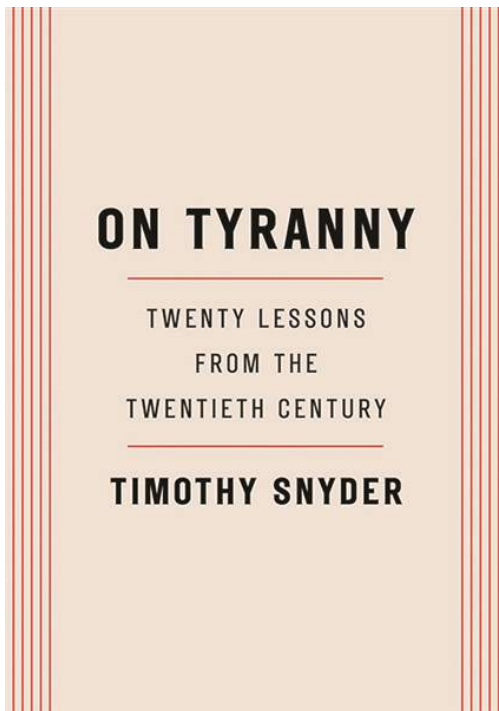


Misconstruing Tyranny

by [Paul Cliteur](#) (September 2017)



Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, Tim Duggan Books, New York 2017.

Abstract

This is a review/essay on Timothy Snyder's book On Tyranny. I will try to show that, although Snyder wrote an engaging and well-written essay on some recent political developments (mainly the American elections won by Donald Trump), his treatise is ultimately unconvincing. Comparing the new American president with Nazism and Fascism misses the point. Apart from that, Snyder is blind to the root causes of the popularity of "populist movements," and he mistakenly characterizes those as "tyranny."

Timothy Snyder is professor of History at Yale University, the author of *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2012)^[1] and *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (2015).^[2] Few

authors are more versed in the horrors that Nazism and Stalinism unleashed upon the twentieth century; expectations are therefore high when this same author tries to draw lessons for liberal democracies in our time. This is what Snyder aims to do in *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (2017).

The book is a clearly written essay (126 pp.) with a host of interesting historical examples from both Nazism and Communism. On every page the author demonstrates his knowledge about the two most prominent ideologies of the twentieth century.

The book does not contain chapters but is organized as a succession of twenty statements with explanation. Here they are:

- 1. Do not obey in advance
- 2. Defend institutions
- 3. Beware of the one-party state
- 4. Take responsibility for the face of the world
- 5. Remember professional ethics
- 6. Beware of paramilitaries
- 7. Be reflective if you must be armed
- 8. Stand out
- 9. Be kind to our language
- 10. Believe in truth
- 11. Investigate
- 12. Make eye contact and small talk
- 13. Practice corporeal politics
- 14. Establish a private life
- 15. Contribute to good causes
- 16. Learn from peers in other countries
- 17. Listen for dangerous words
- 18. Be calm when the unthinkable arrives
- 19. Be a patriot
- 20. Be as courageous as you can.^[3]

Snyder criticizes Americans who convinced themselves that “there was

nothing in the future but more of the same.”^[4] Fascism, Nazism and communism seemed “distant traumas” which receded into irrelevance. The author coins that approach as the politics of inevitability, *i.e.* the sense that history could move in only one direction – that of liberal democracy. This vision of history is teleological. It is a narration of time that leads toward a certain, usually desirable, goal. When Communism collapsed at the end of the twentieth century, many drew the erroneous conclusion that, rather than “rejecting teleologies,” our own story was true.^[5] This is well put, as is the pithy formulation: “the politics of inevitability is self-induced intellectual coma.”^[6]

Though Snyder does not explicitly refer to this author, it is clear that Fukuyama’s “End of history” thesis captures the mood that he criticizes.^[7] And he rightly points at an inherent danger of this vision: “we lowered our defenses, constrained our imagination, and opened the way for precisely the kinds of regimes we told ourselves could never return.”^[8]

This last reproach by Snyder seems correct and also original: the “end of history thesis” can, apart from the question of its accuracy, result in smugness and self-complacency.

