

Nexus Conference 2010

What's Next for the West? Superman meets Beethoven



Friday 11 June 2010
10 am — 5 pm
Concertgebouw
in Amsterdam

Speakers

George Steiner – Dominique de Villepin – Volker Schlöndorff
Colm Tóibín – Margaret MacMillan – Kishore Mahbubani
Russell Sherman – Nick Bostrom – Robert Kagan
Seyla Benhabib – Alexander Goehr – Michael J. Sandel
Horia-Roman Patapievici – Hartmut Haenchen



Part of the Holland Festival

How to reserve a ticket

In order to attend the Nexus Conference, reserving a ticket is required. We kindly ask you to do so on time through www.nexus-instituut.nl.

The conference admission fee is € 85. Subscribers to the journal *Nexus* (Dutch language only) pay € 50 per ticket and can bring up to three guests for the same reduced price of € 50. A special rate of € 25 will be charged to those under the age of 26, provided they enclose a copy of their identity document with their registration form. The conference fee includes lunch and refreshments during breaks.

Only written cancellations will be accepted. Cancellations received before 1 June 2010 will be free of charge; after that date, the full fee will be charged. If you want to register after 1 June, we advise you to contact us by telephone to check for availability.

The Nexus Conference will be held at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam (parking Museumplein; please find details on www.concertgebouw.nl). The conference will be conducted in English. Changes in the programme may occur.

On the evening of the Nexus Conference, Anima Eterna Brugge, under the direction of Jos van Immerseel, will perform Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Tickets for this concert, which is a part of Holland Festival, can only be booked through www.hollandfestival.nl and cannot be ordered with the Nexus Institute.

The speakers will turn their Conference contributions into essays, which will be published in *Nexus* 57 in the spring of 2011.

For more information, please contact the Nexus Institute by sending an e-mail to info@nexus-instituut.nl, or by calling to +31 (0)13-466 3450. See our website www.nexus-instituut.nl for more information.

Programme Nexus Conference

Friday 11 June 2010

- 10.00 am Welcome *Rob Riemen*
- 10.05 am Keynote lecture *George Steiner*
- 11.00 am Break
- 11.30 am I. BEETHOVEN'S GREAT EXPECTATIONS
Panel debate with *Alexander Goehr, Hartmut Haenchen, Margaret MacMillan, Horia-Roman Patapievici, Volker Schlöndorff, and Colm Tóibín*, moderated by *Rob Riemen*
- 1.00 pm Lunch
- 2.00 pm *Russell Sherman* plays Ludwig van Beethoven, Op. 109, with commentary
- 2.45 pm Break
- 3.15 pm II. WAITING FOR SUPERMAN
Panel debate with *Seyla Benhabib, Nick Bostrom, Robert Kagan, Kishore Mahbubani, Michael J. Sandel, and Dominique de Villepin*, moderated by *Rob Riemen*
- 5.00 pm End

On the evening of the Nexus Conference, Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* will be performed at 8.15 pm (as part of the Holland Festival) by Anima Eterna Brugge, under the direction of Jos van Immerseel. See www.hollandfestival.nl for programme and tickets.

What's Next for the West? Superman meets Beethoven

The stranger, whom no one had seen approaching, suddenly appeared beside the fountain on the sunlit square, gazing around as if he were looking for someone. He was noticed instantly, not merely because of his really rather curious appearance: a tall muscular man in a skintight blue suit with a red S in the centre of his broad chest, brown boots, and a long red cape! Anyone, even when wearing more ordinary clothes, would have stood out almost immediately as 'not from here'. For everyone knew everyone, and it had been years and years since any mortal had been found sufficiently worthy of being welcomed into what was still known as the Elysium.

