LANGUAGE, MIND AND SOCIETY:

Chomsky and his Critics

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:

CHOMSKY'S CRITICS: ORWELLIAN UNDERTONES
IN FIERCE DEBATE ON LANGUAGE AND POLITICS.

The majority of articles in this 'Alternative Raven' (see Afterword) are concerned with the work of the leading linguist and political thinker, Noam Chomsky. The essays of Rupert Read ("What is 'Chomskyism'?") and Wil Coleman ("Noam Chomsky and the myth of a generative grammar") are both controversial critiques of the writings of Chomsky. But Dr. Read's less technical cheeky polemic, perhaps because it is more lightweight, has drawn blood.

In an interview in October 1986, Chomsky was asked "to what extent does the control of language shape and form our perceptions and understanding of reality". Chomsky responded: "One important fact to bear in mind when one listens to or is subjected to political discourse is that most terms are used in a kind of a technical meaning that's really very much divorced from their actual meaning, sometimes even the opposite of it." He demonstrates this by taking a term typical of political discourse like 'national interest' and shows how people are coaxed to believe they are supporting the interest of the entire population, when in fact they are rallying behind the interests of a small dominant corporate elite.

Read and Chomsky recognise they are trying to tackle the job set by Orwell in his essay 'Politics and the English Language'. In that essay written for Horizon in 1946, Orwell claimed: "In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible".

But before Orwell, in a lecture entitled "Of Kings' Treasuries", John Ruskin said: "There are masked words droning and skulking about us in Europe just now...there are masked words abroad, I say, which nobody understands, but which everybody uses, and most people will also fight for, live for, or even die for, fancying they mean this or that, or the other, of things dear to them: for such words wear chameleon cloaks -- 'ground-lion' cloaks, of the colour of the ground of any man's fancy: On the ground they lie in wait, and rend them with a spring from it."

Naturally Rupert Read's attempt to extend this criticism of the misuse of words from the realm of politics to linguistics, cognitive science and philosophy, as well as sociology and ethnomethodology, is upsetting some people. Polemics may be the 'art of argument', but it is, as I think Wittgenstein said, also the 'art of throwing eggs'. Even if Dr Read has thrown the eggs badly, people at the receiving end are not going to like it. Readers must judge for themselves whether Read, Coleman and Lawrence do a good job or not.

Most would agree there is general worry about the use of words by academics. Ruskin was clear about the danger: "There never were creatures of prey so mischievous, never diplomatists so cunning, never poisoners so deadly, as these masked words; they are the unjust stewards of all men's ideas: whatever fancy or favourite instinct a man most cherishes,
he gives to his favourite masked word to take care of him; the word at last comes to have an
infinite power over him, - you cannot get at him but by its ministry.”

It is clear that intellectuals, as much as politicians, are apt to use masked words; Chomsky and
Orwell are agreed on this.

**CHOMSKY’S CREDIBILITY AND FASHIONABLE CRAZES.**

We are fortunate in that Noam Chomsky has been good enough to comment on the
significance of some of the criticisms of him in what was to have been an issue of The Raven
(see *Editorial Afterword* and *Chomsky’s Letter*). It is clear that Dr. Read’s criticism of the
misuse of everyday words and technical terms could apply to many other academics,
including distinguished ethnomoethodologists and Wittgensteinians.

In his defence Chomsky himself invokes the durability argument, and one could point to the
popularity of his linguistics. This may run as follows: If the criticisms of Chomsky – from
Read and Coleman, among others – are right, why have so many institutions and scientific
societies continued to associate themselves with Chomsky’s ideas? If Chomsky’s linguistics
and cognitive science are dodgy why are they so popular among academics inside several
disciplines? Surely these critics are not suggesting some institutional intellectual conspiracy
is at work?

There is a remarkable parallel here between the challenge that confronts Dr. Read and Dr.
Coleman, and the difficulty which Tolstoy encountered in 1903, in his pamphlet
*Shakespeare and the Drama*; here Tolstoy tries to explain why Shakespeare is so widely
admired despite being, in Tolstoy’s view, “not an artist” and not even “an average author”.
Tolstoy claimed the reason Shakespeare’s plays had been admired for so long was because
“they corresponded to the irreligious and immoral frame of mind of the upper classes of his
time and ours.”

The Tolstoy argument against Shakespeare is that we have been kidded for years into
believing Shakespeare is “a good writer”. The reason being that we are serial suckers ever
ready to accept “epidemic suggestions”, as with the Crusades, the search for the Philosopher’s
Stone, the craze for tulip growing in Holland and the Dreyfus case, over which the world
became excited for no sufficient reason. Just occasionally, a worthless popular idol may stick
around for centuries, for “it also happens that such crazes, having arisen in consequence of
special reasons accident-ally favouring their establishment, correspond in such a degree to the
views of life spread in society, and especially in literary circles, that they are maintained for a
long time.”

Are Chomsky’s linguistics, and the cognitive sciences, which spring from it, just another
intellectual craze? Shakespeare’s influence has been with us for centuries, Chomsky has had
impact in several spheres for approaching 50 years, and neither shows any sign of waning.
Noam Chomsky is so entrenched as a foremost linguist and scholar, that the list of institutions
and universities in the U.S., Britain and the world who associate with his work is seemingly
endless: *Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the American Psychological Association,
the National Academy of Sciences, the British Academy, etc, and awards aplenty: the
Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association
(1984); the Kyoto Prize in Basic Science from the Japanese Inamori Foundation (1988);
the Orwell Award from the National Council of Teachers of English (1987 and 1989).*
WHY PROFESSOR CHOMSKY DISLIKES THE LATER ORWELL.

Of course, with a figure of Chomsky’s stature there is bound to be a goodish ration of hagiography around as well as the odd idol-bashing iconoclast. Perhaps Dr. Read’s essay causes annoyance because it contrives to praise Chomsky’s politics while holding him to account for some of his claims in linguistics. This praise for the politics and journalism may make the criticism of Chomsky’s linguistics seem more convincingly objective. This may unnerve some who perceive it as a clever tactic to reinforce the criticism. If it is a ploy most readers of The Raven ought to be able to see through it.

Crucially Read identifies Noam Chomsky with George Orwell: “this great inheritor of an Orwellian mantle...” But is Chomsky an Orwellian in the sense that Rupert Read portrays him? Certainly he approves of Orwell’s early book ‘Homage to Catalonia’, about his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. The journalism and some of Orwell’s short stories get a friendly mention during some of Chomsky’s interviews. Yet Chomsky condemns ‘1984’ as “really a tenth-rate novel”.

Why does Chomsky mock Orwell’s late novels ‘1984’ and ‘Animal Farm’? It seems to be something Read, Coleman and other critics have overlooked, and Chomsky’s fans, like John Lawrence, perhaps don’t think important. Chomsky in a Barsamian interview of 1984 is patronising in saying:

“...he (Orwell) missed the main techniques of thought control and indoctrination in the democracies. For example, in England and the United States we do not use for control the devices he describes, crude vicious use of highly visible power...Orwell completely missed this. He didn’t understand anything about it. So I think ‘1984’ is very much overrated. On the other hand, he was an honest man. He did try to, and often succeeded in extricating himself from systems of thought control, and in that respect he was very unusual....”

Chomsky characterises the book ‘1984’ as crude satire on Soviet society, which was an unnecessary fantasy and “as a prediction” of what Orwell expected to happen in the industrial democracies “was very bad”. Some people would regard Chomsky’s interpretation of ‘1984’ as a simple satire on Soviet society and a prediction of what to expect, as crude in itself. Shortly after the publication of ‘1984’, Orwell told trade unionist F.A. Henson of the United Automobile Workers, that “I do not believe that the kind of society I describe will arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book (1984) is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive.”

What seems to get up Professor Chomsky’s nose about ‘1984’ is Orwell’s preoccupation expressed therein: “and if the mind itself is controllable – what then?” Chomsky does accept that both the public relations industry and spineless intellectuals working for the state or big business can bamboozle our perceptions and understanding of reality, but I think he sees this as simply a surface massage applied to corral public opinion. Orwell’s idea of a human mind controlled as completely as in the book ‘1984’, so that free thought becomes impossible clashes with the basic Chomskyan concept. Chomsky’s belief is that we are born with moral barriers to control and domination, and that he takes the view “that intrinsic to human nature is an instinct for freedom”.

The notion of something indestructible in human nature runs through Chomsky’s ideas. ‘1984’ is the culmination of a fear that runs through many passages in Orwell’s writing that
“human nature” may not be timeless and indestructible. To show this let me quote from a book review from 1939 (cited in a recent unpublished essay by James Conant: ‘Freedom, Cruelty and Truth: Rorty verses Orwell), in it Orwell sets out his worries:

“In the past every tyranny was sooner or later overthrown, or at least resisted, because of ‘human nature’, which as a matter of course desired liberty. But we cannot be at all certain that human nature is constant. It may be just as possible to produce a breed of men who do not wish for liberty as it is to produce a breed of hornless cows. The Inquisition failed, but then the Inquisition had not the resources of the modern state...Mass suggestion is a science of the last twenty years, and we do not yet know how successful it will be.”

While dismissing ‘1984’ as a “bad” and “trivial book”, Chomsky argues that in a totalitarian state, like the Soviet Union, you are forced to do what your told but you are free to think whatever you want. Astonishingly, in an interview in 1986, he claims the Ministry of Truth is “not really trying to control (peoples’) thought very much; it’s giving you the party line.” What were the ‘Principles of Newspeak’ designed to do, but restrict thought to the ideological needs of Ingsoc? What was the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary aiming at, if not to prevent subversive thoughts from occurring to the individual by as Syme, the philologist, says in the book: “...the destruction of words”? The Eleventh Edition would by 2050 supersede Oldspeak or Standard English with full-blown Newspeak, which would serve the ideological needs of Insoc. In ‘1984’ Syme claims: “The great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well.”

This kind of talk cannot be expected to please Chomsky, for however bad the regimes in the Soviet Union or Hitler’s Germany, he upholds that the individual is free inside. Orwell rejects this: “The fallacy is to believe that under a dictatorial government you can be free inside.”

The reason Orwell takes this view is not just because there are less loopholes in modern dictatorships than under the old despotisms, or that the desire for intellectual liberty is now less owing to the totalitarian methods of education. No Orwell holds fast to the social nature of humanity, while Chomsky’s philosophy is rooted in an individualistic idea of the autonomous beings. Orwell insists: “The greatest mistake is to imagine that the human being is an autonomous individual.” The idea of “a secret freedom”, he claims, is nonsense because “(p)hilosophers, writers, artists, even scientists, not only need encouragement and an audience, they need constant stimulation from other people.” Orwell even argues: “It is almost impossible to think without talking.”

In saying all this I am not siding with Orwell or with Rupert Read and Wil Coleman against Chomsky. I’m merely arguing that ‘1984’ is not a trivial book as Chomsky has it, and I’m proclaiming that the issues Read and Coleman raise about the misuse of words and the smuggling in of dodgy philosophical concepts into scientific analysis ought to be of concern to anarchists and other readers.

One of Chomsky’s own colleagues at the MIT, Steven Pinker, in his book “The Language Instinct” (pub. 1994), based a chapter on Orwell’s notion of Newspeak. Pinker tries to reassure us, by showing that Orwell offered a possible get-out in that he wrote that maybe not all thought depends on words. And James Conant at the University of Chicago, has just finished a study (Freedom, Cruelty and Truth: Rorty verses Orwell) in which he claims that the “central topic of Orwell’s novel (1984)” is “the abolition of the conditions of the possibility of having an intellectual life”. Futhermore Conant argues: “Orwell thinks that some of the most far-reaching transformations of human social, cultural and political life can
be brought about only with the aid of a totalitarian tactical employment of sophisticated forms of philosophical pseudo-theorizing”.

What Read and Coleman are alleging is that in his linguistic and scientific work there is evidence that Chomsky is involved in pseudo-theorising – which means he performs intellectual conjuring tricks designed to dazzle us, but yet, Read claims this is not true of his political and journalistic writing which Read admires. Not everyone, would accept Dr. Read’s praise of Chomsky’s political writing. His recent work was used by the Milosevic regime to support that smelly little orthodoxy. Chomsky can’t be blamed for this, but he managed to condemn Orwell when the Republican Right used his work in the Cold War. When I pointed this out to him at the end of two years of correspondence he ignored the point.

**CHOMSKY’S VIEW OF THE ESSENTIAL DEGENCY OF HUMAN NATURE.**

Chomsky is an anarchist, as are both Read and Lawrence, yet he is inclined to support nation states against the multi-national corporations. His attitude to Orwell’s ‘1984’ disturbs me. He is a little too cock-sure about human nature, and is intolerant about the anxieties Orwell expresses in that book.

Chomsky can cheerfully uphold a rosy view of human nature because he has lived out his life in a democracy. Orwell experienced dictatorship first hand on the Aragon front and Stalin’s terror in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War. I myself lived and worked for several years in peacetime Spain under the Franco dictatorship. Under a dictatorship it is hard to pursue any kind of independent intellectual life or even to discover what is going on beyond one’s own immediate locality. Conversations that went beyond everyday affairs were almost impossible to conduct in Franco’s Spain, even talk about past events like the Spanish Civil War were off limits for most, beyond a superficial level. That was in the 1960s, when Spain was not suffering the worst dictatorial conditions – even then I had to depend on the English press to find out what was happening during the miner’s strikes in the Asturias.

My view is that the allegations of Read and Coleman about pseudo-theorising academics; misuse of language; and the wrongheaded introduction of science into areas for which it is a smokescreen, are all worthy of discussion. Whether Chomsky is a worthy target is for readers to decide.

Personally I hope Chomsky is right in suggesting that humans may be born with an internalised ‘self-defence kit’ to help them resist dictatorship and totalitarianism. And yet, I, from direct experience of living under the relatively mild dictatorship of General Franco, can identify with Orwell’s misgivings. Chomsky’s ideas give us an easy-fit with classical anarchism – a picture of decent human nature struggling against state institutions. But surely libertarian thought can’t be kept in a straight-jacket of one interpretation, however profound – other possible views have got to be considered and Orwell, Wittgenstein, Tolstoy and more pessimistic approaches ought not to be ignored.

For reasons that are explained in the Afterword, the articles that make up this 'Alternative' Raven were written at least two years ago. It has been decided to publish the articles in their original form.

_Brian Bamford, Northern Editor of Freedom._
LANGUAGE, FREEDOM AND TRUTH:
CHOMSKY AMONGST THE ANARCHISTS.

John Lawrence.

Noam Chomsky is widely regarded as a kind of anarchist by people both inside and outside anarchist circles; he remains, nevertheless, a somewhat enigmatic figure, not given to elaborate and specific declarations of his political allegiance. Descriptions such as 'libertarian socialist' and 'anarcho-syndicalist fellow traveller' or 'social anarchist' give us a hint of the complexities of such terrain. Perhaps it doesn't matter how Chomsky is regarded by the various factions of the anarchist milieu; what is of interest is how this least marginalised of anarchists is regarded in the world at large; what sort of anarchism does he put across?

Chomsky's views on Lenin, Bolshevism and Marxism are bound to endear him to anarchists. Although he views the early Marx as a figure of the Enlightenment, he has called Marxist-Leninism an "inane doctrine"(1) and Lenin the "greatest enemy of socialism". (2) How a vanguard party could lead a population to freedom and justice is for him an "unexplained miracle". (3) Not that he goes out of his way to pronounce on the subject, considering it "unnecessary to dwell on the so-called socialist states or the Marxist-Leninist movements"(4) Where others would consider it very necessary. He is not malicious, and distinguishes the dogmatic authoritarianism of an ideology, from the endeavours of Marxist individuals who try to paint an honest picture.

In 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship' (1968), Chomsky demonstrates the academic's bias by showing how evidence from credible Marxist sources is often ignored. We get here an early hint of the relentlessly rational method as Chomsky uses evidence from those who are expected to be anti-anarchist to construct a more truthful version of events. In this work he makes clear his grasp of the anarchist world, whilst adopting the seemingly non-partisan position of a historian, a seeker after the truth of the matter. He shows that facts, if they are revealed, should be able to speak for themselves, and not to be obscured by ideological posturing or else drowned in other irrelevant facts.

Similarly in his introduction to Guerin's 'Anarchism', he seems to fall short of endorsing anarchism: "...at every stage of history our concern must be to dismantle those forms of authority and oppression that survive from an era when they might have been justified in terms of the need for security or survival or economic development, but that now contribute to - rather than alleviate - material and cultural deficit." Much later, in his preface to the Pluto Press version of Rocker's 'Anarchos-Syndicalism' there is a hint of his attachment when
he says that he feels "that Rocker was pointing the way to a much better world, one that is within our grasp."

Chomsky claims to be the spokesman for no ideology; he thinks any far reaching doctrines of social organisation can only be treated with scepticism, given our rudimentary understanding "of the nature of man or of the range of socially viable social forms"; (5) he is nevertheless attracted to anarchism because of "the tendencies in it to try to come to grips with the problem of dealing with complex organized industrial societies within a framework of free institutions and structures." (6) When asked during an interview recently to say how an ideal anarchist society would function day-to-day, he remarked: "I wouldn't dream of trying to do this. These are matters about which we have to learn, by struggle and experiment." (7)

Such a stance has its advantages, allowing Chomsky to pick and choose from those positive and optimistic elements of philosophy which emphasise the free nature of humanity, and the necessity to think and act for yourself. References to Descartes, Plato, Kant, Rousseau, Humboldt and many more are scattered throughout his writings. For Chomsky, as for many philosophers, it is the possession of language that defines human nature, and it is the nature of humanity to give vent to free expression of thought through action, and in so doing to strive to escape the restrictions on action that we all suffer from in the form of illegitimate authority. For Chomsky there is no point in thinking without acting. In his essay on 'Language and Freedom', he cites the philosopher Schelling: "... the beginning and end of all philosophy is- Freedom" and "man is born to act and not to speculate". (8)

But Chomsky is careful to emphasise that freedom to act is a relative quality:
People are subject to physical restrictions as to the limits of their capabilities in a given environment (or their rights in an environment of other humans). Interestingly, in Chomskyan linguistics language is constrained by the psychological/physical environment of the human brain. However, it is just this restricted nature of freedom that gives the idea meaning. In a social environment, essential to human expression, absolute freedom can only be destructive; in a psychological environment, absolute freedom of language is senseless, for there must be rules and conventions within which communication becomes possible.

Ideology and the Cowardice of Intellectuals.

There is no need, following these initial observations of language and human nature, to build an ideological edifice that can only restrict the freedom of human action, and Chomsky does not set out to do this. For anarchists it should be sufficient to observe people throughout history thinking and acting for themselves in the face of oppression, and from their theorising and their actions, we are able to deduce general principles of human desires and draw conclusions about appropriate social organisation.

There are, however, those who wish to ignore this essential freedom and employ the instrument of freedom to enslave others; Chomsky has mounted famous attacks on such ideologists. The behaviourists' preference for regarding the human brain as a 'blank slate' that can be programmed to certain behaviour through a process of stimulus and response, suggested that language too was a total product of the environment.

By reducing everything to this simplification of stimulus and response, and ignoring human thinking, we can be brought to the idea that people can and should be subject to conditioning to regulate them, a task that can be best carried out by science in the service of government.
One only has to consider the performance of certain Bolshevik type parties and governments to see the results of such reasoning, and a look at B.F. Skinner's novel 'Walden 2'(9), where he describes a utopian society of people who think they are free but are in fact totally conditioned to believing this falsehood, gives another hint of how perniciously the idea can be used.

Chomsky did the world the favour of establishing that the terminology of behaviourism—stimulus, response, habit, conditioning, reinforcement— is so loose when applied to language that it could mean anything and is thus devoid of empirical content.(10) Behaviourist learning theory might be successful in explaining how certain networks of habit and association are formed in the behaviour of animals (including humans) but is totally incapable of explaining the creative aspect of behaviour, especially as it is manifested in human language. This attack on the science of behaviourism as unscientific, demolishes any claims to social control and leadership consequent to the theory.

Chomsky has demonstrated time and again how "ideology will in general serve as a mask for self-interest".(11) Thus some ideologists will ignore facts and issues in order to support the ruling ideology that guarantees their careers. Intellectuals who have all the training and resources to get to the truth of the matter concerning American governmental policy and the influence of multi-national business on the world economy, in general ignore this responsibility, for obvious reasons. Other intellectuals who have seen and oppose the tyranny of capitalism and think that they have discovered some kind of historical truth with predictive power, will view themselves and their knowledge as vital to the task of liberating humanity. We might conclude that the first set of intellectuals reject morality out of cowardice, the second set reject it because morality has no place in the structure of their historical reality.

Chomsky helps us to see through this: "The reason for the general formlessness and intellectual vacuity (often disguised in big words, but that is again in the self interest of intellectuals) is that we do not understand very much about complex systems, such as human societies; and have only intuitions of limited validity as to the ways they should be reshaped and constructed".(12) Any attempt to discover the abstract nature of human culture is basically flawed, and any attempt to cull practical ways of action out of such abstraction would be meaningless and inhumane.

In his introduction to Guerin's 'Anarchism' Chomsky reasons that "our understanding of the nature of man or the range of viable social forms is so rudimentary that any far reaching doctrine must be treated with great scepticism, just as scepticism is in order when we hear that "human nature" or the "demands of efficiency " or the "complexity of modern life" require this or that form of oppression and autocratic rule." The admonition that Chomsky hands out to modern French intellectuals, that they should learn "how to tell the truth, to pay attention to facts, and to reach standards of minimal rationality"(13) could just as well be applied to behaviourists of the Skinnerian or socialists of the Marxist' schools. But taking such advice would surely detract from their influence.

Language and Truth.

For many people the dominant impression of Chomsky is that he is a seeker after the truth. For anarchists who despair at the webs of deceit spun by governments and media, historians and commissars, and the specious reasoning of ideologues, this is immensely refreshing. We
might also learn something ourselves. Anarchists have a vested interest in the truth of the matter, and we are always trying to discover it in the clouds of obfuscation thrown up by those for whom the truth can be a dangerous thing. But seeking after the truth, that is, observing and thinking, following through to logical conclusions and constantly testing these, is not such a simple matter, despite Chomsky’s characterisation of this as the exercise of common sense.

On the problem of understanding social phenomena he has remarked: "The alleged complexity, depth and obscurity of these questions is part of the illusion propagated by the system of ideological control, which aims to make the issues seem remote from the general population and to persuade them incapacity to organise their own affairs."(14) For most of us, it is this escaping from the system of control, in order to be able to free up the common sense, that is the problem. Chomsky has provided a powerful and well attested aid to help us free ourselves from ideological control, in the form of his propaganda model on bias in the US media, where, despite the above caveat on the social sciences, he demonstrates the power of plain language and good common sense. What one has long intuitively understood is laid out with clarity of conception, and supported by swathes of relentless evidence, that one can practically hear the establishment cringe at the blatant truth of it.

If it is obvious why Chomsky’s commitment to truth in the realms of social and political phenomena makes him unpopular amongst those who are lackeys to the state or the rich and powerful, it is perhaps not so clear why his commitment to discovering scientific truths about language has become equally controversial.

Given his prominent position in the two distinct fields, we might speculate whether, since they come from the same mind, there are links in approach. In Chomsky’s own words: if there is a connection, it is on a rather abstract level. But he adds: There is no direct connection between my political activities, writing and others, and the work bearing on language structure, though in some measure they perhaps derive from certain common assumptions and attitudes with regard to basic aspects of human nature. Critical analysis in the ideological arena seems to me to be a fairly straightforward matter as compared to an approach that requires a degree of conceptual abstraction. For the analysis of ideology, which occupies me very much, a bit of open-mindedness, normal intelligence, and healthy scepticism will generally suffice."(15)

It is quite common to read rejections of Chomskyan linguistics framed in a rather off hand fashion. How can someone so committed to truth and rationality be so lightly dismissed? Might this have something to do with some kind of mentality possessed by some intellectuals in our ideologically loaded society, a matter that Chomsky himself has thrown some light upon? But it is also common for people to praise Chomsky’s social and political commentary, and dismiss the linguistics, as if the one were rational, the other not.

