

# Susan Neiman ~ Verzet en rede in tijden van nepnieuws



Ills. Joseph Sassoon  
Semah

De Europese Commissie presenteerde op 25 april 2018 haar voorstel over het bestrijden van nepnieuws en desinformatie. Een gedragscode voor online-platforms als Facebook, Twitter en Google moet worden ontwikkeld en een Europees netwerk van 'fact checkers' moet nepnieuws en valse informatie tegengaan. Speciale lesprogramma's voor scholieren over het herkennen van nepnieuws staan eveneens op het verlanglijstje van de EC.

Ook Susan Neiman stelt de vraag wat we kunnen doen in tijden van 'post-truth politics' in haar in 2017 verschenen boek 'Verzet en rede in tijden van nepnieuws', maar dan vanuit een meer filosofische en morele invalshoek. Ze concentreert zich hierbij onder andere op de situatie in de Verenigde Staten en hoe nepnieuws en desinformatie Trump aan de macht hielp en aan de macht houdt.

De machtsgreep van Trump komt niet uit de lucht vallen. Sinds Trump president is gebruikt hij het woord 'nepnieuws' voor alles wat hem niet uitkomt, met het doel wantrouwen te kweken. Hij ondermijnt zo "de gedeelde werkelijkheid die een voorwaarde is voor iedere vorm van gemeenschappelijkheid". Ook worden

leugens gedeeld onder het mom van 'alternatieve feiten'.

Decennia postmodernistische theorie, "met als uitgangspunt de overtuiging van Foucault dat waarheid en macht inwisselbaar zijn" hebben de intellectuele achtergrond gevormd van de post-truth samenleving en het idee ondermijnd dat er universele waarden bestaan waarvoor we ons actief zouden moeten inzetten.

Postmodernisme maakt bijna overal de dienst uit: in de kunst, media, en in een groot deel van de geschiedschrijving. Je hoeft slechts een nieuw dominant verhaal te creëren om de huidige politieke orde te ondermijnen.

De enorme hoeveelheid onjuiste informatie op internet maakt het verschil tussen leugen en waarheid moeilijk te onderscheiden. Nepnieuws is de schaamteloze minachting voor de werkelijkheid. Trump heeft geen last van respect voor de schone schijn, en speelt schaamteloos als kind van deze tijd met de waarheid al naar gelang het hem uitkomt. Een president die zich boven de grondwet stelt.

In het boek stelt Susan Neiman, voortbouwend op de ideeën van Foucault en Kant, dat waarheid en rechtvaardigheid geen 'kwestie van perspectief' zijn, zoals vaak wordt beweerd, maar universele waarden om voor te strijden.

"Maar de ervaring vaak voorgelogen te zijn, is niet genoeg om niet meer op het concept waarheid te vertrouwen. Om zover te komen heb je theoretische ondersteuning nodig, geconstrueerd uit een samenraapsel van postmoderne filosofie, evolutionaire psychologie en neoliberale economie. Ook al kunnen die in politieke zin tegenover elkaar staan, ze veronderstellen allemaal een metafysica van achterdocht: achter iedere aanspraak op waarheid gaat een verborgen aanspraak op macht schuil, ieder ideaal verhuult een vorm van eigenbelang." De oorlog in Irak is hiervan een goed voorbeeld.



De wereld van na 1989 is gevormd door een grote hoeveelheid filosofische vooronderstellingen, aldus Neiman. Het neoliberalisme suggereert dat er geen andere waarden bestaan dan marktwaarden, hetgeen bekrachtigd wordt door de evolutiebiologie met de onbewijsbare wetenschappelijke theorieën: wij zijn biologisch geprogrammeerd om zoveel mogelijk exemplaren van onszelf voort te brengen. Deze beide ideologieën gaan ervan uit dat aanspraken op waarheid aanspraken op macht zijn. Ze zijn zo binnen gedrongen in de publieke opinie, dat we ze niet meer als zodanig herkennen.

Trump is met zijn aanspraken op waarheid – zijn aanspraken op macht, zijn waarden zijn allemaal materiële waarden, en hij wil zoveel mogelijk kopieën van zichzelf produceren – een goed voorbeeld.

Gelijke rechten voor iedereen, ongeacht ras, geslacht of seksuele geaardheid, waren nog niet zo lang geleden verre van vanzelfsprekend. Die waarden worden momenteel ernstig bedreigd. Het is gevaarlijk de zaken op hun beloop te laten en onszelf te definiëren als slachtoffer van een onafwendbare gang van zaken.

Susan Neiman ziet goede redenen om het werk van Kant, wiens ideeën vooruitliepen op belangrijke aspecten van de internationale wetgeving en van de sociaaldemocratie, te zien als geboorteplaats van de progressieve politiek.

De werkelijkheid wordt beoordeeld naar de mate waarin ze idealen realiseert en idealen worden niet afgemeten aan de mate waarin ze zijn aangepast aan de werkelijkheid.

Het belangrijkste is het idee van idealen, “want zonder idealen kan iedere eis tot verandering van de hand worden gewezen als een utopische fantasie”.

