

1. Greek Period/classical period-
2. Dark Period/Middle age-
3. Renaissance
4. Enlightenment
5. Modernity
6. Post-modernity

**We Have Never Been Modern by Bruno Latour (1947-2022).** He was a French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist. He was especially known for his work in the field of science and technology studies.

We Have Never Been Modern by Bruno Latour is a **reflection on the scientific and philosophical method of modernity** based in particular on concepts developed within the framework of the [actor-network theory](#) (The actor-oriented approach involves understanding the conflict on the basis of power, goals and information of the actor).

[We Have Never Been Modern](#) is a book written by [Bruno Latour](#), published in 1991. It was originally written and published in French, and later translated into English, in 1993. Latour is a French sociologist, philosopher, professor, and writer. He has taught at many highly acclaimed French universities, lecturing on science and technology studies and sociology. Many consider his studies to be more associated with social constructionism; he has turned away from that significantly and has redeveloped his work and thought process concerning sociology. Though he is a famed sociologist and professor, Latour gained the most fame from his books, one of them being this one, We Have Never Been Modern.

Latour's text explores the idea that the rise of science has changed our modern world forever, never able to turn back. The road that we are traveling is a one-way road that is forever leading us forward and forever separating us from our so-called primitive ancestors. Considered by many critics to be an “anthropology of science,” We Have Never Been Modern is a book that forces the reader to contemplate the division modernity makes between nature and society, which is a recent development, in terms of human history. The many modern issues we have such as global warming/climate change, HIV, and the ever-improving biotechnologies are matters that deserve much public concern. In We Have Never Been Modern, Latour works to convince the reader to let go of our common idea of permanent separation from our ancestors and shows us that our world today is built mostly on faith that our modernity will not fail.

For Latour, (European) modernity is finished and, with it, the idea of progress which constituted its matrix. **The world is made up of hybrid objects constantly proliferating and no longer belonging exclusively to the scientific or technical world.** On the contrary, they present themselves as participating in politics, culture or economics at the same time. The same is true of power, which is no longer played only by politicians, but also by industrialists, scientists, technicians, etc.

However, **the critical discourse on modernity** does not allow us to take into account the hybrid nature of modern objects. Instead of associating these objects with each other, of respecting their complexity and their proliferation by considering them in networks (according to the multiple connections that they establish with other entities), **this discourse separates and opposes technique and nature, inhumanity of science and humanity of societies, scholar and politician (this was Max Weber's classic distinction), human and non-human.**

According to Latour, an anthropological discourse is essential since it has above all been reserved for “pre-modern” societies, characterized by the consubstantiality of the natural and the cultural, the technical and the political, or even the mythical and the social. Admittedly, the differences between traditional societies and current societies are considerable and to ignore this would be to confine oneself to the relativist position of postmodernism, a position also rejected by Latour in favor of the concept of “non-modernity”.

But as we have never really applied the program of modernity which postulated an independence of knowledge in relation to the social and the political, we can therefore imagine that we have never been modern: the world in which we live is a compound of men and hybrids, of complex socio-technical networks that it is no longer possible to separate or isolate.

According to Latour, innovations offer an ideal field of analysis to apply this new anthropological posture since they produce hybrids and make human and non-human actors coexist, etc. The analyst can no longer afford to cut this object into parts or ignore its process of formation. It is also necessary to take into account the operations of translations (transformations) of the actors who build the innovation, to follow them, to see how they enroll other actors. **Networking (actor-network) must be at the center of the analysis**; innovation must be understood as it is done through its constant transformations as much by the actors who constitute it as by the users or customers. By formulating their expectations, by translating them, the latter in return co-produce innovation and participate in its hybridity.

### **Why Did Bruno Latour Claim that “We Have Never Been Modern”?**

In his book, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour presented an influential (though controversial) read on the meaning and impact of the ideas underlying modernity.

