

ANTHONY GIDDENS

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



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Anthony Giddens is Great Britain's most important contemporary social theorist and one of a handful of the world's most influential theorists (Stones, 2005a). Giddens was born on January 18, 1938 (Clark, Modgil, and Modgil, 1990). He studied at the University of Hull, the London School of Economics, and the University of London. Giddens was appointed lecturer at the University of Leicester in 1961. His early work was empirical and focused on the issue of suicide. By 1969, he had moved to the position of lecturer in sociology at the prestigious Cambridge University, as well as fellow of King's College. He engaged in cross-cultural work that led to the first of his books to achieve international fame, *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies* (1975). Over the next decade or so, Giddens published a number of important theoretical works. In those works, he began a step-by-step process of building his own theoretical

perspective, which has come to be known as structuration theory. Those years of work culminated in 1984 with the appearance of a book, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, that constitutes the most important single statement of Giddens's theoretical perspective. In 1985, Giddens was appointed professor of sociology at the University of Cambridge.

Giddens has been a force in sociological theory for well over three decades. In addition, he has played a profound role in shaping contemporary British sociology. For one thing, he has served as a consulting editor for two publishing companies—Macmillan and Hutchinson. A large number of books have been produced under his editorship. More important, he was a cofounder of Polity Press, a publisher that has been both extremely active and influential, especially in sociological theory. Giddens also has published an American-style textbook, *Sociology*, that has been a worldwide success.

As a theorist, Giddens has been highly influential in the United States, as well as in many other parts of the world. Interestingly, his work often has been less well received in his home country of Great Britain than elsewhere. This lack of acceptance at home may be attributable, in part, to the fact that Giddens has succeeded in winning the worldwide theoretical following that many other British social theorists sought and failed to achieve. As Craib says, "Giddens has perhaps realized the fantasies of many of us who committed ourselves to sociology during the period of intense and exciting debate out of which structuration theory developed" (1992:12).

Giddens's career took a series of interesting turns in the 1990s (Bryant and Jary, 2011). Several years of therapy led to a greater interest in personal life and books such as *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) and *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992). Therapy also gave him the confidence to take on a more public role and to become an adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. In 1997, he became director of the highly prestigious London School of Economics (LSE). He strengthened the scholarly reputation of LSE as well as increased its voice in public discourse in Great Britain and around the world. More recently he has become involved in debates over globalization and climate change, publishing books such as *Runaway World* (2000) and *Politics of Climate Change* (2009). There is some feeling that all this had an adverse effect on Giddens's scholarly work (his most recent books lack the depth and sophistication of his earlier works), but he is clearly focused on being a force in public life.