Science, reason, modernity: Readings for an anthropology of the contemporary

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Abstract

Science, Reason, Modernity: Readings for an Anthropology of the Contemporary provides an introduction to a legacy of philosophical and social scientific thinking about sciences and their integral role in shaping modernities, a legacy that has contributed to a specifically anthropological form of inquiry. Anthropology, in this case, refers not only to the institutional boundaries of an academic discipline but also to a mode of conceptualizing and addressing a problem: how to analyze and diagnose the modern sciences in their troubled relationships with lived realities. Such an approach addresses the sciences as forms of life and illuminates how the diverse modes of reason, action, and passion that characterize the scientific life continue to shape our existences as late moderns. The essays provided in this book-many of them classics across disciplines-have been arranged genealogically. They offer a particular route through a way of thinking that has come to be crucial in elucidating the contemporary question of science as a formal way of understanding life. The book specifies the historical dynamics by which problems of science and modernity become matters of serious reflection, as well as the multiple attempts to provide solutions to those problems. The book's aim is pedagogical. Its hope is that the constellation of texts it brings together will help students and scholars working on sciences become better equipped to think about scientific practices as anthropological problems.

Includes essays by: Hans Blumenberg, Georges Canguilhem, John Dewey, Michel Foucault, Immanuel Kant, Paul Rabinow, Max Weber.

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I hope the reader will understand and forgive such frequent self-referencing, which is intended not as hubris but as a mode of providing backing for claims that cannot be exhaustively defended in a work of this brevity. The book began life in the shape of the Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures, which I delivered at Stanford University, California, in April 1988. Of this study I shall attempt to provide a fresh characterisation both of the nature of modernity and of the post-modern order which might emerge on the other side of the current era. The Discontinuities of Modernity. The idea that human history is marked by certain “dis-continuities” and does not have a smoothly developing form is of course a familiar one and has been stressed in most versions of Marxism. Anthropology, in this case, refers not only to the institutional boundaries of an academic discipline but also to a mode of conceptualizing and addressing a problem: how to analyze and diagnose the modern sciences in their troubled relationships with lived realities. Such an approach addresses A book forum on “Science, reason, modernity: Readings for an Anthropology of the contemporary” edited by Anthony Stavrianakis, Gaymon Bennett, and Lyle Fearnley. Date uploaded. Dec 16, 2016. The anthropology of science has captured, in French tradition, an anthropology of the experience of modernity, or as the editors put it, an anthropology of modernities. They argue that therefore future anthropologists of science must take up, observe, and reflect on their relationship to these prior problems in order to “articulate lines of inquiry neither bound within nor forgetful of the modern crises of truth and life” (p. 33). 4. It was only once I stopped expecting “modernity” to present itself to me as an easily digestible concept that I came to see its traces exist almost everywhere.