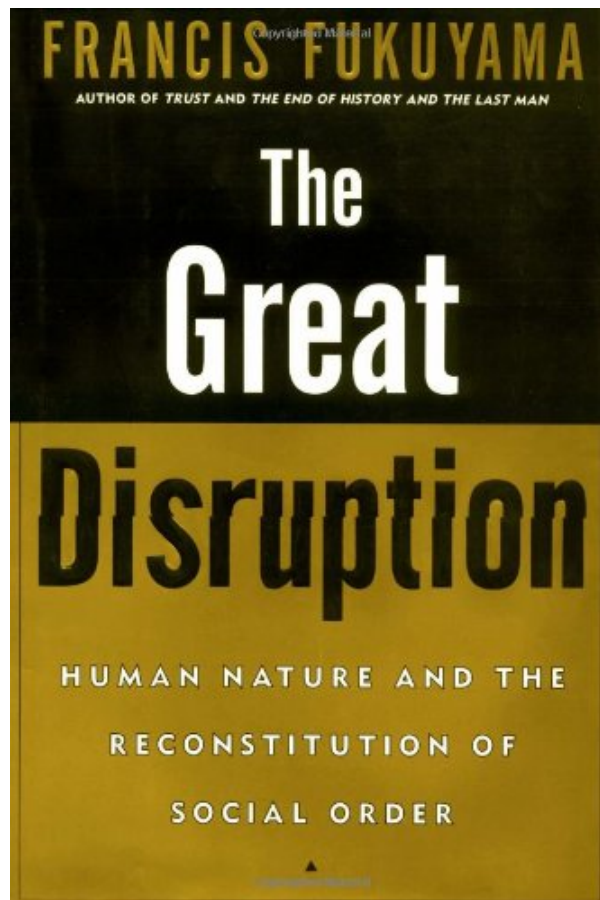
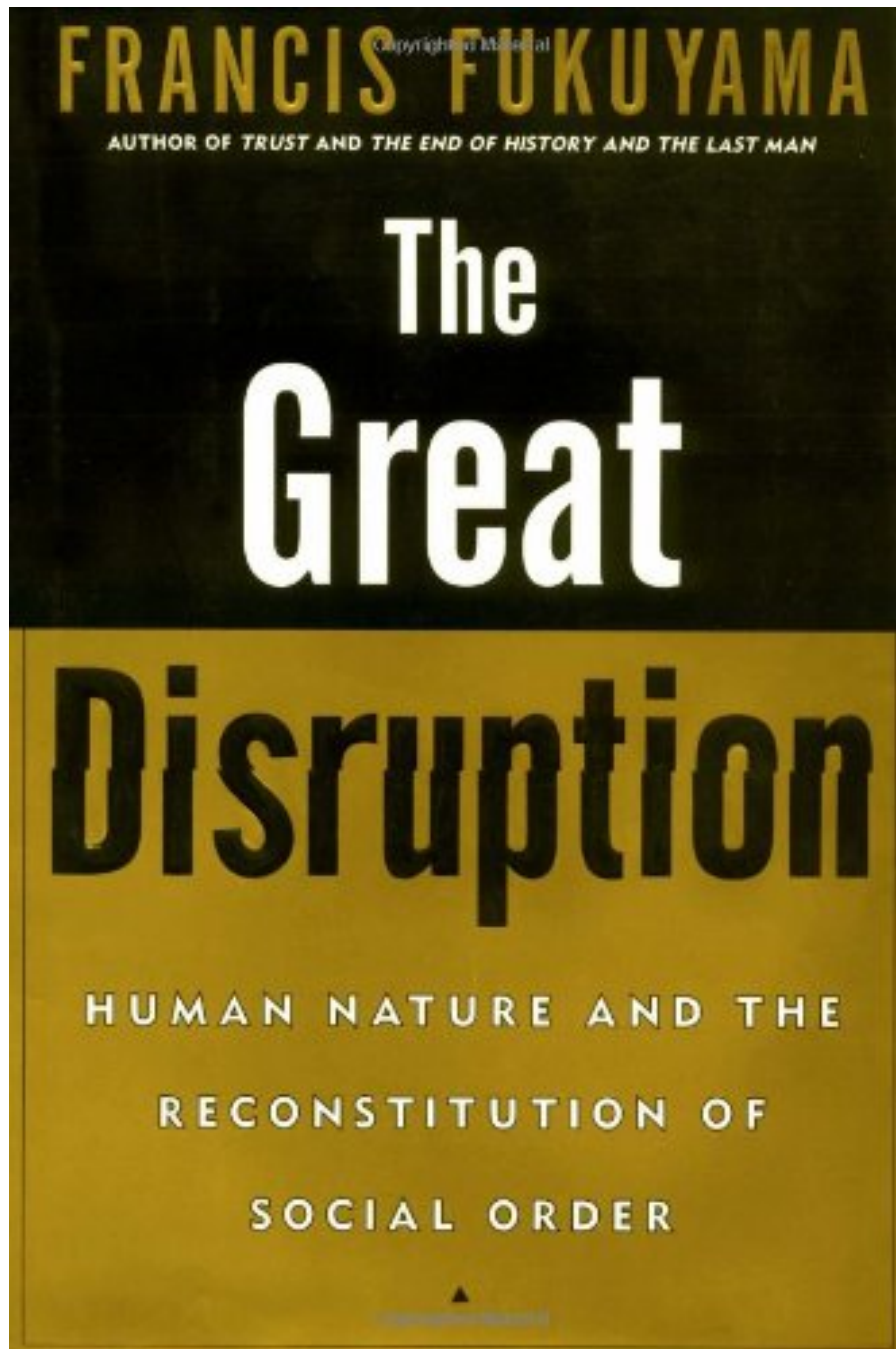


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Discusses how the transformation from an industrial to an information society has disrupted moral standards, showing how the disruption will evolve into a Great Reconstruction.