Ideeën kunnen de wereld veranderen.

De Amerikaanse filosoof Susan Neiman is directeur van het Einstein Forum in Potsdam. Zie: <http://www.susan-neiman.de/>

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# Trade Wars Are Never “Easy to Win”: Economist Robert Pollin On Trump’s China Policy



Robert Pollin ~ Photo: UMass Amherst

Before the election, presidential candidate Donald Trump promised voters across the country that he would turn the tables on foreign competitors to reverse US trade deficits. Last month, President Trump invoked a 1974 trade law and launched a trade war against China by announcing tariffs on more than \$150 billion of Chinese goods and products. Trump has argued that the move might cause “a little pain” but that the US will benefit from it in the long run. But are tariffs good for economic policy? And whom do they benefit most — capitalists or workers?

C.J. Polychroniou spoke to *Robert Pollin* — a distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst — about the impact of tariffs and trade wars on national economies and the labor market.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Bob, let’s first of all get some things straight about Trump’s decision to impose tariffs on Chinese goods and products. Is the US in an actual trade war with China? Trump says it is not, yet he has also gone on record saying*

*that trade wars are “good, and easy to win.”*

*Robert Pollin:* One never knows exactly what Trump is really up to. Whatever policy pronouncements he may have made on day one, there is a good probability that by day four or five, he will have reversed himself. That said, since his 2016 campaign, Trump has been denouncing Chinese trade practices. His main adviser on trade, Peter Navarro, has long been a vehement opponent of US trade relations with China, having authored books titled *Death by China* and *The Coming China Wars*.

Since January, Trump has certainly started aggressive actions against Chinese imports into the US. It started with [tariffs of 30 percent on imported solar panels](#), most of which come from China, then moved on in early March to a [25 percent tariff on imported steel and 10 percent on imported aluminum](#). Predictably, China then retaliated with tariffs on US imports, including aircraft, automobiles, and chemicals, [worth about \\$50 billion](#). Trump then shot back on April 5, proposing another [\\$100 billion in tariffs](#) on a range of Chinese imports. I wouldn't yet call this a “war,” but the threats and skirmishes are intensifying.

Are trade wars “good and easy to win?” Taking the second part of Trump's pronouncement first, it is clear already that they are not “easy to win.” China has the capacity to retaliate if provoked excessively. Are trade wars “good?” As with other kinds of war, we are opening ourselves up to all kinds of uncertainties. Trump's [latest overture](#) to re-enter the Trans-Pacific Partnership — after he had also repeatedly denounced this trade agreement and in fact had already pulled out of it — no doubt reflects his utterly incoherent attempt at keeping up alliances with the rest of East Asia while he is roughing up China. Who knows where it will lead? Certainly not Trump or his advisers.

*What are the real causes and consequences of the US trade deficit, which in 2017 amounted to \$566 billion?*

The United States has been importing more than it exports — i.e., running a trade deficit — for 42 straight years. So this is hardly a new development. The [2017 trade deficit of roughly \\$570 billion](#) amounted to about 3 percent of GDP. The size of the current trade deficit is roughly 50 percent smaller as a share of GDP than what it was a decade ago, just before the financial crisis and Great Recession. So the trade deficit has certainly not been exploding in recent years relative to the

pattern over the past 40 years.

A range of factors has contributed to the US economy persistently importing more than it exports. One is simply the fact that after the end of World War II, the rest of the world caught up with the United States in being able to manufacture products that the rest of the world wants to buy. This has been especially significant when economies where wages are low are able to produce goods at acceptable quality. This means they can undercut producers in the United States on costs while maintaining competitive quality. This has certainly been the case with China, and with other East Asian economies before China, including South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore and even, decades ago, Japan.

Another factor is that other countries have advanced aggressive industrial policies to help their manufacturing firms succeed as exporters. Germany is an important case in point here: Its industrial policies include stable access to financing, research and development support; effective ongoing vocational training for workers; and a much more cooperative work environment between workers and managers that encourages higher productivity. The average German manufacturing worker is paid about 30 percent more than her counterpart in the US. But Germany is nevertheless an export powerhouse, running a trade surplus at about [8 percent of GDP](#).

Still more, the US maintains a unique position with the dollar being the most heavily traded global currency. With other countries, if they import more than they export, the value of their currency will fall. For example, the demand to hold Mexican pesos will fall if Mexico is buying more from other countries than the other countries are buying from Mexico. When the peso becomes cheaper, it also means that its exports are cheaper to buy. This will then help Mexico to increase exports. But this pattern doesn't occur with the US dollar. The demand for the dollar stays high, even with the US persistently importing more than it exports, since the world economy runs primarily on dollars. In addition, Wall Street wants the value of the dollar to be high, since that helps support profits on the dollar-denominated stocks, bonds, real estate and other assets sold on Wall Street.

Finally, it is important that we not simply frame trade issues in terms of one country or set of countries versus others. It is critical to also think of the class issues involved with trade and related policies. A good share of US capitalists are happy to purchase products from other countries that are produced with cheaper

labor, or to move their operations to other countries if that is most advantageous to them. That enables them to sell at cheaper prices and still earn a profit. Critically, it also gives US firms extra bargaining leverage against their workers. Thus, if workers in, say, a US auto plant, say they deserve a raise, the firm can respond by saying, “You want a raise, fine. We will move to Mexico where manufacturing wages are a fifth of what we pay you.”