One can only speculate, but it seems fair to suggest that we are probably all attached to certain familiar ideas, which cluster around and form our particular ideology. If, for example, we are concerned with trying to discover that supposed property of language which is innate, not learned from the environment, we might set off a string of associations: that people are not in their nature malleable beings, that they have innate structures of mind, and by implication, intrinsic social needs. Such a view might well clash with the extreme sociological view that people are entirely a result of their environment, but it does not necessarily do so. Common sense tells us that the whole of human experience consists of the
interplay of the genetic and the environment. But the fact is that there are vested intellectual interests to deal with, as well as vested power interests in the world.

The innatist/environment polarity holds implications for many of the controversies in the philosophy of language, such as the origins of language, cognitive development, the relation of language to thought, and the existence of some special human nature to differentiate us from the beasts(16). It is easy in such debates to over-simplify and make assertions for which there is no irrefutable evidence. But whilst on a cursory reading of Chomsky on language it might be possible to get this impression, it becomes clear when we review his works that in his search for the structure of language, he is just as concerned with the problem of truth as with his other work.

It is the scientific truth of the matter that needs to be sought, whether of not you fear or choose to draw certain conclusions. (I am sorry I cannot offer detailed evidence here to support my arguments; it would be better for those interested to review Chomsky’s work on linguistics themselves, but I am not suggesting that it is necessary to do this to understand his politics.)

Given the vested interests in certain ideological world views, it is clear why dismissal of Chomskyan linguistics occurs at the general philosophical level. At the level of meta-theory dismissals also occur, in a kind of linguistic war for the possession of the real linguistics. From the structuralists’ concern with recording the phenomena of different languages (phenotypes), the Chomskyan revolution has turned attention to seeking that which is common to all languages, the genotype: in other words to deriving principles of language structure from the multitude of language facts. This type of linguistics looks completely different, for in its essence language no longer even consists of words (though it is the pure structural properties of grammatical sentences that are represented), but appears in a computational, or notational form, which is difficult for many to swallow.

One of the problems for amateurs of linguistics(17) here is that things at the level of theory are very abstract and not to be easily grasped. But a brief sketch of the antecedents of the theory might intimate whether or not Chomskyan linguistics is a departure from a normal rationalistic concern with truth.

Grammarians have always been concerned with structure, that is, what is and is not grammatical, so they rely on grammatical judgements. But you don’t have to be a grammarian to tell grammatical from non-grammatical sentences - native speakers know their language in a way that is different from the grammarians’ knowledge of their subject.

Out of the multitude of complex language structures the native speaker knows what is possible and not possible, and can create and interpret such structures at will. The native speaker has thus acquired an infinite capacity from finite means. Moreover, the environmental evidence provided when a child is learning a language; for example they are not taught or exposed to all the possible sentences that they can make or interpret. The child’s knowledge of language is underdetermined by environmental factors.

If all these observations are accurate (and they certainly appeal to common sense), this suggests that there might be some faculty of language present in the human brain, that serves as a kind of template onto which the experience of learning a language is arranged, and makes up that part of formal knowledge that could not be learned. Are we then to wait until
these observations, all controversial, are irrevocably proven one way or another before the search for the structure of language, the language faculty, becomes valid? We would wait a long time.

Grammarians have long since observed that the languages they were familiar with had a structure based not on word categories alone, but on words grouped into phrases, and operations such as question, negative, and passive formation required the movement of whole phrases, not just single words. Whereas we could easily invent rules to create a negative or other construction, say by reversing the first and last words of a sentence, languages do not appear to operate like that. They appear, rather, to be dependent on phrasal structure, and if this is so for all languages, then does this not suggest that there are properties of language that must derive from a language faculty? It would be too much to expect that this shared structural similarity amongst all languages was that of a chance occurrence. To venture that there must be some necessary logical structure to language is only to say that such a logical structure is part of the structure of the brain where the language resides, in other words, an innate faculty.

Another universal feature of language is its recursivity; that is, elements can be combined to create longer grammatical strings, so that infinitely long sentences could be posited, with phrases contained within phrases, clauses within clauses. But there seem to be limits on the interpretability of elements (known as anaphora) which refer back to other elements in the sentence. It seems likely that there are structural limits on location, or distance, that effect the linking or governing of one element to another; an alternative view might be that some elements act as barriers to the interpretation of preceding elements. If a theory can be devised that can account for evidence from all languages, this would suggest that there is indeed a universal grammar wired into the human brain.

These are some of the antecedents of the quest to understand the universal grammar, and if we decide we are interested in this, there seem to be certain consequences in the form of methodology that are unavoidable. These create great controversy, but the question that must be addressed is whether such a methodology is a departure from normal rational scientific method.

For a start, an idealised view of language is necessary, so as not to be distracted by words and their meaning. The method of enquiry requires looking at why some sentences are grammatically acceptable and others are not. By combining parts of two grammatical clauses we can end up with an ungrammatical sentence, and it is this ungrammaticality that needs to be explained. It is the formal properties underlying language that is the subject of the enquiry, not the semantics, or meaning of the sentences. Meaning only has relevance in so far as there is a difficulty in interpreting ungrammatical sentences.

This excites objections from those of a socio-linguistic bent, where chunks of language are collected for analysis and rather less radical idealisation is required. But what this really amounts to is an objection to the argument for the existence of a language faculty, for in the absence of irrevocable evidence to refute this, why should the investigation of universal grammar be denied its necessary conceptual tools?

Next, conclusions must be empirically testable, and one of the common methods in sciences such as mathematics and physics where the phenomena under investigation
cannot be seen, is to apply the principle of falsifiability. Of course in looking for explanatory principles there might often be evidence that does not fit in neatly with the present state of a theory. In such circumstances scientists do not simply ditch theories which still possess explanatory power, rather they exercise epistemological tolerance, holding the conflicting evidence in mind until it can be accounted for (or not, as the case may be) as the theory develops in sophistication. If this means radical revisions of the theory that was originally put forward by Chomsky in the fifties, we shouldn't necessarily hold that the theory was fundamentally useless. In fact the willingness to radically revise your thinking seems an admirable trait to me.

Similarly, it is impossible to avoid the charge that claims are being made from small amounts of evidence, which are held to apply for all languages. But it is simply impossible for researchers to research every language, so they can only formulate working assumptions from the evidence that they analyse. This, it seems to me, is still not a good reason for not continuing.

There appears to be a war of words going on, where basic distinctions in terminology arise, such as between competence and performance, or acquisition and learning. Such distinctions seem to me to refine our understanding of what it is to 'know' a language, and objections that the terms are on some philosophical level meaningless, or tautological, strike me as pointless.

To the charge that the theory tells us nothing about language, Chomsky is careful to point out that the syntactical structures discovered in the enquiries do not demonstrate their existence. For the enquiry does not deal with physical entities which we know about, or mathematical ideas which are analytically true, but only that the theory goes some way to accounting for the evidence considered. The best we can do is to evaluate the relative merits of theories, according to the limits of our understanding. Though there might be a chance of future neurological discoveries throwing some light on the matter.

Whether or not such enquiries will provide important insight into human thought, or if language can be "the mirror of the mind" in any meaningful sense, the whole quest cannot be easily dismissed as invalid. But because it is such a fascinating subject, especially in the light of its implications for many questions in the philosophy of language, it will always attract the minute criticism that it does, as long as it features in the realms of enquiry.

Though there are controversies and difficulties at every step, what shines through the whole Chomskyan project is its demonstration of the intellectual habits of mind that are relevant to particular forms of enquiry, the natural limits that are placed on certain types of assertions and the conclusions that can be drawn. I cannot recall seeing anywhere in Chomsky's writings that the areas of linguistics that he is not involved in are unimportant (which would be absurd because transformational generative grammar is based on initial observations apparent from the 'old' linguistics). Though he is clear about which areas he finds 'interesting' in terms of their potential for revealing truths, rather than just endless facts. But the impression we often get from opponents of Chomsky's linguistics, is the idea that Chomskyan linguistics simply should not exist!

The rational habits evident in Chomsky's linguistics can be transferred to the social and political sphere as a general attitude of truth seeking, an objectivity that refuses to sink in a deluge of relative data, that is able to form conclusions, however qualified and tentative; only then are we able to resolve on morally inspired action.
Chomsky’s Problem: Authoritarianism and the Burden of Proof.

Perhaps the key to understanding Chomsky’s methods in linguistics and in social criticism lies in the differing natures of the problems and the appropriacy of each method. Chomsky has famously framed the two problems: Plato’s and Orwell’s. The first tries to understand the often-observed fact that human knowledge and understanding is so underdetermined by learning, that is, how do we learn to reason creatively? The second, assuming the first, asks how, given our capacity for reasoning, and the mass of evidence to which we are exposed, we cannot see the truth of what is going on in our social system and its relation to the world.

It seems reasonable that the study of language might help us to understand aspects of the first, if only to more clearly delineate it. The motivation is philosophical, the method mentalistic, logical. For Orwell’s problem, given the limits of human rationality in relation to our knowledge of society, the method can only be an exhaustive laying out of the evidence, and the formulation of some general principles which are supported by the evidence, such as ‘intellectuals are ideologically biased’ and ‘the media is biased in favour of ruling elites.’ In social and political commentary the motivation is moral and practical, the need to expose tyranny and release human potential, the method fiercely empirical and logical. Straddling the two approaches is the belief in freedom as the prerequisite for human expression, a freedom that is innate in humans and expressed outwardly through language and through action.

It is important to keep this view of freedom in human nature in mind as we return more specifically to politics. Chomsky has commented that the libertarian left should have a vested interest in innateness, a view he shares with Rudolf Rocker as he shows in this quote from 'Anarcho-Syndicalism': "Only through their own struggle for liberation will ordinary people come to comprehend their true nature...". Chomsky puts it thus: "direct engagement in the work of social reconstruction is a prerequisite for coming to perceive this 'inmost nature'" (19).

On the question of freedom, Rocker expounds the practical notion of "the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all the powers, capacities, and talents with which nature has endowed him, and turn them to social account." Rocker saw anarchism as a development of two currents of historical thought, socialism and liberalism, and it is important to recognise this aspect of the man who, for Chomsky, was the "last serious thinker in the direction of anarcho-syndicalism." (20)

Today the mere mention of a liberal tradition is enough to provoke scorn from some anarchists, but for Rocker, as for Chomsky, socialism will be free or it will not be at all. As Rocker insisted, anarchism "opposes the exploitation of man by man", but it must equally oppose the "dominion of man over man.

Chomsky also admires that other self-proclaimed fanatic lover of freedom, Bakunin. He summarises Bakunin’s view of anarchism as follows:

"The consistent anarchist, then, will be a socialist, but a socialist of a particular sort. He will not only oppose alienated and specialized labor and look forward to the appropriation of capital by the whole body of workers, but he will also insist that this appropriation be direct, not exercised by some elite force acting in the name of the proletariat." (21) We can suppose
from this passage, that there is no overwhelming conflict between the individual and social aspects of human life, or of anarchist principles.

Whilst doctrinal and practical conflicts no doubt arise, Chomsky spends no time on trying to resolve these theoretically, but rather emphasises the common springs of ideas and affinities rather than conflicts. He recognises, for example, in Pannekoek's council communism a likeness to anarcho-syndicalism, and has remarked that "in fact, radical Marxism merges with anarchist currents."(22) While such a remark is obvious to many, we can also imagine how our sectarian and more doctrinaire friends would receive such a comment.

It is this eclecticism that distinguishes Chomsky's thought. He does not see anarchism as a doctrine, but as a process of thought and action that will remain important in history. Broadly speaking, "anarchism may be regarded as the libertarian wing of socialism"(23). But while, for libertarian socialists, this idea is widely held to be a practical response to the dilemmas that result from rigid, logical efforts to pursue anarchist principles in a non-anarchist world, it can also be seen as somehow suspect, a reneging on anarchism, and a too close affinity to Marxists with whom we share the socialism. But surely it is possible to be a libertarian, holding human freedom as a supreme value, while acting to resist the forms of oppression that limit it, and at the same time an anarchist, who would like to see all forms of oppression, so far as they issue from social constructs, abolished.

For Chomsky, generalised statements about libertarian socialist values can serve as an inspiration and guide to people in the process of organising their own struggles against oppression. But he is careful to be inclusive and quite circumspect, and pay heed to context, as in this quotation to his introduction to Guerin's 'Anarchism': "One might venture that some form of council communism is the natural form of revolutionary socialism in an industrial society. It reflects the intuitive understanding that democracy is largely a sham when the industrial system is controlled by any form of autocratic elite, whether of owners, managers and technocrats, a 'vanguard' party, or a state bureaucracy. Under these conditions of authoritarian domination, the classical liberal ideas developed further by Marx and Bakunin and all true revolutionaries cannot be realized."

But for people in struggle, the goals of anarchism might only confuse issues or appear as a pipe-dream. Chomsky is careful to offer a measured indication of how people can proceed, as we have already noted, by dismantling "those forms of authority and oppression that survive from an era when they might have been justified...". While this seems to fall short of a frill anarchist measure, it might be useful to consider how most anarchists have to proceed in the everyday. Chomsky demonstrates, in addition, the need for a healthy scepticism: "Anarchism, in my view, is an expression of the idea that the burden of proof is always on those who argue that authority and domination are necessary. They have to demonstrate, with powerful argument, that that conclusion is correct. If they cannot then the institution they defend should be considered illegitimate."(24)

Unmasking the Nature of the State.

So we have no grand theories of anarchism from Chomsky, rather we have generalised statements of libertarian socialist values. To go beyond such generalised principles would run the risk of attempting to mould the world to thought rather than the opposite attempt to understand the world and draw lessons from it. It is important to bear in mind that language and human thought, as a symbolic system of 'reality' is not reality itself, which can only elude
our efforts to over-constrain it. The only solution here is to advocate an extreme form of self-determination for individuals and groups, processes that must necessarily result in a variety of legitimate forms, in theory and in practice.

Applying such principles to practice is full of pit-falls, especially for someone of Chomsky's standing. Paradoxically he seems to have been accorded the role of an anarchist 'statesman' and is therefore fair game for anyone to take a crack at. But he must be judged according to his own terms. He has repeatedly laid out the contents of his libertarian stall for all to see. With human freedom, and the concomitant freedom of expression, as primary texts, there is naturally ample scope for controversy.

Take the Faurisson affair(25), when Chomsky signed a petition defending the right to free expression of a French professor of history sacked from his university for expressing some beliefs in the genre of holocaust denial. We might feel we need to go into the beliefs of Faurisson, read his writings, consider his other actions and allegiances, consider the needs and agreed practices of committed anti-fascists, and understand the consequences for victims of fascism.

In doing all this we would start from a different moral position to Chomsky. Chomsky's whole moral philosophy is based on the need for human freedom, in principle and in practice. To have acted otherwise than to support this absolute principle would for him have been hypocrisy and expose his beliefs as sham.

This is not to conclude the feelings and practices of committed anti-fascists are not relevant. It might be observed that there is a world of difference between the state bureaucracy banning something (and the immense hypocrisy of this and the implied danger to all dissenters) and the honest endeavours of, say, activists persuading shop-keepers not to stock fascist literature.

Because he is inevitably the subject of much attention, it seems wrong to judge Chomsky by criteria that don't apply. If we seek the correct measure, we will understand better. He seems to say, "look, this is what I'm doing, and here's why, in my particular context; you think and act for yourself in yours." There is an intellectual honesty present that is hard to follow, whether or not you agree with the conclusions, or indeed the premises.

In arguing against forcefully closing down a campus faculty devoted to Weapons Research, he quirkily suggested that the faculty should operate openly but be honestly named something like 'faculty of death and destruction'. Despite the obvious irony, the logic is clear: such work goes on in society almost undercover. Hidden away where no-one can see it and suffer the daily pangs of conscience; it goes on because of the way capitalist oppression is constructed, and part of that construction is the management of understanding, so that the protesters and not the arms industry are portrayed as the perpetrators of criminal acts. Despite the thrill that anarchists get when 'the people' dismantle the instruments of their oppression, we cannot help noting that the difference made is too often small and depressingly transitory.

Perhaps we could characterise Chomsky's politics as the attempt to make a difference, or contribute to making a difference now, in the promotion of universal human values. To do this he has to pay particular heed to the oppressed in their struggle, and how they proceed practically. Such a stance can have great poignancy, as the following extract from an interview with Chomsky shows, when he starts by citing a Brazilian rural workers' slogan:
(They) "must expand the floor of the cage, until the point when they can break the bars. At
times that even requires defence of the cage against even worse predators outside: defence of
illegitimate state power against predatory private tyranny in the United States today, for
example, a point that should be obvious to any person committed to justice and freedom...
anyone, for example, who thinks that children should have food to eat... but that seems
difficult for many people who regard themselves as libertarians and anarchists to
comprehend. That is one of the self-destructive and irrational impulses of decent people who
consider themselves to be on the left, in my opinion, separating them in practice from the
lives and legitimate aspirations of suffering people."(26)

He alludes here to the concern about the business lobby's efforts to devolve US federal
powers to the individual states, where business has relatively more influence.(27) Such
concerns reflect a worldly approach to politics that many anarchists would have difficulty
with. On voting he has said: "Some participation in electoral politics is sometimes very
important. I personally myself almost always vote at least in local elections when things
often make a difference. National politics, it, my opinion, often doesn't make much of a
difference." Elections can also, he reasons, focus attention on issues around which people
organise, but "the important thing is to keep the work up after the election."(28)

In all these positions Chomsky steps on some anarchists' toes.

Many consider it necessary to continue to develop the theory and practice of anarchism, and
in doing so it would be wise to consider the efforts of Chomsky, who in his chosen spheres of
activity, his chronicling of US atrocities, la trahison des clercs, the role of multi-nationals,
and the bias of the media (to say nothing of his more risky involvement in refusal and
defiance) has served as an interface between the world and the anarchist tradition, helping to
overcome the sense of marginalisation that we all experience. In this sense perhaps, when we
are active in really making a difference, where the immediate concerns of the communities
and society we belong to are influencing our practice, and not just some doctrinaire position
taken up perhaps as a result of coercive processes that are an ever present danger, we are then
acting in the role of libertarian socialists. When anarchy comes we can behave like
anarchists.

Chomsky seems to me to be a humanist first, a libertarian socialist in practice, and an
anarchist in preference. Whatever the truth of this, Chomsky in his politics has put the
individual back into social anarchism.

At the front of Chomsky's book "For Reasons of State" there is a citation from Bakunin in
which the nature of the state is exposed and unequivocally condemned. Chomsky is surely a
long way from viewing the state as a necessary evil. He must be as aware as anyone of
another warning from Bakunin, that:
"... doctrinaire liberals, reasoning from the premises of individual freedom, pose as the
adversaries of the state.(But)... when the existence of the state is seriously threatened, are just
as fanatical defenders of the state as are the monarchists and Jacobins."(29)

But who, today, has done more to uncover the true face of the state, to those willing to see,
and with such relentlessness, as Noam Chomsky?
NOTES:

1 'Noam on Anarchism' Interview with Tom Lane (see bibliography)
2 Red and Black Revolution (see bibliography)
3 See note 1
4 In his preface to 'Anarcho-Syndicalism' by Rudolf Rocker
5 In his introduction to Guerin's 'Anarchism'
6 Cited in 'Anarchism Demanding the Impossible' by Peter Marshall p.578
7 See note 1 above
8 See 'The Chomsky Reader' p.140
9 Out of print in UK
10 See Lyons
11 See his essay 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship' in 'The Chomsky Reader'
12 See note 1 above
13 See Barsky p.197
14 'Language and Responsibility' p.4
15 'Language and Responsibility' p.3
16 See for example Gethin's rejection of Chomskyan linguistics. Gethin refers to Englefield's ideas that language was invented, ergo a social construct. Englefield's ideas seem plausible, but they cannot be held to refute Chomsky, since a brain with a language faculty would still need to invent the language, or learn it.
17 The writer is an amateur and makes no bones about it. I can only make broad generalisations that make sense to me.
18 Stated in Marshall p.578
19 See note 4 above
20 Stated in Marshall p.575
21 In his introduction to Guerin's 'Anarchism'
22 See note 21
23 See note 21
24 See note 1 above
25 I am using the accounts in Rai and in Barsky (See Bibliography)
26 See note 1 above
27 See for example transcript of radio interview with rap band 'Rage against the Machine' on Web
28Chomsky for Beginners' Interview with David Cogswell (See Bibliography)
29Bakunin in his essay 'Man, Society and Freedom (see bibliography)

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"I would like to believe that people have an instinct for freedom, that they really want to control their own affairs."

Noam Chomsky (Language & Politics, January 1988)

"One must choose between God and Man, and all 'radicals' and 'progressives', from the mildest Liberal to the most extreme Anarchist, have in effect chosen Man."

George Orwell (Reflections on Gandhi, January 1949)

"I'm basically a sort of an anarchist and have been all my life. I believe that for advanced countries at least, an organisation in the manner that has been developed in anarcho-syndicalist theories is exactly correct; it would be the best form of organisation for an industrial society and possibly any society."

Noam Chomsky (Language & Politics, June 1979)
Noam Chomsky and the myth of a generative grammar

Wil Coleman

The fundamental thesis of Wittgenstein’s later work is that the exit from a philosophical problem is the clear understanding of its nature. The view that philosophical positions are verbal structures with a false scientific facade is destructive of the treasured illusion that philosophers are in search of truth.¹

Gertrude Stein, exploring the relationship of poetry to grammar, observes: ‘I do not know that anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences.’² Noam Chomsky can also be said to diagram sentences. Unlike Stein, he does so in pursuit of devising a ‘generative grammar’. Unlike Stein, he sees his enterprise as theoretical and scientific. So what has diagramming sentences to do with generative grammar? A great deal as it so happens. What, and how exactly, deserves some discussion.

In that discussion, I’ll try to cut through the thicket of technicalities which threatens to ensnare the unwary reader of Chomsky’s linguistics. To start, it will be useful to remind ourselves of the main points of his argument.³

1. He holds that linguistics should be a science.
2. He maintains that the proper job of a scientific theoretical linguistics is to discover the ‘rule-system’, ‘instructions’, ‘algorithm’, or ‘machinery’ (assume for the present these very different terms are equivalent) which will generate the sentences which collectively make up a language. Yet he also thinks of such ‘machinery’ as a grammar. Hence the focus so-called generative grammar.
3. He argues that a very large class of sentences in any language can only be generated by a particular kind of ‘machinery’: a phrase-structure generative grammar.
4. He supposes that knowledge of a language can be cashed out in terms of the ability to generate sentences. He further supposes that the ‘machinery’ of sentence-generation is to be found in the head (or in the ‘mind/brain’). There, as a ‘language acquisition device’ (‘LAD’), it serves to explain how human beings are able to understand language and speak it. Since the LAD is what makes understanding and speaking a language possible, it must have logical and temporal priority over those abilities. Therefore it must be innate.

In what follows I explore what might conceivably be meant by a ‘generative grammar’⁴ and what its putative relationship might be to someone’s ability to speak and know a language. I’ll be concentrating on the first three of the above points, for it seems to me there’s little more to add to what has been said already on the absurdity and confusions inherent in the
notion that the rules of grammar might exist, somewhere, somehow, 'in the head'. For this reason I pay relatively less attention to (4).

