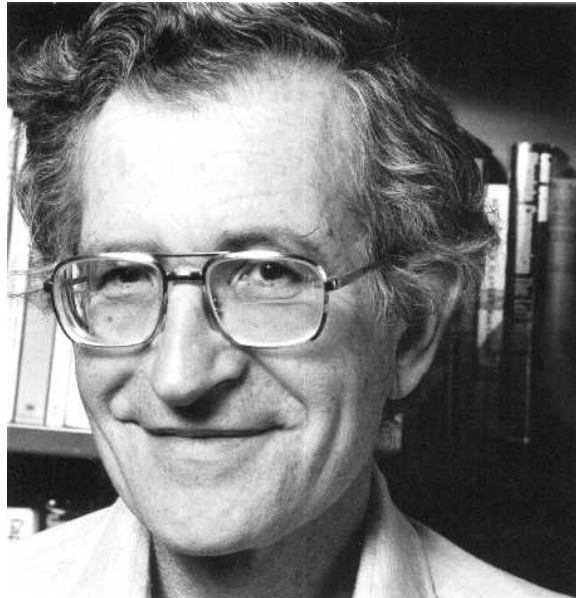


Noam Chomsky: The Rhetoric of Thought Leadership and the Role of Intellectuals in  
Political Activism



by: David Jia

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## Abstract

Since the Vietnam War, MIT linguistics professor Noam Chomsky has spoken out against government corruption and media manipulation, and has emerged as one of the most heard voices of political dissent and political activism. Although Chomsky's academic legacy has been solidified as the father of modern linguistics and a founder of the field of cognitive neuroscience, he continues to work tirelessly as a critic of political injustice around the world. As the most cited individual alive and a top public intellectual, Noam Chomsky is hailed by many as a thought leader in the political sphere. Today, Chomsky's rhetoric of political dissent remains both influential and controversial. In this essay, I argue that Chomsky's success as a leader of political dissent stems from his unique and radical rhetoric, laced with uncertainty and introspection. I first argue that through tailoring his rhetoric to a specific implied audience of highly intellectual individuals, Chomsky is able to justify and interpret political activism using highly evidence-based *logos*, an understated *pathos*, and a seemingly uncertain *ethos*, which I call "self-ostracization." This unique and radical "Chomsky Style" of rhetoric is understood through an analysis of Chomsky's purpose as a leader: Chomsky, unlike many contemporary leaders, aims to change thought through rational contemplation rather than changing behavior directly. Finally, I investigate Chomsky's belief in the existence of an innate human desire of freedom from oppression. This belief contributes heavily to Chomsky's unconventional rhetorical strategies. As a leader of political dissent, Chomsky's success shows us that leaders need not sacrifice true substance of content for the sake of charisma in leadership, and that there is a worthwhile and unfulfilled place for intellectuals in the sphere of political activism and political dissent.

Noam Chomsky: The Rhetoric of Thought Leadership and the Role of Intellectuals in  
Political Activism

The Institute Professor of Linguistics at MIT, Noam Chomsky is both “the father of modern linguistics” and a founder of the field of cognitive neuroscience (Fox). Aside from his immense academic fame, Chomsky has emerged as one of the most influential and controversial political figures of the past five decades. His work on political and societal philosophy has become so prolific that to many, it has almost entirely overshadowed his groundbreaking contributions in linguistics and cognitive science. Nevertheless, while many consider Chomsky one of the “world’s top public intellectual[s]” (Campbell), others dismiss him as “a brilliant debater and an out-and-out bully” (Flint). Regardless of whether one agrees with his political views, Chomsky, a member of the intellectual elite who does not consider himself an activist (Chomsky *An Exchange on Manufacturing Consent*), has had substantial influence on political activism since the Vietnam War. What’s more interesting is Chomsky’s unique rhetoric, laced with uncertainty and introspection. Through tailoring his rhetoric to a specific implied audience of highly intellectual individuals<sup>1</sup>, Chomsky is able to justify and interpret political activism using highly evidence-based *logos*<sup>2</sup>, an understated *pathos*<sup>3</sup>, and a

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<sup>1</sup> By this, I do not mean that the individual must be a member of the intellectual elite or an academic to understand Chomsky’s rhetoric, but merely that she is open-minded and willing to use reason.

