

Nexus Conference 2019

The Ring or What Will Rule the World?



Sunday 10 November | 9.30 AM — 4.00 PM
National Opera & Ballet, Amsterdam

Speakers

Michael Ignatieff — José Manuel Barroso — Mitchell Cohen
Peter Frankopan — Eric Xun Li — Admiral Michael Mullen
H.Exc. Sima Samar — Alexander Schimmelbusch — Pierre Audi
Lila Azam Zanganeh — Karol Berger — Alfonso Cuarón — Ben Goertzel
H.Exc. Zaki Nusseibeh — Deborah Voigt — Leon Wieseltier

Programme Anniversary Conference

Sunday 10 November 2019
National Opera & Ballet, Amsterdam

In the set of Wagner's *Walküre*

- 9.30 AM Welcome *Rob Riemen*
- 9.45 AM Keynote lecture *Michael Ignatieff*
- 10.45 AM Intermission
- 11.15 AM I. GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG: THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS
Panel discussion with *José Manuel Barroso, Mitchell Cohen, Peter Frankopan, Michael Ignatieff, Eric Xun Li, Michael Mullen, Sima Samar* and *Alexander Schimmelbusch*, moderated by *Rob Riemen*
- 1.15 PM Lunch with complimentary refreshments
- 2.00 PM II. WHEN THE GODS REMAIN SILENT
Panel discussion with *Pierre Audi, Lila Azam Zanganeh, Karol Berger, Alfonso Cuarón, Ben Goertzel, Zaki Nusseibeh, Deborah Voigt* and *Leon Wieseltier*, moderated by *Rob Riemen*
- 4.00 PM Book signing

The conference will be held in English.

To attend the Nexus Conference please register online at www.nexus-instituut.nl.
The entrance fee includes refreshments for lunch.

The programme may be subject to change. For the latest information on the conference and its speakers and for terms and conditions, please see our website.

Anniversary Conference 2019

25th ANNIVERSARY NEXUS INSTITUTE

The Ring or What Will Rule the World?

One hundred years ago, in April 1919, the venerable London journal *The Athenaeum* published a letter by the French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, starting with the now famous phrase: ‘We later civilizations, we too now know that we are mortal.’ An insight that reverberates to the present day: civilizations can perish; so can our own.

Valéry continues his letter by noting that of course, prior to 1914, people realized that earlier civilizations like those of Nineveh and Babylon had vanished, together with their gods and laws, academies, science and great classics; but all this, according to the general sentiment, was ‘none of our affair.’ But now, after the world conflagration that raged from 1914 to 1918, ‘our generation learned from its own experience how the most beautiful things and the most ancient, the most formidable and the best ordered, can perish by accident.’

The inescapable question is now: is there hope, after the end of the global war, for a new and better world? But in a pessimistic tone, the writer sketches the intellectual debris of that mountain of painful facts on which we can no longer rely, which blocks, like a great wall, any view of a better world:

The military crisis may be over. The economic crisis is still with us in all its force. But the intellectual crisis, being more subtle because it assumes the most deceptive appearances... will hardly allow us to grasp its true extent. [...] The illusion of a European culture has been lost, and knowledge has been proved impotent to save anything whatever; science

is mortally wounded in its moral ambitions and, as it were, put to shame by the cruelty of its applications; idealism is barely surviving, deeply stricken, and called to account for its dreams; realism is hopeless, beaten, routed by its own crimes and errors; greed and abstinence are equally flouted; faiths are confused in their aim cross against cross, crescent against crescent; and even the skeptics, confounded by the sudden, violent, and moving events... are no longer master of the motions of their thought.

Valéry's deepest concern, however, is that he knows the decline of his civilization is rooted in *the crisis of the mind*. Only once this crisis has been overcome will a view towards a new civilization become possible.



Paul Valéry's famous remark does not only reverberate in our own time; it is itself the echo of the primal chord struck by Richard Wagner's musical epic *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The note of melancholy that characterizes Valéry's letter is absent from this work, however. The tone of Wagner's four-part opera rather prefigures a song that frequently resounds from the end of the nineteenth century, *The Internationale*:

No more tradition's chains shall bind us...
The law oppresses us and tricks us
The rich are free from obligation...