Bruno Latour is a complex thinker. He is renowned for being an ethnographer of the world of everyday technology who has meticulously studied how things that at first glance seem unimportant, like a key or a safety belt, actively influence our behavior. Others know Latour as a highly theoretical essayist who charged the postmodernist philosophers—primarily Lyotard and Baudrillard, but also Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida—that their thinking simply revolved around artificial “sign-worlds;” he challenged them with the provocative statement that “we have never been modern. “

### **What did Bruno Latour Mean by “We Have Never Been Modern?”**

The book *We Have Never Been Modern* by Bruno Latour challenges the conventional division between nature and culture and makes the case that modernity has fallen short of the promises of progress and **enlightenment**. It is a thought-provoking and difficult read. This article will give an overview of Latour’s position and how it affects how we think about modernity.

Since its 1991 publication, *We Have Never Been Modern* has had a significant influence on sociology, anthropology, and science studies. It is a groundbreaking and argumentative work. The book was groundbreaking in that it offered a different framework for comprehending how people interact with the outside world. In it, Latour argues that modernity is a false construct that has neglected to take into account the nuanced social and environmental connections that people have with their surroundings.

Rather than simply existing within a rigid, predetermined order of things, Latour's argument was based on the notion that people are constantly creating their own worlds. He rejected the notion that there is a fixed, unchanging essence of "the modern," arguing that all societies are instead hybrid, not fully "modern" or "traditionally" structured, and constantly negotiating between the natural and cultural worlds. Additionally, he rejected the idea that there is a set of values that all people must adhere to and argued that rather, our beliefs and values are contested and negotiated in the context of an evolving environment.

### **The Ancient and the Modern**

Contrasted with the ancient, reliable past, modernity is a break in time. "Modern" signifies both a break in the course of time, and a conflict between winners and losers. These prepositions are used to qualify this adjective because we are less confident in our ability to maintain the double asymmetry. Latour contends that this is the case because we are no longer able to demonstrate the irreversible arrow of time or award prizes to the winners. It is not always easy to determine who will prevail in the conflict between the contemporary and the traditional, the barbaric and the civil. Revolutions can either bring about or end oppressive systems and regimes, and this is not always clear.

To signify the end of modernity, which was characterized by steady advancement, the Enlightenment, and linear history, this new confusion is then given the label of "post-modernism." Latour disagrees with this, and he will contend that the problem is not that we are no longer modern or that we have somehow abandoned modernity, but rather that we have never entered it in the first place.

### **What Is Modernity, really?**

Latour contends that a set of values and beliefs like progress, reason, and individualism are frequently linked to modernity. Latour argues that these values, though not exclusively associated with modernity, have been present throughout history in various forms. According to Latour, the division of nature and culture is the primary attribute of modernity. The idea that nature is a passive object to be studied and manipulated by humans and that humans are superior to it defines modernity, according to him. Modern societies are structured in a way that reflects this division, with people living in urban areas and nature restricted to parks and other designated areas.

Latour, however, disputes the possibility of this division between nature and culture, contending that it is a fabrication. According to him, people and nature are inextricably linked rather than existing in a separate realm. For him, nature plays an active role in the formation of our social and cultural worlds, contrary to what is commonly believed.

He examines the idea of the modern **constitution**, which he defines as the collection of ideas and customs that form the basis of modernity. He contends that the fundamental separation between nature and society that underlies the modern constitution has resulted in a number of social and environmental issues, arguing that a number of binary oppositions, including nature and culture, subject and object, and fact and value, form the foundation of the modern constitution. These contrasts produce a hierarchy where science is viewed as universally true, and objective knowledge is viewed as superior to other types of knowledge, which are seen as subjective and inferior. Humans are also seen as being superior to nature.

