

# ACTA POLITOLOGICA

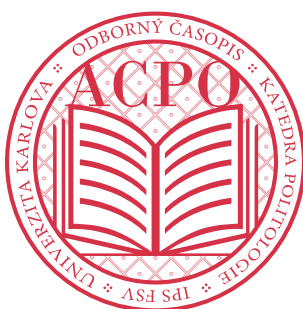
[www.acpo.cz](http://www.acpo.cz)

RECENZOVANÝ ČASOPIS | PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

2018 | Vol. 10 | No. 2 | ISSN 1803-8220

---

---



HALAMKA, Tomáš (2018). Interview with Philip Pettit. *Acta Politologica*. Vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 4–14.

*Tento článek podléhá autorským právům, kopírování a využívání jeho obsahu bez řádného odkazování na něj je považováno za plagiátorství a podléhá sankcím dle platné legislativy.*

*This article is protected by copyright. Copying and use of its content and presenting it as original research without proper citation is plagiarism, which is subject to legal sanctions.*

---

---

**Katedra politologie Institutu politologických studií**  
Fakulta sociálních věd Univerzity Karlovy

**Department of Political Science, Institute of Political Studies**  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

## Interview with Philip Pettit

Tomáš Halamka<sup>1</sup>

*The Irish-born philosopher Philip Pettit (\*1945) is L. S. Rockefeller University Professor of Politics and Human Values at Princeton University and Distinguished University Professor of Philosophy at the Australian National University, Canberra. He has published multiple books, chapters and articles on the topic of republican political theory. Today, he is considered the most influential republican political theorist. This interview was recorded during the Republicanism in the History of Political Philosophy and Today conference, where Philip Pettit delivered the keynote address entitled "Neo-liberalism and Neo-republicanism".<sup>2</sup> The conference was organised in November 2017 by the Institute of Political Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in cooperation with the School of International Relations and Diplomacy, Anglo-American University in Prague and the Centre for Political Philosophy, Ethics and Religion at Charles University.*

**Professor Pettit, you are considered one of the most influential and important political philosophers. At the same time, you appear to put a great emphasis on the practical, or indeed political, significance of your work. I would hence like to start by asking you what, in your view, is the relation between political philosophy and actual politics shaping our everyday lives?**

I myself believe that every party in a democratic system should have a philosophy; a view as to what are the ideals that political life can advance; a view as to what are the best institutions whereby they can advance those ideals. Because it's only if a party has that sort of philosophy that they can win people to support it and rally people in a way that doesn't divide between those of one colour and another colour, those of one religion and another religion. It ought to be a philosophy that potentially can appeal to anyone. People would take to different parties, adopt different philosophies, but those philosophies should organise the party. Without a philosophy, the party is just a gang looking for support that will change its policies to suit the demands of power, and that is really not going to serve the purposes of democracy well. You have got to have a competition between different philosophies in a proper democracy, with government working on compromises between them.

**You are known as one of the main proponents of republican political theory. What is so distinctive about republicanism that it should be treated as the best political doctrine so far? And why should it win our minds, hearts and perhaps also votes?**

I ally myself with what I think of as the republican approach to politics because I think that it meets demands that any philosophy of politics, any philosophy of the state, ought to meet.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tomáš Halamka is a Ph. D. candidate at the Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University. Contact: tomas.halamka@fsv.cuni.cz. ResearchID: H-8686-2018.

<sup>2</sup> A video recording of Professor Pettit's keynote address is available at <http://ideasinpolitics.fsv.cuni.cz/photogallery-2017/videos/>

Is it the best political philosophy? In a way, that's for citizens to decide. Of course, I ally myself with the republican tradition because I think it does provide a very convincing and interesting approach, and I would like to persuade other people of that. But this isn't a case of finding something like the best mathematical theory, for example; this is a case of finding the theory that you think best answers the people's interests. So what's so distinctive about republicanism? Well, I think that it has got a very distinctive and engaging ideal; an ideal of freedom understood in a certain way. And I think it has got a very distinctive and engaging picture of the institutions that we should rely on to promote that ideal. I also believe that, as a political philosophy, it gives us a story of social justice as to how relations between people should be organised, a theory of political justice as to how the government should relate to the people who control it, and a theory of international justice as to what a state and a society should be looking for in its relationships with other states.

