

The World View of Noam Chomsky

An Interview with Noam Chomsky by Fons Elders

----- Original Message -----

From: fons.elders@xs4all.nl

To: Noam Chomsky

Sent: Wednesday, December 03, 2008 8:55 PM

Subject: Re: world view noam chomsky october 2008

Dear Noam,
thank you so much for the corrections.
Next Sunday, we toast on you!
Fons

----- Original Message -----

From: Noam Chomsky

To: fons.elders (by way of Noam Chomsky <chomsky@mit.edu>)

Sent: Monday, December 01, 2008 6:16 AM

Subject: Re: world view noam chomsky october 2008

Finally got to it. It's not a simple matter. Takes quite a few hours.

Noam

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Elders: Greetings Mr Chomsky, I want to do this interview with you in broadly two parts - one dealing with your perspectives in politics and the other talking about your work on linguistics and philosophy. We will explore your ideas on notions of justice, equality, moral judgment etc being innate to human nature, as well. That's why I like to call the interview, 'The world View of Noam Chomsky'. I hope this interview will give an insight into your perception of the world. Further it is my hope that it will clarify your basic values and the reasons for your continued belief in them and further, upon what is your optimism founded.

Despite the political and economic practices of the day painting a very different picture you continue to have faith in the rational capacity of each human being, more than any intellectual or philosopher I do know. You wish to give a voice to the millions who continue to suffer and endure in silence. You analyze in a very clear and empirical fashion how power systems operate. Readers of your books such as this (Hegemony or Survival America's Quest for Global Dominance - Penguin Books 2004) would experience a sense of outrage and even disgust. In a recent article that I chanced to read in the Financial Times by Edward Lewis on how democracy functions in America these days, he writes that, 'we should feel embarrassed

to recommend it to anyone'. That is why I want to begin by asking you about the American Constitution of 1776 and the Bill of Rights. To what extent, do the values you believe in coincide with those in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights?

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Chomsky: Well I hope nobody's values these days coincide with everything in the Constitution! For example one provision in the Constitution stipulates that Blacks are three fifths human. That was put in to ensure that States holding slaves would sign in and even have extra power because of the additional voting rights they would get from the three fifths humans they had. There are other values which expressed decent positions growing out of the enlightenment. The Bill of Rights was in fact added because of opposition to the Constitution that took the form of popular demands that sought to preserve the basic rights in ways that were not done in the Constitution itself. A certain deficiency was perceived there in the eyes of the larger population. But then it is a mixed story over time. The Constitution itself has changed over the years through amendments, through law and through practice. It has been a remarkably stable document but nevertheless, with very substantial changes having been made to it. For example until 1920 about half the population remained disenfranchised. Women had to wait for a long time to vote. Until the 13th and 14th amendments could be ratified after the Civil War Blacks were not full human beings. According to the 14th amendment, which was done some 150 years ago, no person could be deprived of rights, fundamental or constitutional. It took another century before it could be even formally applied. And it still not really implemented and you can tell that by just looking at the incarceration rates. And furthermore it has become the topic of one the hottest debates of the day, that is even figuring prominently in the Presidential campaign- Rights of illegal immigrants. If you read the 14th amendment literally, they can't be deprived of rights. The 14th amendment says that no person can be deprived of rights and not does say no citizen can be etc. So if illegal immigrants are persons then they can't be deprived of rights either. But then that is not even an option on the table. It has never been dealt by the courts with the seriousness due to it. The courts have evaded the issue by determining that they are not persons under the meaning of the law. So when you talk about values, you have to distinguish between a reasonable interpretation of them on the one hand and the implementation of them on the other. And that's a huge gap.