Churchill

Taken out of context these recommendations may not seem very remarkable. But when read in combination with Snyder’s commentary, they present to us a gripping tale, a well-written treatise on a most important topic: the preservation of democracy for future generations in troubled times. Snyder refers to Hamlet, hero of Shakespeare’s eponymous tragedy, who is rightly shocked by the abrupt rise of an evil ruler.

Snyder is at his best when he stresses the need for the defense of our democratic institutions and warns about political fence-sitting. He rightly points out the importance of Churchill’s uncompromising attitude in the face of danger. When Churchill became prime minister in May 1940, Great Britain was alone. The British had no meaningful

allies and yet they entered the war to support Poland.^[18] Although Hitler expected Churchill to come to terms after the fall of France, the British PM did not. Instead he declared: “we shall fight on for ever and ever and ever.”^[19] Powerful language. And after the war, he did not claim victory for himself, but for the British people, whose will he had the honor to express. When others tried to find support in British public opinion for the politics of appeasement, Churchill had resisted.^[11] “Today what Churchill did seems normal, and right. But at the time he had to stand out.”^[12]

If *On Tyranny* has its heroes at all, Churchill is certainly the one. This is important to emphasize, particularly because it does not fit the logic of the rest of the essay.

Hitler and Stalin

With a fine eye for detail, Snyder takes us on a tour along the ugly road of all the atrocious crimes of the twentieth century dictators Stalin and Hitler and their evil ideologies. When we think of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews, we imagine Auschwitz and mechanized impersonal death. But, says Snyder, “this was a convenient way for Germans to remember the Holocaust, since they could claim that few of them had known exactly what had happened behind those gates”.^[13] We should not forget, he reminds us, that the Holocaust did not begin in the death facilities, but with the shooting pits in Eastern Europe.

This is an important observation. Snyder is also sensitive to the dangers of private militias. The SS began as an organization outside the law, became an organization that transcended the law, and ended up as an organization that undid the law.^[14] This is, again, spot on. We need to be extremely vigilant of armed groups that first “degrade a political order, and then transform it.”^[15]

Snyder also warns us about what one may call the “politization of the public sphere.” In 1933, people in Germany wore lapel pins that said

“Yes” during the elections and referendum that confirmed the one-party Nazi state. And referring to the wearing of the swastika by Austrians in 1938, Snyder comments: “What might seem like a gesture of pride can be a source of exclusion.”^[16] When some people wear swastikas, then others have to wear the yellow star. Snyder concludes: “The symbols of today enable the reality of tomorrow. Notice the swastikas and the other signs of hate.”^[17]

He is clearly concerned about what the Dutch constitutional scholar G. van den Bergh (1890-1966)^[18] and the German/American political scholar Karl Loewenstein (1891-1973)^[19] labelled as “militant democracy.” Snyder’s resulting warning is that “any election can be the last.”^[20] Militant democrats teach us that one must respect decisions made by majorities, except one: the decision to abolish democracy. Snyder is concerned about the same.

The Nazis remained in power after all until the moment they were defeated in 1945 (or thereabout, depending on the moment of liberation). After German democracy was defeated by majority vote during the thirties, one had to wait for a total regime change before the situation could be reversed, *i.e.*, after defeat in the war.

Snyder also rightly observes that we should never be over-confident in believing that this cannot happen to us. After all, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” Americans, prone to viewing their country as a stronghold of democracy “looking out for threats that come from abroad”, may be mistaken. Human nature is such, Snyder reminds us, that American democracy must be defended from *Americans* who would exploit its freedoms to bring about its end.^[21]

Indeed, we do not, as the American founding fathers did, have to go back to the collapse of democratic republics in Ancient Greece to find examples that serve as a warning for our times. According to Plato demagogues exploited free speech to install themselves as tyrants.^[22] European history of the twentieth century demonstrates that

democracies can fall, ethics can collapse, and ordinary men can find themselves standing over death pits with guns in their hands.^[23]

Who are the Present-Day Nazis?

