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NOAM CHOMSKY: POST-STRUCTURAL ANARCHIST

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Abstract

Noam Chomsky (an essentialist who subscribes to the Cartesian notion of the mind) is one of the most articulate of modern intellectuals. This essay attempts to unravel the connection between Chomsky's notion of language as connected to an innate device in the mind and the making of an anarchist society based on the libertarian philosophy of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Thoreau, Orwell and Russell. Who is a libertarian and how is s/he different from a liberal and what is her connection with language? Is there a human nature or is it a political discourse that is, in essence, libertarian? How does Chomsky's view of human nature apply to women, children, gays, lesbians and other minority groups? What has language to do with human nature? In a fundamental way, we attempted to read in Chomsky's writings a connection between language as human nature and anarchy as a philosophy of social transformation. The focus of this essay is to show how Chomsky opens himself to a post-structural reading which involves reading a text at multiple levels - in this case, Chomsky as a language theorist, libertarian socialist, essentialist and political critic - and examine the strands of similarity that run through his writings that for short of a better word could be termed a Chomskyean world-view.

Key Words: anarchist, Language Acquisition Device (LAD), Cartesian, innate, grammar.

> [...] disparity between knowledge and experience is perhaps the most striking fact about human language. To account for this is the central problem of linguistic theory.
> N. Chomsky, Language *and Mind*

1. Introduction

The problem of metaphysics is the problem of finding a center for the will. Does the will locate itself in the centeredness of the conscious self or is the will itself a center or is the will a mechanism through which the self acquires its selfhood?

In our reading of Descartes, the will does not have a center (if center here means a source of authority that originates from the human being) because it is a creation of language, a product of discourse[1] and, in a way, seeks to transcend the very notion of what is *innate* in the attempt to realize God. As Descartes puts it, in his fourth Meditation "Of the True and the False", the will is what seeks to extend beyond the limits of understanding and becomes a

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source of error, in the very attempt to devalue the center. It is the consciousness in the subject of an unconstrained will or choice, while evidence of freedom is paradoxically recognition of determination. The subject attains his status as a subject in laying claims to a process of thinking, which *per se* becomes a source of subjecthood that transcends the limits of thought in order to understand, in the precise act of seeing the limitation of understanding, a superior being. "It is only the will, or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God" Cottingham (2003: 40).

In the light of Descartes' claim of *thinking* as a proof of identity as well as a metaphysical authority based upon the will, which restrains understanding from stepping beyond its limits, one may read Chomsky's revaluation of reason that seeks to essentialize reason in the process of destabilizing the underlying metaphysic of a will that preconceives an authority even in the act of manifesting its freedom. What Chomsky takes recourse to is what Russell appropriately points out regarding Descartes' use of the word thinking: "'Thinking' is used by Descartes in a very wide sense. A thing that thinks, he says, is one that doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, imagines, and feels - for feeling, as it occurs in dreams is a form of thinking. Since thought is the essence of mind, the mind must always think, even during sleep" Russell (1961: 565). The identification of thinking with the mind or even language itself is one of the directions in which Chomsky takes Descartes' notion of thinking; in this instance language is beyond the will[2]. "In summary, it is the diversity of human behavior, its appropriateness to new situations, and man's capacity to innovate - the creative aspect of language use providing the principal indication of this - that leads Descartes to attribute possession of mind to other humans, since he regards this capacity as beyond the limitations of any imaginable mechanism" Chomsky (1971: 6).

Chomsky reads a notion of "creative principle" as the essence of Descartes' observation regarding the self-reflective character of the mind. The creative basis of language can be found in the fact that the mind can doubt its own mentality (if we define mentality as an intrinsic aspect of the mind). Language *is* mentality since, by virtue of the fact that it can generate sentences indefinitely, it possesses the capacity to doubt its own linguisticality or what makes it language. Thought as language does not exist in a pure isolation, but is a biological feature that human beings are endowed with, and that acquires the stimulus to exhibit language within a certain surrounding. One of the demands of this creative principle underlying language is a universal grammar "that accommodates the creative aspect of language use and expresses the deep-seated regularities which, being universal, are omitted from the grammar itself.

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[...] "It is only when supplemented by a universal grammar that the grammar of a language provides a full account of the speaker-hearer's competence" Chomsky (1965: 6).

Any theory of universal grammar must indubitably accommodate a theory of the will[3] - where the willingness to reflect is an *a priori* characteristic that may be scientifically pursued, by looking at the grammars of the various languages, and their similarities on a comparative basis.

At the epistemological level, the point is not whether a universal grammar is realizable, but whether universal grammar is a discourse meant to bring the competence (as an innate state of language) of the human being to light. As Chomsky rather warily points out:

> "It is unfortunately the case that no adequate formalizable techniques are known for obtaining reliable information concerning the facts of linguistic structure . . . There are, in other words, very few reliable experimental or data-processing procedures for obtaining significant information concerning the facts of linguistic intuition of the native speaker . . . The critical problem for grammatical theory today is not a paucity of evidence but rather the inadequacy of present theories of language to account for masses of evidence that are hardly open to serious question. The problem for the grammarian is to construct a description and, where possible, an explanation for the enormous mass of unquestionable data concerning the linguistic intuition of the native speaker (often himself); the problem for one concerned with operational procedures is to develop tests that give correct results and make relevant distinctions. Neither the study of grammar nor the attempt to develop useful tests is hampered by lack of evidence with which to check results, for the present. We may hope that these efforts will converge, but they must obviously converge on *the tacit knowledge of the native speaker* (my italics) if they are to be of any significance". Chomsky (1965: 19-20)

The "tacit knowledge" is something of a confession[4] that the speaker makes regarding his or her understanding of the language mechanism. The confession can be taken as evidence for the linguist to further his or her theories of language. Concealed at the heart of this confession or tacit knowledge is a psychoanalytical technique involved, though, without being doctored by the linguist, the evidence is accepted for what it is: as knowledge; and further assumptions are contingent upon this evidence. While the psychoanalyst translates the confessions of his patients in order to fit into a preconceived discourse, the language-theorist shares with the speaker-hearer an intense awareness of the possibilities of language that are revealed in thinking. In fact, the speaker-hearer is his or her own linguist in an attempt to discover one's own

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thoughts as in the day-to-day usage of language the speaker-hearer's intuition inclines one to believe that s/he actually participates in the making of the world.

