

of this debate, and why Weismann's contribution was so important, and divisive. Interestingly, Weismann, considered by many as second only to Darwin in his contribution to evolutionary theory, does not appear to make the same rhetorical use of Malthus that had been so crucial to Darwin. Weismann's germ-plasm theory and famous experiments on mice were explicitly directed at refuting the theory of acquired characteristics, representing a genuinely scientific, and not political, contribution to the debate. This shift in focus seems to represent a turning point in this narrative, with evolutionary science moving away from its political roots by the end of the century. However, this rupture was by no means final, as Hale explains in the last chapter; evolutionary theory would go on to play a significant role in the rise of Eugenic thinking in England, including the work of Francis Galton and Karl Pearson on differential class fertility and the supposed degeneration of the English people.

This work represents an ambitious and, on the whole, successful analysis of how the Malthusian notion of struggle first influenced Darwin's thinking on evolution, and, through this, the wider nineteenth-century debates on society and the individual's place within it. As alluded to by the title, *Political Descent*, this is in many ways the genealogy of that idea, which Hale follows over the generations as it is appropriated in new ways within different contexts. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that as we follow this lineage the story becomes increasingly complicated, as the influence of the original idea wanes and is eventually almost unrecognizable. The unavoidable increase in scope does at times weaken the force of Hale's main argument, and with so much historiography from a wide range of fields being presented, some errors are inevitable. Another risk of this kind of intellectual history is the imposition of too strict a narrative structure on the history of ideas. One of the weaker points of the book is Hale's discussion of William Morris and George Bernard Shaw's rejection of Malthusianism in chapter 6. Presenting the utopian views of these thinkers as purely 'anti-Malthusian' is missing the broader point that these thinkers were responding directly to the utopian visions of William Godwin and the Marquis de Condorcet (to whom Malthus, of course, was responding with his essay). Rather than a linear story, this suggests a debate that had come full circle since the late eighteenth century, with Malthus representing a midpoint and not an origin. Despite these issues, this is an impressive work of scholarship, and Hale's narrative of political and intellectual descent deepens our understanding of this dynamic intellectual period and its main actors.

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Abdul Azim Islahi, *Economic Thinking of Arab Muslim Writers During the Nineteenth Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. xi, 165, \$105. ISBN 978-1-137-55320-1.

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This is a very welcome contribution in an area that has been largely ignored in the global history of economic thought. Scholars of medieval Islamic economic thought have made valuable efforts in the past two decades to fill Joseph Schumpeter's famous

“Great Gap.” However, as the author also states, there is still a considerable gap in our knowledge about the history of Islamic economic thought itself, especially between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. Following recent volumes on Ottoman economic thought by other authors, Abdul Azim Islahi’s book is a harbinger of a growing interest in, and knowledge on, the evolution of economic thinking in the Islamic world in this period.

Abdul Azim Islahi has published many works on the history and theory of Islamic economics. In his earlier historical works, he focused on different periods and figures in the long history of Islamic economic thinking. In this book, he turns to the nineteenth century, when Islamic economic thought went through a considerable change under European impact.

The main objective of the book is to provide a survey of economic ideas put forth by prominent nineteenth-century Arab-Muslim intellectuals of various social, intellectual, and geographical backgrounds, from conservative religious scholars to reformist statesmen and literati, and from Yemen to Tunis. The intellectuals in question are not professional economists, and they did not write treatises on economics. Therefore, what we read about is not Islamic “economics” in a contemporary sense. These writers touched upon various economic issues in their religious, political, and literary works, with references to Islamic scripture as well as modern European economic ideas and institutions. In this regard, the author investigates the early and rather unorganized roots of Islamic economics that emerged in the twentieth century.

The book consists of seven chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. After the short introduction, the second chapter provides the reader with a political and economic historical background about the nineteenth-century Arab world. Chapters 3 to 6 focus on nine representative Arab-Muslim intellectuals’ economic ideas, from religious scholars like Al-Shawkani of Yemen and Ibn Abidin of Syria to literary figures and journalists such as ‘Abd-Allah al-Nadim and Ali Mubarak of Egypt. In this respect, the book provides the reader with a wide range of nineteenth-century Arab-Islamic perspectives on economic issues such as taxation, money, insurance, banking, interest, poverty, agricultural reform, and economic development. The author includes a glossary of Islamic terms at the end of the book. This is especially useful for the readers who have no background in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

Each chapter begins with brief biographies of the Muslim intellectuals in question. Then, the author traces important economic themes and concepts in their writings. Since the chapters are divided according to the educational and professional backgrounds of the intellectuals, it is easy to see the similarities and differences between economic thinking of traditionally minded Islamic scholars and that of reformist statesmen and literati. These features make the book a very useful introductory reference for undergraduate and graduate students, and for scholars who are interested in the history of Islamic economic thought and nineteenth-century Arab intellectual history at a broader level. On the other hand, this is a short book, and a considerable portion of the text covers economic and political conditions of the age as well as the biographies of the intellectuals in question. Therefore, the space remaining for economic ideas themselves is rather limited. Moreover, the parts on economic ideas are mostly encyclopedic. The author lists and summarizes some key points and notions in his subjects’ writings without incisive theoretical and intertextual analyses of these ideas. In most cases, the author does not comment on to what extent these “Islamic”

economic ideas in question are shaped by Islamic scripture, European economic theories, or simply common sense.