Of course, this was a somewhat old-fashioned name, and for that reason Nietzsche had once suggested to rebaptise the place 'Eternal Resting Place for Unemployed Heroes'; but the vast majority of the exalted ones had actually been opposed to this. 'Too negative a name,' they criticised it, although occasionally, one of them would admit to friends that there was a certain truth in the description of the philosopher with the large moustache and the somber eyes. Ascended as they were from the earth, sublime above the tragedy of human existence, the need to create, that urge felt in the depths of their souls, had vanished, and every one of them, without exception, experienced this as the eternal loss of their greatest love. A newcomer who, in his ignorance, would speak of 'Paradise', was severely and sternly admonished: 'This is *not* Paradise! This is the Elysium; celestial and comfortable, but at the same time nothing other than the eternal place of exile of great spirits. Paradise is for saints and for good people. Here...'. The speaker would then fall silent, as the rest was too painful. Here they were: the great spirits, the geniuses, the creators of the greatest works — but as people so petty, so impossible, so egocentric, so intolerant, so uninterested in family, children, and sometimes even in society. The single positive human quality that most of them did possess was the gift of friendship — but solely for that one favorite person whom they truly loved. And, as they themselves were well aware, that was not enough to ascend to Paradise. Wagner had once remarked that the taciturn Nietzsche was sulking because there had turned out to be a God, after all. But again, there was an element of truth in Nietzsche's response: when he heard this, he said that the mere fact of Richard Wagner's presence was proof that this place could not be Paradise, not even Grail Castle, and that here, God was the Great Absentee.

In this place, so melancholy in spite of the abundant sunshine, it was Thomas Mann who recognised the stranger as Superman. Mann remembered all too well that, in the very year he had emigrated to America, this same Superman had also manifested himself there. And, more familiar with good manners than most great minds there (having occasionally discussed with Goethe how regrettable it was, and what a bad impression it made, that so many artists and intellectuals had no notion of the rite of courtesy), he decided to take the unexpected guest under his wing, who was obviously out of his element. When Superman announced that he very much wanted to speak with Beethoven, he responded that this was highly unlikely to happen. The Master, Mann stated solemnly, belonged to that small elite of the very greatest artists who *had* continued working and did not wish to betray what they saw as their life's calling: the

revelation of the Highest. Besides, experts such as Gustav Mahler and Glenn Gould were unanimous in their opinion that the compositions created here, on high, were unplayable, that their beauty far surpassed human hearing. In any event, Beethoven did not like being disturbed in his secluded existence, and his deafness made every conversation so difficult that he certainly was averse to meeting any strangers.

The disappointment in Superman's face was so great that Mann began to feel sorry for him and said: 'Perhaps the Immortal Beloved can help?'

'Who?'

'The Immortal Beloved! That is still her name. It was to her that Beethoven wrote in his most famous letter: "Can you change the fact that I will not be wholly yours and you will not be wholly mine?" and now that, by the grace of God, she is with him forever, he cannot and will not refuse her anything.'

They found the young woman with the lovely pale face and gentle blue eyes in a good mood, adding the finishing touches to a sunflower creation in the style of Van Gogh. 'Here, Ludwig has all the time in the world to compose, and I'm quite sure that your having made the long journey here won't have been in vain,' she answered briskly after Mann had explained who Superman was and why he had come.

We owe the account of the conversation that followed to the fact that Beethoven had also continued using his celebrated *Konversationshefte* in the Elysium, which he had been keeping ever since at age thirty-five he had become totally deaf, and to the observations of Thomas Mann, who had complied with Beethoven's urgent request to stay.

Thanks to his experience as a journalist, Superman managed in just a few words to reveal who he was and to explain about his superhuman powers, his pursuit of the good, and his struggle against evil. He was a hero — for many, the ultimate hero. He had grown up with the idea that all human misery could be blamed on only one or two people who had the power to cause a great deal of harm. But gradually, he had begun to doubt this. Unrest, an atmosphere of crisis, and increasing violence for no reason at all could be noted. He sensed that, in such high frequencies, tensions, worldly vibrations of fear, envy, anger, would seem to make an explosion all but inevitable.

Superman fell silent, and the Immortal Beloved asked: 'But what is it you want from Beethoven?'