**You mentioned a specific understanding of freedom or liberty as a social and political value. What do you think is the advantage of the republican understanding of liberty compared, for example, with neo-liberal or socialist accounts?**

Let me begin by saying what I think that the republican conception of freedom is. The easiest contrast is with the notion of freedom that neo-liberals embrace, but that a great number of other people embrace as well, which is often characterised as freedom in the sense of non-interference. In this sense, freedom is first of all a property of choices and to have a free choice is to not be interfered with by other people in exercising the choice. And the ideal is that you should create a society in which people have a maximum number of free choices available to them.

The republican conception, which I call a conception of freedom as non-domination rather than non-interference, says that, in the first place, freedom is a property of people, of persons, of individuals. And what is it to be a free person? Well, to be a free person is to have, under the law, the same range of choices available as are available to anybody else in the society. And by the same range of choices I mean essentially choices in what are often called the basic liberties, such as the choices bearing on what you think, what you say, what religion you adopt, who you associate with, who you are friends with, who you marry, what job you take up amongst the jobs available to you, where you live in society, what groups you belong to ... And, of course, when it comes to property—assuming there are property laws, as there always will be—what you actually do under those laws with your property. There should be a range of choices like these that are available to each free person. And those choices for each person should be protected by the law to such an extent that people are equal with one another. Those individuals, in a phrase I like to use, should 'pass the eyeball-test'—they should be able to look one another in the eye without reason for fear or deference.

The ideal of freedom as non-interference says we should have an arrangement in which a maximum number of choices and opportunities are available to people, even if it means that there are winners and losers. Some people get many more choices than others because they are wealthier, and so on. But at least the opportunity is there for everyone. In contrast, freedom as non-domination consists not in the availability of more and more choices, but rather in that basic security we have in enjoying, equally with others, the same basic liberties. That's the fundamental contrast between the two ideals of freedom.

Why is freedom as non-domination more attractive? Well, to focus on social justice, I say: if you design a society to maximise choice at whatever cost, as under freedom

as non-interference, then you're going to have a society where some people are very unequal to others: you're going to allow presumably as much inequality as the exercise of free choice in the market actually generates. If you go with the ideal of freedom as non-domination, you're certainly going to allow a free market, and you're going to allow some people to become wealthier than others, but you're going to put limits on how far that can happen. The limits will be set by what is required in order that we can stand as equals with one another and can look one another in the eye without reason for fear or deference. This is a much more appealing ideal of social justice than the first. The first ideal says we should have freedom for all, that we should let the markets rip. The other says we should have a legal system that enables us to operate in the market and the civil society, but that gives us this basic security—equally with others as citizens.

**In your works as well as in your Prague lecture, you criticise the majoritarian conceptions of democracy. Central Europe is nowadays swept by a storm of claims in favour of majoritarian democracy, such as national referenda. These referenda make it possible not only to vote for representatives, but to dismiss by popular vote some of the decisions made previously by the parliament. What do you think is wrong with these majoritarian conceptions of democracy?**

I have talked about freedom as non-domination as a republican value in the area of social justice in comparison with the neo-liberal value of freedom as non-interference. The republican value of freedom as non-domination also gives you a theory of political justice or legitimacy: a theory, in effect, of how democracy should be organised. It's worth noting that the neo-liberal value—freedom as non-interference—says almost nothing about democracy. In the area of political justice, where we look at the demands on what the power of government should be in relation to people, the main opposition to neo-republican thinking is neo-populist rather than neo-liberal thinking. So, the question you raise bears on the comparative advantage of neo-republican thinking as against neo-populist thinking.

What should democracy deliver? Well, I said that in the social justice area, what should be delivered is that people can pass the eyeball test. In the democracy area, what the system should deliver—if people are really going to enjoy freedom as non-domination—is that they should pass what I call the 'tough-luck test'. Government lays down the laws that give us social justice, at least in the ideal. But of course, if that government can lay down whatever laws it wills, regardless of what the people wish, then it's obviously going to dominate us. It's going to be our master. Now, what the neo-republican approach requires is that government should be so organised in relation to people that domination is absent. People should share so much and so equally in controlling government that they keep it in check, imposing constraints on how it can act. They will do this both in electing those who govern and equally in contesting what the government is doing: this, for example, through having a constitution that protects them against government that it elects, giving them power to challenge it, and in having courts that represent their commitment to the law they establish. Through means like these, citizens should enjoy an important degree of power in relation to government. The power they share over government should enable them to see that the system is not driven by the interests or wishes of any particular individuals or sectors of society: that government is forced to stick to constraints or terms that all citizens can find acceptable.

