

Influential books: global objective

Books carry and communicate powerful messages. Whether or not books and the ideas in them are of global influence depends on:

- Whether the books are actually published
 - How many people have access to the books - numbers sold or disseminated
 - Whether or not those people are receptive to the ideas - do they understand them, do they agree or disagree enough to be influenced
 - Are those people able to act and/or pass on the ideas.
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- Some books eg bomb making instructions for the 9/11 bombers may actually be influential through just targeting a small number of very powerful people or small sects determined to act. Some scientific books have also been read by a very few scientists but what they do with that knowledge has had huge impacts.
 - Other books may be influential because certain ideas strike a chord with many people. So the ideas spread even if most people have not even read the book or can understand it. The Arabic Koran and Latin Bible might come into that category. Also some political texts.
 - Influence may also be good or disastrous eg Mein Kampf had a disastrous impact on many people who had not read the book.

But nowadays as very many more people can read and write, and book production is much cheaper, this means books can reach very many more people. At the same time, the ready availability of very many books of different types means that any one book may have less overall impact in itself.

A Google search on 'influential books' brings up a number of lists - but these are very Euro/Western centric.

Amazon 10 books that changed the world

- 1) King James Bible because it made the Bible directly available to anyone who could read English. The list author says: "it's probably fair to say this book has been shaping the western civilization for the last 2000 years."
- 2) Adam Smith Wealth of Nations. The list author says: "this book gave birth to the modern capitalism."
- 3) Marx Das Capital . The list author says "the counter part of "The Wealth of Nations." The communism ideology that affected half the world in the 20th century."
- 4) Darwin Origin of Species
- 5) John Jay The Federalist Papers. list author says: "If the US Constitution is the most cherished document in history, these series of papers made it possible."
- 6) Aristotle Politics. list author says: "The beginning of the western political thought."
- 7) Analects. Confucius list author says: "When you have "Politics" in the west, this one is the equivalent in the east."
- 8) Rousseau Social Contract. list author says: "The corner stone of the modern liberalism."
- 9) Kant Critique of Pure Reason. list author says: "This marks the watershed in the field of philosophy. It's possible you read the whole book and don't understand a word of it."
- 10) Cicero The Republic and the Laws list author says: "The great Roman lawgiver had a great gift for mankind : The first introduction to the rules of law."

Top 10 Books that Changed the World

by Jfrater, July 24, 2007

Listverse.com

1. The Bible – Various Author

(circa 30AD – 90AD) [Wikipedia]

There can be no doubt that the Bible has done more to change the face of the world than any other book. A mere two hundred years after it was created, it brought about the conversion of the entire Roman Empire from paganism to Christianity. Since then, Christianity has become the largest single religion in the world (with 2.1 billion adherents). The oldest and largest of the Christian groups is the Roman Catholic Church whose membership (1.05 billion) is equal to the size of all other Christian groups combined.

The Bible comprises two books – the Old Testament (taken from the Greek edition used by Christ and the apostles) and the New Testament (written by some of the Apostles of Jesus after his death – including St Paul who did not meet Christ during His lifetime).

The Gutenberg bible (a copy of the Latin Vulgate) was the first book ever published on the printing press. The Bible is the most purchased book in the world.

2. The Qur'an – Various Authors

(650AD to 656AD) [Wikipedia]

The Qur'an is the holy book of the Islamic religion. The founder of Islam, Mohammed told his followers that he was given revelations by the Angel Gabriel. These revelations (spanning 23 years) form the basis of the Qur'an. After Mohammed's death in 632 the

Qur'an was recorded by word of mouth only; it was not for another 20 years that the various memories of his words were collected and combined.

The Qur'an is considered by Muslims to be the last revealed word of God (after the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Christian Bible). In recent years much debate has occurred over the content of the Qur'an – with its opponents claiming that it advocates war and murder of non-believers. Muslims generally claim that this is not the case and state that opponents of Islam are taking the text out of context.

3. The Summa Theologica – St. Thomas Aquinas

(1265 – 1274) [Wikipedia]

The Summa Theologica is a multi-volume set of books which outlines in the most precise manner, the doctrines and beliefs of Christianity. It was held in such high regard, that second to the Bible, it was the book most used for reference at the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563). Its influence was felt all across the Christian World as the reforms of the Council of Trent were implemented.