All this is perfectly clear and correct. But the inevitable question upon us now is, of course: who are the contemporary Nazis? What “lessons” can be learned from the twentieth century (history) for the twenty-first century (our age)? Needless to say, a book or an essay can be very convincing in its depiction of the horrors of the past without presenting a convincing agenda for the future. It is here that Snyder’s analysis is less impressive, if there is any analysis at all.

The major preoccupation of Snyder’s essay is the same as that of so many other progressive liberal intellectuals after the recent American presidential elections. The name of that frustration is *Trump*. Snyder *presupposes* that president Donald Trump presents the twenty-first century with a clear analogue to the tyrants of the past. Unfortunately, Snyder does not analyze Trump’s ideas—they are not even categorized. Snyder seems to think that the American president does not have any ideas worth mentioning.

Some might say that President Trump has made some irresponsible statements about the world. But what is more remarkable is that he stimulates his many critics to present commentaries on his behavior that are so over the top. Snyder’s essay is a good example of this.

The central focus of his essay (although this is not explicitly formulated as its central aim) is to prove that contemporary politicians such as Trump and Putin can be compared to twentieth century tyrants like Hitler and Stalin. This is, to put it mildly, not a very convincing statement.

For instance, when Trump said in his usual grandiloquent way that “media has been unbelievably dishonest” and subsequently banned some reporters from his rallies, Snyder compares this with “leaders from authoritarian regimes”.^[24] Snyder: “Like Hitler, the president used the

word *lies* to mean statements of fact not to his liking.”^[25]

These are flimsy comparisons and, if a rhetorical use of the word “lies” would make someone a “Hitler” there are many Hitlers around, including those in the political circles admired by Snyder. Snyder’s loose application of the word “fascism” is responsible for his (in most cases) outrageous comparisons. He writes that one of the characteristics of fascism is (according to Victor Klemperer)^[26] “shamanistic incantation.” The “fascist style” depends on “endless repetition,” Snyder states.^[27] This then places Trump, with his attacks on Clinton, in the category of “fascist,” but one may assume that endless repetition of “Yes, we can” in another presidential campaign is something totally different.

“To abandon facts is to abandon freedom,” is one of Snyder’s observations.^[28] And he exemplifies that if *nothing* is true, then *no one* can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. As Snyder says: “If nothing is true, then all is spectacle.”^[29] Unfortunately this does not result in a categorical rejection of the fashionable fads of postmodern relativism,^[30] but in the arbitrary rejection of some of the things Snyder abhors in the politics of Donald Trump. This takes me to another important point in the ideological confrontation between Timothy Snyder and Donald Trump.

The question of ideology

The convictions of Snyder and the American president severely clash when it comes to the *ideological roots of terrorism*. What, up until now, has attracted insufficient attention from political pundits and other commentators is that Mr. Trump has some essential convictions about the nature of contemporary terrorism.

On August 15, 2016, Republican candidate Donald Trump delivered a speech in Youngstown, Ohio. During this speech he referred to what he called “radical Islam.” He warned against this “hateful ideology” with its “oppression of women, gays,

children, and nonbelievers.” This ideology, said Mr. Trump, should not be allowed “to reside or spread within our own countries.” And he added: “we must use ideological warfare as well.”

Just as we won the Cold War, in part, by exposing the evils of communism and the virtues of free markets, so too must we take on the ideology of radical Islam. Our administration will be a friend to all moderate Muslim reformers in the Middle East, and will amplify their voices.^[31]

These words are interesting for a number of reasons. First, we seem to be confronted with some very firm convictions of a person who does not have a solid reputation of being a principled politician. But Trump’s speech is also remarkable for another reason. On this point he differs markedly from his predecessor, president Obama, who always felt reluctant to mention the ideological background of contemporary terrorism. Obama and his administration, consistently refrained from using the words “Islamism,” “jihadism” or “radical Islam.” He only wanted to speak of “extremism” or “violent extremism.” Trump also said in Youngstown: “Just as we won the Cold War, in part, by exposing the evils of communism and the virtues of free markets, so too must we take on the ideology of Radical Islam.”