The tough-luck test of good democracy is that even when the law goes against your particular interests—and it will always go against someone’s—you should be able to feel that that isn’t because a particular group other than your own is in charge. You should be able to think “well if the law went against me, it was probably just tough luck”: that is how the procedures worked out. You should be able to feel there isn’t a will that’s controlling you, those of your kind, or those in your corner of society: you are not subject to an alien will, a dominating will. More positively, you should feel that this is how our procedures are working: procedures in which we play an electoral part and a contestatory part in controlling.

Neo-populism, as I understand it, basically says elections are the be-all and end-all of democracy: the powers that govern should be those and only those we elect. Thus, neo-populists are inevitably intolerant of NGOs, of citizen bodies that contest what the government is doing: in many countries they are cast as foreign, illegitimate. Equally, neo-populist governments are very impatient with the courts in checking what they do, applying the constitution against them. They are impatient with all of that, asking in the standard rhetorical question: who elected these people?

The point to make against populism is that election is not the only means whereby we the people, the *demos*, exercise *kratos*, or power. We also exercise power through a constitution that we accept and that constrains government. We also exercise power through being able to contest government through our non-governmental organisations and our social movements. And we contest power, we constrain government, via the courts that operate in imposing our law and our constitution on those in government. Again, we exercise power in establishing auditors, for example, who constrain government, answering to the criteria of honesty in government that we all acknowledge. We equally contest government when we have got an independent bureau of statistics or a source of economic information that tells us how our society is doing, even when the government doesn’t want us really to know how we are doing.

These sources of popular, democratic power are ignored by neo-populism, which reduces democratic power to electoral power only. The neo-populist ideal would allow us to elect a government for a period, letting it serve as a dictator in our lives: in the arrangement it favours, we don’t have NGO control over our elected rulers, often we don’t have legal and constitutional control over them via the courts, and we don’t have even the control represented by auditors or by independent source of information. That’s the neo-populist ideal. It’s really an ideal of having, as I say, an elected dictator. It’s not surprising that populist movements are associated with one person emerging as a person who claims to speak for the people, ‘the real people’, and exercises power in a way that’s unconstrained by us to the point of being dominating. It represents the power of a master over us—and that’s exactly what neo-republicanism is against.

**This closely relates to the referendum on the UK staying in or leaving the European Union. What’s your opinion on Brexit, and does your opinion rely on any republican ideas you have just described?**

In any society, there is a written or an unwritten constitution. The constitution lays down the framework that is more or less accepted on all sides of politics. But equally, surrounding the constitution, there are other aspects of the framework that are established by convention, tradition or legislation. I think of the constitution and its surrounding framework as the infrastructure of society. It is infrastructure in so far as it’s taken for granted,

more or less on all sides, as a framework on which invariably people may rely in planning their own lives, in planning what education they receive, what language they learn, what plans they make for their careers, the industry they go into, and so on. Now, sometimes it is appropriate to change the infrastructure, to change the constitution. And traditionally constitutions, of course, give us a way of changing them. But traditionally constitutions make it relatively hard to change them. They cannot be changed just by majority vote; there are a few constitutions that can be, but they are unusual. Without such a safeguard, it's enough to have a 50:50 vote. Then, the people who rely particularly heavily on the infrastructure are basically exposed to the possibility of this changing overnight by the 50:50 vote. The trouble with the 50:50 vote against the status quo, when the infrastructure is in question, is that people will vote for changing the infrastructure for a whole lot of different reasons if they're just unhappy with government in general. Now, that means that very often you can get—if you allow a 50:50 referendum on basic aspects of infrastructure—the people who rely on the part of the infrastructure that's up for voting by amendment are going to be really exposed to the toss of the coin, as to whether or not the ground is going to be pulled from under them. Because the 50:50 referendum won't generally represent a really popular feeling against this aspect of the infrastructure. It will often represent just an expression of discontent on the part of many people who really don't understand much about the infrastructure; they're just against how things are going; they're not all that happy with the government, so they vote 'no'.