To this day, the Summa Theologica is the primary teaching tool used in Roman Catholic seminaries and its author is regarded as a Doctor of the Church (a title reserved for only 33 great thinkers in the history of Christianity). It is also worth noting that St Isidore (popularly considered Patron Saint of the Internet) is also seen as a Doctor of the Church.

4. The Rights of Man – Thomas Paine

(1791) [Wikipedia]

Paine, an English writer, influenced American Democracy and Democracy in general with his writings. According to Paine, the sole purpose of the government is to protect the irrefutable rights inherent to every human being. Thus all institutions which do not benefit a nation are illegitimate, including the monarchy (and the nobility) and the military establishment.

When the French Revolution broke out, Paine went to France where, despite his ignorance of the French language, he was promptly elected to the National Convention. His absence from England at this time was fortuitous because the publication of The Rights of Man caused such a furor in the country that Paine was put on trial in absentia and convicted for seditious libel against the crown.

5. Either/Or – Søren Kierkegaard

(1843) [Wikipedia]

Either/Or portays the two lifeviews, one being consciously hedonistic and one based on ethical duty and responsibility, in two volumes. Each lifeview is written and represented by a fictional pseudonymous author and the prose of the work depends on which lifeview is being discussed. For example, the aesthetic lifeview is written in short essay form, with poetic imagery and allusions, discussing aesthetic topics such as music, seduction, drama, and beauty. The ethical lifeview is written as two long letters, with a more argumentative and restraint prose, discussing moral responsibility, critical reflection, and marriage.

This book, by the father of existentialism has been highly influential with other existentialists. Despite its great popularity, it was not published in English until 1944. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that claims that individual human beings have full responsibility for creating the meanings of their own lives. It is a reaction against more traditional philosophies, such as rationalism and empiricism.

6. Communist Manifesto – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

(1848) [Wikipedia]

This tract, written by communist theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels at the behest of the Communist League, has become one of the most influential political tracts in history. The Manifesto suggested a course of action for a proletarian (working class) revolution to overthrow the bourgeois social order and to eventually bring about a classless and stateless society.

Perhaps the most famous quote from the work reads: “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!”

7. Experimental Research in Electricity – Michael Faraday

(1855) [Wikipedia]

Faraday was an English chemist and physicist whose many experiments with electricity ultimately lead to his invention of electromagnetic rotary devices which formed the foundation of electric motor technology. Although he received little formal education and thus higher mathematics like calculus were always out of his reach, he went on to become one of the most influential scientists in history. It was largely his experiments that lead to electricity becoming viable for use in technology.

During his lifetime, Faraday rejected a knighthood and twice refused to become President of the Royal Society. He died at his house at Hampton Court on August 25, 1867. He has a memorial plaque in Westminster Abbey, near Isaac Newton’s tomb, but he turned down burial there and is interred in the Sandemanian plot in Highgate Cemetery.

8. On the Origin of Species – Charles Darwin

(1859) [Wikipedia]

This book by Darwin is considered a seminal work in the field of evolutionary biology. It proposes that over time, through natural selection, species evolve. It was a highly controversial book as it contradicted many religious views on biology at the time. Darwin’s book was the culmination of evidence he had accumulated on the voyage of the Beagle in the 1830s and expanded through continuing investigations and experiments since his return to England.

The book is readable even for the non-specialist and attracted widespread interest on publication. The book was controversial, and generated much discussion on scientific, philosophical, and religious grounds. The scientific theory of evolution has itself evolved since Darwin first presented it, but natural selection remains the most widely accepted

scientific model of how species evolve. The at-times bitter creation-evolution controversy continues to this day.

9. The Second Sex – Simone de Beauvoir

(1949) [Wikipedia]

The Second Sex is the best known work of Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir wrote the book after attempting to write about herself. The first thing she wrote was that she was a woman, but she realized that she needed to define what a woman was, which became the intent of the book. It is a work on the treatment of women throughout history and often regarded as a major feminist work. In it she argues that women throughout history have been defined as the “other” sex, an aberration from the “normal” male sex.

Simone de Beauvoir (a pioneer of the feminist movement) argues that women have historically been considered deviant, and abnormal. She submits that even Mary Wollstonecraft considered men to be the ideal toward which women should aspire. Beauvoir says that this attitude has limited women’s success by maintaining the perception that they are a deviation from the normal, and are outsiders attempting to emulate “normality”. For feminism to move forward, this assumption must be set aside.