At the end of his presidential career Obama was for the first time challenged on this topic by what later proved to be his successful rival. In a perfunctory commentary on Trump’s views, Obama reiterated a stance that was a long tradition in American politics: *not making any reference to Islam or Islamism*. By that time there was a new terrorist attack in Orlando, Florida. On June 12, 2016, Omar Mir Seddique Mateen (1986–2016) killed 49 people and wounded 53. This was during an attack launched by him in a gay-bar. It was a classic jihadist attack and Mateen declared his loyalty to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).^[32] In his response to the attack Obama stuck to the deep-rooted tradition of not mentioning the ideological background of the attack. Only this time (and here is the difference) there was competition from a successful rival. Now Obama felt

compelled to spell out the reasons (certainly not self-evident) for his semantic approach:

For a while now, the main contribution of some of my friends on the other side of the aisle in the fight against ISIL has been to criticize this Administration, and me, for not using the phrase “radical Islam.” That’s the key, they tell us. We can’t beat ISIL unless we call them Islamists.^[33]

But Obama still remained opposed to his political opponent’s approach (“the other side of the aisle”). Referring to “radical Islam” Obama wonders: “What exactly would using this label accomplish?”^[34] Would it impress ISIL? Would we get more political partners in the combat against terrorism? Is there a military or strategic advantage in using the term “radical Islam?” Obama: *The answer is none of the above.* This only works as “political distraction.”

Obama does not differ from G.W. Bush, who also felt reluctant to speak about radical Islam as one of the causes of contemporary terrorism. But Trump is adamant, and the matter of mentioning *or* being silent on ideology continues until today.

When the new president had a conversation with Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, his national security adviser, at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, on February 20, 2017, the president reiterated his point of view.^[35] McMaster hoped to persuade Trump to soften his rhetoric on the issue, but the president did not backtrack on his qualification “radical Islamic terrorism.”

Snyder’s take on the ideological matter

Where does Snyder stand on this issue? And why is that relevant to the criticism he so profusely heaps on the new American president?

Needless to say, Snyder follows the Obama approach. He does not mention Obama nor does he explicitly address the issue of the ideological roots of contemporary terrorism. But, apparently, he

assumes there are no ideological roots, or in any case he does not consider these worth mentioning. He heavily lambasts Mr. Trump for departing from a wholly different conception. Much of Snyder's criticism of Trump is based on the presumption that Obama is right and Trump is wrong on "the ideological question." But is he? Is it true that ideological attacks are motivated by frustration, by racism, by identity problems, to name only a few of the most common explanations for terrorist behavior, or are terrorists really, as Mr. Trump seems to think, motivated by an ideology, the ideology of radical Islam?

An important part of Snyder's criticism of Trump is based on the assumption that concern about the growth of the ideology of Islamism is only a sham.

If the following list of books contains even a modicum of truth, his viewpoint would be an irresponsible assumption: Ali A. Rizvi's *The Atheist Muslim* (2016),^[36] or Hamed Abdel-Samad's *Islamic Fascism* (2016),^[37] or Daniel Pipes's *Militant Islam Reaches America* (2012),^[38] or Lee Harris's *The Suicide of Reason* (2007),^[39] or Bassam Tibi's *Islamism and Islam* (2012),^[40] or Gilles Kepel's *Terreur dans l'hexagone* (2015),^[41] or Mohamed Sifaoui's *Pourquoi l'islamisme séduit-il?* (2010),^[42] or Charb's *Lettre aux escrocs de l'islamophobie qui font le jeu des racistes* (2015),^[43] or Desai's *Rethinking Islamism* (2007),^[44] or Djavann's *Comment lutter efficacement contre l'idéologie islamique* (2016),^[45] or Bruckner's *Un racisme imaginaire* (2017),^[46] or Ibn Warraq's *Why the West is Best: A Muslim's Apostate's Defense of Liberal Democracy* (2012),^[47] or Walter Laqueur's *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (2003),^[48] or Michael Mazarr's *Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism, and the War on Modernity* (2007),^[49] or Souad Mekhennet's *Die Kinder des Dschihad: Die neue Generation des islamistischen Terrors in Europa* (2008),^[50] or Raffaello Pantucci's *"We Love Death as You Love Life": Britain's Suburban Terrorists* (2015),^[51] or Necla Kelek's *Himmelsreise: Mein Streit mit den Wächtern des Islam*