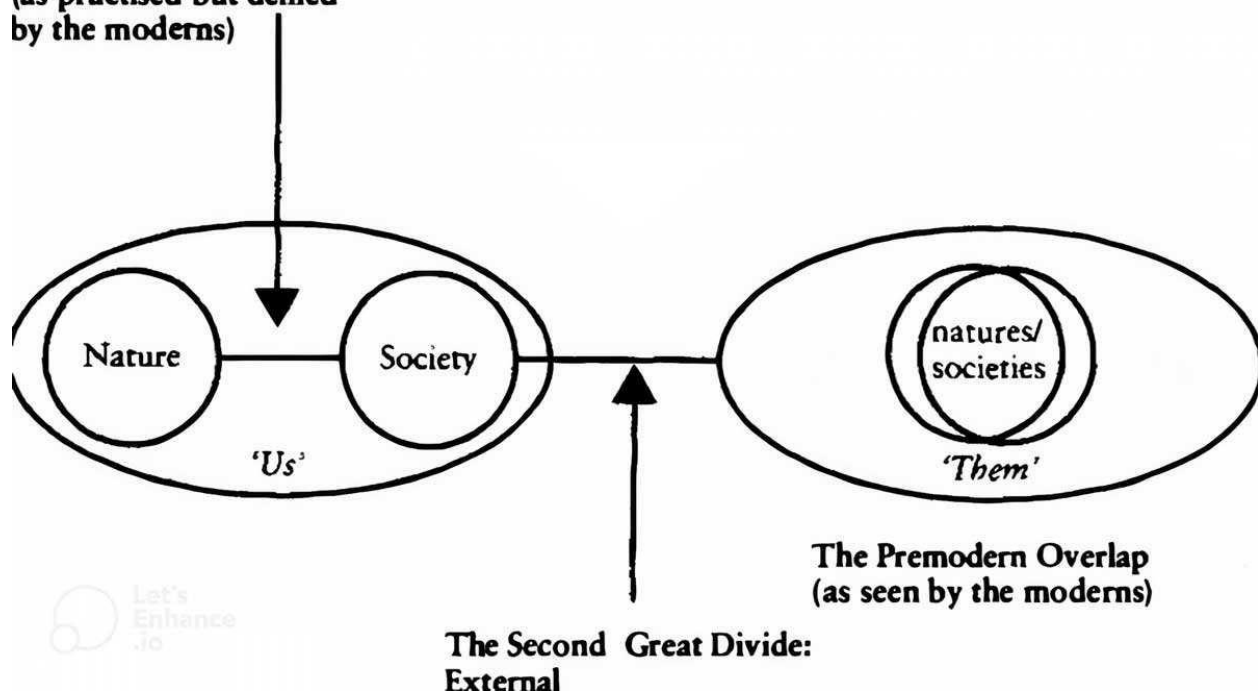
### The Modern Constitution

Bruno Latour claims that the modern constitution has contributed to a number of social and environmental issues, such as the exploitation of natural resources, the destruction of natural habitats, and the marginalization of indigenous peoples and other groups that do not conform to the modernist worldview. He contends that the modern constitution fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness of people and the natural world, which is the cause of these issues.

Latour suggests that in order to develop a new understanding of the interrelationship between people and the natural world, we must look beyond the modern constitution. He contends that we must acknowledge the close ties between humans and the natural world and that **there are other legitimate forms of knowledge besides science**. He contends that in order to better understand the complexity and interconnectedness of our world, we must cultivate new ways of thinking and behaving.