Superman: 'I shall never forget this: I was still a child, at home, my mother was listening to music, there was singing, a choir: "*Alle Menschen werden Brüder...*" I asked: "What does that mean, *alle Menschen werden Brüder?*" and my mother answered: "That, my son, is *civilization*, it is that which is good and noble." That is what my mother said. And today, today it seems as if the good and noble is not allowed to exist, as if it is taken away from us.' Superman did not notice how at that moment, Beethoven and Thomas Mann rapidly exchanged a meaningful glance, and went on: 'So much is happening. I don't know whether I'll be able to save the world. Should humanity even expect it of me? How can humanity continue to exist without civilization, without that which is good and noble? Who will provide them with it? You, Beethoven, you were a hero in your time! Are you able, are you willing to give back to mankind all that is good and noble?'

The Immortal Beloved was visibly moved. Mann anxiously watched Beethoven, who wrote down a mere four words in his elegantly curled handwriting: 'My time has passed.' He was already preparing to leave, but she, whom he could not refuse anything, held him back and wrote: 'I don't believe that!' Later on, Mann would

recount that, like a physician who has to diagnose a patient, Beethoven fired innumerable questions and comments at Superman.

‘People need to rise above themselves!’

‘How?’

‘*Sursum corda!* Ethics! What is it humans aspire to now?’

Superman, without a moment’s hesitation: ‘Money, happiness, health, security, being useful.’

Beethoven: ‘Only virtue brings happiness, not money. Only art and knowledge can elevate people to the Deity. What do people learn today?’

Superman: ‘Technology, economics, organisational science, mass communication, practical knowledge.’

When Beethoven read this, he shook his head and wrote: ‘Philosophy? Poetry?’

Superman: ‘Not terribly important, really. More like a form of entertainment.’

Ill-tempered now, Beethoven wrote: ‘Always used to read a lot! Goethe, Schiller, Plutarch, the Bible, Shakespeare. Always wanted to be familiar with the greatest and most important wisdom of every era. And art? That divine expression?’

Superman wrote down a ? to indicate he didn’t understand the question.

Beethoven: ‘The good doesn’t exist without beauty and revelation of the truth. Moral law inside us and the starry sky above us. Kant!’

Not knowing how to respond to this, Superman shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of helplessness. Again, Beethoven grasped the notebook, and wrote: ‘Music, my music, *tönende Ethik!* Harmony. Expressing the eternal!!’

Now utterly confused by what Beethoven was saying, Superman glanced desperately at Mann, and at the Beloved, who took the notebook and wrote: ‘Too abstract. Answer the question: what makes people good and noble?’

Beethoven: ‘Friendship!’

Superman relaxed and wrote: ‘Today *Facebook*, *Hypes*, many have more than a hundred friends.’ Three disbelieving faces stared at him. Wanting to give a better answer to the question, without any abstractions, Beethoven wrote: ‘*Entsagung!* Joy shining through suffering. Sacrificing life for all that is exalted. Art!’

Superman: ‘Can you do anything?’

Dejectedly Beethoven shook his head: ‘Have given everything already. Great works. The *Ninth!*’ He rose, gave Superman a strong handshake, and left the room, followed by the young woman.

‘I have to confess something to you,’ Mann said as he saw Superman out. ‘You spoke of what is good and noble, of that to which the Master gave such sublime and eternal voice in his *Ninth Symphony*, of the fact that it has been retracted. Well, you should know that it is I who removed it, or at least a hero to whom I gave life did, Adrian Leverkühn. If you have the time, you can read more about it in my novel *Doktor Faustus*.’

‘Why?’ Superman asked in a tone which betrayed both surprise and indignation.

‘Because this music, this very music, could not become a lie, a parody, or kitsch. This music had to be salvaged. Germany no longer deserved it.’ There was bitterness in his voice.

‘Now what?’ Superman asked as he prepared to descend to planet Earth.

‘I don’t know,’ Mann responded. ‘I don’t know whether mortals are interested in us immortals any longer. I don’t know whether Beethoven’s lofty ideals, chased

away and vanished during my time, still fit in with the expectations of today. Perhaps something truly new has been a long time coming. But go back down. A Nexus Conference will be held on these questions. You never know, someone there may be able to tell you who or what can save civilization, the good and noble, and help our human brotherhood survive. *Vale.*'