1 Chomsky holds that linguistics should be a science.

Chomsky has always claimed to be importing the rigorous methods of science into a field more often given over to investigations of an historical and comparative sort. vi So what are the facts Chomsky's science seeks to explain? Among them, these: that without a great deal of overt instruction and despite the fragmentary nature of much of what they hear, children come to understand and speak their mother tongue; that languages commonly display complex sentence-structures which notwithstanding their complexity are readily understood by native speakers; that native speakers use such complex structures in turn.

Unfortunately, the kind of scientific explanation Chomsky thinks these perfectly unexceptionable facts require leads him to misconstrue them.

It's important to be clear about what is at issue here, for it lies at the heart of the Chomskyan enterprise. A great deal of what Chomsky does amounts to taking facts of the sort I've just noted and interpreting them, but tendentiously - namely not only as if they posed profoundly difficult intellectual puzzles (which itself is questionable) but more, as if these problems (and their solution) were of a scientific sort. But this is so much sleight-of-hand, for the 'problems' Chomsky both invokes and claims to solve are quite different in kind from what we might be led to believe from the way he presents them. They constitute, in effect, what the Wittgenstein scholar Alice Ambrose calls 'verbal structures with a false scientific facade'. As such, it makes little sense to try to solve them. Rather, such 'verbal structures' demand to be dissolved by being shown to be the product of the sort of conceptual tangles we get into when our thinking goes awry. Their dissolution comes about once we straighten out the resultant mental kinks. So it is that, stripped of technical jargon vii, Chomsky's would-be explanations are revealed as amounting largely to sophistry and pseudo-science, the fault of the latter being (as Wittgenstein remarks) that it 'obliterates the distinction between factual and conceptual investigations.' viii

2 Chomsky maintains that the proper topic of linguistic inquiry is the generation of sentences. Hence the idea of a generative grammar.

What from the very start was innovatory about Chomsky's linguistics was its focus on the generation of sentences. We need to get a handle on what he means by the notion.

First, in his use of it, Chomsky respecifics what we mean by language. A language (e.g. English) becomes the set of English sentences. Second, he would have it that the grammar of the language (call it 'L') is 'a device that generates all the grammatical sequences of L and none of the ungrammatical ones.' ix Chomsky has always insisted that (as he put it some twenty years ago):

It is important to bear in mind the fundamental conceptual distinction between generation of sentences by the grammar, on the one hand, and production and interpretation of sentences by the speaker, making use of the resources of the grammar and much else, on the other.

Unfortunately, rather than aiding clarification, such a distinction serves only to engender obscurity. As we shall see, there's nothing wrong with the idea of a set of instructions being
used to generate sentences (though, as we'll see, we should be cautious about talking of such instructions as constituting a 'grammar'). And the idea of a speaker - someone learning a second language, say - using a grammar to assist her in 'producing' sentences in the language is perfectly intelligible. But the obscurity comes about through Chomsky's muddying the distinction as for example, when he treats sentence-generation as what goes on in what he dubs 'the mind/brain', wherein sentence-generation involves the use of certain 'mechanisms' (I deliberately place the term in scare quotes for reasons the reader will soon see). \( ^{11} \) To add to many complications and confusions, the ability to generate sentences (what Chomsky treats in terms of 'competence') is to be thought of sometimes simply as the ability to speak a language, and at other times, more unclearly, as what supposedly lies behind that ability (that competence) and serves to explain it.

We have hardly started yet the reader might already feel herself lost. We need a thread to guide us through the maze of Chomsky's thought. The idea of sentences being 'generated' will continue to provide it. There's more than one to construe 'generation', however.

'Generation' as Addition

First, there's generation in the additive sense. It works like this: it resembles stringing coloured beads together to make a necklace. Imagine you have boxes of beads sorted by colour. The beads are of all different sizes, made of various materials. You also have instructions consisting of a rule (call it a 'construction-rule') which tells you what colour of bead you must start your string with, and what to add next, what to end with (e.g. 'Start with a red bead. Next add a green bead, then a blue, then a black one. End with a yellow bead.'). The rule is an arbitrary one: that's to say, while it prescribes an order of coloured beads, a necklace can in principle be made of beads strung together in any order.

Just as a necklace is made out beads so we can think of a sentence as strung together out of words. Imagine a construction-rule like: 'Start with a noun, follow it by a verb. End with another, different, noun.' Used in conjunction with a limited lexicon sorted by type (e.g. the nouns 'Chloe', 'Jules', 'Jim'; the verbs 'loves', 'despises', 'adores') the rule will generate sentences like 'Jules loves Chloe' or 'Jim despises Jules'.

Chomsky relies upon the sense of certain operations necessarily being performed mechanically (or, as he tendentiously has it, 'unconsciously'). It is therefore worth noting that just as a machine can be devised which will make ('generate') necklaces by stringing beads together, a not-dissimilar machine can be envisaged which will string together words to make ('generate') sentences.

'Generation' as Logical Production

Secondly, and very differently, there's a strictly logical sense of generation. Rather than involving an arbitrary construction-rule, it comprises the notion of something being generated out of something else, be it an idea, concept, argument, proposition, sentence, etc.

There are two ways of thinking about generation in the logical sense. I'll outline them both (referring to them as 'A' and 'B' respectively), even though only the first - despite the author's remarks to the contrary\( ^{11} \) - makes sense in the context of Chomsky's project.

(A) What we have here falls under the title of what we saw Gertrude Stein calling 'diagramming sentences'. The key notion here is that of analysis in which a sentence is broken down into its various parts. From the grammatical category 'verb-phrase', for example, is generated its constituent 'article', 'noun' and 'verb'. Therefore, as we
undertake the analysis we can depict the results in the form of an ever-expanding branching tree diagram. Looking at it, we see depicted the sentence’s structure.

Importantly, there’s no equivalent, here, to the construction-rule of 2.2. There, the rule stands extrinsic to and independent of the procedures it governs. What governs analysis, on the other hand, is a commitment on the part of the analyst to logical coherence and the rules internal to that logic, in which the inferential relations between the analysed parts is respected. Such operations can only be performed intelligently - that is to say, in order to be seen to be analysing, the putative analyst must be able to show she understands the meanings of the parts and their relations, and be able to cite reasons for the inferential moves she makes. For this reason, there is a crucial difference between the mechanical mimicking of such moves and their actual performance.

(B) Here, we find the successive application of a function, be it algorithm, rule, or instruction. Formal logic provides many examples. So does maths. For instance, suppose ‘x’ is a variable taking different values. We apply to it a function: ‘x × 2’. Where ‘x’ has the value ‘4’ we generate as product, ‘8’, and by applying the function recursively we generate a series - ‘8, 16, 32, 64, ....’. From any sequence of the series’ elements other elements, as well as the rule generating them, can be inferred.

Chomsky makes a good deal of this notion. For example, he writes: ‘Although the language generated is infinite, the grammar [considered as a function] is finite, represented in a finite brain. Thus, the rules of grammar must iterate in some manner to generate an infinite number of sentences...’ The formulation is misleading, however, for it disguises profound differences between language and maths.

Maths concerns practices of computation. We compute (add, subtract, divide, etc.) in maths. Maths is, as it were, the medium of computation. We do not and cannot compute in language. It’s not that we can’t say in language things like ‘four multiplied by two equals eight’. We can. Yet only as a description in words of a mathematical operation: ‘four’, ‘two’ and ‘eight’ are mathematical terms, and ‘multiplication’ is an operation in maths. Moreover, while we can add words onto sentences (‘The man ran’, ‘the man ran to the car’, ‘the man ran to the car very quickly’, etc.) and we can also subtract words from sentences, it would be farfetched to suppose that in doing so we were engaged in computation.

Lastly, a construction-rule can be ‘iterated’ such that n number of sentences are generated by applying the rule n times. But while a grammatical rule can of course be applied again and again to different cases, because (as we shall see) such a rule doesn’t generate sentences, it makes no sense to speak of iterating a grammatical rule.

Chomsky appears to reject the idea of ‘sentence-generation’ in the additive sense in order to embrace it in the logical, but because of how he conceives of the role of a linguistic science, he is unwilling to reject the first in its entirety. As we shall see, the distinction ends up being fudged. For the present, it will be useful to explore both the additive and logical senses of ‘generation’ in more detail.

What is a ‘Generative Rule’?
In relation to language, the additive sense of ‘generation’, you recall, consists of words being put together like beads on a string. Suppose this time we must follow the construction-rule: ‘Start with a verb, follow it with a noun: end with a verb, a different one from the one you started with.’ (The rule could be abbreviated to ‘V → N → V’.) Used in conjunction with our word-stocks we generate word-assemblages like ‘loves Chloe hates’ or ‘eats dog likes’. Such
word-assemblages will be perfectly in accordance with the rule as I’ve spelt it out. But they won’t be English. They won’t even be sentences. So the rule can’t be a grammatical rule.

Now, a so-called ‘finite state grammar’ works in the additive way just described. By following a construction-rule a string of items is generated. Here is another such rule: ‘N→V→N’. What reason might we have (I stress ‘might’! - I shall come back to this point, below) to think of this construction-rule as a rule of grammar? Well, the reason might be that (as we can see) the construction-rule conforms to the rules of English grammar, and the items concerned are English words. Anyone who uses the rule ‘N→V→N’ in conjunction with a stock of words, will generate English sentences (albeit only a tiny sample of possible sentences). She will be able to do so whether she knows English or not.

But why should we be cautious about describing such a construction-rule as a rule of grammar? Let me get round to answering that question by a slightly roundabout route.

This time, imagine a native Chinese-speaker entirely ignorant of English. She has in front of her two piles labelled ‘N’ and ‘V’. Neither the labels nor the piles’ contents (cards with a selection of English nouns and verbs written on them) mean anything to her. All she sees are two piles of cards with wiggly shapes on them. She follows the construction-rule, ‘N→V→N’. Although she has no idea she is assembling words into sentences, nevertheless this is what she is doing.

Next, suppose to her surprise she learns this is so, namely that the upshot of her following the construction-rule is the construction of well-formed English sentences. It is not inconceivable that, armed with this knowledge, she might use the rule in order to pretend to know English (or at least some English). But we must be clear: pretending to know English and knowing English aren’t at all the same thing. It makes no sense to suppose that in following the rule she in some fashion knows English, knowing it tacitly or unconsciously or some such nonsense. No, it remains the case that in following the rule she just happens to be producing English sentences.

It is illuminating to compare her case with that of someone who does know English. Evidently, the latter could use the rule ‘N→V→N’ to generate English sentences: she could do so, but why should she? She could also and more easily generate sentences without going through the whole rigmarole, simply by speaking English. Indeed, it’s perfectly clear that the person who knows English has no use for a construction-rule of the sort we’ve been considering. Consequently, insofar as it might be Chomsky’s intention to explain what it is to ‘know English’, appeal to anything resembling a construction-rule will fail to satisfy it.

Are ‘Generative Rules’ Grammatical?
I’ll continue to explore the reasons why we should be cautious about treating a construction-rule, ‘N→V→N’, as a rule of grammar. First, as a construction-rule it states only that ‘N-type’ items are to be placed in sequence next to ‘V-type’ items. The rule is quite indifferent as to what these items are. Just because they are (N)ouns and (V)erbs is not sufficient to make the rule a rule of grammar. Something else is required for that to happen.

Picture once more the Chinese-speaker. She knows, because she’s been told, that in following the rule ‘N→V→N’ she’s constructing English sentences. As matters stand, she’s not in a position to use the rule as a rule of grammar. But she can come to do so. How, we need to see.
Presume the Chinese language provides the resources for her to distinguish between words, and between words which are names of persons and words which identify what a person does. Suppose that she is informed (in Chinese, of course) that in the rule, ‘N→V→N’, Ns (here, ‘Chloe’, ‘Jules’, etc.) are of the first sort and Vs (here, ‘loves’, ‘hates’, etc.), of the second. Furthermore, imagine that she is told what the Chinese equivalents for ‘loves’, ‘hates’, etc., are. Now, she will be able to use the rule to say - in English - that e.g. Jules loves Chloe. In other words, the ‘N→V→N rule’ will have ceased, for her, to be an arbitrary construction-rule and will have become a rule of English grammar.

Before, when the rule for her was merely a construction-rule operating on elements as meaningless as beads in a necklace, she followed the rule ‘mechanically’ and was merely happening to ‘generate sentences’. Now she understands the rule as a rule of grammar, in order to follow it she must follow it intelligently. We can say of her that she understands or fails to understand the rule, and insofar as she understands it (and this relates to what I had to say at 2.3) she will be able to cite (albeit still in Chinese, of course) reasons for putting particular words (‘Jules’, ‘loves’, ‘Chloe’) in this particular order.

In effect we have two rules, not one. They look the same when written down (‘N→V→N’) but they’re not. The first is a construction-rule which contingently happens to be in conformity with a rule of English grammar. The second is itself just such a grammatical rule. Contingent conformity to a rule of grammar is not sufficient to make the first a rule of grammar, for a rule of grammar is internal to the language.

This latter point needs some explanation. Consider a sentence like ‘Jules loves Chloe’. A sentence is what is grammatical. That is, it makes sense. It consists of words put together in the right order, not strung together anyhow. A rule of grammar (e.g. the rule ‘Noun→Verb→Noun’) is not independent of and extrinsic to the sentences it ‘governs’. On the contrary, it stands in an internal relation to sentences in the language in that it is the latter which determine whether the rule be ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’, ‘accurate’ or ‘inaccurate’. A grammatical rule serves merely to describe an order the sentences it ‘governs’ already possess by dint of being ‘sentences’. In contrast, a rule like our construction-rule is external to the items it governs. Because it is arbitrary, it can be neither ‘correct’ nor ‘incorrect’, ‘accurate’ nor ‘inaccurate’, for in its case there is nothing which stands as a criterion of correctness.

Construction Rules v. Rules of Grammar
Let’s get our bearings. On the one hand, someone follows a construction-rule which contingently conforms to a rule of English grammar: the rule generates sentences, just as Chomsky wants. Nevertheless (and this is the first fork of a problem Chomsky must face) the rule-follower generates them without the slightest knowledge that that is what she’s doing. For this reason she cannot be said to know English.

On the other hand, someone uses a rule of English grammar. We can imagine our Chinese-speaker, for example, using it as a guide and aide-memoire for correctly constructing English sentences. She uses it to say in English what she can already say in Chinese. In using the rule she necessarily must use it intelligently. Insofar as she uses it intelligently she can be said to know at least some English. But (and here’s the other fork of Chomsky’s problem) because the rule stands in an internal relation to sentences in the language it fails to possess the logical and temporal priority over them which Chomsky’s would-be explanation requires.
I'll briefly develop the point about rules of grammar serving as guides to correct usage. I'll use an example from my own case. I'm presently learning German. As things stand, my knowledge is pretty rudimentary. One thing that still bothers me is the use of the definite article. For example, should I say: 'das Kind ist nett' or 'der Kind ist nett'? To help me, my guide is a manual of German grammar. My point is that, were I to know no German at all the grammar would be meaningless; it would tell me that 'Kind' is neuter but, not knowing the meaning of 'Kind', I would have no means of making use of the fact.

It's interesting that Chomsky himself admits as much. 'A traditional grammar', he writes, 'is not a theory of the language, but is rather a guide that can be followed by a person who already knows the language.' But he goes on: 'A generative grammar, in contrast, seeks to make explicit just what this knowledge is that enables the intelligent reader to make use of a grammar.' Despite Chomsky's apparent confidence in the intelligibility of this claim, it should now be evident that there is something very fishy about the very idea that such 'knowledge' can be cashed out in terms of any sort of generative mechanism.

*Pace* Chomsky, rules of grammar can be said to 'generate sentences' only in the case of someone who knows how to apply the rules relevantly because she has some knowledge of the language. Thus, used as a guide, as a grammatical rule, the rule 'N→V→N' is necessarily followed intelligently, wherein the rule-follower understands what 'N[ouns]' and 'V[erbs]' are and knows what it is she's saying. Hence Chomsky can't explain what it is to know a first language by reference to rules of grammar. On the other hand, used as a construction-rule (i.e. as a generative mechanism), the rule 'N→V→N' can generate sentences independently of the rule-follower's knowledge of the language, but only by being followed 'stupidly', 'mechanically'. (As we have seen, a machine could be constructed to do the same.)

In short, what we have is a contrast between someone merely *generating sentences* using a construction-rule and that person *saying* something. A logical requirement of the second is that she *know what it is* she is saying.

*'Generating Sentences' v. Talking

It will be useful at this point to look again at the passage from Chomsky I cited earlier. There, he insisted that we 'bear in mind the fundamental conceptual distinction between generation of sentences by the grammar, on the one hand, and production and interpretation of sentences by the speaker, making use of the resources of the grammar and much else, on the other.'

Take that 'fundamental conceptual distinction'. Suppose the expression 'sentence generation' were to refer to 'the production and interpretation of sentences by the speaker, making use of the resources of the grammar'. If it were to, it would amount to no more than a fanciful way of expressing the fact that people *say* things to one another and are understood. While it might prompt us to adopt locutions like: 'Noam generated some sentences to me yesterday and I generated some in turn', if that were all there were to 'sentence generation', Chomsky would be right to condemn the notion as trivial.

So instead, suppose we follow Chomsky into thinking of 'sentence generation' as something *other* than talk. We can do this, as we've seen: sentences can be 'generated' in the way that a necklace is 'generated' out of beads added to a string. And, indeed, such 'sentence generation' has the right sort of 'fundamental conceptual distinction' from the ability to
produce and interpret sentences. Yet precisely for that reason, it is also irrelevant to any supposed explanation of that ability.

Which way, then, is Chomsky to turn? To the speaker using the resources of a grammar? Or to the idea of ‘mechanisms’ blindly grinding out sentences? Or shall he try to find his way out of the impasse by charting a third way between them? As we shall see, in effect this is what he does by employing the notion of a ‘generative grammar’. But the idea is an oxymoron, and it leads, not to clarity, but to further fudging and confusion.

3. Chomsky argues that a very large class of sentences in any language can only be generated by a particular kind of rule-system, namely by what he calls a phrase-structure generative grammar.

Chomsky makes much of his rejection of so-called finite state grammars, his expressed reason being that they are unable to generate all the sentences in a language. Yet he is mistaken, for they can.

To see why, we’ll stay with the idea of a ‘finite state grammar’ - not thinking of it as a ‘grammar’ (for that makes no sense) but as a construction-rule. Here, again, is one such rule: ‘N→V→N’. Imagine it re-written, thus: ‘Item Type1→Item Type2→Item Type1’. Now, a moment’s thought will show that we could have a set of such construction-rules, each consisting of a string of items variously ordered. Therefore, suppose that the different item-types are nouns, verbs, pronouns, conjunctions and the rest, and that the different items are English words. If we then suppose that each and every construction-rule is in contingent conformity to rules of English grammar, then between them they will generate the set of English sentences - a set which will of course be infinite because included among the item-types are conjunctions, hence words like ‘and’ and ‘or’.

*Depicting Construction Rules*

In fact it is clear that when Chomsky says that a finite state grammar cannot be used to generate all the sentences in a language he is thinking of it not as a construction-rule at all, but very specifically as a grammar. Which is not to say he is not also - confusingly - thinking of such a grammar as a mechanism for sentence-generation.

But put that confusion on one side for the moment in order to consider what Chomsky might be getting at. Take our Chinese-speaker. This time imagine her seeking to learn English. Suppose as her guide to good practice, all she possesses are rules (conforming to English grammar) taking the form of a string of items like the following (suppose the English expressions explicated in Chinese): ‘Definite article→Noun→Verb (past tense)→Definite article→Noun’ (a rule which can be said to depict, for example, the grammar of the sentence: ‘The man ate the pizza’). Evidently, as someone seriously wanting to learn English what she needs are rules which will assist her to construct well-formed English sentences. What, then, of a rule like the one above? Clearly, for sentences like ‘The man ate the pizza’ or like ‘Jules loves Chloe’, a rule of this form might well prove sufficient. Nevertheless, such rules have the serious limitation of failing to make perspicuous the relationships between parts of more complex sentences. Such sentences are like (b) to (e), below.

a) Jules loves Chloe
b) Jules who we saw last week loves Chloe
c) Jules thinks but is not sure that he loves Chloe
d) Jules who we saw last week thinks but is not sure that he loves Chloe

e) Jules unlike Jim who we saw last week thinks but is not sure that he loves Chloe

The problem for our language-learner as regards such complex sentences as (b) to (e), is that if at her disposal all she has are rules consisting of chains of grammatical terms, rules of the form ‘Item Type₁→Item Type₂→Item Type₃→…’, she will find it next to impossible to assemble them, for they contain embedded clauses. And this despite being able to construct such individual clauses/sentences like ‘Jules loves Chloe’ and ‘We saw Jules’ and ‘The man ate the pizza’. For rules of this sort do not enable her to combine clauses/sentences into more complex wholes. To assist her to do that something else is required.

It is plain that the language-learner might find it useful to see depicted how the different elements of a complex sentence are fitted together. To illustrate what I mean, here is a relatively simple sentence: ‘The man took the cash’. Although relatively simple, it still, of course, can be thought of as consisting of parts or elements; they and their inter-relations can be displayed as follows:

```
( S )
   /\      /
  /   \    /   \
 NP   VP   NP
   |     |     |
  art N    V    art N
     |  |    |   |
    the man took the cash
```

The diagram, above, of a sort familiar to any of Chomsky’s readers, can be thought of as depicting the structure of the sentence ‘The man took the cash’. It shows how it consists of parts, and how those parts are related. Read from the top, it shows how the sentence, ‘S’ (‘The man took the cash’) can be broken down into a noun-phrase (‘NP’) and a verb-phrase (‘VP’), and how the first consists of an article (‘art’) and a noun (‘N’) and the second of a verb (‘V’) and another noun-phrase. And it shows how the latter itself consists of two parts, an article and a noun. Because the terms (‘sentence’, ‘noun-phrase’, ‘verb-phrase’, ‘noun’, ‘verb’, ‘article’) are grammatical terms we can also think of the diagram as depicting the grammatical rules internal to the sentence’s construction. It can be said to depict an analysis of the sentence ‘The man took the cash’, an analysis conducted under the auspices of a so-called ‘phrase-structure grammar’. As such, it might serve a useful pedagogic function.

So-called ‘phrase-structure grammar’ can be considered as one way of showing the structure of any proposition; considered as a rule of grammar, the rule ‘N→V→N’ is another. Both in their different ways make aspects of a sentence’s structure perspicuous.

A grammatical rule stands in an internal relationship to the sentences whose structure it ‘governs’. What any grammatical rule brings out is that the meaning of a sentence is structure-dependent, namely how ‘Jules loves Chloe’ makes sense while ‘loves Chloe Jules’ does not. Different types of rule pick up on different structural features of sentences. For
example, a so-called ‘phrase-structure grammar’ picks up on a certain aspect (the phrasal structure of sentences) and makes it predominant, a ‘finite-state grammar’ another (in this case, the structure of a sentence considered as the relationship between individual words).

'Universal Grammar'
What Chomsky’s ‘phrase-structure grammar’ can further serve to depict is the fact that every proposition (in any language) has at bottom the same form.\textsuperscript{xiii} The point can be made differently. Provocatively, Chomsky argues\textsuperscript{xxiv} that propositions constitute the essential, most basic, elements of any conceivable language; despite its apparently being the case that very many of the things said in language are not propositions - including greetings, questions, exclamations, and the rest - each and all of these, he claims, is derived from the basic propositional form (hence his notion of ‘transformational grammar’\textsuperscript{xxv}). ‘Phrase-structure grammar’ depicts this form, in that when a proposition is diagrammed in accordance with the above format, we see clearly how it has a Subject - Predicate (or Noun-Phrase/ Verb-Phrase) structure. It reminds us that, in a proposition, something is said \textit{about} something or someone.