<sup>2</sup> I define *logos* to be the rhetoric technique of appealing to reason. This is in contrast to the appeal to emotion or empathy (*pathos*), or the appeal to authority (*ethos*).

<sup>3</sup> Understated *pathos* meaning using *pathos*—or the appeal to emotion and empathy—in a subtle or ironic way. This is in contrast to direct application of *pathos*, for example, an appeal to emotion and persuasion by sentimentally detailing the suffering of a group of people under an oppressive government.

seemingly uncertain *ethos*<sup>4</sup>, which I call “self-ostracization.” This unique rhetorical strategy, which he employs almost ubiquitously, has elevated him to cult status among many of his followers. Combined with his radical message and his anti-mainstream, anarchist persona, this “Chomsky Style” of rhetoric has ushered Chomsky to a position of leadership in political activism and political dissent.

In a world where “leadership” has become synonymous with “charisma” and “activism” with “passion,” the public often suspects modern leaders of “being either deceitfully empty or dangerously subversive” (Kane 371). In stark contrast to the decorated rhetoric of many of these modern leaders, Chomsky consistently forgoes direct applications of *pathos* and even *ethos* in his speeches and lectures. Instead, Chomsky relies heavily on *logos* and evidence-based arguments. By doing so, Chomsky demonstrates that leaders need not sacrifice true substance of content for the sake of charisma in leadership, and followers need not dangerously rest their faith on the passion and charms of those who lead them. As an intellectual who neither practically participates in activism nor considers himself a true activist<sup>5</sup> (Chomsky *An Exchange on Manufacturing Consent*), Chomsky’s success also shows that there is a worthwhile and unfulfilled place for intellectuals in the sphere of political activism and political dissent.

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<sup>4</sup> The use of *ethos* in rhetoric often implies certain authority, either derived from practical experience, or some unique position. Thus by “uncertain” *ethos*, I mean that Chomsky forgoes or even systematically lowers his own authority as a legitimate means of persuasion or a reason by which people should be persuaded.

<sup>5</sup> In the interview *An Exchange on Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky states about his involvement in political activism: “I’d go to meetings, get involved in resistance, go to jail, all of that stuff—and I was just no good at it at all...So sort of a division of labor developed: I decided to do what I’m doing now, and other people kept doing the other things...They spend their time organizing.”

In order to understand the success of Chomsky's rhetoric, we must first examine Chomsky's purpose as a leader of political dissent: what does Noam Chomsky want to accomplish? Unlike many political activists, Chomsky's intent is not to push people directly towards action, but to instill thought and reason. He is not interested in changing people's behavior directly. Instead, Chomsky wants to change the way in which people think about problems and issues, which presumably will in turn change their behavior. Consider one of Chomsky's earliest talks given at the Poetry Center, New York City in 1970. Chomsky begins his talk by saying:

I'd like to make clear my own point in advance, so that you can evaluate and judge what I am saying. I think that the libertarian socialist concepts, and by that I mean a range of thinking that extends from left-wing Marxism through anarchism, I think that these are fundamentally correct and that they are the proper and natural extension of classical liberalism into the era of advanced industrial society. In contrast, it seems to me that the ideology of state socialism, that is, what has become of Bolshevism, and of state capitalism, the modern welfare state, these of course are dominant in the industrial countries, in the industrial societies, but I believe that they are regressive and highly inadequate social theories, and that a large number of our really fundamental problems stem from a kind of incompatibility and inappropriateness of these social forms to a modern industrial society. (Chomsky *Government in the Future* 1970)

What's immediately clear from this passage is that Chomsky is interested in discussing ideas—fundamental ideas about human society. Chomsky starts off his speech by stating that he'd like to “make clear [his] own point in advance” and asks the audience, explicitly to “evaluate and judge what [he's] saying” throughout the talk. This shows that Chomsky does not want his followers to simply accept his ideas, but rather to question and even

“evaluate” them. By explicitly leaving room for doubt, Chomsky hopes to instill a sense of contemplation and questioning in his audience.

