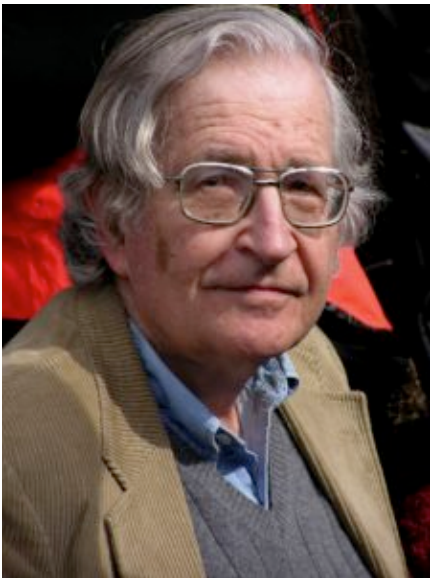


Noam Chomsky On Fascism, Showmanship And Democrats' Hypocrisy In The Trump Era



Noam Chomsky

After 18 months of Trump in the White House, American politics finds itself at a crossroads. The United States has moved unmistakably toward a novel form of fascism that serves corporate interests and the military, while promoting at the same time a highly reactionary social agenda infused with religious and crude nationalistic overtones, all with an uncanny touch of political showmanship. In this exclusive *Truthout* interview, world-renowned linguist and public intellectual Noam Chomsky analyzes some of the latest developments in Trumpland and their consequences for democracy and world order.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, I want to start by asking for your reading of what took place at the Singapore summit, and the way this event was covered in the US media.

*Noam Chomsky: It's reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes and the dog that didn't bark. What was important was what *didn't* happen. Unlike his predecessors, Trump did not undermine the prospects for moving forward. Specifically, he did not disrupt the process initiated by the two Koreas in their historic April 27 [Panmunjom]*

Declaration, in which they “affirmed the principle of determining the destiny of the Korean nation on their own accord” (repeat: *on their own accord*), and for the first time presented a detailed program as to how to proceed. It is to Trump’s credit that he did not undermine these efforts, and in fact made a move toward facilitating them by cancelling the US-South Korean war games, which, as he correctly said, are “very provocative.” We would certainly not tolerate anything of the sort on our borders - or anywhere on the planet - even if they were not run by a superpower which not long before had utterly devastated our country with the flimsiest of pretexts after the war was effectively over, glorying in the major war crimes it had committed, like bombing major dams, after there was nothing else to bomb.

Beyond the achievement of letting matters proceed, which was not slight, no “diplomatic skills” were involved in Trump’s triumph.

The coverage has been quite instructive, in part because of the efforts of the Democrats to outflank Trump from the right. Beyond that, the coverage across the spectrum illustrates quite well two distinct kinds of deceit: lying and not telling relevant truths. Each merits comment.

Trump is famous for the former, and his echo chamber is as well. Liberal commentators exult in totting up and refuting Trump’s innumerable lies and distortions, much to his satisfaction since it provides the opportunity for him to fire up his loyal — by now almost worshipful — base with more evidence of how the hated “Establishment” is using every possible underhanded means to prevent their heroic leader from working tirelessly to defend them from a host of enemies.

A canny politician, Trump surely understands well that the base on which he relies, by now almost the entire Republican Party, has drifted to a surreal world, in part under his influence. Take the major Trump-Ryan legislative achievement, the tax scam — “The US Donor Relief Act of 2017,” as Joseph Stiglitz termed it. It had two transparent aims: to enrich the very wealthy and the corporate sector while slamming everyone else, and to create a huge deficit. The latter achievement — as the main architect of the scam Paul Ryan helpfully explained — provides the opportunity to realize the cherished goal of reducing benefits that serve the general population, already very weak by comparative standards, but still an unacceptable infringement on the prerogatives of the 1%. The congressional Joint Committee on Taxation [estimates](#) that the law will add \$1

trillion to deficits over the next decade. Virtually every economist generally agrees. But not 80 percent of Republican voters, of whom half believe that the deficit will be *reduced* by the gift their leader has lavished upon them.

Or consider something vastly more significant, attitudes toward global warming (apologies for the obscenity: climate change), which poses a severe threat to organized human life, and not in the distant future.

Half of Republicans believe that what is plainly happening is not happening, bolstered by virtually the entire leadership of the Party, as the Republican Primary debates graphically revealed. Of the half who concede that the real world exists, barely half think that humans play a role in the process.

Such destructive responses tend to break through the surface during periods of distress and fear, very widespread feelings today, for good reason: A generation of neoliberal policies has sharply concentrated wealth and power while leaving the rest to stagnate or decline, often joining the growing precariat. In the US, the richest country in history with unparalleled advantages, [over 40 percent](#) of the population don't earn enough to afford a monthly budget that includes housing, food, child care, health care, transportation and a cell phone. And this is happening in what's called a "booming economy."

Productivity has risen through the neoliberal period, even if not as much as before, but wages have stagnated or declined as wealth is funneled to a few bulging pockets. Distress is so severe that among white middle-aged Americans, mortality is actually increasing, something unheard of in functioning societies apart from war or pestilence. There are similar phenomena in Europe under the "business first" ("neoliberal"/"austerity") assault.

Returning to forms of deceit, one technique is simply lying, honed to a high art by the Maestro. Another technique is not telling parts of the "whole story" that matter.

To illustrate, consider the [analysis of "Trump's claims about the North Korea deal"](#) by the expert and highly competent fact-checker of The Washington Post, Glenn Kessler. His article originally ran under the title of "Not the Whole Story," with the title presented in extra-large letters to emphasize the ignominy. Kessler's acid (and accurate) critique of Trump's distortions and inventions opens by declaring (again correctly) that "North Korea has a long history of making

agreements and then not living up to its obligations,” citing the most crucial case, the September 2005 US-North Korea agreement (under six-power auspices), in which, in the official wording, “The DPRK [North Korea] committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] safeguards.”

As Kessler points out, the North Koreans did not live up to these promises, and in fact, soon returned to producing nuclear weapons. Obviously, they can't be trusted.

But this is “Not the Whole Story.” There is a rather significant omission: Before the ink was dry on the agreement, the US undermined it. [To repeat the unwanted facts from our earlier discussion of the matter](#), “the Bush administration broke the agreement. It renewed the threat of force, froze North Korean funds in foreign banks and disbanded the consortium that was to provide North Korea with a light-water reactor. Bruce Cumings, the leading US Korea scholar, writes that ‘the sanctions were specifically designed to destroy the September pledges [and] to head off an accommodation between Washington and Pyongyang’.” The whole story is well-known to scholarship, but somehow doesn't reach the public domain.

