
An analytical review of the research paper: ((The Consequences of Modernity)) by British sociologist Anthony Giddens

مراجعة تحليلية للورقة البحثية ((عواقب الحداثة)) لعالم الاجتماع البريطاني أنتوني جيدينز

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This paper has Prepared by Anthony Giddens for the Conference: “11th Annual Global Development”, California: Stanford University, 15-18 April, 1990. Revised July 17, 1990. Anthony Giddens, Baron Giddens (born 8 January 1938) is a British sociologist who is known for his theory of structuration and his holistic view of modern societies. He is considered to be one of the most prominent modern contributors in the field of sociology; he concerns modernity, globalization and politics, especially the impact of modernity on social and personal life. Giddens's ambition is both to recast social theory and to re-examine our understanding of the development and trajectory of modernity.

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Introduction

This paper attempts offer a new and provocative interpretation of institutional transformations associated with modernity. What is modernity? Also it examines the nature and consequences of modernity by looking at major discontinuities separating modern social institutions from the traditional (or pre-modern) social orders. The disjuncture stems from the following: the pace of change (as in the unprecedented rapidity of change in modern technology), the scope of change (as in the extent to which change has affected the world), and the nature of social institutions not found in pre-modern societies such as nation-state, dependence on inanimate power sources, commodification of products and wage labor, predominance of urban life forms and so on, which, of course, are contingent on capitalism, industrialism, surveillance, and military power.

In developing a fresh characterization of the nature of modernity, the author concentrates on the themes of security versus danger and o 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.

What is modernity?

The author believes that ‘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.” In understanding the nature of modernity, Giddens dwells lengthily on the issues of trust in respect to disembodied institutions and the questions of security, risk, and danger in the modern world. Modernity, for Giddens, is a double-edged phenomenon if not paradoxical. One can see the benefits and advantages modern social institutions have created, which have affected the world on a global scale. On the other hand, modernity has led to problems that are increasingly becoming very significant today, such as the degrading nature of modern industrial work, the growth of totalitarianism, the threat of environmental destruction, and the alarming development of military power and weaponry. How far can we...harness the juggernaut, or at least direct it in such a way as to minimize the dangers and maximize the opportunities which modernity offers to us? is the challenge we all are facing.

Giddens argues that modernity involves a profound reorganization of time and space in social and cultural life. This is spelled out in his discussion on “time-space distancing” and “disembodying.” According to Giddens, social relations of pre-modern societies predominantly are largely confined to a face-to-face interaction in a given locale. However, the advent of modernity undermines social interaction in pre-modern societies by “fostering relations between ‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction”; in other words, it disembeds or lifts out social relations from local contexts of interaction and rearranges them across indefinite spans of time-space. Reflexivity is another defining feature that separates modernity from pre-modern societies.

The institutional dimensions of modernity

In analysis of institutional dimensions of modernity, Giddens negated reductionism holding that there is a single dominant institution for modernity. He argued that modernity is not simply equal to capitalism or industrialism.

Giddens developed a set of four dimensions of modernity. First of all, he distinguished industrialism and capitalism, both of which are among the four

dimensions. The defining characteristics of capitalism developed by Giddens are not much different from the Marxist ones: commodity production, wage labor, competitive market and price signal; whereas those of industrialism are inanimate energy, machine production and "regularized social organization of production". Author regarded capitalist society as a subtype of modern societies, and he gave four institutional features of this subtype:

- (a) The economic order;
- (b) The insulation of economy and other social institutions;
- (c) The separation of polity and economy;
- (d) The state's reliance upon capital accumulation.

Capitalism is international in scope from the beginning due to its expansionist character. However, capitalism is territorially confined by nation-state system and subject to corresponding coordinated administration. Administration depends upon surveillance, which is the third dimension. Surveillance can take such obvious forms like prisons, but more probably make use of the control of information. The fourth dimension is the control of the means of violence, which implies nation-states monopolize the means of violence. And military affairs become industrialized: weaponry, technology, organization and knowledge are systematically produced.

The dimensions of globalization

In this paper Giddens moved on to a discussion of globalization and modernity. He held that "modernity is inherently globalizing). For sociology, undue reliance upon the notion of "society" should be replaced by time-space distinction. Only so can we better understand the relations between local transformation and globalization, the latter part of which means the global spread of modernity and the networking dynamism. Globalization may either diminish or intensify local nationalism in different contexts. The stretching process of globalization across time and space often stimulate more concerns on local autonomy and identity.