This, I think, is what happened with Brexit. You had whole portions of the British population who planned their lives on the assumption they will remain in the European Union. They planned their education, they learned languages, they went into careers, they lived overseas, they've got experience on the assumption they belong to 'Europe', where they could move around for jobs and so on—move around their businesses, for that matter. And now, suddenly, that deep aspect of the framework is put up for a 50:50 vote. That's like exposing them to the toss of a coin, as I say. And it just isn't right that the deeper aspects of the infrastructure should be exposed to that easy way of changing them. There should at least be, say, a 55% vote or 60% vote required to change the basic framework, or else you expose the individuals who depend on it to the domination, so to speak, of a government that is going to take its lead from the toss of a coin: a 50:50 referendum. So, before Brexit ever happened, when it appeared that actually Britain would decide to stay in Europe, I still opposed the referendum because no constitutional infrastructure should be put up for that easy way of changing it. You just expose people to harm and interference. They become dominated, being exposed to an unconstrained power.

**Apart from Brexit, another popular vote in recent days was the Catalan referendum on independence. Now, you yourself have personal experiences with Spanish politics, don't you?**

Yes, because I was asked by [former Spanish Prime Minister] Zapatero, who adopted neo-republicanism as his philosophy of government and used it to support many of the policies he brought in, to review his government. He invited me publicly in Madrid, when I gave a lecture at the beginning of his term of government, to review his government six months before the next election to see how far he had lived up to the philosophy he embraced. So, I took on the role of reviewer and of course got a lot of publicity in Spain as a result. For a brief fifteen minutes I was a public figure, so to speak, rather than a philosopher. Yes, I do know a good deal about Spain. So, you want to know about my attitude to the Catalan referendum?

**Yes, that is precisely where I was heading.**

Well, I think secession should be allowed in extreme circumstances for a particular area in a country, but only in extreme circumstances. Once a country is established and the boundaries are determined, they should not be easily changed. They may have been established in a way we wish had been cleaner, more just or whatever, and the truth is that in most countries today we find ourselves living within borders that are fairly ad hoc. So, do we allow any region that's unhappy to break away from an established country? Well, you are just not going to have stable political systems if you do that. And the one thing we know is that once borders become open to change in the world, war becomes a much more salient possibility and likelihood. So, I think that we should make a presumption in favour of existing borders, except when certain fairly demanding conditions are fulfilled. Then and then only should secession be allowed.

There has to be a real breakdown of trust between people in the dissident region and people in the country at large to make it reasonable for the people in that area to think of breaking away. In order to be justified in seeking secession, they should be subjected to really quite serious disadvantage in relation to the rest of the population. Unless conditions like those are satisfied, secession should not be treated as a morally reasonable option. In any country, there are always some regions that are wealthier than other regions, for example, and to allow them to secede would be a recipe for disaster. The richer, smaller regions of each country would seek to become independent, impoverishing the rest.

So, now look at Catalonia. I fully respect the fact that the Catalan culture is distinctive, the Catalan language is distinctive, the Catalan history is distinctive. And I equally accept that there is a degree of animosity between the Catalan people that lots of people feel, certainly towards those in Castile and perhaps in other areas of Spain as well. However, I do feel that the conditions that would make secession viable and attractive are really not fulfilled. First of all, the degree of distrust between the Catalan region and the rest of the regions is not of grievous proportions, and there is no evidence in recent history that there has been a grievous sense of disadvantage on the part of Catalonia. Secondly, in Catalonia it looks—and most of the polls we have seen suggest so—that only about half of the population would want to secede. So what about the other half? In such a case, I think there should be a bias in favour of status quo. Thirdly, the disadvantage that people in Catalonia perceive it suffers is clearly a cultural disadvantage at most. They are actually a richer area of Spain than most parts of Spain; they have a viable culture; they have their own language; they enjoy a great deal of political autonomy. And, in fact, under Zapatero—and certainly republican philosophy supported this—they got even more autonomy than they had had previously. So, I really don't think that there is a very serious grievance.

Now, what actually really bothers me about what's happening in Catalonia is that it's to the political advantage of the parties seeking independence to whip-up nationalist feelings in Catalonia; that gives them a comparative advantage over other parties. People do get very exercised about in-group and out-group issues, and when a party presents itself as being outed from the rest of Spain and whips-up those feelings of antipathy towards the rest of Spain, that's always a way of gaining followers. It is a very cheap way in a democracy of gaining followers and I disapprove of the strategy. There are so many other issues that are much more important in people's lives to do with their social security, judicial security, their educational system, their educational security and jobs, for God's sake. The most depressing thing in Spain at the moment is the economy. And these politicians are ignoring

all of that in favour of whipping-up nationalist enthusiasm for secession. So, that's why I'm not really enthusiastic.