Take Chomsky’s notion of a \textit{Universal Grammar}. What does it amount to? No more than this: that ‘universally’, all propositions have at bottom the same form. They do so for the reason that it is on this basis we \textit{call them} ‘propositions’.

Now we might want to call this ‘NP + VP’ kernel a ‘grammar’ in some attenuated sense. But the notion is a remarkably empty one. For in any ordinary sense of a grammar we naturally think of English, German, Chinese, etc., grammars. This is because a grammar is what is \textit{used} and to the second-language learner a putative Universal Grammar it is useless, for what she needs to know is, for instance, how a particular German sentence-form is constructed: for this, she needs a German grammar. (But what of the person who is entirely bereft of all linguistic skills, whether of speaking or comprehension? Then a Universal Grammar is both useless and meaningless.)

\textit{Do 'Structures' Explain Sentences?}
A grammatical rule does not \textit{generate} sentences the way an external and arbitrary construction-rule can contingently do. Indeed, Chomsky’s diagrams show this to be the case, for they show how grammatical rules and the sentence they ‘govern’ are mutually elaborated, and how in depicting the structure of a sentence, the linguist is at the same time depicting the grammar.

An elaborated diagram will make more evident this internal relation of grammar and sentence-structure:
S = the man took the cash

NP = the man

VP = took the cash

art = the N = man V = took NP = the cash

the man took the cash

The linguist uses her knowledge of grammar to generate - in the logical sense of ‘generation’ - a series of branching structures. But what exactly does she generate? It is not a sentence she generates, for the words in the bottom line of the diagram are not generated (in the sense of logically derived) from the structure above them. She can infer from Noun-Phrase to ‘article plus noun’ because it’s definitional of the expression ‘Noun-Phrase’ that it consist of these elements. But it’s quite wrong to say that she infers from ‘noun’ to ‘man’. She does not. There is no inferential relation here, and ‘man’ is an example of a noun. Rather, what is generated is a structure displaying logical relations between grammatical categories. The diagram constitutes a representation of the grammatical structure of a sentence using a particular form of notation.

From grammatical categories can be generated only more of the same. And that generation can be accomplished only by attending to the meaning of grammatical terms. Thus when the linguist generates ‘article plus noun’ from ‘Noun-Phrase’ she is not appealing to rules external to these terms; rather, because she understands what a ‘noun phrase’ is, she knows to infer from it, ‘noun’, and ‘article’. That’s why we say that the rules relating grammatical terms are internal to the meaning of those terms.

Different grammatical structures are differently depicted. If we wish to call some of those depictions ‘phrase-structure grammars’ that’s fine. And the relevant branching structures can be generated ad libitum. But - I repeat - no sentence is generated in this fashion.

4. Chomsky supposes that the ‘machinery’ of sentence-construction is in the head (or in the ‘mind/brain’).

When someone states that sentences are rule-governed, it at best serves as a reminder that to be a sentence the order of words must make sense. I’ll use the same example I used before: ‘Jules loves Chloe’ makes sense and ‘loves Jules Chloe’ does not. In saying ‘Jules loves Chloe’, we do not, if native English-speakers, follow the rule: ‘Noun, then verb, then noun’; on the contrary, we simply say it. Unlike the learner of a second language, someone proficient in a language only very occasionally, if ever, has recourse to a grammar book. For the most part, she has no need for grammatical rules, whether in the grammar-book, in her head or, indeed, anywhere. (I would go so far as to argue that everything in Chomsky’s linguistics follows from a failure to appreciate the import of what Wittgenstein says in the *Philosophical Investigations* on rule-following, namely when someone’s learnt a rule that means she is able to act independently and without reference to it.)
Chomsky renders the *logical* connection between ‘knowing a language’ and ‘knowing the grammar of the language’ obscure by treating it as if it were an *empirical* matter. But it should now be clear that grammar is not extrinsic to a language but *part of it.*

Thus my German-teacher says that I know some German because she hears me speaking at least some well-formed grammatical sentences. She also says that I know some German *grammar.* She’s right, but in saying so, she’s not supposing I shall be able to cite any specific grammatical rules. All she’s doing is elaborating the commonplace that when I as a learner can construct some intelligible German sentences, I can for the same reason be said to have grasped the relevant grammar.

*Grammar is part of Language*

When I say that ‘grammar is part of a language’, all I’m doing is pointing out the internal connection emphasised by Wittgenstein\(^{xviii}\) between a rule and the product of *using* a rule. What we find in Chomsky’s work is both a reliance on that connection and a flouting of it. That is to say, he relies on the logical tie between grammar and language to treat ‘knowing the rules of grammar’ as essential to ‘knowing the language’. He then misconstrues that logical tie by treating the grammar as if it were *external* to the language (the ‘sentence-generation’) it supposedly governs, presuming by inference that the speaker must knows the grammar independently of (and prior to) being able to speak it. Hence, ‘grammar’ becomes something mysterious, at one point appearing in the guise of *rules* to be followed, at another taking the form of a *machinery*, operating below the threshold of human consciousness. At yet another point, the distinction is fudged by talk of ‘unconscious’ rule-following and other absurdities. (For example, consider a formulation like this one: ‘...a person in command of a language has in some way internalized the system of rules that determines both the phonetic shape of the sentence and its intrinsic semantic structure...’\(^{xviii}\) Note the possibilities for equivocation around that word ‘internalized’!)

The ‘grammar’ of a sentence is exhibited in the sentence itself. Every sentence *shows* its sense and intelligibility, its rule-governed-ness (so perhaps what Stein found ‘exciting’ about ‘diagramming sentences’ was the perspective gained by explication of that grammar by displaying it: exactly what Chomsky’s tree-diagrams do.) In speaking a language, speakers *show* their knowledge of its grammar. The idea that anything more is either required or possible in way of explanation of their linguistic competence, other than to say they have *learned* the language, is a profoundly confused one: ‘Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain.’\(^{xxix}\)

**NOTES**

i. Alice Ambrose (1966) *Essays in Analysis,* George Allen and Unwin. (From her Preface.)
iii. It would be untrue to say that his argument has remained unchanged since first put forward over thirty years ago. In many respects it has altered substantially. Yet its *central* notions have remained much the same: they are what I seek to address here. (For a quite devastatingly critical account, I recommend out of a large field of critical material, G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker*Language, Sense and Nonsense,* [1984] Oxford, Basil Blackwell, especially Chapter 8. Very different, but equally useful in its own way, especially as a guide to Chomsky’s thinking, past and present, is the much


vi. 'There is no reason to abandon the general approach of the natural sciences when we turn to the study of human beings and society.' (N. Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* [1980], Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p.219).

vii. Which should be seen as belonging, not to the technical vocabulary of a science whose terms are empirically relatable to observable facts, but rather to the sort of grand metaphysical schemas devised by Kant or Hegel. Chomsky's system is a minor version of such schemas.


x. N. Chomsky (1980), p.222

xi. Chomsky speaks of generation as a 'technical term' in which 'the grammar "generates" the sentences it describes and their structural descriptions.' (1980, p. 220). Although this is rather a puzzling formulation, we can take Chomsky's point to be that a grammar describes sentences in the sense that it consists of a rule which describes, e.g. correct word order.

xii. On this issue, Smith's book is to be recommended. (See, for instance, his brief discussion, pp 146 9)


xiv. 'Finite state' because, when associated with machine computation, we are talking e.g. of 'states' of an electrical circuit, discrete ('finite') states like 'ON' and 'OFF'. It will be clear, in the light of what I've said at 2.3 (B), that because of its association with computation, the use of the expression in the context of grammar is likely to be highly misleading.

xv. 'As I am using the term, knowledge may be unconscious and not accessible to consciousness. It may be "implicit" or "tacit"'. (Chomsky 1980, p.128) See here Norman Malcolm's criticisms in (1993).

xvi. This is the reason why we can't say of a machine which - it so happens - generates English sentences that it knows English. It makes no sense to say it.

xvii. This is not, however, Chomsky's reason for rejecting 'finite state' grammars, as we shall see.


xx. The distinction, and Chomsky's proposed solution, maps neatly onto his conflation, 'mind/brain'.

xxi. The reader will forgive such clumsinesses as the idea of a sentence being 'assembled' for we are seeking to make as charitable a reading as possible of what Chomsky intends.

xxii. Moreover, it's possible to depict how the same sentence can have two or more different meanings. Or how two or more sentences can have the same meaning.

xxiii. Chomsky's talk of the 'deep structure' of propositions nicely conflates a logical sense of 'depth' and 'foundation' with depth understood substantively. Such muddles allow him to get away with supposing that grammar is some-thing (of a kind) possessed of causal powers.

xxiv. The fallacy of these arguments would take more space than I have here to spell out.

xxv. Apropos this notion, Baker and Hacker tartly remark: 'An extraordinary mythology informs the thought of grammarians and philosophers alike here. Because we can specify rules transforming e.g.
declarative sentences into interrogatives...it is therefore inferred that we actually derive one from the other...That we do not actually derive the interrogative sentence we use in questions at all...is evidently too mundane a detail to be noticed by linguistic scientists' (G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker [1984], p. 248.)

xxvi. The relationship of 'man' to 'noum' is the relationship between the member of a set to the set-name: they are of different logical types.


xxix. L. Wittgenstein (1958), paragraph 126.

"In fact, language development really ought to be called language growth, because the language organ grows like any other body organ."

Noam Chomsky ('Things no amount of learning can teach', 1983, in LANGUAGE & POLITICS).

"I'm only criticising words in their supposed function as vehicles of thought. And it seems to me that from the point of view of exactitude and expressiveness our language has remained in the Stone Age."

George Orwell (New Words, 1940)

"Put differently, universal grammar is the inherited genetic endowment that makes it possible for us to speak and learn human languages."

Noam Chomsky (Language & Politics, 1983).

"In fact, nothing is more conservative than science. Science lays down railway tracks. And for scientists it is important that their work should move along those tracks."

Ludwig Wittgenstein

"Because Skinnerian behaviourism is off the wall. It’s as hopeless a project as trying to explain that the onset of puberty results from social training."

Noam Chomsky (Language & Politics, 1983).

"Jevons has written a book called The Mysterious Universe and I loath it and call it misleading. Take the title...I might say the title The Mysterious Universe includes a kind of idol worship, the idol being Science and the Scientist.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

32
What is 'Chomskyism'?:
Or, Chomsky against Chomsky.

Rupert Read

Is there a coherent set of doctrines one could usefully call 'Chomskyism'? What do the works of Noam Chomsky, literally the most-cited person alive today, a great academic and much, much more, amount to? What has Noam Chomsky to say to us, us intellectuals and activists and citizens, at the end of Orwell's century?

First off, Noam Chomsky is famous and massively-influential as a linguist, as the father of contemporary linguistics. This essay might be thought of as an allegory of my reading Chomsky, and thus of my coming to be really quite frustrated and annoyed by the influence of this Noam Chomsky -- and yet to be hugely impressed by (the influence of) another Noam Chomsky. It is an attempt to explain how it makes (a certain peculiar) sense that the two co-exist in the same personage. This is not doublethink. Rather, I write in part precisely to free people of the need that I have sometimes noticed in others (and, until recently, also in myself) to think that if they follow one of these Chomskys, they need to learn how to follow the other; or indeed that if they dislike one of these Chomskys, they need to learn to dislike the other. I want to explain what Noam Chomsky has to say to us, and then and thereby to set Chomsky against Chomsky. Thus to make it easier, perhaps, for others not to entertain the illusion that a unified Chomskyism is desirable -- or even possible.

I. Learning to dislike Chomsky (as theoretical linguist and philosopher of mind)

Chomsky argues that human beings are innately possessed of a 'grammar', hard-wired into their brains. He holds that this 'universal grammar' is what makes the acquisition of language possible -- that, in fact, language 'grows', rather than being learnt, in human infants. And he claims that it is as a consequence that we are possessed of a vast creative ability, in particular the ability to create and understand infinitely many novel sentences, whose grammatical properties his linguistics aims to account for.

But his claims are by no means 'universally' accepted. There is a distinguished catalogue of (what might slightly tendentiously be called) 'Chomsky-phobes' in this area. The names of Quine, Putnam, Goodman, Dreyfus, Rosch, Lakoff, McCawley, Ross, Harris, Nielsen, Baker, Hacker, Sharrock, Coulter and Cuetti are among those whom, in their quite different ways, have expressed grave misgivings about Chomsky's linguistic theories.

Given the extensive critiques which already exist from the pens of these thinkers (and others), I am not going to review in detail the many troubling aspects of Chomsky's program in Linguistics. I invite readers in fact to take a look at the remarks on Chomsky's work by some
of the above authors. However, I will sketch in the briefest outline some of the points that such critics have made.

First, it has been alleged and powerfully argued that Chomskyism in Linguistics smuggles in philosophical assumptions it is not necessarily entitled to, and manifests an unfortunate unwillingness to distinguish conceptual from empirical claims. Secondly, that it has exhibited massive and sometimes apparently ad hoc alterations over the years; and, more troublingly still, that it exhibits a continuing lack of empirical and cross-cultural confirmation. In briefly considering these points, I am going to dwell just a very little on the equally troubling influence of Chomskyan Linguistics in other fields, particularly in Cognitive Science and Philosophy.

But it is important to bear in mind before going any further that, considered as Linguistics, there is a sense in which one cannot possibly object to Chomsky's remarkable and epoch-making provocations, his 'tradition', and (any actual) results he has arrived at. Linguistics - and even Cognitive Science - are, just so far as they actually are sciences - and I certainly would not wish completely to deny all aspects or productions of them that status a priori productive of whatever results they are productive of. There can be no quarrel with any such results. The only quarrels can be with the conceptualisation and interpretation of those results;¹ with their actual impact on and purported relevance to other fields and human activities (e.g. to philosophical thinking); and with the field's self-image.²

I do think, however, that in the case of recent theoretical linguistics, one can get an alarming amount of mileage out of only just such quarrels. So, what am I going to do? To what end am I going to try to get this 'mileage'.

The end - roughly, of achieving clarity about these matters - is perhaps best exemplified. So: Let me give a quick illustration of the alarm and of what might be done about it, drawing on the kind of much more detailed work published elsewhere by some of those mentioned above who have challenged the efficaciousness of Chomsky's arguments.

The child is generally conceptualized, in Chomskyan as in empiricist (including Quinean - an interesting and instructive irony, he and Chomsky sharing this postulate³) speculation about language-acquisition, as a theorist, as essentially in the same position as an anthropological field linguist. There are many reasons to be concerned about this. Among them is that it enables Chomsky to make an apparently sensational assertion, once he has shown the inadequacy of empiricist 'claims' about language-acquisition.

Chomsky's assertion is that language is actually not learnt, that (depending on whether one is reading the early or the more recent Chomsky) one is born with the theory which is knowledge of language in mind, or that one is born with very powerful built-in constraints which condition the way that language is acquired so strongly that one cannot be truly said to learn it. As Coulter et al have argued:

[Chomsky's] claim that language "grows" and is not learned is, of course, meant to sound like an argument which directly -- and sensationaly -- confronts what anyone would otherwise suppose. We would normally speak of what the growing infant does as 'learning its first language' and would take it entirely for granted that the child learns that first language from other people in its environment, as is evidenced by the fact that the child comes to speak the same language as its kin and peers do. Hence, to deny that
children learn language sounds like a challenge to the above commonplace suppositions. In fact, though, it is nothing of the sort, for, of course, the inclination of children progressively to master their native tongue in accordance with their progressive exposure to its use is both patent and uncontroversial...

We do not find individuals striving to teach cows, dragonflies or woodpeckers to talk, nor even encouraging budgerigars to emulate more than a few simple phrases...

Despite appearances, then, Chomsky does not actually cast doubt upon the contention that children do learn language. He appears to do so, though; and the suggestion that language grows 'rather than being learned aids the impression that he is saying something revolutionary and controversial. Chomsky's arguments do not, in fact, comprise a straightforward challenge to talk of children learning language, for it (sic.) is a challenge only to a certain philosophical construal of what 'learning language' is. If one supposes that learning a language is like figuring out a theory, then Chomsky's argument is: it is not possible to learn such a theory from others.  

Among other things, then, Chomsky is using the word "language-learning", we find, in a quite technical sense: he understands it only an (incoherent, or at best trivially false) 'empiricist' account, possibly non-existent, of what language-learning ought to be. He takes the term 'language-learning' to refer to a patently-absurd 'account' of the learning of language in which language could be explicitly taught to anyone or anything with a blank slate, be they man or magpie or maggot.

What the above case suggests, among other things, is that there may be something troubling in the respects in which, in the hands of Chomsky and of his followers, terms of our ordinary language become terms of art, technical terms, while appearing nevertheless to retain their former significances or roles.  Such is, for instance, the fate of words such as "language" or 'grammar' in Chomskian theorizing. And this is worrying because it will mislead the layman or the casual reader, and may even seriously mislead the initiate; anyone could be excused for associating in their mind a term they are used to with its ordinary meaning, as opposed to some hi-falutin technical/secondary meaning. Why use a term like "language" or "learning" if what you evidently mean by it is something quite different from what folks ordinarily mean by it? (One possible answer would be: as a piece of rhetoric, to pull the wool over people's eyes, to get them to agree with you as to something actually and for good reason very counter-intuitive).

Much the same as has been just argued is the case perhaps still more dearly so far as the concept of "knowledge of language" is concerned. For here, Chomsky did some years ago make a seemingly-important concession. He tried to stop talking of "knowledge" here - largely in response to the important point that it doesn't normally make sense to talk of someone knowing their own language. He promised to speak instead only of "cognizing" - an explicitly technical term allowing that it wasn't clear that our "cognizing" of language had attached to it the requisite features which knowledge ought to have, features which the word "knowledge" implies. As Baker and Hacker have shown, however, the concession was not genuine. Yes, "cognize" at least wears on its sleeve that it is being used in a technical sense, unlike the other words (e.g. "language", "knowledge") which we have already mentioned.
But just what this sense is, and how far it differs from that of "knowledge" remains undefined in Chomsky's theorizing. Baker and Hacker ask:

[What] exactly differentiates cognizing from knowing? Chomsky insists that: 'I don't think that 'cognize' is very far from 'know' where the latter term is moderately clear, but this seems to me a relatively minor issue, similar to the question whether the terms 'force' and 'mass' in physics depart from their conventional sense (as they obviously do)." [Rules and Representations, p. 7]

But physicists have the decency to give very precise definitions of the terms 'force' and 'mass', and their divergence from the non-technical use of these words is by no means a relatively minor, but an absolutely crucial (if perspicuous) issue. The use of 'cognize' (or 'tacitly know') is only 'explained' to the extent that it is said to be just like 'know', except that one who only cognizes cannot tell one what he cognizes, cannot display the object of his cognizing, does not recognize what he cognizes when told, never (apparently) forgets what he cognizes but never remembers it either), has never learnt it and could not teach it, and so on. In short, cognizing is just like knowing, except that it is totally different in all respects. This is a travesty of the term 'know', of the introduction of technical terms in science, and of respectable reasoning."

It is important that no special set of scientific training is required in order to recognize the kind of point that Baker and Hacker are making here. This will be part of the burden of my Wittgensteinian-cum-Ethnomethodological arguments later; that there is no special skill needed to understand language or to understand its abuse in the hands of some human scientists. All that is needed is a kind of attention to language that we acquire the rudiments of simply through being masters of a natural language, and can develop further through the kinds of methods and reflections that generally get called 'philosophy'.

So: the consequence we are supposed, according to the Chomskys, to draw, so far as founding Cognitive Science etc. is concerned are moot, if Baker and Hacker are here on the right track. Chomsky ought to admit that the introduction of the term "cognizing" changes the subject, and follow through the implications of that. Changing the subject is fine; only don't then pretend that you have anything to say any longer on the questions previously posed, on the layperson's understanding of how language works, and so on. That is to say: In order to be non-misleading it's not enough to change terms and thus maintain your 'scientificity', if you want to be producing results that can and ought to have a fly impact outside the narrow domain of your own construction of an instrumentally-useful scientific 'theory'.

Part of the problem here might be formulated thus: we seem awfully quickly in Chomsky's theoretical linguistics work to pass from abstruse scientific theorizing to popularization. So quickly, indeed, that one can't clearly notice the difference. Perhaps because sometimes the two are packed into one and the same paragraph, even the same sentence. We are driven to the conclusion that much of Chomsky's 'technical' argumentation is itself unfortunately already a particular kind of 'popularization' of - a highly contestable prose rendition of - a set of (incidentally arguably pretty negligibly-confirmed) theoretical postulates, of perhaps-intriguing abstruse pieces of syntactical manipulation.

Back then to 'the child theorist'. For we ought to be concerned, having worked through the above, that even the most central and famous of Chomsky's arguments might be affected by the kinds of considerations adduced here. Specifically, is the 'poverty of the stimulus'
argument - the argument that the 'stimulus' the child is exposed to is too 'poor' to be able to 'generate knowledge of language', such that we must attribute compensatory 'innate knowledge' to the child - is this argument a valid scientifically operationalisable piece of theorizing; or an empty metaphysical shibboleth?

Well, let us ask what would be a stimulus (incidentally, doesn't "stimulus" strike one as a surprising word for an anti-Behaviourist to use?!?) that wasn't poor. Presumably, if Chomsky's claim is contentful rather than mere empty metaphysics, a dressing up of our ordinary understanding of these matters in non-existent clothes, then we will be able to say at least what a stimulus that wasn't poor would look like, even if one is never actually encountered in the world. 'A rich stimulus' would perhaps be one that would make errors in linguistic competence underviable/impossible? But that would require not only linguistic omniscience, but also an infallible and universally guaranteed connection between 'evidence' on the one hand and the 'output' of the linguistic competence module of the mind on the other. Clearly, no 'finite stimulus' could be of this nature.

Would it be enough for a 'stimulus' to be rich for it to exclude logically possible mistakes from being made which in fact humans make, though hardly ever? But there is no principled criterion for differentiating between a stimulus that would do this and the 'infinite' (and thus all-to-assuredly 'rich') stimulus just 'imagined'. No 'finite stimulus' could in principle do the work of logically ruling out the kinds of errors that humans never or rarely make.

And of course, this was really to be expected. For all the 'poverty of the stimulus' argument is is an application of the quite general philosophical points concerning under-determination of theory by data made by Logical Positivism and followed up by Nelson Goodman and by Quine. Thus all it rules out is an incoherent (not false) 'view' which a very few confused empiricists may at some moments have held - the view that language could be learnt - and 'inductively proven' (whatever that would mean...) to have a certain structure - by means of hypothesis-formation. This view being incoherent for various reasons; for starters, because you'd need a language in which to frame the hypotheses.

It does not actually make sense to call the stimulus "poor", because there is no coherent model of the world in which one could have a "rich" stimulus, by the standards of the discussion. One at best gets a "rich" stimulus by appealing to God (or to infinity - it's the same difference here, as usual.) The 'poverty of the stimulus' looked like the basis of a possible empirical support for Chomsky's theory; but in fact it is only making - and misleadingly at that - a philosophical point. Meanwhile, the word "stimulus" (not to mention the word "poverty") is abused - for it turns out that Chomsky's real point can only be that it is simply inappropriate to talk the language of "stimulus" here! This latter is a point that anyone not already a dupe of scientism would have been able to see for themselves anyway. For we are not dealing with a situation which is correctly and unmisleadingly characterisable as involving the construction of a theory. But that is just what Chomsky refuses to admit.