(2010),^[52] or Guido Sternberg's *Kalifat des Schreckens: IS und die Bedrohung durch den islamischen Terror* (2015).^[53]

Frankly, we can make this list considerably longer. Snyder's 4th recommendation ("Take responsibility for the face of the world")^[54] might be slightly modified to read: Read all the relevant literature, especially those books that do not confirm your own leanings.

The lesson that all the above mentioned authors try to get across is that over the last decades we are confronted with the violent manifestations of a new radical ideology, *i.e.* Islamism.^[55] And it is Islamism which is the new ideological antithesis of liberal democracy. Nazism (in 1945) and Communism (in 1989) may have been beaten, as Fukuyama has proclaimed, but what has replaced them is the challenge of Islamist ideology (since 1989).^[56]

Now this falls totally beyond the scope of not only Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, but also of Snyder. That is strange. Snyder does not even seem to be aware of this counter perspective. His essay was written solely against the background of the traditional progressive left-wing paradigm. It simply ignores (in contrast to criticizes) books and information that do not fit into this paradigm. "To abandon facts is to abandon freedom",^[57] Snyder tells his readers, but he has forgotten this lesson for himself.

As reference Snyder refers to Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2005),^[58] But why not to Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission* (2015)^[59] or Boualem Sansal's *2084* (2017)?^[60] Is not the reason for this, that the first two books fit in with the preconceived idea that America is on the road to Nazism (although Snyder does not explicitly say so) and the two novels I cite as alternatives point in a different direction, *viz.* that we are confronted with a new menacing ideology?

Snyder also mentions George Orwell's^[61] and Viktor Klemperer's language

analyses^[62] as important tools to understand Nazism. But the problem is that his way of arguing is not free from the rhetoric he so passionately rejects in his *bête noir* Trump. To give an example: he does not mention the president by name (Trump), but speaks only ominously of “the president.” This adds to the sinister atmosphere the author tries to invoke around Trump.

Now it may be a hazardous enterprise for a prominent intellectual to discuss the ideas of a real estate agent and still keep his composure. However Peter Singer did a better job when he dissected the ideas of G.W. Bush with whom, unsurprisingly, Singer completely disagreed. The title of Singer’s book on Bush is *The President of Good and Evil* (2004) and the subtitle promises what the author makes true: *Taking George W. Bush Seriously*.^[63] The same cannot be said about Snyder’s essay. He should have taken his 11th recommendation (“Investigate”)^[64] more seriously.

Does that mean that one cannot have grave objections to president Trump’s politics? Of course one can. The question is though, whether it makes sense to suggest that Trump is a contemporary Hitler or Stalin. And that is the suggestion that looms over *On Tyranny*. It is something that may be legitimate and enlightening in a work of fiction (Lewis, Roth), but requires much more serious argumentation in the work of a prominent historian who is, or should be, oriented to historical truth instead of literary fiction.

How to deal with terrorism?