The idea is that thinking is a biological activity characterizing the species, since experience does not precede common sense understanding, but rather the latter anticipates the former. On preliminary observation, it seems that the human child is born with nothing and the mind later impinged upon the consciousness; this observation though apparently strong does not account for what Chomsky refers as the tacit knowledge of the speaker. The competence of the speaker is above all the power to tacitly *know* and performance is a manifestation of the tacit power.

Knowing as an act of the human being involuntarily willing the world[5] through language (as Descartes might have willed the existence of God in an attempt to understand the reason of his being), so to say, resolves the question of the "missing link" in the evolutionary ladder, the point when the human mind decided to express its humanity. The point of construction of the language faculty of the brain is also the point when the brain[6] decided to explain the process of its making. It almost appears that language performed a surgery upon itself in a state of consciousness, perfectly willing to *be* language.

2. Competence versus performance

The competence of the individual cannot be quantified because of what D'Agostino refers in *Chomsky's System of Ideas* as Chomsky's "linguistic subjectivism (which) implies, that the structure of a language is a function of its subjective structure. In this case, then, no method for the discovery of the structure of a language can be successful unless it permits investigation of, or incorporates substantive assumptions about, the subjective structure of that language [...] in other words, that there is and can be no purely objective discovery procedure for linguistic structure" D'Agostino (1986: 9). Not behavior[7], but performance can be visualized as a more adequate means of approaching the competence of an individual. Competence itself remains an elusive, ideal state that can be realized in the absence of external and internal constraints. In this sense, competence is infinite, one of the reasons being that it cannot be quantified, though the degree of performance is always finite. The definition of competence would include an ideal state stretching the will to the point, wherein the attempt to understand the notion of the subject dissolves individuality and moves toward identity, with language and the human being synonymous with one another[8]. Such a presumption offers a slight twist to the Chomskyean view that the rules that guide language are finite while the generation of sentences is infinite. The point is not merely that performance is a more reliable indicator or manifestation of competence than behavior, but that behavior is only one aspect of performance and hence cannot be treated as a

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universal criterion for a scientific claim to the truth.

The idea of language as human nature is not the same as human beings are born into language; although, in practice, it is impossible to extricate one principle from the other. The preliminary position endows the human mind with agency, where the subject in understanding herself, is able to cognize a notion of limit, the limit being language itself. This does not imply a circular reasoning as much as *thinking* which is *being* in an all-inclusive sense. The notion of individual as *being* in a potential state of praxis cannot be necessarily confused with the idea of the human being, which is also a generic term, referring to a collective group as a species. Language is what makes the *is-ness* of the human being different from that of other animals, in the sense that from a human (Cartesian, to be precise) point of view, animals do not know that they *are*, as they do not doubt their existence. In the assertion of the subject being language, there is a metaphysical presupposition involved that assumes the function of a discourse. Agency, from an abstract concept, is transformed into an ethical necessity. Language becomes a space, where the subject asserts its nature, in the process of using language. What is the so-called nature of the speaking subject? To say language would not only be tautological, but would mean subtly distancing oneself from the debate (if any) of language as discourse (with language assuming the traditional place of the mind in Cartesian philosophy) and the mind as the source of language.

One serious critique would be that of Heidegger, who in his essay "The Age of the World Picture" discovers the roots of the modern world in the Western metaphysics of Cartesianism, the very anthropology, that in an attempt to center man has robbed the question "concerning the truth of Being-which question simultaneously unveils itself as the question concerning the Being of truth" Heidegger (1977: 141). Anthropology, while dissociating the question of Being from man, endows the individual with subjecthood at the expense of being itself. The subject alienated from being, is the subject of Western Metaphysics that, to Heidegger, owes its existence to Cartesian Rationalism. "Through Descartes, realism is first put in the position of having to prove the reality of the outer world, of having to save that which is as such" Heidegger (1977: 139).

The argument boils down to whether Chomsky at the abstract, theoretical level is a Cartesian revivalist in a poststructuralist period when the idea of the innate is making way for the idea of the play. In Gadamer's terms regarding the innate, it would not be of any absolute significance to know whether the idea is innate or not. As Gadamer puts it in his essay "The play of art":

> If we wish avoid the interpretative framework of the dogmatic Cartesian philosophy of self-consciousness, it seems to me methodologically

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> advisable to seek out just such transitional phenomena between human and animal life. Such borderline cases in the realm of play allow us to extend the comparison into a realm not immediately accessible to us, but which we can approach only through the works that it produces: namely, the realm of art. Gadamer (1986: 125)

What Gadamer seems to suggest is that there are "transitional phenomena" that elude the Cartesian duality of human versus non-human or a thinking subject versus a non-thinking object, and language actually occurs in a "realm of play" where the humanity of the animal as well as the animalness of the human come to recognize and accept each other. The work of art is produced in this state of play. In fact, such a player and artist would be St. Francis of Assissi in whom Gadamer might visualize an ideal expression of a language that cuts across species moving from man to beast to spirit in a tremendously playful manner. In Gadamer's terms, a consequence of the Cartesian principle would be that thinking tends to be objectified at a very sublime level and *thoughtlessness* can be attributed to almost anything at random.