Again, the Constitution was not intended to be a democratic document as I would define it. James Madison, the main framer of the constitution was clear and lucid on this. His utterances particularly in the debates in the constitutional convention are much more illuminating than what people usually get to read. What people usually read are the Federalist Papers. They are valuable, but they were intended for public consumption and so were a kind of propaganda. They were trying to convince a reluctant population to accept the Constitution. The debates in the constitutional convention are much more open, in many ways more revealing. And there Madison explained what the constitution was meant to be. In his words, one primary goal was "to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority." That is the so-called danger of the tyranny of the majority, otherwise known as democracy. It is interesting that Madison was concerned with essentially the same problem that concerned Aristotle. In the first major book on politics, Aristotle's Politics, Aristotle's views on democracy were clear. Both of them regarded democracy as the most preferred of the various types of systems but neither was wildly in love with it. It was the best they could settle for. Both got to the roots of one significant problem, namely, if you have democracy under conditions of significant inequality, then the majority will use their voting rights to take away the property of the rich, and that's a

problem. They both noticed it and they both had a solution, but opposing solutions. For Aristotle the solution was to reduce inequality by measures which are approximately what we would call welfare state measures. For Madison the solution was to reduce democracy. According to him power should be in the hands of "the wealth of the nation," the people who sympathize with property and its rights. The Senate, with the wealth of the nation, was given more power. And the most democratic institution under the Constitution, the House of Representatives, was designed to have the least power. The system was designed in general to fragment the population so that the 'wealth of the nation' would be able to dominate. Now in Madison's defense it should be pointed out that he was pre-capitalist in his mentality. And he assumed that the wealth of the nation would be comprised of let's say of imagined Roman gentleman, of benign philosophers and so on and so forth.

Elders: Yeah, some of those values and especially the later declaration of Universal values play a role here. In this context what is your response to some Arab intellectuals who say that despite all this talk of Universal Values, it essentially remains a Western invention?

Chomsky: No I don't think so. Let's take the universal declaration of human rights which is the best attempt so far at formulating universal human values. It was not a Western invention. If you look at the participation and the contributions in the making of universal declaration, it is from all over the world. Much of it comes from what we now call the third world. It may not be a perfect document but I think it expresses quite reasonable values. I wish countries would at least dream of living up to them. But then I think reality tells a different story. Let us take the case of United States, which is the major actor. The Universal Declaration has essentially three components. First comes civil and political rights. Second is social and economic rights, the third is cultural rights. Cultural rights are the ones that are easily disregarded. The United States has also officially declared the second part, namely social and economic rights, to be invalid. Reagan's Secretary of State Jeane Kirkpatrick once called it a letter to Santa Claus. Morris Abrams, the ambassador to the UN commission on human rights, called it a preposterous and dangerous assumption. Paula DeBriansky, who served in the Reagan Administration and who is now in the present Government as well, simply described the notion of social and economic rights as a myth. In the Universal Declaration they have the same status as all other rights but the most important country in the world, the so called leader of the free world simply declares them inoperative, though the population strongly disagrees.

Elders: We are now getting to an interesting juncture in this discussion. Paul Kagan speaks with sarcasm when he refers to the Golden Rule of Immanuel Kant. The Golden Rule is after all a continuation of the precepts of Confucius and of Christ and is also something that is deeply embedded in your own writings and thinking. While the Golden rule exhorts one to treat other people as one wishes to be treated him or herself, Paul Kagan defends the theory of Hobbes (Homo homini lupus- a man is a wolf to a man). And from an empirical point of view Paul Kagan seems to have been proven often right. In that light how do you view your own espousing of the Golden rule?