I also think that what these Catalan parties have sought to do in seeking secession is not just undesirable, it is also infeasible. The European Union is a union of states, essentially, and it's really misleading to represent it as anything else. And this union of states is not going to allow any region of an existing state to just break away and then seek membership in its own right. The states have to unanimously agree to a new member. They are not unanimously going to agree to a break-away Catalonia becoming a member because many of the other states will be threatened by allowing that to happen. That's why I argued in Zapatero's years that I thought it was a fruitless sort of endeavour—looking for independence of Catalonia.

But I do have great sympathy for Catalan people who feel alienated from Spain. I love Catalonia and have spent a lot of time there. My book, *Republicanism*, is translated into Catalan as well as into Spanish. It was actually launched at an independence meeting, and I explained to the people at that meeting that I was there in a way on false pretences because I did not think that Catalonia should become independent. But I felt a great deal of sympathy towards the wonderful, engaging people, who had sponsored the translation and book launch. But I am afraid I can't defend their cause, and I think that putting up the referendum was probably a mistake.

Let me hasten to say that I think the reaction of the Spanish government has been equally a mistake. I think it was absurd to try to physically stop people going ahead with the referendum. They could have said "we will regard it", as the constitution allows us to regard it, "as an opinion poll". And then you would have found that a lot more people would have voted in the exercise. And you would have had a very different result. But instead the Spanish government in Madrid have taken a very hostile approach. That may be because it's good party-political policy for them to oppose the Catalans. Partido Popular gained support elsewhere by being tough and insisting on Spanish identity and Spanish culture. So, the party officials are playing politics on both sides. And it's really at the cost to ordinary people.

**Let's move for a while across the ocean. It is not only Central and Eastern Europe where republican institutions seem to be under attack. The last presidential election in the US was interpreted in similar ways. Is the Republican candidate, President Trump, actually in a sense anti-republican, in your understanding of republicanism?**

Absolutely. In my understanding of republicanism—and I think the founders in America were certainly republicans in that sense—the Republican Party today does not represent a republican political philosophy. After all, if we look at the Republican Party mainly over the last 10 to 15 years, the party that Trump joined, that party was really a neo-liberal party that was entirely in favour of maximising individual choice, at more or less whatever cost to equality. The party was neo-liberal in its policies within America and its policies outside America. It was a party that I think showed very little concern for the position of workers, for example employees in contractual relations with their employer. It has actively supported the right of employers to fire at will, and the introduction of arbitration clauses into employment contracts. Under these clauses, employees can't resort to class action against an employer. They have to go to arbitration about any complaint they have before a special panel, and they have to do so one by one rather than uniting in a class action before the courts. Equally, the Republican Party has supported non-compete clauses. These mean that



you can't change your employer in the same industry for another employer within two years or so, so that employers gain greater control over workers.

Their line on employer-employee contracts offers just one instance of the neo-liberal policies supported by the current Republican Party. Think how differently the founders of the United States thought. Thomas Jefferson thought that industrial working conditions were very hard to square with the republican value of not being subject to a master who can exercise arbitrary power in your life. He called workers who were subject to that sort of power 'wage slaves', a phrase later taken up by European socialists. Today's Republican Party have turned their backs entirely on that republican line of thinking. But they have turned their backs on the tradition in other ways, too. Thus, they seem to favour making voting as difficult as possible, at least for non-supporters. And they show themselves willing to alter the boundaries of electoral districts to their party's advantage. Those are not republican policies.

Now, President Trump presented himself throughout his election campaign as an opponent of neo-liberalism in the sense of opposing free trade deals, which neo-liberalism supports in the globe at large. He presented himself, in my terminology, as a sort of neo-populist, who insists that the people who elected him are the real people and is in denial about the fact that actually more people supported his opponent Hilary Clinton than supported him: almost three million more people. And then, believing that he has a special sort of mandate from the people, he likes to present himself as the people's champion: certainly the champion of the supposedly real people behind him. He shows nothing but disdain for the courts, for example, representing their constraints on his power as being an affront, so to speak, to democracy. He doesn't understand that republican democracy is about people having control over government not just via elections, but via the courts as well. And he also derides the public movements or NGOs that criticise him; he tweets against them as if they were enemies of the people. Now, that's not the language of a republican in my sense of republicanism, that's the language of a populist who is looking for a sort of position of unconstrained power because he has been elected and, if he had his way, would be very happy to be an elected dictator.