Chomsky's interest to the scientist, the grammarian as well as the language theorist, none of whom can be delineated in a clear-cut manner, is that he attempts to conceptualize the idea of the *innate*. At the speculative level, the idea of universal grammar has the appeal of a cross-cultural hypothesis. There is a discourse attached to the notion of universality and different notions of universality consequently have diverse forms of discourse attached to them.

From a pure metaphysics of reason that we see in Descartes, Chomsky seems to be offering a reason of metaphysics; in this case, the essence is to see language as human condition or a property of the species. In universalizing reason as language in the form of a biological language acquisition device, Chomsky is humanizing the duality of reason and non-reason to a position where the reasonable, by virtue of the fact that it distinctly exists in each and every individual, overcomes the alienation that is a consequence of the failure of the subject (in the Heideggerian critique of the Cartesian thinking self as alienation from the question of being) to conceive the notion of language as universal.

3. The mentality of language

Can language exist outside or other than human condition? If language is the condition under which human beings are born, then solutions are to be found within language, rather than in a metaphysical domain outside language. The question whether language precedes the existence of the mind or the mind, language, is less a question of origins and more a rejection of the senses as the sole recipient of data in order to comprehend the real world. The Chomskyean

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position, while not absolutely disallowing the senses, endows the mind with active participation in the making of reality. Chomsky's essential contribution is the assertion of language as mentality: a person as a linguistic being. A term such as language-animal would be inappropriate, being an oxymoron, because language or at least the capacity for language is what intrinsically humanizes the non-human, in this instance, the animal. This, perhaps, is one of the major implications of Chomsky's reassertion of Descartes, regarding the importance of reason in solving social and political problems.

Chomsky's singular contribution that the *mentality* of language is fundamentally rule-guided does have an anarchist dimension to it. One implication is that the mind does not need external constraints. The other subsequent connotation is that, in a condition of freedom, the mind performs to the limits of its competence. At the metaphysical level, Chomsky is attempting to recover the Renaissance-humanist notion of the *human being* as a linguistic entity, capable of articulating his or her competence in diverse ways, though systematically guided by intrinsic rules that are natural. The claim of the language capacity as basically rule-oriented is not sufficiently metaphysical in Chomsky's terms, since, "the system of language is only one of a number of cognitive systems that interact in the most intimate way in the actual use of language. When we speak or interpret what we hear, we bring to bear a vast set of background assumptions about the participants in the discourse, the subject matter under discussion, laws of nature, human institutions, and the like" Chomsky (1980: 188).

Another significant point is whether the invention of history coincides with the birth of language, in the sense of language as an invention of the group. Can anarchy be termed as a discourse of return to the "origins," the prenatal state of Christopher unborn? The reference is to Carlos Fuentes' experimental novel *Christopher Unborn* that plays with the idea of innate memory, the language of the child in a state of pre-conception revealing the childlikeness of the Cartesian notion of "ideas". If the voice of the unborn Christopher can be read as the voice of an anarchist toying with the idea of languages, then he belongs to the future rather than the past. The child's interest in origins is in the connection that he is able to establish with the present as he visualizes it from the depths of his mother's womb:

> She's [Angeles, the mother of the unborn Christopher] simply devoid of language. She's empty of words (she communicates to me in silence or communicates it in silence, but it turns out that I, mere sleepyhead that I am, happen to be bedded down in her soft womb, whether she knows it or not: I listen to her, I hear her marvelous silence: her silence speaks to the other, the one who is absent; she receives what the world prints on her language, but a marvelous compensation leads her always to find the

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> antonym of the word given her: her discourse shares my father's discourse, but it completes it as well). She does not speak. I only listen. It isn't the same. But something links us. She creates me, but I create myself as well. She comes toward me. I go toward her. Her son. My mother. I see the world through the life she gives me. But she also sees it through the life I give back to her. We will never be the same, we will never be a union, we shall always be a difference: mother and child, we shall celebrate not our union but our alterity! We are the mirror of our languages. I shall be within hers to say what she cannot say. She shall say what I cannot say. Gentle Readers: pray for me, pray that I do not forget (as I shall forget so many other things the instant I am born) the lesson of language I have learned in my mother's womb. Allow me on being born to know not only my language but the language I leave behind, so that forever and ever in my life I can always say not only what I say but what she says: the other: the others: what I am not. Fuentes (1989: 256)

It might be more appropriate to say that the word "innate", while it denotes something basic or natural, is a stylistic device referring to what occurs prior to the essence; in fact, the innate leads to the essence instead of being the essence. In a way Fuentes' novel offers a Chomskyean reading of competence, that, in the act of being innate is also the other at the core of the self; hence, the innateness of the other or the otherness of the innate. In making "a fundamental distinction between *competence* (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and *performance* (the actual use of language in concrete situations" Chomsky (1965: 4), Chomsky indirectly attributes the unborn Christopher with linguistic competence that precedes his birth in time. Fuentes uses Christopher's biologically endowed capacity with the knowledge of speaking-hearing, i.e., the innate competence as the basis of a rhetoric underlying the narrative, wherein he (Christopher) is able to articulate his "union" as well as his "alterity" with his mother.