Kessler is a fine and careful journalist. His evasion of “the whole story” appears to be close to exceptionless in the media. Every article on the matter by The New York Times security and foreign policy experts is the same, as far as I've seen. The practice is so uniform that it is almost unfair to pick out examples. To choose only one, again from a fine journalist, Washington Post specialist on Korea Anna Fifield [writes](#) that North Korea “signed a denuclearization agreement” in 2005, but didn't stick to the agreement (omitting the fact that this was a response to Washington's breaking the agreement). “So perhaps the wisest course of action,” she continues, “would be to bet that it won't abide by this one, either.” And to complete the picture with a banned phrase, “So perhaps the wisest course of action would be to bet that [Washington] won't abide by this one, either.”

There are endless laments about the deceitfulness and unreliability of the North Koreans; many are cited in [Gareth Porter's review of media coverage](#). But it would be hard to find a word about the rest of the story. This is only one case.

I don't incidentally suggest that the deceit is conscious. Much more likely, it's just

the enormous power of conformity to convention, to what Gramsci called hegemonic “common sense.” Some ideas are not even rejected; they are unthinkable. Like the idea that US aggression is aggression; it can only be “a mistake,” “a tragic error,” “a strategic blunder.” I also don’t want to suggest this is “American exceptionalism.” It’s hard to find an exception to the practice in the history of imperialism.

So far, at least, Trump has kept from disrupting the agreement of the two Koreas. Of course, all of this is accompanied by boasts about his amazing deal-making abilities, and the brilliance of his skillful tactics of threatening “fire and fury” in order to bring the dictator to the negotiating table. There are many accolades by others across the spectrum for this triumph — which is about on a par with the standard claims that Obama’s harsh sanctions forced Iran to capitulate by signing the joint agreement on nuclear weapons, claims effectively refuted by Trita Parsi (*Losing an Enemy*). Whatever the factual basis, such claims are necessary to justify harsh measures against official enemies and to reinforce the general principle that what we do is *right* (with occasional tragic errors).

In the present case too, there is good evidence that the truth is almost the opposite of the standard claims, and that the harsh US stance has impeded progress toward peaceful settlement. There have been many opportunities in addition to the 2005 agreement. In 2013, in a meeting with senior US diplomats, North Korean officials outlined steps toward denuclearization. One of those who attended the meeting, former US official and Stimson Center Senior Fellow Joel Wit [reports that](#), “Not surprisingly, for the North Koreans, the key to denuclearization was that the United States had to end its ‘hostile policy’.”

While the US maintains its threatening stance, the North Korean leadership — “not surprisingly” — has sought “to develop a nuclear arsenal as a shield to deter the US while they moved to develop the economy.” The North Korean government, in June 2013, “issued an important new pronouncement that it was open to negotiations on denuclearization,” Wit writes, adding that, “The Obama administration dismissed it at the time as propaganda.” He adds further that “the North Koreans have given a great deal of thought to denuclearization and almost certainly have a concrete plan of action for the upcoming [Singapore] summit, whether the White House does or not.” In fact, at the 2013 meetings, “the North Korean officials actually laid out a concrete plan to achieve denuclearization,” Wit reports.

Not the only case. China's "double freeze" proposal, supported by Russia, Germany and others, has been on the table for years, rejected by Washington — until the Singapore summit.

Trump's diplomacy, such as it is, has been subjected to withering attack, especially by liberal opinion: *How could the US president agree to meet on friendly terms with a brutal dictator? How could he fail to demand that North Korea end its human rights violations, which are indeed horrendous?*

Willingness to look at "the whole story" suggests some other questions, of course unasked — in fact, unthinkable: *How could Kim agree to meet on friendly terms with the head of the state that world opinion overwhelmingly regards as the greatest threat to peace? How could North Korea fail to demand that the US end its human rights violations, also horrendous? Has North Korea done anything remotely like invading Iraq, the worst crime of this century? Or destroying Libya? Has it been condemned by the ICJ [International Court of Justice] for international terrorism ("unlawful use of force")? And a lot more that is easy enough to reel off.*

It made perfect sense for North Korea not to bring up US crimes as a condition for moving forward. The proper goal of the meeting was to expedite the efforts of the two Koreas to pursue the directions outlined in their April 27 Declaration. And the argument cuts both ways.

Interestingly enough, while Trump seeks to appease his political doppelgänger in Pyongyang, he has succeeded in alienating most of the US's major Western allies, including Canada, France and Germany. Is this the consequence of his alleged foreign policy doctrine ["We are America, bitch"](#)?

There are extensive efforts to try to discern some coherent doctrine that guides Trump's behavior, but I suspect it's a fool's errand. A very good predictor of Trump policy is [his fixation on] ... reversing anything associated with the despised "Kenyan Muslim" he replaced: in foreign policy, tearing up the successful Iran deal and accepting the long-standing possibilities for addressing the serious North Korea crisis (proclaiming to have created an astonishing breakthrough). Much the same is true of other actions that look like random shots when the driving forces are ignored.

All of this has to be done while satisfying the usual Republican constituencies: primarily the business world and the rich. For Trump, that also means unleashing

the more brutal wing of the Republican Party so that they can dedicate themselves even beyond the norm to the interest of private wealth and corporate power. Here the technique is to capture the media with attention-grabbing antics, which can be solemnly exposed while the game goes on — so far, quite effectively.

Then comes the task of controlling the so-called “populist” base: the angry, frightened, disillusioned white population, primarily males. Since there is no way for Trumpism to deal with their economic concerns, which are actually being exacerbated by current policy-formation, it’s necessary to posture heroically as “standing up” for them against “malevolent forces” and to cater to the anti-social impulses that tend to surface when people are left to face difficult circumstances alone, without institutions and organizations to support them in their struggles. That’s also being done effectively for the time being.

The “We are America, bitch” posture appeals to chauvinistic instincts and the white supremacy that is a deeply rooted feature of American culture and is now exacerbated by concern that whites might even become a minority. The posture can also delude working people into believing that their tough-guy protector will bring back the world they’ve lost. Such propaganda exercises cannot, of course, target those actually responsible for the plight of the victims of neoliberal globalization. On the contrary, attention has to be diverted away from corporate managers who largely shape state policy while establishing complex global supply chains to maximize profit at the expense of working people. More appropriate targets are desperate people fleeing horrors for which we are largely responsible: “foreigners” who have been “robbing us” with the connivance of “treacherous liberals” and other assorted devils that can be conjured up in periods of social breakdown.

Allies, friends, who cares? There is no need for policies that are “coherent” in any traditional sense. Consequences don’t matter as long as the primary goals are met.