For like his Russian friend, the anarchist Bakunin, Wagner is convinced, when he starts working on his *Ring des Nibelungen* in 1848, the year of revolution, that a new civilization, a new world order can only come about if the old world is first destroyed, if a true *Götterdämmerung* takes place.

For Wagner, his own time is this old world, which it would be best to get rid of as fast as possible. It is a world of gods, of elites leading a beautiful life of pleasure in their ostentatious Walhalla, eternally young, seeking only to enjoy themselves without limit and caring little for the rest of the world or even for nature. They hold political, economic and legal power, but are at the same time prisoners of this power and of their own traditions.

There is also a more mundane world, the world of the masses which let themselves be exploited, partly because of their own greed, and are only interested in working, making money and chasing after their desires.

In this world — this time! — artists are no less infected with the lust for gold, and they do everything to entertain both the divine elite and the mundane masses with their tricks.

Above all everyone, elites and masses, is under the sway of the Ring! This is the same Ring we already encounter in Plato's *Republic*, and in the

twentieth century in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Absolute dominion over the world, limitless power, a power invisible like the money that is capable of corrupting everything and everyone; that is what the Ring offers to whoever possesses it. But it comes at a cost... The Rhinemaidens, who guard the gold from which the Ring can be made, declare: the one who chooses limitless power will never know love. Power or love, that is the choice. And the earth goddess Erda warns: the Ring is cursed; in the end, limitless power will only bring doom, death and decay, because the true human nature of love and beauty will waste away.

For this world order Wagner sees no future, nor should there be any future for it. As Thomas Mann would later note, the Richard Wagner of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (only one of Wagner's shapes, because like the characters in his operas he would take on different shapes in the course of his life) is a true cultural bolshevist, struggling against capitalism and the bourgeois elite society with its antiquated traditions and obsolete power relations, focused only on personal gain. The Walhalla, the domain of the elites in the modern states, deserves to go up in flames. And only the truly free, and therefore fearless man, Siegfried, and the truly disinterested love of a woman, Brünnhilde, can bring about this new social order and civilization and undo the curse of the Ring by renouncing the world of power and its rule by money.

The herald of this new world order, Wagner argues in his 1849 essay *Art and Revolution*, is *not* Christianity; it never was, because this religion 'adjusts the ills of an honourless, useless, and sorrowful existence of mankind on earth, by the miraculous love of God.' The art that had existed until then will also fail to bring salvation, because 'its true essence is Industry; its ethical aim, the gaining of gold; its aesthetic purpose, the entertainment of those whose time hangs heavily on their hands.'

No, it will be the new art, the revolutionary art, that is: his own *Ring des Nibelungen* which, propelled by the great social movement of the revolutions of 1848, will 'teach mankind its noblest meaning and true direction: a fellowship of free men, their lives sustained by love and the beauty of art.'



Shakespeare, no less than Wagner, was convinced of the power of art. As he has Hamlet proclaim, the essential purpose of theatre is 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.'

Today, a hundred years after Paul Valéry's diagnosis, when we must once again realize that our civilization, too, is mortal, that a given world order can collapse or disappear; that the prevailing social contract can turn out to be unsustainable, that perhaps there is still a curse on the desire for limitless power and world domination (but could love, on the other hand, ever rule

the world?), and that the intellectual and spiritual crisis that Valéry discerned has not just not been overcome, but has indeed even intensified; then it might help to first follow Hamlet's advice and look in the mirror that Wagner shows us with his *Ring des Nibelungen*, to then ask the essential questions: who and what should rule the world? How should power be handled? What can art really offer us? And how can the spiritual crisis of our time be overcome — to keep our civilization from destroying itself or being destroyed?

I. GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG: THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

'*Weisst du wie das wird?* — Do you know what will happen?', one of the goddesses of fate asks her sisters as they are weaving the thread of destiny in the first scene of *Götterdämmerung*, the final opera of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

What will happen? What, besides the mirror Wagner shows us with his *Ring*, can history teach us? For we now know what happened after Paul Valéry's ideal of civilization died in that First World War. That was the first chapter in our modern history. Second chapter: global poverty as a result of economic depression. Third chapter: millions of people seek salvation in fascism, Nazism and Stalinism. Fourth chapter: a second world war. Fifth chapter: under the maxim 'never again', a world order is created in Western societies that seeks to uphold human rights, international treaties, and liberal and democratic values, while putting its faith in a new sacred Trinity: Money, Technology and Science, which will bring Progress, Peace and Prosperity.

