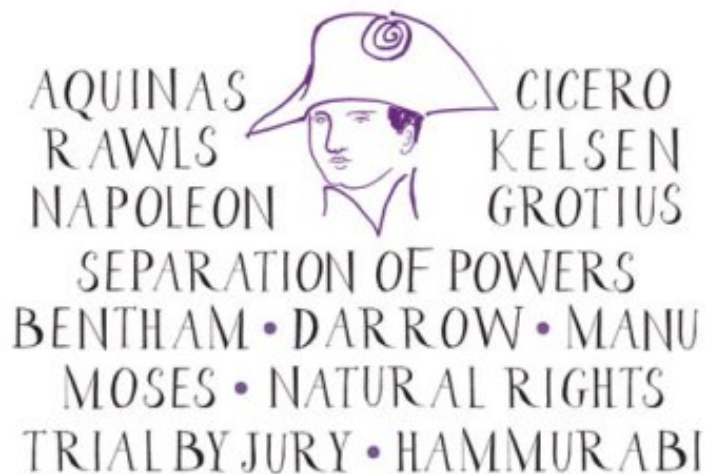
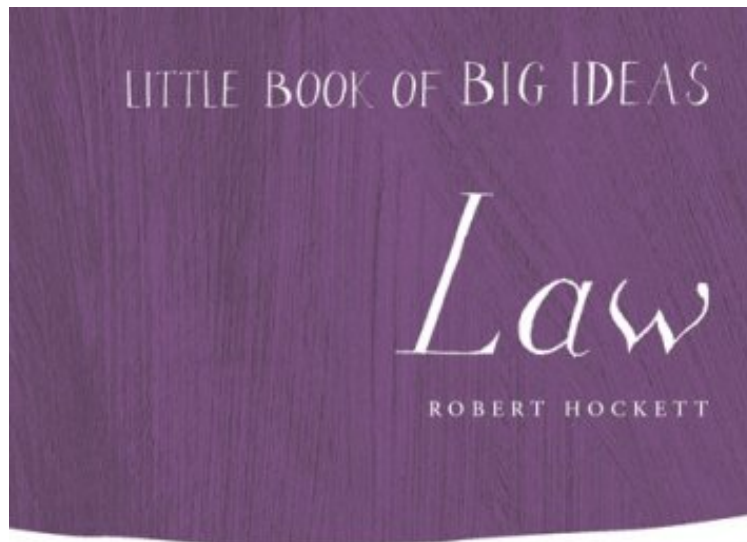


## Little Book of Big Ideas: Law

*Robert Hockett*

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**Robert Hockett : Little Book of Big Ideas: Law** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Little Book of Big Ideas: Law:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Lawcritics Blog: Difficult to Overstate the Continuing Value of this Slim Volume By Blog Reader This book is going to live on my coffee table, in arm's reach, for a very long time to come. It is as difficult to overstate the continuing value of this slim volume as a reference source and, at times, an engaging essay, as it is to exaggerate Robert Hockett's achievement in verbal economy, saying so much in so few words. On first inspection, Little Book of Big Ideas: Law, appears to partake of a rather familiar idiom, similar in format, for example, to the "very brief introduction" series. Measuring just 7.5 x 5 inches, its 129 pages, after

introductory material, consist of exactly 60 two-page entries: 50 biographies of significant lawgivers, legal innovators, and jurists, and ten glosses on various important legal concepts. Predictably, in a book of such limited size and scope, its pages are replete with the obligatory splashy graphics, illustrations and drop quotes. The problem with too-brief introductions, in this reviewer's opinion, is that they seldom work; they achieve brevity only at the cost of informativeness, and the illustrations detract more than they contribute. Professor Hockett's book is not merely an exception to that trend: it rethinks the very genre. In some ways it is a deep meditation on the nature and origin of law, masquerading as the kind of fun, hip and highly accessible fare you expect to encounter at the bookstore cash register. It isn't entirely a masquerade: The book certainly is accessible. But it is so much more than an introduction. The first thing you notice is the book's breadth. Hockett's erudition ranges over time and space, picking up, to be sure, the traditional usual suspects (Hammurabi, Moses, Solon) down through to the present and recent past (Clive Stafford Smith, Ronald Dworkin) by way of some predictable intermediaries (Sir Edward Coke, Thomas Jefferson), but also pulls in matter from more distant traditions (Manu, Confucius, Muhammad). But what makes this book remarkable is not so much its inclusiveness as its depth and vision. Through page after page of insightful observation, the reader begins to gain a sense of the unifying themes that span legal traditions of all stripes. Consider the entry on constitutionalism and the rule of law. Hockett notes natural-law parallels among the Greek "Logos," the Chinese "Tao," the related Confucian "Li," and the Indian "dharma," and compellingly ties all these to the concepts of constitutionalism and the accountability of government to the governed. Historical evidence is found early in the Hebraic traditions (Samuel anoints Saul), but also in the later European practice of coronation and excommunication of king by pope, or in the Chinese "zhengming," whereby sage dethrones ruler. That our own modern practices may be lineal descendents of these is taken up later, in the entry on separation of powers and judicial review--concepts that harken to those same early issues of governmental accountability to higher rule. Today, the mantle of cleric has shifted to the secular judge, whose "continuing practice of donning long gowns," Hockett points out, "serves as a vestigial reminder of the ecclesial descent of their office." (Reflect on this: When you see Chief Justice Roberts swear in President Obama, you witness a ritual descendent from Samuel's anointing of Saul!) The book is as suffused with insights into the continuity of law through time (for example the relationship between Augustinian thinking and that of the modern positivists, contrasted with a Thomistic philosophy of which, it is argued, Finnis and other natural-law torch bearers are in some respects the modern intellectual heirs) as it is with revelations of the parallelism of laws across legal traditions (including, for instance, an entry on Muhammad, since "Islam does not distinguish between religious ... and legal life"--a notion made perhaps less exotic when you reflect again on our American judges' long gowns). Whatever else you may say of observations such as these, they are far deeper, richer, and more thought-provoking than what one would reasonably expect of a mere introduction. Buy this book. Read it cover to cover in one sitting if you like, or savor its bite-sized two-page entries in 60-second increments over a month of coffee breaks. Either way, don't shelve it when you've finished: you're going to want this book within arm's reach.

**Little Big of Big Ideas:** Law distills the essential history of two millennia of legal thought and practice through the lives of 50 great legal minds. The great trial lawyers, judges, codifiers, and legal philosophers are all introduced, along with 10 legal principles that underpin modern systems of justice. Find out where the law comes from, the people who developed it, and what justifies it. Discover the great activist lawyers, the defenders of human rights, and founders of international law. From Hammurabi and the legal codes of ancient Babylon to the groundbreaking legal theorists of the Enlightenment and contemporary debate about the origins and extent of human rights, the **Little Book of Big Ideas: Law** charts the developments of the legal systems that rule our lives today.

"These books are good starting places for research." *School Library Journal*