societies. Such forms of society are, whether or not they are in some sense natural to us, not *un*natural to us either. That's all we need to know for now.

Chomsky supposes that human nature is something to be investigated scientifically someday. Actually, it already has been, for a very long time. For example, the findings of sociobiology – which I am not endorsing – although not as optimistic as Kropotkin's suppositions, at least controvert the "killer ape" theory, the Original Sin theory, and the Hobbesian, war-of-each-against-all theory. There is no "social aggressive instinct."[155] Oddly enough, Chomsky has recently concluded that *Kropotkin* invented sociobiology![156] There is, it may be, a social defensive instinct, and an ingrained suspicion of those who are different. But these are not insuperable "barriers" (in Chomsky's word) to anarchy, they only imply that people who are different should get to know each other, and form societies in which people don't have to be afraid of each other, whether within or between societies.

As far as I'm concerned, unless there is solid proof that humans are psychologically incapable of living together in an anarchist society, anarchy is a goal worth aspiring to.[157] And even if there was any discouraging evidence, I'd give it a shot. Man is something to be surpassed, as Nietzsche said. And as Gaston Bachelard also said: "A man [or woman, of course] must be de-

[155] Edmund O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1978), 103.

[156] Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature and Evolution: Thoughts on Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology," *Science of Language*, 103, 105.

[157] "Men are not good enough for Communism, but they are good enough for Capitalism?" Peter Kropotkin, "Are We Good Enough?" *Act for Yourselves: Articles for Freedom, 1886-1907*, ed. Nicolas Walter & Heiner Becker (London: Freedom Press, 1988), 81. By communism Kropotkin of course meant anarcho-communism. The claim that human nature is evil or flawed supports the argument for anarchism: "since no one is completely virtuous, it is folly to entrust anyone with government power." Allen Thornton, *Laws of the Jungle* § 118 (Vermilion, OH: Mermaid Press, 1987).

Chomsky on the Nod

Bob Black

2014

the beasts, to the products of the human imagination."[150] Anthropologist Edwin R. Leach suggests that "the ability to tell lies is perhaps our most striking human characteristic."[151]

If featherless bipedalism and mendacity are, although unique to humans, frivolous nominations here, it's only because only features which relate to human action (which, however, lying does) are of practical interest to those in search of human nature. Specifically, any argument about human nature is likely to be relevant to politics.[152] This isn't science. There is always an ideological agenda. Chomsky's idea of human nature is one of the connections between his linguistics and his politics. In both contexts it is conservative.

In the tradition of Christian thought, human nature is considered to be congenitally sinful (Original Sin). In the tradition of Western thought, human nature is considered to be egotistical, greedy and aggressive.[153] Kropotkin and other anarchists have argued, on the contrary, that humans (and indeed, some other social animals) are naturally cooperative, not competitive.[154] The evidence of history and ethnography overwhelmingly demonstrates that humans are capable of sustaining permanent egalitarian, cooperative, anarchist

[150] Quoted in Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 55.

[151] Edmund R. Leach, "Men, Bishops, and Apes," *Nature* 293 (5827) (Sept. 3-9, 1981), 21. *Cf.* Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities,* tr. Richard Weaver (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Inc., A Harcourt Book, 1978), 48: "There is no language without deceit"; Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, tr. Alan Kotsko (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 71: "Precisely because, unlike other living things, in order to speak, the human being must put himself at stake in his speech, he can, for this reason, bless and curse, swear and perjure."

[152] Roger Trigg, *Ideas of Human Nature: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 169.

[153] Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2008).

[154] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, ed. Paul Avrich (New York: NYU Press, 1972) (reprint of the 1914 edition).

to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization."[147]

According to Charles Fourier, who was an innatist like Chomsky, there are nine "passions" – five are "sensual" and four are "distributive" – whose permutations generate 810 personality types. Society should therefore be organized so as to coordinate and gratify all the various passions of everyone.[148] The arrangements Fourier proposes for the "phalanstery" are ingenious and imaginative, if overorganized and somewhat implausible; but for that, I commend the reader to their author. Even Marx and Engels referred to Fourier with respect.[149] At least they'd read him. Fourier posits instincts as arbitrarily as Chomsky posits faculties, but his are much more attractive. It would never occur to Chomsky that the gratification of the passions is any purpose of an anarchist society.

There are many attributes which arguably distinguish humans from animals, but there can be only one essence, lest we be mistaken for rabbits or rocks. In addition to language, the state, the city, and labor, other nominees include reason, religion, and possession of a soul. Nietzsche nominated laughter. According to conservative Paul Elmer More, the human essence is property: "Nearly all that makes [life] more significant to us than to the beast is associated with our possessions – with property, all the way from the food which we share with

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Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, tr. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 13. Marx, who was brought up as a Lutheran, would have been familiar with this book.

[147] Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (3rd rev. ed.; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 37.

[148] *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, trans. & ed. Jonathan Beecher & Richard Bienvenu (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), 189, 215-23.

[149] Frederick Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 405-06.

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is also an "innatist"![140] According to Wilson, anarchism is, because it is contrary to innate human nature, "impossible."[141]

Natural law, according to John Locke, is what stands between us and – anarchy!: "if you would abolish the law of nature, you overturn at one blow all government among men, [all] authority, rank, and society."[142] Sounds good to me. Democracy, which Chomsky espouses, after all involves manipulation: "The action of the democratic process itself, in terms of argumentation and persuasion, represents an attempt to manipulate behavior and thought for given ends."[143]

Chomsky believes that language – or rather, the language *faculty* – is the distinctive, defining human attribute. If there is such an attribute, language is, I admit, one of the more plausible candidates. Aristotle thought that language was it.[144] But who says there has to be one and only one defining attribute? Hegel thought that it was the state, but Marx denied that the state was the "abstract universal."[145] Marx pointedly did not regard either civilization or the state as accomplishing the emergence from animality. For him the special human quality is *labor*: "Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion[146] or anything else you like. They themselves begin

[140] Quoted in Sahlins, *Use and Abuse of Biology*, xii-xiii.

[141] Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 208, quoted in Barry, *Human Nature*, 42.

[142] Locke, *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature,* 213.

[143] Herskovits, "The Problem of Adapting Societies to New Tasks," 122.

[144] Aristotle, *The Politics,* trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 37. He also asserted that urbanism and politics are our nature: "it is evident, then, that the city [polis] belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal." Ibid., 37. His contemporaries the Cynics, however, rejected the polis as "against nature." John L. Moles, "Cynic Cosmopolitanism," in *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, ed. R. Bracht Branham & Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 107.

[145] Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 158.

[146] Religion "is an expression of human nature, based in one of its necessary modes of acting or impulses or whatever else you like to call it . . . "

or of anything else. He fears that human nature might be manipulated by authority, if human nature is malleable.[138] In a conference discussion, he mentioned that "this is pure speculation on my part, I have no evidence whatsoever."[139] But if human nature can be manipulated by authority, it can also be recreated by the free choices of autonomous groups and individuals acting on themselves. A risk can be an opportunity. If circumstances are auspicious – such as during a revolution – people are capable of changing, and changing themselves, and changing very much and very fast. Whether these changes go to "human nature" or "human essence" – who cares? Only the Pope and Noam Chomsky, for doctrinal reasons, worry about that sort of thing.

Chomsky doesn't reject high technology because it can be "manipulated" by capital and the state. It *is* manipulated by capital and the state. They invented it. Technology is their foundation. It erects real barriers, not imaginary moral barriers, to freedom of action and self-realization. But for Chomsky, technology is morally neutral and potentially emancipatory. He doesn't condemn it because it really *is* misused. But he condemns the social and historical conception of human nature because it *might* be misused.

Chomsky doubts that empiricist theories of mind are progressive – at least, not any more. But innatist theories of mind have never been progressive. Plato was not progressive. Aquinas was not progressive. The medieval Scholastics and the Jesuits were not progressive. Sociobiologist E.O. Wilson is not progressive. When his sociobiology was denounced as a conservative ideology, Wilson's defense was that Noam Chomsky

[138] Chomsky, *Radical Priorities*, 114; Chomsky, "Chomsky on Human Nature and Understanding," 98-99. As is usual with Chomsky, the later statement is more emphatic and dogmatic than the earlier.

[139] Noam Chomsky, "Discussion," *Language and Learning*, 270.

Chomsky on Anarchism. By Noam Chomsky. Selected and edited by Barry Pateman. Edinburgh, Scotland and Oakland, California: AK Press, 2005.

Occupy. By Noam Chomsky. Brooklyn, New York: Zuccotti Park Press, 2012.

> *Let me just say that I don't really regard myself as an anarchist thinker* – Noam Chomsky[1]

Let me just say that I agree with him. Noam Chomsky is not only the world's most famous anarchist. He's the world's most famous anarchist who isn't one.

Chomsky had written books, many books, for almost 50 years – on linguistics (his academic specialty) and on U.S. foreign policy (his phobic obsession) – before he or his publisher, AK Press, felt a need to publish his writings on anarchism. The back cover blurb for *Chomsky on Anarchism* is as ingenuous as it is amusing: "in this flood of publishing and republishing" – almost all of it, by now, from his current publisher, AK Press – "very little gets said about what exactly Chomsky stands for, his own personal politics, his vision for the future."

To say, in the passive voice, that "very little gets said," is evasive. Very little gets said about Chomsky's anarchism because *Chomsky* says very little about it. In his "Preface" to the book, writing on behalf of the AK Press Collective, Charles Weigl relates: "I was a teenager [the year was around 1980] when I first learned that Chomsky was an anarchist." (5) This was the period when some punks took up anarchism as a slogan ("Anarchy in the U.K." and all that) and as a subcultural signifier, like Mohawk haircuts. By the 1990's, Marxism ceased to be fashionable and anarchism began to be fashionable. That was when Chomsky began to open up a little about his anarchism to his American readers and listeners. The Chomsky marketed by AK

[1] *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 135. Hereafter, page references to this book will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

Press combines the holiness of a saint with the infallibility of a pope.

There's a simple reason why Chomsky's anarchism came as a surprise to Weigl. Chomsky himself kept it a secret so as not to trouble the leftists and liberals he was writing books for, and, in full page newspaper ads, signing petitions with (justice for East Timor! etc.). That's why it is genuinely funny (the only laugh in this otherwise solemn book) that Pateman can say that "Outside the anarchist movement, many are completely unaware of the libertarian socialist roots of Chomsky's work." (5) That's because he kept those roots buried. Chomsky, whose first linguistics book was published in 1957, and whose first left-wing political book was published in 1969, has never written for an American anarchist newspaper or magazine, although he writes for rags with titles like *International Socialist.* He has given literally thousands of speeches[2] and interviews, but only one of each, so far as I know, for anarchists.[3] But he has often written for left-liberal and Marxist periodicals.[4] Judging from this book, his first and, for many years, his only pro-anarchist text was an Introduction to Daniel Guérin's *Anarchism: From*

[2] James McGilvray, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, and Politics* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1999), 1.

[3] Noam Chomsky, "Preface," *Powers & Prospects* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996), xi.

[4] "Noam Chomsky is probably the most well-known American anarchist, somewhat curious given the fact that he is liberal-leftist politically and downright reactionary in his academic specialty of linguistic theory." John Zerzan, "Who is Chomsky?" in *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House 2002), 140. Zerzan has recently written to me: "He commonly appears in progressive and Marxist-Leninist rags (e.g. *Int'l Socialist Review*) but has he *ever* contributed to an anarchist one? Some @s I know in Istanbul asked him for something to go into their zine, a few years ago, and he impatiently replied, 'I'm an *activist*, why don't you ask Zerzan?' This was at the Istanbul Hilton after finally getting through all the suits to get in a word with the old turd. He seemed greatly embarrassed to be even seen talking to them." John Zerzan, letter to Bob Black, April 12, 2012.

diers massacred the Sioux at Wounded Knee.[134] *There are no moral barriers.* Anybody who says that there are, is just another false prophet.

As John Locke observed, natural *law* presupposes a Law-Giver or Legislator: God.[135] All ancient, medieval, and early modern discussions of natural law credit it to the Deity. Roman Catholic doctrine still does. Chomsky's reticence about God suggests that, unlike Descartes, Locke, and the Pope, he does not believe in Him.[136] But unless you believe in God, it makes no sense to believe in natural law. It might not make sense even if you do believe in Him.

Chomsky is against mind manipulation by the powerful, although, as a college professor (now retired), he was paid – well-paid – to manipulate minds a little bit. Indeed, he holds that "schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in [the] system of control and coercion."[137] However, what Chomsky dislikes is not, just because he dislikes it, any argument in support of any theory of human nature –

[134] Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971).

[135] Locke, *Questions Concerning Human Nature*, 159; John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 87.

[136] As he put it, he was raised as a "practicing Jewish atheist." Quoted in *A World of Ideas*, ed. Bill Moyers (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 55, quoted in Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 10.

[137] Quoted in Donaldo Macedo, "Introduction" to Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on MisEducation* [sic] (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 3. Just as Chomsky's book on anarchism is mostly not about anarchism, this, his book on education, is mostly not (indeed, hardly at all) about education. Instead, as usual he rails against U.S. foreign policy and media dishonesty. He refers vaguely to democracy in the classroom, but never discusses democracy in *his* classroom. His raging indictment of American education ignores higher education. A sympathetic, indeed, obsequious account of Chomsky's politics contains a chapter on "The Function of the University" which says absolutely nothing about democratizing the governance of the university or its classrooms. Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 101. I have not found anything by Chomsky on this topic.

because if it were, authoritarian governments, with expert advice, might then mold our minds: "The principle that human nature, in its psychological aspects, is nothing more than a product of history and given social situations removes all barriers to manipulation by the powerful."[129] Does he think natural law is a barrier to manipulation by the powerful? Chomsky agrees with Eric Mack that "Lockean rights" – well, for Chomsky, not *Lockean* rights – "alone provide the moral philosophical barrier against the State's encroachments upon Society."[130] To which L.A. Rollins replies, "a 'moral philosophical barrier' is only a metaphorical barrier, and it will not more prevent the State's encroachment upon 'Society' than a moral philosophical shield will stop a physical arrow from piercing your body."[131] George H. Smith has written: "In its various manifestations natural law theory has been used to justify oligarchy, feudalism, theocracy, and *even socialism* [!]."[132]

In 1890, some of the Indian tribes in the American West were caught up in the Ghost Dance religion, whose prophet promised that if the Indians carried out its rituals (especially marathon dancing) , the gods would get rid of the whites and institute a paradise for Indians. The Indians would then be invulnerable to bullets.[133] However, it turned out that the Plains Indians were not in fact invulnerable to bullets. American sol-

literature on primitive societies of anarchists, as Chomsky is not. If human societies were anarchist for over a million years, human nature is not a "barrier" to anarchy.

[129] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language,* 132; Chomsky, *Language and Politics,* 244.

[130] Eric Mack, "Society's Foe," *Reason*, Sept. 1976, 35.

[131] L.A. Rollins, *The Myth of Natural Rights* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, 1983), 2.

[132] George H. Smith, review of *Natural Law in Political Thought* by Paul E. Sigmund, *Libertarian Review*, Dec. 1974, 1 (emphasis added).

[133] James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896).

Theory to Practice.[5] He publicly acknowledged that he was an anarchist in 1976, in an interview with the British Broadcasting System (133-48), but this interview was not published in the United States until 27 years later (148).[6]

Chomsky on Anarchism is a book of 241 pages, from which we can subtract six pages of gushing, adulatory Prefaces and Introductions, so it is down to 235 pages. 91 of these pages consist of "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship" (11-100), which was, in 1969, his debut political essay. It wasn't necessary to reprint this text, even if it was worth reprinting, because Black & Red in Detroit had already done so.[7] The first part of this text is a bitter, well-documented denunciation of the academic and intellectual supporters of the Vietnam War. (29-40) This is the template for many books which Chomsky went on to write. It has nothing to do with anarchism. The Vietcong were not anarchists. So: 235 – 29 = 206 pages.

The second part of this text is a critical review of a book about the Spanish Civil War by historian Gabriel Jackson.[8] Chomsky convincingly shows, contrary to Jackson, that there was a Spanish Revolution, not merely a Spanish Civil War. Spanish workers and peasants – many of them anarchists – initially defeated, in some parts of Spain, the fascist generals, and also collectivized much of industry and agriculture, which they placed under self-management. It is possible – in my opinion, and also in Chomsky's opinion, probable – that if the

[5] New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970. This was a Marxist publisher.

[6] Noam Chomsky, *Radical Priorities*, ed. C.P. Otero (expanded ed.; Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 211-24. He wrote a preface for a Yugoslav anarchist anthology in the Slovene language in 1986 (149-52) which his non-Slovene readers would of course never see. The BBC interview was published – in Canada – in 1981. Noam Chomsky, *Radical Priorities*, ed. Carlos P. Otero (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Black Rose Books, 1981) , 245-261.

[7] Noam Chomsky, *Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 1997).

[8] *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965).

Soviet-supported Republican government hadn't suppressed the social revolution, it might not have lost the war.

However, correcting the history of the anarchist role in the Spanish Civil War is not the same thing as writing about anarchism, much less expounding one's own "vision" of anarchism. Many historians who are not anarchists have written about, and documented, the anarchist role in the Spanish revolution.[9] They were doing so before Chomsky's brief, one-time intervention, and they have done so afterwards. Since what Chomsky says there isn't really Chomsky on anarchism – it doesn't say anything about (in Pateman's language) what he stands for, his vision for the future – I would subtract all 91 pages of "Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship," although it was a worthy writing, in 1969 – so we are down to about 135 pages.

"Containing the Threat to Democracy" – anarchism should *be* the threat to democracy – is 23 more pages of Chomsky's standard denunciations of the mass media, U.S. foreign policy, and other college professors who disagree with him, plus Chomsky's espousal of democracy, natural rights, and even his supposedly Cartesian linguistic philosophy – everything *except* anarchism, which isn't mentioned. So let's subtract another 23 pages: that leaves 102 pages of possible anarchism. The next text, "Language and Freedom" (1970) – 16 pages – does not refer to anarchism. We are down to 86 pages of possible anarchism.