Exactly thirty years ago, on 9 November 1989, this world order experienced its ultimate triumph with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet communism. A world order led by the United States, the 'indispensable nation' which thus vindicated the prediction made by Franklin D. Roosevelt in Chapel Hill on 5 December 1938, when he received an honorary doctorate from the University of North Carolina:

There may be those in the world who believe that a regimentated people, whose every thought and action is directed by one man, may give some people a type of security which is pleasing to them. But whatever convictions I have, none is stronger than my abiding belief that the security and well-being of the American people can best be served by the democratic processes which have made this country strong and great.

The future, however, rests not on chance alone, not on mere conservatism, mere smugness, mere fatalism, but on the affirmative action which we take in America. *What America does or fails to do in the next few years has a far greater bearing and influence on the history of the human race for centuries to come than most of us who are here today can ever conceive. We are not only the largest and most powerful democracy in the whole world, but many other democracies look to us for leadership that world democracy may survive.*

Twenty years later, in 1958, it is President Eisenhower who voices his conviction in his Law Day Address: ‘In a very real sense the world no longer has a choice between force and law. If civilization is to survive it must choose the rule of law.’

This is the world order that will rule the West after two world wars, to bring about a new world, a new civilization.

But civilizations are mortal... As Karl Marx already knew, when he wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 that ‘all that is solid dissolves into air, all that is holy is profaned.’ And this is what we see happening before our eyes right now.

The America President Roosevelt envisioned no longer exists. Nor does the world order he had in mind. Other powers, especially China, will increasingly dominate the world order. Democracies are changing. Resentment, fear and a loss of certainty and security due to globalization, large-scale immigration and the rise of digital technologies are felt around the world. To many, liberal values are no longer ‘the vital center’, as Arthur Schlesinger Jr., historian and adviser to President Kennedy, called them. International law is increasingly displaced by brute force and authoritarian regimes are gaining in popularity.

All the more reason to ask that one question: what will happen? What will rule the world?

The contemporary gods who meet each year in their new Walhalla, Davos, have already issued the divine pronouncement that the world should prepare for *Globalism 4.0: The Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution* — and that the gods themselves are very busy designing the architecture of this new world order, though it is not yet known what it is going to look like. But we need not be concerned, because the gods ensure us from the pulpit of their World Economic Forum: they remain ‘committed to improve the state of the world’.

But Shakespeare taught us to respect and learn from the arts for good reason. If we turn to the mirror of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* now, what do we see?

Firstly, that the British historian Arnold Toynbee had a point when he noted in his magnum opus *A Study of History* that civilizations fall, not because it was inevitable, but because governing elites do not respond adequately to changing circumstances or because they focus only on their own interests.

For how trustworthy are today’s gods, despite all their promises? Do we not often observe, more often than we would like, the powerlessness and the failure of political leaders? Why is that? How powerful are they really? What or who is the greater, invisible power they cannot or will not see? Or is it the very nature of power that is the problem, does that curse still rest upon the Ring?

And if our civilization dies, what will be the cause of death? What are its symptoms? Valéry said there was an intellectual, even a spiritual crisis. What is this crisis, and how does it manifest itself? And will today's gods eventually face a *Götterdämmerung* because they, with all their power, will turn out to be powerless? But what will happen then? Who will then rule the world?

These are questions we must answer first, before, like Hamlet, we can take our own responsibility and say: 'The time is out of joint. O cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right.'

II. WHEN THE GODS REMAIN SILENT

At the beginning of the adventures of Odysseus, Homer recounts how Zeus, the ruler of the gods, grumbles: 'Look you now, how ready mortals are to blame the gods. It is from us, they say, that evils come, but they even of themselves, through their own blind folly, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained.'

For once, Nietzsche agreed with a god. For he was still young, when he held a boundless admiration for Wagner and saw in him the greatest cultural hero of his time. Equally great was his dismay and anger when he felt he discovered that Wagner did not live up to his own ideals. Nietzsche felt that the premiere of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Wagner's own temple of art was nothing more than a soiree for the affluent elite, and that Wagner in this way diminished his own art, turning it into entertainment for those 'whose time hangs heavily on their hands.'