10. Atlas Shrugged – Ayn Rand

(1957) [Wikipedia]

Atlas Shrugged was Rand’s last work before she devoted her time exclusively to philosophical writing. This book contains a variety of themes that would later become the core of her philosophy Objectivism. She considered it to be her magnum opus and is it the most popular of her non-fiction work.

While the book was largely a critical failure, it had an enormous popular success. As far as influence in the world, the Objectivist philosophy gave much to the Libertarian movement which has enjoyed great popularity around the world.

In a three-month online poll of reader selections of the hundred best novels of the twentieth century, administered by publisher Modern Library, Atlas Shrugged was voted number one. She has a large following in the celebrity world, including Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie who have been selected to play the two main characters in a trilogy of films that aims to bring Atlas Shrugged to the silver screen in the near future.

10 More Books That Changed The World

by JFrater, March 2, 2009
Listverse.com

10 Principia Mathematica Isaac Newton

Why it changed the world: Newton's Principia, published in 1687, laid the foundation for much of modern physics and mathematics.

The Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica (mathematical principles of natural philosophy) is a three-volume work by Isaac Newton published on 5 July 1687. It contains the statement of Newton's laws of motion forming the foundation of classical mechanics, as well as his law of universal gravitation and a derivation of Kepler's laws for the motion of the planets (which were first obtained empirically). The Principia is widely regarded as one of the most important scientific works ever written. It is in a supplement to the Principia, entitled General Scholium, that Newton expressed his famous Hypotheses non fingo ("I feign no hypotheses" or "I make no guesses").

9 The Analects. Confucius

Why it changed the world: A truly radical text in its time, the Analects have been the dominant influence on Chinese thought and culture.

The Analects, also known as the Analects of Confucius, are a record of the words and acts of the central Chinese thinker and philosopher Confucius and his disciples, as well as the discussions they held. The Chinese title literally means "discussion over [Confucius] words." Written during the Spring and Autumn Period through the Warring States Period (ca. 479 BCE – 221 BCE), the Analects is the representative work of Confucianism and continues to have a tremendous influence on Chinese and East Asian thought and values today. The Analects were almost certainly penned and compiled by disciples and second-generation disciples of Confucius, albeit being mostly about Confucius himself and his thought.

8 The Interpretation Of Dreams. Sigmund Freud

Why it changed the world: While many of Freud's theories have now been dismissed by modern specialists, his concept that the unconscious retains much that the conscious mind appears to have forgotten has changed and influenced the way that people think about themselves.

The Interpretation Of Dreams introduces the Ego, and describes Freud's theory of the unconscious with respect to dream interpretation. Dreams, in Freud's view, were all forms of "wish-fulfillment" — attempts by the unconscious to resolve a conflict of some sort, whether something recent or something from the recesses of the past. The initial print run of the book was very low — it took many years to sell out the first 600 copies. Freud revised the book at least eight times, and in the third edition added an extensive section which treated dream symbolism very literally. Later psychoanalysts have expressed

frustration with this section, as it encouraged the notion that dream interpretation was a straightforward hunt for symbols of sex, penises, etc.

7 Canon Of Medicine Avicenna

Why it changed the world: It brought together the knowledge and theories of Ancient Greek, Persian, and Indian medicine (largely forgotten otherwise) and combined it with contemporary 11th century understanding. It laid the foundations of modern medical science.

The Canon of Medicine is a 14-volume Arabic medical encyclopedia written by a Persian scientist and physician Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and completed in 1025. It is considered the first pharmacopoeia, and among other things, the book is known for the introduction of systematic experimentation and quantification into the study of physiology, the discovery of the contagious nature of infectious diseases, the introduction of quarantine to limit the spread of contagious diseases, and the introduction of evidence-based medicine, experimental medicine, clinical trials, randomized controlled trials, efficacy tests, clinical pharmacology, neuropsychiatry, physiological psychology, risk factor analysis, and the idea of a syndrome in the diagnosis of specific diseases.

6 The Histories Herodotus

Why it changed the world: They are the source of much of our knowledge of the ancient world and the foundation of history in Western literature.

