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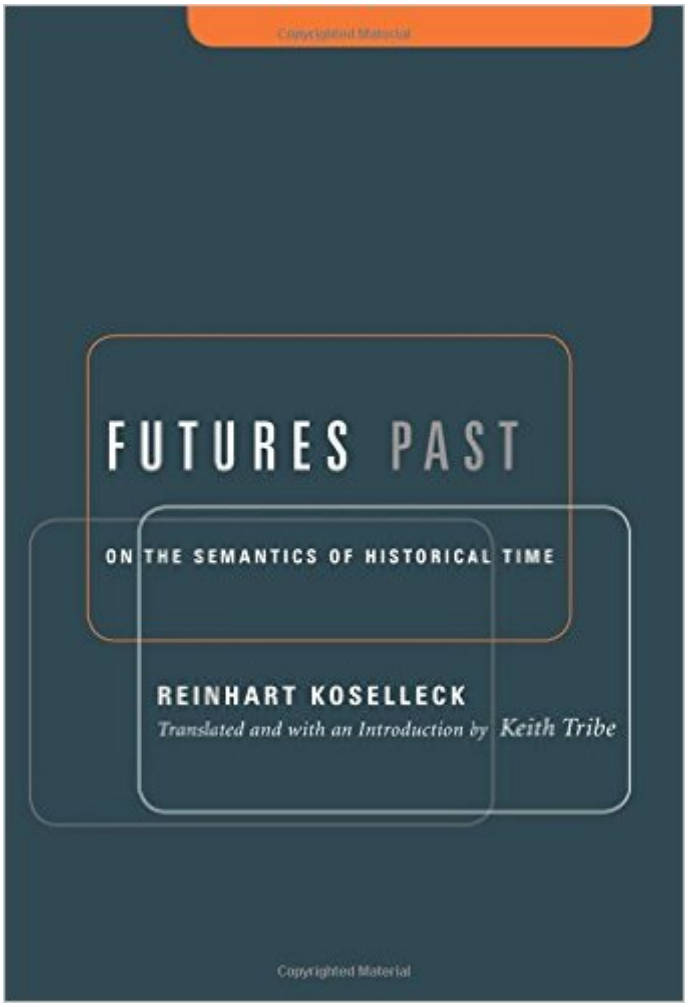

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Synopsis

Modernity in the late eighteenth century transformed all domains of European life -intellectual, industrial, and social. Not least affected was the experience of time itself: ever-accelerating change left people with briefer intervals of time in which to gather new experiences and adapt. In this provocative and erudite book Reinhart Koselleck, a distinguished philosopher of history, explores the concept of historical time by posing the question: what kind of experience is opened up by the emergence of modernity? Relying on an extraordinary array of witnesses and texts from politicians, philosophers, theologians, and poets to Renaissance paintings and the dreams of German citizens during the Third Reich, Koselleck shows that, with the advent of modernity, the past and the future became 'relocated' in relation to each other.The promises of modernity -freedom, progress, infinite human improvement -produced a world accelerating toward an unknown and unknowable future within which awaited the possibility of achieving utopian fulfillment. History, Koselleck asserts, emerged in this crucial moment as a new temporality providing distinctly new ways of assimilating experience. In the present context of globalization and its resulting crises, the modern world once again faces a crisis in aligning the experience of past and present. To realize that each present was once an imagined future may help us once again place ourselves within a temporality organized by human thought and humane ends as much as by the contingencies of uncontrolled events.

Book Information

Series: Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought.

Paperback: 344 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press (June 16, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231127715

ISBN-13: 978-0231127714

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.7 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

This is a reedition of the 1985 text that MIT Press put out, also translated by Tribe. In this version, Tribe revises some of his more significant errors ("gescheiterte AnsÃ¤tze" in the essay Historia Magistra Vitae was rendered "intelligent ventures" and not "failed attempts", a fairly important distinction when discussing Kant's views on history post-French Revolution) but in general the translation still remains clunky and thus conceals some of the less-obvious elements of Koselleck's prose.Another example, from the same essay, is where Koselleck is citing German historian Niebuhr, who has shied away from calling his lectures on the recent past a "History of the French Revolution" for "die Revolution selbst ist wieder ein Produkt der Zeit. .. es fehlt uns allerdings ein Wort fÃ r die Zeit im allgemeinen und bei diesem Mangel mÃ¶gen wir sie das Zeitalter der Revolution nennen." Tribe renders this as "the Revolution is itself a product of the period ... we do indeed lack a general word for the period and in view of this we should like to call it the Epoch of Revolutions." This translation, which obscures the dual sense of "Zeit" in German, is acceptable here, but immediately runs into trouble in the next sentence, where Koselleck writes "Hinter diesem UngenÃ gen steckt die Erkenntnis, die eine der Geschichte genuine Zeit Ã berhaupt erst als etwas in sich Unterschiedenes und Unterscheidbares auftauchen lieÃ . Die Erfahrung aber, die genÃ¶tigt ist, Zeit Ã berhaupt in sich zu differenzieren, ist die Erfahrung der Beschleunigung und der VerzÃ¶gerung.

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