After months of harsh rhetoric against China’s trade practices, Trump has decided to impose tariffs of \$50 billion on Chinese imports, prompting Beijing, subsequently, to declare that the US has embarked on a trade war and to announce in turn that it will retaliate with similar measures against US imports. First, isn’t it true that China is merely practicing today the same sort of mercantilist policies that the US and Great Britain practiced in the past on their

way to global ascendancy? Second, is the targeting of tariffs expected to have any impact either on China's economy or on the size of the US trade deficit? And lastly, if a new era of protectionism is about to take off, what could the consequences of such development be for the reign of global neoliberalism?

Several questions arise. First, what is Trump's motive? If it were concern about China's economic management and trade policies, he wouldn't be going out of his way to alienate allies with tariffs and insults but would be joining with them to confront China on the issues of concern. If, however, the driving force is what I discussed earlier, then targeting both China and allies with abuse and tariffs has a certain logic: It may play well in the rust belt, contributing to the delusion that our hero is fighting to ensure jobs for working people — though it's a tricky strategy, because it harms other parts of his loyal base, mainly farmers, and also, though more subtly, because it imposes a new tax on consumption, which is what tariffs amount to.

As for China's economic policies, yes, they are similar to those that have been used by developed societies generally, beginning with Britain and then its former North American colony. Similar, but more limited. China lacks the means available to its predecessors. Britain stole superior technology from India, [the Low Countries](#), Ireland, and by force and severe protectionism, undermined the Indian economy, then the world's most advanced along with China. The US, under the [Hamiltonian system](#), resorted to high tariffs to bar superior British goods, and also took British technology in ways barred by the current US-initiated global trading system. Economic historian Paul Bairoch describes the US as “the mother country and bastion of protectionism” into the 1920s, well after it had become far and away the richest country in the world.

The general practice is called “kicking away the ladder” by economic historians: first use the practices to develop, then bar others from following.

Earlier, Britain's economic development relied on large-scale piracy, now considered by its former practitioner to be the most heinous of crimes. Keynes wrote that the booty of English pirates, like the famed and admired Sir Francis Drake, “may fairly be considered the fountain and origin of British foreign investments.” Piracy was also a standard practice in the American colonies. Both British and US economies also relied crucially on the most hideous system of slavery in human history. Cotton was the oil of the industrial revolution, providing

the basis for manufacturing, finance, commerce, retail. Such practices are not available to China.

Like Britain before it, the US called for “free trade” when it recognized that the playing field was tilted properly in its direction. After World War II, when the US had incomparable power, it promoted the “liberal world order” that has been an enormous boon to the US corporate system, which now owns about half of the global economy, an astonishing policy success.

Again, following the British model, the US hedged its commitment to “free trade” for the benefit of domestic private power. The British-dominated “free trade” system kept India as a largely closed protectorate. The US-dominated system imposes an extreme patent system (“intellectual property”) that provides virtual monopoly power to major US industries. The US government also provides huge subsidies to energy industries, agribusiness and financial institutions. While the US complains about Chinese industrial policy, the modern high-tech industry has relied crucially on research and development in the publicly subsidized sector of the economy, to such an extent that the economy might fairly be regarded as a system of private subsidy, private profit. And there are many other devices to subsidize industry. Procurement, for example, has been shown to be a significant device. In fact, the enormous military system alone, through procurement, provides a huge state subsidy to industry. These comments only skim the surface.

Britain abandoned laissez-faire when it could no longer compete with Japanese competition, part of the background for World War II in the Pacific. Some in the US are having similar qualms today, concerns that Trump is cynically exploiting. But not the powerful corporate sector that relies crucially on the US-designed global economic order.

The corporate sector relies so extensively on the global economy it has designed that it is sure to use its enormous power to try to head off a major trade war. The Trump tariffs and the retaliation might escalate, but it’s likely that the threat will be contained. Trump is quite right, however, in proclaiming that the US would “win” a limited trade war, given the scale of the US economy, the huge domestic market and unique advantages in other respects. The “We are America, bitch” doctrine is a powerful weapon of intimidation.

The Trump administration is moving full speed ahead with its intent on cracking

down on unauthorized entries to the country by separating immigrant children from their parents. More than 2,000 children have been separated from their parents during the last seven weeks, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions sought recently to justify Trump's immigration policy by citing a verse from the Bible. What can one say about an advanced Western society in which religion continues to crowd out reason in shaping public policy and public attitudes? And didn't the Nazis, although they were no believers, also use Christianity to justify their immoral and criminal acts?

The immigration policy, always grotesque, has descended to levels so revolting that even many of those who foster and exploit xenophobia are running for cover — like Trump, who is desperately trying to blame it on the Democrats, and like the First Lady, who is [appealing to "both sides of the aisle"](#) to come together to stop the obscenity. We should, however, not overlook the fact that Europe is crawling through much the same gutters.

One can quote scripture for almost any purpose one likes. Sessions doubtless knows that "all the law" hangs on two commandments: loving God and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But that is not the appropriate thought for the occasion.

It is true, however, that the US is unique among developed societies in the role of religion in social life, ever since the Puritans landed.

Recently, Trump stated that he had the absolute right to pardon himself (after he had already said that he could shoot someone on New York's 5th Avenue and not lose any support), while his lawyer, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, said the president could even commit murder in the Oval Office and still not be prosecuted for it. Your thoughts?

After praising Kim [Jong Un] effusively as a strong leader who "speaks and his people sit up at attention," Trump added: "I want my people to do the same." When the predictable reaction followed, he said he was kidding. Maybe. I hope we don't have an opportunity to find out.

While it is clear that the country is well on its way to becoming a pariah nation, the Democrats continue to focus their attention primarily on Trump's alleged collusion with Russia and unethical behavior, all the while trying to outflank the president on the jingoist front, adopting new restrictions for the 2020 elections so

they can keep away the likes of Bernie Sanders, and of course, playing masterfully the fundraising game that works in a plutocracy. With all this in mind, how would you describe the nature of contemporary US politics?

Much as in Europe, the centrist political institutions in the United States, which have long been in the driver's seat, are in decline. The reasons are not obscure. People who have endured the rigors of the neoliberal assault — austerity in the recent European version — recognize that the institutions are working for others, not for them. In the US, people do not have to read academic political science to know that a large majority, those who are not near the top of the income scale, are effectively disenfranchised, in that their own representatives pay little attention to their views, hearkening rather to the voices of the rich, the donor class. In Europe, anyone can see that basic decisions are made by the unelected Troika, in Brussels, with the northern banks peering over their shoulders.