Giddens regard the "embracing conception of globalization relationship" and an awareness of the particularity of modernity as two of the contributions made by Wallerstein in his world-system theory. As Giddens interpreted, Wallerstein held that the pre-modern world economic relations were based on the administrative capacities of several great empires, whereas the world capitalist economy is integrated by international economic relations rather than a political center. But I think this understanding is questionable because:

- A. Ancient China in Han Dynasty had maintained "Silk Road" trade with Roman Empire for a long time, in which large parts of the trading road was not directly administrated by Han Empire or Roman Empire,
- B. The early expansion of capitalism from Europe to Asia cannot be sustained were it not backed by the overwhelming military power of British Empire,

C. In the face of communist spread starting from the Soviet Union after World War II, the U. S. replaced the U. K. to be the political center of world capitalism and strived to restore capitalism on the ruins in Western Europe and Japan.

Giddens listed four dimensions of globalization: world capitalist economy, nation-state system, world military order and international division of labor. Transnational corporations cannot rival nation-state in terms of territoriality and control of means of violence despite the startling economic capacities of some empire-like transnational corporations like Microsoft and Toyota. Although the power of any nation-state is strongly conditioned by its wealth, the nation-state is not a pure economic machine, and other concerns like fostering national culture and geopolitical involvements have never been erased from its agenda.

Trust and risk in conditions of modernity

Giddens introduced the notion "re-embedding", which means "the re-appropriation or recasting of disembodied social relations", the purpose of which is to pinpoint the disembodied in the local space-time structure. Then he distinguished two types of re-embedding: face work commitments and faceless commitments.

Then he moved on to an analysis of trust in abstract system, in which "trustworthiness" is the focal conception. Trustworthiness exists in two types of relations: intimates and acquaintances that have kept contacts for a long time and affirmed the other party's reliability. The trust in abstract systems does not necessarily include direct contact with the operators or representatives of the system; nonetheless, usually lay persons do have encounters with those people, for example, a medical consultation with a doctor, or meetings with a lawyer regarding a legal case.

Giddens regarded trust as a persistent and recurrent human need with regard to the familiarity and reliability of others and the social and material environments. Ontological security and routine and closely connected due to the pervasiveness of habit. Although routine is relaxing for our day-to-day life, it also demands "constant vigilance" on a level of practical consciousness so as to maintain itself and avoid misunderstanding, puzzlement and other bad feelings, which may emerge when routine is violated or neglected. In short, careful maintained and continuously sustained routine is the basis for the daily updating of trust.

Giddens stress that in pre-modern societies; ontological security is connected with contexts of trust and forms of risk, and can be precisely positioned in localized time-space framework. There are four major contexts of trust: kinship, local community, religion and tradition.

Giddens depicted the risk profile of modernity composed of seven points. The first four points are with regard to the objective distribution of risk, whereas the remaining three points are about the experience and understanding of risk.

The first point is the globalizing intensity of risk. Along with the spread of world-wide risk, there is no "others" who can be stay out of the global risk profile, for example, in the face of the threat of nuclear war. Second point is the global extension of risk, which makes the global risk beyond the control of any specific individual or group. Third point is regarding the changed relations between human beings and physical environment, namely, the "socialized nature", which itself is the source of a variety of new risks. Fourth point is the institutionalized risk environments such as stock market. These two together concern the changed type of risk environments. Fifth point is the good awareness and recognition of risk by both experts and lay persons, which even gives rise to psychological numbing.

Subsequently Giddens discussed the fourfold adaptive reaction to the risk profile in modern society. The first is "pragmatic acceptance", which focuses on short-term benefits, because the overall trajectory of modernity cannot be controlled. The second is "sustained optimism", sort of continuation of the Enlightenment, which obtain its optimism from the faith in providential reasons, technological advancements and some religious ideals. The third is "cynical pessimism", which directly concerns the anxiety deriving from risks. The last approach is "radical engagement", which implies "practical contestation towards perceived sources of danger", in order to minimize or even transcend their impact. The major means is social movement.

The dimensions of utopian realism

Then Giddens put forward the conception of "utopian realism" and his systematic framework for envisaging the possible post-modern social order. The overriding objective of minimizing high-consequence risks transcend all divisions of values and power, therefore, there is no privileged social group in this context. Giddens emphasized that utopian realism never reject the use of power, because beneficial changes often take place by virtue of the privileged group, and many such changes actually are realized undesignedly. Social transformation needs to be connected with institutional possibilities.

In summary, Giddens depicted four dimensions of utopian realism: life politics, emancipator politics, politicization of the local and politicization of the global. Due to modernity's impinging upon other countering trends, Giddens believed that this scenario is also applicable to those less developed countries.

Types of social movements

Giddens then discussed the role of social movements in his framework of utopian realism. The importance of labor movement has dramatically declined because the

laborer has become one of the various interest groups. The diversification of interest groups and social movements reflected the multi-dimensional character of modernity. Labor movements derive from capitalism, or the economic order of modernity, aiming to control the workplace and the state apparatus. Labor movements were the major carriers of fighting for freedom of speech and democratic rights; however, because those struggles do not derive capitalism in their natures, but rather, the surveillance system, the labor movement is not the only means. Peace movements concern the means of violence, the root reason of which is the industrialization of war, especially the high-risk war like nuclear war.