Chomsky: From an "empirical point of view," if you look at history women are not human. They are serfs of some sort. Take a look at most of human history, this has been true. There are exceptions like matriarchal societies but they have remained exceptions and the rule has been something else: that women should not have rights and they should be servants and slaves of men in patriarchal societies. So what? That just tells us that there is something wrong with the way history has unfolded. And we should therefore improve upon it. Therefore we should struggle for women's rights and in fact it is only in the last 6 or 7 decades that we have seen significant improvements in this respect. Some thing that has happened only in our own life times. If you take US or Europe, which are very similar -- recently I read about a big scandal in Sweden where it emerged that there was high incidence of abuse of wives and Swedes were living under the illusion that this did not happen in a nice country like theirs. And the same happened here in United States. So now we have even in wealthy progressive suburban communities sections of the police force designated to deal with domestic abuse. Something that was the norm that went unnoticed some 30 or 40 years ago is now regarded as outright criminal. What has happened is the result of our constant striving and it comes from our inner nature, striving towards overcoming elements of historical practice that we understand to be intolerable. In fact it is quite interesting to look at the discussions and debates over these issues. So let us take slavery for instance. Slavery was regarded as being highly moral by slave owners. They were performing a service to these poor backward people by taking care of them, by tending to their needs. Christianizing them. And by offering the slaves a way of entering at the lower levels of civilization, they were doing a service. Otherwise they were just barbarians who were suffering in the wilderness.

Elders: At the heart of your thinking and action is the idea that every power or authority is inherently illegitimate unless explicitly justified. And I must say I do too. And yet we have here the question of people accepting all kinds of belief systems and hierarchies, both religious and secularist ones. Here we have the tension between individuals being the very source of their moral actions on the one hand and people believing in practically everything else other than themselves, on the other.

Chomsky: I don't look at either contemporary society or history that way. In fact I think over time there has been an expansion of the moral horizon. Well just take the last few centuries, or even the last few years, things that were considered entirely legitimate and proper, even noble, are now considered criminal and unspeakable. I think we can regard that as a kind of a slow recognition of our true moral nature as we struggle out of a history of oppression and subordination and so on. I've mentioned a couple of examples and can easily add others. But take, say animal rights. I mean the moral horizon is in recent years extended to the point where we at least consider that animals do have rights. Right here in Cambridge for example, we are talking not of many years ago, there were very few constraints on animal experimentation. Now there are significant constraints. You know there is debate about just what they should be and what you can have, it's not a settled issue. But the point is it is at least a question now and not long ago it wasn't a question. Slavery is now considered totally illegitimate, not that it doesn't exist, there may be 30 million slaves in the world, but it's considered something entirely wrong. That's very recent to human history. It is the same with rights of women, same with the rights of minorities, same even with the means of warfare. I mean it's totally barbarous but things that were regarded as legitimate no longer are. And the

Supreme Court right now is considering the question of whether what's called enhanced interrogation, which is another word for torture, is illegitimate practice. And not so long ago, that was not considered a question.

I remember reading a history of criminal justice by a well known criminologist who happens to be a Norwegian. It was the history of treatment of criminals in Norway in the past. And I may not have all the details right but the picture was something like this. He said that up until, I think it was, the 1820s they had very few prisons in Norway. But since then the number of prisons increased sharply. And the reason was that up until whatever date it was, the punishment for crime -say suppose somebody committed a robbery, you didn't send them to prison, all you did is drive an iron stake through their hand. Ok so you didn't need prisons. As treatment of people became more humane, as the moral sphere enlarged, you didn't continue the kinds of practices that were routine, that were totally inhuman and barbaric. And it would have been a crime to carry on with them so you therefore begin to get penal systems and then new questions arise. This happens all through history and there are examples after examples. So it seems to be that you can find plenty of horrifying practices but you can also detect a tendency, not a uniform tendency but a significant tendency towards recognizing principles of justice and humanity and morality which are part of our nature. And recognition that we should do something to bring these principles to fruition, that does seem to be a definite historical tendency and it does tell us something about what is innate in us.

Elders: I hope I will be able to return to this question later. Mister Chomsky as a young boy you believed in Zionism. And your belief in Zionism has come to be seen lately by many Americans and American Jews as anti-Zionist. My son in law who was born in Jerusalem recently told me, 'Fons, Israel is lost'. He found it painful to utter those words. Simone Biton - the director of the movie *Le Mur* remarked that Israel has become a ghetto. You too write about Israel having become an offshore satellite of the US. Can you elaborate a bit further on this difficult but extremely important topic?