The point here is not even that the firm will have to move operations to Mexico, or to import assembled parts from Mexico. The point is that the firm can *credibly threaten* to move. This keeps the workers’ bargaining power down. This is a major reason why average wages for US non-supervisory workers have been stagnant since the 1972 — for 46 long years — even while average labor productivity in the US — the amount the average worker produces in a day — has more than doubled. With wages stagnant and productivity doubling, that means there is twice as much money available for high-end employees and business owners at the end of the day. Here we have a major factor driving the relentless rise in income inequality in the US.

*Are tariffs good as an economy policy?*

Tariffs can be good or bad as a policy tool, depending on the broader set of circumstances. For the US today, tariffs are not good policy, certainly operating on their own, as opposed to being one part of an overall industrial policy to support domestic manufacturing. The problem is straightforward, as we see in the case of the US and China now. First, tariffs have to be set relatively high, like the 25 percent rate that Trump has imposed on imported steel, in order to seriously discourage US consumers and businesses from purchasing imports. But this also means that US consumers of steel, such as auto manufacturers and construction projects, will now pay more for the steel they buy. At the same time, setting a high tariff barrier against foreign producers seeking access to US markets would no doubt provoke other countries to retaliate, which in turn would reduce our exports as well as our imports. This is what is happening now with China, where the US is now selling [\\$130 billion in US products](#), even while importing \$500 billion of Chinese products.

But tariffs can be a valuable and perfectly legitimate tool for a country trying to develop new, or what is termed “infant” industries. In the 19th century, the US aggressively imposed tariffs on British textiles, which created a protective



environment for the development of a US textile industry. The US tariffs today on imported solar panels could be beneficial for strengthening a still developing domestic solar manufacturing industry. But this tariff policy on imported solar panels only makes sense in the US today as one component of a broader green economy and climate stabilization program, including binding measures to steadily drive down greenhouse gas emissions to zero over the next 30-40 years. Obviously, Trump will have nothing to do with a positive green economy agenda in support of climate stabilization. As such, the tariffs on solar panels make no sense as a one-off measure.

*Who benefits the most from tariffs — capitalists or workers?*

It is hard to think about tariff policy independently of a broader set of trade policies, industrial policies and still more broadly, social protections. Tariffs that protect domestic industries can help support jobs, for example, in some US manufacturing areas. But that doesn't mean that the jobs protected will necessarily be good ones. We therefore still need unions and worker protections like a \$15 minimum wage to help workers maintain bargaining power against capitalists and to make jobs in these protected industries pay decently. We would still need to take a large share of revenue from the tariffs to help domestic industries thrive through infrastructure investments, and to support social programs such as decent school systems that pay teachers and other public sector workers living wages. Without such measures, the tariffs simply become a way to protect domestic capitalists against foreign competition, including domestic firms that are perfectly happy to continue exploiting their workers to the maximum extent.

*What should be a left vision for trade?*

Fundamentally, I think that the left today should be committed everywhere to pushing the institutions of liberal capitalism to their limit in allowing democratic politics and egalitarian goals to gain ascendancy over acquisitiveness. In concrete terms, this translates into advancing programs for full employment with decent wages and generous social benefits in all countries, allowing for specific circumstances as to how to apply this set of goals most effectively. We need to then think about trade policies within this broader framework.

Speaking of the US today, we can achieve and sustain a full employment economy



with decent wages and social benefits even while maintaining a trade deficit at roughly the level the economy is at now. As it is, unemployment in the US is at a historically low level, at about [4 percent](#). This is while we are also running a trade deficit at about 3 percent of GDP. We do need to still expand job opportunities much further. But we also need to make sure these jobs are paid decently and that our social programs are well funded. Wages therefore need to go up and profits to go down, while taxes on the rich need to rise to finance a generous welfare state.

We also need to remember that the left's egalitarian commitments must be global, not just confined to our own country. In this spirit, we need to recognize that most other countries, especially developing countries, benefit more from selling products in US markets than the US economy is harmed by running trade deficits at current levels. The US dollar remains the world's most desirable currency, which enables the United States, uniquely, to continue importing more than it exports without having to undertake serious adjustments to close that gap. The United States should certainly pursue industrial policies to promote innovation and growth in manufacturing, especially around clean energy and related environmental projects, along the lines of Germany. But this does not mean that the US should be committed to expanding domestic job opportunities by reducing opportunities in, for example, Vietnam, Kenya, Guatemala, China or India.

That said, it is also true that developing economies, especially large successful exporters such as China and India, should shift their growth strategies away from relying on exporting to rich countries. These countries should increasingly become focused on raising wages and improving working conditions among the still-overwhelming majority of poor people within their borders. This will lead to growing domestic markets in the developing world, enabling working people there to buy the products they themselves produce.