Of the eleven texts in this book, five are interviews, which take up about 72 pages. In most of these interviews, Chomsky isn't asked about anarchism. He is usually asked the same questions, to which he naturally provides the same answers,

[9] *E.g.,* Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Pierre Broué &Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tom White (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).

coincidence and coevolution of bipedalism, a big brain getting bigger, an organized social life, and the realized capacity for symbolic (but not linguistic) thought and expression. Who can say? Not Locke, Rousseau or Chomsky.

One reason why Chomsky clings to the notion of a universal, immutable human nature might be that he only deals with people who are a lot like he is. Prior to his retirement, Chomsky had not been out of school since he was five years old. He is pro-labor, but he has never had what some workers might consider a real job. Chomsky is an academic and a leftist. The people he meets are almost all academics or leftists, even when he gets flown around the world to Turkey or India or Australia to give speeches – to academics and leftists. Even anarchists are different enough to make him uncomfortable, although he is comfortable with leftists, because he is a leftist, and so they are the same as he is, if not quite so smart. Nothing in his personal experience gives him much reason to doubt the basic sameness of human nature everywhere.

Paradoxically, Chomsky is a globe-trotter who doesn't get out enough. Everybody is like Noam Chomsky, only not as smart. Just as you only need one confirmed example from one language to establish the universal validity of a rule of generative grammar, you only need one confirmed example, such as the English language – intuited and analysed by the self-introspective mind of Noam Chomsky – to establish the universal truths of human nature. There's nothing mutable or malleable about *his* mind. It is, unlike his grandmother, like a rock.

And what might human nature be? Chomsky admittedly has no idea.[128] He does insist that human nature isn't malleable,

[128] "Is human nature, whatever it is, conducive to the development of anarchist forms of life or a barrier to them? We do not know the answer, one way or the other." (186) ; see also Noam Chomsky & David Barsamian, *Chronicles of Dissent: Interviews with David Barsamian* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1992), 354: "We don't know anything about human nature." Actually, "we" do know the answer, if "we" are familiar with the ethnographic

consist of some attribute which is uniquely human. This is good Plato – Chomsky puts himself in the Platonic tradition (113) – and even better Aristotle, and good medieval Catholic theology, but it's not good science. Biologists don't go around trying to identify the essence which distinguishes a moth from a butterfly, or a mouse from a rat. Identifying their similarities and differences is incidental to investigating these organisms. Biologists leave essences to perfume manufacturers and Catholic theologians.

One of the earliest known attempts to identify human uniqueness was Plato's definition of a human as a gregarious, featherless biped.[125] Diogenes the Cynic got hold of a chicken (chickens are bipedal, and sociable), plucked its feathers, and brought it into Plato's Academy, announcing: "Here is Plato's man."[126] According to Rudolf Rocker, the last serious thinker, the Cynics were anarchists.[127] I identify myself as a cynic: an anarcho-cynicalist.

What is distinctively human about human beings might not be one unique attribute, but a unique combination of attributes. Language may well be just one element. Research on primates shows that, even if these animals are unable to create language, some of them, such as Nim Chimsky, might be capable of learning it, and using it. The unique combination of qualities which defines humanity might not include language at all. It might, for example, consist of the

[125] Plato, "The Statesman," in *The Sophist & The Statesman*, tr. A.E. Taylor, ed. Raymond Klibansky & Elizabeth Anscombe (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961), 270.

[126] Diogenes Laertius, "Diogenes," in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2:40. Another translation: "Plato defined man thus: 'Man is a two-footed, featherless animal, ' and was much praised for the definition; so Diogenes plucked a cock and brought it into his school, and said, 'This is Plato's man.'" Diogenes Laërtius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. C.D. Yonge (London: George Bell & Sons, 1901), 231.

[127] Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 12.

since he has never changed his mind about anything.[10] What little content there is in all these repetitive interviews could, in my estimation, be condensed to about 20 or 25 pages. That would reduce the anarchism in *Chomsky on Anarchism* to 66-71 pages. That reduces Chomsky's 35 years of anarchist writing to enough material for a pamphlet. I'm not as prolific a writer as Chomsky, but, I could write 70 pages on anarchism, not in 35 years, but in 35 days. And I have, in fact, done so.

Since Chomsky and his publisher obviously had to scramble to find enough Chomsky anarchism to fill a book, it's interesting to notice one published interview which is left out. It was conducted in 1991 by Jason McQuinn, then the editor and publisher of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*. That journal was (and is) open to unorthodox anarchisms: situationist-influenced, queer-influenced, egoist-influenced, green, sex-radical, primitivist, anti-work, insurrectionary, post-left anarchist (myself included) and more. It was painfully obvious that Chomsky was ignorant of, or contemptuous toward, all of this – often both – although these anarchists tried hard to draw him into a dialog. They didn't want to believe what an asshole Chomsky is. But actually, the arrogance and impatience which Chomsky exhibited there also runs through all the interviews that AK Press did publish. It also regularly surfaces in his professional polemics against recalcitrant linguists and philosophers, but I won't be going into that.

Jason McQuinn recently provided me with a copy of the interview, which took place in Columbia, Missouri, when Chomsky had a speaking engagement at the university there. It was conducted by four members of the Columbia Anarchist

[10] "His fundamental values have remained virtually unchanged since childhood." Robert F. Barsky, *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 1997), 95. His political opinions too haven't basically changed since he was 12. Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 8. These authors are effusively pro-Chomsky. Rai co-authored a book with Chomsky, *War Plan Iraq*.

League.[11] Chomsky could only be bothered to talk to these fellow anarchists for five minutes. McQuinn asked Chomsky if he kept up with the contemporary American anarchist press. Chomsky claimed to subscribe to most of it, "more out of duty than anything else I guess."[12] That doesn't sound like a man who is interested in, or open-minded about contemporary anarchism. Acting out of duty instead of acting out of desire is inherently counter-revolutionary, but, as we shall see, that is fundamental to Chomsky's stoic anarchist vision.

This interview does, however, expose, in Chomsky's offhand remarks, his mindless, absolutely uncritical opinion of modern industrial civilization. Even many liberals were then, and since, worried about aspects of modern industrial civilization – but not Chomsky.

Here is Chomsky exercising his brilliant mind:

> Civilization has many aspects, it doesn't mean anything to be for or against it.
>
> Well, to the extent that civilization is oppression, sure, you're against it. But then the same is true of any other social structure. You're also against oppression there.
>
> But how can you give a criticism of civilization as such? I mean, for example, an anarchist community is a civilization. It has culture. It has social relations. It has a lot of forms of organization. In a civilization. In fact, if it's an anarchist community it would be very highly organized, it would have traditions . . . changed traditions ["changed traditions"?]. It would have creative activities. In what way isn't that civilization?[13]

[11] Letter, Jason McQuinn to Bob Black, July 5, 2012. The published version is no longer available.

[12] Ibid., 2.

[13] Ibid., 2.

and sometimes on grounds which are more political than scientific.

Human Nature and Natural Rights

"The core part of anyone's point of view," insists Chomsky, "is some concept of human nature, however it may be remote from awareness or lack articulation." (185) There must be innate ideas, and therefore human nature, and therefore natural law, and therefore natural rights, as we saw, lest his grandmother be no different from a rabbit or a rock; and there must be an innate human nature, lest his granddaughter be no different from a rock, a salamander, a chicken, or a monkey. (There is, incidentally, no necessary relation between the concept of innate ideas and natural law. John Locke took for granted natural law, but rejected innate ideas: "Is the Law of Nature inscribed in the minds of men? It is not."[123])

There has to be a human nature, true, but only in Bishop Butler's banal sense that human beings are different from other beings, because they are not the same as other beings. Chomsky admits that "all rational approaches to the problems of learning, including 'associationism' and many others that I discuss, attribute innate structure to the organism."[124] Chomsky's dogmatic postulate is that this means that the characterization of human nature consists of the identification of the human essence, and that the human essence must

[123] John Locke, *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, trans .Robert Horwitz, Jenny Strauss Clay, & Diskin Clay (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 93, 139; Peter Laslett, "Introduction'" to John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (rev. ed.; New York: Mentor Books, 1963), 94-95.

[124] Noam Chomsky, "Discussion of Putnam's Comments," in *Language and Learning*, 310; see also Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1965), 53; Jean Piaget, "Discussion," *Language and Learning*, 168.

in universities. A university consists of the "faculties" of the different academic departments: history, physics, economics, etc. Fields of study are departmentalized: in other words, compartmentalized. Some of the demarcations are as arbitrary as those of the Scholastics – what is political science except an ad hoc amalgamation of some subfields of sociology and philosophy, with a little law thrown in? Anthropology is even more miscellaneous. But, to the faculty members, who are trained in them and who work in them, their departments come to seem like the natural organization of human knowledge – what philosophers call "natural kinds"[120] – just as for Chomsky, his hypothetical language faculty is a fact of nature. Subjects of study are not even assigned to the same departments in different countries. These academic faculties are nothing but the products of history and professional socialization, and perpetuated by inertia.

But, to return to the mind: should vision, and the sense of hearing, be assigned to the department of perception, or should they each be set up each in its own department? Should language be assigned to the – what should I call it? – the "social senses department"? (along with psychology) – or to its own special department (or "cognitive domain" as Chomsky sometimes says, but that's just a modern-sounding synonym for organs and faculties).[121] Ferdinand de Saussure, the real father of modern linguistics, conceived it as a department of an overarching, inclusive science of signs, which he called "semiotics," in which linguistics would assume the major but not exclusive part.[122] Fields of knowledge are more constructed than found,

[120] Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom,* 19.

[121] "How wide is a domain? Is all of mathematics one domain? If so, what about empirical science? Or are physics, chemistry and so on, all *different* domains?" Hilary Putnam, "What Is Innate and Why: Comments on the Debate," *Language and Learning*, 296.

[122] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974), 16; Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure,* 97.

It so happens that there are answers to these would-be rhetorical questions.

Chomsky must be absolutely ignorant of the reality that human beings lived in anarchist societies for about two million years before the first state arose about 6,000 years ago, in Sumer. Some anarchist societies existed until very recently.[14] Anarchism wasn't first attempted in practice, as Chomsky supposes, in Ukraine in 1918 or in Catalonia in 1936. It was the way humans lived for two million years, as also did our primate relatives, such as apes and monkeys. Our primate ancestors lived in societies, and our closest primate relatives still live in societies. Some primates now living also have "culture," if culture encompasses learning, innovation, demonstration and imitation.[15] Chomsky might acknowledge that, but dismiss it, since for him, what is distinctive about humans is language, not culture. It is claimed that some primates can be taught the rudiments of language, a possibility Chomsky rejects, not because the evidence is insufficient (possibly it is), but because it disproves his linguistic theory.[16] One of the best known of these primates was named Nim Chimsky.[17]

The anatomically modern humans of the last 90,000 years or so had their "creative activities." There are cave paintings in France and Spain, attributed to the Cro-Magnons, datable to maybe 40,000 years ago. There are also rock paintings in

[14] See, *e.g.*, Harold Barclay, *People Without Government*: *An Anthropology of Anarchism* (London: Kahn & Averill with Cienfuegos Press, 1982); Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State* (New York: Urizen,1977); James C. Scott, *The Art of* Not *Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* ((New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 200); *Tribes Without Rulers,* ed. John Middleton & David Tait (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

[15] F.B.M. de Waal, *The Ape and the Sushi Master: Reflections by a Primatologist* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

[16] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 40.

[17] Elizabeth Hess, *Nim Chimsky: The Chimp Who Would Be Human* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008).

southern Africa, which are at least 10,500 years old, possibly 19,000-27,000 years old, which continued to be done into the nineteenth century, by the Bushmen (now called the San).[18] I would like to think that Chomsky would accept these artifacts as evidence of culture, and he does,[19] but in the interview he implies that there is no creativity outside of civilization. He doesn't know anything about prehistoric humans. When he cites examples of pre-technological societies, he refers to the mythology of the Old Testament![20]

When he refers to peasants – as he did in talking (down) to the Columbia anarchists – he told them: "Peasant societies can be quite vicious and murderous and destructive, both in their internal relations and in their relations with one another."[21] And this is the guy who has cheered on every violent Third World national liberation movement, every leftist gang with a peasant base and Marxist intellectuals for leaders – the Vietcong, the Khmer Rouge, the Sandinistas, etc. – every one which has come along in the last fifty years! He likes *their* peasant violence, when it is controlled by Marxist intellectuals like himself. But that peasants should engage in violence autonomously, in their own collective interest and in nobody else's, well, *then* they are vicious, murderous barbarians.[22]

[18] David Coulson & Alec Campbell, *African Rock Art: Paintings and Engravings on Stone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 6.

[19] Noam Chomsky, "The Place of Language in the Mind," *The Science of Mind: Interviews with James McGilvray* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70.

[20] Letter, Jason McQuinn to Bob Black, 2. Even the Old Testament tells a story about the Israelites imploring Samuel to make them a king, which he did, "but the thing displeased Samuel," which is understandable. *I Sam.* 8: 6 (KJV). Samuel went on to tell them what evils they were getting themselves in for in acquiring a state like any other state, in eloquent words which are up there with the finest of anarchist rhetoric.

[21] Interview, 2.

[22] Chomsky doesn't even know what peasants are. He further lectured the Columbia anarchists: "For example, there were thousands of year[s] of peasant societies before the formation of city-states, before the invention of

versals in human *experience* . . ."[116] For example, all physical bodies, animate and otherwise, universally follow the laws of gravitation, so these laws are not innate or unique to humans. Sickle cell anemia, on the other hand, is innate but not universal. "When a biologist," writes a biologist, "decides that an anatomo-physical trait is innate, he does so on the basis of a body of theory and experiment which is singularly lacking in Chomsky's presentations."[117]

Lakoff and Johnson further state: "Cognitive science, neuroscience, and biology are actively engaged in characterizing the nature of human beings. Their characterizations of human nature do not rely upon the classical theory of essences. Human nature is conceptualized rather in terms of variation, change, and evolution, not in terms merely of a fixed list of central features. It is part of our nature to vary and change."[118] Language is probably not to be referred to its own special department in the brain: "There are powerful indications here that the construction of expressions is a process that draws on the full resources of our language frame rather than on some subcomponent of the mind concerned with purely 'linguistic' knowledge in some narrow sense."[119] Isn't it conceivable, for instance, that how we see and hear things, influences how we say things about what we see and hear? (And the converse might be true too.)

Chomsky's faculty psychology does not correspond to the organization of the brain, but it does correspond to the organization of the university. Chomsky has spent his entire adult life

[116] Melville J. Herskovits, "A Cross-Cultural Approach to Myth," *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism*, ed. Frances Herskovits (New York: Random House, 1972), 240; see also Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 508 (many language universals derive from common post-natal experiences).

[117] Guy Cellérier, "Some Clarifications on Innatism and Constructivism," *Language and Learning*, 86.

[118] Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 557.

[119] Lee, *Cognitive Linguistics,* 89.

say about language has nothing to do with his own linguistics. His Cartesian credentials are not in order.[112]

Chomsky has failed to establish that von Humboldt ever even slightly influenced linguistic theory *or* political thought. Chomsky himself doesn't claim that he or any linguist was influenced by von Humboldt. Regarded as a *philosophe,* von Humboldt is a minor, atypical, and in his time, by his own choice, an unknown figure. Chomsky claims that the Baron "inspired" John Stuart Mill (173), but all we know is that Mill quoted von Humboldt in *On Liberty*. (108-09) I have quoted plenty of people, favorably, who never inspired *me,* because I found my ideas elsewhere, or I made them up, before I ever read those writers.

However, Chomsky does have medieval forebears. Roger (not Francis) Bacon and Dante are candidates, but the clearest example is Boethius of Dacia and the other radical Aristotelians known as Modists. They "asserted the existence of linguistic universals, that is, of rules underlying the formation of any natural language."[113] Umberto Eco is explicit about it: "One can say that the *forma locutionis* given by God is a sort of innate mechanism, in the same terms as Chomsky's generative grammar."[114]

Two of Chomsky's Cognitive Linguistics critics have concisely addressed the point: "Chomsky's Cartesian philosophy requires that 'language' define human nature, that it characterize what separates us from other animals. To do so, the capacity for language must be both universal and innate. If it were not universal, it would not characterize what makes us *all* human beings. If it were not innate, it would not be part of our essence."[115] Note also that Chomsky ignores the reality of "uni-

[112] Hans Aarsleff, "The History of Linguistics and Professor Chomsky," *Language* 46 (1970): 570-85.

[113] Umberto Eco, *Serendipities: Language & Lunacy*, trans. William Weaver (NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 39.

[114] Ibid., 40.

[115] Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 476.

However, culture is not "civilization," except in the German language (*Kultur*). Before civilization – and after – there were anarchist societies of various degrees of complexity: band societies based on hunting and gathering; tribal societies (horticultural, agricultural or pastoral); chiefdoms and autonomous village communities (agricultural). A civilization is basically an economically differentiated but politically administered, urban-dominated society. Civilization is urban-dominated society with class divisions and subject to the state (and sooner or later blessed with add-ons such as writing, standing armies, the subordination of women, and hierarchic religion controlled by a priesthood). Society long preceded civilization. Culture long preceded civilization. If we accomplish the creation of anarchist communities, they will be societies and they will have culture. According to Chomsky, "an anarchist community is a civilization."[23] But it might *not* be a civilization.[24] To say that it will be, is to beg the question. Anarchist societies might be better than civilization. In fact, an anarchist civilization is by definition impossible: "The *state* differentiates civilization from tribal society."[25]

Whether neo-anarchist communities or societies would be "highly organized" (133), which is Chomsky's fond wish, nobody knows, not even Chomsky. But an authoritarian like him

writing and so on. . . . There are peasant societies that go back seven or eight thousand years, to the beginnings of agriculture." Interview, 2. By definition, peasants are cultivators who are subject to states. Eric R. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 3-4, 9-10. There are no peasants independent of civilization, just as – until recently – there were no civilizations not dependent on peasants. Neolithic farmers lived in autonomous (anarchist) village communities, in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, for several thousand years before states and civilizations occasionally emerged from one or more of them. Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2-3.

[23] Letter, Jason McQuinn to Bob Black, 2.

[24] Bob Black, *Nightmares of Reason,* and Bob Black, "More Modesty All Around," both available at www.theanarchistlibrary.com.