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- Published on: 1999-06-14
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- Dimensions: 1.17" h x 6.40" w x 9.49" l,
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Amazon.com Review

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A good primer in modern sociology without the politics

By Marty Spiller (spiller@bicnet.net)

The *Great Disruption* is a wonderfully apolitical look at the rather disconcerting changes that have taken place in the social structure of western civilization during the last third of the twentieth century. Francis Fukuyama does this by examining the recent changes in social norms and values in western civilization as a whole, including the course they have taken in other countries, as well as in the United States. He lucidly examines the underlying causes for these changes, and compares them with those observed in other cultures as well as those that have taken place due to earlier social disruptions throughout the history of Western civilization. It is of special interest to those of us who grew up in the times prior to the disruption, when social norms tended to support individual happiness by stressing the more communitarian aspects of culture such as family, religion, and reciprocal employer/employee relations. For many of us, the world has become a cold, lonely place.

Fukuyama does NOT take sides in the culture war except insofar as to acknowledge changes that have come about, or are in the process of taking place. He does make judgments about the adaptability of some of the changes and their likelihood of remaining in their present form over the long haul. It is of particular interest to note that he does not attribute the various disruptions in social norms to politics per se, but rather to natural reactions of individuals to the changes in their environment wrought by the new technologies that have come to dominate western culture. These include the wide dissemination of information, increases in longevity and the shift from a society based on manual labor to one based on intellect. The politics on either side, from the feminists and the sexual liberationists on the left to the religionists on the right were not seminal in either creating or delaying these changes, and in fact, Fukuyama seems to be arguing that human nature will be the final arbiter of the form that social norms will finally take. In short, neither side will ultimately win the culture war, but then, neither side will lose either. The left will be happy to learn that the liberation of women is a natural phenomena and cannot be reversed. The right will be happy to learn that

Fukuyama sees no clear, realistic alternative to traditional families (nuclear or extended), and that over time the rather devastating changes in family structure wrought by the change in status of women will certainly be modified, (as indeed is slowly happening now) not because of political arguments, but because human nature, the key to all social interaction, will demand it.

The first half of the book reads more easily than the second half because it deals with actual real life societal changes and their causes. The second half deals more heavily with socioeconomic theory and is a good deal more work, but rewarding if you have the will to stick it out. My major criticism with the book is that it does not deal at all with timeline other than to hint that the disruptions will be ironed out within a number of generations. It would have been cold comfort for Czarist loyalists to know that the Soviet experiment would eventually fail, but that it would take three generations and millions of political deaths for it to happen, and another several generations for Russian citizens to rebuild enough social capital to rejoin the rest of the world.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

contradictions

By Rion

I started out really liking this book and if it had continued in the vein it began, I probably would have given it four or five stars. The author's definition of social capital is key to the book's good and bad points: "Social Capital can be defined as a set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them." He proceeds from there to analyze various factors in the world that add to or detract from social capital and correlate these to historical changes in culture, economy, crime, etc. Things that help social capital include trust, community, marriage, education; things that hurt it include crime, greed, individualism, single parent families, etc. After all his outstanding analysis, I could only imagine the chapter on capitalism would have to point how the greed and individualism it inspires is a problem. But no! Instead he seems to stop and redefine what social capital is, just so he can say that capitalism is a good thing: "The view that social capital is a public good is wrong." "...rather a private good that is pervaded by externalities." So this rationalizing basically gets to a point where he is suggesting that greed and individualism now do work for the common good and therefore add to social capital. It was enough to make me want to throw the book out the window! Luckily, the window I was next to didn't open!

In the end his conclusions were very anti-climactic. There have been many of these "disruptions" in the past and this current one is just another like the ones before (not so "Great" after all?) and it is currently on the decline, taking care of itself, so apparently all you and I need to do is sit back in our LazyBoys and have another beer! NOT a feel-good book, they say? I think it IS. I would recommend it only for the first half of the book.

36 of 39 people found the following review helpful.

Seeing the big picture

By Todd Winer

This is an important book for readers who are interested in how our cultural landscape has shifted in the last three decades and what the future holds for us. Mr. Fukuyama is the premiere writer in American today when it comes to articulating the big picture and offering unique and provocative viewpoints. "The Great Disruption" is further evidence of that fact. Many Americans fail to appreciate the incredible social changes that have taken place since 1960 and Fukuyama pinpoints the prime culprit - a radical change in gender relations. Changes in the economy and the government are big enough but when you're talking about the way that families are raised and how men and women relate to each other - social mores that have lasted for thousands of years - you're talking about a seismic social shift. This revolution, which Fukuyama traces to the birth control pill, has led to serious social issues - teen pregnancy, single-parent families, crime, low trust in government, and more. This is not a completely unique thesis but Fukuyama explains it in far more depth than any other recent author. Furthermore, Fukuyama reports that this "Great Disruption" is mellowing and he uses the encouraging statistical data of the last five years as evidence. The author sites mankind's

fundamental need for order as the catalyst for this social pause. What he leaves out, however, is a vision of what our country will look like ten or twenty years from now because of this development. Will these statistic trends level off? Will they reverse themselves? And if so, completely? Or is this just the eye of a storm waiting to churn again? This, I suppose, is left to the intellect of the reader. Nevertheless, this book is a must-read.

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