Furthermore, according to a study by psychologist and leadership scholars Robert Lord and Cynthia Emrich, successful leaders often use the first person collective pronoun “we” in addressing their audience (Lord and Emrich 564). Yet, in the above passage, Chomsky consistently uses the first person singular pronoun “I” to address his own point of view. Here, Chomsky is using a rhetorical technique I call “self-ostracization,” which I define as the process whereby a leader takes on an uncertain *ethos* to align herself and her ideas against the collective masses. When using this rhetorical strategy, the leader rejects the presumption that she is the rightful authority on the subject matter about which she speaks. In the above passage, Chomsky clearly singles out himself and his ideas. By using the first person singular pronoun “I” in his rhetoric, Chomsky intentionally renounces any presumption of its universality and purposefully makes vulnerable his views to further questioning and disagreement. Chomsky’s subtle but conscious use of “self-ostracization,” though seemingly counter-intuitive to the purposes of persuasion, is in fact highly effective in shaping the way in which people think. By preceding his ideas with “I think” or “it seems to *me*,” Chomsky does not presume immediate agreement and allows the freedom of questioning and the ability to doubt—both of which are the first steps to changing thought.

What’s more, Chomsky not only points out his own view, but also acknowledges the opposition and uses evidence to demonstrate its failure. Chomsky does so by allocating as much weight in his talk to address the opposition as he does his own view. In his hour-long talk, Chomsky devotes only twenty minutes, or one third of his speech to

the libertarian-socialist concepts, which he considers to be the correct model for society; the rest is devoted to revealing the fallacies of alternative concepts that Chomsky considers incorrect models for society. In discussing the opposing “state systems” perspective of government, Chomsky states:

Senator Vandenberg 20 years ago expressed his fear that the American chief executive would become "the number one warlord of the earth". That has since occurred. The clearest decision is the decision to escalate in Vietnam in February 1965 in cynical disregard of the expressed will of the electorate. This incident reveals I think, with perfect clarity, the role of the public in decisions about peace and war, the role of the public in decisions about the main lines about public policy in general, and it also suggests the irrelevance of electoral politics to major decisions of national policy...

The corporate executives and the corporation lawyers and so on who overwhelmingly staff the executive, assisted increasingly by a university based mandarin class, these people remain in power no matter whom you elect (Chomsky *Government in the Future*).

In this passage, Chomsky first quotes an established source—Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan—regarding the centralization of power in the U.S.; Chomsky then uses *kairos* to backup Senator Vandenberg’s observation by presenting concrete contemporary evidence: the unconstitutional nature of the Vietnam War, which, as many know, was never officially declared by Congress. This overstep of executive power, Chomsky goes on to say, is a direct result of the American elite’s capitalistic desire for global hegemony. Here, Chomsky strategically utilizes *kairos* through appealing to the anti-Vietnam War sentiment of the 1970s to further support his rhetoric about societal systems. According to a recent study, “[t]he outrage that precipitated the nationwide college shutdown was not rational...It was completely reactionary anger” (Krane 16). So,

by using *logos* and evidence-based arguments, Chomsky not only brought reason and order to this largely chaotic anti-war movement, but also gave the movement credibility in the eyes of the public. In the same talk, Chomsky goes on to quote an abundance of other reputable sources, including reports by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), *Foreign Affairs* magazine, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., George Ball, Secretary of Defense, Robert MacNamara, business historian Alfred Chandler, and extensive studies by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and National Planning Association, all of which point to Chomsky's conclusion, that "capitalism and democracy are ultimately quite incompatible" (Chomsky *Government in the Future*).

From these vastly diverse sources, Chomsky is not only able to assert his disagreement with "state systems," but also demonstrates his extensive knowledge and understanding of the contrasting "state systems" philosophies. Instead of solely mentioning these opposing views in order to rebuff them, Chomsky uses them as a basis to build upon his own rhetoric, calling these opposing views "points of reference" (Chomsky *Government in the Future*). In doing so, Chomsky exercises the philosophical ideals of the late western philosopher and Nobel Laureate, Bertrand Russell. Russell contends that in considering different philosophical views, "the right attitude is neither reverence nor contempt, but first a kind of hypothetical sympathy, until it is possible to know what it feels like to believe in his theories, and only then a revival of the critical attitude, which should resemble, as far as possible, the state of mind of a person abandoning opinions which he has hitherto held" (Russell 57). This "hypothetical sympathy" is important and necessary because it assures both the questioning philosopher—in this case, Chomsky—and the audience that thorough considerations have



been made in fully understanding the opposing point of view. It then follows that any critique of the opposing perspective holds greater weight against potential bias or subjectivity. Thus, this careful and evidence-based deliberation of contrasting points of view indirectly raises Chomsky's *ethos* by making his rhetoric more objective, while simultaneously sets up Chomsky as an equitable critic and makes Chomsky's rhetoric effective and credible to his audience.