[25] Sahlins, *Tribesmen*, 5 (emphasis added).

wants the anarchist society to be highly organized, just like the existing society is, except that in the new order the workers and other people (if any other people are tolerated) had better attend a lot of meetings if they know what's good for them. This is not obviously an improvement on the status quo.[26]

Chomsky says: "I was attracted to anarchism as a young teenager, as soon as I began to think about the world beyond a pretty narrow range, and haven't seen much reason to revise those early attitudes since." (178) In other words, in the 1930's he was imprinted with left-wing anarchism, in the same way that a very young duckling will follow around a human being, or a bag of rags, instead of its mother, if exposed to it first. It would have been better if he discovered girls before he discovered anarchism. Had he read something else first, Chomsky might have become a lifelong Leninist or Catholic instead. He encountered anarchism at the worst time in all its history, when, outside of Spain – where it would shortly be annihilated – it had lost its connection to the working class. In that decade its famous elderly leaders died off (Errico Malatesta, Nestor Makhno, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Benjamin Tucker, etc.) – although Chomsky never mentions any of them.

Most anarchists were then old men – or sometimes younger men who thought like old men – who cherished anarchism as an ideology with established, comforting dogmas, and with a hagiography of martyred saints and heroes. Chomsky is profoundly mistaken if he believes that he is thinking about the world "beyond a pretty narrow range" when he thinks about the world in terms of a version of anarchism which was already archaic when he chanced upon it. He is still following around a bag of rags.

[26] Bob Black, *Debunking Democracy* (Berkeley, CA: C.A.L Press, 2011), 10-11 & *passim*.

categorized as the rational faculties; others as the sensory faculties. Through him, they became, and remain, orthodox Catholic doctrine. For Aquinas, "the mind was essentially a set of faculties, that set off human beings from other animals."[110] None of this gets us, or got them, anywhere.

This last point explains why Chomsky espouses a Scholastic philosophy of mind which is accepted today by no psychologist or biologist or – outside of the Catholic Church – any philosopher. He is urgently concerned with defining "human nature," the human essence, regarded as the defining difference between humans and animals. Chomsky has referred to language as "the human essence," available to no other animal. Language universals form an essential part of human nature.[111] Why is it so important to him to be different from other animals? What's wrong with being an animal? Is there an animal inside Chomsky which he is determined not to let loose? An animal which might not follow the rules? An anarchist animal?

I like being an animal. In conditions of anarchy, I would expect to get better at it, and enjoy it more. Unlike conservatives, I don't think of anarchy as a reversion to animality. Unlike Chomsky, I don't think of anarchy as the human triumph over animality. I think of anarchy as humanity taking animality to a higher level – realizing it without suppressing it. And respecting the other animals too.

Chomsky had to go to a lot of trouble to find a tradition to carry on. He associates his version of innate ideas with Rene Descartes and Wilhelm von Humboldt, thus associating himself with the age of the Scientific Revolution and the age of the Enlightenment, respectively. What little Rene Descartes had to

Philosophy, ed. A.S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 215-16.

[110] Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy*, 235.

[111] Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, 49; Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice vs. Power," *Chomsky/Foucault Debate*, 4.

that relate to moral development, some that relate to development as a member of human society, [and] some that relate to aesthetic development."[106] Just how many faculties are there? You don't explain anything by labeling it, any more than in the Molière play *The Imaginary Invalid*, where the quack doctors solemnly attributed the sleep-inducing efficacy of opium to its "dormitive principle." Why not posit an anarchy-forming faculty? Because that would not go over well with Chomsky's leftist and Third World nationalist fans.

Scholastics and Faculties

Chomsky often refers to the language capacity embedded in the brain as a "faculty."[107] If the word "faculty," in this context, is somewhat unfamiliar, that's because, in its original meaning, it has largely disappeared from scientific discourse and ordinary language. Faculty psychology "is a model of the mind as divided into discrete 'faculties.'"[108] There's a faculty for every operation of the mind – dedicated: a one-to-one correspondence between structure and function. Faculty psychology has roots in ancient Greek philosophy, but it really flourished in the Middle Ages. For the Arab philosopher Avicenna, an Aristotelian, there were five of these "internal senses": the common sense, the retentive imagination, the compositive imagination, the estimative power, and the recollective power.[109] St. Thomas Aquinas took over Avicenna's five faculties, some of which he

[106] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics*, ed. Carlos P. Otero (Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Black Rose Books, 1988), 147, quoted in Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 101.

[107] *E.g.*, Chomsky, *Powers & Prospects*, 14 (an actual language is just a particular state of the language faculty).

[108] Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh,* 410.

[109] Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 226. The phrase "inner senses" – which captures Chomsky's conception of the mind – is from Robert Pasnau, who translates Avicenna's terminology differently. "Human Nature," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval*

It is evident from *Chomsky on Anarchism* that Chomsky's acquaintance with anarchist history and theory is extremely limited. He never cites any anarchist thinker who is more recent than Rudolf Rocker, whose significant books, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* and *Nationalism and Culture,* were published in 1938.[27] Chomsky himself wrote a brief Preface for a 1989 reprint of the former book – why was it omitted from *Chomsky on Anarchism*? – in which he relates that he discovered the book in a university library shortly after World War II.[28] Chomsky has referred to Rocker as "the last serious thinker."[29]

There is no reason to think that Chomsky has read any book by any anarchist author now living, not even the orthodox leftist ones sometimes published, as he is, by AK Press.[30] There is no reason to think that he has read any of the anarchists who began to revive anarchism in the English-speaking world, if only as an intellectual current, from the 1940's into the 1960's: Herbert Read, George Woodcock, Alex Comfort, Kenneth Rexroth, Colin Ward, Albert Meltzer, Stuart Christie, Paul Goodman, Nicholas Walter, Sam Dolgoff, etc.

However, Chomsky is also but slightly acquainted with the classical anarchists in the canon. Over and over again he repeats the same few quotations from the same few authors: Rudolf Rocker, Michael Bakunin, and Wilhelm von Humboldt (not an anarchist: but a Chomsky favorite because Chomsky fancies that Baron von Humboldt anticipated his own linguis-

[27] *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1938); *Nationalism and Culture,* trans. Ray E. Chase (Los Angeles, CA: Rocker Publications Committee, 1938).

[28] Noam Chomsky, "Preface" to Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), vi.

[29] Quoted in Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 578.

[30] Not that AK Press is really an anarchist publisher. Bob Black, "Class Struggle Social Democrats, or, The Press of Business," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 64 (Fall/Winter 2007): 26-29, available online at www.theanarchylibrary.com. Neither is its spinoff, PM Press.

tic theory). He mentions Kropotkin once, but only to drop the name. He mentions Proudhon once, but only on the subject of property, not with reference to his anarchism or federalism or mutualism. Chomsky never mentions William Godwin, Henry David Thoreau, Benjamin Tucker, Errico Malatesta, Lysander Spooner, Emma Goldman, Leo Tolstoy, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Elisee Reclus, James L. Walker, Emile Armand, Alex Comfort, Sam Dolgoff, Ricardo Flores Magon, Voltairine de Cleyre, Albert Parsons, Gustav Landauer, Emile Pataud, Peter Arshinov, Paul Goodman, James Guillaume, Albert Meltzer, Dorothy Day, Emile Pouget, George Woodcock, Emma Goldman, Octave Mirbeau, Enrico Arrigoni, Ammon Hennacy, John Henry Mackay, Renzo Novatore, Josiah Warren, Alexander Berkman, Jo Labadie, Voline, Luigi Galleani, Robert Paul Wolff, Alfredo Bonanno, Herbert Read, Gregory Maximoff, Pa Chin, or Francisco Ferrer or any other Spanish anarchist.

This is not intended as a required reading list.[31] I would not expect someone who is not (as Chomsky modestly admits) really an anarchist thinker to be as well-read in anarchism as someone who really is an anarchist thinker. Nor is wide reading necessary to understand the anarchist idea. Godwin and Proudhon, after all, had no anarchist thinkers to learn their anarchism from, but they remain to this day among its foremost

[31] So far, I've resisted the temptation, and the suggestions of some friends, that I draw up such a list. One reason for my reluctance is that, if the objective is to suggest books that I'd like anarchists to read, I'd want to include authors who didn't call themselves anarchists, although I consider them anarchists (such as Godwin, Fourier, Stirner, Thoreau and Tolstoy), but also authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche, William Morris, Oscar Wilde, Robert Michels, Karl Kraus, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, and Ivan Illich. I would also want to include some texts by historians and anthropologists, such as Marshall Sahlins and Richard Borshay Lee – but, you get the idea.

culture[100]: "Language is primarily a cultural or social product and must be understood as such."[101] Occasionally the conventional wisdom is right. According to Chomsky, language presupposes a generative, even computational procedure.[102] But language, according to Cognitive Linguistics, may rest "on the capacity for symbolic thought rather than on an innate algebraic index."[103]

The concept of culture has been understood in many ways, but it always connotes an interpersonal system of shared meanings. Chomsky would rip language out of culture, although language is the heart of culture. Without it, what's left is not only incomplete, it is unintelligible. Culture is then an aggregation of unrelated activities which happen to be practiced by the same people: a thing of shreds and patches. As such, these activities cannot be explained as parts of a meaningful whole. Chomskyism reduces the social sciences to rubble, which is fine by him, since he despises them.[104]

There's nothing left but to attribute each of these activities, too, to a discrete "faculty" – an aesthetic faculty, a religious faculty, etc. This is not to parody or misrepresent Chomsky, who believes that there exists a "science-forming faculty" (or "capability")![105] Indeed, whenever he wants people to be a certain way, he just posits that they have an innate "capacity" for being that way, "some that relate to intellectual development, some

[100] Leslie A. White, *The Evolution of Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959), 1.

[101] Edward Sapir, "Linguistics as a Science," *Culture, Language and Personality: Selected Essays*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956), 76.

[102] Chomsky, "Language and Thought," 13.

[103] Taylor, "Cognitive Linguistics," 578.

[104] Chomsky, "Studies of Mind and Behavior and Their Limitations," *Science of Language*, 144-46.

[105] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 125 ("faculty"); Noam Chomsky, "Chomsky on Human Nature and Human Understanding," *Science of Language*, 96 ("capability").

dom has been called "the German idea of freedom,"[97] which doesn't even look like an idea of freedom any more, not even to Germans.

Chomsky's final version of his theory, "the minimal program," is the most extreme in terms of its pseudo-mathematical abstraction and its detachment from the evidence of experience. Only a madman, he implies, would reject innate ideas: "To say that 'language is not innate' is like saying that there is no difference between my grandmother, a rock and a rabbit."[98] The charitable way to interpret this statement is as an example of Bishop Joseph Butler's truism: "Every thing is what it is, and not another thing."[99]

But language – innate or not – is not the only difference between his grandmother, on the on hand, and a rabbit or a rock, on the other. And even if language is not innate, it would still distinguish Granny from the rabbit and the rock. In most respects, Granny has more in common with the rabbit than the rock. Chomsky may have a little more in common with the rock than Granny does. That was the charitable interpretation.

The uncharitable way to interpret this statement is that this is crazy talk.

Almost everybody but Chomsky is aware that the primary function (or, better: importance) of language, though not the only one, is communication (not Thought thinking about Itself), and that language is cultural, not biological. In fact, what could be more cultural? The conventional wisdom is that it is by the ability to "symbol" that humans are capable of producing

[97] Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957); see also John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (rev. ed.; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942) and – unwittingly – J.H. Muirhead, *German Philosophy in Relation to the War* (London: John Murray, 1915).

[98] Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 50.

[99] Joseph Butler, Preface, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Temple* (London: Hilliard, Gray, Litthay & Watkins, 1827), available at anglicanhistory.org/butler rolls/preface/html.

expositors.[32] But anyone who thinks that anarchist thought started with Proudhon or Bakunin, and was complete and available for restatement by Rudolf Rocker, is bound to have a conception of anarchism which is, at best, outdated, narrow and impoverished, and at worst, radically wrong.

When Chomsky does discuss earlier anarchist thinkers, he only exhibits his ignorance and left-wing prejudices. He refers to Max Stirner as an influence on the American believers in laissez-faire economics (235) – the people who have bought or stolen, in the United States, the name "libertarian" which originally referred, and properly only refers, to anarchists. I have detected no trace of this influence. Stirner rejected free competition.[33] Few right-wing libertarians are aware of the role of individualist anarchists such as Benjamin Tucker and Joseph Labadie in keeping alive some of the theoretical underpinnings of their ideology.[34] Stirner played no such role.

Chomsky's "Notes on Anarchism" (118-32) first appeared as an introduction to Daniel Guérin's *Anarchism*.[35] Guérin, an ex-Marxist, understands anarchism – as does Chomsky[36] – in

[32] I am assuming that Proudhon, who did not know English, was unfamiliar with Godwin, whom he never mentions, as far as I know. By Proudhon's time, Godwin was forgotten even in Britain.

[33] Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 232-33.

[34] Carlotta R. Anderson, *All-American Anarchist: Joseph A. Labadie and the Labor Movement* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 253.

[35] Noam Chomsky, "Introduction" to Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, vii-xx.

[36] George Woodcock, the author of the best English-language history of anarchism – *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Press, 1962) – maintained that Chomsky is really "a leftwing Marxist (like Guérin) who wished to use anarchism to soften and clarify his own Marxism." (7) Woodcock levelled "the charge that against Noam Chomsky and Daniel Guérin, accusing both men of selecting 'from anarchism those elements that may serve to diminish the contradictions in Marxist doctrines' and 'abandoning the elements that do not serve their purpose.'" Ruth Kinnah, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, Eng-

the most Marxist possible way, considering that these theories are irreconcilable. And yet, in a short book which Chomsky – I would hope – read before he wrote an introduction for it, Guérin devoted four pages to a sympathetic exposition of Stirner's ideas and their place in a full-bodied anarchist theory. Guérin went on – this should have scandalized Chomsky – to relate the ideas of Stirner to the ideas of Chomsky's beloved Bakunin.[37] There is *absolutely nothing* in Stirner which espouses capitalism or the free market. But there is something fundamentally important which *Chomsky* shares with the free-market libertarians, something to which Stirner is implacably opposed: the idea of natural rights. Chomsky fervently believes in them. (173) According to Stirner, "men have no right at all by nature."[38]

I will return to this matter of natural rights later, because of its intrinsic importance. For now, my point is simply that Chomsky is dead wrong about which of them, he or Stirner, is in bed with the pro-capitalist libertarians. There is also the irony that Chomsky frequently quotes or cites Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt. This Prussian aristocrat and bureaucrat advocated – not anarchism – but the same minimal state, the

land: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 25, quoting George Woodcock, "Chomsky's Anarchism," in *Anarchism and Anarchists* (Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Quarry Press, 1992), 228. As I will discuss later, Woodcock is absolutely right. Predictably, a Chomsky leftist toady sneers: "This is a good example of what might be termed the doctrinal approach to anarchism, perhaps also the dominant approach." Rai, *Chomsky's Anarchism,* 95. There is no indication in his book (he is otherwise unknown) that Rai is an anarchist or knows anything about anarchism except gleanings from Chomsky, who also knows very little about anarchism, and certainly a lot less than Woodcock did. What Rai calls "the doctrinal approach to anarchism," is what anarchists call "anarchism."

[37] Guérin, *Anarchism,* 27-33.

[38] Stirner, *Ego and Its Own,* 168.

> UG will specify what language learning must achieve, if it takes place successfully.[93]

With Chomsky it is always rules, essences and necessities.

Instead of being assignable to some single faculty or organ, language capacity implicates various capacities of the mind, such as perception. Jean Piaget's hypothesis is "that the conditions of language are part of a vaster context, a context prepared by the various stages of sensorimotor experience."[94] Chomskyism is inconsistent with the empirical findings about syntax. Syntax is not independent of meaning, communication, or culture. According to neuroscience, Chomsky's idea of syntax is physically impossible, because every neural subnetwork in the brain has input from other neural subnetworks that do very different things.[95] The mind is not like the faculties of a university at all. It's an interdisciplinary program.

But, mindful of my readers who want to know what all this has to do with Chomsky on anarchism, I draw attention to such words as *rules, necessity,* and *must.* In language as in politics, Chomsky believes that freedom consists of bowing to necessity and following rules. His notion of freedom as self-realization or creativity is superficiallyattractive, although vague and incomplete, and so abstract as to be meaningless. For Chomsky, creativity "is predicated on a system of rules and forms, in part determined by intrinsic human capacities" – although he admits that he doesn't know what those capacities are.[96] That is what Kant and possibly Hegel and von Humboldt believed, but it's not what most anarchists believe. Chomsky's idea of free-

[93] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 29.

[94] Jean Piaget, "Schemes of Action and Language Learning," *Language and Learning*, 167.

[95] Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 479-80.

[96] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 133 (quoted); *Noam Chomsky: Radical Priorities*, 415-16.

begin by laying the facts aside, as they do not affect the question."[89]

True, experience is required to "activate a system of innate ideas," but "that could hardly be regarded as 'empiricist' if the term is to retain any significance."[90] Hardly. Chomsky mentions that his own theory rests on three assumptions: two of them are false and the third is implausible.[91] He has said that there is "a ton of empirical evidence to support the opposite conclusion to every one I reached."[92] But we may lay the facts aside, as they do not affect the question. Chomsky states:

> Let us define "universal grammar" (UG) as the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages not merely by accident but by necessity – of course, I mean, biological, not logical necessity. Thus UG can be taken as expressing "the essence of human language." UG will be invariant among humans.

[89] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origins of Inequality," in *The Social Contract and Discourses,* trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company & London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1950), 198. This is one of Chomsky's favorite political texts. In addition to claiming Descartes and, with more cause, von Humboldt as his forebears in linguistics – John the Baptist to his Jesus Christ – Chomsky claims *Rousseau*: "Rousseau found[ed] his critique of repressive social conditions that derive from strictly Cartesian assumptions regarding the limitations of mechanical explanation." Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (3d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67. "Rousseau went on to discuss sense perception in terms not discussed by Cartesians." Christopher Coker, "The Mandarin and the Commissar: The Political Theory of Noam Chomsky," in *Noam Chomsky: Consensus and Controversy*, ed. Sohan Mogdill & Celia Mogdill (New York: The Falmer Press, 1987), 270.