First debate. Beethoven's great expectations

A century ago, Beethoven's era had not yet passed. On the contrary. In France in 1903, the writer and essayist Romain Rolland — quite wrongly totally forgotten now — publishes his *Vie de Beethoven*. It is the first book in a series on 'heroes whom Europe, now choking in its materialism and egotism, ought to welcome as a breath of fresh air.' In it, Beethoven is presented as the greatest modern hero, who accepts the tragedy of his existence (deaf, misunderstood, and solitary) to bring us joy and solace through his art, to be a model of freedom, dignity, and human solidarity. Anyone able to read at the time has read that little book — and believes in Beethoven's ideals and grandeur. In Vienna, only a year earlier, artists such as Mahler, Klimt, and Hoffman did not hesitate to dedicate a temple to Beethoven, built over Max Klinger's statue of him! Beethoven will save the world! Art will bring salvation...

What was the meaning of those great expectations, and why is Beethoven's cultural ideal no longer ours?

Beethoven's worldview was one of high culture, exalted ideals, of elevating people, and of the artist as the mythological Greek hero Prometheus who saves civilization. Whence this aspiration? What is the essence and the significance of a high culture? What are its premises, political implications, religious presuppositions? What is its image of mankind? What values are cultivated? And whence the great expectations of art? Whence the heroic status of Beethoven as the new Prometheus, the saviour of artists? Why did Beethoven believe in the moral value of art as a force able to save humanity, to inspire brotherhood?

Be that as it may: *das war einmal...* In terms of Beethoven's expectations, the advice of Goethe's Faust, 'What we inherit is merely a loan / learn to make it your own by acquiring it', is lost on us today. Indeed, our distrust of the classical ideal of civilization is great. But why does that ideal of high culture no longer exist? What (religious, political, social) premises have ceased to be ours, and why? And what do we know better than Beethoven did? That more culture does not lead to more civilization; that an aristocratic culture does not match with the ideals of democracy; that God no longer exists and that people do not have to be uplifted, but that they have to be free in their own choices; that science and technology can do more than poetry and philosophy... Yet are we really more civilized than before? And what meaning do the creations of Beethoven still have for us today, now that we no longer share his ideas and ideals? Is there a future for European culture?

Second debate. Expecting Superman

Beethoven himself knew it, too: 'My time has passed.' But what expectations do we have? What are our aspirations? Our ideal of civilization has not been based on art, philosophy, and poetry for a very long time. We have more faith in law, science, technology, globalization, force, and power. We don't feel the need to be wise as much as we feel the need to be *smart*. Instead of a metaphysical culture, we have political-democratic values; instead of Beethoven's aristocratic view of humanity, we cherish

our democracy, liberalism, and capitalism. We now know that values are not absolute but pluriform, and sometimes relative as well. Ethics is replaced by politics. The arts are socially irrelevant, and knowledge of the arts no longer exists. We may still play the symphonies of Beethoven — but what do we really hear anymore?

However, the high expectations we hold with regard to this ideal of civilization are increasingly more open to doubt. More democracy did not produce greater human brotherhood; economic growth also brought a global environmental crisis; more technology does not provide better answers to existential questions; the financial crisis destroys social cohesion; prosperity has not diminished aggression; and we don't have much confidence anymore in the social elite. America is in decline and Europe is powerless, and all of the ghosts of the 1930s are coming back again: nationalism, populism, extremism, racism, antisemitism.

Why, and what are the consequences? Were our expectations misguided (again), or not, and why? Which values do we now cultivate? What should our ideal of civilization be in the twenty-first century, what should the best and highest values be, and how do we make this ideal a reality? What is its foundation; what are its political, religious, and social premises? Which ideas and institutions are essential to a twenty-first century ideal of civilization? Can civilization exist without a high culture, a metaphysical ideal, transcendental values, or does history actually teach us that high culture and civilization have nothing to do with each other? What is it that will make us better people, that will bring back the good and noble? What are the sources we still find trustworthy? What is the basis of our morality, what is the essence of our human dignity? Which ideas and factors will determine the future of our civilization? Which threats does the western ideal of civilization pose to the near future, and which possibilities does it open up? Or does our future lie in the East, and will there be a new, economically driven, global civilization?

