
In his latest work, Zygmunt Bauman, the esteemed postmodern sociologist and ethicist at the University of Leeds, continues his analysis of what he terms ‘liquid modernity’. Developing the concept over through a series of recent works—Liquid Modernity (2000), Liquid Life (2005), Liquid Love (2005), Liquid Fear (2006) and Liquid Times (2007)—Bauman argues that modernity has outgrown a ‘solid’ phase wherein nation-states police their population and economy, preserving themselves by marking ‘us’ from ‘them’. Despite his belief that the solid state is defined by an exclusionary sovereignty that culminated in totalitarianism, the ‘liquid’ phase is not much better. The world had been remade my globalization in economics, the de-centering of political authority and the breakdown of stable personal relationships. The Market has stepped in to take the place of the sovereign State, but still in the interest of an oppressive totality that leaves individuals anxious and rootless.

In Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?, Bauman directs his analysis of liquid modernity to the problem of individuation and socialization. Specifically, he asks whether the present era has the resources that sustain citizenship and the web of non-coercive relationships that exist between politics and commerce—the family, school, community meeting, church, and so on. As befits a jeremiad, he argues that it does not. Chapter two, ‘Categorial Murder, or the Legacy of the Twentieth Century and How to Remember It’, looks back to conclude that genocide is the apotheosis of the State yet we are unwilling to acknowledge this ever-present possibility within our society. Instead, fear of the Other leads us to secure and police the boundaries of the community. Commerce promises both uninterrupted happiness and liberty but, as presented in chapters three and four on freedom and the harried life, it is attained only by living in the anxious Now. There is no satisfaction except in the promise of the next purchase, as the market requires that we remain perpetually dissatisfied. The happiness that comes of a stable, chosen life-plan, like that of the politically-engaged citizen, is impossible. Freedom becomes the hope that fortune will smile on us with sudden fame. The modernist’s dream of perfection embodied in art does not fare much better. As argued in chapter five, art is co-opted to commerce. Following Theodor Adorno, Bauman argues that culture is grounded in management or the regulation of desire. True creativity is a counter to totalization, but a weak one at present. We are left with branding instead and art’s promised image of perfection retreats. Bauman concludes with a chapter on ‘Making the Planet Hospitable to Europe’ in which he describes the uneasiness that haunts Europe with the rise of other global powers and terror networks. Europe must find a place in the world while, following Kant, also remaining hospitable to it.

Bauman’s text is both compelling and familiar. It is written in an engaging semi-popular style. It draws from a wealth of deeply interesting thinkers such as Hegel (of the French variety), Foucault, Nietzsche, Kant, Bourdieu, Adorno and Freud while also appealing to popular culture, current events and, in one surprising example, entomology. Bauman’s concerns are human, not ‘academic’ and his knowledge and passion shine through. However, it is also perhaps too familiar. His book shares the dominant framework of most post-war European thought. Its central problematic is the relation between Totality and the Other. Also, like communitarians, civic republicans and others, it hopes to rediscover the middle ground between State and Market.
It takes up the contemporary European search for a future that is neither totalitarian nor neoliberal. Each of these is, of course, worthwhile. Unfortunately, however engaging and widely-knowledgeable Bauman’s synthesis is, it suffers the weaknesses of the jeremiad. While a critical call to action, it is unclear what must be done, or whether anything is possible at all.

For example, Bauman faces the Levinasian problem of the Third. Emmanuel Levinas’ postmodern ethic explicitly undergirds Bauman’s project. Levinas’ fundamental insight is that the individual is constituted by its ethical obligation to the Other. However, the I-Thou relation with its infinite obligations faces the problem of the Third, the ‘other Other’ who also makes demands on us. As each obligation is absolute, we may not adjudicate between them, but we must. This problem is made explicit in Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being* and acknowledged by Bauman. The strength of this position is that we gain an ethical vantage point from which to critique the failures of the political. Its weakness is that politics becomes a realm of necessary sin. As he presents it, totalitarianism is the State’s essence, not simply its potential. Bauman does not argue for a politics of positive freedom and citizenship so much as an ethical and anarchic anti-politics.

Bauman hopes for a social world governed by the edict to “love thy neighbor” and makes occasional reference to the need for a more humane politics, but the rest of the text indicates that this is no longer possible. He is not a post-modernist so much as a betrayed modernist. The political and aesthetic ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity and beauty are openly held as ideals, but ones betrayed by the nation-state and the free market, those essentially modern inventions. There is certainly a need to develop a humane politics and this will require an engagement with the exclusions of the State, the distractions and false promises of the Market, the role of the artist and the place of hospitality in societies that would rather police their borders for the always threatening ‘Them’. Bauman’s desperate plea is both compelling and exhibits his deep insight and broad knowledge, but the reader is left wanting more.

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In Josiah Royce’s 1908 work *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, the teacher of W.E.B. Du Bois and colleague of William James offered a treatment of the principle of loyalty, which he saw as chief among virtues. Also published in 1908 was a collection of essays intended to show the role of the principle of loyalty as it might be applied to problems that are existent in American society, entitled *Race Questions, Provincialism, & Other American Problems*. In 2009, Scott L. Pratt and Shannon Sullivan have re-introduced and amended the latter work to include six additional essays that have not been available since their original publication more than 90 years ago. In so doing, the pair has added an invaluable collection to the pool of available works by early 20th century American philosophers. In this brief review, I offer comments on the introductions as well as a few remarks about the topic of the last of the newly introduced works by Royce.