[90] Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, 17.

[91] Noam Chomsky, "Language and Thought: Some Reflections on Venerable Themes," *Powers & Prospects,* 14-15; see also Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 9 (where he "assumes" a proposition which, he admits, is known to be false).

[92] Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 22-23.

same nightwatchman state, "extreme *laissez-faire,*"[39] as the right-wing libertarians now do.

Chomsky is aware that von Humboldt prudently left this text for posthumous publication; and that its author was the designer of the authoritarian Prussian state education system; and that he was in the Prussian delegation to the Congress of Vienna of 1815 (which tried to restore Europe as it was before the French Revolution). He must know this, since the information is in the introduction to the von Humboldt book that he quotes from. But Chomsky has obviously never read Stirner, and so he has no business discussing or disparaging him. Baron von Humboldt was very explicit about his own political ideal: "the State is to abstain from all solicitude for the positive welfare of the citizens, and not to proceed a step further than necessary for their mutual security and protection against foreign enemies; for with no other object should it impose restrictions on freedom."[40]

Chomsky's other attempt to discuss a much more important radical thinker – Charles Fourier – is an even worse travesty. He includes a reference to (Fourier, 1848), without later providing that reference. (124) Fourier died in 1837. I don't know if anything by Fourier was published or republished in 1848. What I do know is that Fourier would never have said the things that Chomsky says that he said. Fourier was *not* an advocate of proletarian revolution, or of any revolution: he was an advocate of radical social reconstruction. He never used leftist, Politically Correct cliches like "emancipatory." Chomsky claims that Fourier was concerned about some "imminent danger to civilization." (124) Fourier was the avowed *enemy* of civilization, a word he used as a term of abuse. He looked for-

[39] J.W. Burrow, "Editor's Introduction" to Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, ed. J.W. Burrow (Oxford: at the University Press, 1969), xxxiv-xxxv. As a boy, von Humboldt studied Adam Smith. Ibid., xxvi.

[40] von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action,* 33 (italics removed).

ward to its imminent *demise*: "Civilization does indeed become more hateful as it nears its end."[41]

I was frankly baffled, knowing something about Fourier, how Chomsky could quote Fourier as speaking of "the third and emancipatory phase" of history. This wasn't Fourier at all. It was Victor Considerant, a Fourier disciple who, as disciples usually do, betrayed the master.[42] Chomsky has never read Fourier. I'll be discussing Fourier a little later, in connection with Chomsky's belief in an innate, universal, immutable "human nature."

After reading a lot of Chomsky, and after reading a lot about Chomsky, I've decided to debunk his philosophy of language, in addition to as his concept of human nature, his political blueprint, and his political activity (such as voting). I am doing this reluctantly, because I don't understand Chomskyist linguistic theory, and because I regret how much all this will lengthen my review. However, I don't think that I have to understand the profundities of Chomsky's universal grammar in order to recognize its untenable intellectual underpinnings and its authoritarian political implications.

Language and Freedom

Noam Chomsky is widely believed to be the hegemonic theorist of linguistics. His publisher leaves that impression, in order to magnify the importance of its celebrity author, who is

[41] Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones & James Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 104.

[42] Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, trans. R.F.C.Hall (Boston, MA: Beacon Hill Press, 1958), 18-19. "Considerant suggests a Christian socialist approach, one of his emendations of Fourier." He reduced Fourier's system to its economic aspects, adding Christianity and subtracting the radical feminism and the sexual freedom. Joan Roelofs, "Translator's Introduction" to Victor Considerant, *Principles of Socialism: Manifesto of 19th Century Democracy,* trans Joan Roelofs (Washington, D..C.: Maisonneuve Press, 2006), 20.

undeniable.[85] As for the language organ, "speech is not a special organism obeying its own laws, as was formerly believed; it is the form of expression of individuals socially united."[86] Such is the opinion of Rudolf Rocker, the last serious thinker. It is curious that Chomsky is collectivist in his politics, but individualist in his linguistics.[87] Rocker is at least consistent.

It is a truism that humans have the capacity for language, because they all do have language, and so this is a "universal" truth about us. But it is also true that all humans have the capacity for wearing clothes, because they all do wear clothes. Shall we regard that as indicative of our innate clothing-wearing capacity, and infer that we have a sartorial organ in our brains somewhere? Chomsky purports to be creating, as Rene Descartes did not, a "Cartesian linguistics." Descartes thought that the soul was located in the pineal gland.[88] Where does Chomsky think it is?

Chomsky is obviously indifferent to evidence. He intuits certain postulates, and he deduces his conclusions from them. He denounces empiricism, adopting instead the methodology of one of his ideological heroes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Let's

[85] Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture,* 284.

[86] Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 283. Chomsky has to know of these statements, because he has quoted this book himself. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York & London: Harper and Row, 1966), 24, 91 n. 50.

[87] The standpoint of generative grammar "is that of individual psychology." Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 3. The apparent disconnect between Chomsky's science and his activist politics was noticed, disapprovingly, in the 1960's and 1970's. Harris, *Linguistics Wars*, 217-18; Dell Hymes, "Introduction: Traditions and Paradigms," *Studies in the History of Linguistics: Traditions and Paradigms*, ed. Dell Hymes (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), 21-22.

[88] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 7.

For Chomsky, the problem for which the language organ is the solution is the, to him, seemingly miraculous way in which all children learn a language at a very early age. The quality and quantity of the speech to which they are haphazardly exposed is so low (he speaks of "the degenerate quality and narrowly limited extent of the available data"[82] – degenerated from *what*?) that children could not possibly learn a language through experience, as was generally supposed before Chomsky. Children don't learn language, they "acquire" it because, in a fundamental sense, they know it already.

Chomsky explains a miracle by another miracle. Or by a tautology (knowledge is derived from – knowledge). He once wrote that, "miracles aside," it just must be true that the child's rapid acquisition of language is based on something innate.[83] But he hasn't set the miracle aside. He can't do without it. Chomsky has never displayed much serious knowledge of, or interest in developmental psychology, as was apparent from his 1975 debate with Jean Piaget, any more than he evidences any knowledge of neurobiology. These sciences just *have to* support his theory, because his theory is true. Psychologists were at first excited by Chomsky's transformational/generative grammar, at a time when it seemed that it might have semantic implications, but they soon concluded that its promise was illusory. It was the same for educators.[84] Usually, scientific knowledge sooner or later has practical applications. Chomsky's linguistics has none.

Rudolf Rocker, whom Chomsky has called the last serious thinker, contended that speech is no purely personal affair, but rather, a mirror of man's natural environment as mediated by social relations. The social character of thought, as of speech, is

[82] Quoted in Rafael Salkie, *The Chomsky Update* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) , 38, as quoted in Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 4).

[83] Chomsky, "Language & Thought," *Powers & Prospects*, 23.

[84] Allen, *Linguistics Wars*, 196-97, 215-17.

described on the back cover as "the father of modern linguistics." That title properly belongs to Ferdinand de Saussure.[43] But the accolade does reflect Chomsky's stature as of, say, 1972. It is no longer correct.[44] Chomsky's linguistic theory has come under severe attack from other linguists.[45] An entirely different theory, Cognitive Linguistics (CL), seems to be gradually displacing it. I am only somewhat interested in Cognitive Linguistics, although it does have the merit of being empirical and somewhat understandable, unlike Chomsky's abstract deductive theory. CL also assigns central importance to meaning, which Chomsky has always slighted. As far as I can tell, Chomsky has never acknowledged CL's existence.[46] It isn't just anarchists who get the silent treatment from Chomsky.

It isn't easy to summarize Chomskyist linguistics, and I won't try. The main point of interest, for my purposes, is that Chomsky believes that language originates in something biological, not cultural. It is not really learned, it is "acquired."[47] He admits that language cannot be acquired by very young children unless they are exposed to it at an early enough age, so as to "activate a system of innate ideas,"[48] just like those imprinted ducklings who, not knowing any better, followed around bags of rags. But this, he explains, is a process of

[43] Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1977), 83.

[44] David Lee, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

[45] *E.g*, Pieter A.M. Seuren, *Chomsky's Minimalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[46] In 2004, his discussion of the previous twenty years of developments in linguistics made no mention of cognitive linguistics. Noam Chomsky, *The Generative Enterprise Revisited* (Berlin, Germany & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 147-169.

[47] Chomsky, *Powers & Prospects*, 13.

[48] Noam Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 17.

maturation, not learning.[49] Experience merely pushes the button that turns on the language mechanism. Language isn't learned: it grows.[50]

He makes the point vividly: "So, if someone were to propose that a child undergoes puberty because of peer pressure . . . people would regard that as ridiculous. But it is no more ridiculous than the belief that the growth of language is the result of experience."[51] He overlooks at least one difference. For language acquisition, a social experience – exposure to speech – is necessary. But for puberty, exposure to pubescent people is not necessary. Not unless you think the reason why Peter Pan never grew up is because Never-Neverland is populated exclusively by children.

Chomsky often refers to language as a "faculty" like vision, and as something which is acquired in the same way.[52] But even this so-called faculty of vision is shaped by culture. In different cultures, for example, people perceive anywhere from two to eleven colors: "It is not, then, that color terms have their meanings imposed by the constraints of human and physical nature, as some have suggested; it is that they take on such constraints insofar as they are meaningful."[53] Among the Hanunóo in the Philippines, color terms refer, not to positions on

[49] "It seems now reasonably established" – to Chomsky's satisfaction – "that there is a special component of the human brain (call it 'the language faculty') that is specifically dedicated to language." It grows in early life by the process of language acquisition, "sometimes misleadingly called 'language learning,'; the process seems to bear little resemblance to what is called 'learning.'" Chomsky, *Powers & Prospects*, 13.

[50] Noam Chomsky, *The Architecture of Language*, ed. Nirmalandshu Mukerji, Bibudhendra Narayan Patnaik, & Rama Kant Agnihotri (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

[51] Ibid., 7.

[52] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 8-9; Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 4, 55-56.

[53] Marshall Sahlins, *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 66-67.

a fairy tale, but it's the only tale Chomsky has to tell about the origin of the supposed language faculty, or organ. One might, diffidently, suggest evolution, but that, standing alone, is only a label, a conclusion, not an explanation – and besides, "there isn't much in the way of evolutionary theory."[79] According to Piaget,

> this mutation particular to the human species would be biologically inexplicable; it is already very difficult to see why the randomness of mutations renders a human being able to "learn" an articulate language, and if in addition one had to attribute to it the innateness of a rational linguistic structure, then this structure would itself be subject to a random origin and would make of reason a collection of mere "working hypotheses," in the sense of [Konrad] Lorenz.[80]

It wasn't unfair of one of Chomsky's critics to call him a creationist. God said, Let there be speech! And there was speech. And God heard the speech. And He heard that it was good.[81]

"Introduction" to Chomsky, *Science of Language,* 2. Even if this happened to some single primate brain, or to more than one, it would explain nothing about language acquisition, because to acquire a language, one must be exposed to language. Because none of these primates was speaking a language already, the mutant primates would never hear language, and their language organs could never be activated.

[79] Chomsky, *Generative Enterprise Revisited,* 178. B.F. Skinner, says Chomsky, is correct that the logic of behaviorism is very similar to the logic of evolution – similarly wrong. Chomsky, "Chomsky's Intellectual Contributions," *Science of Language*, 76.

[80] Jean Piaget, "The Psychogenesis of Knowledge and Its Epistemological Significance," *Language and Learning*, 31.

[81] God had second thoughts, however, when men, after talking it over, began to build a stairway to heaven, the Tower of Babel. He then imposed a multiplicity of languages on them (72, to be precise) and scattered them all over the earth. *Genesis* 11: 1-9.

the spectrum, but to intensity.[54] Vision is natural, but perception is cultural.

According to Chomsky, linguistics is – not one of the social or cultural or (this is for Chomsky a dirty word) "behavioral" studies[55] – it is a branch of biology of which biologists are inexplicably unaware. Thus he often speaks of the language faculty as an "organ" like the heart or liver. He reasons that the mind is "more or less analogous to the body"; the body "is basically a complex of organs"; *ergo*, the language thing is a mental organ.[56] Analogies, however, are only "a condiment to argument . . . but they are not the argument itself."[57] The occult, self-standing, modular language organ or faculty is located in some unknown area of the brain.[58] To speak of language as an organ is, he admits, to speak metaphorically,[59] but he usually doesn't say so. The task of the "neurologist," he says, "is to discover the mechanisms involved in linguistic competence."[60] No biologist has identified or located the language organ. Neurobiologists will find the language organ on the same day that archaeologists find Noah's Ark.

[54] Harold C. Conklin, "Hanunóo Color Categories," *Southwest Journal of Anthropology* 11(4) (1955): 339-344, available online at www.anthro.ucsd.edu/~nj.haviland/

[55] Chomsky, "On the Intellectual Ailments of Some Scientists," *Science of Linguistics,* 66-67.

[56] Noam Chomsky & Sol Laporta, "An Interview with Noam Chomsky," *Linguistic Analysis* (4) (1978), 308.

[57] E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (new ed.; London: Merlin Press, 1995), 139-40.

[58] Chomsky & Laporta, "An Interview with Noam Chomsky," 308.

[59] Noam Chomsky, "Discussion," in *Language and Learning*: *The Debate Between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*, ed. Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 76.

[60] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 91. Chomsky doesn't know that a neurologist is a physician, not a research scientist.

state of unclarity with regard to meaning as we are with regard to intuition."[73] When, in the 1970's, some of his disciples tried to develop a transformational semantics, Chomsky repudiated them.[74] A nasty academic spat ensued.

But then language, for Chomsky, isn't essentially a means of communication. Instead, it's for the expression of Thought.[75] He states: "If semantics is meant by the tradition (say Peirce or Frege or somebody like that), that is, if semantics is the relation between sound and thing, it may not exist."[76] Chomsky is not really interested in language, except for using it to fathom the mysteries of the human mind.[77]

Where did this extraordinary "faculty" come from? Maybe from outer space – something like the brain-ray that zapped the apes at the beginning of the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Or as Chomsky puts it: "To tell a fairy tale about it, it is almost as if there was some higher primate wandering around a long time ago and some random mutation took place, maybe after some strange cosmic ray shower, and it reorganized the brain, implanting a language organ in an otherwise primate brain. That is a story, not to be taken literally."[78] It certainly is

[73] Noam Chomsky, *The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory* (New York & London: Plenum Press, 1975), 87.

[74] "It was in the 1970s that Chomsky put paid to the Generative Semantics movement, after which he propelled the generative enterprise toward ever greater levels of abstraction and empirical restrictiveness." Taylor, "Cognitive Linguistics," 569. Some of these linguists, such as George Lakoff, went on to invent cognitive linguistics. For an account of the fiercely fought controversy, see Randy Allen Harris, *The Linguistics Wars* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). This was an Oedipal revolt which the father repressed.

[75] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language,* 56-57.

[76] Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 73.

[77] Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, 46.

[78] Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 4. "For Chomsky," as one of his followers explains, "the science of language is an objective natural science that treats language as a biologically based system that evolved in a single individual and was genetically transmitted to progeny." James McGilvray,

As two of Chomsky's disciples admit, brain scientists almost completely ignore the findings of generative grammar.[61] But that's okay: according to Chomsky, in the brain sciences "there is not much in the way of general theoretical content, as far as I am aware. They are much more rudimentary than physics was in the 1920's. Who knows if they're even looking at the right things?"[62] Similarly, "physics deals with very simple things. Remember physics has an advantage that no other field has: If something gets too complicated, physics hands it over to somebody else."[63] In other words, universal grammar is *more scientific* than neurobiology, and *more complicated* than physics. Noam Chomsky to Stephen Hawking: "Eat my dust!"

Since the language faculty is the same for everyone, the diversity of languages is of no interest to linguistics. The differences among languages "are quite superficial"[64]: "all languages must be close to identical, largely fixed by the initial state."[65] In a very real sense, there is only one language.[66] And that makes Chomsky's job much easier. If he has demonstrated, to his own satisfaction, the validity of some transformational principle for one language, and there is no reason to believe that it is not learned, he assumes he has identified a universal property of all languages – so why bother to test it against other

[61] Naoki Fukui & Mihoko Zushe, "Introduction" to Chomsky, *Generative Enterprise Revisited* , 21.

[62] Chomsky, *Generative Enterprise Revisited*, 182-83. Earlier, in 1995, he put it this way: "Perhaps the contemporary brain sciences do not yet have the right way of looking at the brain and its function, . . . " Chomsky, "Language and Thought," 18. Of course, that must be it! The much harsher judgment of 2006 evidently reflects Chomsky's growing impatience and peevishness with sciences which perversely fail to confirm his theories.

[63] Chomsky, *Generative Enterprise Revisited*, 174; see also Chomsky, "Language & Nature," *Powers & Prospects*, 34-35.

[64] Chomsky, *Architecture of Language*, 15.

[65] Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, ed. Neil Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 122.

[66] Chomsky, "Language and Thought," *Powers & Prospects,* 27.

languages?[67] And that's a lucky break for Chomsky, because, as he says, "the reason I don't work on other languages is that I don't know any very well, it's as simple as that."[68]

For nearly everybody, language is understood to be fundamentally interpersonal (social and cultural): it is about *communication.* But not for Chomsky! He's too smart to acknowledge the obvious. Language is a social phenomenon made possible by a system of interpersonal conventions.[69] One would suppose that, whatever else linguistics might be about, inasmuch as it is about language, it's about meaning. That's what language is *for*, except for Chomsky. Indeed, he thinks language is poorly designed for communication, but, we manage to scrape by with it.[70] But Chomsky's theories are only about "transformational" grammar and syntax (grammar and syntax are not, as other linguists understand these words, the same thing, but for Chomsky they are[71]): they are not about semantics – meaning.[72] We are, according to Chomsky, "in pretty much the same

[67] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language,* 118. "There had to be at most slight differences among [languages] or else the acquisition problem is unsolvable." Chomsky, *Generative Enterprise Revisited,* 148. And since Chomsky has solved the language acquisition problem, it follows that languages differ, at most, slightly! Chomsky is much better at begging questions than answering them.

[68] Chomsky, *Generative Enterprise Revisited*, 107; see also Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, 118.

[69] Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure,* 49.

