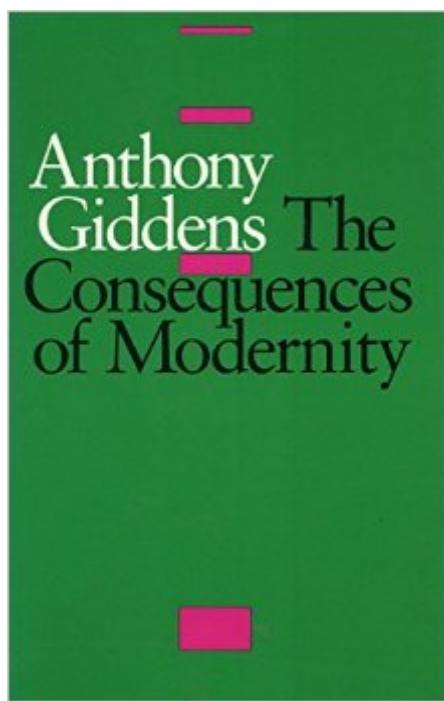


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The Consequences Of Modernity



Synopsis

In this major theoretical statement, the author offers a new and provocative interpretation of institutional transformations associated with modernity. What is modernity? The author suggests, "As a first approximation, let us simply say the following: 'modernity' refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence." We do not as yet, the author argues, live in a post-modern world. The distinctive characteristics of our major social institutions in the closing years of the twentieth century suggest that, rather than entering into a period of post-modernity, we are moving into a period of "high modernity" in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before. A post-modern social universe may eventually come into being, but this as yet lies on the other side of the forms of social and cultural organization that currently dominate world history. In developing a fresh characterization of the nature of modernity, the author concentrates on the themes of security versus danger and of trust versus risk. Modernity is a double-edged phenomenon. The development of modern social institutions has created vastly greater opportunities for human beings to enjoy a secure and rewarding existence than in any type of pre-modern system. But modernity also has a somber side that has become very important in the present century, such as the frequently degrading nature of modern industrial work, the growth of totalitarianism, the threat of environmental destruction, and the alarming development of military power and weaponry. The book builds upon the author's previous theoretical writings and will be of great interest to those who have followed his work through the years. However, this book covers issues the author has not previously analyzed and extends the scope of his work into areas of pressing practical concern.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ostensibly, Giddens offers up *Consequences of Modernity* as an answer or alternative to Lyotard's version of postmodernism. Thus, even though Giddens only makes direct reference to Lyotard on a few pages, Lyotard's "The Postmodern Condition" is still a prerequisite for reading Giddens's *Consequences*. In Lyotard's postmodern world there are only lesser narratives which cannot be reintegrated. There are no longer any grand narratives to explain life, the universe and everything. The disparate narratives no longer speak the same language; they are no longer part of the same story. The construction and completion of the grand narrative was the mission of Modernity. This was the project that Bacon and the later the Encyclopedists believed in. But rifts have formed and there is no longer any unifying theme. The realization of the impossibility of a single unifying grand narrative results in the acceptance of the epistemological fragmentation that is the Postmodern condition. Giddens disagrees with Lyotard. He considers the contemporary world to be the result of the ongoing unfolding of Modern themes. Instead of pointing to a shift from Modern to Postmodern Giddens points back to the shift from the Traditional to the Modern. The consequences of Modernity are still coming to fruition. We are not entering a new Postmodern Era but rather we are in the process of finally fully leaving behind the Traditional era. Giddens describes a number of discontinuities between the Traditional and the Modern. There was a shift in our understanding and experience of space and time. In the Modern era time and space became bounded and measured. Space is now meticulously mapped out. Time is now strictly kept track of down to the millisecond. This was not the case in the previous age.

When evaluating Anthony Giddens's *The Consequences of Modernity*, it is useful to recognize that it was first presented as a series of lectures in 1988, when the post-modern perspective was still fairly fresh and influential. Its proponents sought to persuade us that a qualitative change in world view had occurred, with epistemological and practical consequences more dramatic than, say, the transformation from feudalism to capitalism beginning in Fourteenth Century Europe. Some of the central tenets of the post-modern perspective were not new, including radical anti-foundationalism and thoroughgoing decentering, both of which contributed to putting each of us on his or her own, uncertain of the rectitude of any moral code or ethical standards. We found ourselves alone in a chaotic world where men and women had no special claim to privileged status. Beyond that,

post-modernism made the unsettling judgment that all good-faith truth claims were equally worthy of consideration, meaning that science was just one endeavor among many and should not be granted special credibility. An oft cited concept was discontinuity, meaning not only that history was not teleological, but that efforts to find consistency over time resulted in ill-conceived narratives, sloughing over ruptures and breaks that gave the lie to claims of interpretable unity. The world was an epistemological mess, and little or nothing could be known with certainty. Insofar as the ambient context provided a social and cultural home for mankind, it was a frighteningly unstable one, where identities were inherently precarious, and there was nothing to grab on to that would introduce even a modicum of knowledge-based security.

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