In the US, respect for Congress has long been hovering in single digits. In recent Republican primaries, when candidates emerged from the base, the Establishment was able to beat them down and obtain their own candidate. In 2016, that failed for the first time. True, it's not far from the norm for a billionaire with enormous media support and almost \$1 billion in campaign funding to win an election, but Trump was hardly the choice of the Republican elites. The most spectacular result of the election was not the Trump phenomenon. Rather, it was the remarkable success of Bernie Sanders, breaking sharply with US political history. With no support from big business or the media, Sanders might well have won the Democratic nomination had it not been for the machinations of Obama-Clinton party managers. Similar processes are apparent in recent European elections.

Like it or not, Trump is doing quite well. He has the support of [83 percent of Republicans](#), which is without precedent apart from rare moments. Whatever their feelings may be, Republicans dare not cross him openly. His general support in the low 40s is not far from the norm, about the same as Obama's going into his first midterm. He is lavishing gifts on the business world and the wealthy, the authentic constituency of the Republicans (with the Democrat leadership not far behind). He has thrown enough crumbs to keep the Evangelicals happy and has struck the right chords for racist/white supremacy elements. And he has, so far, managed to convince coal miners and steel workers that he is one of them. In fact, his support among union members has increased to 51 percent.

It is hardly in doubt that Trump cares almost nothing about the fate of the country or the world. What matters is *me*. That's clear enough from his attitude toward global warming. He is perfectly well aware of the dire threat — to his properties. His application for a [seawall](#) to protect his Irish golf course is based explicitly on the threat of global warming. But pursuit of power impels him to lead the race to destruction, quite happily, as is evident from his performances. The same holds of other serious, if lesser, threats, among them the threat that the country may be isolated, despised, declining — with dues to pay after it's no longer his concern.

The Democrats are now torn between a popular base that is largely social democratic and a New Democrat leadership that panders to the donor class. Under Obama, the party was reduced to shambles at the local and state level, a particularly serious matter because the 2020 elections will determine redistricting, offering opportunities for gerrymandering even beyond today's scandalous situation.

The bankruptcy of the Democrat elite is well-illustrated by the obsession with alleged Russian meddling with our sacred elections. Whatever it might amount to — apparently very little — it cannot begin to compare with the “meddling” of campaign funding, which largely determines electoral outcomes, as extensive research has shown, particularly the careful work of [Thomas Ferguson](#), which he and his colleagues have now extended to the 2016 elections. As Ferguson points out, when Republican elites realized that it was going to be Trump or Clinton, they responded with a huge wave of last-minute money that not only led to Clinton's late October decline but also had the same effect on Democratic candidates for Senate, “virtually in lock step.” It is “outlandish,” Ferguson observes, that former FBI Director James Comey or the Russians “could be responsible for both collapses” in the final stage of the campaign: “For the first time in the entire history of the United States, the partisan outcome of Senate races coincided perfectly with the results of every state's presidential balloting.” The outcome conforms very well to Ferguson's well-supported “Investment theory of party competition.”

But facts and logic matter little. The Democrats are bent on revenge for their 2016 failure, having run such a rotten campaign that what looked like a “sure thing” collapsed. Evidently, Trump's severe assault against the common good is a lesser matter, at least to the party elite.

It's sometimes been noted that the US not only regularly meddles in foreign elections, including Russian ones, but also proceeds to subvert and sometimes overthrow governments it doesn't like. Horrifying consequences abound, to the present, from Central America to the Middle East. Guatemala has been a horror story since a US-backed coup overthrew its elected reformist government in 1954. Gaza, declining in misery, may become unlivable by 2020, [the UN predicts](#), not by acts of God. In 2006, Palestinians committed a grave crime: They ran the first free election in the Arab world, and made the "wrong" choice, handing power to Hamas. Israel reacted by escalating violence and a brutal siege. The US reverted to standard operating procedure and prepared a military coup, pre-empted by Hamas. In punishment for this new crime, US-Israeli torture of Gaza sharply increased, not only with strangulation but also regular murderous and destructive US-backed Israeli invasions, on pretexts that quickly collapse on examination. Elections that come out the wrong way plainly cannot be tolerated under our policy of "democracy promotion."

In recent European elections, there has been much concern about possible Russian meddling. That was particularly true of the 2017 German elections, when the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) did surprisingly well, winning 94 seats in the Bundestag, the first time it had won seats. One can easily imagine the reaction had Russian meddling been detected behind these frightening results. It turns out that there was indeed foreign meddling, but not from Russia. AfD hired a Texas media firm (Harris Media) known for support of right-wing nationalist candidates (Trump, Le Pen, Netanyahu). The firm enlisted the cooperation of the Berlin office of Facebook, which provided it with detailed information about potential voters for use in microtargeting those who might be receptive to AfD's message. It may have worked. The story seems to have been ignored, apart from [the business press](#).

If the Democratic Party cannot overcome its deep internal problems and the slow expansion of the economy under Obama and Trump continues without disruption or disaster, the Republican wrecking ball may be swinging away at the foundations of a decent society, and at the prospects for survival, for a long time.

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Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken & Darek M. Haftor (Eds) ~ Reason, Faith And Practice In Our Common Home - Festschrift for Dr. Sytse Strijbos ~ Content & List of Contributors



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*Juni, 1 2018 - Reason, Faith and Practice In Our
Common Home - Festschrift for Dr. Sytse Strijbos -
Will be online within a few weeks*

Introduction

This book is devoted to Dr. Sytse Strijbos, in our appreciation of his unique, devoted, and selfless efforts and contributions to the betterment of the world we live in.

The present age, often understood as either late modernity or postmodernity, seems to have manifested a developmental paradox. The invention and use of science and technologies has brought material well-being never experienced in human history. Much of the modern world is characterized by economic growth and reflected in advanced housing, schools, healthcare systems, transportation and communication infrastructure, safe and secure workplaces, social insurances of various types, pharmaceuticals that save the lives of millions—all bringing human comfort and fueling a consumption economy. Normatively regarded, however, there seems to be a blurred image. The development of societal

institutions, based on some form of democratic rationality, is important in its striving for human equality and participation as well as the elimination of coercions and oppressions.

Yet, we witness constant news about social, religious, political, and economic polarizations, with terrorist attacks and local wars killing innocent civilians, with global warming effects and microplastics in the oceans, with so-called “alternative truths” and challenges democratic institutions, including at its very heart the elections. More people than ever are consuming antidepressant pharmaceuticals and committing suicide. This imbalance between material development and normative advancement can be understood as the paradox of modernity and was brought to the surface eloquently by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in their seminal “Dialektik der Aufklärung” (Eng. “Dialectic of Enlightenment”). They challenge the myth of enlightenment and its progress, based solely on human reason, as reflected in rational bureaucratic organizations, science, and technology.

