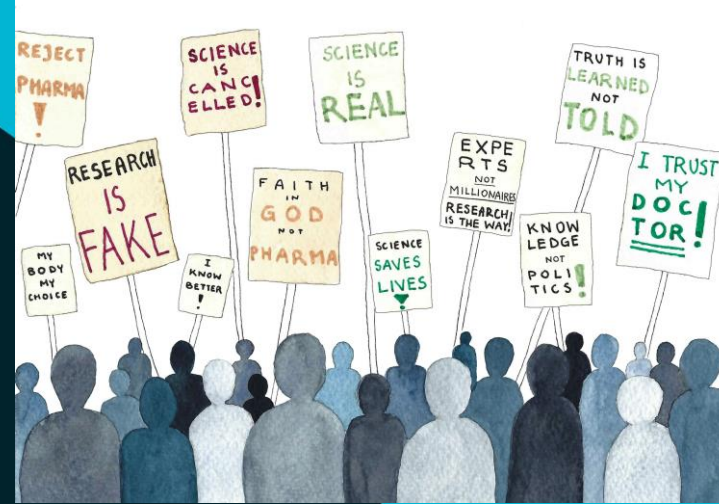


Science and Suspicion:

Why warranted trust in science is never a given
findings from the IANUS project – WCRI 2024

Prof. Dr. Hub Zwart
Dean – Erasmus School of Philosophy (ESPhil)



IANUS

Allow me to introduce to you... IANUS

Inspiring and Anchoring Trust in Science

WHY
TRUST
SCIENCE
?
NAOMI
ORESQUES

Trust in science

- **Trust in science** is quite considerable among Dutch citizens (the Rathenau Institute). There is more trust in science than in other institutions (government, courts of law, newspapers, television, trade unions, corporations).
- **Our most important asset as academics: our reputation of trustworthiness.**
- Paradoxically perhaps, **public distrust** in science has increased as well, notably during the COVID-19 crisis, and **became more vocal** in the public sphere.
- **Case study: Virology.** Many participants in public debate, virology experts first and foremost, experience an increase of polarisation, and especially social media offer space for distrustful, polarised and accusatory forms of communication.
- **Can scientists still trust public debate?** We notice scepticism among scientists whether a safe and respectful exchange of views is still possible in the public sphere and whether scientific expertise and validated knowledge are still sufficiently valued.

Trust in Science

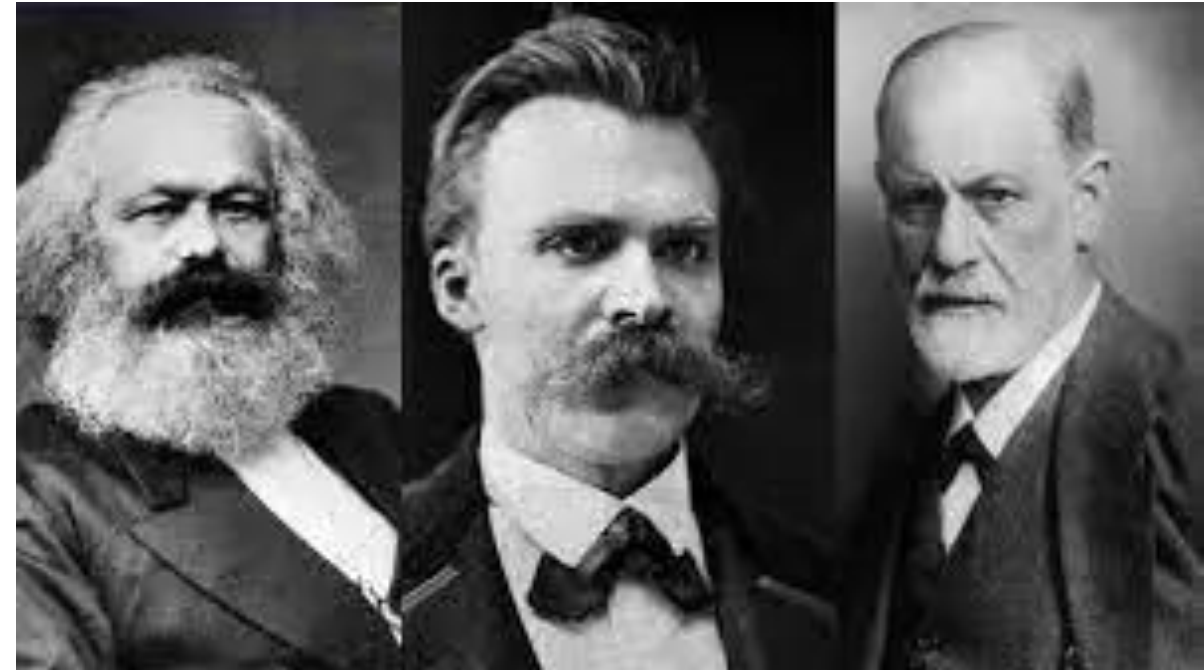


- Trust in science is never a given, scepticism is an integral part of the scientific method
- ...and of public debate
- Emerging challenges: polarisation, disruptive technologies, growing inequalities, social media
- Restoring trust: open, transparent, responsible, responsive, interactive, inclusive research, sensitive to societal expectations, values and concerns