The fundamental problem that I have raised (and rehearsed) thus far in the present paper is this: that important work in theoretical linguistics is rather thoroughly shot-through with philosophical assumptions of a most troubling kind. How are these to be tackled? Arguably, what is most urgently required is for some of the terms of art that this theoretical linguistics uses to be brought back to their everyday senses/uses. The trouble with Chomsky's linguistics is that it gives at best a metaphysical sense to various of its key terms - terms that either are, or are functionally related to, words of a completely everyday and non-scientific nature -
while pretending that it is itself science. As shown above, it is actually metaphysics, for instance, to 'deduce' that "Really, language is not learnt; it only grows, in certain organisms", to 'deduce' that from a set of arguments that contain substantive philosophical premises and only gain their plausibility from the risible nature of their historical 'opposition' within philosophy - i.e. from sometime Empiricist nonsense about tabula rasas and so on.

What I am getting at can perhaps best be illustrated in the following quote from Wittgenstein: "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (Philosophical Investigations para. 116). It is this that Chomsky patently does not do, that he does the reverse of, in fact.

It is this Chomsky, who is a metaphysician in scientist's clothing, who takes words away from their everyday use and puts them in fact only to a mythico-scientistic - 'metaphysical' - use, who one might have just intellectual cause to want to bring down, and thoroughly to 'dislike'.

II. Learning to love Chomsky (as political writer and responsible intellectual)

The parenthetical words here of course give the game away, for those who hadn't already guessed it. There is another - a different - Noam Chomsky, to that described in Section I, and this one I really do deeply admire; his works and influence I largely love.

There is a famous story, about a group of Polish intellectuals, I think, who had assumed that there actually were two different men who happened to be called "Noam Chomsky". They were astounded upon being informed that the two were in fact one and the same man. Their reasoning, apparently, was not so much that they had seen no possible connection or compatibility between the ideas of the two, but simply that they were certain that no one man could have the time to do, at the most, more than what one of these two Chomskys had done. And indeed, it is phenomenal that the leading Linguist alive today is at one and the same time a very busy and world-renowned dissident, a political campaigner and a major historical writer.

How has Chomsky managed to add the second reputation to the first? What are the clues to his fame and success as a public intellectual? We might start by noting his iconoclasm, (and) the way that when he is talking politics he 'tells it like it is'. He is a foe of intellectual elitism, and deeply suspicious of those who would be (in policy-making or in providing the kind of background of academic respectability that policy-makers like and eventually need) quasi-scientific 'experts' re. political and historical matters. He mocks the need for grand theories in the political and historical sphere, suspecting that all such theories and models are rackets for the obscuring of truths which are quite within the grasp of any moderately well-informed citizen. His integrity is generally undoubted.

Above all, perhaps, he simply describes what is happening or has happened, and endeavours to systematically debunk and unmask those who would give false or misleading descriptions, either directly in their own interests or in the interests of those with power over them or (more commonly) simply as part of their job, as part of an in-place and functioning system (but a system which we may adjudge overall to be 'dysfunctional' and/or unjust). He is especially concerned at the forms this takes in recent times, where, as he suggests (in the tradition of Orwell), it takes the form among other things of a hypostatization of language into a less direct character, into manners of speaking which are less 'uncomfortable' and challenging.
But these remarks are not intended to be evocative of a grand Chomskyan political theory - there is none such, only pragmatic common-sense, and a lot of information (and a healthy smattering of humanistic anarchist ethico-political principles 12). The way to understand Chomsky's politics is inevitably in concrete cases. Most notably, perhaps, in the way he attempts to unmask the corruption of the very language we speak, corruption which often seems functionally to occur in order to render it harder than it would otherwise be for ordinary people to grasp what is happening to them or to others. But what is meant by "corruption" here? Let us then look, again pretty briefly, at some examples.

One of Chomsky's methods is simply to take a bit of contemporary news-speak, present us with it, and re-contextualize it to the point that we realize how bizarre it truly is. His paper on "Problems of Population Control" in a wonderfully-named collection of his articles, 'Deterring Democracy', yields some of many possible exemplifications of this. 13 The paper begins by citing the Wall Street Journal's headline at around the time when there was first talk of a post-Cold-War 'peace dividend' - the Journal decided that in fad what we were now seeing arrive was the "Unsettling Specter of Peace".

Chomsky simply allows us to notice how this figuration of peace, as the spectre now haunting Europe and America, can only make sense if one is pursuing the interests of a narrowly-defined set of groups (e.g. weapons producers! some economic planners) who do not have the obvious attitude to superpower peace - that of relief. Chomsky goes on to argue that the approach of this 'spectre' renders it advisable for these particular groups to look for an alternative method of channeling the population's aspirations and fears, now that the threat of the Communists is no longer plausible or relevant. He finds this alternative in part in 'the Drug War', 14 and goes on to suggest some of the manners in which this diversion of attention is fostered, by means for instance of focusing on the threat to Third World 'democracies' purportedly posed by drug-trafficking, though not, so they say, by certain other factors (e.g. by America and Britain):

"The naive might ask why we fail to exercise [our! America's] right of intervention in South Korea, Indonesia... There is no inconsistency, however. These countries are committed to "democracy" in the operative [- among the relevant elites - ] meaning of the term: unchallenged rule by elite elements...that generally respect the interests of U.S. investors, with appropriate forms for occasional ratifications by segments of the public. When these conditions are not satisfied, intervention is legitimate to "restore democracy". To take the fashionable case of the 1980s, Nicaragua under the Sandinistas was a "totalitarian society" (Sec. of State James Baker) ...where we must intervene massively to assure that elites responsive to U.S. interests prevail as elsewhere in the region. Colombia, in contrast, is a democracy with a "level playing field", in current jargon, since these elements rule with no political challenge. // A closer look at Colombia...provides further insight into what counts as "democracy". In Colombia, the New York Times informs us, courageous people threatened by "violence from cocaine gangs" are struggling "to preserve democratic normalcy"... The reference [to courageous people'] is not to peasants, union leaders, or advocates of social justice and human rights who face the violence of the military and the oligarchy. And crucially, democratic normalcy has never been threatened by the fact that the two parties that share political power are "two horses [with]
the same owner" (former President A.L. Michaelsen) - not exactly a circumstance unfamiliar to us. Nor does a problem arise from the actual conditions of this "democratic normalcy"... [D]eath squads have killed about 1000 members of the one party not owned by the oligarchy (the Patriotic Union, UP) since its founding in 1985, leaving the unions and popular organizations with no meaningful political representation... These death squads dedicated to extermination of "subversives" are in league with the security forces (Amnesty International). An official government inquiry made public in 1983 found that over a third of members of paramilitary groups engaged in political killings and other terror were active-duty officers, a pattern that continues up to the present, along with alliances with drug dealers, according to human rights inquirers...

"America's historic purpose" 16 - and its "yearning for democracy" 17 are, so they tell us, not threatened by these humdrum and myriad violations of what would and do appear to a competent user of the language to be the most basic features of... democracy. The misuse of the English language (in its popular and uncorrupted sense) that is being practiced upon us - that is evident in for instance the nested New York Times quote - is part of the context of the violations of decency and humanity that are obvious in much U.S. policy toward Latin America, etc.. Chomsky is in the business of sarcastically deconstructing and unmasking the kind of linguistic corruption that is in play when words are thus abused.

Another of Chomsky's deservedly-effectual rhetorical strategies, besides exposing the dubious and 'technical' uses of words operative in the media (and in parts of the academy) etc. is to call features of (e.g.) the American polity by names which are usually reserved for what 'America' is fighting against, in order to highlight the 'technical' nature of those names' use by the media, government, etc. . Thus, in "Problems of Population Control", he speaks of "the Washington Connection" 18 (cf. 'the French Connection') - of the trafficking in illegal drugs to raise money for illegal covert operations (and also of the facilitation of the (legal) export of chemicals that the government has overwhelming evidence to believe will be used to make illegal drugs); and he speaks more generally of the "huge narcotics trafficking operation" 19 run by the American government (by virtue, under the banner of 'free trade', of its forcing foreign countries to accept its tobacco exports, even when they have laws which would forbid this)

This type of Chomskyan strategy is being used noticeably more frequently in recent years in the course of public political engagements and arguments: witness the recent efforts (by U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, even) to introduce the term "corporate welfare" to public and mainstream forums for political discourse in the U.S.

These methods of Chomsky's are summed up perhaps most effectively in his short and deliberately-populist tract, 'What Uncle Sam really wants':

"WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

The terms of political discourse typically have two meanings. One is the dictionary meaning, and the other is a meaning that is useful for serving power - the doctrinal meaning...[Take "free enterprise"; a term that refers, in practice, to a system of public subsidy and private profit, with massive governmental intervention in the economy to maintain a welfare state for the rich. In fact, in acceptable usage, just about any phrase containing the word "free" is likely to mean something like the opposite of its actual
meaning...[Or take "special interest"... The well-oiled Republican PR systems of the 1980s regularly accused the Democrats of being the party of the special interests: women, labour, the elderly, the young, farmers - in short, the general population.... //The Democrats plaintively retorted that they were not the party of the special interests: they served the national interest too. That was 'correct, but their problem has been that they lack the single-minded class consciousness of their Republican opponents. The latter are not confused about their role as representatives of the owners and managers of society...It's really not that hard, once one understands the rules.

To make sense of political discourse, it's necessary to give a running translation into English, decoding the doublespeak of the media, academic social scientists and the secular priesthood generally. Its function is not obscure: the effed is to make it impossible to find words to talk about matters of human significance in a coherent way. We can then be sure that little will be understood about how our society works and what is happening in the world - a major contribution to democracy, in the PC sense of the word."

Of course, in trying to block this process, and. returning to words their actual meanings, we may not always be able to trust the dictionary. Chomsky, being a competent linguist (besides being politically-aware), acknowledges that languages and dialects live - 'mutate' - much faster than reference works do. All that one will be able quite firmly to trust, in fact, is one's own linguistic competence/performance (one's being a master of a language-in-use) and, if a supplement or a check is required, one will be best off going by the use made by ordinary people of a term, by the accountable use made, in actual situations, of items of language. These ought always to be the starting points for any proposed extensions of the use of terms for particular purposes.

Any technical terms being used in political science, Chomsky's position makes clear, need to be justified. Otherwise they stand vulnerable to the charge of not reflecting the self-understandings of the people upon whom the technical terms are being deployed. Of substituting instead a superstructure of uses of terms and established presumptions and maxims which will tend, for political and practical reasons, in general only to serve the interests of career-builders in political science, in government planning, etc.. And of serving the illusion that our systems of governance and polity in the contemporary West / North are pretty open, free, and democratic, while ensuring that these systems remain in 'practice astonishingly dosed and tipped toward the support of corporate and elite power and profits.

And this is what interests me most, in the present context, about Chomsky's method. It is a feature of his work which is I think more developed than the (complementary) contributions of writers and activists such as Gore Vidal, Christopher Hitchens, John Pilger, and Paul Foot. Chomsky shows us, as clearly as anyone ever has, how we need to and can resist the transformation of our language into a something it ought not to be. In short, in his highly practical and non-theoretical political and historical work, he resists the turning of our ordinary language into a replacement both technical and emotive. And he resists especially the obscuring of this turning - the failure to admit that the use, for instance, of the binary opposition "special interest" vs. "public interest" in the media today is a technical use not reflecting our ordinary or common-sense understanding of these terms, and a use furthermore
evidently intended (to judge by its 'judicious' use on the political Right) to have an emotive effect (i.e. to get us to like tanks rather than people, etc.).

It would be no exaggeration to say that the picture we find in the language of the modern media etc. is one that tends to hold us captive, and that fosters an inchoate set of assumptions that are hard to resist because they are so repeatedly implied and 'gently' drummed into one. I say "inchoate", because, rather than being false, many of these assumptions are absurd/nonsensical. How could it be, for instance, that "the public interest" had hardly anything to do with the actual interests (as perceived and comprehended in their guts and in the daily realities of their lives) of the public? Many of the 'technical' usages of terms in medial academic political discourse have become so perverted that they simply are metaphysical/nonsensical, as they stand.

The Chomsky I love is the Chomsky who, in his political and historical work, brings words like "American" and "national interest" and "Communist" and "conservative" and "victory" and "freedom fighter" and "truth" back from their metaphysical to their everyday uses.

III: Conclusion: When to bring words back to their everyday uses

Chomsky himself has, thankfully, tended if anything to resist pressures to link up the two wings of his highly-influential thought into one unwieldy bird. He has thus until recently been largely innocent of having encouraged those who constitute the unwholesome spectacle of leftist and anarchist activists presuming that they ought to read up on Generative Grammar and thus comprehend the true basis in enlightenment thought and contemporary science for their political persuasion. (There is also the less common but nevertheless not unknown (at least in my personal experience) - and still less wholesome - phenomenon of right-wing academics reading back from Chomsky's politics to purported errors in his linguistics or in its underpinnings.)

Chomsky's politics and his linguistics can be kept quite separate. But those who would deduce things about one from the other are not entirely mistaken; there is potentially a link -- a link indeed allowed by Chomsky himself -- albeit a pretty general, tenuous, and only-slightly-argued-for one. Chomsky's general humanist universalist enlightenment attitude can indeed be seen (vaguely) behind some of his concrete politics, as well as behind his linguistics in its species-centred bio-psychological presumptions. He would countenance an innate psychological basis for the preference for free institutions and for freedom from various kinds of controls, and thus for his opposition to political philosophies of human plasticity, such as behaviourism and strong strands in marxism.

However, the vital (if indirect) link that I have endeavoured thus far in the present paper to intimate is perhaps more salient - and solidly argued for. It is this: Chomsky believes that any endeavour which can be genuinely pursued using more or less exclusively methods modeled on those of the natural sciences need not pay any dues to or take any notice of our ordinary language, of what normally (and therefore, I would suggest, ultimately) makes sense to say. Leaving to one side for present purposes entirely reasonable concerns about the existence in the first place of a genuinely identifiable scientific method, which are unfortunately beyond the scope of the present paper, one can hardly disagree deeply with his belief. What I have argued is that Chomsky errs crucially in wrongly identifying linguistics (and other disciplines I areas such as 'cognitive science' etc.) unreservedly as having in fact been successfully so modeled by him and his followers. Wrongly, because these areas in fact have seen a great
deal of problematic philosophising and popularizing, etc., mixed in with their actual scientific content. And also because Chomsky thus neglects the huge and vital sense in which people can, without any technical training, attain linguistic competence about language, can master how to speak of language learning etc.; and can learn to recognise the abuse of everyday language which Chomskyan Generative Grammar tries to foist upon us.\textsuperscript{28}

Thus Chomsky thinks - wrongly - that he can do linguistics in a way that ignores precisely the effective aspects of how he does politics, by means of careful attention to (its) language. The argument of this paper firmly denies him the almost absolute differentiation between (philosophical) linguistics and 'political science' that he normally presupposes.

At this point, I should consider an objection, namely this: Couldn't it be said that Chomsky \textit{does sometimes} effectively integrate his political concerns, including concerns over misleading and debasing 'technical' uses of language, 'into his claims in linguistics; most notably in his famous and historically-important attack on Skinnerian behaviourism in linguistics, his "Review of B.F. Skinner's "Verbal Behaviour""?\textsuperscript{29}

I think there is some truth in this objection. Certainly, when we find Chomsky saying things like the following, in the course of his critique of Skinner's concepts of 'operant conditioning', 'reinforcement' and so on, we ought to prick up our ears at least slightly optimistically: "A mere terminological revision, in which a term borrowed from the laboratory is used with the full vagueness of the ordinary vocabulary, is of no conceivable interest."\textsuperscript{30} And again:

\begin{quote}
[Skinner] creates an illusion of a rigorous scientific theory with a very broad scope, although in fad the terms used in description of real life and of laboratory behaviour may be mere homonyms, with at most a vague similarity of meaning. To substantiate this evaluation, a critical account of his book must show that with a literal reading (where the terms of the descriptive system have something like the technical meanings given in Skinner's definitions) the book covers almost no aspect of linguistic behaviour, and that with a metaphoric reading, it is no more scientific than the traditional approaches to the subject-matter, and rarely as clear and careful.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

This is strong stuff, and, by means among other things of paying attention to dubious misuse of 'scientific' language, it hits at least some of its targets. Chomsky is in fact on his strongest ground against Skinner here, and when he shows Skinner debasing human beings, by missing mental - and verbal - life.

But my question back to the objection would simply be this: When it comes to his own positive proposals, does Chomsky remember any of the lessons he attempted to teach here? I think the answer is simply: "No". This moment of Chomskyan semi-perspicuity - albeit one still incorporating scientific assumptions about what a real science of linguistics behaviour ought to be (like) - is a rare moment.

It would be instructive to apply Chomsky's criticisms of Skinner to his own work. In his work in Linguistics, does Chomsky use the term "poverty", or even "cognize", for instance, with a laboratory precision, with the kind of care he urges on Skinner? No; he uses these terms in a vague, extended - metaphysical - sense.
It is arguably essential in soundly doing human science I social studies to take seriously the language which people actually use, the rules which they follow, their own mastery of their practice. For amplification and justification of this claim, which would take us too far afield in the present context, see Peter Winch's work, and indeed the entire area of ethnmethodology. But for an illustration at least, let us take a moment to look at a particularly relevant moment from the work of probably the leading contemporary ethnmethodologist of science, Mike Lynch, stating the methodology he recommends for the study of any scientific endeavour:

"Use a "normal science" methodology. This is not Kuhn's "normal science", as it derives from an offhand remark made by Noam Chomsky in a debate with a sociologist. Chomsky presented a critical argument about the way the "mainstream" U.S. press covers international events and conflicts. In his talk he made a number of cross-national and historical comparisons, and afterward a sociologist commentator questioned whether his account followed appropriate "methodological" canons for the selection of comparable cases. Chomsky claimed in his rejoinder that no special knowledge of sociology or of its methodology was necessary for his purposes; rather, he asserted that he practised "normal science" when he presented and documented his argument. By this, I take it that he meant "nothing fancy", that his method was one of juxtaposing (arguably) comparable cases, citing testimonies and reports, drawing out common themes, noting relevant discrepancies and trends, and appealing to common intuitions and judgments.// "Normal science" in this sense uses ordinary modes of observing, describing, comparing, reading, and questioning, and its constituent activities are expressed in vernacular terms. From the standpoint of an idealized scientific observer, this may be a disappointing methodology.... Although normal science offers no foundation for a scientific sociology, it serves very well for the kind of investigation I have in mind, because a more "technical" approach might dazzle us, thus distracting our attention from the primitive...phenomena that first must be understood in their "natural" settings."

I hope that by now it is dear what kind of lessons and parallels I would draw from this very interesting and useful passage. Why indeed think that there should or could be anything "fancy" or 'dazzling' to a useful social/political studies approach, anything that outran the resources of those making up the society or polity in question to come to grips with? Why think, even, that there could usefully be a "scientific sociology" or a "scientific political science", equipped with 'technical' resources etc.? If we could not through our everyday language come to understand ourselves, our everyday language, how could a technical replacement for it help?

The upshot of my argument - and this is the crux of the matter - is this: it is essential in soundly doing 'social/human science', as Chomsky himself recognises in the case of 'political science' [see especially Section II, above] to recognise the language which participants actually use, to get clear about how they are using words, to understand the world as they 'construct' it (for instance, using words like "public interest" and "terrorist" to mean and say just what they really mean) and not as it is constructed 'for' them (whether by 'ideologically imperialistic' human scientists or actually-existing imperialistic government officials, politicos, or the media); and so, in particular, it is essential in avoiding error or imperialism vis-a-vis language itself to do the same in linguistics. And sadly, Chomsky has made an
immense academic career in linguistics out of doing the very reverse. He has tried, that is, to (re-)construct for us the world of our’ grasp of our own language, to foist a set of alien terms upon us or persuasively redefine the terms we already have and can use perfectly well, while pretending that he is simply and neutrally describing and explaining how things really are in this domain.

If one looks at the tone with which Chomsky addresses his critics on the theory of language, one will soon see instances of the kind of thing I mean. The way that Chomsky tends to simply and derisively dismiss - as grossly false, as non-starters - deep and serious criticisms of his line, criticisms which do not assume his ‘technical’ senses of words like those discussed and problematised in Section I of this paper -- the way I suspect most of those reading this paper who think of themselves as linguists or cognitive scientists or even philosophers of language will simply dismiss most of my argument without following it through carefully and looking at it in the context it would choose for itself, as opposed to in the context of the received (Chomskyan) ‘wisdom’ is so very (sadly) reminiscent of the way in which the Chomskyan line on politics is routinely dismissed by ‘mainstream’ intellectuals and commentators.36

We might usefully compare and contrast Chomsky here with the views of another great twentieth century social/human ‘scientist’, intellectual, and rationalist. Here is Steven Lukes, on Emile Durkheim:

As to the legitimacy of authority, he argues as an intransigent rationalist: where special competence is in question, deference to expert opinion is rationally justified; where what is at issue pertains to the ‘common judgment of man’ such deference is contrary to reason and duty. Here, indeed, lies the peculiar responsibility of the intellectual to apply rational judgment to a problem of ‘practical morality’ in the fact of... ‘the prestige of authority’.37

My claim is that Chomsky is wrong, and an elitist of precisely the kind that he elsewhere attacks, when he holds that "deference to expert opinion" is essential in linguistics, just as Durkheim is wrong to have thought the same vis-à-vis social studies. To problems of ‘practical morality’, and of language, we can all apply our ‘reason’ -- if, indeed, sometimes a la Lynch's Chomskyan "normal science". The responsibility of the intellectual vis-a-vis human affairs must be a democratic one. It is a bad idea to suppose that linguistics (and/or Sociology) is 'science', while politics is 'human affairs'. We should look instead for an understanding of 'human affairs' that embraces all of these.

Durkheim stood up wonderfully for Dreyfus, in the notorious 'Dreyfus Affair' that consumed French politics a century ago now, just as Chomsky stands with the oppressed and with their capacity to speak their oppression in our own time. But it ought to be noted that those anti-Dreyfusard intellectuals who opposed Durkheim and others had at least some good points to make all the same, points that it is hard to see how scientism in the human sciences' can cope with. Here is Lukes again, on a key anti-Dreyfusard, Brunetiere:

[T]he individualism and anarchy which threatened the army and all that it represented were [according to Brunetiere] primarily to be found among 'various intellectuals' -- persons who, in virtue of some specialized knowledge, were assumed to have some special authority in all matters, including 'the most delicate questions concerning human morality, the life of nations and the interests of society'. Such an assumption was unfounded
and dangerous, and the danger was only increased by their appeal to 'science' to support their purely individual opinions. Grand phrases like 'the scientific method, aristocracy of intelligence, respect for truth' only served to conceal...the great sickness of the present time...Each of us has confidence only in himself....and does not even allow his opinion to be discussed. Don't tell biologists that human affairs are not amenable to [their] scientific 'methods'; they will laugh at you.  

Similarly, don't tell this linguist that human affairs are not entirely amenable to his 'methods'; qua linguist, he will sneer at you.

I would advocate bringing words back to their everyday uses whenever possible, except when some clear function (such as: creating literary effects; or harmlessly abbreviating; or speaking of something for which we otherwise lack any requisite terms (as is sometimes necessary in the sciences, especially of course in the natural sciences)) is served by doing otherwise. I love Chomsky when he brings words back from their metaphysical use (as terms known only to or being the special property of an elite) to their everyday (known to any competent speaker) use [See Section II, above]. I don't love him when he doesn't do this [See Section I, above].

I like and dislike him, then, for the very same reason: that I think an important part of what we ought usually to be doing, all we 'human scientists' and intellectuals and activists, is bringing back words to their ordinary uses, and pointing out remorselessly those who fail to do so - or who, in fact, do the opposite.