In essence, Chomsky does not merely want to change people's behavior superficially, but more importantly, he wants to probe deeper by changing people's worldviews of how a civil society should fundamentally be structured. This requires a great effort, no doubt. Understanding this difficulty, Chomsky exercises patience by providing his audience with the ability to question and the capacity for intellectual debate.

So Chomsky's goal as a leader of political dissent is to change the way people fundamentally think by instilling reason and ideas. With this in mind, we can better understand why Chomsky resorts to what he does best as an academic: to use *logos* as his primary means of rhetoric. However, much like in academia and most fields of intellectual pursuit, this partiality towards *logos* and evidence-based reasoning is not purely out of preference, but entirely out of the necessity of *logos* as the rudimentary vehicle for critical thinking and the discovery of truth (Silver). According to the 16<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher Francis Bacon, to arrive at and discover truths about the world, one must apply the law of *logos* through "a desire to seek, patience to doubt,

fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order; and hatred for every kind of imposture” (Bacon 518-520)<sup>6</sup>.

As a matter of fact, this careful and meticulous deliberation of evidence and consistent application of *logos* hailed by Bacon is exactly the methodology that Chomsky uses in his rhetoric. In a more recent talk about the war on terrorism held in 2006 at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, Chomsky analyzes whether the war in Afghanistan should be considered a just war. During the talk, he cites a highly regarded source, and then uses simple *logos* to dispute the conclusions of that source:

Another recent and also highly regarded inquiry into just war theory is by moral-political philosopher, Jean Bethke Elshtain...she adds that "nearly everyone with the exception of absolute pacifists" and a few lunatics "agree" that the bombing of Afghanistan was clearly a just war ["A Just War?" Boston Globe, 6 Oct 2002]...In reality, "nearly everyone" excludes substantial categories of people, the majority of the world's population, for example, even in Europe, far more so in Latin America, and also leading Afghans who had been fighting the Taliban, including US favorites, and virtually all aid agencies working there. (Chomsky *On Just War Theory*)

Arguing against Elshtain, Chomsky starts off the discussion by stating that Elshtain’s inquiry was in fact “highly regarded.” This immediately establishes Chomsky as an objective and fair commentator. He further builds upon his objectivity and sets up his *logos* argument by carefully quoting Elshtain’s words that “nearly everyone with the exception of absolute pacifists” agree that the Afghanistan war was justified. Then Chomsky refutes Elshtain’s claim by unequivocally voicing the views of so many around the world who disagree with Elshtain, thereby deeming her claim of “nearly everyone”

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<sup>6</sup> This quote is from an excerpt of some of Bacon’s earlier unpublished drafts, which were later assembled and published together in an anthology of Bacon’s works.

false. Even so, Chomsky does not stop his *logos* argument there. As any diligent scholar would do, Chomsky goes on to further consider Elshain's reasoning by examining her specific model and criteria of "just war:"

First criterion: the "war must be openly declared or otherwise authorized by a legitimate authority." Second: It "must begin with the right intentions." Third: Force is justified if it "protects the innocent from certain harm", as when a country "has certain knowledge that genocide will commence on a certain date." Fourth: It "must be a last resort after other possibilities for the redress and defense of the values at stake have been explored" (Elshain *Just War Against Terror* 57-58). Well, the first two conditions are vacuous: declaration of war by an aggressor confers no support whatsoever for a claim of just war. And even the worst criminals claim right intentions. The third and fourth conditions sound reasonable, but they have no relevance at all, clearly, to the case of Afghanistan. So, therefore Elshain's paradigm example collapses entirely under her own criteria. (Chomsky *On Just War Theory*)

Here, Chomsky is applying a classic *reductio ad absurdum* argument: proof by contradiction. Chomsky first assumes Elshain's argument is correct, implying that her own criteria for "just war" must also be valid. Next, Chomsky shows that in fact each of the criteria is either flawed in some way, or do not apply to the case of the War in Afghanistan. Chomsky argues that the first two criteria are vacuously true because they can apply to any situation—anyone can claim to be a "legitimate authority" or claim "right intentions." While Chomsky contends that the second two criteria are reasonable, they do not apply to Afghanistan because neither do we have a certain date for the commencement of genocide, nor was war our last resort<sup>7</sup>. In fact, according to Jack A.