In Nietzsche's eyes, the Wagner who had a sacred faith in the fearless, free man (Siegfried) and humanization through love (Brünnhilde) underwent a metamorphosis into an evil magician à la Klingsor, mixing German nationalism, strident antisemitism and the slave morality of Christianity into a magic potion with which to intoxicate the entire world. Even Thomas Mann, who held a life-long passion for Wagner's music, could not avoid admitting at a certain point: 'There is plenty of Hitler in Wagner.'

Like a true Siegfried, free and unafraid of any power whatsoever, Nietzsche takes up arms, using his pen as a sword, against the establishment in all its forms and shapes: its traditions, laws, morals, institutions and values, and he declares the supreme power that reigned for so long, the God of Christianity, to be dead. No God can save us, the gods are silent, man is cast back upon himself alone. At the same time, Nietzsche envisions the coming of that 'most sinister of guests', the most ominous event in history, and the cause of the cultural crisis described by Valéry: *nihilism*. In his notes, he describes this as 'the festival of the death of God': with nihilism, the moral values of good and evil will disappear; philosophy will disappear ('the popular ideal of "the sage" has fallen'), politics will be ruined ('lies, opportunism prevail'), and nihilism leaves its mark on history ('fatalism, Darwinism, the last attempts to read reason and divinity into it have foundered'). This nihilism is the cause

of the inescapable fact that ‘the dignity of man has been reduced immensely in his own eyes’.

Two decades before Valéry came to realize his civilization had died, Nietzsche already knew it was going to happen and why: ‘What I am relating is the history of the next two centuries. I am describing what will happen, what can no longer happen in any other way: *the rise of nihilism*. This history can be told already: for it is necessity itself that is at work here. This future already proclaims itself in a hundred signs, this fate announces itself everywhere...’

But Nietzsche also knows: ‘We must first experience nihilism to discover what the *value* of these “values” was... one day, we will need *new values*...’

Before this time comes, however, Nietzsche predicts that where order has disappeared, where contracts no longer hold, only forces in perpetual conflict will rule, like in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.

The extent to which nihilism is gnawing at the tissue of Western society was described by Erich Fromm, psychoanalyst and a student of Freud, in his classic work *The Sane Society* in the 1950s. Fromm observes that, despite the progress in technology and science and despite the general economic affluence, a collective crisis of identity has taken root. It can hardly be a coincidence, he notes, that the highest rates of mental affliction — suicides, domestic violence, depression, drug abuse, alcoholism — are found in the most affluent countries. Instead of creating life, we are busy destroying it. Fromm’s conclusion: the world is in the grips of a spiritual crisis! He then asks the logical next question: is our modern society actually capable of satisfying people’s essential needs? And what would these be?

The disappearance and silence of the gods can, however, also offer us an optimistic view of the future. Flaubert, for example, writes to Madame Roger des Genettes in 1861: ‘With the gods gone, and Christ not yet come, there was a unique moment, from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone.’ The same spirit of optimism can be discerned in twentieth-century existentialism: now, each individual can and must take charge of shaping his own life! And Robert Musil writes in his *Man Without Qualities*: ‘If there is such a thing as a sense of reality... then there must also be something that one can call a sense of possibility. [...] Things are the way they are, but they could just as well be some other way.’ In the 1960s, the slogan of this philosophy would become: all power to the imagination!

And this brings us back to Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, with its vision of a great social movement resisting the injustice of the social order, using art as a vantage point, a vision above all that love, as symbolized by Brünnhilde, will rule, invulnerable to the power of money because true love is never for sale, since its value is meta-physical and therefore infinite!

Perhaps this is possible. For now, it is more utopian than realistic. And the nature of the realism that would rule the world we find, of course, expressed

most perfectly by the gods in their Walhalla, Davos. The ‘fourth industrial revolution’ awaits us: the age of digital technology, artificial intelligence, robots... But will this bring us a civilization that can do justice to the dignity of human beings and that can satisfy our essential needs? Or was the French writer Georges Bernanos right when he warned in his 1944 essay *La France contre les robots* that ‘the age of the machines will also be that of the powerlessness of man, whose life will be governed from now on by the striving for returns, efficiency, and profit. [...] The machine civilization does not know quality, only quantity will count, Number will rule the world. It will never be able to defend freedom, because only money will matter. [...] Modern man will be servile and know no responsibility. *Obedience* and *Irresponsibility*, these are the two magic words at the gate that grants access to the Paradise of the Civilization of Machines.’