And thus the argument of my paper might be summed up as follows: Chomsky does one thing in his linguistics and something quite contrary in his political writing. In linguistics, he is scientific, dressing up vacuous claims in scientific terms, and pretending as if Chomskian linguistics were vastly more scientific than anything before (or since). What is particularly objectionable is Chomsky's penchant for taking plain words from the common language, giving them incredible reinterpretations, and then using these words to announce the 'bold new discoveries' of his linguistics: e.g. that children do not learn language, but rather already have/know language(s). Whereas in his political writings, Chomsky follows an entirely different course, revealing a highly desirable sensitivity to ordinary language and to ordinary persons' - to the populace's - capacity for understanding, and demonstrating with countless examples how media and government abuse the common language to suit their purpose(s).

What I wish is that Chomsky would see how he himself in his academic homeland is guilty of something disturbingly close to what he decries in the media/bureaucracy criticized in his political writings. The very thing he condemns in, say, the New York Times, is practiced by Chomsky himself in, say, his book 'Cartesian Linguistics', with no sense on Chomsky's part that there is anything amiss!...

To close: Is it possible that history will judge this great inheritor of an Orwellian mantle, Noam Chomsky, to have been in his own original field and in its immediate neighbours, ultimately, more a propagandist and dangerous 'newspaper' than a long-lasting successful innovator? Unless the kinds of criticisms cited and made above are taken more note of, might his over-weening ambitions eventually be seen to have carried his human science into a degenerate research programme? And/or will he be a hero of liberation movements in the twenty-first century, widely-read for his devastating analyses of intellectual elitism and propaganda wherever it rears its ugly head? Will he go down as a political 'truespeaker' who
provided some of the best tools we may have for the dismantling of metaphysics dressed up as news or knowledge or privileged insight.41

Well, it's in part up to us, really, isn't it? And again, I think I may at least have shown how it need not be doublethink to suppose that the answer to all these questions could conceivably turn out to be "Yes." 42

NOTES

1. Quarrels here can of course be very substantial and substantive. Again, trivially, whatever results Government and Binding Theory or what-have-you may have produced are whatever they are -- but they may not be at all what their producers have taken them to be.

2. Being an expert on or in Linguistics need have no necessary connection with being an 'expert' on what Linguistics is; except insofar as we would expect some kind of basic linguistic competence regarding use of the term 'Linguistics' etc.

3. See also below for further respects in which Quine and Chomsky are unfortunately more unwitting friends than enemies as detailed in my "Wittgenstein and Quine on meaning and language-learning" (presented to the Middle Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society Annual Conference, New Brunswick, U.S.A., May 5 1990).


5. I have explained my fundamental distrust of metaphysics (of words being used 'without opposition') and have analyzed in more general terms the kind of philosophic error involved in such manipulation of technical terms in my "The real philosophical discovery" (Philosophical Investigations 18:4 (1995), 362-9), and "On the eliminability of technical terms from philosophical enquiries" (paper given to the Human Sciences Seminar, Manchester Met., Oct. 31 1996).


8. See p.213 of Button, Coulter et al, op cit. (Again, we have here the irony of noting what Chomsky shares in common with his supposed nemeses, i.e. with famous 'post-Empiricists' such as Quine).

9. Chomskyans might still insist on asking, "why do we develop one grammar rather than another, then? What's your account of why this grammar rather than that is arrived upon in humans' linguistic development?" This is strictly quite beyond the scope of the present paper, but two brief points: (i) They cannot point to grammars either; and 'grammar' is in any case their term, not mine. It's just begging the question to ask "Explain to us, why this grammar rather than that one?"! (ii) In a fly case, as suggested in the text above, this kind of question is arguably empty, too. For if one talks the grammar talk, then there are always further possibilities logically compatible with any evidence, including all the (in any case rather paltry amount of) evidence which they have assembled.

10. Note that it is not enough for Chomskyans to resist my argument here by claiming that we can say what the so-called 'data' -- the misleadingly-termed 'stimulus' - would need to be in order for empiricist mechanisms to prove adequate to guarantee language-acquisition. For firstly, how rich the data would need to be in order to do this has never even been explicitly asserted, let alone argued for. And secondly and more importantly, the reason for this is probably that the empiricist 'mechanisms' that have occasionally been proposed make no sense for the case of a language-less child. (I in fact think that mostly the right way, and certainly the charitable way, to read Goodman et al is as providing roughly the same kind of philosophical reminders as I am giving here - not as proposing an
alternative mechanism(s) to those proposed by rationalistic linguists. See also p.viii of Hilary Putnam's Foreword* to the 4th edition of Fact, Fiction and Forecast (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1983 (1954)), where Putnam points out that Chomsky is quite wrong to construe the moral of Goodman's book as being that "...an innate ordering of hypotheses is needed for induction. . . [That] isn't even right. There are models for induction in which no innate ordering of hypotheses or predicates is presupposed; Goodman's own model is one such." Nativism (innatism) does not solve (e.g.) Goodman's problem; it at most shows how we don't require a solution to the problem as traditionally conceived; but Goodman could already do that anyway, via his 'theory' of entrenched. Contrast p.80ff. of Chomsky's Language and Mind (enlarged edition; New York: Harcourt, 1972)). Chomsky puts up the empiricists as opponents whose theories are false - but the latter aren't usefully described as 'theories', still less (if theories) usefully dignified with the descriptor, "false". It you argue for the falsity of a non-existent 'view', you will almost certainly fail also to have a 'view'. I am suggesting that we have good grounds for taking a would-be substantive Chomskian linguistics to be, at the level of its would-be self-description (as opposed to at the level of any actual results it has demonstrated, with which there can be no quarrel), incoherent metaphysics.

11. As implied on p. 213 of Button, Coulter et al, and above, it is of course then moot as to whether Chomsky's analogising of the child to the linguist can be anything other than nonsensical, as even Chomsky latterly seems to have partially recognised. See also Nielsen, op. cit.

12. See e.g. his Radical Priorities (ed. C. Otero, Montreal: Black Rose, 1981). There might, of course, be questions raised about whether Chomsky's political writings have really come to terms with politics as it is now, in respect of (e.g.) the transformation of the political landscape due to the New Social Movements. I think these questions can be fairly easily answered. More plausibly, one can question whether Chomsky's position can cope at all with some of the distinctive political philosophy of recent times -- e.g. that of Michel Foucault: Chomsky understands exploitation and "domination" admirably; but does he have the apparatus to deal with questions of "subjection"? For what it's worth, I am strongly inclined to think that he does not; but that this is not a problem in the current context. For we are precisely not looking at Chomsky's politics to be a complete system of thought, but rather to be a motley set of important and useful responses to and methods for dealing with certain concrete political and historical phenomena.

13. Pp.107-137 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992). The paper's title interestingly confounds our expectations: it turns out not to refer to the containment of the growth of population, but simply to the containment in the sense of 'crowd control' of Western populations. See n.14, below.

14. "Such menaces as Nicaragua and international terrorists have the advantage that they are weak and defenceless...But for the same reason, [a sense of] their menace is difficult to sustain. To enhance credibility, the selected targets have regularly been linked to the Evil Empire, evidence having its usual irrelevance. But these charges too have lost their force, and new monsters are badly needed to keep the population on course. // Enter the Medellin cartel." (Ibid., p.114).

15. Ibid., pp.109-i 10.

16. See p.109 of ibid.: "[Robert Tucker's] comments on "America's historic purpose" -- also conventional [among America's "respectable" planners and intellectuals] -- do merit some notice. Such rhetoric would elicit only ridicule outside of remnants of pre-Enlightenment fanaticism -- perhaps among the dullahs in Qom, or in disciplined Western intellectual circles."

17. Ibid.: "In the Reagan years a "yearning for democracy" was added to the battery of population control measures.

18. Ibid., p.119.

19. Ibid., p.121.


22. As would be evidenced, ideally, by Austrian-cum-Sacksonian study of the actual concrete use of terms (See John Lee, 'Language and culture: the linguistic analysis of culture', in Button (ed.), *Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991)). Clearly, such study and its data must and can be accessible to - available to - people without mastery of a theory, in a way which is not true of Chomskian Linguistics, but only of its popularizations. Popularizations which, I have argued, can be understood, without mastery of any theory, to offer only travesties of our language.

23. Thus it is not accurate to say that what Chomsky as public intellectual is about is the unmasking of lies, if by "lies" is meant falsities deliberately told. For (1) Not only is it the case that many of the 'lies' he exposes cannot be perceived as such by those who tell them, but also (2) Much of the exposing is of incoherent, rather than false, assertions or assumptions. Point (1) is especially important in the present context, because it connects with something we have not had space to discuss here: the canard that Chomsky has a 'conspiracy theory' of politics. Chomsky has, wisely, nothing that it would be wise to call a 'theory' of politics, not even really of the media in relation to politics; he only suggests that there are individuals, institutions and structures which effectively function effectively (including through manipulation of language) such as to perpetuate themselves and their own aggrandizement, almost as if they were in a conspiracy more or less against the rest of us. So the "Chomsky implausibly says it's all a conspiracy" canard cannot be effectively used to undermine my suggestion, below, that Chomsky's political analyses might with profit be applied analogically to his influence on his own discipline.


25. It will be objected, of course, that for some people, such as some Fascists and some leaderwriters, using a word or phrase like (e.g.) "Freedom fighters" to connote what most of us would understand better from a phrase like "murderous butchers" is an everyday use. But the same is true, of course, in the case of the words of metaphysics -- some philosophers on an everyday basis use a word like (e.g.) name to connote what most of us would understand better by a word like "demonstrative", and deny that proper names are 'actually' names, etc.. The importance of this is at least twofold: The Chomskyan method in political thought, and the -- arguably -- concomitant Wittgensteinian method in philosophical thought must be (a) 'therapeutically persuasive' in intent; we must always hold out hope that the other will themselves recognise that in some sense they meant to be using the terms in the sense in which we suggest they are generally/properly used, all along; and (b) only rarely if ever fully ethical neutral in intent and nature-- the task of returning someone to the ordinary uses of their words is arguably not a non-moral one. For the philosophical background to these claims, see e.g. Wittgenstein's own remarks about the spirit of his work and the importance of people changing the way they talk and live, and also Naomi Scheman's recent work.


27. Compare John Searle's description in "Chomsky's Revolution in Linguistics" (New York Review of Books, June 29 1972, p.16f.): "Throughout the history of the study of man there has been a fundamental opposition between those who believe that progress is to be made by a rigorous observation of man's actual behaviour and those who believe that such observations are interesting only insofar as they reveal to us hidden and possibly fairly mysterious underlying laws that only partially and in distorted form reveal themselves in behaviour...// Noam Chomsky is unashamedly with the searchers after hidden laws." Once one juxtaposes this with, for instance, Chomsky's remark quoted toward the close of Section II, above - castigating academic human scientists and "the secular priesthood", is it not obvious how, for political-Chomsky-type reasons, one might have serious worries about the mystification liable to be involved if one abandons one's concern with the everyday use of language as soon as one hits Linguistics, and focusses on finding hidden laws and 'only-comprehensible-to-the-initiated' truths there-- just as so many political scientists, economists, historians etalclaim to do? How can it be right to take Political Science in one way and 'Linguistic Science' in an utterly different and opposed way? (Perhaps in particular given that Chomsky himself has at least begun to sketch how the two must interact..)

28. Of course, there is a lovely little irony here -- that Chomsky, the great champion of linguistic competence irregardless of performance should fail to recognise and accept this key respect in which we are quite competent linguistically prior to any 'scientific' learning...
29. 1956; Reprinted in Geirsson and Lonsky (eds), Readings in Language and Mind (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)
30. Ibid., p. 421.
31. Ibid., p.416.
32. In a forthcoming paper written jointly with Dave Randall, I take on the interesting and rather huge question of whether and how not just the work of Giddens and other 'modern social science greats' but also some ethnomethodological work has itself been beset be an unfortunate tendency to scientise and jargonise.
33. Scientific Practice and Ordinary Action: Ethnomethodology and Social Studies of Science (Cambridge; CUP, 1993), pp. 304-5. Lynch notes in a footnote that he "would not want to equate Chomsky's remark at the conference with a proposal for a research program", and that he doubts "whether he would have it cover his linguistics research." The question I am now asking is: Does Chomsky have good grounds for treating the two cases so differently?
34. Cf. Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, para. 120.
35. At least insofar as what one is doing is other than the generation of entirely logico-mathematical 'theories/formalisms, or arriving at results either through this means or through experimental means (hard as it might be to envisage how this could possibly happen).
Again, there can be no quarrel with any practice in any science just so long as the range and nature of its claims are appropriately restricted. Wittgensteinians err if they think they can rule any results of Chomskyan linguistics out of court by exposing deleterious philosophical assumptions, etc.. A respecification of linguistics, even one that raises serious questions about (e.g.) the basic dichotomy of syntax vs. semantics, ought not to be confused with a simple all-out polemic against contemporary linguistics, which is unlikely to help anyone terribly much.
36. The letter is shown graphically in the full-length film made by Barsamian et al on Chomsky's life and work, Manufacturing Consent.
39. One last objection to my general argument, from quite the opposite angle to that already considered, might return a new to the subject-matter of Section I and ask: Couldn't it be claimed that Chomsky in fact does have a fairly grand political theory one which has been imposed on his subject-matter (modern politics) in his political writings just as much as his theories have arguably been imposed on his subject-matter (human language use) in linguistics? Isn't this shown by his proclamation in Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the mass media (New York: Pantheon, 1988; written jointly with Edward Herman -- who is in fact first author) that he adheres to a 'Propaganda model' of the media and to some extent of politics more generally?
In the present piece, we have been pressing the point that Chomsky's assumptions in linguistics are utterly unrealistic and that realistic assumptions ought always to be striven for in the human sciences. I mean here to object quite profoundly to unrealistic assumptions in the human sciences, pace Friedman (see e.g. his "The methodology of positive economics" in Essays in Positive Economics ((Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953)), and pace Popper, Chomsky, and others; and I mean to be defending the possibility (indicated in Winch's The Idea of a Social Science (London: Routledge, 1958, 1990), and in Ganinkel's Studies in Ethnomethodology (New York: Prentice Hall, 1967)) of realizing in social studies a more 'limited' but real knowledge of human affairs -- based on the 'knowledge-in-practice' that social actors 'always already' have. A knowledge of human beings and their language, that is, that does not miss their agency, their humanity, their complexity, their differences, and their interactions with their studiers. But: Are Chomsky's assumptions in his political writings not in fact equally unrealistic, equally based on an abstract ('propaganda') model, ultimately equally speculative, metaphysical, perhaps spurious?
There is something to this objection also; but not terribly much. As I have argued earlier, the bulk of Chomsky's political/historical work and writing is highly concrete, not 'theoretical'. (As are the sociological, anthropological, and literary critical forms of activity that he recognizes, e.g. on pp.56-60 of his Language and Responsibility (Hassocks, Sussex: Pantheon, 1977)). If sometimes, by force of habit, or to impress or ape a little -- sometimes, I think, merely ironically -- those who cannot think beyond the purported need for hypotheses and theories in political science, he does talk the language of 'models' etc., this can I think be charitably re-read, and paraphrased. The point is:
Chomsky's claims about the media etc. are thoroughly exemplified and ultimately explained in clear terms -- thus does he practice what he preaches against the obfuscatory methods of professional political scientists, creatures of think-tanks and the like. (I hope to have shown this with the representative examples from his political writings which pepper Section II, above.) Whereas I hope to have shown in Section I of this paper that the same cannot, unfortunately, be said of his philosophical linguistics.

40. Thus among other things I have argued that it is because Chomsky on politics brings words back to their everyday and proper uses, rather than accentuating the opposite process (as his practice in his linguistic theorizing encourages), that we don't have the problem in his political thought of reconciling how what he does can be both populistically/popularly available and correct, a telling of the truth / the facts of the matter. While in the linguistics, there is a continual massive tension between the elements and implications of the work which are supposed to be easily popularly accessible and the elements of the work which are highly technical/scientific in nature and content.

41. Will the kinds of tools he provides toward those ends in fact increasingly be applied against his own innovations within Linguistics, among other places? A few years ago, a critique by Martin Steinmann of Richard Rorty's philosophy was published which claimed to prove that "Rortyism" (Philosophy and Literature 12:1 (April 1988), 27-48) was incoherent. I think the grounds for the claim with respect to "Chomskyism" would be much stronger, if "Chomskyism" were supposed to include his linguistics his philosophy and his politics. For I have argued that his method in his politics must contradict (even refute his method in) his linguistics.

42. This is a shortened, slightly-simplified and revised version of a paper forthcoming in Radical Philosophy. Many thanks, for thorough comments and discussion, and for some fine original ideas, to Richard Hamilton. Thanks also to Wes Sharrock, Mike Lynch, John Street, Jeff Coulter, David Houghton, Ellen Klein, Nigel Pleasants, and an anonymous referee.

"I also think he (Orwell) missed the main techniques of thought control and indoctrination in the democracies. For example, in England and the United States we do not use for control the devices he described (in his book 1984), crude vicious use of highly visible power. That's not the way thought control works here. It works by much more subtle and much more effective devices...Orwell completely missed this. He didn't understand it. So I think 1984 is very much overrated."

Noam Chomsky (Language & Politics, December 1984)

"First you ask, is this science (Skinner's Behaviourism)? No, it's fraud. And then say, OK, then why the interest in it? Answer: because it tells any concentration camp guard that he can do what his instincts tell him to do, but pretend to be a scientist at the same time. So that makes it good, because science is good, or neutral, and so on."

Noam Chomsky (Class consciousness and the ideology of power, 1974, in Language & Politics).

"But unfortunately the equation of science with common sense does not really hold good...Modern Germany is far more scientific than England, and far more barbarous. Much of what (H.G.) Wells has imagined and worked for is physically there in Nazi Germany. The order, the planning, the State encouragement of science, the steel, the concrete, the aeroplanes, are all there, but all in the service of ideas appropriate to the Stone Age. Science is fighting on the side of superstition."

George Orwell (Wells, Hitler and the World State, 1941).
EDITOR'S NOTE:

What follows is letter from Noam Chomsky written to the editor of this Raven in March 1999. It is a response to a request that he replies to the polemic of Rupert Read in this issue, entitled ‘What is Chomskyism’.

We have decided to publish this letter in full in fairness to Chomsky, because we do not want to quote him out of context. Despite a plea from the Freedom Press Collective that this is a private letter and ought not to be made public, we have taken the view, after careful consideration, that there is an overwhelming public interest that the contents be given wider coverage in the anarchist movement and generally.

In fairness Professor Chomsky never marked any of his letters ‘private and confidential’ and I cannot believe he would want us to hold back, given his worthy reputation for boisterous dispute and controversy.

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY.

Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

March 1, 1999

Dear Mr Bamford,

I read the article you sent me, but doubt very much that I would comment on it even if the time span proposed were feasible, no matter where it appeared. There are two reasons.

One reason is quality. I have devoted enormous amounts of time and effort, pages, to discussing critiques by philosophers, a fact commonly pointed out in critical reviews in professional journals. But I do make choices, as does everyone engaged in such activities and there are many. Critiques of this kind, which do exist, are virtually never discussed, by me or others, as you can readily verify. I don't think you'll have much difficulty discovering the reasons, if you are interested in doing so. In any event, that is certainly a choice that each person is entitled to make, and must make, given objective constraints on time.

A second and vastly more important reason has nothing to do with the quality of the article, or with me at all. I am a little surprised, frankly, that you are not pursuing the matter in the journal, and suggest that you should. Assume the critique to be valid at every point. Then a very serious question arises as to why the Raven is publishing it in this form, with such a narrow and personal focus. An exposure of the dishonesty and imbecility of a particular person is hardly a concern of this journal, but the implications of that exposure, which are extremely broad and significant, do fall within its domain. Again, all of this should be clear on a moment's thought.

The accusations charge severe professional and indeed moral misconduct, what amounts to criminal fraud. There are journals in which they would be appropriate: The Chronicle of Higher Education might be one. Far more significant is the pretty obvious fact that insofar as the charges have any validity, they apply with enormous breadth: not to one utterly disreputable fraud, but to a very broad range of participants in these shameful activities, and much more important, to the institutional structures that allow these depraved practices to persist. All that is apparent at once.
The article makes very broad claims and extremely serious charges. Take three representative examples, to illustrate. According to the author, I:

1. (1) hold that “deference to expert opinion” is essential in linguistics.
2. (2) am “dressing up vacuous claims in scientific terms”.
3. (3) am “the great champion of linguistic competence irregardless of performance.”

An advocate of (3) could be charged with cretinism, but an advocate of (1) and (2) is an incompetent and dishonest fraud, guilty of what by ordinary intellectual and moral standards amounts to criminality, and should certainly have been expelled long ago from the academic professions or any institutional structures that claim to observe minimal standards of integrity. That is a topic that might well have a place in this journal, since it raises very serious questions, not about a particular thug, but about the whole institutional structure of the professions and higher education. On the assumptions of the article, it would be fair for the Raven to raise quite serious questions about MIT; other leading universities in the US, Britain, and the world; the professional associations (American Psychological Association, National Academy of Sciences, British Academy, etc.); and many others. You can easily unearth them by a quick look at standard sources, which list institutions that have associated themselves with the shocking performance of the perpetrator of the crimes alleged. Furthermore, the author’s criticisms, if valid, apply very broadly to the study of language; hence the implications are extremely important and interesting. The Raven is missing a remarkable opportunity to make a really significant contribution in a domain that falls well within the concerns of anarchists — or anyone concerned with the nature of dominant institutions — by failing to raise the questions that arise at once, assuming that the critique has even the slightest merit.

Let’s turn to that, just keeping to these examples.

(1) is the precise opposite of the truth, and since the author, as elsewhere makes no attempt to justify the charge, it is impossible to guess what might have led him to this extremely serious indictment.
(2) is a broad indictment offered without the slightest argument, or even an indication that the author knows where he might look to check the veracity of the denunciation.
(3) Is scarcely intelligible, so remote from anything I believe or have ever expressed that it is useless even to speculate as to what the author may have in mind.

The article proceeds in this vein, with no substantive exception I could find, but with charges that should lead him and the editors, to far more significant conclusions, not restricted to a certain person who is a disgraceful fraud, but to the institutional structure of higher education, the professions, scientific societies, etc. One might ask, again, why the obvious directions are not pursued, even raised, since these would be entirely appropriate for the journal, while exposure of the crimes of a particular person hardly is.

Independently of all this, the author seems to have no comprehension of the activities and writings of mine that he says he respects (even loves). He seems to think that these have to do with the use of words. True, that matter arises (how could it not?), but so marginally as hardly to be worth discussion. One might ask why he is misled in such an extraordinary way – speculations come to mind. But the fact should be obvious to anyone who looked at a page of what I have written.

Let’s turn to the broader and far more interesting question that the raven ignores. Assume that the article meets the ordinary standards of integrity, and assume further that the critique is exactly correct: I am guilty of extreme dishonesty, intellectual fraud, and cretinism, by advocating such positions as (1) – (3). Then the questions of institutional complicity just mentioned arise at once, and these are very interesting and important, though ignored. Furthermore, it is immediately apparent that to the extent that the author’s remarks might apply to anything I have written, they apply as well to innumerable other, including people quite well known in the various fields, some of them in fact prominent Wittgensteinians. But you do not devote articles to their alleged work — the term “alleged”, I’m afraid, is necessary — and criminality. Why is that? In fact, suppose that the article were actually concerned with anything I had written or done in these areas. Would it belong here? Why? How would we react if a Council Communist journal of the ‘30s had run articles on Pannekoek’s work in astronomy, even articles that paid attention to what he had written? I think we both would react to such performances with considerable distaste, independently of the merit of the work, for reasons that should be clear enough, to anarchists at least.