Raised in Dutch society during the World War II recovery effort, Strijbos is part of this paradox of modernity. He has witnessed the economic and material developments of his country and Europe, and the normative challenges of their societies. Strijbos has been exposed to several influences: a version of the Christian faith that promotes love and compassion, the power of intellect in science and technology, and the importance of action in entrepreneurship and businesses. Unlike most engaged people, he does not assume a stand for one of these three poles. Drawing on the intellectual tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, he seeks and formulates an integrative vision and approach that can be characterized in terms of three poles, where each pole interacts with the other two and in that manner aims toward human dignity and justice. His message is that only in that manner can we firstly understand the roots of modernity and its paradox and then redirect our societies.

Strijbos characterizes this integrative approach as disclosure, understood as “a process in which norms take shape that do justice to human life and society in its diversity. Disclosure accordingly goes together with recognition of the distinctive character and intrinsic normativity of the various terrains of life.” This concept is founded on the view that “human actions and interventions must be a positive response to a normative order that is itself anchored in the world.” [1]

Over nearly three decades, after changing his career from developing new

technologies through advanced applied research at Philips laboratories into an academic career based at the Department of Philosophy at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Strijbos' integrative visions and approach are manifested in his unique leadership. While occupied with his devotion to family life and university lecturing, he has managed to conceive of, initiate, establish, and govern several independent organizations (e.g., "the Centre for Technology and Social Systems" and "International Institute for Development and Ethics")

that aim to advance this integrative vision. The uniqueness of these efforts is that without any granted external resources, he motivates people in various parts of the world (e.g., the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK), Sweden, and South Africa) to pursue intellectual and practical activities also aimed at advancing this integrative vision, where attempts are made to relate faith and conviction to thinking and intellect, and to actions and practices. These efforts have formulated tentative bridges of several kinds. One kind is in the academia among the various specialized disciplines, typically isolated from each other, and with philosophy and theology. The other kind of bridges are between the academic world of thinking and the world of practices and actions, be it firms, entrepreneurship, hospitals, or aid agencies.

In the course of three decades, Sytse Strijbos has provided organizational and intellectual leadership that has contributed uniquely to the development of young people and scholars, several of which are today full professors and a university rector. In this book, students and colleagues of Strijbos have taken time to author a text with a message that in one way or another relates to the integrative vision proposed by Strijbos. These contributions are diverse, which only reflects the multidisciplinary impact of Strijbos' work and efforts and one of its underlying messages: the root cause of modernity and its paradox can neither be understood in terms of one or a few aspects only, nor in terms of the assumptions held by modernity. Rather, an integrated view is needed where faith should be related to thinking and science, which must be related to actions and practices - any separated approach is deemed to produce a partial diagnosis and thus a faulty remedy. Therefore, the title of this Festschrift that celebrates Sytse Strijbos is *"Reason, Faith and Practice in Our Common Home."*

Thank you, Sytse!

Spring 2018,

Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken, The Netherlands

Darek M. Haftor, Sweden

NOTES

[1] Both from: Strijbos, S. (2003). Systems Thinking and the Disclosure of a technological Society: Some Philosophical reflections. Systems Research and Behavioral Science, 20, 119-131. (p.128)

[2] The editors are grateful for the contributions of Harma Strijbos and dr. Carols Reinecke who provided many details about Strijbos' life and career.

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philips_Natuurkundig_Laboratorium

[4] Some data can be found in manuals on ceramic technology: R.J. Brook (ed.) Concise Encyclopedia of Advanced Ceramic Materials, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1991, page 113-117 and page 383-384. And also in: M.N. Rahaman, Ceramic Processing, Taylor & Francis, London/New York, 2007.

Christine Boshuijzen-van Burken & Darek M. Haftor (Eds) ~ Reason, Faith And Practice In Our Common Home - Festschrift for Dr. Sytse Strijbos ~ Biography Of Dr. Sytse Strijbos



Dr. Sytse Strijbos was born in Rotterdam, Netherlands, on March 28, 1944. He is the seventh child in a family of eight children, where the eldest and youngest were girls. His father was a hardworking tailor, and his mother worked as a nurse before she married. When Strijbos was about one year old, he stayed temporarily with relatives outside Rotterdam to recover from the effects of the Dutch famine winter at the end of the World War II. Strijbos was raised in the Calvinist faith, and in his youth, was shaped by the postwar Dutch mentality that emphasized citizens' contribution to the reconstruction of society, and an attitude that disciplined work is central in life.

In September 1961, after finishing high school, the young Strijbos moved to Delft, where he started his studies in applied physics at Delft University of Technology. He defended his master's dissertation at the Department of Physical Transport Phenomena, in April 1967. During his years as a student, the young Strijbos was an active member of the student society *Civitas Studiosorum Reformatorum*, where he was the president of the board from 1964 to 1965. Still, each year, he meets former board members and colleague students. Those younger years shaped Strijbos' thinking and attitude. This shaping would later influence Strijbos to search for an *integrative approach*, where the Christian faith's tenets of human dignity and compassion are combined with the human intellectual capabilities to reason and the human intentional action that transforms and intervenes in our reality - the crucial step from thinking and believing to action and the consequences thereof.

Philips Years

After his graduation in 1967, Strijbos started his career as a researcher at Philips *Natuurkundig Laboratorium Eindhoven*. [i] About one year later, in December 1968, Strijbos married Harma Bosker, whom he met in the Reformed Church in Delft. They started their married life near Eindhoven, first in Heeze and later in Aalst-Waalre. The first three of their four children were born there. During his studies in Delft, Strijbos was strongly inspired by the philosophy classes of Professor Hendrik van Riessen. Shortly after his marriage, he decided to enroll as a student of philosophy at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. He studied almost all

evenings and on his days off, in addition to his fulltime job at Philips. About five years later, in the spring of 1975, he received his master's degree in philosophy.

At Philips Research Laboratories, Strijbos conducted applied research in the research group on "*ceramic materials*" led by Professor Stuijts. One of the topics he worked on was compaction of powders, that is, one of the stages in the fabrication process of advanced ceramic materials.[\[ii\]](#) Initially, he planned to write a doctoral dissertation on this topic; however, he abandoned this plan without much hesitation when he was unexpectedly invited to apply for a job at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. Strijbos left Philips Eindhoven after ten years and took up the position as assistant professor in the Department *Systematic Philosophy and Cultural Philosophy*, led by Professor Van Riessen. In the summer of 1977, the family moved to Maarssen, a small city near Utrecht.