While this kind of domestically focused, wage-led growth model for developing countries is compelling, it cannot be implemented overnight, even assuming the majority of policymakers in these countries embraced the approach. In the meantime, developing countries will continue to rely substantially on selling their products in US markets. But this need not pose major difficulties within the United States precisely because we are capable of achieving full employment and a generous welfare state while maintaining a trade deficit at roughly the current level.

# Africa's Youth And Conflicts: A Sub-Saharan Spring?



Recent travels to Chad, Cameroon and Mali confronted me with the conflicts in these countries as well as in the Central African Republic, and the youth's involvement in them. How are we as researchers to analyse the conflicts and protests, what questions and fields of study should we explore? Are we observing a Sub-Saharan spring?

## *Opposed youth groups in CAR*

In Cameroon I worked on a [project](#) with researchers from CAR. Since 2013 CAR has entered a new cycle of violence. Seleka and anti-Balaka are opposed groups of mainly youth who fight in a rhythm of vengeance. The government controls the capital city Bangui, but other parts of the country are under control of the diverse 'rebel' groups. Both sides are mainly filled with young (wo)men.

## *Salaries cut in Chad*

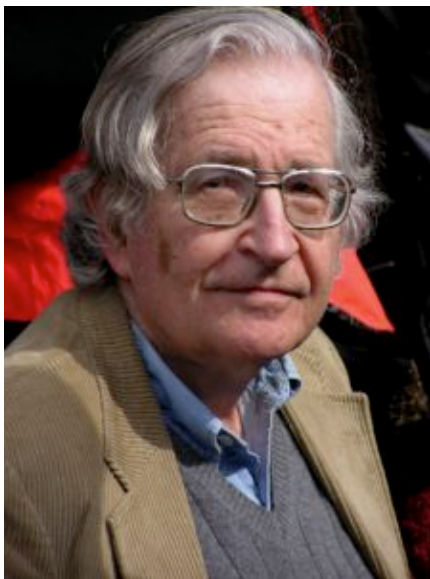
In Chad I met young men who had just been released from prison where they had been tortured on accusation of disturbing the order. Since January this year Chad has entered a new period of protests and strikes. It was not acceptable for most people that salaries were cut by half and indemnities were not paid. Families could no longer pay for the school fees of their children and some families could only afford one meal a day. It was another period of scarcity in a long sequence of protests in, what is in fact, bankrupt Chad since November 2015. Youth are raising their fists against the regime, but they have little power as the oppression is far more powerful. Since a month now the internet has been cut down again. (This [research](#) done in Chad from 2014 to now about youth movements/hardship gives more insight.)

Read

more: <http://www.ascleiden.nl/mirjam-de-bruijn/africas-youth-and-conflicts-sub-saharan-spring>

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# **“A Complete Disaster”: Noam Chomsky On Trump And The Future Of US Politics**



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:  
[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

Just how bad are things with Donald Trump in the White House? And what does having a racist, misogynist, xenophobic and erratic president who continues to enjoy unquestionable support from his base tell us about the state of US politics and the dangers to the future of democracy in the US and in the world on the whole? Noam Chomsky shares his thoughts on these and other related questions in an exclusive interview with C. J. Polychroniou for Truthout.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, it's been already 14 months into Donald Trump's*

*turbulent White House tenure, but sometimes we still need to pinch ourselves to make sure that it's not a nightmare that a racist, misogynist, homophobic man who apparently cares only about himself runs the world's most powerful nation. But, really, how bad is it having Trump in the White House?*

Very bad. As Trump began his second year in office, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists advanced their Doomsday Clock to two minutes to midnight, citing increasing concerns over nuclear weapons and climate change. That's the closest it has been to terminal disaster since 1953, when the US and USSR exploded thermonuclear weapons. That was before the release of Trump's Nuclear Posture Review, which significantly increases the dangers by lowering the threshold for nuclear attack and by developing new weapons that increase the danger of terminal war.

On climate change, Trump is a complete disaster, along with the entire Republican leadership. Every candidate in the Republican primaries either denied that what is happening is happening or said ... we shouldn't do anything about it. And these attitudes infect the Republican base. Half of Republicans deny that global warming is taking place, while 70 percent say that whether it is or not, humans are not responsible. Such figures would be shocking anywhere, but are remarkably so in a developed country with unparalleled resources and easy access to information.

It is hard to find words to describe the fact that the most powerful country in world history is not only withdrawing from global efforts to address a truly existential threat, but is also dedicating itself to accelerating the race to disaster, all to put more dollars in overstuffed pockets. No less astounding is the limited attention paid to the phenomenon.

When we turn to matters of great though lesser import, the conclusion is the same: disaster. While Trump's antics occupy the attention of the media, his associates in Congress have been working intensively to advance the interests of their actual constituency — extreme wealth and corporate power — while dismantling what is of value to the general population and future generations. With justice, the Republican leadership regard the tax bill as their greatest triumph. Joseph Stiglitz rightly [describes](#) the triumph as “The US Donor Relief Act of 2017,” a vast giveaway to their actual constituency — and to themselves. As he points out, the Republican leaders “are stuffing themselves at the trough —

Trump, Kushner and many others in his administration are among the biggest winners — thinking that this may be their last chance at such a feast.” And “Après moi, le deluge” — literally in this case.