Prima facie the subject of “terrorist attacks” does not figure prominently in Snyder’s analysis of tyranny, to put it mildly. But that proves false on further inspection. The terrorist attacks are ubiquitous because Snyder’s argument against Trump is in considerable part based on the presumption that “tyrants” use terrorism and terrorist attacks as a ploy to solidify their position. Tyrants and “authoritarians” are likely “to exploit such events in order to consolidate power.”^[65] Snyder believes that today’s authoritarians are “terror managers” who deploy terrorist attacks for their own personal

gain. Here, attention is not primarily directed at Donald Trump but also at Putin who, while he suppressed a terrorist attack at the Moscow theatre, exploited the occasion to seize control of private television.^[66]

Obviously, this is a real danger. But what strikes the reader is that Snyder does not use that insight to come up with a more realistic analysis to combat terrorism. Snyder's 19th advice ("Be a patriot. Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come. They will need it.")^[67] can also be interpreted as: Make the right diagnosis of the problems of our time. Our political leaders and society need all the good advice they can get. Failure in your diagnosis of the forces that drive terrorists, means failure in protecting your country against them.

The problem with terrorism is that the Obama administration, like mainstream European politics, has made little headway in curbing this problem. That makes it easy for the "populist leaders" to "exploit" the situation (read: exert some justified criticism on political failure). But Snyder is clearly not concerned with *terrorism*. Rather he is concerned with the *political gain* that populists ("tyrants" in his vocabulary) are likely to acquire as a result. Snyder is so concerned with Trump's, in his view, erroneous way of conducting "terror management"^[68] that he forgets that terrorism presents a real danger. He approvingly quotes Hannah Arendt, who wrote after the Reichstag fire: "I was no longer of the opinion that one can simply be a bystander."^[69] But Snyder overlooks the danger that he himself will be a bystander to terrorism, simply because he fails to develop a realistic diagnosis about the causes of this phenomenon. His frustration about the outcome of the last American presidential elections blinds him to the forces that are at work in this world.

How to Designate Contemporary Terrorism?

Contemporary terrorism is ideology-driven. It is based on the ideology of Islamism. But the Obama administration, like progressive liberals

in general, have made the deliberate decision to obfuscate the ideological leanings of terrorism, out of fear for discrimination of religious and ethnic minorities (Muslims). So they speak of “extremism” and, although reluctantly, of “terrorism,” but they are keen to leave out the ideological source of this “extremism.”

Somewhat reluctantly Snyder concedes: “When politicians today invoke *terrorism* they are speaking, of course, of an actual danger.”^[70] But this is immediately followed by: “But when they try to train us to surrender freedom in the name of safety, we should be on our guard.”^[71]

Note the word “invoke.” Politicians “invoke” terrorism? Do they? Is that the right way to speak about the situation? Let us take the lessons of Klemperer and Orwell to heart and closely watch how language is used. In the way Snyder speaks about this issue it is as if terrorism is some sort of *invention* by politicians, a ploy they use to invigorate their position. Do not terrorists use terrorism, a very real phenomenon in this world, and not something you can define away by omitting “dangerous words?”

Note also that Snyder speaks of politicians who “train us.” Like Pavlovian dogs, we’re “trained” to “surrender.” And because he finds it “easy to imagine situations where we sacrifice both freedom and safety at the same time,” he ends up on the side of those who advocate inactivity in the face of ideological terrorism. “When we enter an abusive relationship or vote for a fascist”^[72] we are further from home, Snyder seems to think, than simply waiting for fascists to take over. And that is the problem, because Snyder has defined away all ideological terrorism as simply “extremism;” he cannot see the ideological challenge of what the German political theorist Hamed Abdel Samad (b. 1972) would call “islamic fascism.”^[73]

Undoubtedly, “Islamic fascism” is a “dangerous word.”^[74] A word Snyder supposes only to come from the side of tyrannical leaders like Trump and Putin, and not from serious scholars. But precisely that is the

problem with the analysis adumbrated in *On Tyranny*.

It is strong in its description of the past, but weak in the application of supposed historical lessons for our time. “It is the government’s job to increase both freedom and security,” Snyder remarks optimistically, but he seems not to be aware that this is very difficult. As the American founding fathers were well aware: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”^[75]

I hope I do not sound too pedantic in quoting this, but it seems quite relevant here—because there *really is* a delicate balance between security and freedom. Stressing that dilemma is not only a ploy used by tyrants, but a realistic insight formulated by the greatest of our political philosophers.