Giuseppe Verdi, a composer *and* politician who had a great faith in the power of art and human freedom, remarked in one of his letters: '*Torniamo all'antico: sarà un progresso* — Let us return to the past: that will be progress.' Let us consider this advice for a moment. What meaning might lay hidden in the art and the cultural ideal of Beethoven? Why should we still listen to his *Ninth Symphony*? Is returning to that past a welcome renaissance, or a dangerous nostalgia for the 'conservative revolution'? For how can Beethoven's ideals be combined with our contemporary premises?

Each civilization is a reflection of an idea of human grandeur. Beethoven was once a hero. In New York, in the middle of the crisis years, the thirties of the twentieth century, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created a new hero: Superman. Who is our true hero now, Superman or Beethoven, and what do we expect? What can we do and what are we hoping for? Where do we find the secret of a world in which all people are each other's brothers?

Rob Riemen
Founder & President, Nexus Institute

Speakers

SEYLA BENHABIB (Turkey, 1950) is one of the most influential philosophers of our time. She is the Eugene Meyer professor of political science and philosophy at Yale University. She has published on the history of German political thought — including Hannah Arendt, the Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas; on feminist theory and on the rights of migrants, refugees and foreigners in the contemporary world. Her work has been translated into 11 languages and in September 2009, she was awarded the Ernst Bloch prize for her contributions to cultural understanding in a pluralist civilization. Her most recent books include: *The Rights of Others. Aliens, Citizens and Residents* (2004; winner of the Ralph Bunche award); *Another Cosmopolitanism*, with Jeremy Waldon, Will Kymlicka and Bonnie Honig (2006) and most recently, *Migrations and Mobilities. Gender, Borders and Citizenship*, edited with Judith Resnik (2009).

NICK BOSTROM (Sweden, 1973) is Director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University and Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy. He previously taught at Yale. His writings have been translated into 19 different languages, and reprinted in numerous anthologies and textbooks. Bostrom has a background in physics, computational neuroscience, and mathematical logic as well as philosophy. His current research centers on big picture questions for humanity, with foci on issues in the foundations of probability theory, scientific methodology and rationality, human enhancement, global catastrophic risks, moral philosophy, and consequences of future technology. In 2009, he was given the inaugural Eugene R. Gannon Award for the Continued Pursuit of Human Advancement, and he made the FP 100 Global Thinkers list, the *Foreign Policy Magazine's* list of 'the 100 minds that mattered most in the year that was'.

ALEXANDER GOEHR (Germany/United Kingdom, 1932) is an eminent modern composer. His father, Schönberg conductor Walter Goehr, went with his family to England in 1933. Alexander Goehr, who studied in Manchester and in Paris, with Olivier Messiaen, became a prominent representative of the musical avant-garde with the cantata *The Deluge* (1957), the *Piano Trio* (1966), the opera *Arden must die* (1966), the music piece for theatre *Triptych* (1968-'70), the orchestral work *Metamorphosis/Dance* (1974), and the *String Quartet No. 3* (1975-'76). *Psalm IV* (1976) marked Goehr's transition to a more modal, harmonious style of composing. His compositions included operas such as *Behold the Sun* (1985), the cantata *The Death of Moses* (1992), and chamber and orchestral music. As a result of his enthusiasms and travels, especially in Asia, he tried in his compositions — which, in the course of half a century, have been conducted by Oliver Knussen, Pierre Boulez, and Daniel Barenboim, among others — to bring together elements of different musical cultures and times. Goehr was professor of music at Cambridge University from 1976 to 1999. This autumn, his opera *Promised End* premieres, which is based on Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

HARTMUT HAENCHEN (Germany, 1943) impressed many with his performances at a very young age as cantor of the Dresdner Kreuzchor. After studying at the Dresden conservatory, he quickly rose to fame: he was the conductor of various renowned

orchestras, such as the Dresdner Philharmoniker and the Deutsche Staatsoper in Berlin. In 1986, he became musical director of the Netherlands Opera and chief conductor of the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra. Haenchen's great musical intelligence and erudition resulted in outstanding and innovative productions, which made the Netherlands Opera a household name throughout the world. Experts consider his Amsterdam *Ring des Nibelungen*-cycle of the second half of the 1990s to be one of the best performances to date of Wagner's opera. Since then, he has enjoyed worldwide success with almost all great orchestras and opera companies. Haenchen, who has also written a number of influential publications, will be visiting conductor at the Teatro Real in Madrid and the Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden.