Chomsky: Well you are right. I grew up as a Zionist and I was a Zionist youth leader in the 1940s and so on. Now many people would consider me an anti Zionist but I haven't changed. Zionism has changed. I have pretty much the same view as I had then. In those days when I was a Zionist youth leader I happened to be opposed to a Jewish state. I don't think that there should be Christian states or Islamic states or Jewish states. I don't even think there should be states, but that's another question, but if there are, they should be the states of their citizens. But that was considered Zionism in those days. In fact I was part of and an active member of that part of the Zionist movement which opposed the Jewish state but wanted a society based on Arab-Jewish working class cooperation which I don't think was an idle dream. Now people mock at it but I don't think it was an idle dream under the circumstances of those days. And furthermore, there was a brief period when it was possible I think to go back to something like this concept of Zionism - namely from 1967 to 1975 roughly, and during that period an enlightened Israeli leadership could have moved towards first of all a peaceful settlement with the major Arab states -- that was easily possible and easily documented as well -- but also internally to some kind of federalism, that is, turning the

territories occupied after '67 to primarily Palestinian entities. I mean a kind of federal government comprising of primarily Jewish and Palestinian entities. Perhaps then gradually moving towards closer integration of the societies as hostilities decline and relationships develop along lines other than ethnic so on. I think that was entirely feasible. In fact there were even proposals within Israeli military intelligence to do something of this sort. They decided to abandon the opportunity by the mid-70s when Palestinian nationalism entered the international agenda and those opportunities were lost. But they still remain in the long term as viable options and I think it would be a much more healthy outcome for both societies. So what's called Zionism changed and what I continue to believe in has shifted from being Zionism to anti-Zionism, but that's terminology. What Zionism has become and what your friend was talking about is a form of state worship. That's a fact in the United States, also in Europe, and it's reminiscent of some of the ugliest days of Stalinism where you support the state no matter what its crimes are and no matter how violent it is. Then denounce critics of state violence as being anti-Semitic, some appellation or other. All this is quite reminiscent of Stalinist practice and I think it's very bad for Israel. Since the 70s I've written many times that the people who call themselves supporters of Israel are in reality supporters of its moral degeneration and probably its ultimate destruction.

There were specific decisions made in the past, you can identify them right along the way, which have led to the consequence of Israel becoming now pretty much an off shore vassal, a satellite of the United States. Even beginning to resemble it in its internal construction. Israel used to be a sort of a social democratic Scandinavian style society. And that's changed enormously, it has now some of the highest inequality of the world and the social services have collapsed. It's becoming a kind of caricature of some of the worst aspects of the United States.

Elders: But you know, apparently in opposition to what you are saying, there were in 50s two laws enacted and passed in Israel in the same year (1950). One, on the right of return for all the Jews worldwide and the other one, which is much less known, the so called 'law of the absentees'. This law is applicable to Palestinians who are expelled and have gone into exile and so on. That law gives the Israeli government the right to expropriate their land and their houses. Prior to 1950 nearly 800,000 thousand Palestinians fled Israel. Now the number of Palestinians in exile would be roughly 4 million. In fact the exiled Palestinians are even denied the right of return and their children can entertain no claims whatsoever on this count. These two laws are not only complementary but are very big impediments to the realization of the two-state solution you are defending.

Chomsky: I do not entirely agree with that. First of all I think, the most significant discriminatory laws against the remaining Palestinian population are hidden in a complex mixture of legal decisions, of bureaucratic arrangements, administrative decisions and so on. They are designed to ensure that the non Jewish citizens of Israel do not have access to over 90 percent of the land of that country. Now there is no law that says that in those many words but if you look at the combination of law, administrative practice, contracts with the Jewish National fund and so on that is exactly the way it comes out. I have had to decode a lot of

complex threads to find it, but it's there. And I've written about it extensively and there is a detailed literature on it. That's a very serious discrimination. Now it's interesting that 7 years go, in 2000, the high court in Israel did finally rule that those laws and practices were illegal. In the case of one Arab trying to move into a village that was locked away from Arabs this ruling came. However it has not been implemented apart from this one case -- which took several years. Maybe it will be sooner or later. The structure of discrimination is beginning to break. You will recall, as I said before, that the 14th amendment of the United States took a century for it to be even formally implemented. But things like that are very serious.