The grand triumph brings an extra advantage. It explodes the deficit (a trademark of Republicans since Reagan), which means that they can move on to cut away at entitlements, as the chief architect, Paul Ryan, announced happily at once. The US already ranks near the bottom of the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries — the 35 richer and more developed countries — in social justice measures. The Republican triumph will sink it even lower. The tax scam is only the most prominent of the devices being implemented under the cover of Trump buffoonery to serve wealth and corporate power while harming the irrelevant population.

Many other policies are simply [unconscionable], such as Trump’s initiative to have the Department of Homeland Security separate children, even infants, from their mothers in order to discourage immigration — 700 families have been split in this fashion since October, a New York Times investigation found. Many of these families are fleeing from the murderous consequences of US policies: Honduras has been the main source of refugee flight since the US, almost alone, endorsed the military coup that ousted the elected president and the fraudulent election that followed, initiating a reign of terror.

We also must endure the sight of Trump wailing in terror because a caravan of victims reached Mexico, most hoping to settle there. Trump’s suggestion that these victims are threatening the security of the US is reminiscent of Reagan strapping on his cowboy boots and calling a national emergency because Nicaraguan troops were a two days march from Texas, and about to overwhelm us. It’s amazing that such performances do not evoke profound national embarrassment.

*To the extent that politics is the art of the possible, would you say that Trump has been consistent so far with the promises he made to voters during the 2016 campaign?*

In some cases, yes. He is fulfilling the wishes of the Evangelicals who are a large part of his voting base. He is greatly increasing the military budget, as he promised. ... Most of his promises are about as close to fulfillment as his

commitment to “drain the swamp,” which is now overflowing. [Scott] Pruitt’s [Environmental Protection Agency] alone is a cesspool, though its dismantling of efforts to deal with the impact of climate change are far more serious than the wholesale robbery, which seems to be a Pruitt specialty from well before he was handed the wrecking ball.

On trade, though the policies, insofar as they are coherent, are generally harmful, the rhetoric is not completely false. Thus it is true that China is using devices that violate World Trade Organization rules — devices that were critical to the growth of the rich societies, from England to the US and beyond, and are now banned by the investor rights agreements mislabeled “free trade agreements.” This is a textbook illustration of what economic historians call “kicking away the ladder”: First we climb up, then we kick the ladder away so that you can’t follow.

And Trump is right that the [North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)] should be revised. Some sensible proposals have been put forth by the partners in NAFTA. For example, Canada has proposed that the revised NAFTA should ban harsh US anti-labor laws, like the right-to-scrounge laws called “right-to-work” in contemporary Newspeak. These laws are soon to become federal policy, it seems, under the reactionary Roberts Court, which was made more extreme by [Senate Majority Leader Mitch] McConnell’s shameful parliamentary maneuvers to prevent even consideration of Obama’s nomination, opening the way to the appointment of Neil Gorsuch — another gift to the far right.

The Canadian proposal was prominently reported in the major Canadian press, but, oddly, is missing from the discussions of NAFTA revision here, which keep to Trump proposals.

*Allegations of collusion continue to haunt Donald Trump’s presidency, primarily over his alleged ties to Russia and Putin, and former FBI Director James Comey said in a recent interview with ABC News that Trump is “morally unfit” to be president. What’s your take on all this, and what does Trump’s disrespect for law and the fact that his base is refusing to abandon him tell us about the current state of American democracy and US politics in general?*

We don’t need Comey to tell us that Trump is morally unfit. He made that abundantly clear in the primaries, if not before. The fact that the Oval Office is coming to resemble a schoolyard on a bad day may be obnoxious, but it doesn’t

rank high among the misdeeds of the administration, in my opinion. ... Same with his alleged ties to Russia and Putin. Much more serious is the clique that now surrounds him. It's a sad day when one has to hope that General [James] Mattis will keep the ... [rest] in check. The [John] Bolton appointment in particular should send shivers up the spine of any person.

As for Trump's base, they are indeed quite loyal. Most Trump voters were relatively affluent and probably are fairly satisfied with the ultra-reactionary policies. Another important segment was non-college-educated whites, a group that voted overwhelmingly for Trump (a 40 percent advantage). There is a close analysis of this group in the current (Spring 2018) issue of the Political Science Quarterly. It found that racism and sexism were far more significant factors in their vote than economic issues. If so, this group has little reason to object to the scene that is unfolding, and the same with the white Evangelicals who gave Trump 80 percent of their vote. Among justly angry, white, working-class Trump voters, many apparently enjoy watching him stick his thumb in the eyes of the hated elites even if he doesn't fulfill his promises to [working-class voters], which many never believed in the first place.

What all this tells us, yet again, is that the neoliberal programs that have concentrated wealth in a few hands while the majority stagnate or decline have also severely undermined functioning democracy by familiar mechanisms, leading to anger, contempt for the dominant centrist political forces and institutions, and often anti-social attitudes and behavior — alongside of very promising popular reactions, like the remarkable [Bernie] Sanders phenomenon, [Jeremy] Corbyn in England and positive developments elsewhere as well.