‘*Weisst du wie das wird?* — Do you know what will happen?’ Now that the goddesses of fate are silent, too, this is the question *we* must answer. What do we want for our world? How can we overcome the cultural crisis? If technology and science cannot help us with our existential questions and needs, what can we expect, and to what art or philosophy can we turn? And if the Western world is ailing, what can we learn from the non-Western world? Can we do without God or gods? And what or who will rule — if it must be without that Ring?

Rob Riemen
Founder and president of the Nexus Institute

Speakers

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF (Canada, 1947) is an author, former politician and one of the world's leading public intellectuals. Ignatieff was the leader of the liberal opposition in the Canadian parliament from 2008 to 2011, and is currently the president and rector of the Central European University in Budapest. Due to the Hungarian government's attacks on this prominent liberal institution, Ignatieff was forced to announce the university's move to Vienna at the end of 2018. Ignatieff taught at Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard and the University of Toronto, made programmes for the BBC and is the author of books including *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (2004), *Fire and Ashes: Success and Failure in Politics* (2013) and *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World* (2017). Ignatieff has regularly spoken and written for the Nexus Institute and held the keynote lecture at the very first Nexus Conference in 1996.

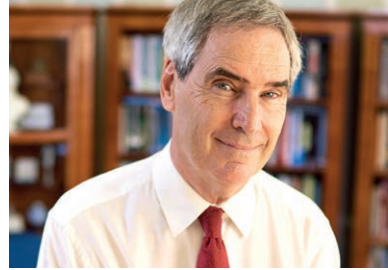


Photo: Daniel Vogel

JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO (Portugal, 1956) was president of the European Commission from 2004 until 2014. Previously, he served as prime minister of Portugal from 2000 to 2004 and as minister of Foreign Affairs from 1992 to 1995. As president of the European Commission he played an influential role in the passing of the Treaty of Lisbon, in responding to the financial crisis and in incorporating new members into the European Union. In 2012, Barroso received the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the EU. Barroso was visiting professor at Georgetown University and at Princeton University, and currently acts as chairman and non-executive director of Goldman Sachs International. He has been awarded numerous university honorary degrees and has received more than 60 decorations, prizes and honours, including the Great Cross in the Portuguese Military Order of Christ and the Great Cross in the Dutch Order of Orange-Nassau.





MITCHELL COHEN (United States, 1952) is Professor of Political Theory at the City University of New York. He specializes in the political theory of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in contemporary European politics. Between 1991 and 2009, he was co-editor with Michael Walzer of the cultural-political journal *Dissent*, which still frequently publishes his articles. His essays also appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Les Temps Modernes*. His work *The Politics of Opera* (2017) received the Prose Award for Music of the Association of American Publishers and was named one of the best books of 2017 in the *London Evening Standard*. He is currently working on a new book, *The Political Passions of Richard Wagner*.



PETER FRANKOPAN (United Kingdom, 1971) is Professor of Global History at Oxford University and Director of the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research. He works on the history of the Eastern Mediterranean, Russia, the Middle East, Central Asia and China. His book *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (2015) has been described as ‘not just the most important history book in years, but the most important in decades’ (*BerlinerZeitung*). His most recent book is *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World* (2018). It is a ‘masterly mapping out of a new world order’ (*Evening Standard*). In 2017, Frankopan was appointed Senior Advisor and Academic Expert to a major project for the World Bank and the British Department for International Development on transport corridors in South Asia. He advises governments, inter-government agencies, multilateral institutions and corporations around the world about geopolitics. In 2019, he was named one of the World’s 50 Top Thinkers by *Prospect Magazine*.

ERIC XUN LI (China, 1968) is a venture capitalist and political scientist. After studying in the United States he returned to China, where he became a critic of the notion that China's progress should follow the path of the West's free-market principles. He has written articles on global politics and the relation between China and the West for *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs* and other publications. In his writings and public lectures, he argues that globalization has run out of steam and that the Chinese model offers a viable alternative to Western liberal democracy. Li is the founder of Chengwei Capital in Shanghai, serves on the board of directors of China Europe International Business School and is a Fellow of the Aspen Institute.