As for the right of return, it's tricky to see how it works. So the right of return, law of the right of return says Jews are permitted to return to Israel but non-Jews are permitted to return too if the rabbis decide to designate them to be Jews. It is not a trivial fact. If you look at the Russian immigration to Israel, a very high proportion of the Russians who came do not qualify as Jews under Jewish law. And they were brought in for racist reasons. They're blond, they're blue eyed they're white and so on and they are educated- you know a lot of Israeli high tech comes from them. So it sort of protects Israel from a process which has been called 'levantinisation'- becoming too much like the bad people of the region. That's one of the reasons why the so called oriental Jews, the Jews from the Arab countries, have also been so sharply discriminated against. In some ways worse than Israeli Arabs. Personally I've seen some amazing examples. It is slowly changing but pretty slowly so there are all kinds of things happening inside. However the move towards some form of integration with the Palestinians- Palestinian Arabs right now, since the chances of federalism in the early seventies have been lost for the time being, is a prospect. That prospect could be achieved if first the United States and Israel would abandon their rejectionism. Now they have for 30 years unilaterally rejected the international consensus on a two state settlement, but if they abandon their rejectionism and accept what the international consensus has been- and that's pretty clear, a two state settlement on the international border with minor and mutual modifications. Various adjustments on Jerusalem and so on are needed and which of these are practical is pretty clear. If the US and Israel would accept these, that could be the first step in moves towards closer integration, perhaps some kind of federalism maybe even broader (maybe involving Jordan, who knows). Maybe even allowing for a closer integration of the populations, as circumstances would permit. And anyone who knows that area, who has traveled around cis-Jordan and knows the region from Jordan to the sea, can see that drawing a line through it anywhere doesn't make a lot of sense for the people involved. It should be an integrated area. And over time maybe that will happen.

Elders: Another difficult question, on 9/11, many people consider that as a kind of unique event and regard it as the beginning of a new era. But then you could also see that attack fitting into a pattern of resistance against the Western world that stems from (and even a continuation of) the decades of anti colonial struggles of the past century. So my question to you is how do you view this event, as something really unique or as something that fits into a more global pattern of struggles between partly the former colonies and the Western world- especially the United States?

Chomsky: Well it was unique in one critical sense. A western power was attacked. For the United States 9/11 was the first time that the US national territory had been attacked

since the British burned down government buildings in Washington in 1812. The guns had always been pointed in the other direction. I need not run over history. But here the United States was not the attacker, but was attacked. With a criminal attack. If you look at the world reaction there is something significant, I don't mean the European reaction -so move to the part of the world that is not deeply immersed in imperial ideology. The reaction all over the world was outrage at the crime, sympathy with the victims. But then something else: welcome to the club. What you are now suffering is a small part of what you've done to us for years. In fact, let's be specific about it. 9/11 was horrible enough but it could have been worse. Let's imagine the following. Imagine that Al Qaida had bombed Washington, had bombed the White House, killed the president, instituted a military coup, established a vicious dictatorship which killed 50 to 100,000 people and tortured 700,000. Set up a massive international terrorist center which helped carry out assassinations throughout the world, helped establish neo-Nazi style states in the region and so on. Suppose they brought in a group of economists, and I call them the Kandahar boys, who drove the economy into what may be the worst economic disaster of its history.