(Dis)trust and Truth

- Masters of suspicion
- Neutrality versus engaged scholarship
- Epistemic inclusion
- Disruptive innovation – growing inequalities
- Trust and truth: the social construction of truth
- Truth and power
- Genres of the imagination

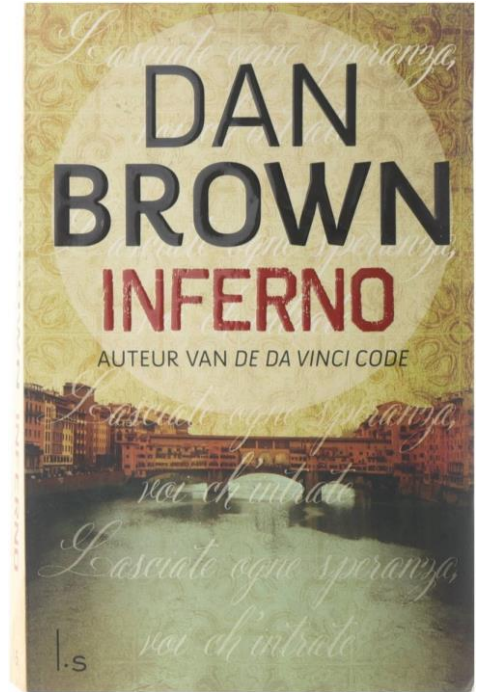


EMPERIE

- **European Management Platform for Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious disease Entities.** My role: ethics advisory board
- On Tuesday morning, May 28, 2013, in a conference room at the Hilton Hotel in Rotterdam, virologist Ab Osterhaus opened the ethics session of the annual EMPERIE meeting by introducing his colleague Ron Fouchier as keynote speaker with the following quote, displayed on a power-point slide, inviting participants to guess its source:
“Just recently, two very respected virologists – Fouchier and Kawaoka – had created a highly pathogenic mutant H5N1 virus. Despite the researchers’ purely academic intent, their new creation possessed certain capabilities that had alarmed biosecurity specialists and had created a firestorm of controversy online...”

DAN BROWN

- Objective: “to contribute to effectively countering the potential public health threat caused by new and emerging infectious diseases in Europe by establishing a powerful network capable of structural and systematic prediction, identification, modelling and surveillance of infectious diseases health threats and pathogens”.
- Quote: Dan Brown’s novel *Inferno* (Brown 2013, p. 452) which had been released just two weeks before the meeting (on May 14). The reference to Fouchier’s work is more than an aside. Virology is the key topic in Brown’s book.
- **Paradox of preparedness:** studying and modifying dangerous / lethal pathogens in the lab



Maxim Gorky – Children of the Sun

- Pandemic drama written by Russian novelist and playwright Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) in 1905 about a cholera epidemic which struck Russia in 1862.
- Cholera, originating in India, has been named the “classic epidemic disease of the nineteenth century”, intimately connected with colonialism and global capitalism
- This particular epidemic affected Russia with a death toll of more than a million.
- Gorky wrote his play while being imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress (Saint Petersburg) during the “first” (abortive) Russian Revolution in 1905, charged with inciting the people to revolt.



Article

Science and Suspicion: Maxim Gorky's *Children of the Sun* as a Critical Mirror in Times of COVID-19

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Abstract

From a contemporary perspective, the current COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly an extraordinary event, but historically speaking pandemics are periodically recurring phenomena and intimately connected with socio-economic processes of globalisation. Therefore, history may serve as a backdrop for coming to terms with the present, by comparing current challenges with previous events that are both sufficiently similar and sufficiently different. In this article, the COVID-19 crisis will be assessed from a humanities perspective, using a pandemic drama entitled *Children of the Sun* (written by Russian novelist and playwright Maxim Gorky in 1905) as a critical mirror. In Gorky's play, the pandemic as a disruptive event reveals a number of tensions and divides, between science and society first of all, but also between socio-economic classes and subcultures, which become interconnected through globalisation but evolve at an uneven pace. Thus, Gorky's drama addresses a number of themes that are still relevant for COVID-19

LAW, CULTURE
AND
THE HUMANITIES

Law, Culture and the Humanities

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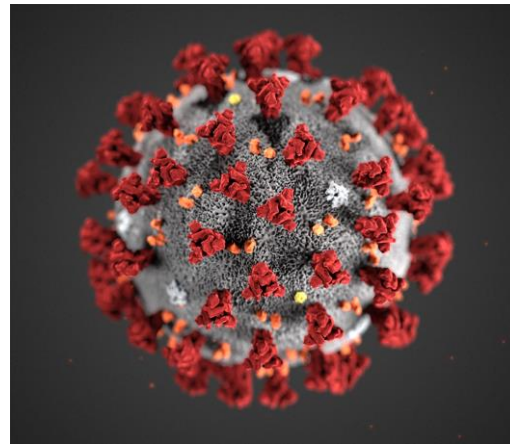


Plot

- A wealthy amateur chemist named Pavel Protasov is firmly convinced that progress in chemistry will bring about a better world and that he himself is on the verge of a major breakthrough in understanding the biochemical principles of life.
- When a cholera epidemic breaks out, however, suspicion quickly spreads among villagers that the disease was either caused by physicians, or originated in Pavel's home-made laboratory (as chemical run-off from an unsafe storage tank polluted the water supply).
- The play ends with an angry mob storming the Protasov mansion, as a local stronghold representing the life-style and views of a self-centred, privileged, bourgeois elite.