What may come as a surprise is that *even* the words “extremism” and “terrorism” are considered to be “dangerous words” by Snyder. Let me quote him *in extenso*:

Extremism certainly sounds bad, and governments often try to make it sound worse by using the word terrorism in the same sentence. But the word has little meaning. There is no doctrine called *extremism*. When tyrants speak of *extremists*, they just mean people who are not in the mainstream—as the tyrants themselves are defining that mainstream at that particular moment.^[76]

This is a puzzling passage, because the one who uses the word “extremism” is Obama, not Trump. Now Obama is probably not the “tyrant” Snyder has in mind. But Trump speaks of “radical Islamic terrorism.”^[77] That the word “extremism” in itself “has little meaning” is the point that Trump is making, and he deserves some credit for that.

Polemics or serious historical commentary?

The problem with *On Tyranny*, perhaps, is that it is such a difficult combination of styles. On the one hand there is the serious historian of Nazism and Stalinism who exemplifies his observations with interesting illustrations and anecdotes. On the other hand there is the polemicist who tries to apply his historical knowledge to a political opponent who recently won an election that is deeply deplored by Snyder and his colleagues in academia. That's a vulnerable combination.

It is perfectly true, as Snyder writes, that “tyrannical regimes arose at different times and places in the Europe of the twentieth century” and that we always must be on our guard for this to happen again.^[78] But simply overlooking that there is an important new ideological challenge in the world that has close affinities with Nazism and Fascism is a serious flaw in the approach of an eminent historian. In 1989, with the fall of the German Wall, communism eroded. But this was also the year Ayatollah Khomeini inflicted his death verdict on Salman Rushdie. Those in academia who are preoccupied with “populists” or, to use Snyder’s vocabulary, of “tyrants” usually have missed that. They cannot see the ideological background of 9/11, the San Bernardino attack (2015),^[79] the assault on *Charlie Hebdo* (2015) or other attempts of Islamist terrorists to annihilate the principle of free speech.^[80]

The problem is that *because* “tyrants” like Trump see the matter in a more realistic light, academic scholars become more and more insistent in recycling their ramshackle analyses of what they, and we all, have to deal with.

Coda

These are, indeed, the times that try men’s souls. It seems we have no other choice than between two alternative factions of approach.

On the one hand the business entrepreneur in the presidential office, on the other hand a myopic academic elite seemingly

blinded to the most obvious societal processes. The central point of this debate is that not only Europe, but also the United States, is threatened by an ideology-driven brand of terrorism that many find terribly hard to understand. The trouble is that the more educated one becomes, the more the chances of a realistic analysis seem to diminish.

For Snyder, as a well-spoken representative of the progressive liberal academic elite, terrorism is only a name for a series of haphazard violent incidents without structure or deeper significance other than that these incidents are used as pretexts for what he considers “tyrants” to fortify their position. This approach is so patently deficient, that the instincts of a business entrepreneur on this topic are more reliable than the expert opinion of a history professor from one of the most prestigious universities of the United States.

[11] Snyder, Timothy, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, Basic Books, New York 2012.

[2] Snyder, Timothy, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, Tim Duggan Books, New York 2015.

[3] Snyder, Timothy, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, Tim Duggan Books, New York 2017, p. 117.

[4] Snyder, Ibid., p. 118.

[5] Snyder, Ibid., p. 119.

[6] Snyder, Ibid., p. 119.

[7] Fukuyama, Francis, “The End of History?”, in: *The National Interest*, No. 16, Summer 1989, pp. 3-18.

[8] Snyder, Ibid., p. 118.

[9] Snyder, Ibid., p. 53.

[10] Snyder, Ibid., p. 54.

[11] Snyder, Ibid., p. 55.

[12] Snyder, Ibid., p. 56.

[13] Snyder, Ibid., p. 49.

[14] Snyder, Ibid., p. 44.

[15] Snyder, Ibid., p. 43.

[16] Snyder, Ibid., p. 35.

[17] Snyder, Ibid., p. 32.