Suppose all that happened. Well actually that did happen; I'm not making it up. That happened on what is usually called the first 9/11, in Latin America, namely September 11th 1973. That happened in Chile. The only thing I have changed is to the per capita equivalents, which gives the right sort of comparison for numbers. You know we didn't pay much attention to that. But that was exactly a US backed, maybe instigated, coup in Chile, Pinochet's coup. And that's by no means the worst atrocity that the West has carried out in the rest of the world. So yes, what we call 9/11 was a unique event because of the way the guns were pointed. It was a horrendous crime undoubtedly. But if we were to understand it honestly, we have to extricate ourselves from the deeply rooted imperial mentality which makes a sharp distinction between the crimes we carry out against others which are ok and the crimes they carry out against us which are unspeakable. So sure it changed history in that respect. And if you look at its effect on the US population, it's kind of interesting. It's dual. I mean it did lead to some sort of antagonism - let's kill the rag-heads and so on and so forth. On the other hand it opened people's minds and may be raised questions. It's a very insular society; most people probably don't know where the Netherlands are. That's not a joke. But this made people think; look we've got to know something about the world. Why do people out there hate us, we are so nice and wonderful. And the effect is quite striking. It was a mind opening experience. Books from the 80s which barely were known suddenly were reprinted. Dissident critics received a flood of invitations from all over the country, with huge and engaged audiences. It has been a kind of shock therapy.

Elders: Mister Chomsky you have, as I learn from the internet, recently been praised by Bin Laden as a wise man because you understand the political situation. You also met Nazrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, in Beirut after the war in Lebanon in 2006. And also Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has praised you publicly. And if I'm not mistaken your lecture in the United Nations was held in September 2006. Well that leads me to a probably weird question in your eyes, would you ever consider mediating between the parties involved in the war on terror if asked?

Chomsky: Well you are asking a very common question and this has come up before. And it's a very interesting question. Interesting because, I don't want to be impolite, but the question itself is an interesting reflection of Western imperial mentality. So let's take those cases apart. What Bin Laden said was that George Bush should have followed my advice not to invade Iraq. Not a very surprising comment, I think you'd get high agreement on that all over the world. But Bin Laden didn't just mention me. He mentioned others much more prominently. He recommended the book of Michael Scheuer- that's far beyond a mention. Who's Michael Scheuer; well Michael Scheuer is a former top CIA agent, responsible for tracing bin Laden, who criticizes the Bush administration because it is not violent enough. If Osama bin Laden wants to mention a super-hawk who believes that the United States should annihilate anyone in its path that is just fine. But if he mentions a dissident, that is somehow a big problem. Let's take Nasrallah. Yes I visited Nasrallah when I was in Lebanon, giving lectures. And when I'm in a country I like to find out as much as I can about the range of opinions and attitudes about popular movements and so on. Hezbollah is a substantial part of the Lebanese political system. Along with its close ally Amal, it represents pretty much the Shiite population. If you then take their other allies into count, that would represent the majority. So sure I was quite interested in meeting Nasrallah and that's a big incident in the West. However on the same trip I spent a lot more time with the leading opponent of Hezbollah, namely Walid Jumblatt, a Druze leader. He invited me and my wife and our companions to his home up in the mountains- the Mukhtara. We had dinner there and discussions. But that's not an issue. What's an issue is if you meet someone who's an official enemy of the West. That becomes a big issue. When you're meeting someone who is a friend of the West, no. not an issue. Hugo Chavez showed that book in a press conference, fine. What's the matter? We should ask ourselves why things are presented the way they are and we learn a lot about ourselves that way.

Now would I mediate in the so called war on terror? They don't need my mediation. Well the war on terror, first of all we should ask what the war on terror is. Point number one, George Bush didn't declare the war on terror on September 11th 2001, he re-declared it. The war on terror was declared by Ronald Reagan 20 years earlier when he came into office and announced that the fight against international terrorism would be the focus of US foreign policy -- a war against "a return to barbarism in our time," and so on. His war on terror quickly became a major terrorist war. It killed a couple of hundred thousand people in Central America, practically destroyed four countries. It supported South African terror in Mozambique and Angola that may have killed a million and a half people, on and on- that was the war on terror. That was the first one. Because of the form it took, it has been written out of approved history.