I should perhaps add that the preceding is an understatement. It is hard to think of any work on language that goes beyond informal comment, anything in the field since Panini, that does not fall under the author’s strictures, if these are taken literally — contrary to intention, I presume, but that raises further questions. Apart
from the kind of personalization of issues that we would all oppose, there is no point in selecting me as target or approaching me for comment.

Virtually anyone working on language would be as good a choice, in either respect. Frankly, I doubt that you would be able to find anyone willing to respond to material of this kind, whatever name is selected as the chosen villain, but that you may verify, easily enough, but all of this pales alongside the questions that are ignored about the institutional structures of higher education, science, the professions and scholarship, questions that are undoubtedly of great significance and that arise in a very sharp and dramatic form on the assumption that the article has some merit.

As usual at this period of the year, I am in the midst of a very intense and demanding schedule, and am therefore unable to accept any invitations to write within a brief time frame. But for the reasons indicated, I would be disinclined in any event. As noted, I doubt that other equally legitimate targets would react any differently, but that you can easily determine for yourself, not very far from where you live, or elsewhere.

Your editorial policy is your own, of course. I wouldn’t presume to comment on it, and am doing so only because you asked me to.

Sincerely,

Noam Chomsky

‘God may say to me: “I am judging you out of your own mouth. You have shuddered with disgust at your own actions when you have seen them in other people”.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein (Culture & Value, 1977)

‘Everyone who thinks at all has noticed that our language is practically useless for describing anything that goes on inside the brain.’

George Orwell (New Words, 1940)

‘A truth that’s told with bad intent
Beats all the lies you can invent,’

William Blake

‘Without common experience, of course, no word can mean anything. If you say to me “What does bergamot smell like?” I say “Something like verbena”, and so long as you know the smell of verbena you are somewhere near understanding me.’

George Orwell (New Words, 1940)

‘It is sometimes said that animals do not talk because they lack the mental capacity. And this means: “they do not think, and that is why they do not talk.” But — they simply do not talk. Or to put it better: they do not use language — if we except the most primitive forms of language. — Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein (Philosophical Investigations, 1953)
What is Ethnomethodology?

We Sharrock and Dave Francis

Ethnomethodology is predominantly the creation of the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel. The papers collected in his Studies in Ethnomethodology (1967) contain an extraordinary large number of profound reflections on the nature of sociology and explore its central issues in a largely unprecedented way. Garfinkel had begun to develop many of ethnomethodology's central concerns during the 1940s, partly through a strategic reworking of the theoretical problems confronted by his teacher, Talcott Parsons, the leading sociological thinker of the day.

Garfinkel rethought Parsons' concerns in terms taken from the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz (Schutz, 1970). Schutz had emphasised the fundamentally intersubjective character of social life and pointed out that sociological theories such as Parsons's presuppose but fail to capture this intersubjectivity. Whilst Schutz had presented arguments which were concerned with the presuppositions of sociology, without exploring the consequences these might have for the conduct of actual sociological inquires, Garfinkel was determined to follow through the broad conceptual arguments and to show their specific and radical implications for the work that made up empirical sociology in the United States during and after the 1940s. In other words, Garfinkel set out to develop the possibility of empirical studies of intersubjectivity.

Thus, ethnomethodology is, in many ways, the application of Alfred Schutz's work to the problems of empirical inquiry. To say this is in no way to diminish the originality and ingenuity of Garfinkel, who saw with unparalleled perspicuity the radical and thoroughgoing implications of broadly phenomenological ideas for the practice of sociology.

Ethnomethodology emphasises the practical and situated character of all social action. As against conceptions that explain the orderliness of action as determined by 'external' causes or shaped by general rules, ethnomethodology points out that social actors accomplish orderly activity with respect to the local circumstances they face and which comprise the situation within which they are relevantly located. For ethnomethodology, then, the key questions are just how members of society make sense of such circumstances and how they collaborate to produce the courses of action that constitute recognisable scenes of daily life.

The Impact of Garfinkel's Ideas
During the 1960s Garfinkel's ideas began to have considerable impact, and a large number of younger sociologists were attracted to them. Most prominent among them was Harvey Sacks, who, in his turn, to perceive the potential in Garfinkel's ideas for radicalising the topic of 'language'. Sacks recognised the capacity of Garfinkel's ideas to facilitate the systematic and detailed organisation of speech. In a series of lectures delivered at the University of California, between 1964 and 1972 - lectures subsequently published in 1992 (Sacks, 1992) - Sacks created a wide ranging series of reflections on the nature of sociological method and the practice of sociological analysis, reflections which were predominantly, but not exclusively, centred on the study of conversation. Sacks thereby initiated the enterprise that soon acquired its own independent and distinctive identity as 'conversational analysis'.

Garfinkel and Sacks provided initiatives which have been strongly influential within a relatively small, but internationally distributed, company of scholars and around their idea have been generated a large number of studies of the phenomena of everyday life. (The bibliography included in Jeff Coulter's Ethnomethodological Sociology (1990) lists over 1,400 items. There have of course been many more studies since then.) Since bursting upon the general sociological scene in the 1960's, ethnomethodology has been the focus of controversy and the subject of considerable criticism. Its respecification of sociology's core issues has encountered vehement opposition on many fronts.

In our judgement much of the debate about it has been fruitless, since ethnomethodology's would-be critics typically manifest, at best, a superficial grasp of its purpose and arguments. The level of controversy has diminished as time has past and sociological fashions have changed. In the early years the criticisms stemmed mainly from functionalist and marxist sociologists, who charged ethnomethodology with denying the objective reality of society. As objectivist approaches have fallen out of favour, some recent critics have found ethnomethodology at fault for not being sufficiently radical in its rejection of objectivism. Thus some proponents of post-structuralist and post-modernist conceptions consider themselves to have surpassed the achievements of ethnomethodology and believe that its arguments have thereby become irrelevant. (For an example of this argument, see Malcolm Ashmore, 1989)

We do not have space to enter into sustained debate with post-structuralist and post-modernist strategies here, but we can express our own view, which is to the contrary that nothing has happened since the 1960s to detract from cogency of ethnomethodology for sociological practice.

The Problem of Social Order

The fierce opposition to ethnomethodology among many 'mainstream' sociologists is largely a product of their perception that ethnomethodology stands as a direct rival to their project, competing for the same analytical and investigative space that they seek to occupy. However, we suggest that this is a false impression. Ethnomethodological investigations are invariably orthogonal to those conducted by more orthodox sociologies, and are governed by objectives and ideals which are not shared with those other sociologies.

The characteristic feature of ethnomethodological studies, relative to the investigations of mainstream sociology, is that they are concerned with matters that are systematically disregarded, matters which - ethnomethodology maintains - those studies must necessarily neglect. They are features of the social order which, from the point of view of mainstream
approaches, must be treated as a 'given'. This point can be regarded as a generalisation of Garfinkel's central complaint against Talcott Parsons' formulation of the 'problem of social order'.

In his classic work, The Structure of Social Action (Parsons, 1949), Parsons had argued that the utilitarian approach to action was ultimately unsatisfactory because it treated the ends of action as given and, thus, as effectively random. Garfinkel, in his turn, argued that Parsons' own elaborate theoretical scheme treated everyone's understanding of the social order as a given. The fact that the actions and communications of the members of a society were mutually understandable and that these were, in addition, understandable to the sociological investigator were treated as things which could be presumed and depended upon by the Parsonian scheme.

The Parsonian problematic - of the classic 'problem of social order', of identifying the conditions of conflict free co-ordination of actions - can only be posed on the basis of assuming the presence of a social order which 'makes sense'. The 'world of daily life' was, therefore, treated by Parsons as the unexamined scene of his theorising; the setting within which the properties of the 'social system' might be sought. It was simply not possible for Parsons to treat the availability of 'the world of daily life' as a problematical topic without disrupting the program of inquiry that he had installed.

It is possible to develop this line of argument quite comprehensively with respect to the range of sociological schemes, maintaining that for them 'the world of daily life' as such is unavoidably treated as the unproblematically given setting within which their projects are formulated, and that that world cannot, therefore, be subjected to systematic examination unless the very terms of their project are suspended.

The basic question which ethnomethodology poses, then, is whether the idea of what sociology might be, as elaborated by other schemes and projects of inquiry, is exhaustive of the range of serious possibilities. It proposes that it is not.

**Methodological Nuisances' and the Limits to Top-Down Sociology.**

From the standpoint of ethnomethodology, sociology is a pervasively programmatic discipline. The question which confronts the discipline is not, then, whether its studies can be counted as yielding 'findings' but, rather, whether they can be judged to have delivered on the objectives of the program which motivates and informs them.

Sociological studies are not conducted merely by virtue of their capacity to generate findings about their subject matter, but are just as significantly - if not much more so - conducted to stand as illustration or demonstration of how sociology is to be done; to show how a program of work is to be effectively implemented.

However, it is with respect to the development of the programs they use that the outputs of sociological inquiries are seriously problematic. It is persistently the case that sociological approaches cannot take their programs beyond the provisional, illustrative phase. Furthermore, sociology experiences chronic problems of reconciling its actual practice to its programme. Thus, for example, it is widely recognised within sociology that the actual practices of social research do not match up with the formulated requirements of rational method as laid down in methodology manuals. Fulfilling the methodological demands of
adequate inquiry is *always* problematic and *always* necessitates 'ad hoc' practices to bridge the gap between the *actual* and the *ideal* method.

In face of such difficulties, it is possible to suppose that sociology's problem is that it has not yet identified the right program, and to undertake to provide an alternative one. But, it is equally conceivable that yet another program is the last thing that is needed, and rather than setting out an alternative program to those on offer ethnomethodology abjures all programmatic.

From ethnomethodology's point of view, sociology's general proclivity to work in terms of programmatic seems an impractical way in which to pursue its disciplinary development. The programmatic approach is essentially a 'top-down' one, wherein a general conception of what sociology ought to be is devised in advance of its studies. Thus, and most classically, a conception of what 'science' might be is first adopted; then it is determined what sociology ought must be if it is to conform to the requirements of that conception of science. Finally, an attempt is made to follow through that general contention with studies of particular phenomena.

The application of this approach in practical inquiry is likely to posses a 'Procrustean' character, with the attempt being made to 'discipline' observable phenomena so that they can be categorised and processed in terms of the pre-designed sociological schema. The conduct of research often seems more like an attempt to subordinate the phenomena of social life to the perceived necessities of; for example, a supposedly 'scientific' conception of them. Invariably, this approach leads to a situation in which many of the characteristic features of social phenomena are treated as 'methodological nuisances' rather than as things to be studied and understood in their own right.

It was in protest against this extensive aprioristic - and ultimately ineffective - approach to sociological work that ethnomethodology initiated its series of studies. Harvey Sacks's early lectures, for example, are filled with comments about how thoroughly strange the usual way of setting out to build sociology seems to him. How perverse it is to design a program for sociology in advance of any detailed acquaintance with the phenomena that are to provide that discipline's purported subject matter; in advance - effectively - of knowing what it is that the discipline might have to do or account for.

**Rejecting Sociology's 'Ironic' Stance**

In pointing to the inherently programmatic character of the project for a 'scientific sociology', ethnomethodology might seem to be doing little more rehearsing by now well worn arguments against such a project; as doing nothing more interesting than yet another reiteration of 'anti-positivism'. But the point being made has a far broader application.

While the specifics of the positivist program distinguish it from other projects of inquiry in Sociology, it shares with them a resolutely ironic stance towards the social world within which its own investigations are located. Such a stance is characteristic of sociological projects which pride themselves on their anti-positivist credentials.

The 'ironist' stance can be illustrated with reference to some remarks of Garfinkels about functionalism. He once commented that in its operations functionalist analysis is analogous to a teacher who set his class the task of writing an essay. The class, appropriately enough, ask
what the essay title is to be. The teacher says that they are to write the essay first, and that then he will, after he has received the essays, decide what the title is to be and evaluate the essays to see whether they are good answers to that question.

The point might, again, be generalised to a great deal of sociology. Sociological analysis invites us to look upon the lives of persons in society as though they were organised to answer the questions that sociologists decide to ask - thus it is, as remarked above, that the ways in which persons do live their lives is often looked upon as a 'methodological nuisance' to the sociologist. That is they will act in ways that makes the professional sociologist's work difficult. In ways which inhibits the professional sociologist's capacity to achieve equivalent status with the leading natural sciences or to recommend a rational and readily implementable scheme for the organisation of society.

Most notably, for example, it is a source of complaint that the users of natural language employ means of expression which fail to satisfy the (supposedly) logical and scientific standards for determinateness of meaning and clarity of expression, and which, further, make it problematic to assume - as Aron Cicourel so forcefully pointed out in his 1964 book Method and Measurement in Sociology - an isomorphism between the structure of any formal theory of action and the structure of the actions carried out through the medium of 'ordinary' language.

Sociological analysts look upon social lives as being lived to answer questions which the members of society have not, themselves, asked. These questions are posed by the sociological inquirer and arise from within the terms of the inquirer's theoretical preconception. Functionalism is a good example, because of the way in which the attempt to conceive society 'as a system' leads to the presentation of needs that must be satisfied if the system is to survive. The system's survival must be 'solved' by the activities of society's members - what they do must meet those system preconditions if there is to be any empirically existing system - but the activities by which the members engender such solutions are not one to which they are themselves directing their actions. On the contrary, they are directing their actions to other purposes, but somehow, by pursuing their own purposes, are solving the system's problems. However, as we stated above, this ironist stance is not confined to positivism and functionalism.

In similar vein, contemporary sociological theorists generate issues which, in the terms of their theory, require resolution - the relation between 'structure' and 'agency' is one that currently occupies them, for example - and they turn to social life to see how people act in ways which 'solve' this problem. Though solving the structure-verses-agency debate is surely the furthest thing from the mind of the members of society who are themselves engaged in, for example, looking for a service station before their car runs out of fuel; trying to find a library book that has been misplaced; deciding how best to deal with a difficult and demanding elderly relative, planning how to bring a commercially funded design project to completion on time, searching for a theoretically predicted but hitherto unidentified astronomical object, and so forth.

**Sociology Glosses Everyday Life**

We do not deny that contemporary theoretical projects may have both interest and utility, but we do repeat the point made above, that the essentially ironic way in which these sociologies collectively conceive the discipline simply does not exhaust its possibilities. However
'productive' it may be, in the terms in which those other sociologies set themselves up, to examine social lives as if they were lived to answer the questions posed by sociological theorists, there is no necessity to frame one's questions in that way. Indeed insofar as is interested in understanding the ways in which social lives are lived, then to that extent, such a treatment may be superfluous to requirements, and vastly more preferable to consider the way social lives are lived relative to such ends - if any - as they are themselves intended to achieve.

Thus, ethnomethodology sets itself apart by its resolute refusal to make the phenomena it studies 'sociologically interesting'. It refuses to justify its investigations of social life by seeking to demonstrate that the activities under study are relevant to the discussion, and resolution of those themes which are fashionable in current sociological debate. Attention is placed, rather, upon understanding activities in indigenous terms, with reference to the purposes the participants bring to their activities and the ways in which they organise them in pursuit of whatever ends they might have in mind.

As we noted at the outset of this article, Alfred Schutz initiated, for sociology, the theme that conduct in the world of everyday life is conducted under the auspices of a 'practical orientation'; and ethnomethodology has assiduously pursued this idea, setting out to examine the ordinary affairs of everyday life not only in 'in their own terms' but also to examine their organisation as the product of ineluctably practical action.

If we may revert to the comparison we were previously making, with respect to the way in which sociological analysis considers member's actions from the view of its preconceived theoretical problems, we may add that a significant consequence of this is that investigation and analysis typically 'gloss over' the issue of the practical execution of those courses of action.

For example, in proposing to consider the social utility or dis-utility of the family or the contribution of the education system to the stability of the social system as a whole, sociological analysts simply take it for granted that the members of society have already formed themselves up into family units or have established schooling arrangements, and that they are, on a routine, day-today basis, carrying these out. As persons together live through the daily life of their family or of a school class they produce, in and through their activities the very phenomena the organisation of which the sociological theorist wishes to account for.

Just how those activities are carried out, just what it takes for each person to deliver the activities which make up the 'family life' or the 'routines of the school class', just what it takes for those persons collectively to interrelate their activities in ways which make up the affairs of the unit are not questions which sociological studies typically concern themselves. They just take for granted the fact that somehow the practical affairs of day to day life in society are managed; that somehow the members of society will arrange things so as to provide organised social settings and units that can be made the focus of sociological study.

By glossing over the conduct of the affairs of daily life, sociological studies also gloss over the basic issues in the analysis of social action, those which pertain to the way in which practical action is organised over its course, is organised in its course in ways which provide for the observed orderliness of social settings and social units. It is these topics that ethnomethodology makes its own.
Studies in Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology, then, is primarily a program of descriptive studies, rather than a theoretical project or epistemological stance. We cannot within the limited space available, condense a survey of the variety and achievements of studies which have been made in ethnomethodology’s name. The best we can do is provide a brief characterisation of some of the leading features of those studies. The features to which we draw attention are:

1) their emphasis on the 'real-worldliness' of practical action and practical reasoning.
2) their concern to ground description in the 'raw materials' of social action, and
3) their attention to the 'in situ specifics' of activities.

Real-Worldliness
Ethnomethodology is concerned with the organisation of actions under real world circumstances and in real time. In emphasising the worldliness of social action, it draws attention to the fact that actions routinely are conducted 'under circumstances not of the actor's own choosing' (to paraphrase Marx), in face of conditions which may be unfavourable or perhaps intractable in relation to the actor's project.

It highlights too the extent to which the carrying through of a course of action may be problematical for its would-be perpetrator. In his account of common sense courses of action, Garfinkel forcibly reminds us of the degree to which both the ends of such actions and the means towards them are typically quite vaguely conceived. Though the course of action, even that of a sociological investigation, can be only 'loosely' anticipated, nonetheless it must be carried out in definite, specific ways, and the particulars of actual circumstances must be turned - if the action's course is to be accomplished - towards the desired objectives. Thus even though the particularities to be encountered could not be specified in advance and their significance for the action-in-its-course could not be known in detail until they are come upon (and perhaps not even then), the actors involved have to deal with these particularities as best they can in the circumstances.'

Talk of the 'real world' character of social actions reminds us, then, of the fact that the performer of a course of social action can't 'gloss over' or otherwise dis-attend the particularities of the conditions under which action is undertaken, but must attend to and manage those to the extent that whatever is done will be 'adequate' and 'effective' in the realisation of that projected course of action.

Grounded Description
A second prominent feature of ethnomethodological studies is a commitment to the close examination of materials that reproduce social action in its detail. By speaking of 'raw materials' it may sound as though we are claiming some 'absolute' empirical basis to ethnomethodology's studies. We emphasise, however, that it is relative to the forms of data employed in other kinds of sociological research that it is reasonable to speak of ethnomethodology's desire to examine 'raw materials'.

The everyday social world, as it appears in most sociological studies - and insofar as it recognisably appears at all - typically manifests itself in processed and edited forms. Thus the 'raw data' of a social survey not only will involve the responses to specific queries, framed by the researcher, but will also have been subject to coding operations and statistical
manipulations. Similarly, the raw materials of a field study will consist of a large body of field notes and other records, from which a few brief passages will be selected for direct citation.

From the point of view of the reader of such studies, the actual procedures used to process and select specific materials is unavailable. But not only are these procedures unknown, neither can they be assumed to be sociologically neutral. As ethnomethodological studies of research activities repeatedly have shown, these procedures are permeated by common sense and sociological preconceptions of one kind or another, with the result that the 'data', as it appears in the research report, already (though non-explicitly) reflects such preconceptions.

If we are to understand how sociological investigations represent the world of everyday life then we must have access to the ways in which such representations are generated and their relationship to the 'data' to which they refer. For this reason, ethnomethodological studies seek to present their empirical materials in as 'raw' a form as is possible, in order that the reader may be provided with as explicit an account as possible of the relationship between those materials and the sociological arguments related to or derived from them.

The Specifics of Action
The final characteristic feature we have space to comment on is ethnomethodology's concern with what Garfinkel refers to as the 'haecclieties' of activities. This term expresses a concern to ask, with respect to any activity or sphere of social action, in what the identifying detail of the activity consists.

As we have already indicated, for ethnomethodology the constituent features of an activity or course of action are 'locally produced and managed'. In other words, they are accomplished by whomsoever is engaged in it in-and-as the bringing off of that activity. The task ethnomethodology sets itself is to describe the methodical character of such accomplishments in their detail.

It is this task that Garfinkel seeks to emphasise in speaking of the 'haecclieties' of activities. In using this term he is not making any legislative ontological claim about the 'necessary essence' of an activity. Nor is it assumed that the diverse interactional components of a complex activity can be reduced to some behavioural 'core'. Rather, the aim is to focus attention on the in situ specifics of an activity, whatever these might be. Contrary to some interpretations, then, Garfinkel's insistence on attention to the 'haecclieties' of activities involves neither reductionism nor essentialism. The point he is making in the very reverse: ethnomethodology should attend to howsoever a complex activity is accomplished and seek to explicate its specifics as these are available 'from within'.

One methodological consequence of this commitment in relation to technical or specialised activities is that it requires the ethnomethodological investigator to be technically competent, at least to the level of a 'working competence' in the activity. Only then will the detail of the setting be available to him or her in the same kind of way that it is to the participants themselves. One simply cannot attend to the 'haecclieties' of, for example, playing jazz, conducting a biochemistry experiment or performing a surgical operation without a considerable degree of local, working knowledge of what these activities involve. Thus the requirement to engage with an activities 'haecclieties' places considerable demands on the would-be ethnomethodological researcher, far more rigorous demands, we would suggest, than are acknowledged in conventional sociological research.
Conclusion

Our aim has been to give an overview of 'where ethnomethodology stands'; to specify its central concerns and assumptions and locate these vis-a-vis sociology generally. Clearly here we have only been able to sketch out the arguments in defence of these assumptions. It has not been possible to do more than characterise ethnomethodology's approach and illustrate the 'pay-offs' that its assumptions have in terms of substantive studies. For a fuller appreciation, we refer the reader to the numerous collections of ethnomethodological studies that are available (for example, Watson and Seiler, 1992; Travers and Manzo, 1997; Hester and Francis, 2000).

Ethnomethodology's credentials as a significant and valuable programme of work in the human sciences are by now well established, or so one would think. Ironically, these credentials have been accepted more readily outside sociology than within it. Interest in ethnomethodology has been growing in recent years across a number of disciplines: computer science, linguistics, psychology, management studies and health studies, to name but a few. In these fields, researchers have found ethnomethodology's commitment to examination of the constitutive detail of social activities a valuable stimulus to inquiry. In these fields, arguably, ethnomethodology's contribution is likely to be assessed on its merits.

By contrast, in sociology such acceptance as there is of ethnomethodology often has a double-edged character - it is deemed to have a place in the 'established order' of sociology, but only on terms that practising ethnomethodologists find it impossible to accept as an adequate appreciation of the work they do.

We simply assert that ethnomethodology is alive and well, and comprises a substantial and significant body of sociological work. The company of scholars whose inquiries are dedicated to the pursuit of Garfinkel's conception of 'locally managed order' continues to grow. In a sense, though, one might argue that despite having been around for more than thirty years and having assembled an impressive collection of studies of varying kinds, ethnomethodology's project has barely begun.