At least that's Trump's body language. Now, happily, the Constitution in the US, which is a republican constitution, has many flaws and I'd love to see it changed, but it has some basic protections in there that derive from the original republican philosophy; these include the basic rights established in the amendments to the Constitution, the division and separation of powers it implements, and so on. I don't see that Trump really endorses this. He actually seems to me sometimes not even to understand the Constitution and the constraints that it quite rightly puts on those elected to power. So, I see him as really betraying the republican tradition. And, in honesty, I also see the Republican Party in general as now betraying the republican tradition.

**If we move back to your Prague lecture, you connected there the problem of domination, one of the key concepts in your philosophy, with two other current issues: the growing power of corporations on the one hand and social media on the other. Could you please explain to our readers the concept of domination and its role in republican thought?**

Well, the concept of domination goes back to the idea of a free person. As I said at the very beginning, in the republican image a free person is someone who enjoys the protection of the law against those who would interfere in their basic liberties. This means that because

of being protected, you don't just depend on the powerful being good-willed towards you, thinking nicely about you and so on, in order to stop them interfering. They can't interfere even if they turn against you. That's what it is not to have a *dominus*, not to have a master. That's what it is to enjoy freedom in the sense of non-domination.

Of course, you must have more than law to protect you. You also have to have the norms of society, the culture of society operating in a protective role. If, for example, you are a woman, the fact that there is a women's movement that has set up homes for battered wives is going to be part of the protection you enjoy in the society. If you are a worker, you will be protected, hopefully, by the law, by the regulations governing conditions of employment, and by the procedures that have to be followed in order to dismiss you. But you will also be powerfully protected if there is a union that protects you: if your fellow workers will stand with you in the event of your being singled out for unfair treatment.

So, the protection that freedom as non-domination requires can be provided in a whole range of ways. But these protections get put under pressure when the employers are large corporations. Corporations have grown in strength over the past half century, and they've now reached a point where they can push back against states, even quite large states, and assert their own interests against the law.

Why is that the case? Well, now corporations can move from one country to another with great ease. And international financial capital can now move across countries, so that companies can locate in whatever location will produce the best result to raise their shareholder value. This means that within a small country, even a country as strong as the Czech Republic, a corporation that is giving a great deal of employment in that country can easily leave and move elsewhere. That's a great threat to the government because once people become unemployed, they are unhappy with the government, and the government risks not being re-elected. So, governments do their utmost to keep the corporations happy. The corporations needn't even threaten the government; they may just make it obvious they can move.

Thus, corporations can force states to reduce corporation tax, as we are seeing at the moment; corporation taxes have been falling all over the world, including in the European Union. To my shame, Ireland is the worst offender within the European Union. It charges only 12.5% corporation tax. That's been good for Ireland, but it has been bad for other countries. I would like to see the European Union establish a common corporation tax rate, so that corporations couldn't then push individual countries towards lower and lower rates.

Equally important is the fact that corporations can force countries to loosen-up workplace relations, so that workers can be fired more easily; they can force countries to let the law loosen, so that they get more power over the people they employ. And, of course, corporations can also force countries to loosen-up environmental regulations and restrictions.

The power of corporations can affect consumers as well as employees, compromising social justice. In the United States, for example, corporations can now insert clauses in their contracts with customers that prevent later class actions about some complaint. To give you an example, I owned a diesel Volkswagen, which I bought in 2011, accepting the deception of that company about the emission standards reached by its diesel cars. Under American law as it was at the time, I was able with thousands of other people to join a class action and as a result of that class action I was fully compensated. Volkswagen had to take back my car and give me back my money, because I didn't want a car that emitted at the level at which their cars were actually emitting. I believed it was environmentally a sound car, and it wasn't.

But in more recent American legislation, which the Supreme Court has okayed, a company's contract with customers can have an arbitration clause, the effect of which is that customers cannot join a class action against the corporation in the courts; they can only raise a complaint, effectively on a one-by-one basis before an appointed panel. Arbitration clauses serve the same role in this context that they serve, as we saw, in free trade treaties.

That's enough on corporations. Do you want me to talk also about social media, which your question mentioned?