What has the second war on terror done? One of the things it has done is it increased terror, substantially. And as anticipated. So take, say the invasion of Iraq, it was expected by intelligence agencies that it would probably lead to increase of terror. Well it did, but far beyond what was anticipated. So a study by two US terrorism specialists calculates that what they call the Iraq effect - the effect of the Iraq war on terror -- has led to a seven fold increase of terror. That's pretty substantial. It's not a war on terror. If you want to look at how to reduce terror you have to think about it seriously. One way to reduce terror which is rarely discussed is very simple. Stop participating in it. And that's a simple way to reduce terror and in fact that would reduce it quite considerably. But we're not supposed to talk about that. Because our terror is not terror, it's you know liberation or something. But one way to reduce terror is stop participating in it, stop supporting it.

In the case of terror by others against us -- officially recognized terror -- if people commit crimes, efforts should be taken to identify them, apprehend them and bring them to justice. If it is an international crime then that would involve international co-operation. Serious academic studies on the Jihadi movement indicate that even within the Jihadi movement in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 there was very harsh criticism, criticism of Bin Laden, for carrying out a very un-Islamic act of involvement in crime and so on. But thanks to George Bush, the invasion of Afghanistan and of course later that of Iraq led to reversal of those attitudes and an increase of support for terrorist activities. Now let's take the invasion, did it have to be that way? Let us take the invasion of Afghanistan, which in Western ideology is considered you know as a perfect war. But it's very far from that.

The invasion of Afghanistan was undertaken with the expectation that it might lead to driving literally millions of people over the edge of starvation. That was understood by the aid agencies, by the US government, by academic scholarship and so on. That's pretty serious. To undertake actions which carry a significant risk of driving millions of people, the estimates were two and a half million, into death by starvation, is not trivial. Well there's an official reason, George Bush gave it the day he announced the attack. The reason was that the Taliban had refused to hand over to the US people who the United States suspected of terrorism. Now the Taliban had in fact made moves which may or may not have been real. They asked for evidence and they indicated they might consider extradition, if evidence were presented. Well we don't know if they would have, but no evidence was presented and in fact that was dismissed with glib contempt. Is that the way to respond? Why was no evidence presented? Well we know. 8 months later the head of the FBI informed the press that after the biggest and most intensive investigation in history they had no evidence. They had suspicions they said. So lacking any evidence, they bombed Afghanistan with a great and enormous risk to the population. Three weeks after the bombing began the US and the UK announced that the goal of the bombing was to overthrow the Taliban. In fact what they said to the Afghans is, we will bomb you until you overthrow your government, and that's international terrorism at an extreme level. So that's Afghanistan. Well I don't have to talk about Iraq I suppose. But actions like those, instead of acts that would apprehend criminals and subject them to justice, have had precisely the effect of inflaming terrorism. It's not a war on terror.

Elders: Mister Chomsky I would like to shift the focus of our discussions slightly into another direction- linguistics and philosophy. Could you in a few sentences describe your views on those basic innate structures of the human mind? I feel that this is in every aspect, not only crucial for whatever you are doing in linguistics but also to your political discourse, causes you sympathize with and your struggle for greater morality.