In her essay, "Motherhood according to Bellini," Kristeva arrives at what can broadly be referred to as the "competence" of the mother. The competence, in this instance, as a language in itself is peculiar to the maternal body of the "woman-mother". Like the unborn Christopher, the Christ-child as depicted by Bellini, is able to partake in the *jouissance* of the mother, which is a language outside the Cartesian tradition of the thinking self as the center of consciousness. The mother exists at the border of consciousness. While lacking the "self", the mother is able to write from a point similar to that of Christopher the fetus, almost touching the verge of competence. Here, competence has a range that goes further than the idea of consciousness, which is limited to the purely performative dimension of the self. Competence as knowledge of the

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language possessed by the speaker-hearer is the capacity for language that transcends the limits of discourse, in the sense that it displaces any fixed notion of quantitative measurement of the language possessed by a person from a behavioral point of view. In offering an essentialist notion of competence that belongs to women as a group, Kristeva celebrates an identity that is *ahistorical* (history coinciding with the beginning of patriarchy), in being isolated from the masculine centered self:

> Material compulsion, spasm of a memory belonging to the species that either binds together or splits apart to perpetuate itself, series of markers with no other significance than the eternal return of the life-death biological cycle . . . Such an excursion to the limits of primal regression can be phantasmically experienced as the reunion of a woman-mother with the body of her mother . . . The homosexual-maternal facet is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing: it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge. Kristeva (1980: 239-240)

The grammar of the Mother's *jouissance* participates in a radically similar manner with that of the unborn child in Fuentes' novel. In very subtle ways, the Mother and the child offer their own functional definition of competence, within which they can identify themselves, though less as "selves" and more as language creatures, whose competence has been denied for historical reasons. They are biologically endowed with linguistic competence, and in ideological ways share the knowledge of their competence with "the other: the others: what I am not".

An interesting digression is whether linguistic competence is an objective, neutral zone isolated from the function of "pleasure" in the human body? How far is the body's innate pleasure contingent upon the degree of conceptualization as well as the syntax structure that a person employs which could very well deviate from what common sense presupposes? In simpler terms, what is the impact of the sex of a person as a cognitive mechanism on the treatment of language as a biological fact? Irigaray speaks of a woman's innate pleasure in her essay "Cosi Fan Tutti," when she says:

> And make sure this does not come up, the right to experience pleasure is awarded to a statue. "Just go look at Bernini's statue in Rome, you'll see right away that St. Theresa is coming, there's no doubt about it."
>
> In Rome? So far away? To look? At a statue? Of a saint? Sculpted by a man? What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure? For where the pleasure of the Theresa in question is concerned, her own writings are perhaps more telling.
>
> But how can one "read" them when one is a "man?" The production of ejaculations of all sorts, often prematurely emitted, makes him miss, in

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> the desire for identification with the lady, what her own pleasure might be all about.
>
> And . . . his? Irigaray (1985: 91)

Irigaray's point strikes at the heart of the discourse of language as human nature, since a woman merely by the fact of being a woman is able to manifest her pleasure in a language that eludes commonsensical notions of understanding, in a way that even a great artist like Bernini or an eminent psychoanalyst like Lacan cannot do. The lingering point is that even if men and women are universally endowed with a language acquisition device, the way they cognize the world would be essentially different in the case of women, children, gays or lesbians. The intuition to acquire language could vary possibly depending on the nature of the desire mechanism of the body toward the other, i.e., the world, in turn affecting the linguistic intuition itself. This is not to instance either women, children, gays or lesbians as species outside the group generally referred to as human beings, endowed with reason, but, instead to generalize (in an unavoidably simplistic manner), that the variation of competence among different groups like men and women could be so great that it would be hard to make a reasonable justification for any theory of universality. Competence is a variable like performance. Each group (not unlike individuals) selectively internalizes a diverse set of data or rules that suit their genetic make-up affecting not only their performance but also the basis of their language.

The point is that Chomsky's notion of language does open itself to a reading that includes the child (born and unborn), the mother, the woman, gay, lesbian, etc. As he says in his book, *Rules and Representations*:

> To know a language, I am assuming, is to be in a mental state, which persists as a relatively steady component of transitory mental states. What kind of mental state? I assume further that to be in such a mental state is to have a certain mental structure consisting of a system of rules and principles that generate and relate mental representations of various types. Alternatively, one might attempt to characterize knowledge of language-perhaps knowledge more generally - as a capacity or ability to do something, as a system of dispositions of some kind, in which case one might be led (misled, I think) to conclude that behavior provides a criterion for the possession of knowledge. In contrast, if such knowledge is characterized in terms of mental state and structure, behavior simply provides evidence for possession of knowledge, as might facts of an entirely different order - electrical activity of the brain, for example. Chomsky (1980: 48)

The variability of the mental states of individuals and groups does not automatically imply a variation in the basic system of rules guiding one's

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language. To Chomsky, the notion of the mind/brain - whether the positivist notion of the brain is an invention of the mind or the "mental state" of language, preempts any logical discussion of the organism as a whole or even language, except in metaphysical terms that preconceives the reality of the external world in order to make feasible the existence of the mind or vice-versa. As Chomsky expresses it in *Language and Thought*:

> "Let's say somebody could come along with a chess-playing program that behaved exactly like Kasporov, made exactly the moves he would every time. Would it be playing chess? Well, no, just as in the case of "breathing." Playing chess is something that people do. Kasparov has a brain, but his brain doesn't play chess. If we asked, "Does Kasparov's brain play chess," the answer is no, any more than my legs take a walk. It's a trivial point" Chomsky (1993: 91).

The notion of a causal link between language and the world as either happening simultaneously or one before the other, while attributing reality to origin, approaches the very reality from a nihilistic (in the etymological sense of "nihil" as meaning 'nothing') perspective.

4. Language as human nature

An assumption based on innateness tends be radical, in some sense, God-given (even without the God, if one goes by the Cartesian notion of man as a thinking being who wills God) and has a claim to metaphysics, until substantiated in a scientific manner.

