



Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers? (Institute for Human Sciences Vienna Lecture Series)

By Zygmunt Bauman

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Bauman urges us to think in new ways about a newly flexible, newly challenging modern world. In an era of routine travel, where most people circulate widely, the inherited beliefs that aid our thinking about the world have become an obstacle. He challenges members of the “knowledge class” to overcome their estrangement from the rest of society.

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Editorial Review

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Immanuel Kant extrapolated the trajectory of eighteenth-century history into a future that would demand a universal morality. That future, Bauman announces, has now arrived. But serious thinkers must proceed with the Kantian project in circumstances more difficult than the German philosopher could ever have anticipated, as traditional, locally grounded absolutes dissolve in the flux of twenty-first-century lifestyle consumerism. Tragically, some uprooted groups have tried to recreate the reassuring ethical order of a monolithic community, even when doing so has meant unleashing genocidal violence against outsiders (as in Cambodia, Rwanda, and Kosovo). Doubtful that an American superpower that excels only in military technology will offer better cultural options, Bauman adumbrates a hopeful orientation inspired by the transnational aspirations of Europeans. These aspirations are already restraining profit-seeking global capitalism while advancing a progressive code of planetary responsibility. Some readers may suspect that the very different universalism of a resurgent Islam deserves more attention that it receives, but Bauman poses questions deserving attention from anyone trying to understand our rapidly globalizing society. --Bryce Christensen

Review

Zygmunt Bauman's voice is as exemplary as it is powerful. He writes not only in Max Weber's spirit, but also in that of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, as well as Hannah Arendt and Norbert Elias. This is a very important collection by one of the leading thinkers of our time. (Ron Eyerman, Yale University)

This thoughtful and elegant little book by one of the world's most humble but distinguished intellectuals conveys a sense that the wisdom of a lifetime is being distilled here in a pithy but above all in a usable form. (Paul Gilroy, London School of Economics)

About the Author

Zygmunt Bauman was Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds and the author of many books.

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