[70] Noam Chomsky, "Perfection and Design (Interview 20 January 2009)," *The Science of Language*: *Interviews with James McGilvray* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 50.

[71] John R. Taylor, "Cognitive Linguistics and Autonomous Linguistics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics,* ed. Dirk Geeraerts & Hubert Cuyckens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 572; George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 473, 476-77.

[72] John R. Searle, "Chomsky's Revolution in Linguistics," *N.Y. Rev. of Books*, June 29, 1972, reprinted in *On Noam Chomsky: Critical Essays*, ed. Gilbert Harmon (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 2-33, also available at www.chomsky.com.; Taylor, "Cognitive Linguistics," 573.

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2014

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fined by the tendencies which impel him [or her] to go beyond the *human condition*."[158] Testing the limits of human nature is the only way to discover what they are. Going too far is the only way to go.

Chomsky purports to be an optimist,[159] but he's a fatalist. He has to be. We know that human nature is not a "barrier" to anarchy, because anarchy has been realized, although you might not know that if you get your ethnography of human nature out of the Old Testament. My own opinion is a matter of record: "It's true that anarchists reject ideas of innate depravity or Original Sin. These are religious ideas which most people no longer believe in. But anarchists don't usually believe that human nature is essentially good either. They take people as they are. Human beings aren't 'essentially' anything."[160]

I can believe that human nature is already good enough for anarchy. I can also believe that in the practice of anarchy as everyday life, in living it, new vistas of collective adventure would open up. And I can even believe that the simultaneous process of revolutionary construction and destruction would commence the transformation, and prepare us for a new way of life. "Human nature" might be reduced to banal truths, such as that we will never fly by flapping our arms, while the human *natures* of social individuals – more social, and more individual than we have maybe ever been, even in the Paleolithic – will effloresce and flourish in all their pluralities. Human nature is our lowest common denominator, our, as Chomsky might say, our minimalist program. Let's de-program ourselves (our *selves*: each other, one another, all of us).

[158] *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie: Selections from the Works of Gaston Bachelard*, trans. Colette Gaudin (Indianapolis, IN & New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), 16.

[159] Noam Chomsky, "Optimism and Grounds for It," *Science of Language*, 118-123.

[160] Bob Black, *Anarchy 101* (Portland, OR: Eberhardt Press, [2011]); *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 60 (23)(2) (Fall/Winter 2005-2006), 65.

It's curious that human nature, which is, by definition, the same in all times and places, is in all times and places different from the way it is expressed in all other times and places. John Locke drew attention to this fact:

> If this law of nature were naturally impressed entire on the minds of men immediately at birth, how does it happen that all men who are in the possession of souls furnished with this law do not immediately agree upon this law to a man, without any hesitation, [and are] ready to obey it? When it comes to this law, men depart from one another in so many different directions; in one place one thing, in another something else, is declared to be a dictate of nature and right reason; and what is held to be virtuous among some is vicious among others. Some recognize a different law of nature, others none, all recognize that it is obscure.[161]

"That ideas of right and wrong differ," observes social psychologist Solomon Asch, "poses a problem for the theory of human nature."[162] That's an understatement. It would seem that Chomsky would have to say that the moral sense is, conveniently, yet another innate faculty. And so he does! Moral principles "must arise from some much smaller set of moral principles" – I know, that's circular – "that are a part of our fundamental nature and thought by some generative procedure . . . "[163] What, another generative procedure? An altruism al-

[161] Locke, *Questions Concerning Human Nature*, 141.

[162] Solomon E. Asch, *Social Psychology* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1967), 367.

[163] Chomsky, "Human Nature Again,"*Science of Language*, 109-110. Citing unpublished research by John Mikhail, Chomsky asserts that there is strong cross-cultural evidence of agreement on the moral principle that an innocent person should not be sacrificed to save the lives of others (for instance, by harvesting organs from a healthy person). This is called cherry-

self-managing a kindler, gentler version of the world we're so sick of?

As little as Chomsky knows about anarchism, he knows less about anarchy. I don't attach much value to novelty for its own sake. Novelty is only a small though necessary part of my idea of creativity. Television and advertising provide plenty of novelty, but only as appearance, as spectacle. Life looks different but remains the same. Indeed, life remains the same, among other reasons, precisely because it looks different.

I want a world with less fear, more safety and more security – yes, I'm getting older – and yet, I still want a world with surprises, indeed, with marvels. Chomsky reminds me of Immanuel Kant, whose daily routine was so rigid that the local joke was, that when he walked to work, the citizens of Königsberg could set their watches by him. But even Kant interrupted his routine twice: once when he received a copy of Rousseau's *Emile*, and once when he heard of the fall of the Bastille. Those are the sort of interruptions I would welcome in my own routine. But would anything interrupt Chomsky's routine? Nothing ever has. Nothing ever will.

produce sentences which have never been articulated before, considering what those sentences say, or try and fail to say, or just don't say. I'm more impressed with what's never been said but which I long to hear – the unspeakable! I really don't care how language is acquired, unless that has something to do with how it can be used in extraordinary, exciting, and potentially emancipatory ways. This is a connection, if there is one, which Chomsky has never made, and if the great linguist can't make the connection, who can?

Apparently language doesn't have this potential, not for Chomsky, and this doesn't concern him. His utopia is rationalized, humanized, institutionalized – and utterly ordinary. Creative language doesn't enter into creating the brave new world of fulfilling factory labor and, after punching out, workers forced into its very frequent, democratically conducted, broadly participatory, and very long meetings.

But there are many visionaries, such as Blake, Rimbaud, Kraus, Joyce, Artaud, who have strained against the limits of language, limits which Chomsky considers to be inherently enabling, constitutive, maybe liberating. Maybe he should have read some of them, even if it meant reading fewer newspaper clippings. Anarcho-syndicalism, high-tech industrialism, meaningful work, healthier food, representative democracy, human rights, moralism – why, all that's just common sense! I wonder if the word "poetry" appears in any of Chomsky's 70 books. Or is it 80?[256] Why should we risk "our lives, our fortunes, and other sacred honor" (this from the American Declaration of Independence) on the off-chance of

[256] "In Chomsky's philosophy, rationality and freedom take center stage, while culture, aesthetics and pleasure (e.g., religion, ritual and ritual objects, business and trade, music, art, poetry and sensuality) play no essential role in universal nature; for Chomsky, these things just get in the way of proper politics and have nothing to do with reason and language." Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 479.

gorithm? Generative generosity? Computational compassion? But this is just to confuse "is" and "ought," fact and value.

How is it possible (for instance) that hardly any people now consider wage-labor to be the moral equivalent of slave-labor? Because this self-evident truth "has been driven out of people's minds by massive propaganda and institutional structures"![164] So much for moral barriers, moral principles and our fundamental nature! They can be battered down even by such lowlifes as teachers, advertisers, and journalists (to whom I might add: parents, bosses and priests).

It is, as Thomas Kuhn puts it, a sobering truth that "all past beliefs about nature have sooner or later turned out to be false."[165] Beliefs about human nature, directly influenced as they are by religious and ideological considerations, are more than usually likely to be false.

According to historian Peter Marshall: "The main weakness of the argument that anarchism is somehow against 'human nature' is the fact that anarchists do not share a common view of human nature. Among the classic thinkers, we find Godwin's rational benevolence, Stirner's conscious egoism, Bakunin's destructive energy, and Kropotkin's calm altruism."[166] As anarchist Peter Gelderloo observes: "The great diversity of human behaviors that are considered normal in different societies calls

picking the evidence – if there really is any evidence. Infanticide is widely reported in primitive societies, and in some that were not so primitive, such as ancient Greece (remember the Oedipus legend)? Senicilicide (killing the old by neglect, abandonment, encouraged suicide, or outright homicide), has also been common in many societies. Leo W. Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1945), 225-239.

[164] Chomsky, "Optimism and Grounds for It," 119.

[165] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Trouble with the Historical Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Department of the History of Science, 1992), 14. "The history of ideas is a history of mistakes." Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures in Ideas* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 30.

[166] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* 642. I think the "main weakness" is rather the evidence of ethnography and history.

into question the very idea of human nature."[167] Chomsky is far away from mainstream anarchist opinion: "While most socialists and anarchists have argued that character is largely a product of environment, Chomsky has tried to formulate a biological concept of 'human nature' with its own innate and cognitive aspects."[168]

Although Chomsky cannot say what human nature is, he insists that there are *natural rights*, derived from human nature: "On the matter of common sense and freedom, there is a rich tradition that develops the idea that people have intrinsic rights. Accordingly [sic], any authority that infringes upon these rights is illegitimate. These are natural rights, rooted in human nature, which is part of the natural world, so that we should be able to learn about it by rational inquiry." (173). He believes something often assumed but never demonstrated – that, supposing that there exists natural law derived from human nature, "the corollary idea of natural rights" follows.[169] (173) Not for Jeremy Bentham, whose utilitarianism presupposed an invariant human nature, but who derided natural rights as "nonsense on stilts."[170] Natural law, according to John Locke, "should be distinguished from natural right [*jus naturale*]; for right [*jus*] consists in the same that we have a free use of something, but law [*lex*] is that which either

[167] Peter Gelderloos, *Anarchy Works* (n.p.: Ardent Press, 2010), 46.

[168] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 578.

[169] Paul G. Kauper, *The Higher Law and the Rights of Man in a Revolutionary Society* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1974), 1 (quoted) (Kauper was a legal scholar); Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 25 (Rothbard was an "anarcho-capitalist"); Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1944), 37 (Maritain was a Catholic theologian). Political philosophy, like politics, makes strange bedfellows. Anything that Kauper, Rothbard, Maritain and Chomsky agree on just *has* to be wrong.

[170] "Anarchical Fallacies," *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 2: 501

how Chomsky is alien to anarchism. An anarchist should be anarchistic. Chomsky isn't.

Anarchists denounce, as they should, the hackneyed equation of anarchy with chaos. But for anarchists who are anarchists in feeling as well as in thinking – and there is no real thinking without feeling – there is also, in their vision of anarchy, elements of indeterminacy, risk, adventure, inspiration, exaltation, play (*definitely* play), sex (*definitely* sex), and even love: elements of chaos. Proudhon wrote that liberty is the mother, not the daughter of order. But liberty had another child: chaos. Anarchy is the synthesis of order and chaos. But maybe our enemies and defamers have a point. Maybe anarchy, if it really has some special connection to creativity, as Chomsky suggests, has a soft spot in its heart – the "new world in our hearts" of which Durutti spoke – for chaos too.

Chomsky is quite sure (he always is) that his vague conception of human nature – when he isn't pretending not to have one – entails a conception of human beings as intrinsically creative beings. In his debate with Michel Foucault,[255] it became clear (and Chomsky admitted this) that when Chomsky speaks of creativity, he's not referring to artistic or scientific creativity, he's referring to the way that, after their astounding childhood achievement of language acquisition, people actually talk. Before age two, we are all Einsteins and da Vincis. By age six, we're not, except for the occasional Chomsky.

I am unimpressed by Chomsky's impoverished, minimalist notion of creativity. The more people talk, the less they seem to have to say. I don't read or hear very much which exhibits any creativity in language or thought, in any way that matters. I'm not impressed by the fact that anybody can and does

[255] Chomsky, "A Philosophy of Language," *Chomsky/Foucault Debate*, 133. Chomsky obviously didn't understand anything that Foucault had to say.

just aren't sure about, how the basic anarchist principle – society without the state – can be realized as an anarchist society: as anarchy. Chomsky is hiding his statism behind the skirts of an anarchist diversity of opinion which he doesn't even respect, and which, to a considerable extent, he is, by his own choice, ignorant of.

Conclusion

Insofar as my purpose has been to show that Noam Chomsky is not an anarchist, it is accomplished. Chomsky is not an anarchist – because he advocates a national syndicalist state; because he advocates a "transitional" post-revolutionary state; because he advocates obedience to state law (because it is the law); because he advocates voting; because he advocates a reformist political party; and because he advocates strengthening the existing national state. There is something on this list, usually several items on this list, to disqualify Chomsky as an anarchist by the standards of any anarchist, past or present. His program is, in one way or another – usually in one way *and* another, and another . . . – repugnant to all anarchists including communists, mutualists, neo-platformists, greens, individualists, syndicalists, autonomists, primitivists, insurrectionists, and post-leftists. He would be repudiated by every anarchist he has ever mentioned, including Bakunin, Kropotkin and Rocker. They were for revolution. Chomsky is against revolution.

It would seem that my work is done. What I've said about Chomsky is like what the loudmouth lawyer in the film *My Cousin Vinnie* told the jury in his opening statement: "Uh . . . everything that guy just said is bullshit. Thank you." Everything that Chomsky has said about anarchism is bullshit. So is a lot of what he has said about other things, such as technology, democracy, human nature and natural rights. Thank you. But I have trouble letting go. There's something more about

commands or forbids some action."[171] These were also Hobbes' definitions.[172]

Natural law philosophy goes back at least as far as Aristotle – and Christians claim they invented it[173] – but natural rights-talk, aside from a few isolated medieval anticipations, is scarcely older than the seventeenth century. Even as late as 1756, the jurist William Blackstone could discuss natural law without anywhere acknowledging natural rights.[174] The tradition, be it rich or poor, is recent.

However, we cannot derive natural rights from human nature without knowing what human nature is. Instead, we are compelled, says Chomsky, to make "an intuitive leap, to make a posit as to what is essential to human nature, and on this basis to derive, however inadequately, a conception of a legitimate social order." (173) For Chomsky the political philosopher as for Chomsky the linguist: when in doubt, "make a posit," make up something that suits you, something that predetermines your conclusion. For him, wishful thinking is a scientific methodology. But, as Jeremy Bentham argued, "reasons for wishing there were such things as rights, are not rights; – a reason for wishing that a certain right were established, is not that right – want is not supply – hunger is not bread. *Natural rights* is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, – nonsense on stilts."[175]

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[171] Locke, *Questions Concerning the Law of Nature*, 101.

[172] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), 189.

[173] "The consciousness of the rights of the person really has its origin in the conception of man and of natural law established by centuries of Christian philosophy." Maritain, *Rights of Man*, 45. Maritain was one of the principal draftsmen of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a very big bag of rags.

[174] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (London: at the Clarendon Press, 1756), 1: 38-45.

[175] "Anarchical Follies," 2: 501.

That "rich tradition" of natural rights is much less imposing than Chomsky supposes. But its short history is enough to exhibit, as the fundamental natural right, if there is even one natural right, it's the right of *property*, as it was upheld by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, James Madison, Ayn Rand and more notables than you can shake a stick at. As Locke stated: "'tis not without reason, that he [man] seeks out, and is willing to joyn in Society with others who are already united, or have a mind to unite for the mutual *Preservation* of their Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general Name, *Property*."[176] Slavery was widely considered, as Locke considered it, a property right. Czars and other monarchs, such as James I of England and Louis XIV of France, proclaimed the divine (and therefore natural) right of kings. Aristotle had maintained that some men are slaves by nature.[177] John Locke also maintained that slavery was a property right, thus a natural right.[178] Natural rights, like the language organ, like God, cannot actually be located anywhere:

> Since it has no anatomical locus (nobody really knows where your natural rights are like they know, for instance, where your pancreas is), [the concept of natural rights] involves an ability to deal with intangible things of this sort. They amount to matters that have no dimensions and I call them religious ideas – there is no challenging them. Someone who supports religious ideas involving the Trinity or Transubstantiation or a number of other religious doctrines is irrefutable.

[176] Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 395.
[177] Aristotle, *The Politics,* 37-39; Rocker, *Nationalism and Freedom*, 80.
[178] Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 433 & *passim.*

tinent — but instead, he rambled on about Tunisia and Egypt, and never answered the question.[253]

The next time he was asked about anarchy – specifically, if he considered anarchy to be "an ultra-radical version of democracy," he replied:

> First of all, nobody owns the concept of "anarchism." Anarchism has a very broad back [something he'd said in his 1970 introduction to Guërin (118)]. You can find all kinds of things in the anarchist movements. So the question of what an anarchist society can be is almost meaningless. Different people who associate themselves with rough anarchist tendencies have very different conceptions.
>
> But the most developed notions that anarchist activists and thinkers have had in mind are those for a highly organized society – highly structured, highly organized – but organized on the basis of free and voluntary participation.[254]

Did I overlook something, or did Chomsky, for the second time, avoid answering a question about the relationship of anarchism to Occupy, in an interview reprinted in a pamphlet by him *about* Occupy, and him claiming to be an anarchist, and claiming to find some value in the Occupy movement? Even the admirers who worship him, his interviewers here, couldn't get straight answers out of him to some simple questions about anarchism. Just because anarchists are diverse in their views – something which Chomsky regards with distaste – doesn't mean that the concept of anarchism is "almost meaningless." It might mean, and it does mean, that anarchists differ about, or

[253] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 58-59.
[254] Chomsky, *Occupy,* 64.

tics and investigative journalism, his mind turns to mush, but unfortunately, he blathers on.

Even if there was now a substantial revolutionary majority, Chomsky would not be part of it, because he believes that we are nowhere near the limits of what reform can carry out.[251] And he can always say that, somebody will always be able to say that, no matter what happens, so long as the electoral farce continues. If global warming melts the icecaps and drowns the coastal cities, a good government – with a lesbian Eskimo, perhaps, as President – can always enact a program to plant citrus groves in Alaska (farm subsidies again). Also another bailout . . . a *literal* bailout. Tax credits for buying buckets.

Occupy is the revealing, shameful sequel to *Chomsky on Anarchism*. Anarchists – usually veterans of the anti-globalization movement – played major roles in founding the Occupy movement, participating in it, and by influencing its decision-making procedures, and in its not making demands. That last part really bugged the journalists. Occupy, at its best, was always critical and never constructive. It was neither reformist nor revolutionary, although both reformists and revolutionaries were involved in it. Chomsky was probably highly regarded by some Occupy people. He delivered a speech at Occupy Boston which is reprinted in the pamphlet.[252] For him, Occupy is the greatest thing since sliced bread, or since the internal combustion engine, or since double-entry bookkeeping. So what does he have to say about anarchists and anarchism as related to Occupy?

Nothing! In one interview reprinted in the pamphlet, he was asked, point-blank, whether he considered Occupy to be an anarchist movement. This was his chance to say, "yes, finally!" or, more cautiously, "yes, but . . . " or say *something* per-

[251] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 60.