Academic Years

During his career in the Faculty of Philosophy at *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, Strijbos established and managed several teaching and research initiatives in cooperation with other faculties and universities, which would clearly manifest his search for the integration of thinking, believing, and action. An initial and important initiative was the cooperation with the *Faculty of Dentistry*, now known as *Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam*, (ACTA), which is a joint venture of the *Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Amsterdam*, the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, and the *Faculty of*[\[iii\]](#) *Exact Sciences* for students of computer science and artificial intelligence. On behalf of the ACTA, Strijbos developed a special ethics education program in cooperation with colleagues from social dentistry and the clinical staff. Eventually, this program led to an important achievement, namely, the publication of "*Kiezen en Keuzen: Ethiek in de Tandheelkundige Praktijk*," the first book on dental ethics in the Dutch language.[\[iv\]](#)

Almost at the beginning of his work at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, Strijbos conceived a plan to conduct a doctoral research project on *Systems Thinking*, which was a quickly and strongly emerging field. An initial impetus for this research direction was from a conference held in 1979 at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* on "*Systems Thinking and Societal Problems*," that was held on the occasion of the third anniversary of the *Faculty of Philosophy* [\[v\]](#). In the initial years of his doctoral research, Strijbos attempted "*to build a bridge to the special sciences and seriously address the problems that arise there*," he writes in the

preface of his doctoral dissertation. He was specifically faced with the challenge of delving into the fields of dentistry and medicine, which were unknown fields to him. Strijbos writes in the preface of his dissertation, *“In order to become familiar with the problems of health care I not only processed much professional literature in recent years, but I also had many discussions with dentists and doctors.”* Supervised by Professor Sander Griffioen and cosupervised by Professor Egbert Schuurman, Strijbos received his doctoral degree in 1988 with a dissertation entitled *“Het technische wereldbeeld: een wijsgerig onderzoek van het systeemdenken”* (Eng. *“The technological worldview: a philosophical study of systems thinking”*).[\[vi\]](#) Partly inspired by his contacts at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, in particular the physician and medical historian Professor Gerrit Arie Lindeboom [\[vii\]](#), he devoted the last chapter of his dissertation to a comprehensive analysis of the *“technologization process”* (Dutch *“vertechniseringsproces”*) of modern medicine. This is a further development of his earlier reflections on medicine and medical ethics, which he published earlier in 1985, in the book *“Nieuwe Medische Ethiek”* (Eng. *“New Medical Ethics”*) [\[viii\]](#).

The retirement of Professor Van Riessen at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, followed shortly by the departure of his younger colleague and pupil Dr. Egbert Schuurman, also meant a change for Strijbos. More specifically, Strijbos’ initial plan to further develop the pioneering work of Van Riessen’s philosophy of technology and culture together with Prof. Van Riessen had to be changed. Instead, Strijbos joined then the Department of *Social-Cultural Philosophy*, headed by Professor Griffioen. At about the same time, Strijbos sought international cooperation with colleagues with whom he could share his philosophical interest in systems thinking and the philosophy of technology. One of the first contacts was with Donald de Raadt, whom he traced through a publication in an academic journal in the field of systems thinking. This contact and subsequent dialogs led to their establishment of the *Centre for Philosophy, Technology and Social Systems* (CPTS), in 1995, an international, interdisciplinary academic cooperation in the fields of philosophy, technology, social sciences in a framework of systems thinking.

Centre for Philosophy Technology and Social Systems

In 1995, Strijbos was the principal organizer of the annual conference of the International Society for Systems Sciences (ISSS) at the *Vrije Universiteit*

Amsterdam. Donald de Raadt was then the president of the ISSS. The dialogs with Donald de Raadt culminated in a long-term collaboration. Strijbos presented courses on systems thinking at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, where Donald de Raadt resided. Andrew Basden, from Salford University, UK, who also had a keen interest in philosophy and the use of information and communication technologies, soon joined this cooperation. In this cooperation, Amsterdam, Luleå, and Salford expanded to include a dozen doctoral students, with annual working conferences held in Maarssen, Netherlands. Central to this cooperation was the three founders' shared interest in the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. The CPTS initiative can be regarded as a second major achievement (the ACTA initiative was the first), and represents an integration of faith and theology with thinking, where philosophy interacts with several specialized disciplines and their actions.

At the ISSS conference in Budapest in 1996, Strijbos met Professor Dries de Wet and Dr. Annemarie Potas from the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, Vaal Triangle Campus, South Africa (now known as the North-West University). They shared similar interests and the view that science and faith should not be isolated. This relationship was formally established in 1997, through an interdisciplinary research project where Strijbos cooperated with his new South African colleagues. At that time, Strijbos formulated his ideas and termed them "*disclosive systems thinking*," on which he wrote scholarly contributions[\[ix\]](#) that attracted several scholars from the Centre of Science and Faith at North-West University to participate in the annual working conferences of the CPTS in Maarssen. This long-lasting cooperation with South African communities manifested another dimension of the integration pursued by Strijbos: an integration between the Southern and Northern hemispheres, with all their peculiarities.

From the Netherlands, there was a keen interest in the CPTS' unique cooperation and attempted integration from the *Institute for Culture Ethics*, especially from Dr. Jan van der Stoep. The intellectual cooperation between researchers within the CPTS resulted in a millstone publication of a book in 2016, edited by Sytse Strijbos and Andrew Basden, entitled "*In Search of an Integrative Vision for Technology*." For the first time, this volume presents, in a systematic and comprehensive manner, the unique research program of the CPTS. This program proposes a conception of humans, society, and technology and its use in an

alternative mode to the prevalent contemporary approaches and their straggle between the intentional-constructivist and the material-determinist approaches. After a decade of operations, the CPTS was transformed into the current *“International Institute for Developmental Ethics”* (IIDE).

International Institute for Developmental Ethics

Encouraged by his entrepreneurial brother Aad Strijbos, and with support from Aad’s company CHR Investment B.V., based in Rotterdam, Strijbos started an initiative that led to the establishment of the IIDE in 2004. The IIDE is a scholarly institute with a practical mission, researching the extent, nature, and normative aspects of poverty, inequality, and injustice through local, regional, national, and international channels. In that sense, Strijbos succeeded in achieving a fuller integration of the concrete action, with faith and reason dominating the endeavors of the CPTS.

Although the IIDE is a fully independent organization without ties to any religious denomination, it takes Christian principles and values as its primary source for guidance and reference. As such, its views on Christian social responsibility lead the way to its vision, its mission, and its concrete services and products for the benefit of society. The IIDE’s mission is to offer expert capabilities to enable people and organizations in the development environment to become more caring, creative, and free in the context of development, by operating on the basis of Christian values, such as service, love, justice, equality, freedom, human dignity, and solidarity.