Giddens in this paper regarded social movements as the provider of the possible future scenario, as well as the means to realize it. But he held that social movements are not the necessary preconditions and sole base for improving the society. Utopian realism recognizes the importance of the powerful, and does not regard them as always, the naturally harmful. The division of interests among different social groups may impact social movements, but the power is not necessarily the tool for some groups to oppress or exploit other groups. In general, the power is the means to achieve certain goals, but also needs to be used concertedly in order to maximize opportunity and minimize risks.

The contours of a post-modern order

Although Giddens reject the misuse of the conception "post-modernity", he positively depicted his contours of a post-modern order, the implications of which are the transcendences of four dimensions of modernity. To Giddens, four dimensions of post-modern order are multilayered democratic participation, post-scarcity system, demilitarization and humanization of technology. He generalized the four dimensions of post-scarcity system as follows: socialized economic organization, coordinated global order, transcendence of war and system of planetary care.

Modernity is full of risks, which has been fully discussed in preceding parts of the book. Four dimensions of risks in modernity can be generalized as follows: collapse of economic growth mechanisms, growth of totalitarian power, nuclear conflict or large-scale warfare and ecological decay or disaster. In transition to a new order beyond modernity, diverse direction can be identified, all of which are full of risks.

Another topic discussed by Giddens is whether modernity is equal to westernity, or in other words, is modernity particular to the West. The roots of two most significant organizational complexes in the four-dimension contour of modernity are all in Europe: nation-state and systematic capitalistic production. The astonishing power generated by the combination of the two complexes enables Europeans to expand globally and devastate almost all other countertrends.

Giddens's criticism of the conception of post-modernity

Giddens used the term "Juggernaut" to describe modernity largely because of its uncontrollable feature, which makes itself different from the Enlightenment envisions. He see there are four major factors severing as the explanation for the defects of modernity. The first is "design fault". Modernity is intrinsically connected with abstract system, the design faults of which make modernity deviate from its originally designated path, given the fact that any social organization is expected to achieve certain goals, which can serves as the criteria for assessing the efficiency of modern institutions. The second is operator failure. Operators of modern institutions cannot completely avoid mistakes. Wherever people are involved, operator failures will persist. Besides, no calculation can effectively incorporate operator failure, because this kind of failure is actually unpredictable. The more important reasons are the remaining two: unintended consequence and the reflexivity. The complexity of human activity and other systems that are interacting with the system in question brings about the unpredictability of modern institutions. Reflexivity has been well discussed by Giddens, which continuously alters the form, nature and development direction of the living environment.

Critique

In dealing the "consequences of modernity" (especially the sombre side, the dangers and risks), seem Giddens himself belongs to the "radical engagement" kind he describes. Not only trying to have some impact through his analysis of the situation to date, but practically participate in the "power arena" Thus his argument about getting into power to "make thing done" has its trail. And I can't agree more on this standpoint. However, I think he could have paid more attention to the uneven relationship between Western and Non-Western countries within modernity or globalization

This paper doesn't wade very far into the politically charged debates about modernity--Is modernity just a Western concept that pretends to merely describe what is actually being imposed as an ideological project? Does it make sense to talk about "multiple modernities," alternatives to Western patterns of modernity that can or should develop in different parts of the world? In *_Consequences_* Giddens doesn't do more than glance at counter arguments to his own; but he didn't intend to. Serious readers will eventually want to get a bigger picture.

Conclusion

The author tried to generalize his major arguments in the shortest words. High modernity dissolves the sense of security provided by tradition and the dominance enjoyed by the west. Since the collapse of certainty established by "preestablished dogmas ", doubts involved in modernity has been institutionalized. There are two-fold circulations of knowledge in social sciences: one implies that the knowledge is



subject to constant corrections, the other refers to practical circulations of knowledge in and out of social life. The inherent reflexivity of modernity and the circulation of knowledge give rise to new risks. Modernity combines large-scale organizations with individuals dielectrically on both local and global levels. Subjectivity transforms simultaneously with the transformation of global social organizations. The future-orientation of modernity provides the basis for utopian realism, namely, the prediction and orientation of the future. Utopian realism combines the prediction of the future with the institutional analysis of the current trends.

Through the voices of utopian realism, finally, Giddens advocate the post-modern order in his mind which opposes reflexivity and temporality of modernity and sets a baseline to the currently endless expansion of modernity. This transition may give rise to the resurgence of tradition more or less, and intense reorganization of time and space locally and globally.