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<sup>7</sup> This is a point still heavily debated by war theorists and historians. Unfortunately, only through the lens of history bestowed by the passage of time can we truly hope to gain a

Smith, journalist and former editor of *The Guardian*, “Bush rejected an offer by the Taliban to produce bin-Laden if the U.S. wouldn’t invade... war was Bush’s first resort, not last” (Smith). So through logical reasoning, Chomsky is able to deduce that not only is Elshain’s original statement false, but also that her conclusion is not even supported by her own model, a clear self-contradiction. Thus, as a result of Chomsky’s *logos* argument, Chomsky—and presumably the audience—can logically conclude that Elshain’s argument “collapses entirely under her own criteria” (Chomsky *On Just War Theory*).

Moreover, aside from his heavy reliance on evidence and *logos*, Chomsky employs an understated use of *pathos*, which instills a sense of sarcasm in his rhetoric. In other words, rather than over-sentimentalizing, Chomsky chooses his words specifically to reveal absurdity. In his 1989 talk at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Chomsky described several different categories of “bloodbaths” that he and his co-author used to analyze the media’s reaction to them:

[W]e divided the atrocities we looked at into three categories, what we called, constructive bloodbaths: meaning, ones that are good for U.S. power and the corporate class, so they're constructive, benign bloodbaths: one where U.S. power probably doesn't really care very much one way or another, it's sort of irrelevant, and nefarious bloodbaths: those are the ones carried out by official enemies. So we had various types of benign, constructive, and nefarious bloodbaths. And we gave quite a number of examples of these. Well, our prediction was that the media would welcome the constructive bloodbaths, that they would ignore the benign bloodbaths,

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deeper understanding of the conceptions and implications of the war. However, the important point to note here is the highly logical and evidence-based method Chomsky’s uses to analyze and frame the discussion.

and that they would become outraged over the nefarious bloodbaths  
(Chomsky *Manufacturing Consent*).

In the above passage, Chomsky comments on the biased and absurd nature of the American media, contending that the media reports the news with varying attitudes depending on whether the news benefits America's agenda. It is not difficult to see that this message can be conveyed in other ways. For example, the word "bloodbath" can be replaced with a word such as "conflict" without changing the underlying meaning of the message. However, doing so would greatly lower the effectiveness of Chomsky's rhetoric. The word "bloodbath," meaning "an event or situation in which many people are killed in a violent manner," has a dark and powerful connotation that cannot be effectively captured by neutral words such as "conflict." Hearing the word "bloodbath," one cannot help but feel a sense of horror; the utterance of the word directly accesses our emotional capacity for sympathy. Yet, when combined with such seemingly incongruous qualifiers such as "constructive," "benign," and "nefarious," the listener cannot help but do a double take. This is because these qualifiers are tame in comparison to the dark connotations of the word "bloodbath." By consciously constructing the passage in this sarcastic way, Chomsky conveys the lightness in which the media considers such serious atrocities of human suffering around the world: that our Fourth Estate would go so far as to sacrifice and even distort the voice of the oppressed in an effort to buttress a biased domestic agenda. Thus, this understatement of *pathos* is highly effective in demonstrating the ridiculousness and absurdity of the mass media.

Although these ideas about societal philosophies and theories of war may seem highly intellectual, Chomsky nevertheless makes them easily accessible to a broad audience. According to Stanford classics professor, Rush Rehm, who teaches a course on

Chomsky each year, “Chomsky is the synthesizer of an enormous amount of information,” and through this meticulous synthesis of information, Chomsky can present the audience with a clear and approachable message (Rehm). Professor Rehm holds that “Chomsky doesn’t require you to have any special skills other than an open mind, and as he would say, basic Cartesian common sense, which is universal. In a sense, he’s only drawing on the kinds of things that a person with a normally rational sense would be able to approach... so [Chomsky’s rhetoric is] intellectual in the sense that [Chomsky is] widely read, but it’s not intellectual in the sense that you have to be an intellect to understand it” (Rehm). Admittedly, this idea that an intellectual and highly *logos* and evidence-based rhetoric can have such mass appeal is refreshing and, in a word, radical. From the success of Chomsky’s radical rhetoric, future leaders can take heed of Chomsky’s rhetorical strategies and trust that they need not sacrifice substance for passion, and in doing so, not only win over the hearts of their audience, but also unlock their intellectual pursuit of freedom.