In the case of language, the scientific basis is contingent upon the intuition that permits language to be visualized in human terms; the whole idea that language is able to generate a basis that both interprets and documents intentionality. The notion that the mind at birth is a blank slate is invalidated by the very metaphor of the blank slate, which literally connotes the absence of any mind at all. The empirical argument that the mind is a post-natal creation does not support any theory in favor of the origin of language or even the simple fact of why the mind is in the later stages of its growth incapable of deleting the writing on the slate in order to introduce a fresh dose of learning upon the very slate (though this somehow seems to have always been the policy of fascist states). One perspective is that the world that imprints itself on the mind has a deterministic quality about it elusive of the fact that imagination or even memory is primarily a product of intuition that relies on the senses for data. Learning, perhaps, plays the part of conditioning thought rather than being the basis for the thought-processes of the mind to develop further.

To illustrate the point that distinguishes learning from the point of view of empiricism and Cartesian notion of the innate, we have chosen an instance from Aldous Huxley who opts for an empirical basis to sight. In his book, *The*

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Art of Seeing, Huxley makes a distinction between seeing, "which is a biological activity related to the nervous system from perceiving, which is a mental activity related to an 'individuals' accumulated experiences, in other words, to memory" Huxley (1975: 24). The Chomskyean position would be toward visualizing perception as a structure-dependent activity related to the brain, and though experience increases the range and the selectivity of the data observed and experienced by the senses, it is the mind that applies its rules in the construction of the world and in the making of the very perception "and of that necessary condition of perception, memory" Huxley (1975: 23).

Is Chomsky to be read as Cartesianism bereft of the metaphysics? Chomskyean metaphysics which places too much faith in the competence of human nature, at the theoretical level, loses much of its claim to value neutrality. At a certain point, the argument becomes hermeneutical, when prejudice becomes inevitable and more than that, necessary. Take the following example that Chomsky offers in his book, *Modular Approaches to the Study of the Mind*:

> For example, suppose some Martian had the same sensory system that we have but did not have the rigidity principle and the binding principle. Given exactly the data we have been presented with, the Martian might develop a different set of beliefs; in the case of language, a different system of knowledge. Whereas we know that expression such and such means so and so, the Martian would know just as well that the expression means some different thing; and whereas we perceive that the object is rotating, the Martian would perceive it as shrinking. That is, different systems of knowledge and belief could arise on the basis of exactly the same experience if the mind were simply organized in terms of different principles. Chomsky (1984: 21)

In the example, the dominant prejudice is that the organization of the mind is always already prior to the inception of language.

The above argument leads to Foucault's notion of "power" and "resistance"; the power of learning and the potential of the mind (in innate ways, and in order to assert its nature) to resist learning, which is a fact of social life and not a natural facet of the species of man. One implication within the equation of language as human nature is the location of power; power, like resistance, is an aspect of human nature. Power and resistance are not oppositions as much as concepts that complement each other. Foucault (1978: 95)

Resistance in a sense being one form of power, goes deeper into the idea that there is an originary human nature that empowers resistance and resists being disempowered, refuting behavior as the sole, determining criteria to understanding either language or the human mind.

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While Foucault's argument offers a political side to Chomsky's definition of competence, it is important to note that Chomsky's own notion of power would be based on identity (universal grammar), and not so much dispersal; the location of power as vested in the state; and the necessary transformation of the authority of the state to more communal forms of government (somewhat like the Israeli Kibbutzim) based on the anarchist philosophy that Chomsky in his interview expounded to James Peck:

> Anarchism isn't a doctrine. It's at most a historical tendency, a tendency of thought and action, which has many different ways of developing and progressing and which, I would think, will continue as a permanent strand of human history. Take the most optimistic assumptions. What we can expect is that in some new and better form of society in which certain oppressive structures have been overcome, we will simply discover new problems that haven't been obvious before. And the anarchists will then be revolutionaries trying to overcome these new kinds of oppression and unfairness and constraint that we weren't aware of before. Peck (1987: 29)

If language is human nature, what are the political implications of articulation? As Chomsky puts it: "The question "what is human nature?" has more than scientific interest. As we have noted, it lies at the core of social thought as well. What is a good society? Presumably one that leads to the satisfaction of intrinsic human needs, insofar as material conditions allow. To command attention and respect, a social theory should be grounded on some concept of human needs and human rights, and in turn, on the human nature that must be presupposed in any serious account of the origin and character of these needs and rights" Chomsky (1987: 195).

5. Liberal versus Libertarian Socialist

Chomsky's assumptions about language in the process of lending themselves to the making of a theory of human nature open the field for a philosophical as well as a political critique. This is the attempt of the later Chomsky in his book *Knowledge and Freedom*, where knowledge and freedom are not binary categories but one systematically leads to or affects the other. Intelligence, in addition to being a cultural fact, is an ethical question for Chomsky. To know the limit, i.e., the rule (in other words, how we interpret the world) is to be free (i.e., how we change the world).

> The principles of mind provide the scope as well as the limits of human creativity. Without such principles, scientific understanding and creative acts would not be possible. If all hypotheses are initially on a par, then no scientific understanding can possibly be achieved, since there will be no way to select among the vast array of theories compatible with our

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> limited evidence and, by hypothesis, equally accessible to the mind. One who abandons all forms, all conditions and constraints, and merely acts in some random and entirely willful manner is surely not engaged in artistic creation, whatever else he may be doing. Chomsky (1972: 50)

Within this broad conception of knowledge as a possibility of freedom, we have tentatively attempted to define what differentiates Chomsky as a libertarian apart from a liberal[9]. *A liberal is an involuntary supporter of the policies of the state with the "state" acting as an originary construct, an ideal representation, a metaphysic; and a libertarian is a conscious "dissenter" from the policies of the state that seeks legitimacy by disseminating the metaphysic of consent through an interested "majority" who give the entire notion of dissent an obviously negative character*.

This distinction seems to be the basis of Chomsky's political activism. It is not an original distinction in so much as the "tradition" of dissent can be traced back to the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Thoreau, Tolstoy, Orwell and Bertrand Russell. The connection between Chomsky's libertarian outlook and the making of an anarchical society is primarily based on the notion of reasonableness in the conduct of human affairs.

