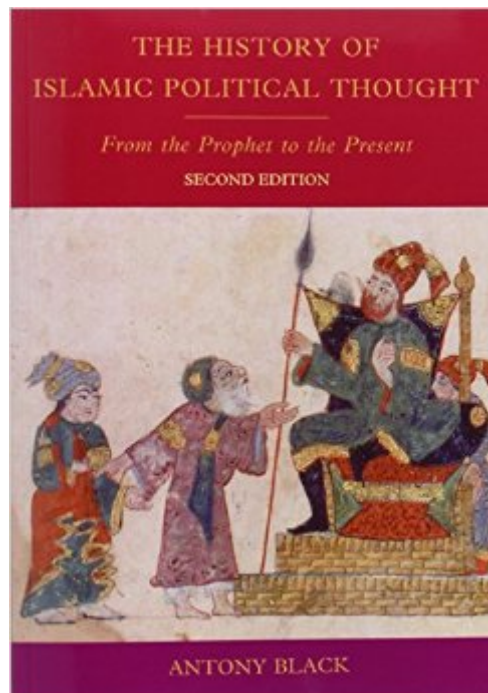


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The History Of Islamic Political Thought, Second Edition: The History Of Islamic Political Thought: From The Prophet To The Present



Synopsis

A complete history of Islamic political thought from early Islam (c.622-661) to the present. Now in its 2nd edition, this textbook describes and interprets all schools of Islamic political thought, their origins, inter-connections and meaning. It examines the Qur'an, the early Caliphate, classical Islamic philosophy and the political culture of the Ottoman and other empires. It covers major thinkers such as Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Ibn Taymiyya as well as a number of lesser authors, and Ibn Khaldun is presented as one of the most original political theorists ever. It draws on a wide range of sources including writings on religion, law, philosophy and statecraft expressed in treatises, handbooks and political rhetoric. The new edition analyses the connections between religion and politics, covering the most recent developments in Islamic political thought and the most recent historical scholarship. It ends with a critical survey of reformism (or modernism) and Islamism (or fundamentalism) from the late-19th century up to the present day.

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Customer Reviews

THIS IS A REVIEW OF THE FIRST EDITION, NOT THE SECOND
Antony Black is a brilliant scholar. His 'A World History of Ancient Political Thought' was lucid, informative, balanced, and thoughtful. This was informative, balanced, and thoughtful, but incredibly poorly edited. It could have done with far more care and thought for the reader-- Are we going to define terms? Are we going to use those terms consistently? Basic titles like Caliph, Imam, and Emir are tossed around interchangeably with their translation, not to mention lesser-known titles, concepts, and institutions from the Islamic political experience. The editing comes across as rushed and the text as

unduly confused. This book could be far more readable with a good developmental edit. I'm hoping that's what the second edition received aside from a post-9/11 update. Had it a few more months editing, the author, publisher, and audience would have had a better product for the English-speaking world to better understand the Islamic world when it most needed to. Instead it had very sloppy book on a very relevant topic by a very intelligent scholar.

The first thing I should state is that I am no expert in Islamic studies. I have dabbled in reading the Qur'an and the Falsafa. I do not know enough about the history of the Near East and North Africa to consider myself conversant in it. But I am well versed in the history of Europe and its philosophy. The point I am making is that I cannot state that Black's presentation is accurate and illuminating. I can say that it fits in with what I did know and introduced me to any number of thinkers and issues worth studying. There are people these days (like Fred Dallmayr) who are trying to make Western political philosophy less provincial. Not just in the sense of looking at the history of other peoples as providing source material to discuss but in the sense of absorbing the political philosophies of other peoples to use on our own source material. In other words, to try to see our own history or the history of the world in terms of the conceptual apparatuses of other peoples. And herein lies my problem. If Black's book is a fair and judicious presentation of the history of Islamic political thought, then I do not see that it contributes much to that effort to create a worldly or cosmopolitan political philosophy. And I suspect that Black doesn't either. Consider this from p. 345: "The political thought of Muslims has been significantly changed by encounter with the West. A new chapter in the history of Islamic political thought has begun." Notice the direction of influence- from West to Islam. On p. 351, he sums up what Islam has to offer today with three ideas. The first is that the Royal Advice literature offers a storehouse of prudential ethics and political realism. The second is the concept of *mizan* (balance) "as a guide to rational calculation in practical affairs". The third is that Ibn Khaldun is still a pretty darn good read (I agree). This hardly seems like much after 350 pages of what seems to be well organized and lucid exposition on dozens of thinkers. In my reading of the book, the main problem with Islamic political thought is three-fold.¹ Everything we need to know is in the Qu'ran or the Hadith. All arguments must be grounded on these two great sources.² There is no concept of humanity in Islamic thought. There are Muslims and non-Muslims. The House of Islam and the House of Strife.³ Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong. This central concept in Islamic ethics can be read as making every Muslim the enforcer of Shari'a. This encourages acts of both great heroism and incredible tyranny. Having said all that, Black's work is a work of seemingly impeccable scholarship. He is an outstanding scholar of Medieval and Early

Modern Western Political Thought and often finds very telling points of comparison between the two traditions. He introduces many different figures and gives enough exposition to determine who and what you want to further explore. For me, it highlighted a central tension in all political thought- that between our community and our humanity. Each can be a source of freedom, strength and knowledge. Each can be a source of tyranny and exclusion. Islam, for the most part, is my Other. And as a secular humanist social democrat tree-hugging sarcastic rationalist, I appear to be its Other as well. I feel like I need to know more so that I can get to see the common ground.

I stumbled upon this book for one of my early research papers about Islam, and I was amazed. This is truly an academically honest masterpiece. It covers everything from the political system created in Islam right after Muhammad's death to the contemporary Salafi movement including the work of Maududi, Qutb, and Khomeini. It also references common hadiths, fikh, and the Sira, which is a breath of fresh air because recently everybody believes they are an Islamic scholar but they've only remotely studied books about the Qur'an (not even the Qur'an itself, seriously it's frustrating in academia). The bottom line is if you're a student (informal or formal) of Middle Eastern and Islamic politics you need this book.

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