*Ryan, an influential architect of the Republican economic platform, announced that he is stepping down from Congress. Do you think his decision was motivated by the fear that a "blue wave" may be coming in November as a result of a growing backlash against Trump and Trumpism?*

There is much talk about how this "admirable" figure, who bedazzled the media with fraudulent spreadsheets, wants to spend time with his family. Much more likely, I think, is that he decided to leave Congress because he had achieved his long-standing goals, particularly with the "Donor Relief Act of 2017" and the deficit cuts that open the way to sharp reduction of entitlements: health, social security, pensions — whatever matters to the people beyond the very privileged.



And perhaps he prefers to be out of town when it becomes too hard to conceal what's being done to the general population and someone will have to face the music.

*With regard to foreign affairs, what do you consider to be the most menacing elements of Trump's handling of US foreign policy?*

Trump inherited multiple crises. His own policies have been largely incoherent, but he has been consistent in some areas, primarily the Middle East. He has provided strong support for the Saudi war in Yemen, a major catastrophe, and is exulting in the huge arms sales to the dictatorship. Last December, UN agencies warned that the Saudi blockade of Yemen could lead to "one of the largest famines in modern times." Yemen already has the world's worst cholera outbreak, which is not under control. The Saudi blockade is hindering desperately needed imports of food, medicine and fuel.

Apart from the human disaster it is creating, the Saudi dictatorship, always with firm US backing, seems intent on carrying forward the Taliban and ISIS projects of destroying precious antiquities. Reviewing the systematic Saudi destruction, the chair of Yemen's Organization of Antiquities and Museums charges that the attacks on 60 sites are "a conscious campaign to wreck Yemen's heritage and demoralize its citizens." Western experts agree that the destruction seems deliberate, using information provided by the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] on cultural heritage sites to direct bombing attacks, with no military objective.

The US-led attack on ISIS in Raqqa destroyed the city, and nothing is being done to reconstruct or help the victims. Under the influence of [US-UN Ambassador] Nikki Haley, one of the more sinister (and, it seems, ambitious) figures in the administration, Trump has sharply cut funding to the [United Nations Relief and Works Agency], which barely keeps millions of Palestinian refugees alive. In general, "make America great" means great at destroying, and that's where the greatness ends. It's by no means entirely new, but is now raised to a higher level and becoming a matter of principle.

In May, Trump will presumably refuse to renew sanctions relief for Iran, as required by the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). That does not constitute formal withdrawal, though that's the likely effect. Even if the European signers formally

persist, the consequences will be severe because of the central role of the US in the international financial system — not to speak of the danger that their persistence might arouse the ire of the unpredictable Trump, who can do a great deal of damage if crossed. Effective withdrawal might provide an opening for the new national security adviser, Bolton, a genuine war criminal who publicly calls for bombing Iran, presumably in collaboration with Israel and with tacit Saudi approval. Consequences could be horrendous.

There is much fevered debate as to whether Iran might have violated the JCPOA, contrary to the firm conclusion of [the International Atomic Energy Agency] Director General Yukiya Amano on March 5, 2018, that “Iran is implementing its nuclear-related commitments.” But we hear virtually nothing about US violations, though these have been clear enough. Thus the JCPOA commits the signers to support the successful implementation of the agreement, including in their public statements, and to refrain from any adverse effect on trade and economic relations with Iran that conflict with their commitments to successful implementation of the JCPOA. The US has been in flat violation of all of these commitments, which have serious consequences.

Unmentionable as always is the obvious way to alleviate whatever threat Iranian nuclear programs are imagined to pose: establishing a nuclear weapons-free zone in the region. The way is clear. The proposal is strongly supported by Iran, the Arab states and the world generally. But there is an impediment. It has regularly been blocked by the US, for familiar reasons: Israel’s nuclear weapons. Also ignored is that the US [and] UK have a special commitment to work for this goal, having committed themselves to it in the UN [Security Council] resolution they invoked in an effort to find some thread of justification for their invasion of Iraq.

There is more to say about this troubled region, but there are crises elsewhere as well. One involves North Korea, and here there might be some rays of light. Trump has so far accepted the moves of the two Koreas toward improving relations, and has agreed to negotiations with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un that so far look promising. If these initiatives succeed, they might go as far as the September 2005 agreement in which North Korea pledged to abandon “all nuclear weapons and existing weapons programs.” Unfortunately, the Bush administration immediately violated all of its commitments under the agreement, and North Korea proceeded with its nuclear weapons programs. We may hope that Trump will be willing to accept success in denuclearizing the peninsula and

in further steps toward accommodation. And if he wants to brag about the achievement as a demonstration of his brilliance as a deal-maker, just fine.