Libertarian Socialism is an alternate name for anarchism, a discourse comprising the language of dissent while anarchism itself is popularly viewed as a political doctrine. To the libertarian socialist (someone like Orwell or Chomsky) the implications of language and the forms it assumes in order to reinforce the self-perpetuating character of the state is of extraordinary importance in order to critique those patriarchal forms that seek to eliminate the notion of the individual and the group as agents or *willing* entities. Chomsky's aim, it seems, is to take Descartes out of the closet of pure metaphysics where the will serves a higher authority, perhaps God to a position where the will, since it is the faculty of expression of an independent mind, can discover its own expression in the absence of constraints and in the presence of constraints seeks to overcome them through revolutionary means.

Anarchism is a political, social and economic alternative rooted in a theory of human nature. Is competence essentially a state of anarchy or is anarchy a state where competence and performance dissolve into a single entity? How does Cartesianism or the notion of an innate mechanism open itself to a reading of anarchy? Is language, in essence, anarchistic? The notion of whether linguistic competence can be willed from a position of marginality is, in other words, to say whether one can will one's own nature. If language is willed through an intrinsic capacity and not just passively experienced, it undermines any reductionist variety of empiricism functioning as a positivist metaphysics that subsists on synthetic proof and certitude rather than hermeneutical explanation and play.

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Chomsky's contribution to the Cartesian philosophy of the mind as a source of language is the connection he establishes between language, human nature and a state of anarchy. The human mind with its inbuilt mechanism of rules can hypothetically function to the utmost level of its competence in the absence of authority. Since the rules are precisely within the mind, creativity is not random but rather controlled; at a parallel level in the social world, authority is what originates within rather than without the individual. The presupposition of an internal mechanism is metaphysical because it is a presupposition though the scientific claim rests in the premise of language as the basis of the study of why human nature is the way it is, i.e., the question of what endows human language with the intrinsic capacity for liberation. Russell has an apt phrase "enlightened self-interest" where an individual is able to reconcile his interests with the general welfare of humanity.

The implications of Chomsky's assumptions regarding the innate mechanism of language can most visibly be seen in the area of educational theory - the child as a blank slate or an active human being in the process of expressing its inner needs. As an instance of this "anarchistic" way of rearing the child is the school called Summerhill started in the year 1929 in Suffolk, England. According to its founder A. S. Neill,

> "Logically, Summerhill is a place in which people who have the innate ability and wish to be scholars will be scholars; while those who are only fit to sweep the streets will sweep the streets . . . would rather see a school produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar" Neill (1960: 4-5).

The notion of cognition is, in radically experimental and poetic ways, equated with creation and freedom in the broadest possible sense. It is creation that leads to happiness and, in turn, happiness is the condition of creation leading to a better world.

Chomsky himself, in the interview to James Peck, cites an autobiographical instance of his first years at a progressive school in Philadelphia.

> "Well, anyway, at this particular school, which was essentially a Deweyite school and I think a very good one, judging from my experience, there was tremendous premium on individual creativity, not in the sense of slapping paints on paper, but doing the kind of thinking that you were interested in. Interests were encouraged and children were encouraged to pursue their interests. They worked jointly with others or by themselves. It was a lively atmosphere, and the sense was that everybody was doing something important" Chomsky (1987: 5).

Though Neill never explicitly discloses an interest in language theory, he typically uses the word freedom to suggest that the child blossoms to his/her

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utmost only in a condition of freedom. In fact, he appeals to the idea of freedom as being in essence innate to the human child.

Anarchism, as Neill's radical notion of cognition demonstrates in educational theory, neither sees the individual as an end in itself (as in extreme versions of *laissez-faire* capitalism that Ayn Rand talks about[10]) nor believes in the sacrifice of the individual to the so-called collective needs of the society (as extreme versions of Marxism tend to believe). As Bakunin, the proponent of scientific anarchism in the 19th century Russia puts it:

> Man frees himself only from the brutal pressure of *his* external and material and social world, including that of all the things and people surrounding him. He dominates things through science and by work; and as to the arbitrary yoke of men, he throws it off through revolutions. Such then is the only rational meaning of the word liberty: it is the domination over external things, based upon the respectful observance of the laws of nature; it is independence from the pretentious claims and despotic acts of men; it is science, work, political rebellion, and, finally, it is the organization, at once planned and free, of a social environment, in conformity with the natural laws inherent in every human society. Maximoff (1964: 265)

Anarchy is the rule of the mind; possessing the rule and the mind's knowledge of the rule; it is an intuitional feature of human language. On the contrary, the rule of external authority (that is internalized by the mind) is an observance (both conscious and unconscious) of an activity called language and the connection between the rule and the activity is never intrinsic like in the case of language and the mind. The idea is that what is social and political is not necessarily real (and can be transformed) - an enlightenment premise - while what is real is human nature that can discover its own rules of functioning - a romantic assumption - as Rousseau contends that "Man is born free." Freedom is what is natural to the mind and language is not just the source but freedom itself.In a political system where the rule that guides the mechanism of language exists outside the individual in a medium that constantly attempts to create a "public voice," it is easy to observe why some individuals and groups and nations continue to be delineated under the utilitarian slogan of "the greatest good for the greatest number". Anarchism relies on the radical transfer of authority - dismantling the language of the State - in order to make way for the language of the individual. In a democratic society, an individual allows his or her nature to develop rationally while a media that works at the behest of the state attempts to shape individuals in order to suit vested interests. In a genuinely anarchist society,

> A "democratic communications policy," . . . would seek to develop means of expression and interaction that reflect the interests and