The Histories of Herodotus of Halicarnassus is considered the first work of history in Western literature. Written about 440 BC in the Ionic dialect of classical Greek, The Histories tells the story of the Greco-Persian Wars between the Achaemenid Empire and the Greek city-states in the 5th century BC. Herodotus travelled extensively around the ancient world, conducting interviews and collecting stories for his book.

5 On Liberty John Stewart Mill

Why it changed the world: Most of Mill's theories are now full integrated into modern democracies – particularly the need to protect the rights of the individual.

On Liberty is a philosophical work by 19th century English philosopher John Stuart Mill, first published in 1859. To the Victorian readers of the time it was a radical work, advocating moral and economic freedom of individuals from the state. Perhaps the most memorable point made by Mill in this work, and his basis for liberty, is that "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign". Mill is compelled to say this in opposition to what he calls the "tyranny of the majority", wherein through control of etiquette and morality, society is an unelected power that can do horrific things.

4 The Republic Plato

Why it changed the world: Plato's contrast between the imperfect world of mortals and the perfect forms of immortal souls had a great deal of influence over Christianity and Islam and Western philosophy in general.

The Republic is a Socratic dialogue by Plato, written in approximately 380 BC. It is one of the most influential works of philosophy and political theory, and Plato's best known work. In Plato's fictional dialogues the characters of Socrates as well as various Athenians and foreigners discuss the meaning of justice and examine whether the just man is happier than the unjust man by constructing an imaginary city ruled by philosopher-kings.

3 Lady Chatterley's Lover D H Lawrence

Why it changed the world: It brought the concept of book censorship to a head and eventually helped to overturn it.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is a novel by D. H. Lawrence written in 1928. Printed privately in Florence, Italy in 1928, it was not printed in the United Kingdom until 1960 (other than in an underground edition issued by Inky Stephensen's Mandrake Press in 1929). Lawrence considered calling this book *Tenderness* at one time and made significant alterations to the original manuscript in order to make it palatable to readers. It has been published in three different versions. The publication of the book caused a scandal due to its explicit sex scenes, including previously banned four-letter words and perhaps because the lovers were a working-class male and an aristocratic female.

2 The Canterbury Tales Geoffrey Chaucer

Why it changed the world: Popularized the use of vernacular English as the dominant language in English literature (rather than Latin or French commonly used at the time) – the Canterbury Tales set the standard for future works of English literature.

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century (two of them in prose, the rest in verse). The tales, some of which are originals and others not, are contained inside a frame tale and told by a collection of pilgrims on a pilgrimage from London Borough of Southwark to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The Canterbury Tales are written in Middle English. Although the tales are considered to be his magnum opus, some believe the structure of the tales is indebted to the works of *The Decameron*, which Chaucer is said to have read on an earlier visit to Italy.

1 Geographia Ptolemy

Why it changed the world: It set practical standards in geography which lasted 1500 years, and is our best record of the state of geographic knowledge in the 2nd century.

The *Geographia* or *Geography* is Ptolemy's main work besides the *Almagest*. It is a compilation of what was known about the world's geography in the Roman Empire of the 2nd century. Ptolemy relied mainly on the work of an earlier geographer, Marinus of Tyre, and on gazetteers of the Roman and ancient Persian empire, but most of his sources beyond the perimeter of the Empire were unreliable. The original work included maps, but due to the difficulties involved in copying them by hand, they have fallen out of the manuscript transmission. The work has been discovered and used through the ages by several noted people around the world. Ptolemy also devised and provided instructions on how to create maps both of the whole inhabited world and of the Roman provinces. Ptolemy was well aware that he knew about only a quarter of the globe.

Twelve Books That Changed the World Melvyn Bragg

book 2006

The twelve books listed were:

- Principia Mathematica (1687) — Isaac Newton
- Married Love (1918) — Marie Stopes
- Magna Carta (1215)
- Book of Rules of Association Football (1863)
- On the Origin of Species (1859) — Charles Darwin
- On the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1789) — William Wilberforce in Parliament, immediately printed in several versions
- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) — Mary Wollstonecraft
- Experimental Researches in Electricity (three volumes, 1839, 1844, 1855) by Michael Faraday
- Patent Specification for Arkwright's Spinning Machine (1769) — Richard Arkwright
- The King James Bible (1611) — William Tyndale and 54 scholars appointed by the king
- An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776) — Adam Smith
- The First Folio (1623) — William Shakespeare

From Wikipedia