Finally, I turn to a point of interest in which I will consider an introspective question of my own: why does Chomsky believe his brand of rhetoric will succeed<sup>8</sup>? This question, although intriguing in its own right, is particularly pertinent in the discussion of rhetoric because the process of answering it allows us to uncover a deeper understanding of how novel approaches to rhetoric—such as that of Chomsky—can be arrived at and constructed. Certainly, many leaders today use rhetorical strategies in order to directly change behavior. American psychologist B.F. Skinner notes in his influential book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* that all human action is determined and not free, and that

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<sup>8</sup> To put it another way: what made Chomsky choose to speak in a way that is so different from contemporary leaders?

“all control is exerted by the environment” (Skinner 83). But if this were true, then all leaders should simply resort to altering behavior and disregard any attempt to change the way people think. This would mean that Chomsky’s rhetoric around changing thought is futile. However, all evidence thus far suggests the opposite. As the most cited individual alive (Grossman), Chomsky’s influence in the political sphere has been unparalleled for the past century. So why is Chomsky’s rhetoric successful?

In answering this seemingly enigmatic question, I investigate Chomsky’s roots as an academic: his groundbreaking work in the theory of linguistics. In his essay *The Case Against B.F. Skinner*, Chomsky refutes Skinner’s behaviorist perspective of human nature, and drawing reference to the claims of racist anthropological thought of the nineteenth century, argues that if man is solely “malleable by nature, then what objection can there be to controls exercised by a superior race” (Chomsky *The Case Against B.F. Skinner*)? Through this rhetorical question, Chomsky contends that such pure behaviorist beliefs lead us to a society not much different from one governed by fascism (Chomsky *The Case Against B.F. Skinner*). However, besides the philosophical contradictions illuminated by this thought experiment, Chomsky also presents strong scientific evidence through his research in linguistics<sup>9</sup>. Through his work on human languages, Chomsky asserts that humans are not merely blank slates, waiting to be molded by their environment, but that there is something innately shared by all humans, namely, the ability to acquire language. The idea that there exists a grammar universal to all human languages became the foundations to Chomsky’s political rhetoric. Chomsky believes that our universal ability for creative expression of language reflects naturally our innate

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<sup>9</sup> Chomsky’s research in linguistics and language theory requires an extensive exposition and are unfortunately outside the scope of the current paper.

desire for freedom of thought and reasoning. In other words, the fact that language—a creative and free endeavor—is innate suggests that our desire for freedom is also innate<sup>10</sup>. In regards to Chomsky’s believe of this innate desire, Professor Rehm states: “[Chomsky believes that] humans have a cry of freedom in there. He thinks that is part of human nature, among other things” (Rehm). In *Language and Freedom*, Chomsky writes, “[l]anguage, in its essential properties and the manner of its use, provides the basic criterion for determining that another organism is a being with a human mind and the human capacity for free thought and self-expression, and with the essential human need for freedom from the external constraints of repressive authority” (Chomsky *Language and Freedom*). So because of the existence of this shared capacity for language, which is exhibited by all human beings, there is also the universal desire for creative freedom<sup>11</sup>, unfettered by all external authority.

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<sup>10</sup> Here, I would like to make the clarification that I am not referring to the age long debate of determinism versus free will, which is a philosophical question on the level of metaphysics, one which does not necessarily presuppose the existence or exact perception of reality. Here, I am solely working within the bounds of reality, taking it as a basic assumption. So when I say “free,” I mean that the individual is “free” from oppressive external factors, such as ones imposed by society or a governing body. For example, in my definition, one is “free” if she can refuse to pay taxes—which is ordained by her government—to protest a war which she believes is unjust.