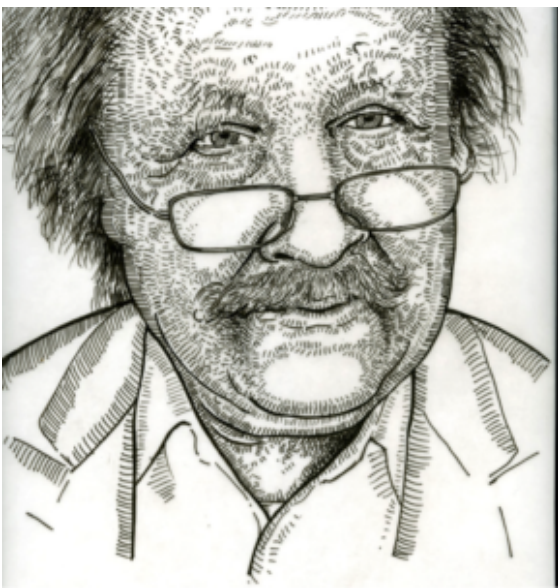
This by no means exhausts the foreign policy issues that should be seriously addressed — topics that would carry us far afield.

*What's your overall sense about Trumpism? What is it really all about, and do you think Trumpism is showing us the future of right-wing politics in the US?*

Trumpism is one of many manifestations of the effects of the neoliberal policies of the past generation. These have led to extreme concentration of wealth along with stagnation for the majority. There have been repeated crashes of the deregulated financial institutions, each worse than the last. Bursting bubbles have been followed by huge public bailouts for the perpetrators while the victims have been abandoned. Globalization has been designed to set working people throughout the world in competition with one another while private capital is lavished with benefits. Democratic institutions have eroded. As already mentioned, all of this has led to anger, bitterness, often desperation — one remarkable effect is the increasing mortality among middle-age whites discovered by Anne Case and Angus Deaton, analyzed as “deaths of despair,” a phenomenon unknown in functioning societies. While there are variations from place to place, some features are common. One is the decline of the centrist parties that have long dominated political life, as we see in election after election. In the US, in recent years, whenever candidates arose from the base in the Republican primaries, the established powers were able to crush them and impose their own choice: Mitt Romney, most recently. In 2016, for the first time they were unable to do so, but they quickly rallied to the winning candidate, who proved quite willing to front for the more brutal wing of the traditional party. The real surprise in the election was the Sanders campaign, which broke with a long tradition of pretty much bought elections, and was stopped only by machinations of the Obama-Clinton party managers. The Democratic Party is now split between the donor-oriented New Democrat managers and a growing activist social democratic base.

What all of this portends, worldwide, is far from clear. Though there are also significant signs of hope, some commentators have — with good reason — been quoting Gramsci's observation from his prison cell: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

# Peter Sloterdijk ~ Wat gebeurde er in de 20e eeuw?



Peter Sloterdijk - Tekening Joseph Sassoon Semah

In zijn nieuwe essaybundel *‘Wat gebeurde er in de 20e eeuw?’* beperkt Peter Sloterdijk zich niet tot de vorige eeuw, een eeuw vol destructie, maar hij biedt ook nieuwe perspectieven op globalisering, ecologie, economie en geschiedenis. De mens wil steeds meer en meer en steeds verder en verder, maar tegelijkertijd heeft de mens ook behoefte aan een sociale gemeenschap, aan geborgenheid, aan ergens bij horen, hetgeen hij illustreert aan de hand van het episch dichtwerk *‘Odyssee’* van Homerus.

In het eerste essay *‘Het antropoceen - een proces-toestand in de marge van de aardgeschiedenis’* beoordeelt Sloterdijk de verantwoordelijkheid van de ‘aardeburgers’ voor de natuur: “Als producent van enorme indirecte emissies komt de ‘mensheid’ van het industriële tijdperk, ongeacht haar gewichtloosheid

als biomassa, mogelijk inderdaad een geologisch relevante rol toe – namelijk in haar hoedanigheid van uitbuiters van enorme wagenparken en vloten vliegtuigen en schepen die worden aangedreven door verbrandingsmotoren, maar ook met het oog op hun warmtehuishouding in aardse contreien waar strenge winters aanleiding geven tot pyrotechnisch en architectonisch compenserende maatregelen. Het proces over het ‘antropoceen’ kan tot de openbare rechtszitting worden toegelaten.”

De actuele inmenging van de mens in de ontwikkelingsgeschiedenis van de natuur heeft geleid tot verontrustende vervuiling van de aarde, zoals de enorme plastic soep in de Noord-Atlantische en de Stille Oceaan en de toenemende verzuring van de oceanen, maar ook tot doldraaiende, ‘zelfversterkende cirkelprocessen’, die onderling met elkaar zijn verbonden.

Sloterdijk benoemt er zes: de beeldende kunsten, het kredietwezen, de machinebouw, het staatswezen, het wetenschappelijk onderzoek, en het rechtswezen, waar analoge processen plaatsvinden.

Op bijvoorbeeld het terrein van de beeldende kunst heeft zich sinds de veertiende eeuw in Europa een totaal nieuw soort organisatie ontwikkeld.

Vanaf de Renaissance heeft een eeuwenlang doorgaande zelfintensivering van het artistiek vermogen, een cirkel van virtuositeit, een gelukkige opwaartse beweging, plaatsgevonden, een “waarin zich de eerste tekenen aankondigden van een verandering in de modus van het menselijk in-de- wereld-zijn die tot op de dag van vandaag doorwerkt, te weten “de integratie van de natuurlijke historie in de geschiedenis van de mens.”