[252] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 23-51.

> You can't disprove it – but again there's no way of proving them either.[179]

Chomsky's darling, Freiherr Wilhelm von Humboldt, rigorously upheld the natural law doctrine. He throughout (he says) "proceeded strictly from principles of human nature," in accordance with the "immutable principles of our nature."[180] For him, as for Chomsky, it follows that there must be natural law as our infallible guide: "Natural law, when applied to the social life of men, defines the boundary lines [between freedom and the requirements of security] unmistakably."[181] But, as always, natural law, whose existence has never been demonstrated, in every formulation attempted by its believers, lacks the universality which natural law must have. The Baron, for instance, thought that "man is more disposed to dominion than freedom," and he also thought that "war seems to be one of the most salutary phenomena for the culture of human nature; and it is not without regret that I see it disappearing more and more from the scene."[182] Chomsky, viewing the battlefields of Vietnam and East Timor, would not agree. So natural law and natural rights are just plain common sense?

If we took a roll call of historical anarchists, there would be many who paid lip service to the idea of natural rights, but also some who rejected it. William Godwin, the first systematic philosopher of anarchism, rejected it.[183] So did Max Stirner. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first self-styled anarchist, held

[179] "Introducing Revisionism: An Interview with James J. Martin," *Reason*, Jan. 1976, 19.

[180] von Humboldt, *Limits of State Action*, 134-35, 75.

[181] von Humboldt, *Limits of State Action*, 90.

[182] von Humboldt, *Limits of State Action,* 135, 45. He would soon get plenty of war, as Napoleon repeatedly defeated Prussian armies and for awhile occupied Berlin.

[183] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, 1976), 91-96.

that "the law of nature as well as justice is equality . . ."[184] and thus apparently accepted the idea, insofar as his philosophy was based on the idea of justice. This isn't an issue to be resolved by counting votes. Indeed, for anarchists, no issue should be resolved by counting votes.

My own view is that what has been called "rights talk" is obscurantist for anarchists. It is only a roundabout way of expressing preferences which might more honestly and economically be expressed directly. This might be wishful thinking on my part, but I sense a gradually growing rejection of natural rights ideology among anarchists.[185] A good example of its erosion is Chomsky himself, as quoted above (173), saying that[186] we need a conception of immutable human nature, so that[187] we can deduce from it our natural rights, so that[188] we are justified in opposing illegitimate authority. Why not skip steps[189] and[190] and, for that matter,[191], and just oppose authority for all the good reasons anarchists have for opposing it?

What is "legitimate authority"? *We* don't need to justify to anybody our taking our lives into our own hands. Let *authority* justify itself, if it can, to our satisfaction. But it can't,

[184] *Selected Writings of P.-J. Proudhon*, ed. Stewart Edwards, trans. Elizabeth Fraser (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 51.

[185] See, *e.g., Anarchy 101,* ed. Dot Matrix (n.p.; Ardent Press, n.d.), 16-18, taken from texts at www.anarchy101.org.

[186] *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 135. Hereafter, page references to this book will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

[187] James McGilvray, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, and Politics* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1999), 1.

[188] Noam Chomsky, "Preface," *Powers & Prospects* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996), xi.

[189] *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 135. Hereafter, page references to this book will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.

[190] James McGilvray, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, and Politics* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1999), 1.

[191] Noam Chomsky, "Preface," *Powers & Prospects* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996), xi.

the workers one iota closer to their goal; it has even prevented them from protecting the rights they have won against the attacks of the reaction."[248] Nearly all contemporary anarchists agree, except that most do not belong to what remains of the industrial proletariat[249] and most do not think that anarchism has any special relation to the working class as to a privileged revolutionary agency. Certainly the workers don't think so. Anarchism is not just for the exploited. It is for all the dominated and for all the free spirits. All anarchists, unlike most Marxists, reject political parties. They are not following around *that* old bag of rags.

In his recent pamphlet *Occupy*, Chomsky has, perhaps because old men like us tend to get garrulous, finally made it explicit that he is against revolution: "To have a revolution – a meaningful one – you need a substantial majority of the population who recognize or believe that further reform is not possible within the institutional framework that exists. And there is nothing like that here, not even remotely."[250] So of course Chomsky would be indifferent to anarchists like Rudolf Rocker who object to voting on the ground that participation in government compromises anarchism, anarchism considered as the principled rejection of government, and anarchism considered as revolutionary.

I can't think of many "meaningful" revolutions – I'm not sure I can think of any revolutions – which have ever satisfied Chomsky's criterion. Not the English, American and French revolutions (any of the French revolutions) to mention just a few. "Meaningful revolution" is another warm, fuzzy, vacuous phrase, like "organic community." What would be an example of a meaningless revolution? Chomsky is thought to be a man with a razor sharp mind, but when he strays beyond linguis-

[248] Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 114.

[249] Nicholas Walter, "Introduction" to Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, xviii.

[250] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 59.

the state withers away. Indeed, Chomsky doesn't want to wait for the transition – it would be a very long wait – he wants to strengthen the state *now*. But if the state serves capitalism, it is absolutely crazy to say, as he does, that state and corporate power are "pretty much" inversely proportionate. (213) They are closer to being directly proportionate.

Chomsky explains: "My short-term goals are to defend and even strengthen elements of state authority which, though illegitimate in fundamental ways, are critically necessary right now [this was in 1996] to impede the dedicated efforts to 'roll back' the progress that has been achieved in extending democracy and human rights."[246] (193) "I mean," he says, "in my view, and that of a few others, the state is an illegitimate institution. But it does not follow from that that you should not support the state." (212) It doesn't? Just what would it take for Noam Chomsky *not* to support the state? We will never know, since he will always support the state.

"Rather unusually for an anarchist," writes Milan Rai, "Chomsky is favourably disposed to the idea of forming a mass political party in the United States."[247] Almost universally, anarchists of every tendency reject political parties and electoral politics. A representative statement, by (I can quote him too) anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker, is that "practical experience has shown that the participation of the workers in parliamentary activity cripples their power of resistance and dooms to futility their warfare against the existing system. Parliamentary participation has not brought

[246] "Progressive taxations, Social Security isn't [sic] anarchist, but it's a reflection of attitudes and understandings which, if they go a little bit further, do reflect anarchist commitments." (231) If you think (as Chomsky does) that when government does a little bit to help some people, that's almost an "anarchist commitment," you are a moron. You are not even smart enough to be a liberal. Even Elizabethan England had Poor Laws. Even Barry Pateman seems uneasy with Chomsky's position. (8)

[247] Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 111.

not even if it's democratic.[192] Let's cut the crap. Let's cultivate and coordinate our desires and, as far as that's in our power, act on them (anarchists call this "direct action" and "mutual aid"). As Emma Goldman wrote concerning the unimpeachable "Lie of Morality": "no other superstition is so detrimental to growth, so enervating and paralyzing to the minds and hearts of the people, as the superstition of morality."[193] When Professor McGilvray suggested that, for Chomsky, "there are at least some fairly recognizable facts about our moral nature," Chomsky replied: "Well, if someone doesn't at least accept that, then they [sic] should just have the decency to shut up and not say anything."[194] Thus, according to "the science of language," some people should shut up, including Max Stirner, Benjamin Tucker, Emma Goldman, Renzo Novatore and myself. Chomsky champions free speech even for Holocaust Revisionists, but not for the wrong kind of anarchists. Chomsky is a moralizer on the level of a newspaper editor or a Baptist minister.

The whole point of all this natural law/natural rights rigmarole is to derive "ought" from "is" – to derive natural rights (values), via natural law (some sort of confusion or mixture of values and facts), from human nature (supposedly a fact). But Chomsky derives "is" (human nature) from "ought" (morality): "The core part of anyone's point of view [I have previously quoted this] is some concept of human nature, however it may be remote from awareness or lack articulation. *At least, that is true of people who consider themselves moral agents, not monsters.*" (185 [emphasis added]) Human nature isn't universal after all. You don't have it if you don't believe in it. Chomsky has written the nonbelievers, the "monsters," such as Stirner, Tucker, Goldman, Novatore and myself, out of the human race.

[192] Black, *Debunking Democracy*.

[193] Emma Goldman, "Victims of Morality," in *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Random House, 1972), 127.

[194] Chomsky, "Chomsky on Human Nature and Understanding," 102.

In exactly the same way, the godly write out of the human race atheists such as Chomsky and myself, although atheists tend to act in accordance with Christian values (and obey the law) much more often than Christians do. For a genius, Chomsky says some really stupid things.

Chomsky's Marxism

After reading all his political books, one would be hard-pressed to identify Chomsky's politics, except maybe as consisting of some sort of generic, anti-American leftism. After reading *Chomsky on Anarchism*, one would still be uncertain. Chomsky has referred to himself, and has been referred to by his sympathizers, in various terms. For him, anarchism is voluntary socialism, libertarian socialism, the libertarian left, anarcho-syndicalism, and anarcho-communism "in the tradition of Bakunin and Kropotkin and others." (133) Chomsky might have trouble identifying any "others," except Rudolf Rocker, and he is unaware that Bakunin was not a communist.[195] He must not have read very much Bakunin. Anarchism "may be regarded as the libertarian wing of socialism." (123) But . . . does socialism *have* a libertarian wing? Not according to the socialists. According to a prominent socialist of the last century, H.G. Wells, anarchism is "the antithesis of Socialism."[196] Socialists still think so. For once, they got something right.

It is already apparent that Chomsky is ignorant or confused. For instance, anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism are not the same thing. Their proponents have been arguing with each other for more than a century. Kropotkin, the foremost communist anarchist, wrote a favorable Preface

[195] Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 164.

[196] H.G. Wells, *The Future in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 57 (originally published in 1906).

evil." And the "lesser evil" will continue to mean supporting capital and the nation-state.[239]

Ultimately, Chomsky did vote in 2004 – not for Kerry, as he was advising other people to do, but for Ralph Nadar, the Green Party candidate, who was even more authoritarian than the major party candidates. Nadar advocates making voting compulsory. Chomsky voted for Nadar, he explained, because Massachusetts was a safe state for Kerry, which should mean, according to Chomsky, that he had no reason to vote at all.[240] In other words, whether a state is safe for the Democrats or not, anarchists should vote. There is always a lesser evil, although, the lesser of two evils is still evil.[241] No state of affairs, or affairs of state, could ever keep Chomsky out of the voting booth.

In 2008, Chomsky endorsed the Democratic presidential candidate, Barack Obama, for voters in swing states.[242] By 2010, he was denouncing the Obama administration's subservience to big business and its perpetuation (in Iraq) and intensification (in Afghanistan) of the militarist foreign policy of his Republican predecessor.[243] So, naturally Chomsky endorsed Obama again in 2012.[244] He just doesn't get it.

Contrary to any rational understanding of anarchist principles, Chomsky believes that, as Peter Marshall described his position, "a degree of state intervention will be necessary during the transition from capitalist rule to direct democracy."[245] That is the "transitional" period for Marxism-Leninism before

[239] Jason McQuinn, "Part-Time Anarchists: Voting for Empire," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 58 (22)(2) (Fall/Winter 2004/2005), 2.

[240] *CounterPunch,* June 25, 2004, available at www.chomsky.com.

[241] Sy Leon with Diane Hunter, *None of the Above: The Lesser of Two Evils . . . Is Evil* (Santa Ana, CA: Fabian Publishing Company, 1976).

[242] www.huffingtonpost.com/

[243] Noam Chomsky, *Hopes and Prospects* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2010).

[244] digitaljournal.com/article/317710.

[245] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* 674.

times, most recently in 2004, that a candidate won the national popular vote but lost the electoral vote.

Chomsky lives in Massachusetts, which always votes Democratic, so he should never vote in national elections. But he does. He lied in saying that he only votes in local elections. In 2004, "people like Noam Chomsky and a horde of self-proclaimed Progressives have thrown their weight behind the [John] Kerry campaign, bleating in unison. 'Anybody but Bush.'"[238] Kerry was certain to win the vote in Massachusetts, not only because the state always votes for the Democrat, but also because Kerry himself was a popular Senator from Massachusetts who is still in office. Unfortunately, Chomsky was not the only anarchist to vote in that election. It's a source of shame.

Chomsky apparently argued, in 2004, that the election of Kerry over George W. Bush would alleviate some hardship and suffering. I doubt that it would have made much difference, but, even if it did, for anarchists, there are other considerations:

> It should be obvious that a position like this directly demeans the importance of any genuine radical activity (attempting to take back our lives) in favor of complicity or collaboration with capitalist and statist institutions (like political parties). Whenever just about *any* type of differences between candidates may potentially result in the amelioration of some social problem there will be people calling for the renunciation of social radicalism in favor of the candidate who has promised (or hinted that he or she might) do something about it. Those who succumb to this ransom logic will continually betray the radical commitments in order to fall in line supporting the "lesser

[238] Lawrence Jarach, "Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 58 (22)(2) (Fall/Winter 2004-2005), 3.

to an exposition of anarcho-syndicalism, but he couldn't help but observe about the highest coordinating body, "the 'Confederal Committee,' it borrows a great deal too much from the Government that it has just overthrown."[197] At the famous anarchist conference in Amsterdam in 1907, the communist Errico Malatesta and the syndicalist Pierre Monatte debated whether trade unions were both the means and ends to the revolution – as Monatte maintained – or whether trade unions, however beneficial to their workers under capitalism, are inherently reformist and particularistic, as Malatesta maintained.[198] Here my point is not to argue which version of anarchism is correct, but only to point out that anarchists have long been aware that these versions are very different. All moderately well-read anarchists know this, but Chomsky is not a moderately well-read anarchist, even aside from the fact that he's not an anarchist.

Chomsky has also espoused left Marxism: specifically, council communism: "One might argue [he is being coy: he believes in this] that some form of council communism is the natural form of revolutionary socialism in an industrial society." (127) George Woodcock accused Chomsky of "wishing to use anarchism to soften and clarify his own Marxism."[199] After quoting the council communist Anton Pannekoek, Chomsky tells us that "radical Marxism merges with anarchist currents."

[197] Peter Kropotkin, "Preface" to Emile Pataud & Emile Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth,* tr. Charlotte & Frederic Charles (London & Winchester, MA: Pluto Press, 1990), xxxv.

[198] George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH & New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 262. For Malatesta's views, see *Malatesta: Life & Ideas,* ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1977), 113-33; Errico Malatesta, *The Anarchist Revolution: Polemical Articles, 1924-1931,* ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1995), 23-34.

[199] Barry Pateman, "Introduction," *Chomsky on Anarchism,* 7; see also Milan Rai, *Chomsky's Politics* (London & New York: Verso, 1995), 94-95.

(126) Like so much that Chomsky says about history – if this is a statement about history – it is false. Despite what to outsiders like myself appears to be considerable similarity in their blueprints for a highly organized post-revolutionary industrial society, as it appears to Chomsky (146), left Marxists/council communists (they now call themselves "anti-state communists") and syndicalists have never "merged." They are today as mutually hostile as they have always been. "The consistent anarchist, then, should be a socialist, but a socialist of a particular sort" (125): yes: a gullible one. A Marxist.

His editor Dr. Barry Pateman complains that "Chomsky is regularly identified in the media as a prominent anarchist/libertarian communist/anarcho-syndicalist (pick as many as you like)." (97) If the media do that, they are only accurately reporting the facts for a change. Chomsky has willingly worn all these uniforms, and others. But in fact, the American media, at least, have blacklisted Chomsky ever since, in 1974, he imprudently published a book which was mildly critical of Israel.[200]

American journalists are generally even more ignorant than they are stupid. They've never even heard big, long words and phrases like "libertarian communist" and "anarcho-syndicalist." Probably the spell-checkers on their computers, as on mine, don't even recognize "syndicalism" as a word. If the journalists notice Chomsky at all – occasionally, some

[200] Noam Chomsky, *Peace in the Middle East?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Chomsky lived for some months on a kibbutz in Israel. He even believes that "the most dramatic example" of successful large-scale anarchism is the kibbutz (134), which, of course, is neither large-scale nor anarchist. His dissertation was about aspects of the Hebrew language. He is by no means anti-Israel, as his Zionist critics contend. After this book, Chomsky's political books were no longer published by mainstream publishers: "[his] tone and unyielding criticism long ago landed Chomsky in the Siberia of American discourse." *Business Week*, April 17, 2000. Chomsky was shut out of his major conduit into the liberal intelligentsia, the *New York Review of Books*, in 1972. Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 3.

Chomsky says that "representative democracy is limited to the political sphere and in no serious way encroaches on the economic sphere." (134) That's for sure! He identifies collusion between "huge and large unaccountable economic tyrannies" and "powerful states." (188) He tells us that the major parties in the American two-party system are just two wings of the business party, the capitalist party. (157) Again, he is absolutely right. It should follow, then, that – in the anarcho-syndicalist tradition – Chomsky should reject anarchist electoral participation. Since the state supports capitalism – or, at least, the state can do nothing in a "serious way" to control or regulate capitalism – it would seem to be obvious that anarchists and, for that matter, anti-state communists, should not vote or do anything to confer legitimacy on the democratic state. Most do not. But it will not surprise any reader who has stuck with me this far that this is not the conclusion which Chomsky draws from his own premises.

Chomsky is, in *Chomsky on Anarchism*, evasive or worse about discussing his own voting. He dodged a question about whether he votes for the Democratic Party. (212-13) He suggests that anarchists should vote in "swing states." This can only refer to American Presidential elections, where, under the idiotic system known as the Electoral College, to be elected, a candidate must receive the votes of a majority of "electors," which does not mean voters. The plurality winner in each state gets all the votes of its electors, and the candidate who collects an absolute majority of electoral votes (270 votes), wins the election. We have 50 states plus the District of Columbia casting electoral votes. In at least 40 of these states, usually more, it is certain that either the Republican or the Democratic presidential candidate will win. It is common knowledge, for example, that Massachusetts will always vote for the Democrat and Arizona will always vote for the Republican. They are "safe states." Therefore the advertising and campaigning are concentrated on the 6-10 swing states. It has happened a number of

chist to know that, but Chomsky doesn't know that. There's a lot about real life that Noam Chomsky doesn't know.