The IIDE has two legally independent departments: one in South Africa and one in the Netherlands. The department in South Africa resulted from Strijbos’ collaboration with Rev. Kiepie Jaftha, then chief director of community service at the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein), and his interactions with North-West University, based on an informal level and through personal contacts and incidental conferences on developmental issues. Prof. Annette Combrink, then rector at North-West University, served as one of the board members of the IIDE. Strijbos’ leadership is manifested by the memoirs of Prof. Lucius Botes, as follows:

“When I think of Sytse Strijbos when he first approached me while I was the Director of the Centre for Development Support at the University of the Free State, South Africa the following thoughts and impressions came to mind. I was immediately impressed with Sytse’s knowledge of the South African faith-based

development scene. At that stage, he already networked with some 80 plus people and organizations in South Africa. I was also struck by his focus that we should create some space where faith-based development practice should reflect on the ethics of the practice. He constantly reminded me how important it is to pursue an engaged scholarship that attempts at bridging the gap between scholarly and conceptual views and practical experience. This means mobilizing practitioners to have more theoretical reflections on their practice and encourage development scholars to reach out to practitioners."

Professor Lucius Botes, former "Director of the Centre for Development Support" and Dean Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Free State, South Africa.

Strijbos succeeded in engaging the "*Noaber Foundation*" as a donor and investor for the projects pursued in South Africa, such as helping small business owners in Qua Qua with their start-up investments. That work produced an academic book titled "*From Our Side*," 2008, edited by Steve De Gruchy, Nico Koopman, and Sytse Strijbos. In the book, several scholars from South Africa and the Netherlands present their vision of social and cultural development.

International Engagements

In his academic work, Strijbos has been invited to deliver lectures and full courses on various aspects of normativity, technology, and systems thinking in various countries for a number of years. On an invitation from Professor Donald de Raadt, one major engagement toward the end of 1990's was the development and annual delivery of a unique course on systems thinking to undergraduate students at Luleå University of Technology in Sweden. He has delivered multiple guest lectures in Asia, for example, in China at the invitation of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and at several universities in South Korea and Japan. He also has presented guest lectures in North America.

From 1997 to 2014, Strijbos visited South Africa two to three times per year, usually for two weeks. In that context, Strijbos was appointed as an associated professor in the newly established *Centre of Science and Faith* at North-West University, providing him with the context where science and faith could be addressed in an integrated manner. Together with the director of this centre, Professor Pieter Potgieter, Strijbos developed annual workshops for newly appointed academic staff at North-West University, that is, workshops addressing the relation between science and faith.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the government of South Africa introduced a new educational mode for institutions of higher education called the “The South African Qualifications Authority” (SAQA), which required all academic staff to have had exposure to the following:

Identifying and solving problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using creative and critical thinking have been made.

Using science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility toward the environment and health of others.

Demonstrating an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognizing that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Contributing to the full personal development of the learner and the social and economic development of society at large, by making it the underlying intention of any program of learning to make the individual aware of:

- participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national, and global communities;*
- being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts.*

Prof. Daan van Wyk, dean of the Faculty of Natural Science of North-West University, appointed the then retired rector of the PU vir CHO, Prof. Carools Reinecke, to develop new material for the prescribed course in philosophy of science for third-year undergraduate students to comply with the new SAQA regulations. Moreover, all the students in the Faculties of Natural Science, Health Sciences, and Engineering had to pass that course. Prof. Reinecke recommended that Strijbos act as an advisor and collaborator in the development of the new course. Based on his wide experience in this field, Strijbos proposed an alternative focus to the course: Science, Technology, and Society (STS). In addition, he advised that at least four other collaborators from the Netherlands be appointed by the university to partake in the development of the new course - a proposal approved by the university. Strijbos acted as scientific coordinator and Prof. C. Reinecke as managerial coordinator of a team that included Dr. Ir. F.K. Boersma (*Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*), Prof. Dr. M. de Vries (Technical University Eindhoven and Technical University, Delft), Dr. H. Jochemsen (Director of the Centre for Medical Ethics at the G.A. Lindeboom Institute, Ede), and Dr. J. van der Stoep (Director of the Institute for Cultural Ethics, Amersfoort). Under Strijbos' initiative North-West University was the first institution that formally complied with the new SAQA requirements.[\[x\]](#)

Strijbos' social awareness has been well known throughout his academic life, through his continuous focus on practice-oriented research and additional activities. Among others, he was a guest lecturer for several years at the *Foundation of Christian Philosophy*, where he taught courses at the University of Twente and Wageningen University, Netherlands. He has served as member of the Provinciale Staten in Utrecht (States-Provincial, which is the provincial parliament in the Netherlands), acted as an external advisor of a hospital ethics committee in the Utrecht region, and served many years as elder in the local church community.

Strijbos has always been interested in the relation between technology, philosophy, and theology. His primary hobby is reading books that are intellectually challenging or about history. He enjoys reading to his grandchildren and loves hiking and multiday tours.

Strijbos' Message

Strijbos' book on the ethics of dentistry is a bold manifestation of his vision for the interaction between faith, intellect, and action. A starting point is that theoretical reflection should begin with a pretheoretical concern in the context of human affairs, which is fed into an intellectual reflection unconditionally founded on creedal convictions that require critical reflection. The results from such intellectual reasoning should be fed back into social intervention for the sake of humans flourishing. Strijbos is not against the use of technology and development of social affairs but is always critical about the way development and technology are conceived, used, and pursued in human affairs; he stresses the importance of an explication of a normative direction of development and the use of technology. His book on the ethics of dentistry contains a plea for a modern version of professional dentistry that applies to any profession. Its pages provide a guide, not a solution, for normative reflection on daily professional practices, where emphasis is placed on the practical situation and contact with the patient in the sociocultural context, where the latter conditions human actions in the clinical practice.

Notes

[i] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philips_Natuurkundig_Laboratorium

[ii] Some data can be found in manuals on ceramic technology: R.J. Brook (ed.) *Concise Encyclopedia of Advanced Ceramic Materials*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1991, page 113-117 and page 383-384. And also in: M.N. Rahaman, *Ceramic*

Processing, Taylor & Francis, London/New York, 2007.

[iii]

[iv] Kiezen en Keuzen: Ethiek in de tandheelkundige praktijk. Houten/Diegem, Bohn, Stafleu, Van Loghum, 1999. - In Dutch, the word “kiezen” translates both as “choosing” and as “molars”; thus, the title can be translated as “Choosing (or Molars) and Choices: Ethics in Dental Practice”

[v] From this congress resulted the volume “Systeemdenken en samenlevingsproblematiek,” edited by S. Strijbos, VU Boekhandel, Amsterdam, 1981.

