



# The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution

By David Wootton

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## The Invention of Science: A New History of the Scientific Revolution By David Wootton

A companion to such acclaimed works as *The Age of Wonder*, *A Clockwork Universe*, and *Darwin's Ghosts*—a groundbreaking examination of the greatest event in history, the Scientific Revolution, and how it came to change the way we understand ourselves and our world.

We live in a world transformed by scientific discovery. Yet today, science and its practitioners have come under political attack. In this fascinating history spanning continents and centuries, historian David Wootton offers a lively defense of science, revealing why the Scientific Revolution was truly the greatest event in our history.

*The Invention of Science* goes back five hundred years in time to chronicle this crucial transformation, exploring the factors that led to its birth and the people who made it happen. Wootton argues that the Scientific Revolution was actually five separate yet concurrent events that developed independently, but came to intersect and create a new worldview. Here are the brilliant iconoclasts—Galileo, Copernicus, Brahe, Newton, and many more curious minds from across Europe—whose studies of the natural world challenged centuries of religious orthodoxy and ingrained superstition.

From gunpowder technology, the discovery of the new world, movable type printing, perspective painting, and the telescope to the practice of conducting experiments, the laws of nature, and the concept of the fact, Wootton shows how these discoveries codified into a social construct and a system of knowledge. Ultimately, he makes clear the link between scientific discovery and the rise of industrialization—and the birth of the modern world we know.

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

**An Amazon Best Book of December 2015:** Here's a big, fat history of science (spanning from 1572 to 1704) with a very clear thesis: that science, and thus the world, entered the modern age during this precise span. Wootton, the Anniversary Professor of History at the University of York, explores primary texts and detailed history to build his argument that Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe's discovery of a new star in 1572 started a scientific revolution, and that Isaac Newton's 1704 publication of *Opticks* sealed it. What happened in between was a series of discoveries—of gunpowder, movable type, the New World, etc.—that altered our perception of *what is* and, through the Newtonian Revolution, opened our minds to *what might be*. The sheer size of the book allows readers to jump around between essays, but taken as a whole *The Invention of Science* builds a powerful, thoroughly fascinating argument ripe for debate. --*Chris Schlueter*

### Review

“Wootton is a dazzling expicator of difficult ideas whose relish for his material is evident.” (Matthew Price, the Boston Globe)

“Wootton tells his tales well and portrays characters vividly. He writes with wit, and his book is full of surprises.” (Robert P. Crease, The Wall Street Journal)

“A masterly account of the ‘scientific revolution.’” (Financial Times' Best Books of 2015)

“New, encyclopedic history.” (Adam Gopnik, the New Yorker)

“Full of insights...even jaded scholars will find it fresh and compelling.” (The Economist)

“...perceptive, thought-provoking, deeply erudite and beautifully written.” (Nature)

“Vibrant and impressive...The Invention of Science is a marvel of expositional clarity” (Steve Donoghue, The Christian Science Monitor)

“Not only a history of science but a revisionist historiography of science” (Steven Poole, The New Statesman)

“A big bang moment” (Lorraine Daston, The Guardian)

“Extremely well researched and documented...This is bound to become a basic reference in the future.” (Adhemar Bultheel, the European Mathematical Society)

“A bracing rediscovery of the marvel that is science” (Booklist, starred review)

“David Wootton’s The Invention of Science is outstanding. It details how, when and why the philosophical, intellectual and practical frameworks of modern science arose, and it sees off relativism in the process. While dealing wonderfully in broad sweeps, it offers a wealth of entertaining details.” (Richard Joyner,

Times Higher Education)

“Fascinating and original ... Wootton is a marvellous writer with an enviously encyclopaedic knowledge, and he has exciting things to say ... a stimulating, well-informed and imaginative account.” (Patricia Fara, Literary Review)

“A superbly lucid examination of a dramatic revolution in human thought that deserves a place on the shelf with Thomas Kuhn and David Deutsch.” (Kirkus Starred Review)

#### From the Back Cover

We live in a world made by science. How and when did this happen? *The Invention of Science* tells the story of the extraordinary intellectual and cultural revolution that gave birth to modern science, and mounts a major challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy of its history.

Before 1492, all significant knowledge was believed to be already available; there was no concept of progress, as people looked to the past, not the future, for understanding. David Wootton argues that the discovery of America demonstrated that new knowledge was possible: indeed, it introduced the very concept of discovery and opened the way to the invention of science.

The first crucial discovery was Tycho Brahe’s nova of 1572: proof that there could be change in the heavens. The invention of the telescope in 1608 rendered the old astronomy obsolete. Evangelista Torricelli’s experiment with the vacuum in 1643 led directly to the triumph of the experimental method in the Royal Society of Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton. By 1750, Newtonianism was being celebrated throughout Europe.

This new science did not consist simply of new discoveries or methods. It relied on a new understanding of what knowledge may be, and with this came a fresh language: *discovery, progress, fact, experiment, hypothesis, theory, laws of nature*. Although almost all these terms existed before 1492, their meanings were radically transformed, and they became tools to think scientifically. Now we all speak this language of science that was invented during the Scientific Revolution.

This revolution had its martyrs (Bruno, Galileo), its heroes (Kepler, Boyle), its propagandists (Voltaire, Diderot), and its patient laborers (Gilbert, Hooke). The new culture led to a new rationalism, killing off alchemy, astrology, and the belief in witchcraft. It also led to the invention of the steam engine and to the first Industrial Revolution. Wootton’s landmark work changes our understanding of how this great transformation came about, and of what science is.

## Users Review

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