Chomsky: Well, first of all, there is what's called a debate about whether the capacity for language is innate. But that is a one-sided debate. There are people who condemn the hypothesis but there's nobody who defends it. The reason is, it's a truism. There is nothing to defend. Take my granddaughter, let's say. When she was born there was a certain environment around her. She reflexively picked out of the environment some aspects which are language related, and almost reflexively acquired the kind of competence that you and I are now exercising. Let's take her pet kitten or chimpanzee or songbird all of whom had

exactly the same environment but couldn't even take the first step, let alone the later ones. Now there are two possibilities here. One is, it's a miracle. The other possibility is she has some genetic capacity that they lack, just as she couldn't pick up the bee's capacity to navigate. In the latter case we take for granted that there's a genetic capacity. Well if there's a genetic capacity that yields the ability to acquire language, ok, then the core capabilities for language are innate. There's no hypothesis to defend other than the hypothesis that things aren't miracles. And the same questions would arise, same kinds of questions about all other capacities, including the ones we were talking about earlier, capacities for moral judgment. They're going to develop the same way: from some combination of genetic endowment which fixes the general framework in which they'll develop, some form of experience which will pick one or the other of the possible systems, and some ways in which laws of nature, say laws about how computation functions- efficient computation, how that enters into it, etc. And these are non trivial scientific questions but in principle you know how to address them.

Elders: Before we conclude, if I may recall here arguments that figured in the debate between you and Michel Foucault in 1971 as they touch upon these elements very keenly. The title for the debate was 'Human nature - justice versus power.' It really was very intense. Foucault believed that the human mind during birth was totally empty. He believed in that radical behavioristic point of view, of an empty mind and therefore for him it followed that whatever we do and think has been conditioned by education, circumstances, class etc. And therefore he analyzed whatever people are doing in terms of power structures while you were defending during the debate a different point of view. Holding that there is something more profound and deeper. You perceive a basic creativity innate in human nature that leads to feelings of compassion, justice and so on. And so it comes back to this question of the true and intrinsic nature of the human mind.

Chomsky: Well we have to distinguish the two issues here; one is the belief that the human mind is empty. It could become or develop into anything. That's pure mysticism. If the human mind is empty, nothing can develop. We are then left with the question what is intrinsic human nature? You can't deny its existence coherently, any more than you can deny bee's inherent nature coherently. So we're left solely with the question, what it is. Are elements like sympathy and compassion fundamental components of human nature or not? And that it's a matter of inquiry. People like say Adam Smith, David Hume and others took it for granted that sympathy and solidarity are basic components of human nature. Leading figures of the 18th century enlightenment and of the romantic period assumed that the need for creative work under one's own control is a fundamental property of human nature. We can investigate whether that's true but we can't investigate the question or the claim that there is no human nature, because it is incoherent. So we can ask, well, what exactly is human nature, and that's a serious topic of inquiry- from elements of history, from experience even by now from experimentation. But we can't deny the existence of human nature.

Elders: Mister Chomsky, thank you very much.

Chomsky: Let's have another interview in 35 years time! (Chomsky refers here to an interview 35 years ago. fe)

NPS

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betr.: The World View of Noam Chomsky
49'52'' tv interview; regie: Fons Elders

Geachte heer Daalmeyer,

Bovengenoemd interview (februari 2008) bestrijkt de belangrijkste politieke vragen van deze tijd: universele mensenrechten; 'war on terror'; Israel-Palestina; zionisme-anti-zionisme; Osama bin Laden'; 9/11, Afghanistan, maar ook vragen annex antwoorden over de menselijke natuur; hoop voor de toekomst... en het thema: macht & gerechtigheid n.a.v. het debat tussen Noam Chomsky en Michel Foucault dat in 1971 onder mijn leiding plaatsvond.

De viering van 60-jaar Israël in mei vereist ook aandacht voor de rechten van het Palestijnse volk én aandacht voor de achtergronden van het conflict.

Noam Chomsky heeft als jong zionist de oprichting van Israël op de voet gevolgd en tot vandaag de dag het bestaansrecht van beide volken bepleit zonder de een tegen de ander uit te spelen. Hij gaat in dit gesprek uitvoerig in op de transformatie van het zionisme, en plaatst het belangrijkste conflict in de wereld, de primaire bron van spanningen in het Midden-Oosten, en één van de wortels van het islamisme, in perspectief.

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In afwachting van uw antwoord,

met alle hoogachting,

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cc. N.I.O., dr. M. Aarab

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