[vi] S. Strijbos, “Het technische wereldbeeld: Een wijsgerig onderzoek van het systeemdenken”. Amsterdam, Buijten & Schipperheijn. An English summary can be found here: <http://hdl.handle.net/1871/15599>

[vii] See introductory Chapter 1 in the volume “De Medische Ethiek in de branding, Een keuze uit het werk van Gerrit Arie Lindeboom,” edited by S. Strijbos, Buijten & Schipperheijn, Amsterdam, 1992.

[viii] See Chapters 2, 3, and 7 in “Nieuwe Medische Ethiek,” edited by S. Strijbos, Buijten & Schipperheijn, Amsterdam, 1985

[ix] Strijbos S. 2003 Systems Thinking and the Disclosure of a Technological Society: Some Philosophical Reflections in *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 20: 119-131.

[x] The positive outcomes of the innovative approach to education are documented in Proceedings of the Annual Working Conference of the CPTS (Reinecke, C. (2008). Critical cross-field outcomes for all graduate education at the North West University of South Africa. In: *Proceedings of the 13/14th Annual Working Conference of CPTS*, Basden, A., Eriksson, D., Strijbos, S. (eds). CPTS: Maarsse, 66-81).

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Introduction

The following text was written as an introduction to the proceedings of the annual conference of the Centre for Philosophy, Technology, and Social systems, an international and interdisciplinary research cooperation cofounded by Strijbos. The chief motive for the inclusion of this text in this Dr. Sytse Strijbos Festschrift is to provide the reader with a short illustration of the kind of thinking that occupied Strijbos, and the research collaboration that he coestablished and governed.

Integrative framework

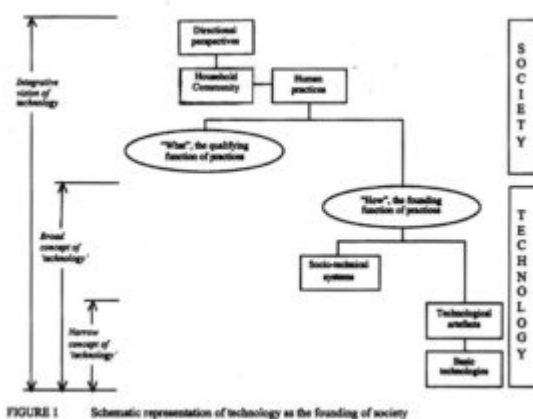
With slight exaggeration, one can say that change is the only constant factor in today's society, where everything is in flux - continuing change seems to be a basic condition for living in modern times. These extreme dynamics and fluidity of society (Bauman 2000) have been directly related to the complex of Science, Technology, and Economy since the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century in Europe. In past decades, the study of this complex has become a vast field of interdisciplinary research with many ramifications and approaches (*see e.g., the Encyclopedia of Science, Technology and Ethics.*)

To understand social change in a technology-based society first requires a

conceptualization of the main terms “technology” and “society”. One should realize, however, that both terms are container concepts or collective names and do not refer to a specific object. Furthermore, one must be aware that by distinguishing between such a thing as “technology” on the one hand and “society” on the other, one might already start from a false view of technology, namely, as something separate from society. Aiming for an integrative vision of technology and society, one should consider that technology is about people and thus a part of society, not unlike a meteorite that impinges from outside on our human lives and society. “We know that technology does not determine society: it is society. Society shapes technology according to the needs, values, and interests of people who use the technology.” (Castells and Cardoso 2005: 3)

Figure 1 provides a schematic of an integrative vision, in which the lower part of the diagram represents “technology” and the upper part “society.” In everyday language, technology usually refers to material artifacts, such as a cell phone, car, or laptop. Usually, we are unaware that each of these artifacts is, for its functioning, dependent on a comprehensive system, for example, to use a car, a system of roads, petrol stations, legal regulations, and numerous other amenities required. Characteristic of modern science-based technology is that a fundamental transition has taken place in the relation between technology and

society, namely, from technology that consists of separate artifacts in the hands of individuals to technology as a total environment in which we live. This new relationship between technology and society concerns the “how” or foundation of the various human and social practices in which our daily life unfolds. These practices have become dependent on their realization of organized “sociotechnical



systems,” such as transportation from the mobility system, medical support from the health care system, and schooling and training from the educational system. The transition from a traditional to modern society thus goes along with a fundamental and irreversible change of our living environment. Technology has become a new habitat for people, a technotope.

This fundamental transition to a modern technological world also has profound

implications for the economic sphere of society and politics. Referring to Figure 1, one could observe that the sociotechnical systems that provide the foundation for societal life in its variety of practices also include the economic and political dimension, for example, the health care system. Since about the 1980s, the economy of health care has become a recurring matter of public debate. Notably, the traditional ethical relationship of medical practice between physician and patient has been dyadic. This situation has changed profoundly because this relationship is intertwined within a broader nexus in which several other parties are involved. This means, among other things for the physician, that their obligations to each patient must be balanced in a network of competing obligations and conflicting interests (see e.g. Haavi Morreim 1991).

Let us now turn our attention to “society” at large, the upper part of Figure 1. Through the centuries, the household has been the fundamental building block of human society - within the household and family is where the exchange between the generations and their care for each other takes place. The fabric of society around the household has fundamentally changed since the rise of the Industrial Revolution. As long as the household as the fundamental unit of society persists, a broad range of human practices has gradually differentiated from the household, a process that began with the organization of labor and technical production in factories. The challenge for social change in a modernizing society can now be understood as the dual task of preserving the household as the ethical core of society and opening up the household and the potential of the various human practices for the benefit of society. This means that the shaping of the “how,” the technical-organizational foundation of society, should enable concretization of the specific “what” of each domain of human life along with the sustenance of healthy households in society.

It is difficult to ignore that peoples’ behavior patterns vary among regions and distinct cultural backgrounds. The role of culture and religion is therefore a hotly debated topic, in particular, the debate related to the economic development of a society. In recent years, the debate has been triggered by the study *Culture matters: How values shape human progress* (2000), edited by Harrison and Huntington, and some later publications. In the scheme of Figure 1, the role of culture and religion for the development of our technology-based societies is accounted for by “directional perspectives.” Traditionally, the household and local community play key roles in the transfer of basic cultural values, formation

directional perspectives on human life, and communication about the world from one generation to the next. In a differentiated society, human practices must play a complementary role in the transfer of specific values, or echoing MacIntyre (1981: 178), in developing and maintaining the so-called “internal good” of these practices.

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