ROBERT KAGAN (Greece, 1953), a historian and political scientist, is adjunct professor of history at Georgetown University. His ideas greatly influenced President George W. Bush's government policy. His book *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (2003) was a worldwide best-seller, while *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (2006) and *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (2008) confirmed his reputation as an eminent political thinker. Kagan, who writes for newspapers and journals such as the *Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *New York Times* and *Foreign Policy*, and who is regularly included in the *Prospect* list of the world's most influential intellectuals, is currently a Senior Associate with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He does not believe in an 'End of History' or in the idea of 'perpetual peace', but instead foresees a return to the old politics of power blocs, with a leading role for the superpower America.

MARGARET MACMILLAN (Canada, 1943) is an eminent historian, whose *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (2002, also published as *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*) brought her fame. She is Warden of St. Antony's College and a professor of international history at the University of Oxford. MacMillan is an expert in the field of international relations, and has a keen eye for historical tensions accompanying the watershed of any two eras, particularly for those surrounding the First World War. Two years ago, her book *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008) appeared.

KISHORE MAHBUBANI (Singapore, 1948) is Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, and one of Asia's most influential intellectuals. Between 1971 and 2004, he served in the Singapore foreign service, most notably as Ambassador to the United Nations, where he twice presided over the UN Security Council. Mahbubani has become famous internationally with books such as *Can Asians Think? Understanding the Divide Between East and West* (2001) and *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (2008), as well as with numerous essays and journals articles that highlight the rise of Asia and declining power of the West. He has been listed as one of the top 100 public intellectuals in the world by *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect* magazines and was also included in the March 2009 *Financial Times* list of Top 50 individuals who would shape the debate on the future of capitalism.

HORIA-ROMAN PATAPIEVICI (Romania, 1957), physician, essayist, polyglot, and polyhistor, belongs to modern Romania's intellectual elite. He studied physics, and is currently writing a PhD thesis in philosophy. Patapievici is head of the prestigious Romanian Cultural Institute, and he is editor-in-chief of the leading cultural journal *Idei în dialog*. As a member of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, he pleaded for more openness involving the former Romanian communist regime's secret service. In the eyes of many, Patapievici is one of the leaders of the spiritual and intellectual renaissance which Eastern Europe has been experiencing since its historical revolutions.

ROB RIEMEN (1962) is Founder and President of the Nexus Institute and Editor-in-Chief of the *Nexus* journal. In 2008 he published *Nobility of Spirit. A Forgotten Ideal* (Yale), now translated into 13 languages.

MICHAEL J. SANDEL (United States, 1953), a political philosopher at Harvard University, became world famous with his immensely popular university classes, which feature 'Socratic' debates on ethics, morality, and justice. He launched his reputation with *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), and recently published *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*, an influential book about the role of moral argument in democratic life. A professor of government, Sandel delivered the prestigious Reith Lectures of the BBC (2009), and served as a member of the US President's Council on Bioethics. His ethical objections against using biotechnology for non-medical human enhancement are presented in *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (2007). He also explored these issues in the 2007 Nexus Masterclass in Tilburg.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF (Germany, 1939), generally considered one of the world's greatest film directors, began his career as an assistant to Louis Malle and Alain Resnais. His film version of Musil's *Der junge Törless* (1966) was the first in a series of literary adaptations, which was to develop into a unique cinematic 'European memory'. He received the highest praise worldwide for films such as *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (after Böll, 1973), *Die Blechtrommel* (Grass, 1979, rewarded with an Oscar and a Golden Palm), *Eine Liebe von Swann* (Proust, 1984), *Death of a Salesman* (Miller, 1985), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1990). Both his more politically inspired films, such as *Der neunte Tag* (2004) and *Strajk* (2008), and his opera direction have similarly attracted great public attention. With his 'timeless' films, Volker Schlöndorff, who in 2008 published his autobiography *Licht, Schatten und Bewegung*, essentially stands for half a century of German, and thus European, history: the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the revolt of the 1960s, the 'German Autumn', and the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