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> concerns of the general population, and to encourage their self-education and their individual and collective action . . . the goal can be approached only as an integral part of the further democratization of the social order. This process, in turn, requires a democratic communications policy as a central component, with an indispensable contribution to make. Serious steps toward more meaningful democracy would aim to dissolve the concentration of decision-making power, which in our societies resides primarily in a state-corporate nexus. Chomsky (1989: 136)

In Chomsky's terms, the state has acquired the ability of indoctrination to the extent that the individual is convinced that his or her "needs" are as real as that of the "authority" that caters to them - and therefore the title of his book "Necessary Illusions." In his essay "Governmentality," (the pun works either way as the mentality of those who govern as well as the governed) Foucault speaks of the governmentalization of the state. He defines "governmentality" as a "complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge, political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security" Burchell and Miller (1991: 87). An extreme version of this governmentalization is visible in George Orwell's *1984*, in which the distinction between the state and the government is blurred into a single phenomenon that merges into a concept of "power entirely for its own sake" Orwell (1992: 217).

The title *1984* is itself a spatial metaphor of time frozen in "London, chief city of Airstrip One," signifying a sense of the ultimate alienation possible in language based on Big Brother's fundamental perception that individuals are basically units of language and a radical alteration of language is a re-modification of these linguistic units. Big Brother's philosophy of language is characterized by an extreme scientism, a systematic annihilation of the metaphor - which connects dissimilars, since dissimilars do not exist anymore. If Foucault's notion of resistance that endlessly opposes power can be read as a theory of metaphor, (since the innate is creative in the act of recognizing its own rules), then human nature itself can be equated with language and creativity and someone as unintelligent and mediocre in the novel as Tom Parsons can commit "thoughtcrime" by denouncing Big Brother in his dream. Orwell (1992: 192)

As Chomsky might see it, this governmentality has more to do with "transnational corporations" rather than the state *per se*. As he says in one of his speeches, "The shift from national economies to a single global economy also has the effect of undermining functioning democracy. The mechanisms are pretty obvious. Power is shifting into the hands of huge transnational corporations and away from parliamentary institutions. Meanwhile, there's a

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structure of governance that's coalescing around these transnational corporations" Anderson and Davey (1994: 22). It is corporate power that is the new Big Brother with an entirely different corporate language in the form of imagery at its disposal in order to influence the decision-making capacity of the masses. The anarchist view is that the masses are essentially capable of arriving at their own sense of rightness.

Describing the Paris Commune of 1871 as a popular uprising, in which the masses spontaneously decided to overthrow an oppressive government, Kropotkin recognizes an intuitional element in the uprising, a genuine, wholehearted desire to found a social system based on a revolution, "a revolution which would have completely transformed the whole system of production and exchange by basing them on justice; which would have completely modified human relations by putting them on a footing of equality; which would have formed our social morality anew by founding it upon equality and solidarity. Communal independence was then but a means for the people of Paris; the social revolution was their end" Kropotkin (1970: 125).

Kropotkin's argument boils down to the fact that the masses are innately capable of founding a truly anarchist society. In Kropotkin's terms, the masses do not need a leader from the elite bourgeoisie in order to educate them into an egalitarian social order. The intelligence of the masses is something native to their beings as well as their condition; that they can articulate is a linguistic premise; that they will articulate their needs as a group in order to obtain the welfare of the entire society is something that rests conclusively within them. While, no doubt, much of the anarchist arguments observe an agenda in the natures of individuals, the point to be observed is the implication that an anarchist vision has for critical theory. Chomsky himself discloses his faith in popular movements to remedy their condition without an elite guide them that more often than not replace the old oppressors. In this sense, the anarchist does not subscribe to any organized doctrine of thought. As Chomsky said in an interview to the magazine *Rolling Stone:*

> In fact, as a rule of thumb, any concept with a person's name on it belongs to religion, not rational discourse. There aren't any physicists who call themselves Einsteineans. And the same would be true of anybody crazy enough to call themselves Chomskyean. In the real world you have individuals who were in the right place at the right time, or maybe they got a good brainwave or something, and they did something interesting. But I never heard of anyone who didn't make mistakes and whose work wasn't quickly improved on by others. That means if you identify yourself as a Marxist or a Freudian or anything else, you're worshiping at someone's shrine. Young (1992: 70)

An individual is an *a priori* theorist, even before s/he experiences the

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world. But experience is what activates the faculty to theorize or languagify (using language as a verb) the world. The subtle difference is that the power of languagification is not dependent on experience; the mind does not passively receive data that fills its own emptiness, i.e., a state without language. One fundamental principle guiding language theory would be that language is born into experience; experience does not condition language, though the faculty to understand the world through language would remain in its rudimentary stages in the absence of a context. Another point would be that it is in the nature of the language faculty to appropriate the world with words, in that human nature itself is a biological capacity of acquisition of the outside through language. An equally significant point would be that while experience can be creatively molded in infinite ways, it is limited to the data to be accounted for. Language is something natural to the human species as Chomsky observes in *Language and Mind.*

> Roughly, I think it reasonable to postulate that the principles of general linguistics regarding the nature of rules, their organization, the principles by which they function, the kinds of representations to which they apply and which they form, all constitute part of the innate condition that "puts a limit on admissible hypotheses." If this suggestion is correct, then there is no more point asking how these principles are learned than there is in asking how a child learns to breathe, or, for that matter, to have two arms. Rather, the theory of learning should try to characterize the particular strategies that a child uses to determine that the language he is facing is one, rather than another, of the "admissible languages." When the principles just alluded to are made precise, they constitute an empirical assumption about the innate basis for the acquisition of knowledge, an assumption that can be tested in a variety of ways. Chomsky (1972: 171)

The question then is not "why," but to account in philosophically and scientific ways, as to what makes the innate structure rich enough to cope up with the diversity of languages. One most productive generalization in this regard is that any language could be learned since the mind intrinsically possesses the grammar to constitute the world. As John Lyons puts it: "What his (Chomsky's) theory of generative grammar seeks to formalize - rule-governed, structure-dependent creativity whose complexity is defined by the power of the grammar - is certainly an essential part of language" Lyons (1977: 143).

