



Bauman, Elias and Latour on Modernity and Its Alternatives

Three Contemporary Sociological Theorists on Modernity and Other Options

By Sandro Segre

Pub Date: 31 March 2020

Binding: Hardback

Price: £45.00 / \$79.95

ISBN: 9781785273049

Extent: 250 pages

Size: 153 x 229 mm /

6 x 9 inches

BISAC CATEGORY: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Sociology / General
SOCIAL SCIENCE / General, SOCIAL SCIENCE / Anthropology / General

BISAC CODE: SOC026000

BIC CODE: JHB

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Exclusive: WORLD

A comparison of the sociological works of three contemporary authors on modernity and its alternatives

'Bauman, Elias and Latour on Modernity and Its Alternatives' provides a comparison between the conceptions of modernity and its alternatives in the works of Bauman, Elias and Latour. Their work and research are linked to their distinct views on modernity and its alternatives. For Bauman, the rationality, effectiveness and impersonality that characterize present-day bureaucratic apparatuses are the distinguishing features of modernity. Its post-modern or 'liquid' alternative has none of these traits. For Elias, modernity has two different and contrasting faces, that of civilization and barbarity. Elias conceives of civilization as a process connoted by self-control and pacification, which prevail as a consequence of the restraint which honor and morality exert on individuals. By contrast, the breakdown of civilization involves barbarity. For Latour, modernity if defined by a separation between society and nature, or humans and non-humans, has never existed. By virtue of their intimate association, humans and non-humans have formed hybrids, whose proliferation is the hallmark of our age. Modernity, therefore, has never prevailed. Alternatives to hybrids are, in the current age, failed hybrids. The set of alternatives is then as follows: modernity vs. post-modernity (Bauman); civilization vs. barbarity (Elias); and successful vs. unsuccessful hybrids (Latour).

Contents

Preface; 1. Bauman; 2. Elias; 3. Latour; 4. Conclusion; Index.

About the Author

Sandro Segre was professor of sociology and sociological theory at the University of Genoa, Italy, until his retirement in 2015.

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