RUSSELL SHERMAN (United States, 1930) is an ingenious virtuoso and an insightful master pianist. *The New York Times* describes him as 'quite simply one of the best pianists in this or any other country.' Mr. Sherman made his solo debut at the age of fifteen and his orchestral debut with the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein. Since then he has performed with major orchestras in major cities throughout the world. Mr. Sherman is a prolific recording artist. He is the first American pianist to have recorded all of the sonatas and concertos of Beethoven and his recording of the Beethoven sonatas has been called 'a set for the ages.' Mr. Sherman is an eloquent communicator both

on and off the concert stage. Described by some as a true Renaissance man, Sherman published the book of essays *Piano Pieces* in 1996, as a monumental reflection on his experience as a pianist and teacher. Mr. Sherman studied with Eduard Steuermann and graduated from Columbia University with a degree in the humanities. Sherman has been teaching at the New England Conservatory as a Distinguished Artist-in-Residence and continues to garner accolades from critics and audiences alike for his imagination and poetry.

GEORGE STEINER (France, 1929) has been called 'the last European'. In 1924, his Jewish parents fled the increasingly anti-Semitic climate in Vienna and moved to Paris, where in 1929 George Steiner was born. In 1940, the family fled Europe to settle down in New York. After having completed his language and literature studies at the University of Chicago, Steiner went back to Europe. What he then began to teach at the universities of Cambridge and Geneva is best described as lessons in reading the classics, the masterpieces that never lose their power of expression. A brilliant essayist with a rare erudition, he became world famous with *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. An Essay in the Old Criticism* (1959), *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), *Language and Silence* (1967), *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (1971), *After Babel* (1975), *Real Presences* (1986), *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1995* (1996), his autobiography *Errata* (1998), *Grammars of Creation* (2001), *Lessons of the Masters* (2004), *The Idea of Europe* (2004, published by the Nexus Institute), *Dix raisons (possibles) à la tristesse de la pensée* (2005, Dutch translation published in *Nexus* 46) and *My unwritten books* (2008). George Steiner lives in Cambridge (United Kingdom).

COLM TÓIBÍN (Ireland, 1955) is, in the eyes of many, the most important contemporary Irish writer. After studying history and English at University College in Dublin, he left for Barcelona in 1975, the year of Spanish dictator Franco's death, and taught English there for three years. His lasting passion for Barcelona and Catalonia formed the basis of his first novel, *The South* (1990), and of *Homage to Barcelona* (1990). Back in Ireland, he worked as a journalist and editor until his definitive breakthrough as an author in the 1990s with *The Story of the Night* (1996), *The Blackwater Nightship* (1999), *The Master* (2006, about the life of Henry James), and *Brooklyn* (2009). In an impressive way, his novels touch on contemporary dilemmas regarding identity, tradition, and artistic creation. Tóibín is also well-known as a literary critic, and was a visiting professor at Stanford University and the University of Texas. He is currently Leonard Milberg Lecturer in Irish Literature at Princeton University.

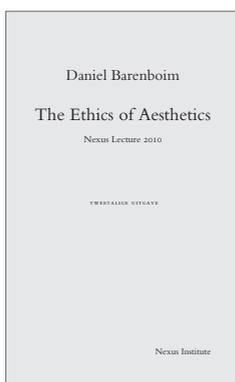
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DOMINIQUE DE VILLEPIN (Morocco, 1953) was Prime Minister of France between 2005 and 2007. He is generally considered one of the greatest European *hommes politiques* of contemporary Europe, upholding the spirit of Alexis de Tocqueville. After studying at some of France's most prestigious academies, De Villepin embarked upon a brilliant diplomatic career. He became Foreign Minister in 2002 (and as such, withheld French support to the United States' Iraq war) and Interior Minister two years later. De Villepin, who is also famous for his poetry, has published a book a year since his much-acclaimed work on Napoleon, *Les Cent-jours ou l'esprit de sacrifice* (2001). His extensive essays betray an intimate knowledge of European culture, which he considers to be the only guarantee for a safe, social, and intellectually blossoming future Europe.

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