**Yes, that is the other issue you connected with domination.**

On the social media side, what is now pretty clear is that organisations, companies and governments can gain enormous knowledge about us as individuals by the virtue of the e-mails we send, the things we search on Google, download on the web, the Facebook and Twitter presence we have, the books we buy through Amazon, and so on. All of these activities on the web provide data that can be accessed by various agencies. And these data can then be broken down by algorithms that provide these agencies with a political and commercial profile of who you are. This enables them to determine what you are likely to buy, so advertisements can be targeted on you. And it makes it possible for them to tell how you are likely to vote and where you stand politically, so that you can be targeted by political parties that seek to manipulate you.

Political manipulation is always problematic, especially when it only occurs on one side of politics, which appears to be what happened in the last US presidential election. We have been told that Cambridge Analytica were very important in organising the Trump campaign. The best professional opinion is that they would target democratic voters with messages that kept saying that Hilary Clinton was a crook, seeking to inhibit them from voting; and target republicans with information—or misinformation—about the dangers of immigration, prompting them to go to the polls. This sort of manipulation might not be so bad if it had occurred on both sides of politics, but it appears that it didn't.

But, apart from a new sort of manipulation, there is another major problem that the political use of social media has generated. Before social media, parties put out messages via television or radio or newspapers, giving information or claiming to give information about things in support of their cause. But in these outlets, they are generally required by law in most countries to put a signature to the message, so you know that it is sponsored by such and such a party, such and such an individual. And so you can tell if that individual or that party is saying inconsistent things, since you have access to what they are saying in different parts of the country in different media. There is always an investigative journalist who is liable to discover the inconsistency. That has all changed with the rise of social media. But now a party can target you without your knowing who they are. And they can send out one message to you and a totally inconsistent message to another group, because no one will be able to tell if they are actually passing out inconsistent information and therefore lying, so to speak.

So we need badly to deal with this problem. I would suggest that all messages on social media, especially political messages, should have a signature. This should be a legal requirement. And it should equally be a legal requirement that every signature has a master website on which all the messages sent out over that signature are actually available for anyone to see, so that you can put a check on whether they convey a consistent story. Of course, we also need some sort of fact-checking, and that needn't be the work of

government. It could be a development within civil society, with the emergence ideally of bodies we can all trust for fact-checking: because they fact-check all sides and are likely to be as hard on one as on the other.

These are just basic protections we need to protect our democracy, so that we know what information we are getting. It used to be the case that the real problem in democracy was that we didn't get enough information. Freedom of information was really what we needed in order to overcome that problem. The problem nowadays is that the airways are flooded with data, and we don't know what is correct and what is not. We don't know what information is there and what is not. That is what I call news pollution. Light pollution is what occurs when you can't see the stars because there are so many lights on the ground. News pollution is what occurs when you can't see the news, you can't see what genuine information is, because there is so much data around. And so long as it's anonymous and just pumped out like in the current manner, it's going to swamp all of us. We won't know what is going on and will be the playthings of these forces.

**If there was one thing you had the power to change in contemporary democracies, how they function institutionally, perhaps, what would it be?**

Perhaps because I am currently living a good part of my year in America, where it is a great problem, I would love to be able to keep money out of politics. We learned how to separate church and state. We have not learned how to separate business and state. In America at the moment it's pretty clear that the wealthy have a great deal of control over the politicians. So, here is the really striking thing about the Trump administration. He got elected on the basis of anti-neo-liberal policies, claiming to represent 'the real people' and to identify with the fact that many people suffered as an indirect consequence of globalising trade. But he continually supports legislation that will hurt those very people and help the hyper-wealthy.

Paul Krugman, a Nobel Prize-winner in economics and ex-colleague of mine in Princeton, has a regular column in the *New York Times*, and he has been arguing that the only rationale you can find in most of the policies that are being adopted and supported by the Republican party in Congress is: make the wealthy wealthier. And we are talking here about the top 1% or 2%: the very people who pump money into politics.

The hyper-rich are the people who support the campaigns of different politicians. So, if you could stem that flow of money and influence, you would immediately get much more power to the ordinary voters. Politicians have learned, or think they have learned, that you can control the voter by pumping out on social media whatever information or misinformation you want by posturing in a way that makes you popular by saying things that sound great. You can win power by manipulating the voters in that way, and then you can really cater to the needs or the interests of those who finance and support you: the very wealthy and the very powerful. The lobbying industry in Washington, which is often better funded than public offices, offers those financiers and supporters a very effective way of shaping policy. It should be no surprise that legislation is progressively empowering the powerful and making the wealthy wealthier. Due to the influence of money, democracy is in danger of degenerating into oligarchy.