The majority of American adults don't vote, which makes them better anarchists than Chomsky is. He says: "On local issues I almost always vote. Usually the local elections make some kind of difference, beyond that it is . . ." (241) – the sentence trails off, since it could hardly be completed without saying something foolish. United States government is decentralized in theory, but centralized in practice. Local elections make much less difference than state elections, which is why voter turnout is much lower there. State elections make much less difference than national elections, which is why voter turnout is lower there too. But it's low at all levels, and what they all have in common is that nobody's individual vote ever determines the outcome. To vote is only a way of pledging allegiance to the democratic state. That's why anarchists who understand anarchism don't vote. Here is an explanation, reflecting more thought about voting than Chomsky has ever devoted to it, by contemporary anarchists:

> An anarchist has a larger view of the world than its political systems and politicians allow for. We must keep ahold of that perspective and it is not a simple task; we are constantly bombarded with the simplistic messages and worldviews conveyed by commercialism and politics. To effectively vote, one must engage with the dynamics and arguments that are being voted upon and this will necessarily narrow one's perspective. It is not that the act of voting in a vacuum is bad or destructive, in fact it just doesn't matter. But engaging in the liberal/conservative banter renders one relatively thoughtless.[237]

[237] *Anarchy 101*, 124.

witch-hunting right-wing columnist or radio talk-show demagogue mentions him – they don't use these fancy words. They just identify him as an anti-American pro-Communist. Which is what he is. There will always be someone around to remind them that in the 1970's, Chomsky defended the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia against allegations that they were exterminating vast strata of their own population.[201] Which is what they were doing, as by now, all the world knows. Chomsky and his fans deplore his mass media blackout, which is ironic – not to say hypocritical – because Chomsky "has done his best to marginalize anarchist perspectives."[202] Sometimes the wooden shoe is on the other foot.

In his introduction to Guèrin's book on anarchism, Chomsky identifies what he considers to be valuable in it:

> Daniel Guèrin has undertaken what he has described as a "process of rehabilitation" of Marxism. He argues, convincingly I believe, that "the constructive ideas of anarchism retain their validity, that they may, when re-examined and sifted, assist contemporary socialist thought to undertake a new departure . . . [and] contribute to enriching Marxism." From the "broad back" of anarchism he has selected for more intensive scrutiny those ideas and actions that can be described as libertarian socialist. This is natural and proper. (128)

For Chomsky it is natural and proper that the contemporary significance of anarchism is, not to assert and expound anarchism, but to enrich and rehabilitate Marxism. Only a Marxist who is not an anarchist, except in his otherwise underde-

[201] Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1979), vol. 2.

[202] Zerzan, "Who Is Chomsky?," 141.

veloped imagination, could be so condescending, and so insolent. Everything that anarchists have thought and said and done, what many of them have gone to prison for, or died for – is good for nothing but *rehabilitating* and *enriching* Marxism, "when re-examined and sifted." We should feel honored to serve. However – to put it mildly: "The relationship between anarchists and Marxists has never been happy."[203]

We anarchists are not around to save Marxism from the errors, inadequacies and inconsistencies in its ideology, which we have been pointing out for almost 150 years. We were right all along. We are not here to conceal, but rather to reveal, the shameful history of Marxist movements and Marxist states. We are not here to apply anarchist cosmetics (black and red or even green) to give socialism a human face. We have not forgotten that in times of crisis, we have supported the Marxists, but they have never, ever supported us. We have not forgotten the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Revolution, and what we did for them there, and what they did to us there. In this new century, as revolutionaries, we are the only game in town. We make things happen. We energize the anti-globalization movement. We inspired and we participate in the Occupy movement.[204] We do a lot of things. We don't need Marxists. We don't *want* Marxists. It follows that we don't need Chomsky, and we don't want Chomsky. "Sift" *that*!

Chomsky desires – what we already have, in spades – a "highly organized society." (181) Anarchism is, according to Chomsky, "the rational mode of organization for an advanced industrial society." (136) Chomsky endorses (62) the position which Bertrand Russell once held, that

> Socialism will be achieved only insofar as all social institutions, in particular the central in-

[203] Kinnah, *Anarchism*, 27.

[204] *Occupy Everything: Anarchists in the Occupy Movement, 2009-2011*, ed. Aragorn! ([Berkeley, CA]: LBC Books, 2012).

norms, he means the laws of the state. You don't even have to be an anarchist to notice that some laws don't codify community norms, and that some community norms are actually illegal. He brags that he stops at red lights even at 3:00 A.M. when no pedestrians or other motorists are around. (239) Under the circumstances, running a red light is a victimless crime. But for Chomsky, who respects the law, there can be no such thing as a victimless crime.

He isn't kidding about the red light, as shown by an anecdote recounted by one of his fans, Jay Parini. They were walking down a road and came to a crossing:

> the light was red, but – as is so often the case in Vermont – there was no traffic. I began, blithely, to cross the intersection, but realized suddenly that Chomsky had refused to work against the light. Mildly embarrassed, I went back to wait with him at the curb until the light turned green. It struck me, later, that this was not an insignificant gesture on his part. He is a man profoundly committed to law, to order – to the notion of a world in which human freedom operates within a context of rationally agreed-upon limits.[236]

Surely this was another victimless crime.

As Chomsky now does, I once lived in a Boston suburb, although his (Lexington) is for rich people whereas mine (Watertown) was working class. The community norm in the Boston area is that, when the traffic light changes from green to red, the first four or five cars run the red light. I don't approve of this custom, but it does exist. Community norms are often different from the laws of the state. You don't even have to be an anar-

[236] Jay Parini, "Noam Is an Island," *Mother Jones*, Oct. 1988, 41, quoted in Rai, *Chomsky's Politics*, 162.

Parsons, one of the Haymarket martyrs, put it: "Whether government consists of one over a million or a million over one, an anarchist is opposed to the rule of majority as well as minority."[234] Something not so obvious in the past, but obvious now, is that it's impossible to be both anti-capitalist and pro-democratic.[235] And yet the noisiest anarcho-leftists, such as the ones published by AK Press and PM Press, are democrats.

Rudolf Rocker, who is one of the very few anarchists whom Chomsky has read, and whom he has described as the last serious thinker, thought that anarchism was the synthesis of liberalism and socialism. But Rocker explicitly did *not* consider democracy to be any part of this synthesis. He considered democracy to be inherently statist and anti-socialist and anti-liberal. Rocker was right. Chomsky is wrong. Chomsky is always wrong.

Noam Chomsky, Model Citizen

Professor Chomsky asserts: "If you act in violation of community norms, you have to have pretty strong reasons." (239) If you are right and the community is wrong, isn't that a pretty strong reason? What better reason could there possibly be? But the real issue here is Chomsky's assumption that state law embodies community norms. He makes clear that by community

in *The Collected Works of Lysander Spooner* (Weston, PA: M & S Press, 1971), 2: 206-07, 218-19; Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Walden & Civil Disobedience* (New York: Signet Books, 1963), 223; Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, 75, 97; Leo Tolstoy, *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia, PA & Santa Cruz, CA: New Society Publishers, 1987), 300; Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy* (London: Freedom Press, 1974), 14; Emma Goldman, *Red Emma Speaks*, 36-37; Albert Parsons, quoted in *Quotations from the Anarchists*, ed. Paul Berman (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 42; see Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, ch. 17, & Black, *Debunking Democracy*.

[234] "Albert Parsons on Anarchy," in *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis* (Chicago, IL: Mrs. A.R. Parsons, Publisher, 1887), 94.

[235] Alain Badiou, "Discussion," *Philosophy in the Present*, 88-90.

> dustrial, commercial, and financial institutions of a modern society, are placed under democratic industrial control in a federal industrial republic of the sort that Russell and others have envisaged, with actively functioning workers' councils and other self- governing units in which each citizen, in Thomas Jefferson's words, will be "a direct participator in the government of affairs." (61)[205]

A rational anarchist society, then, will include "central industrial, commercial, and financial institutions" – the central institutions of late capitalism: the engines of globalization. Anarchists call for decentralization, not central institutions. What does the word "industrial" mean in phrases like "democratic industrial control" and "federal industrial republic"? Is this councilist or syndicalist state to be controlled by industrial workers, who are, not only but a fraction of the population in countries such as the United States, they are only a minority of the working class even in those countries, as Chomsky has belatedly noticed?[206] This is the dictatorship of the proletariat if anything is. Another word for it is oligarchy. It isn't obviously superior to, say, the dictatorship of college professors, or the dictatorship of housewives. Fortunately, neither industrial workers, nor housewives – I'm not so sure about college professors – aspire to state power.

Robert Michels, at a time (before the First World War) when European socialism, syndicalism, and even anarchism were seen as serious political forces – and at a time when he was a socialist himself – studied the German Social Democratic Party, the largest such party in the world. It was a Marxist party programmatically committed to democracy and

[205] Taken from Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, 61. Quoting Thomas Jefferson in this context is ludicrous.

[206] Noam Chomsky, *Occupy* (Brooklyn, NY: Zuccotti Park Press, 2012), 26.

socialism. But in *Political Parties,* Michels found that it was thoroughly oligarchic. An elite of politicians and party bureaucrats made all the decisions in the name of the vast majority of passive party members. This is a book which every anarchist should read, as its thesis has relevance, as Michels pointed out, to the anarchists too, whenever they leave the realm of pure thought and "unite to form political associations aiming at any sort of political activity."[207] Similarly, syndicalism believes that "it has discovered the antidote to oligarchy. But we have to ask whether the antidote to the oligarchical tendencies of organization can possibly be found in a method which is itself rooted in the principle of representation? Does it not rather seem that this very principle is in indissoluble contradiction with the anti-democratic protestations of syndicalism?"[208]

Notoriously, syndicalism is based upon representation and hierarchy. Even one of Chomsky's academic supporters admits that. It's a form of representative government.[209] And now even Chomsky admits it.[210] The essence of politics is representation.[211] In an "advanced industrial society," because of its extreme division of labor and high degree of technical specialization, many major decisions affecting ordinary life cannot be made in face to face neighborhood associations or in workers' councils. Since syndicalists don't challenge industrial society as such – they only want a change of ownership – they have to accept the specialization which it entails, and the supra-local scale at which many critical decisions would have to continue to be made. That means that, unless they want

[207] Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden & Cedar Paul (New York: The Free Press & London: Collier Macmillan Limited, 1962), 327-28.

[208] Ibid., 318.

[209] MacGilvray, *Chomsky,* 193.

[210] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 65.

[211] Jacques Camatte & Gianni Collu, "On Organization," in Jacques Camatte, *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays,* ed. Alex Trotter (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1995), 20.

democracy). I am not aware that in his many decades as a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that Noam Chomsky has ever advocated campus democracy. Democracy in factories, democracy in East Timor, sure, but not democracy at MIT! NIMBY – Not In My Back Yard!

Whatever democracy might theoretically mean, in the real world, "democracy is a euphemism for capitalism. . . . Every time an anarchist says, 'I believe in democracy,' here is a little fairy somewhere that falls down dead":

> When anarchists declare themselves to be democrats for respectability's sake, so they can get on better at university research departments, so they can tap into a shared and honourable left tradition, so they can participate in the global forum, when they crown their decomposition by saying, "we're democrats true, we're true democrats, participatory democrats," they ought not to be surprised at how enthusiastic democracy is to return the compliment, and of course extract its price.[232]

All anarchists should get into their heads, those of them who have some room for it there, the truth that democracy isn't anarchy at all, it's the final stage of statism. It's the last wall of the castle. It's the curtain with the man still behind it.

Admittedly, even some of the classical anarchists thought that there was something democratic about anarchism. On this point, they were wrong. Many other anarchists have agreed with George Woodcock (and I am one of them).[233] As Albert

[232] Monsieur Dupont, "Democracy," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 60 (23)(2) (Fall-Winter, 2005-06), 39, 41.

[233] Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice,* 216 ; P.-J. Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Beverley Robinson (London: Freedom Books, 1923); "An Essay on the Trial by Jury,"

The Democratic Mirage

Noam Chomsky is an ardent believer in democracy, which, once again, proves that he is a statist, not an anarchist. Democracy is a form of government. Anarchy is society without government. As George Woodcock – an anarchist critic of Chomsky for not being an anarchist, as we have seen – has written: "No conception of anarchism is further from the truth than that which regards it as an extreme form of democracy."[230] This is true by definition, but that has not stopped some anarchists from trying to make anarchism popular by identifying it with democracy, the regnant political dogma of the 20th century. Whereas what we need to do is, as the Situationists put it, to leave the 20th century. I don't think that democracy is popular. It's just fashionable, and probably not even fashionable, except among some professors and students.[231] There is nothing democratic about the governance of colleges and universities, which is where the democratic theorists nest. There are no demands by anyone to democratize them, as there were in the 1960's and early 1970's (I was one of the students advocating campus

found in the government and administration of these unions, it is not possible to say that any one of them constitutes a democratic union." Alice H. Cook, *Union Democracy: An Analysis of Four Large Local Unions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, 1963). As early as 1949, a leftist militant complained that "labor's democracy today, like that in society generally, is not a meaningful one. It is a manipulative type of democracy." Sidney Lens, *The Crisis of American Labor* (New York: Sagamore Press, 1949), 293-94. Lens also mentions a fundamentally important fact – more true than ever, but not acknowledged by Chomsky – "Ours is the only labor movement that endorses the free-enterprise system." Ibid., 19.

[230] George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH & New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 33. In agreement with Woodcock is David Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1995), q/v "Democracy."

[231] Black, *Debunking Democracy*, 1.

to invest all power openly and directly in technocrats, they must assign some power to representatives at a higher level of decision-making. And that's hierarchy.

Some contemporary syndicalists might say that this is in some respects an obsolete critique. They may not necessarily be indifferent to environmental concerns, as Chomsky is,[212] and (they may say) they're not necessarily committed to accepting all of industrial technology in its current form. But – here – I am not criticizing contemporary syndicalism. I am criticizing Noam Chomsky. According to one of his editors, syndicalism considers Marxist economics to be "essentially correct."[213] Chomsky hasn't expressed any disagreement.

In remarking that "the principle of equality before the law can only be partially realized in capitalist democracy" (149), Chomsky implies that equality before the law is a fine thing, which could and should be fully realized under democratic socialism. But this implies that he is a statist. There is no law without a state.[214] The idea that anarchy, as the abolition of the state, is necessarily also the abolition of law, has not crossed his brilliant mind, although he would have encountered the idea in his anarchist readings, as meager as they are.

Chomsky's syndicalism is based on a centralized national state:

> It seems to me that anarchist or, for that matter, left Marxist structures, based on systems of workers' councils and federations, provide exactly the set of levels of decision-making at which decisions can be made about a national plan. Similarly, State socialist societies also provide a level of decision making – say the nation [!] – in which national

[212] Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 676.

[213] Carlos P. Otero, "Introduction to Chomsky's Social Theory," in Chomsky, *Radical Priorities* (1st ed.), 35.

[214] Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, ch. 10.

> plans can be produced. There's no difference in that respect. (146)

Say what? Anarchism is internationalist, but Chomsky is a nationalist. In a sense, this is not surprising. He has always supported every Third World national liberation movement that has come along. That these movements, when they come to power, generally set up corrupt authoritarian regimes, and never carry out social revolutions, doesn't faze him. If a country like East Timor – he was championing its national liberation movement at the same time that he was defending the Khmer Rouge – is, as an independent nation, not a society of free producers, just another crummy little formally independent Third World state, the only possible explanation is Western malice.[215] Chomsky supports all nationalisms – except American nationalism. Zionists have called Chomsky a self-hating Jew, unjustly I believe – he's not anti-Semitic, just anti-semantic – but he is certainly a self-hating American.

Are there to be any international – or, if you prefer another word, worldwide – political institutions? Are six billion people

[215] Third World nationalist regimes "have not led to a society of free producers," but only because of "the objective conditions that Third World revolutions must endure, conditions in part imposed by Western malice." (64-65). He said exactly the same thing in 1970. Chomsky, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, 65. These excuses wear thin after 40 or 50 years, as in Algeria (which even toyed with "autogestion" – self-management – at first). No national liberation movements, not even before they assumed power, even pretended to aspire to a society of free producers. East Timor has resolved a dispute with Indonesia and Australia about how to divide up offshore oil rights: East Timor gets 50%. East Timor is not currently the victim of Western malice: it is dependent on Western food aid. Neither poverty nor Western malice explains why the national liberation movements of such countries as Zimbabwe and Vietnam, in power, established authoritarian regimes. They have not even set up political democracies, much less societies of free producers. Chomsky is living in a fantasy world.

Chomsky on trade-unions: "Unions have been enemies of workers, but they are also probably the most democratic form of organization that exists in our highly undemocratic society." (219) As everyone who has interested himself in this question knows, or who has ever been a member of an American union (as I have), all American unions are undemocratic. I previously quoted Robert Michels. In his introduction to Michels' book *Political Parties,* Seymour Martin Lipset writes:

> Michels' analysis is of particular pertinence in the study of trade union government. With few exceptions such analyses are concerned with the absence of an active democratic political life. Union after union, in America and in other countries, are [sic] revealed as being governed by one-party oligarchies consisting of a political apparatus, able to maintain itself in power indefinitely, and to recruit its own successors through cooptation.[226]

Lipset elsewhere states again that almost all American unions "are characterized by a one-party oligarchy."[227] His conclusion is that "the functional requirements for democracy cannot be met most of the time in most unions and other voluntary groups."[228] And specifically, following Michels, he states: "Even anarchist and labor groups, whom we might expect to be highly sensitive to the dangers of oligarchy, have succumbed to the blight."[229]

[226] Seymour Martin Lipset, Introduction to Michels, *Political Parties*, 23-24.

[227] Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin A. Trow, & James S. Coleman, *Union Democracy* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1956), 3.

[228] Ibid., 403.