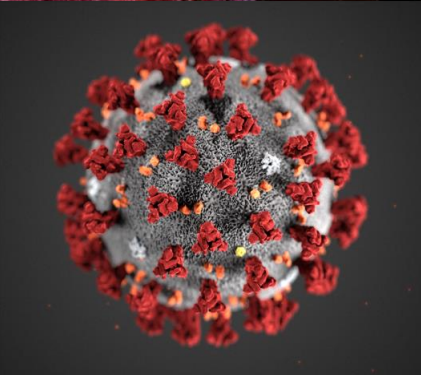
COVID-19

- **Globalisation.** Emerging viral threats exemplify the extent to which humans evolved into a global species, with a pervasive and irreversible impact on the planetary ecosystem.
- **Symptomatic** for the current era of hyperconnectivity and global mobility
- **COVID** is closely connected with environmental degradation, animal husbandry, food production, global mobility, and international knowledge networks
- **Biopolitics** on an unprecedented scale: vaccination campaigns, face masks, social distancing, quarantine, etc. Behavioural engineering on population level



Erasmus

Wuhan China: wet market



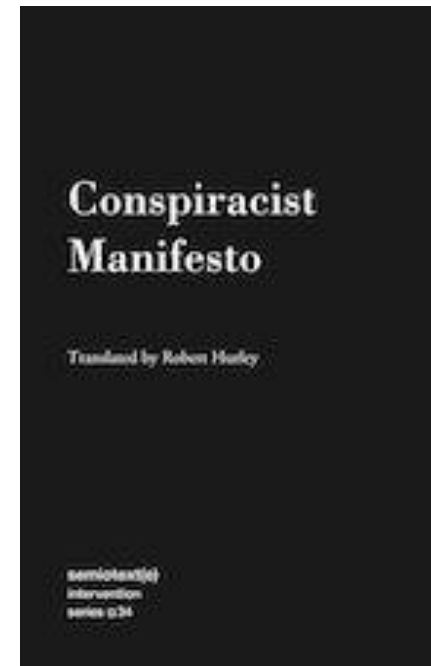
Conspiracist Manifesto

Translated by Robert Hurley

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The Conspiracist Manifesto

- The *Conspiracist Manifesto* (2022), an anonymous volume, originally written in French by a team of authors, taken off the shelves by the publisher (Éditions du Seuil), so that it is only available in translation by Robert Hurley, a translator of leading French philosophers into English (e.g. Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Georges Bataille)



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Robert Hurley', written in a cursive style.

The Conspiracist Manifesto: Wuhan

WHO. The theory of a laboratory leak at WIC to explain COVID-19 is highly improbable.

The official view: COVID-19 originated at a wet animal market in Wuhan, visited by humans, but also by rodents and cats, where not only fish and shellfish, but also various species of exotic animals were for sale.

The Lancet : “We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin and overwhelmingly conclude that this coronavirus originated in wildlife” (97).

Manifesto: *The National Institute of Health* funded coronavirus experiments in humanised mice at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIC): augmented contagiousness.

Manifesto. It cannot be a coincidence that a virology institute located in the same city and formally cleared to work with dangerous viruses at biosafety-level 4 (a form of research that is difficult if not impossible to conduct in the West).

Manifesto. Pre-covid atmosphere of revolt (yellow vests in France, Arab spring, etc.)

COVID-19 allowed those in power to turning the revolutionary tide into a stunning intensification of the governmental hold on the world

Etymology

- In Latin, *conspiratio* means harmony, concord: breathing together.
- Stoic philosophy: everything conspires: the “conspiring, and unbroken affinity of all things” (Cicero). Universal harmony among creatures
- The conspirational dimension of existence.
- The web of life: breathing together

Preparedness to restore trust: epistemic inclusion

- Suspicion entails the view that, whereas the politics of preparedness allegedly serves the public good, other (political, commercial) interests are at work.
- Our response: make scientific research open to society, develop participatory and inclusive methodologies, responsive to societal values, questions and concerns, lowering barriers between academic and societal knowledge, use societal concerns and scepticism as a source of inspiration.
- Rather than seeing societal engagement and interaction as the final stage of a research trajectory, research must build on mutual learning, involving societal dialogue as part of the “empirical cycle” and as an intrinsic component of participatory research methodologies.
- This is not an easy approach, as we are facing emerging challenges: societal polarisation (often in response to disruptive technologies), growing inequalities and the replacement of a common public sphere by communicative bubbles and social media.

Thank you for your attention!

