philosophy, Wagner’s research focuses on the comparative analysis of both social and political forms of modernity. In *Modernity: Understanding the Present*, Wagner presents an overview of the social theory that engages with the concept of modernity by analysing the changing definition of the term ‘modernity’ in its historical and contemporary contexts. The work creates a strong foundation for the interpretation of modernity in the 1960s and its post-1979 reassessment, when a sense of superiority of the West during the Cold War era divided the world into three domains: the liberal-democratic industrial capitalism of the First World, the Soviet-style socialism of the Second World and the Third World of so-called ‘developing countries’.

Wagner divides the book into two parts. In the first part, he takes a revisionist approach to Western modernity by re-theorising its relation to the Enlightenment, the French and American revolutions, the Protestant Reformations and the worldview prevailing during the Cold War era. The second part analyses Western modernity’s association with capitalism and democracy in contemporary expression. Although the use of extensive subtitles allows for a better understanding of the material and summaries of Wagner’s findings, the book fails to clarify how post-modernity exposes itself in liberal democracies, and whether modernity refers to an abstract imagined space. It would have been helpful to address this question explicitly by inviting a conversation about theoretical and practical differences between modernity as an idea and modernisation as a process.

Overall, the book discusses interpretations of the term ‘modernity’ and its application to global societies in a historical sense e.g. the European and non-European trajectories of modernity and varieties of post-colonial situations. Wagner’s interpretation, as influenced by the philosophical and sociological theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Immanuel Kant, helps us understand the historical roots of contemporary tension between democracy and democratisation. It is clear through Wagner’s writing style and organisation that the book is intended for fellow scholars and advanced-level graduate students rather than undergraduate students or the general public, although the contents do provide a stimulating read for all.

Mehmet Karabela
(Ipek University, Ankara)


Gender has been largely overlooked in much of traditional and contemporary political science. Nevertheless, politics as a real life practice and as an academic science is significantly gendered – the most obvious example being the continuing male domination in both politics and the political science academy. By contrast, this handbook makes gender the point of departure for thinking about political science. The roots of the core assumptions about what constitutes politics go back to the work of political theorists such as John Locke, who analytically separated the public and the private sphere, thereby constituting the private sphere ‘as lying outside the political arena and therefore not form[ing] part of the legitimate subject matter of the discipline’ (p. 7).

The notion of a separation of the public and the private persists today and significantly affects the way economies are structured and economic value is calculated, as well as what and who counts as political and as politics. It was feminist advocates and academics who first pushed for a definition of politics that encompassed ‘the personal’ and ‘the private’, including male violence against women, unpaid care work, sexuality, access to abortion and reproduction. However, this comprehensive handbook beautifully demonstrates that the discipline of gender and politics is not merely about sexuality, the body, work, motherhood and violence. Gender operates along institutionalised relations of power and violence and along several interrelated dimensions such as sex, class, sexuality and race; and it encompasses the organisation of citizenship, intimacy and labour.

The handbook captures this complexity and multi-dimensionality in 34 chapters written by established scholars in the field and is ordered into seven broad sections. The first section outlines the main concepts of gender and politics as well as its specific contribution to methods and methodology. The second section focuses on body politics, including chapters on reproductive rights, gendered violence, sexuality and heteronormativity. A third section discusses the genderedness of the political economy, looking at
issues connected to production and reproduction. Given the scholarship’s close link to the practice of politics and feminism in particular it should not come as a surprise that an entire section is dedicated to civil society and feminist organising for change. The next two sections engage with classical political institutions, systems and structures: the chapters of the fifth section zoom in on participation and representation in political parties, electoral systems, judicial politics and courts; while the sixth section examines the gendered nature of the state, governance and policy making. The final section engages with the dilemmas of (gender) equality and the meaning of citizenship and ‘the nation’. All in all, this handbook provides a nuanced state of the art of the rich field of gender and politics for both established and starting political scientists.

Petra Debusscher
(University of Antwerp)

Britain and Ireland


The years between 1918 and 1945, as Stuart Ball notes in this book, was one of four periods in the age of modern political parties in which the Conservative Party dominated British politics. How they came to exercise and maintain this dominance is an important theme of this book, which offers a comprehensive examination of the party’s organisation, operation and direction between the two world wars. In a series of topical chapters, Ball details the party’s structure from the constituency associations to the Central Office, the composition of its parliamentary membership, and the leadership and how it managed the party within the context of governing the country.

What emerges is a picture of a party that was well positioned to exploit the beneficial circumstances before it. The opposition during the period was in flux, with the Liberal Party being supplanted by the Labour Party as the Conservatives’ main challenger. The decline of Liberalism nationally, and the geographically and socially constrained appeal of Labour, meant that the Conservative Party enjoyed a unique status as the only political party with a truly national appeal. This was reflected not only in their strength among the middle class and the rural regions, but in their success in courting working-class voters as well, which was indispensable to gaining the party’s parliamentary majorities. Ball sees several factors playing a role in this success, including unity of belief, superior organisation and a moderate strategy in national politics. Together, they gave the Conservatives a focus and direction that ensured their dominance throughout the 1920s and 1930s – a dominance that Ball suggests would have continued well into the 1940s but for the disruptive effects of the Second World War.

Such a summary can only begin to do justice to this detailed and wide-ranging work, one that reflects the enormous amount of research and analysis undertaken in its writing. Comparisons with John Ramsden’s earlier study of the Conservatives during this period, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin (published in 1978), are inevitable, and in nearly every respect Ball meets or exceeds the high bar set by that book. With his expansion on Ramsden’s work on constituency associations and his inclusion of an examination of the shared principles which united Conservatives, Ball has written a work that will serve historians and political scientists alike as an invaluable resource for understanding the Conservative Party during the interwar era.

Mark Klobas
(Scottsdale Community College, Arizona)


The Cultural Politics of Austerity is a critical and novel contribution to a contemporary debate of crucial importance: how the meaning of ‘austerity’, as something that is related but different to government spending cuts, is negotiated in everyday life. Although the volume is explicitly framed primarily as a contribution to memory studies, Rebecca Bramall’s arguments will clearly be of interest beyond that field as well. In particular, it will be of interest to those who believe