6. Final remarks

In fruitful ways, Chomsky integrates his political criticism with his linguistic theories, in order to provide a sense of unity to his work. What we have attempted to do in our reading is to show that the unity is internal to Chomsky's

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theory of language based on an innate mechanism, which comes out as human nature that in turn becomes a basis of political thought.

Notes

[1] The *Dictionary of Philosophy* edited by Dagobert D. Runes defines discourse as "orderly communication of thought or the power to think logically." I chose this particular definition of discourse for its characteristic universality. However, in the Foucauldian sense, discourse is the power that thinks non-logically or even *unthinks* logic. It is not an orderly communication of thoughts. It is a dis-ordered, indirect communication of what is not just thought in the classical sense with a capital T, but thought in a more dispersed sense. The discourse is never there as a fact to be observed. It is always already not there as a *non-fact* lying everywhere. One functions within a discourse or an "order of things." The order of things involves a definition of power. It can be either an order meant to repress or silence or an alternate order meant to critique the existing order. Either way discourse is power. As Foucault puts it in his interview to Lucette Finas "Power is constructed and functions on the basis of particular powers, myriad issues, myriad effects of power. It is this complex domain that must be studied" (1980: 188). There is a power that functions at various levels of discourse. The Chomskyean discourse can be read as an alternate order of things explaining the existing order of things and attempting to change it. Both the orders (the existing as well as the alternate) are constructions of power.

[2] To 'will' (as a verb) is something that an individual consciously does. It is larger in scope than choice because it involves action at an ontological level. I may choose to work for the Red Cross Society or I may not. But I will to be a human being i.e. I construct myself in a certain light that I would like to be as an individual. At a parallel level, I may choose to use English or French to convey an apology. But I do *not* will to use language as such. In Chomskyean terms, once I have seen language as thinking itself, even my thought regarding the will falls within the scope of my use of language. My intrinsic language mechanism anticipates my desire to will language.

[3] A theory of the will implies a conscious decision to use language on the part of the individual. However, there is a rudimentary, language mechanism that is pre-conscious but paradoxically able to reflect upon its condition. Chomsky sees it in biological terms (more than philosophical) as a language acquisition device that makes language a day-to-day reality.

[4] Confession is meant both in the sense of the sinner at the confessional as well as the patient before a psychoanalyst. The grammarian, unlike the priest or the doctor, tries to his theory more in terms of the "intuition of the native speaker" than attempt to impose one's own discourse upon the "enormous mass

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of unquestionable data."

[5] The world precedes the will; hence willing is involuntary since one is born into the world. The will is what makes the world to be known in terms of reality. I may will to believe in a God or I may treat it as an idea that makes no sense. The making of the world is also the making of reality. Any hard and fast distinction between reality and the world is bound to be fallacious because it tries to isolate terms purely for the sake of argument. As Chomsky points in "Language and Thought," "The world is what it is, with its various aspects: mechanical, chemical, electrical, optical, mental, and so on. We may study them and seek to relate them, but there is no more a mind-body problem than an electricity-body problem or a valence-body problem. One can doubtless devise artificial distinctions that allow such problems to be formulated, but the exercise seems to make little sense, and indeed is never undertaken apart from the mental aspects of the world" (*Powers and Prospects* 6). The various aspects of the world cannot be isolated from the mental aspects and spoken about in categorical terms.

[6] Broadly, Chomsky sees the mind/brain controversy as seemingly pointless because "the brain is a real natural object, just as a molecule is, whether we study its abstract properties say, structural formulas) or its postulated components" (*Powers and Prospects* 12). While I see the mind and brain as interchangeable terms or as mind/brain, I also tried to work upon the older distinction of the brain as a biological phenomenon and the mind as an offshoot of the brain.

[7] While behavior can be seen as response in the way one reacts to pain or hunger, performance has more to do with creativity. An actor can perform in a manner so as to mimic responses. In that case his behavior is not a reliable indication of his competence, since he is playing the role of a hungry man or a man in pain. On the other hand, his performance can lead us to visualize the competence of the person in question.

[8] In the act of visualizing an individual as *being* language (wherein the use of language is what makes the individual human) the individual loses his or her identity as a mere language-user and in fact *is* language itself. Language is no more something the individual uses for one's purposes. Language *is* the individual and the individual is a linguistic entity apart from being a mere language-user. In this case one stretches the competence of the willing subject to its logical conclusion in viewing one as language itself.

[9] C. Wright Mills in his essay "Liberal values in the Modern World" offers an interesting discussion regarding liberalism as a "set of articulated *ideals*," a "political *rhetoric*" and a *theory* of society." "The ideals of liberalism have been divorced from any realities of modern social structure that might serve as a means of their realization. Everybody can easily agree on general ends; it is

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more difficult to agree on means and the relevance of various means to the ends articulated. The detachment of liberalism from the facts of a going society make it an excellent mask for those who do not, cannot, or will not do what would have to be done to realize its ideals" (Mills 1963).

[10] "If it were true that men could achieve their good by means of turning some men into sacrificial animals, and I were asked to immolate myself for the sake of creatures who wanted to survive at the price of my blood, if I were asked to serve the interests of society apart from, above and against my own--I would refuse. I would reject it as the most contemptible evil, I would fight it with every power I possess, I would fight the whole of mankind, if one minute were all I could last before I was murdered, I would fight in the full confidence of the justice of my battle and a living being's right to exist" (Rand 1961).

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