MICHAEL MULLEN (United States, 1946) is a retired US Navy admiral, who held the highest rank in the US military, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, from 2007 to 2011. Considered one of the most influential Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in history, Admiral Mullen takes a fresh approach to the most important issues of the 21st century, including America's global positioning and how business trends and the economic health of the US impact American national security. Admiral Mullen acted as the top military advisor to two presidents — George W. Bush and Barack Obama — and continues to maintain strong relationships with leaders around the globe. He led the military during a critical period of transition, overseeing the end of the combat mission in Iraq and the development of a new military strategy for Afghanistan. Today he shares with audiences his deep experience in leading change in complex organizations, crisis management, strategic planning, budget policy, congressional relations, risk management, technical innovation and cyber security.





SIMA SAMAR (Afghanistan, 1957) is a renowned advocate of human rights. She was appointed as the inaugural chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in June 2002. Previously, she served as Minister of Women's Affairs in post-Taliban Afghanistan. She also served as UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Sudan and is currently serving as Chair of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. Samar's contributions to human rights, democracy and transitional justice have been widely recognized and she is the recipient of several prestigious awards. Samar was recently appointed as member of the United Nation Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation.



ALEXANDER SCHIMMELBUSCH (Austria, 1975) studied economics and German at Georgetown University in Washington. He worked as a consultant for an investment bank in London for five years, but left the world of high finance to become a journalist and writer. His widely acclaimed book *Hochdeutschland* (2018), in which a successful investment banker becomes disillusioned with his luxurious lifestyle and writes a political manifesto to radically reform German society, is a searing critique of the world of late capitalism. He is currently working on a television series on the tech scene in Berlin in 2028.

PIERRE AUDI (Lebanon, 1957) is an internationally celebrated theatre and opera director. From 1988 to 2018 he was director of the Dutch National Opera. Under his directorship, DNO became one of the leading opera houses in the world, staging grand performances including the first Dutch production of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Between 2005 and 2014 Audi was artistic director of the Holland Festival, attracting prominent and promising artists and directors from various disciplines to the Netherlands. From September 2018 he has been general director of the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence as well as artistic director of the Park Avenue Armory in New York. Audi was knighted in the Order of the Dutch Lion and in the Légion d'honneur. To mark his departure from the Dutch National Opera he received the Gold Medal of Honour for Arts and Sciences of the House of Orange Nassau for his contribution to Dutch cultural life and for his work as a stage director.

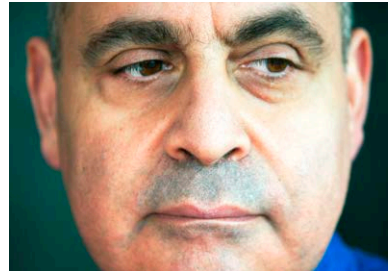


Photo: Sarah Wong

LILA AZAM ZANGANEH (France, 1976), daughter of Iranian exiles, is an acclaimed writer. Her literary debut, *The Enchanter: Nabokov and Happiness* (2011), explores the work and person of Vladimir Nabokov to demonstrate how reading and writing can be ecstatic and thus deeply exhilarating experiences. She has regularly written essays for international dailies and magazines including *The New York Times*, *Le Monde* and *La Repubblica*, and is the author of the forthcoming novel *A Tale for Lovers & Other Madmen*. She has taught literature and cinema at Harvard University, and was a judge for the 2017 Man Booker Prize in the UK as well as the Formentor Prize in Spain. Azam Zanganeh is a global ambassador for Libraries without Borders and an advocate for Narrative4, a global organization which promotes empathy through the exchange of stories, proving that every life matters and creating understanding by breaking down barriers and shattering stereotypes.



Photo: Marcelo Correa



KAROL BERGER (Poland, 1947) is Professor in Fine Arts at Stanford University. He studied musicology at the universities of Warsaw and Yale and specializes in the history of music aesthetics and musical theory, as well as in music from 1770 to 1850. His award-winning books include *A Theory of Art* (2000), *Bach's Cycle*, *Mozart's Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (2007) and *Beyond Reason: Wagner contra Nietzsche* (2017). In 2011 he received the Glarean Prize of the Swiss Musicological Society and in 2014 the Humboldt Research Award of the Humboldt Foundation. He is a Foreign Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Honorary Member of the American Musicological Society, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and, since 2019, a Foreign Member of the Academia Europaea.