[18] Van den Bergh, George, *De democratische Staat en de niet-democratische partijen* (in English: *The democratic State and the non-democratic parties*), De Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam 1936.

[19] Loewenstein, Karl, "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights", I, in: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (June 1937), pp. 417-432, also in: András Sajó, *Militant Democracy*, Eleven, International Publishing, Utrecht 2004, pp. 231-245; Loewenstein, Karl, "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights", II, in: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol 31, No. 4 (August 1937), pp. 638-658, also in: András Sajó, *Militant Democracy*, Eleven, International Publishing, Utrecht 2004, pp. 245-265.

[20] Snyder, Ibid., p. 29.

[21] Snyder, Ibid., p. 27.

[22] Snyder, Ibid., p. 9.

[23] Snyder, Ibid., p. 12.

[24] Snyder, Ibid., p. 73.

[25] Snyder, Ibid., p. 73.

[26] Klemperer, Victor, *The Language of the Third Reich*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2013 (1947).

[27] Snyder, Ibid., p. 66.

[28] Snyder, Ibid., p. 65.

[29] Snyder, Ibid., p. 65.

[30] See: Searle, John R., "Rationality and Realism, What is at stake?", in: *Daedalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Fall 1993, Vol. 122, nr. 4, pp. 55-83; Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion*, Routledge, London and New York 1992.

[31] Trump, Donald, "Donald Trump's speech on fighting terrorism", Republican candidate Donald Trump, speech delivered in Youngstown, Ohio, August 15, 2016 in: *Politico*, August, 15 2016.

[32] "Omar Mateen pledged allegiance to ISIS, official says", in: CNN, June 12, 2016.

[33] Quoted in: Cassidy, John, "Obama's defining attack on Trump and Trumpism", in: *The New Yorker*, June 14, 2016.

[34] Cassidy, Ibid., p. 2.

[35] Acosta, Jim, and Watkins, Eli, "Trump refers to 'radical Islamic terrorism' despite NNSC pushback", in: CNN, February 28, 2017.

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[55] Snyder presents "some of the political and historical texts that inform the arguments made here" and refers to: Orwell, Klemperer, Arendt, Camus, Milosz, Havel, Kolakowski, Garton Ash, Judt, Browning and Pomerantsev (Ibid., p. 63). As one may expect, this is interesting literature on totalitarianism but *not* on the present challenge of Islamist religious fundamentalism, as the list of books I have quoted in the main text of this essay is.

[56] Khomeini's fatwa on Rushdie in 1989 may be taken as an important date for the new era.

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[61] Snyder, Ibid., p. 61. See: Orwell, George, "Politics and the English Language", in: *Horizon*, April 1946, pp. 252-264.

[62] Snyder, Ibid., p. 66 ff.

[63] Singer, Peter, *The President of Good and Evil: Taking George W. Bush seriously*, Granta Books, London 2004.

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[65] Snyder, Ibid., p. 103.

[66] Snyder, Ibid., p. 106.

[67] Snyder, Ibid., p. 111.

[68] Snyder, Ibid., p. 110.

[69] Snyder, Ibid., p. 110.

[70] Snyder, Ibid., p. 100.

[71] Snyder, Ibid., p. 100.

[72] Snyder, Ibid., p. 101.

[73] Abdel-Samad, Hamed, *Islamic Fascism*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York 2016.

[74] Snyder, Ibid., p. 99: "Listen for dangerous words".

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[76] Snyder, Ibid., p. 101.

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[79] Wikipedia, apparently less pusillanimous than the Obama administration or academic scholars, reveals as the “motive” behind the attack “Islamic terrorism”. According to Snyder’s recommendation 17 that would be a “dangerous word”. See: Snyder, Ibid., p. 99.

[80] For instance the Curtis Culwell Center attack, carried out by two men who attacked officers with gunfire at the entrance to an exhibit featuring cartoon images of Muhammad (Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, Texas on May 3, 2015). As “motive” Wikipedia gives us: “Retaliation for depictions of Muhammad.”

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