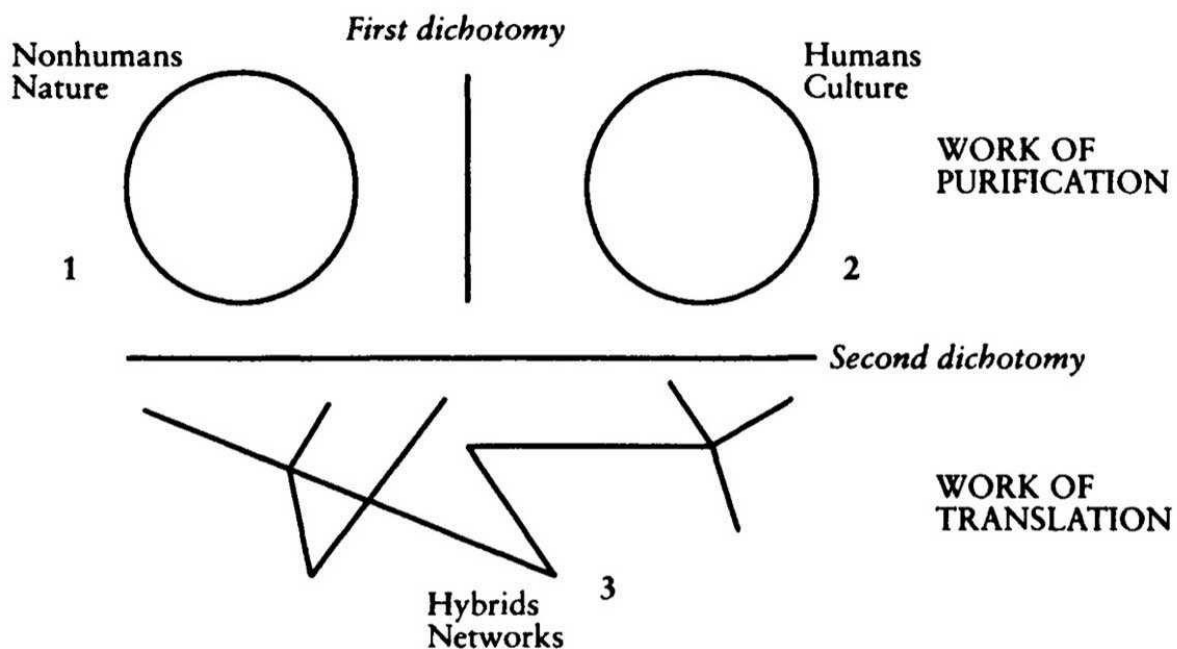
### Modes of Existence: Premodern and Modern

**The Modern Partition**  
(as practised but denied  
by the moderns)



Latour's main claim is that the modern world is characterized by a fundamental contradiction between two modes of existence: the "premodern" mode of existence, in which humans and non-humans coexist in a web of relationships, and the "modern" mode of existence, in which humans are cut off from nature and placed in a realm of pure culture. Latour claims that the Enlightenment, which aimed to free people from the shackles of tradition and superstition and establish a rational, scientific, and secular society, is to blame for this dichotomy.

We have never truly been modern, and the project of modernity has failed. He argues that the myth of the separation between nature and culture is untrue and that the modern world is, in fact, characterized by a complex web of relationships between humans and non-humans.



**Figure 1.1 Purification and translation**

Latour uses numerous examples from science, politics, and culture to substantiate his claims. He explores how the complex web of connections between people and non-people is distilled down to a collection of abstract concepts through a process known as "black boxing," which is how scientific knowledge is created. He also examines how political institutions are created through a "purification" process in which the complicated web of connections between various groups and interests is condensed into a binary opposition between the state and the individual.

Our understanding of the interaction between people and nature is significantly impacted by Latour's critique of modernity. According to him, the traditional division between nature and culture is a byproduct of modernity and has resulted in an antagonistic and unsustainable

relationship between people and the natural world. He argues that we need to get past this dichotomy and create a new perspective on how people and other animals interact, one that takes into account the intricate web of connections that exists between them.

We must move past this dichotomy and develop a new understanding of the intricate web of relationships that exist between humans and non-humans. His critique of the division between nature and culture has significant implications for our understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world.

### **Bruno Latour's Rejection of the Ideas of Modernism**

Contrast to the idea that modernity is a steady and uniform process of linear change, Latour's book makes the case that it has never been a homogenous phenomenon and is constantly in flux.

The fact that Latour goes beyond simply rejecting the idea of modernity and advocates for the preservation of specific regional pre-modern traditions is one of the book's most contentious elements. This is seen as a challenge to the Western notion of progress, which holds that freedom and equality are possible for people only through the advancement of modernity. Latour's method was criticized for being ineffective and for ignoring the fact that specific pre-modern traditions can be oppressive and harmful to certain communities.

The book had a significant impact because it sparked a contentious discussion about the nature of modernity and contributed to dismantling the prevailing discourses. When considering the alleged "progress" of modernity, it also served to emphasize the significance of comprehending various cultures and regional contexts. In addition, the book provides an alternative to conventional narratives of modernity by presenting a fresh perspective on understanding and analyzing our contemporary world. In the end, the book has changed the way we think about modernity and its implications.