[229] Ibid., 8. Another social scientist, having investigated four large unions at the local level (which would be, presumably, the most democratic level), concluded that, "for all the commendable and imaginative elements

For a genius, Chomsky can be pretty clueless. He suggests that opportunities for productive and creative work "are enormously enhanced by industrialization." (144) Even Adam Smith recognized that the extension and intensification of the division of labor would stultify and stupefy the workers – the vast majority of the population. All the evidence confirms that Smith, not Chomsky, is right. Industrialization annihilated the craft skills of pre-industrial society, and also the conditions of worker solidarity in which they had often been practiced. It sometimes gave rise to some new types of skilled work, but it went on to de-skill industrial work whenever possible, and it was usually possible. The world has endured over 200 years of industrialization, which has never enhanced, much less enormously enhanced, opportunities for creative work, it has only increased opportunities for productive work – *i.e.,* just plain work, since the bosses don't pay anyone to do *un*productive work, except themselves. Too bad Chomsky doesn't read some of those anarchist periodicals he grudgingly subscribes to.

Chomsky seems to know more about the peasantry of East Timor than he knows about the working class of the United States or Europe; although, maybe he doesn't know that much about East Timorese peasants either. For American leftists like him, the farther away the revolting peasants are, the better. FRETILIN in East Timor, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and the Vietcong in Vietnam, have all been at the exact maximum distance – on the opposite side of the world – 12,000 miles away from the United States. For American academics, intellectuals and college students to support them – with words only, of course – is easy enough. We don't have any peasant revolutionaries here, because we don't have any peasants in the United States, only commercial farmers and agri-businesses whose prosperity largely depends on Federal government farm subsidies. This is the Federal government which Chomsky wants strengthened.

to elect the directors of the International Monetary Fund?[216] According to Chomsky, workers' self-management on the international level – hell, why not? – "It doesn't mean that it doesn't have representatives" – we don't have to have a six billion Occupy-style general assembly – "it can have, but they should be recallable and under the influence and control of participants."[217] Participants in *what*: the global economy? Libertarian socialism might, of course, resolve this particular problem by abolishing money. But Chomsky has never advocated that, and, by endorsing financial institutions, he is endorsing money, since the only thing financial institutions do is move money around.

Much might be said, and needs to be said, about Chomsky's foreign policy views, but not here. All I want to draw attention to here is Chomsky's notion of a "national plan." He accepts the nation-state as the highest unit of economic and therefore of social organization. The "national" part establishes his statism right there. (Of course, if he envisages, as did H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell, an overarching world-state, so much the worse.) But, the "plan" part is also anti-anarchist. The neo-classical economists are right about one thing: a planned economy – also known as a command economy – is wasteful and inefficient. Things never go according to plan. And it should be obvious that, regardless how much input a plan gets from the bottom up, the Plan adopted will come from the top down, on an or-else basis. And anarchists don't like to be commanded, or even planned. If, at the grass roots, they depart from the Plan, will they be arrested by the Plan Police or the Police Collective?

Where is this Plan to come from? A national economic plan isn't something that just anybody can draw up, not even if she

[216] Slavoj Žižek, "Discussion," in Alain Badiou & Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, ed. Peter Engelmann, trans. Peter Thomas & Alberto Toscano (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 97.

[217] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 65.

is a class-conscious worker who has been taking night courses in business administration. Only economic experts can draw up a Plan. There are no economists today who are known to be anarchists, or even sympathetic to anarchism. After the Revolution, these experts will have to be recruited from the Revolution's enemies in the economics departments, just as the Bolsheviks recruited their secret police from the Czarist secret police. They respected expertise. The Bolsheviks were, in their own way, as they saw it, also experts: that was the Leninist idea, the vanguard party. They were experts in politics, regarded as just another profession for experts. That's the advanced industrial model of society. The Politburo was the original plan factory.

Chomsky's idea, which has no basis in anarchism – not even in anarcho-syndicalism, its most archaic and degraded version – is that economic planning is just another industry. Economic planners are just workers like everybody else: regular Joes, except they don't have to get dirt under their fingernails. Some workers produce food, some workers produce steel, and some workers produce plans: "It may be that governance is itself on a par with, say, steel production," and if it is, it too could be "organized industrially, as simply one of the branches of industry, with their own workers' councils and their own self-governance and their own participation in broader assemblies." (138) The only place I've come across this notion of a "plan factory" is in the early (1950's) writings of the late Cornelius Castoriadis, a former Trotskyist, at the time a left Marxist/council communist.[218] Chomsky follows Castori-

[218] Paul Cardan [Cornelius Castoriadis], *Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* (London: Solidarity Group, 1972), ch. 7 (originally published in 1957), available online at www.marxists.org/archive/castoriadis/1972/workers-councils. It is also published, as "On the Content of Socialism, II," in Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings*, trans. & ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 2: 90-154; concerning the plan factory, see ibid., 119-123.

have not been devoted to examining the question or to overcoming the onerous and self-destructive character of the necessary work of society." (141) I'd like Chomsky to say just what he means by work, what he means by "onerous," and why he thinks some of it just has to be done. He could learn a lot about these things if he actually read those anarchist publications he claims to subscribe to, "more out of duty than anything else."

An anarchist of even modest acquirements would contest the very concept of the standard of living. Anarchy would not raise, or lower, the standard of living, which is a quantitative concept, and not a very well thought- out concept at that, and which is meaningless except with reference to the concepts of bourgeois political economy. Anarchy would be a qualitative transformation of society, a new way of life. If the current standard of living cannot be maintained without work – which is certainly true – that's not an argument against work, it's an argument against the current standard of living.

During an interview with his yes-man Barry Pateman, he (Chomsky himself) asked the rhetorical question: "What are you going to do with people who *don't want to work* or people with criminal tendencies or *who don't want to go to meetings*?" (221 [emphasis added]). I suppose we expected to be shocked by these worst-case scenarios, which are, for me, more like best-case scenarios. For Chomsky, slackers, criminals, and people who are indifferent to politics, are all deviant social undesirables. He doesn't answer his own question. He doesn't say what should be done with them – with *me*. But just asking the question is ominous, as it implies that Chomsky doesn't understand why some people don't want to work, or why some people commit crimes, or even why some people don't like to go to stupid political meetings. Will the solution be forced labor, criminal punishment (or, even worse, "rehabilitation"), and compulsory attendance at meetings? Where do I have to go and what do I have to do to get my ration card stamped? Whose grapes do I have to peel? Whom do I have to blow?

should be directly responsible to the organic community in which they live." (137) In other words, the anarcho-syndicalist regime is a "government," a state. And so Chomsky is not an anarchist. Just what "organic community" could possibly refer to, in a high-tech society with a government, he does not say. It's just a meaningless feel-good phrase, like "organic food."

Peter Jay was quick to realize that Chomsky wanted to have it both ways. Chomsky wants all the conveniences and luxuries that he gets from industrial capitalism – he is in a very high income bracket (229) – but without industrial capitalism. An anarchist revolution would put an end to industrial capitalism. Chomsky wants to maintain, after the Revolution, the prevailing (as he supposes) high standard of living and extend it to everybody in the world. He may not be sufficiently aware that, even in the United States, the standard of living of very few people is as high as his is. Few Americans feel economically secure, not even many who would be considered rich in most other countries. Most jet-setters and globe-trotters, unlike Chomsky, have to pay their own airfare. In the Third World, as he knows, the standard of living is much, much lower. He shows no awareness of how much exploitation of resources, and of workers, it takes to sustain his own high standard of living, which could never possibly be extended to the whole world. We would use up everything useable on this planet long before that millennium arrived. And Chomsky would probably not dismiss the problem in the casual way that the science fiction writer Robert Heinlein did: "We've used up this planet, let's get another one."

Jay asked him how, under anarchism, it would be possible "to sustain anything like the standard of living which people demand and are used to." Chomsky's reply: "Well, there's a certain amount of work which just has to be done" – why? what work? done by whom? – "Well, there's a certain amount of work which just has to be done if we're to maintain that standard of living. It's an open question how onerous that work has to be. Let's recall that science and technology and intellect

adis so closely that Castoriadis almost has to be his source, and I wonder why Chomsky doesn't say so.

Let Chomsky again explain himself in his own words:

> Oh yes, let's take expertise with regard to economic planning, because certainly in any complex industrial society there should be a group of technicians whose task is to produce plans, and to lay out the consequences of decisions, to explain to the people who have to make the decisions that if you decide this, you're like to get this consequence, because that's what your programming model shows, and so on. But the point is that those planning systems are themselves industries, and they will have their workers' councils and they will be part of the whole council system, and the distinction is that these planning systems do not make decisions. They produce plans in exactly the same way that automakers make autos.

All it takes is "an informed and educated working class. But that's precisely what we are capable of achieving in advanced industrial societies." (146-47)

Well, we already have some advanced industrial societies, but where is the informed and educated working class? And where is there the slightest trace of worker interest in workers' councils? Workers' councils just mean that workers still have to keep doing their jobs, and just when they would like to go home and forget about work, they have to go to meetings.[219]

Probably nothing better shows Chomsky's remoteness from, and ignorance of, the work of the working class than his confident assertion that making national economic plans

[219] Michael Walzer, "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," *Dissent* 15(3) (May 1968), reprinted in *Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 118-128.

is just like making automobiles. I was born in Detroit. My grandfather was an auto worker. What expert credentials do these facts confer upon me? None! I just thought I'd mention them. Does Chomsky think that national economic plans can be constructed on an assembly line? Does he know anything about how automobiles are made? Or that factory workers have nothing to say about how automobiles are made? Or that, because of a division of labor carried to extremes, factory workers don't know any more, in general, about the making of automobiles than does Noam Chomsky? It 's as if he has never heard of Henry Ford, Taylorism, the assembly line, and "just in time" – although he has in fact heard of Taylorism. (224)

Does Chomsky suppose that work on the assembly line would be any more creative and self-fulfilling, as he and von Humboldt call for all activity to be, if the workers elected their bosses? Or took turns bossing each other? Does Noam Chomsky produce linguistic theory "in exactly the same way that automakers make automobiles" or homemakers bake cookies? Would he bow to the directives of the Linguists' Council? Or is he assuming that he will chair the Linguists' Council?

Just for laughs, let's imagine that a national Planners' Collective has been recruited out of the economics departments. These planners are unlikely to sympathize with, or even understand, the muddled leftist rhetoric of workers' control, participatory democracy, and all that rot. Because they are trained in neo-classical microeconomic theory, they have, in fact, no more expertise in planning industrial production than do social workers, performance artists, or linguistics professors. That kind of planning is something which, by now, so long after the fall of Eastern European Communism, probably nobody knows how to do, and which nobody ever did know how to do well. The scientific pretensions of economists, which have been discredited by recent economic developments, and not for the first time, are as credible as

imagination wander, and he imagined machine slaves; but then, he regarded human slaves as machines too.[225] Some thinkers (Hegel, for one) have thought that slavery degrades the master as well as the slave. This was a popular theme in the American anti-slavery movement, and it was an opinion held earlier by enlightened slaveowners such as Thomas Jefferson. Possibly living off robot slaves would degrade the owner too. He might get fat and lazy. That is what Chomsky should think, if he seriously believes what von Humboldt had to say about self-realization and creativity as the highest development of men. It's not so much that Chomsky doesn't believe in this ideal – which was better expressed by Friedrich Schiller, Max Stirner and William Morris, than by von Humboldt or himself – as that he doesn't understand it.

Easily the most revealing text in *Chomsky on Anarchism* is the interview with the BBC. In all the other interviews, Chomsky's sycophants ask him questions for which, as they know, he has well-rehearsed answers. The BBC interview is one of the places where he avers that anarchism is the "rational mode of organization for an advanced industrial society . . . I think that industrialization and the advance of technology raise possibilities for self-management over a broad scale that simply didn't exist in an earlier period." (136)

This kind of vacuous rhetoric is good enough for the likes of fanboys like Barry Pateman, but the BBC's Peter Jay was not to be fobbed off so easily. He was out to get a good story, not to glorify Chomsky. If he wasn't already familiar with the obvious deficiencies of high-tech anarcho-syndicalism, he quickly picked up on them from listening to Chomsky's windy pomposities. Jay asked about what "residual forms of government would in fact remain" (137) – Chomsky did not object to this formulation, he only said that "delegation of authority is rather minimal and that its participants at any level of government

[225] Aristotle, *The Politics*, 36-37, 43.

write. Chomsky now acknowledges that even during the good old days, wealth, industrialization, development, and working hours went up, and income stagnated or went down.[223] Technology advances, productivity goes up, working hours go up – if technology is neutral, why is it having these consequences?

The Marxist concept of socially necessary labor is problematic. Necessary for what, and for whom? Among some anarchists, the concept of work itself has been challenged for many years.[224] Industrial technology has never reduced the hours of work in the 20th or 21st centuries. In the last 60 years, for instance, in the United States, productivity has increased enormously, driven by advanced technology, but the hours of work, in the last 50 or 60 years, have increased, until they are the longest in the Western world. Even Chomsky knows this. This has nothing to do with the level of technology. It has something to do with the level of class struggle, which has declined throughout this period, and something to do with the decline of traditional heavy industry – caused in part by more advanced technology. American workers are doing more work, and worse work, than they have had to do in a very long time. I'm not aware that conditions are better anywhere else.

Exactly what socially necessary work can be consigned to machines – and to what machines – nobody can say, since these machines do not exist, and probably never will. The idea is some sort of science-fiction nerd/geek fantasy of a pushbutton paradise. Really it amounts to a longing for robot slaves. Aristotle, who was an upholder of human slavery, once let his

[223] Chomsky, *Occupy,* 24-25, 29.

[224] Bob Black, "The Abolition of Work," *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, n.d. [1986]), 17-33; CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective, *Work* (n.p.: CrimethInc., 2011).; David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anthropologist Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 79-82; Why *Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society* (London: Freedom Press, 1983). The writings of Charles Fourier, William Morris, Ivan Illich and others contain powerful critiques of work.

the scientific pretensions of criminologists, astrologers, and certain linguists.

The planners of the national economy will need a bureaucracy, a very big one, if only to amass and digest the vast quantity of production and consumption statistics necessary to formulate rational plans on a national scale. (Assuming that people at the grass roots can be bothered to compile these statistics. What happens to them if they don't?) Real anarchists would eliminate every bureaucracy, governmental and corporate. That's basic. But Chomsky's national syndicalism can't do without one. And, as Bakunin, and even Marx explained, what bureaucracy does best is to perpetuate itself. And, as Weber explained, and Michels explained, and again Marx also made this point, the essence of bureaucracy is routinization. That will stifle the creative self-fulfillment of the bureaucrats too, who are, in turn, unlikely to facilitate the creative self-fulfillment of anybody else. That's not in their job description.

As Chomsky imagines it, the comrade planners will prepare a smorgasbord of plans to send downstairs. As the ultimate repositories and interpreters of all those statistics, and as the recognized experts at economic planning, they will naturally think that they know what is best for their fellow workers. They will consider one of their plans to be the best plan. They will want the fellow workers to adopt that plan. So the other plans will be presented as obviously inferior to the one they favor. And they *will* be inferior, if only because the comrade planners will see to it that they are. Even if the comrade masses are suspicious, they will be unable to say why – and the Plan will surely be hundreds of statistics-ridden pages – and reluctant to send the planners back to the drawing board, because the deadline is imminent to replace the previous Plan.

This idea of a Planners' Collective is, for anarchists, grotesque. It's as if anything goes these days, and anything qualifies as anarchist, if it is assigned to a "collective." I

have had occasion to ridicule an anarchist who wrote "The Anarchist Response to Crime," who believes that the anarchist response to crime should include Police Collectives, Forensic Laboratory Collectives, Detective Collectives, and Prison Guard Collectives.[220]

These proposals should be repugnant to all anarchists. But anarchism has become fashionable, especially among refugees from the left who don't understand that anarchism isn't a sexier version of leftism, it is what it is, it is something else entirely, it is just anarchism and it is post-leftist. Why not a Rulers' Collective? That's what the Planners' Collective is. Chomsky used the word "governance." That's a euphemism for "government." "Government" is a synonym for "the state." Indeed, he refers to the delegation, from "organic communities" – whatever that means – of power to higher levels of government, and he is honest enough to use the word government. (137) I just wish he was honest enough to stop calling himself an anarchist.

Technology

Chomsky's vision of an anarchist society is tightly bound up with his enthusiasm for the liberatory potential of industrial technology. Industrialization and "the advance of technology raises possibilities for self-management over a broad scale that simply didn't exist in an earlier period." (136) He doesn't consider whether the advance of technology destroyed possibilities of self-management, as it did. This is somewhat inconsistent for Chomsky, because he has celebrated the self-management, during the Spanish Revolution, of the Barcelona workers (where industry was backward even by 1930's standards) and the peasants of Catalonia and Aragon, whose technology was not much beyond Neolithic. The Makhnovist peasant anarchist insurgents of the Ukraine were at least as technologically backward. Their idea of advanced technology was tractors. Our best examples of anarchist self-management in practice, then, involve people using technology which was far from advanced, even for their own time. We have, in fact, no examples of anarchist revolutions in truly advanced industrial societies, although there are some anarchists in these societies. Perhaps the anarcho-primitivists deserve a hearing after all.[221]

Technophile anarchists, and not only anarchists, do a lot of hand-waving and flag-waving, but, after they calm down, all they really have to say is that advanced technology will reduce the amount of work that has to be done. It will always solve all the problems that it creates, and all other problems too, just like it does in science fiction. It's a panacea. Technology is, for Chomsky, "a pretty neutral instrument." (225) Thus Chomsky asserts that much socially necessary work "can be consigned to machines." (136-37)

But it's never worked out that way. "For centuries, since this country began" – this starts out sounding like, to me, another of his fairy tales, "once upon a time" – the United States was a "developing society." A very flawed society, of course (slavery, imperialism, institutional racism, rampant violence, political corruption, religious fanaticism, ruthless exploitation of the working class, and what was done to the Indians – although Chomsky mentions none of this): "But the general progress was towards wealth, industrialization, development, and hope."[222] This is about as fatuous and one-dimensional an understanding of American history as I have ever seen, even in junior high school history textbooks. It's even more stupid than the stuff his historian buddy Howard Zinn used to

[220] Scott W., "The Anarchist Response to Crime"; Bob Black, "An Anarchist Response to 'The Anarchist Response to Crime,'" both available online at www.theanarchist library.org.

[221] See, *e.g., Uncivilized: The Best of Green Anarchy* (n.p.: Green Anarchy Press, 2012).

[222] Chomsky, *Occupy*, 24-25.