We made reference earlier to Sacks' early lectures, given in the mid-1960s. There pervades these lectures a spirit of wonder about the detailed orderliness of the ordinary, everyday social world. Ethnomethodology's studies have demonstrated something of the depth and range of this orderliness. But in relation to the massive variety and complexity of the activities that comprise social life they could be said as yet only to have scratched the surface. Ethnomethodology, from this point of view, stands at the beginning of its journey.

REFERENCES


'Inspired by *The Structure of Social Action* ethnomethodology undertook the task of respecifying the production and accountability of immortal, ordinary society.'

Harold Garfinkel

'The Western sociologist sees in the rise of intellectuals to effective power the hope for a more humane and smoothly functioning society, in which problems can be solved by "piecemeal technology".'

Noam Chomsky (OBJECTIVITY & LIBERAL SCHOLARSHIP 1968)

'I like to believe that the intensive study of one aspect of human psychology – human language – may contribute to a humanistic social science that will serve, as well, as an instrument for social action.'

Noam Chomsky (Language & Freedom, 1970)

'In philosophy we are not, like the scientist, building a house. Nor are we even laying the foundations of a house. We are merely "tidying up a room".'

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Review:
SOCIALISM AND THE LABOUR PARTY

Derek Pattison.

Was the Labour Party ever a socialist party? For many people on the left this debate seems almost as old as the Labour Party itself. Equally as perplexing, is the question of what Labour’s leaders have understood by the term “socialism”.

In his ‘A History of the Labor Party from 1914’, G.D.H. Cole observes that whilst there were socialists in the Labour Party and socialist societies affiliated to it, the Labour Party up to 1914 “neither stood, nor professed to stand, for socialism”. Indeed, its constitution in 1914, did not contain anything to indicate what the Labour Party stood for in concrete terms and according to Cole, had there been any attempt at this time to commit the Labour Party to socialism, this would have endangered the support of the Trade Union leaders, who were in political terms, Liberals.

Even as early as 1904, when the Labour Representation committee (LRC) – the original name of the Labour Party until 1906 – had sought to affiliate to the socialist International, there were doubts on both sides about admitting the LRC to the International, which was basically Marxist and which also advocated class war. According to Cole, the problem was eventually resolved by admitting the LRC to the International...”as a party which practiced the class war, even though it refused to preach it”. Nevertheless, over the years, many of Labour’s leaders have espoused their own brand of socialism.

Clement Attlee, believed that socialism was about equality or it was about nothing. Herbert Morrison, defined socialism as what Labour Governments do, and for Aneurin Bevan, socialism was about priorities. Neil Kinnock dismissed the so-called socialist pledge – Clause 4 – contained in the Labour Party Constitution of 1918, as ...”tunes of glory”, and Tony Blair had it deleted altogether. The only thing that one can be certain about as regards the Labour Party, is that it has been in a state of change and renewal since its foundation.

‘THE RAPE OF SOCIALISM’

In his book ‘THE RAPE OF SOCIALISM: HOW LABOUR LOST THE MILLENIUM’, Donovan Pedelty, deals mainly with the post-war record of successive Labour Governments and in particular, with the way Labour Party rhetoric has often been at variance with political reality. This book or ‘lamentation’, as the author himself chooses to describe it, also focuses on the way in which, the Liberal and conservative parties, responded to the gradual enfranchisement of the working classes through a process of “jockeying for power”.

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The discussion in the early chapters of this book, is concerned with the way in which the Liberals and conservatives in the middle of the 19th century, sought to outbid one another in order to secure the working class vote as parliamentary representative democracy gradually moved towards manhood suffrage on a piece-meal basis. As Pedelty points out, until the election of two working class members of Parliament in 1874, the House of Commons was totally made up of gentlemen who represented property interests. Moreover, he also shows that whilst it may have been apparent to some politicians that obtaining power was becoming increasingly dependent on securing the votes of labouring men, for others, the very idea of extending the franchise to labouring men was totally abhorrent.

The Whig historian Macaulay, proclaimed in Parliament that universal sufferage was utterly incompatible with the very existence of civilization. Lord Salisbury, predicted that democratic reform would lead to taxation being wielded as an instrument of plunder. He favoured a system of ‘graduated suffrage’, whereby political power was proportionate to a man’s stake in the country. The Liberal, Robert Lowe, who led a faction within the Liberal Party which sought to frustrate efforts to extend the franchise in 1866, felt that it was totally repugnant that his seat should depend on the votes of labouring men who he regarded as: “impulsive, unreflecting, violent, and a prey to venality, ignorance and drunkenness”. Even Gladstone, who had sought to extend the franchise, expressed misgivings. He felt that labour lacked information, and thought that their value as electors was diminished due to their reliance on employers and landlords.

A theme that Pedelty pursues throughout his book is what he sees as the alien character of ‘Thatcherism’ in relation to the Conservative Party. He argues that with the election of Margaret Thatcher as leader, the Tory Party was effectively ‘hijacked’. For Pedelty, it was not the old fashioned Tory paternalism that was a foreign body in today’s conservatism, but Thatcherite libertarianism, which for him, largely consisted of 19th century individualism dressed-up in 20th century clothes.

Although Pedelty acknowledges that the Conservative Party’s raison d’etre, is to obtain power and maintain a society based on private property and inequalities in wealth and power, he nevertheless argues that that state interventionism was never at variance with the Tory tradition. He refers to Disraeli’s reforming ministry from 1874, which introduced laws to improve conditions for working people. We are told that Harold Macmillan believed that Toryism was a form of paternal socialism, and the ‘Industrial Charter’, which was passed at the 1947 Conservative Party conference, had endorsed the nationalization of mines, railways, and the Bank of England. However, all political parties must adapt to survive and Pedelty acknowledges, that collectivist pressures unleashed after the last war, and the election of a Labour Government in 1945, were primarily responsible for the conservative vigour for state intervention.

According to Pedelty, what distinguished the Labour Party from its main opponents was the importance that it attached to economic equality. Clearly, many at the time and saw the election of the Labour Government in 1945 as a watershed, and by some even as the beginning of the social revolution. For Roy Hattersley, the Attlee government “…presided over a transformation of Britain which was so radical that it amounted to a revolution. While other Labour stalwarts, such as Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, declared the Attlee government to be the “pinnacle of Labour’s socialist tradition”. (I) But in reality, how did successive Labour governments measure up to their own ideals when opportunity knocked and they found themselves in power?
In his own analysis of post-war Labour governments, Pedelty, refers to a study undertaken by Sked and Cook entitled: ‘Post-War Britain – A Political History’. The authors in this study argue that the first majority Labour ministries – despite all their bluster – failed to either control or capture the commanding heights of the economy. Indeed, it is suggested that the 20% of the economy which was acquired by the Attlee government, was the least profitable and the most profitable sectors remained in private hands. With railway shareholders and mine owners, being bought out by the Labour government at prices they could hardly expect on the open market, socialist planning was even deemed acceptable to the Tory party and capitalists.

As regards industrial democracy and workers’ control, the record of the first majority Labour administration of control of the ministries is just as bad as its general performance of commanding the economy. The National Coal Board appointed Emmanuel Shinwell, as Minster of Fuel and Power, had no worker representatives on its Board. A statutory provision, which required consultation with workers employed in the coal industry, was pronounced by Shinwell to be superfluous. By 1948, even the socialist doyen, Sir Stafford Cripps, was proclaiming the present impossibility of “…worker controlled industry, even if were on the whole desirable”.

In terms of foreign policy, Labour had called for collective peace and a co-operative world commonwealth, based on social justice. It also declared that war resistance was the duty of every citizen and not just organized labour. However, during the Attlee government, Labour helped to crush risings in Vietnam, Malaya and Greece. In 1947, six African mutineers in Kenya were shot dead for striking in protest at delays in mobilization, and in Nigeria in 1949, twenty-one workers were killed for taking part in a miner’s strike.

Although Pedelty refers briefly to the use of British troops by successive labour governments as strike breakers: such as in the firemen’s strike in 1977. Troops were thus used on eighteen different occasions during the Attlee governments between 1945-51.

According to Geof Ellen(2), from 1945 onwards, the Attlee government deployed special Branch and Scotland Yard detectives to exercise surveillance over unofficial strike leaders. Indeed, the use of troops as well as MI5 and States of Emergency, were used against dockers in May 1949, who were boycotting Canadian ships in solidarity with a strike by the Canadian seamen’s union. In October 1950, ten leaders of the gas worker’s strike were sentenced to one month’s imprisonment under Order 1305 – a measure introduced during the war to outlaw strikes and lockouts. In February 1951, seven members of the London and Merseyside dockers’ unofficial committee were arrested by Special Branch while meeting in a pub to discuss a strike. By 1953, Labour supported the Tories’ use of troops against London tanker drivers and they declared a State of Emergency against the official strike by seamen in 1966.

As regards the question of equality and the redistribution of wealth, Pedelty argues that all Labour governments have bowed down to the financial orthodoxy of the day, and have never had the guts to take on the City in the name of socialism. For Pedelty, the Attlee government did not establish the foundations of a classless society, but instead built welfare capitalism. The basis of which had already been established by the wartime coalition government with the Beverage committee and Butler’s Education Act. He also argues that in the White Paper of May 1944 the Government had already pledged itself to maintaining a high and stable
level of employment when the war was over. This continued until Dennis Healey abandoned the commitment to full employment in his budget speech in 1975.

Pedelty argues that what successive Labour governments dispensed to the working class, was not social justice or equality, but charity. He points out that in 1978, when the Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, had declared that Labour’s aim was to eliminate poverty, and redistribute income and wealth, half the nation’s personally-owned wealth was held by 5% of the adult population with the top 1% holding half of that half. But Pedelty suggests that the greatest change in the last 50 years has been that for the first time, poverty has become the affliction of a minority and to that extent, welfare capitalism has delivered the goods.

**NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD TO SOCIALISM.**

Without doubt this book is well researched and there is a great deal of factual historical material in it. However, much of the time, I found it ponderous to read owing to the writing style of the author. There is a tendency to be verbose and use high-falutin language. A passion for inserting whole sentences within sentences in parenthesis, which distracts the reader. Moreover, I found that much of the discussion pursued through the book was ambivalent or contradictory.

Take as an example the title of the book. It is clear from the title that the author believes that the Labour party was intrinsically a socialist organization and not just a reformist political party. In the opinion of the author, what has occurred in the Labour Party is “the rape of socialism”.

For Pedelty, the commitment to socialism was enshrined in clause 4 of the Labour Party Constitution, which called for the workers to receive the full fruits of their industry through common ownership and not ‘nationalisation’, which was never mentioned. But most of the evidence in this book hardly seems to support the author’s main contention.

For instance, in the chapter entitled ‘Hope Deferred’, the author poses the question: “was the Labour Party ever a socialist party?” This point is pivotal to the whole discussion and is a response to an opinion advanced by Gregory Elliot ‘Labourism and the English Genius 1993’; which suggests that the Labour Party – as its name implies – was never a socialist party, but merely a coalition of social reformers and reformist socialists who set up the Labour Party to further the interests of the labouring classes within capitalism by reforms. Elliot also argues that reformist socialists were always in a permanent minority, whether as parliamentarians, trade unionists or individual members. Elliot suggests that it is Clause 4 which has bred the illusion that the Labour Party is committed to the goal of socialism – a goal it has never really possessed.

In replying to Elliot, the author seems to concede defeat in my view, when he asserts: “What Elliot says is true but paradoxically it is misleading”. He then goes on to suggest that the problem with Elliot’s distinction between ‘social reformers’ and ‘reformist socialist’, is that the terms are interchangeable and that many Labour Party members have often claimed to belong to both, because they saw no distinction. Moreover, whilst conceding that ‘committed socialists’ were always a minority in the Labour Party, Pedelty, nevertheless argues that socialists had a disproportionate influence. For Pedelty, the story of the Labour party is a story of ‘moderates’ and ‘radicals’.

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NOTES


2. Ibid


‘Cambridge grows more and more hateful to me. The disintegrating and putrefying English
civilization. A country in which politics alternates between an evil purpose and no purpose.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein

‘There is no doubt that during the political upheavals of the mid-1930s Wittgenstein’s sympathies
were with the working class and the unemployed, and that his allegiance, broadly speaking, was with
the Left.’

Ray Monk (Wittgenstein: The Duty Of Genius, 1990)

‘One who abandons all forms, conditions and constraints, and merely acts in
some random and entirely wilful manner is surely not engaged in artistic
creation, whatever else he may be doing.’

Noam Chomsky (On Interpreting the World, Bertrand Russell Lectures
1971)

‘The image of mind, initially unconstrained, striking out freely in arbitrary
directions, suggests at first glance a richer and more hopeful view of human
freedom and creativity, but I think that conclusion is mistaken.’

Noam Chomsky (On Interpreting the World, Bertrand Russell Lectures
1971)
Similarly, an argument put forward by Cliff and Gluckstein 'The Labour Party: A Marxist History', which Pedelty refers to, suggests that - the drafting of Clause 4 by Sidney Webb was intended to counter the fear of mass action and revolution in response to the Russian revolution. This goes unchallenged by Pedelty, as does Ralph Miliband's assertion that the purpose of the Labour Party has always been to manage British capitalism somewhat differently than the Tories. Indeed, in his own peroration at the end of his book the Pedelty states: "Look where you will, the record shows that whatever the proclaimed intentions of Parliament-centred socialist parties when in opposition, in office, they ineluctably act primarily as the agents of capitalism."

Given the title of this book and the author's main contention, this conclusion seems something of a volte-face. To declare that the Labour Party acts as the agent of capitalism -- as the author does -- is hardly a startling revelation in my view and I didn't need Mr. Pedelty book to become acquainted with that fact. A fundamental problem with this book is that it is not clear who the book is aimed at. In political terms the author seems to want to run with the hare and hunt with hounds.

For example, we are told on the back of the book that the author has written a "darkly humorous Anarchist critique", and yet, Mr. Pedelty, based on his comments in this book and his years spent in the Labour Party is not an Anarchist. His model is not anarchism, but Swedish democratic socialism and the paternalistic State. Moreover, anarchists do not foster illusions in political parties or the political system; they shatter those illusions. Anarchists see participation in the political system such as voting, as an act by the individual of relinquishing power to others.

Although Pedelty quotes extensively from the writings of Kropotkin, in particular 'The Conquest of Bread', we find him arguing in favour of proportional representation elections and using the State, as an instrument to "...shove society in a Socialist direction". Conversely, he seems equally as comfortable putting forward an argument such as: "...the primary role of the State is to protect property -- the State is for the most part, the instrument of the property owning classes." When reading this book, it seems at times, as though the author didn't know what his left hand was doing from his right hand.

What I found particularly confusing is how a man like Donovan Pedelty, who clearly sees that capitalism and bourgeois democracy enjoy a "mutually beneficial symbiosis" and operate in the interests of the middle class, should appear to invest so much faith in the Labour Party and parliamentary democracy as a route to fundamental social change i.e. socialism.

If anything, what this book demonstrates, is that those who work within the political system in order to change it from within, invariable finish up supporting it. Throughout this book there are numerous examples that show how political realities, ambition, pragmatism, electoral concerns and the power of capital, have a sobering effect on the most idealistic of Labour's socialist politicians. Even Lloyd George recognized this when he once remarked that the parliamentary socialists were the best policemen for the syndicalists. (3)

In my opinion, the value of this book is that it should stand as a testament to all Labour Party members with a socialist streak and other entryists, that there is no parliamentary road to constructing a socialist society and abolishing capitalism. Moreover, this book should also stand as a warning that political liberty without equality, is but a delusion and a snare.
EDITORIAL AFTERWORD:
THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF INTELLECTUALS

Over thirty years ago Noam Chomsky gave a talk at Harvard entitled 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals'. Chomsky was worried then about the rise of what he called the "scholar-expert"; he went on to argue: "I would simply like to emphasize that, as is no doubt obvious, the cult of the expert is both self-serving, for those who propound it, and fraudulent."

In Chomsky's analysis technical experts and a scholarly elite were in the 1960s taking over from the "free-floating intellectual", who had "felt that the wrong values were being honoured, and rejected the society". Chomsky declared:
"A good case can be made for the conclusion that there is indeed something of a consensus among intellectuals who have already achieved power and affluence, or who sense that they can achieve them by 'accepting society' as it is and promoting the values that are 'being honoured' in this society."

He thought these kind of power-worshipping 'technical experts' expected to manage the 'post-industrial society' and "cope with the classic problems without a radical transformation of society." At that time he considered that the proper job of "intellectuals (was) to speak the truth and to expose lies", rather than manage capitalism.

Today, there has been talk of a curious consensus among the practitioners of Chomsky's own discipline in Linguistics, especially among the Anglo-Saxon academics, and it has been claimed that this is owing to a "Reign of Terror" that prevails.

I can only report on the strange fuss that developed over the publication of what was to have been an issue of the Raven on Chomsky's linguistics, and politics. It was only after I wrote to Professor Chomsky in February 1999, and got his reply back a month later (see Chomsky's Correspondence), that the publishers Freedom Press began to express doubts. I was then asked to drop the Rupert Read essay 'What is Chomskyism?'

Chomsky has told me that he had had nothing to do with the moves to prevent publication, yet he has never admitted during a correspondence which lasted over two years, that he contacted other people involved in the production of this Raven. We know that after receiving my first letter accompanying Dr. Read's essay in March 1999, he wrote to his former colleague Milan Rai. Mr Rai, Chomsky knew to be a contributor to this Raven who had already submitted an article. Rai hastily wrote to me in March 1999: "I've just received a copy of Noam Chomsky's letter to you regarding the proposed Raven piece on linguistics...given the evidence about this article from Chomsky's letter, I (am) withdrawing my own piece from publication in the Raven."

Mr Rai insisted that on the strength of Chomsky's letter to me, he considered Rupert Read's polemic to be "a comprehensive, but completely unfounded, attack on Chomsky's intellectual credibility." At that time Rai had not read Read's essay, but Chomsky had immediately despatched a copy of his letter to me as editor of the Raven to Milan Rai as well. Rai concluded: "I would urge you in the strongest possible terms not to publish it." This letter was followed by an angry phone call from Mr Rai telling me not to publish the Read essay, or I would "regret it". Mr Rai had always been anxious that, as it was Chomsky's 70th birthday
in December 1998, we should publish a commemorative issue of the Raven in celebration. To be fair Milan Rai did later apologise for the aggressive way he spoke to me and admitted that his refusal to contribute alongside the Read article did constitute a “form of pressure”.

When I wrote, in December 2000, to Professor Chomsky about the attempts to prevent publication of the Rupert Read polemic he replied: “I was sorry to hear about the efforts to prevent publication of Read’s piece”. He added: “...that should be an editorial decision, undertaken without outside interference.”

Yet, it is clear that there was outside interference and not just on me as editor. Freedom Press, the publishers, formally turned down the material for the ‘Language, Mind and Society’ Raven in March 2001. The grounds for doing so were that the “the contributions are technical papers” and that it would “be quite wrong for Freedom Press to be the disseminator of such material.” The publishers also write “we were gravely at fault in allowing you and your correspondents to send material directly to our typesetter without passing through the Freedom Press office.”

This suggests that the material slipped through unnoticed by the Freedom Press publishers. Alas, this could not be the case. In February 1999, a month before Chomsky wrote his letter, a covering letter was sent on Freedom Press notepaper to Dr Read which ran as follows: “I enclose proof copies of your article ‘What is Chomskyism?’ which I understand you have offered to our journal ‘The Raven’”. The writer, Charles Crute on behalf of Freedom Press, then said he had read the material, asked if Dr Read wanted to make “any further alterations or amendments...And thanks very much for letting us have your material for the Raven.”

There is further correspondence to me as editor about other contributions, but more significant perhaps is the notice in an issue of Freedom in early 1999 (before Chomsky’s letter denouncing Dr Read), which announced: “A forthcoming issue of The Raven will deal with Chomsky’s politics and linguistics.”

It is clear that Freedom Press knew of the material in the, Chomsky ‘Language, Mind and Society’ Raven, despite their protestations to the contrary. In June 2000, another member of the Freedom Press Collective Donald Roum wrote: “My impression is that Read ... (is) of the Marxist 'tabula rasa' school of thought, that absolutely all human behaviour is learned, and that any findings to the contrary must be unscientific.”

This ‘Marxist’ dig at Dr Read blends with Chomsky’s own complaint, in a letter of August 2000, where he writes of Read’s critique: “The only counterparts I can think of are the denunciations of political enemies in Stalinist or Maoist journals.” In that letter Chomsky presents the Read affair thus: “The article describes a level of deceit, chicanery, posturing, sheer stupidity, and outright criminality that has no parallel in the history of science or scholarship, to my knowledge.”

And yet, Professor Chomsky continues to insist throughout our exchange: “That (all these qualms), of course, is irrelevant to the decision of a publisher, whether anarchist or ultrareactionary, to publish a Stalinist-style diatribe devoid of content or understanding if they so choose.” (letter Jan. 2001)

Professor Chomsky does have a dramatic turn of phrase, and I did point this out to him in a letter reminding him he had variously referred to B.F. Skinner, the famous behaviourist, as “Off the wall” and guilty of “fraud”. But Chomsky claimed his powerful critique of Skinner’s behaviourism in the essay “Psychology and Ideology” in which he argued that “Skinner confuses science with terminology”, hadn’t the “remotest resemblance to the Read” essay. He was equally dismissive of a letter from Dr Dave Francis at one of the Manchester
Universities defending the Read polemic; of Dr Francis, Chomsky wrote "I know nothing about him, except that he cannot possibly have any familiarity with anything I have written about language."

Noam Chomsky is clearly a pugnacious debater and some of his techniques may be mistaken for bullying. But despite his protestations that he did not want to prevent publication of the Read polemic he did write to his former political secretary Milan Rai, and he must have known that this would be unhelpful. Certainly Mr Rai understood this and immediately withdrew his own contribution. Powerful figures don't have to issue a job description to get things done; 'nods and winks' are often enough.

And if, Mr Rai knew what was required of him, so to it seems did Freedom Press. From the time of Chomsky's first letter was received in late March 1999, they stonewalled and asked us to dump the Read essay. When they became aware that the northern anarchists involved in the publication, some like John Lawrence sympathetic to Chomsky, had joined with the academics to support Rupert's polemic -- they threw out the whole issue on the grounds that three of the articles were too academic.

The contributors to this volume are unanimous in their view of these events. We feel that Freedom Press has been morally and intellectually weak on this matter. The argument that the articles are "too academic" seems to us to be little more than a way of censoring debate, without having the honesty to admit that that is what is being done. In the light of Freedom's decision, the contributors met and decided to publish the issue as an 'Alternative Raven'.

But it is not just Freedom Press that comes out badly from this episode. Chomsky himself has been surely disingenuous. He has written to me about the incident: "Sorry to hear of your problems with the anarchists in London (Freedom Press). Why a dispute about linguistics, or the theory of perception... should have caused any of this (prevention of publication), I haven't the slightest idea. It seems very odd, as the whole series of incidents does."

Professor Chomsky is too modest; he doesn't know his own strength. All that was required was a sign of his disapproval about the Rupert Read polemic 'What is Chomskyism' and people like Milan Rai and Freedom Press would know what to do.

It is not only in politics and the social sciences, as Professor Chomsky seems to believe, where the scholar-expert can exercise an authority and influence not justified by his or her intellectual credentials. Those who wish to criticize the mis-use of intellectual expertise need to be attentive to the possibility that their own status may be treated as sacrosanct and should guard against their views being taken as unquestionable. Neglect of such matters may well undermine their avowed efforts to "dismantle... forms of authority and oppression". As any anarchist knows, insulation from criticism is the mark of, and will invariably result in, circumstances reliable to the State.

"Creeds like pacifism and anarchism, which seem to imply a complete renunciation of power, rather encourage this habit of mind."

George Orwell (Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool, March 1947)