“rests upon genuine knowledge of reality” (26). But the Florentine Machiavelli believed “the end justified the means” (81) because humans are “ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain” (82). Gerrard and Murphy rightly warn that, while some of these thinkers’ political ideas are idealistic or obsolete in today’s political world, other insights retain their relevance in the twenty-first century. Although the authors attempted to include a few non-European thinkers in the mix, the collection remains mostly Eurocentric.

The modernist section, the largest in the book, covers the major English, French and German thinkers, as well as the first European feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, thinkers who have shaped the modern world as we know it. In this section, we get the gist of the major ideas behind liberal democracy, utilitarianism, capitalism, constitutional monarchies, Marxism, feminism, as well as the motivations behind the major revolutions in European and American history. Political thinkers didn’t only debate the realities of their present but projected the possibilities of a just, rational and peaceful future for human beings, as they simultaneously reached into the past. The reader gets a glimpse of a time continuum where the past, present and future are meshed together. We discover that the American Declaration of Independence and Thomas Jefferson’s Constitution, drafted in the late 1800s, reach back to the seventeenth-century ideas of the English philosopher John Locke. Most notably, the authors tell us that Locke’s major ideas were instrumental as the American Founding Fathers were laying the groundwork for their independent republic. These concepts are: religious freedom, a limited constitutional government based on the consent of the people and protection of property, and the separation of church and state. Some of these topics have resurfaced in modern-day America and Europe.

Gerrard and Murphy bring the discussion of how to be political up to date by including three women and a distinguished philosopher-turned-environmentalist to the list of world thinkers. How to Think Politically would be a valuable primer for the general reader and for introductory courses in political science and international politics.


Age of Coexistence offers a fresh look at the making of the modern Arab world. Given the plethora of studies that focus on contemporary wars and sectarian violence, this well-researched study employs Arabic and Western resources that challenge the prevailing perceptions about the region and its people. Ussama Makdisi conjoins the basic centrality of religion in the Mashriq with the idea of the process
of building, what he calls the “ecumenical frame.” Briefly, the term refers to a
denunciation of “religious fanaticism,” an idea that attempts to reconcile secu-
lar political equality within the Islamic Ottoman Empire governed by Muslim
law, to uphold equality among all its citizens despite their diverse ethnicities and
religions, Muslims, Christians and Jews, and to safeguard both the political and
legal order of secularity and gendered “personal status.” This recalibrated context,
according to Makdisi, depicts the intellectual and political transformation liter-
ate Arab subjects under the Ottomans sought to explore secularism and religious
coexistence for a modern nation-state, which continued after the Ottoman Empire
fell to colonial Britain and France, who divided the spoils of Empire between them
and planted the roots of European Zionism in Palestine. The book is in two parts,
with an introduction and epilogue. Part I deals with the Ottoman Empire up to the
breakdown of the imperial system in the nineteenth century, and part II traces the
history of the Mashriq in the period after the colonial powers defeated the Otto-
mans by 1917. For reasons of space, this brief review will focus on part I of the
book and highlight a few major points discussed in part II.

Chapter 1 lays out the workings of the ecumenical coexistence before the nine-
teenth century under the supremacy of the Muslim Ottomans in their multi-ethnic,
multi-religious imperium. Makdisi argues that imperial Istanbul was able to dis-
tribute privileges that afforded civil and religious autonomy to all their subjects in
return for loyalty and obedience, without evading cultural differences or denying
the existence of discriminatory Muslim law. Until the rise of nationalism, secular-
ism and the call for nation-states in Europe, there was no ideology regarding equal
rights, citizenship or the Jewish question: tolerance existed side-by-side with coer-
cion within the larger ethos of coexistence.

Chapter 2 examines how the rise of nationalism in the Balkans and Anatolia,
and the interventions of imperial Europeans on behalf of non-Muslims threatened
Ottoman supremacy, an issue that would also seep into the Levant. Consequently,
Tanzimat were introduced. They were non-discriminatory reforms to counter
European interventions on behalf of Christians across both the northern parts of
the Ottoman Empire and the Arabic-speaking Mashriq. Makdisi says that the
Tanzimat were ambiguous, implemented differently across the empire. For exam-
ple, in Mount Lebanon, where the sole anti-Christian sectarian violence took place
in 1860, the region was decreed autonomous, a Mutasarifîyya, to be administered
by a quota system of religious factions. Due to European interventions, this quota
system was politically rigid, made to preserve sectarian divisions rather than ecu-
menical coexistence.

Chapter 3 discusses the divisions that came to the fore in the nineteenth cen-
tury between the northern part of empire and the Levant. While the fight for
national independence took hold of the Balkans and Anatolia, resulting in outright wars in countries like Greece and Bulgaria, the Levant did not experience such nationalism. Makdisi narrates how these conditions gave rise to Ottoman Muslim nationalism, leading to the major ethnic cleansing of Armenian Christians beginning in the 1890s. Paradoxically, the Arab-speaking Mashriq experienced what is usually referred to as the *Nahda*, a renaissance in education, writing, translations and culture in general. The author contends that the “nahda ecumenism emerged as a counterpoint to Turkish nationalism, and that both manifested the limits and possibilities of a *modern* nationalist age” (21).

Part II of the *Age of Coexistence* explores how the colonial interventions in the Mashriq shattered the existing ecumenical framework. Despite claiming religious freedom and self-determination, Britain and France supported religious sectarianism. The Arab-speaking Mashriq, now under colonial mandate systems, had to develop and adapt to new contradictions within the new political system of “divide and rule.” The ultimate destruction of ecumenical coexistence originated when Arab was pitched against Jew with the forceful implementation of European political Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Makdisi juxtaposes the effects of the colonial Zionist project on Palestinians and Jews alike. European Zionism, which arose in racialized Europe, did not only cause the Nakba by displacing Palestinian Muslims and Christians from their homeland. But it also displaced the Jewish Arabs across the Mashriq: “The destruction of the idea that one could be simultaneously Arab and Jewish still scars the Arab world” (22).

The epilogue discusses the post-’48 period when the ecumenical frame continued to be developed and modified in the midst of the transformations of the modern Arab world: politically, socially, economically and technologically. Makdisi argues that, amidst colonial interventions, which nourished sectarian divisions that resulted in the rule of unequal sectarian regimes, twentieth-century Arabs persevered in their efforts to sustain an ecumenical frame, albeit a conservative one, that upholds political independence, equal citizenship alongside religious differences and gendered “personal status” (10).

*Age of Coexistence* is an outstanding study with insight about the agency of Arab intellectuals, thinkers and people at large who, despite twentieth-century local and global violence, persist in struggling for a better world. This is a must-read for all scholars and students of Middle East and cultural studies.