<sup>11</sup> By “creative freedom” I mean free from external factors and external authorities to exercise one’s own creativity. Sometimes, artists will limit their own means of expression in order to generate creative work. This is a generative strategy well known to many artists. For example, a poet may force herself to first write in a certain received form, or a painter may say to herself that she will only use three primary colors. Although these are essential limitations of “freedom,” they are self-imposed. So I would like to distinguish these aforementioned limitations from the limitations imposed by society and environment, which I consider external limitations. For example, a painter may be limited through governmental censorship to only paint on particular subject matter (or not paint on other subject matter). This kind of limitation is an external one, and one that limits the “creative freedom” as I define it, and it is vastly different from the self-imposed ones an artist might want to make on herself.



In applying this philosophy of the innate human desire for creative freedom to political activism, Chomsky realizes that in order to truly instigate change on a large scale, he must first change the minds of the people. However, according to American philosopher Dwight Macdonald, who was also a great influence to many of Chomsky's earlier works, "[t]he trouble with mass action today is that the institutions (parties, trade unions) and even the very media of communication one must use for it have become so perverted away from sensible human aims that any attempt to work along that line corrupts one's purposes" (Macdonald 93). In other words, instilling a change in thought, especially one that is considered by contemporary standards as "radical," is impossible through traditional outlets by the very fact that these outlets are anti-radical by nature, and even if successful, leads to nothing more than groupthink—a contradiction to the original aim of inducing rational thought. Thus, Macdonald asserts that to change thought on a large scale, "we must reduce political action to a modest, unpretentious, personal level...consist[ing] of individuals" (Macdonald 95). Here, Macdonald's message is twofold. First, a change in thought must first be brought about in the minds of the individual. Second, and perhaps more important, is that political action should be "unpretentious<sup>12</sup>," meaning that it should not adhere to some hierarchy of power purely

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<sup>12</sup> Macdonald's original point (as is Chomsky's) is that individuals should be free from unjust and immoral authorities of their government. But in order to do this, they must be willing to distrust authority, to question those that lead them. However, individuals who are tired of their existing government or feel that an authority has wronged them in some way may be tempted to join a "movement," a "revolution" for the sake of change itself, without necessary justification for that change or understanding of the fundamental reasons for change. The result of this is simply a superficial shift of allegiance from one authority to another. This motive of desiring change simply for the sake of change, without rational or moral justification is one that I believe Macdonald would consider "pretentious." Although the end might be the same, the means to reach that end is equally, if not more important.

for the sake of creating an organized movement, that individuals should look upon themselves to find the right course of action rather than depending on a preordained authority for direction—which would ultimately defeat the original purpose of instilling thoughtful contemplation.

From the passages analyzed in this essay, the fact that Chomsky has consistently advocated for a focus on the unpretentious personal level of the individual is not difficult to see. In an interview with fellow activists, Chomsky voiced his frustration of being bombarded with emails asking him to “lead” them in his political movement. In response, Chomsky states that “[they’re] completely missing the point...real work is being done by people who are not known, that's always been true in every popular movement in history. The people who are known are riding the crest of some wave...you can ride the crest of the wave and try to use it to get power, which is the standard thing, or you can ride the crest of the wave because you're helping people that way, which is another thing” (Chomsky *An Exchange on Manufacturing Consent*). Professor Rehm argues that by forgoing any desire to take advantage of this “wave” to gain power, Chomsky’s rhetoric becomes even more effective. Professor Rehm states: “one of the reasons Chomsky is so effective is because in a sense, he doesn’t want anything. He’s not trying to get your vote; he’s not trying to get your money; he’s not trying to get your support...He sees himself as an intellectual worker...He’s extremely interested in the state of the world, and he’s quite fearful for it” (Rehm). Chomsky truly believes in the ability of humans to create change, so much so that he entrusts the responsibility of political action in the mind of each individual to seek out her own inner desire for freedom from oppression.

In Chomsky's own words, "it is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies" (Chomsky *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*). Indeed, intellectuals are in a unique position to reveal truth and expose injustice in our society through rational and intellectual contemplation. As the Occupy Movement works actively against financial corruption on Wall Street and environmentalists rush to solve the ongoing problem of climate change, ever more responsibilities rest on the shoulders of today's intellectuals. As such, understanding Noam Chomsky's unique and radical rhetoric as a thought leader will allow future activists to bridge the gap between true substance of content and leadership rhetoric in political activism.

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