ALFONSO CUARÓN (Mexico, 1961) is an award-winning film director. He studied film at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and worked as a television and movie director, before he shot to global fame with his 2001 film *Y tu mamá también*, which was nominated for an Oscar for best original screenplay. Cuarón next directed the critically acclaimed third Harry Potter film, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004). The dystopian drama *Children of Men* (2006) won three further Oscar nominations, and the widely acclaimed *Gravity* (2013), a stunning sci-fi thriller with Sandra Bullock and George Clooney, won him his first Oscar for best director. His latest film *Roma* received glowing reviews; it was nominated for nine Oscars and won three, for best directing, best cinematography and best foreign language film.

BEN GOERTZEL (Brazil, 1966) is one of the world's foremost experts in Artificial General Intelligence, a subfield of AI oriented toward creating thinking machines with general cognitive capability at the human level and beyond. Goertzel is CEO of the decentralized AI network SingularityNET, a blockchain-based AI platform company, and the Chief Science Advisor of Hanson Robotics. Goertzel also serves as Chairman of the Artificial General Intelligence Society, the OpenCog Foundation, the Decentralized AI Alliance and the futurist nonprofit Humanity+. He has decades of expertise applying AI to practical problems in areas ranging from natural language processing and data mining to robotics, video gaming, national security and bioinformatics, and has published 20 scientific books and over 140 scientific research papers in these fields.



ZAKI NUSSEIBEH (Mandatory Palestine, 1946) is minister of state in the United Arab Emirates government. He was born in Jerusalem and studied economics at Cambridge University. In 1967, Nusseibeh settled in Abu Dhabi as a journalist, reporting on the foundation of the UAE by Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. A year later, Nusseibeh joined the newly formed government of Abu Dhabi and became the official interpreter for Sheikh Zayed. In 1975, Nusseibeh was attached directly to the Diwan (the Crown Prince's Court) of Sheikh Zayed as Director of Information and later as the Press Advisor. In 2006, he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Authority for Culture and Heritage, helped to establish the Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, and was also involved in the founding of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017. As President of the Classical Concert Committee and as founding President of Abu Dhabi's branch of the international Friends of Richard Wagner society, Nusseibeh is a promotor of classical music in the Arab world. Nusseibeh has also published translations of Gulf and Arab poetry into European languages. Nusseibeh was knighted in the Légion d'Honneur in 2015 and the Order of the British Empire in 2013, received an honorary degree by the University of Jerusalem, as well as many other international awards and honours.





Photo: Heidi Gutman

DEBORAH VOIGT (United States, 1960) is one of the world's most versatile and distinguished dramatic sopranos. Through her performances and television appearances, she is known for the singular power and beauty of her voice, as well as for her captivating stage presence. Voigt has given definitive performances of iconic roles in German opera, from Wagner's Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*), Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*), Elsa (*Lohengrin*) and Isolde to Strauss's Ariadne, Salome, Kaiserin (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*), and Chrysothemis (*Elektra*). She starred as Brünnhilde in Robert Lepage's visionary interpretation of Wagner's *Ring* cycle at the Metropolitan Opera in New York; the DVD set featuring her performance won the Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording of 2013. Among many awards, she received the Gold Medal in Moscow's International Tchaikovsky Competition and First Prize at Philadelphia's Luciano Pavarotti International Voice Competition, and was made a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Her memoirs *Call Me Debbie: True Confessions of a Down-to-Earth Diva* were published in 2015.



LEON WIESELTIER (United States, 1952) is one of America's leading public intellectuals, a distinguished critic and prolific writer. After his studies at Harvard and Oxford, he quickly became the principal literary editor for *The New Republic*. After more than thirty years at this influential journal, he left in 2014 in protest of managerial changes. Wieseltier, whose moving diary *Kaddish* (1998) phenomenally addresses the eternal themes of loss and faith, freedom and predestination and the significance of traditions, is a devoted Jew. Wieseltier regularly publishes articles on a wide variety of social issues, with a sharp eye for the central problems of our time, setting the standard for serious cultural discussion.

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The Nexus Institute's 25-year history has been a remarkable success story. It began in 1991 with the journal *Nexus*, which led to the founding of the Nexus Institute in 1994. The Institute soon gained international fame for its unique ability to keep the spirit of European humanism alive and for pursuing the ideal of *universitas*, which disappeared in the academic world a long time ago.

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Van Lanschot