Op het eind van de 20 ste eeuw is hiervan de hoogconjunctuur aangebroken, ‘klimaatverantwoordelijkheid’ ligt op ieders lippen.

Renaissance is volgens Sloterdijk, “in de kern een project om de lijdzame berusting in het lot te saboteren, waarbij het moderne activisme het middeleeuwse passivisme (het katholicisme) bedwong.”



“Door de permanente Renaissance, die de impliciete agenda van de moderne tijd bepaalt, ontstaat een netwerk van aanstekelijke verhalen, voor herhaling vatbare animaties en expansieve ondernemingen, waarin de algemene kennis van het globaliseringstijdperk werd gearticuleerd.”

Sloterdijk ziet globalisering als de belangrijkste gebeurtenis van deze tijd, een verandering van de wereld in een dynamisch verband, een ongehoorde versnelling van communicatie, waarin bijna alles met bijna alles overal in interactie treedt. De dynamiek van het geglobaliseerde is het zoeken naar geluk, maar

globalisering betekent ook de opheffing van het recht van onwetendheid.

Zijn we te laat om onze toekomstige problemen op te lossen?, is de vraag die Sloterdijk gelukkig ontkennend kan beantwoorden.

“Er bestaat een prognostische intelligentie die zich precies in leemte tussen ‘laat’ en ‘te laat’ nestelt. Het is deze intelligentie die hier en nu krachtadig tot uiting zal moeten komen.”

De bestaansstijl van de moderne mens van de afgelopen eeuwen moet radicaal gemodificeerd worden. Door de gemakkelijke beschikbaarheid van fossiel-energetische brandstoffen, leiden we een leven “alsof Prometheus het vuur een tweede keer had gestolen.” Dat vuur brandt nu ook in onze existentiële motieven.

“Wij kunnen ons geen vrijheid meer voorstellen die niet altijd ook vrijheid impliceert voor riskante versnellingen, vrijheid om je voort te bewegen naar de meest afgelegen doelen, vrijheid om te overdrijven en dingen te verspillen, ja uiteindelijk zelfs de vrijheid om dingen op te blazen en jezelf te vernietigen.”

De actuele klimaatstrijd moet er voor gaan zorgen dat het civilisatieproces voortgang kan vinden. Een positieve samenwerking tussen culturen in werkbare gemeenschappelijke instituties dient daartoe te worden versneld, waarbij de idealistische partij pleit voor nieuwe bescheidenheid in plaats van je alleen te richten op groei en expansie, een radicale ommekeer van de richting die de civilisatie tot dusver heeft genomen.

Sloterdijk voorspelt dat we in de 21ste eeuw de strijd tussen expansionisme en minimalisme zullen meemaken en moeten “Afrekenen met een cultuur waarin overvloed, verspilling en luxe burgerrechten hebben gekregen.” Hij houdt een

pleidooi voor nieuwe bescheidenheid als antwoord op ecologische feiten; ecologisch puritanisme als enig verstandig moraal.

Daartoe moet een algemeen verplichtend regelsysteem komen en een global-governance-orgaan in het leven worden geroepen. Technische ontwikkelingen moeten ervoor gaan zorgen dat het mogelijk wordt de maritieme praktijken voor redelijke prijzen te civiliseren. De techniek moet een andere rol gaan spelen, anders dan die van milieu vernietiger van biogenetische proces, namelijk op artificieel vlak natuurlijke productieprocessen voortzetten.

Het civiliseren van de globalisering berust, als het succesvol verloopt, op “de synergie van recht, wetenschap en technologie.” Maar dit alles kan alleen succesvol zijn als een allesomvattende verandering plaatsvindt, die de morele of spirituele drijfveren achter de globalisering aanpakt: zij betreft het civiliseren van het zoeken naar het geluk zelf.

Peter Sloterdijk – *Wat gebeurde er in de 20e eeuw?*

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In 2011 presenteerde Peter Sloterdijk in Felix Meritis de Nederlandse vertaling van zijn boek ‘Du musst dein Leben ändern’ – ‘Je moet je leven veranderen’.

Onder leiding van Tiers Bakker ging René Bos in gesprek met Peter Sloterdijk.

*Linda Bouws – St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten*

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# **Anonymous ~ The Story of Aaron Swartz ~ Full Documentary**

This film follows the story of programming prodigy and information activist Aaron Swartz. From Swartz’s help in the development of the basic internet protocol RSS to his co-founding of Reddit, his fingerprints are all over the internet. But it was Swartz’s groundbreaking work in social justice and political organizing combined



with his aggressive approach to information access that ensnared him in a two-year legal nightmare. It was a battle that ended with the taking of his own life at the age of 26. Aaron's story touched a nerve with people far beyond the online communities in which he was a celebrity. This film is a personal story about what we lose when we are tone deaf about technology and its relationship to our civil liberties.

Film by Brian Knappenberger - Luminant Media