Writing a separate chapter (chapter 2) on historical conditions to contextualize and historicize the ideas is an important service to the readers. However, the author's historical narrative, both in chapter 2 and in the rest of the book, is problematic. First of all, the author adopts the old Orientalist historical perspective that reads modern Middle Eastern history as an awakening from a centuries-long deep sleep as a result of the European intellectual and political impact. At times, the author makes sweeping generalizations about the alleged static historical conditions in the region. He states, for example, "During the early nineteenth century, the intellectual condition of the Arab world was not that different from those of previous centuries" (p. 12). It is undeniable that the nineteenth century was an age of rapid change in the Arab world as well as in the rest of the world. However, this does not entail that there had been no change, intellectually or otherwise, over the previous centuries. The dynamics of change in these centuries were surely different from those in the nineteenth century, and scholars of the early-modern Middle East provided ample research on the subject, which the author has overlooked.

Another serious problem with the author's historical explanations is that the author, in the analytical chapters, repeats the (mostly normative and politically motivated) historical narratives of the intellectuals he studies, instead of contextualizing these narratives and ideas with the help of recent academic scholarship on modern Middle Eastern history. The author, thereby, misleads the reader about the historical context by taking his subjects' arguments about their own age for granted. Moreover, the author, at times (e.g., pp. 50, 63), does not make stylistic touches to separate his own historical narrative from that of his subjects, thereby causing further confusion.

As the author notes, covering the entire century for the wide geography of the Arab world in such a short introductory book is an utterly difficult task. Therefore, he chooses some "representative personalities" to "present ... a sketch" of nineteenth-century Arab-Islamic economic thought (p. 5). This leaves us with a need for prospective studies on other Arab intellectuals—preferably including non-Muslims who played similarly important roles in social and political change. Moreover, as the author also wishes, we need more detailed studies on the intellectuals covered in this study, since the book provides us only with very short summaries of their ideas on various topics, rather than presenting in-depth historical and theoretical analyses of these ideas. Besides, despite some notes in passing about some intellectuals' being influenced by European sources, in many cases the author does not specify these sources. As a researcher who worked on nineteenth-century intellectual history in the Middle East, I am fully aware of the difficulty of tracing the original sources of an idea in a world without strict academic rules about citation. However, careful close-textual reading and intertextual analyses with prominent European sources of the era could provide us with valuable clues about the sources of influence.

Another important subject that is not covered in the book is a discussion on the (translated or penned) texts on economics, and the condition of economic education in the Arab world. The author mentions two early works on economics in Arabic (p. 25), but does not go into analyzing their content and intellectual impact. Therefore, further research on the nineteenth-century economics literature in Arabic is crucial to understanding the role of post-Smithian economic literature in the shaping of Islamic

economic thinking of the era. Similarly, economics education, however weak and unsystematic it was, might have also played important roles in the shaping of the change in economic thinking in the Arab-Islamic world, from traditional Islamic moral economy to modern Islamic economics.

All in all, Islahi's book is an important contribution that, it is hoped, will inspire the development of a new literature on nineteenth-century Islamic economic thinking and on the early history of post-Smithian economics in the Arab world. Further studies along these lines will bring us closer to having a truly global history of economic thought.

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François Allisson, *Value and Prices in Russian Economic Thought: A Journey Inside the Russian Synthesis, 1890–1920* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 202, \$160. ISBN 978-1-138-83977-9.

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This high-quality book is devoted to the history of one theoretical concept that appeared in Russian economic science at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. It describes the attempts of Russian economists to synthesize (combine) classical political economy and marginalism, and particularly to unite the labor theory of value and marginal utility. The author focuses on Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky's works (chs. 4 and 5), and then analyzes the transformation of his approach in later theories of Nikolay Shaposhnikov and Leonid Yurovsky (ch. 6, pp. 145–164). The related ideas of Vladimir Dmitriev, Vladislav Bortkievich, Evgeny Slutsky, and of some other Russian economists of that time are also under investigation (ch. 6, pp. 134–145).

All these conceptions were grouped by the author under the notion of “Russian synthesis.” The specific aim of this project was to reveal the common features of all these conceptions and discover (identify) their specifically Russian historical and intellectual background.

In this connection it seems reasonable that the author begins his study by analyzing a wide range of related issues. He clearly describes general aspects of the relationship between value and price as it was presented in the European economic literature at the time (ch. 1, pp. 14–22), paying special attention to the “transformation problem” and European (primarily Marshallian) version of synthesis. Then he tries to determine the main features of the Russian intellectual tradition and the way it was formed towards the end of the nineteenth century (ch. 1, pp. 22–30). In this regard and following the author (p. 5), we can confirm that this book represents the history of economic *thought* rather than the economic *analysis*, as could logically be assumed from the book's title.

The next two chapters are devoted to the history of assimilation of classical political economy (ch. 2) and marginalism (ch. 3) in Russia. The author focuses on the transformation of original conceptions and the changes that took place in the process of their distribution. As to political economy, the author insists on the crucial role of Nikolay