

CHOMSKY'S LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM

Libertarian Socialism

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INTRODUCTION

Chomsky declares himself to be a libertarian socialist (Chomsky 1981 p 245). For some, such a claim constitutes a contradiction in terms. This paper begins by looking at the difficulties traditionally associated with being committed to both libertarian and socialist values - most specifically the values of liberty or freedom and equality. The paper then looks at the way in which the libertarian socialist or anarchist tradition in general and Chomsky in particular has attempted to defend the logical consistency when these two values are conjoined.

Even if this can be shown, the question remains whether such values are realisable in any concrete sense. It is all very well to argue at an abstract philosophical level that such concepts are mutually interdependent, but it is quite another to then assume that human beings can or will behave in accordance with such values. To make claims about the possibility or otherwise of organising society in a way which is radically different from what we have now depends upon one's view about the possibilities and constraints on human behaviour. The argument might be that if people have maximal freedom, they would act in ways that serve their self-interest, and thereby compromise egalitarian ideals. Conversely, it might be argued that so long as society is organised in the appropriate way, egalitarian ideals are actually fostered in human behaviour. If human behaviour is malleable in this way, then the value of freedom becomes redundant. Both positions then carry with them, if only implicitly, a view about human behaviour, entailing a view about human nature. In the first, human beings are deemed capable of self-interest, which implies that they are separable from the society in which they live.

In the second, human beings are seen as formed by the society from which they come, and as such their natures are plastic, or at least contingent.

It is argued in this paper that Chomsky's vision of the good society does not begin by asking what is logically just and fair, so that he can then preach and justify his vision. Rather he takes a less abstract route. He asks what are the conditions most suitable for human beings to realise their full potential. In other words, he begins with a premise about human nature. Given his view of human nature, he argues that libertarian socialist ideals of freedom and equality are not only consistent with human behaviour, but are indeed necessary for human beings to have the opportunity to live to their full potential. Therefore, libertarian socialism is not simply a morally worthy ideal; it is a necessary state for the human condition (Edgley 1999). While his work in linguistics may be suggestive of a 'strong' account of human nature, Chomsky remains deeply sceptical about our ever being able to verify his account, or any account of human nature for that matter. "I don't see any reason to believe that the sinews and connections of thought ... are even in principle available to introspection" (Chomsky 1988 p 111). He restricts himself to hope. As he explains using the analogy of Pascal's wager:

Pascal raised the question: How do you know whether God exists? He said, if I assume that he exists and he does, I'll make out OK. If he doesn't, I won't lose anything. If he does exist and I assume he doesn't, I may be in trouble. That's basically the logic. On this issue of human freedom, if you assume that there's no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, there are opportunities to change things, etc., there's a chance you may contribute to making a better world. That's your choice (Chomsky 1992 p 355).

THE GOOD SOCIETY: WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR THE LIBERTARIAN SOCIALIST?

It is conventionally held that, if freedom is the chief value of liberalism and equality is the chief value of socialism, then the two are mutually exclusive, since to ensure equality in society will necessarily mean infringement upon people's freedoms. Conversely, if society is organised to ensure that people have maximum freedom, then an egalitarian outcome is impossible. At the centre of both questions lie a series of concerns about the state. The liberal tradition has sought to establish the legitimising principles as well as the necessary scope of the state in order to maintain conditions of maximum freedom. The socialist tradition, on the other hand, has debated the state's role in redistributing resources to ensure equality during and after the transition from capitalism to socialism. The question is then, to what extent is it practical and coherent to claim to be a libertarian socialist?

Both traditions carry inferences about the nature of human beings. Within the liberal tradition, the emphasis on freedom generates an explicit conception of human beings as autonomous, rational and self-determining individuals. This tradition is sometimes labelled idealist because these traits are taken to be *a priori* characteristics of human beings. By contrast, within the socialist tradition human beings are seen as essentially social and co-operative beings by nature, and, although there are different degrees of emphasis on this point, the social or historical circumstances determines the extent to which this nature can blossom.

These (often-implicit) views of what constitutes human nature are important, because they inform the respective traditions about the vehicle for getting from *what is* to *what ought to be*. To cast the debate crudely again, if, as in the liberal conception, human beings are autonomous, rational and self-determining individuals, then to achieve the good society requires changing or raising people's consciousness, usually by education. In other words, it means changing their ideas. Conversely, for socialists, the social, economic and political, in other

words the material world, requires revolutionising for fundamental change to occur.

To set up the debate in these terms is without doubt to prioritise a certain reading in the history of ideas. In particular, the term ‘socialist’ here is recognisably drawing upon its form within the Marxist tradition. Libertarian socialists and left-wing anarchists would automatically object to the umbrella use of the term ‘socialist’ to defend the above positions. They regard themselves as socialists without subscribing to such a view of the state, of human nature, and of how to move to the good society.

Equally, Marxists might object to the failure to identify the possibility of freedom with their position. Indeed, they would want to argue that freedom is important but that it can only be established once people have equality. It is without doubt a defining characteristic of what it is to be Marxist, to identify a role for the state in establishing and defending the appropriate material conditions during a transitional period between capitalism and socialism. However, in time the state would ‘wither away’. Bakunin and subsequent anarchists by contrast have balked at both the theory and the practice of the state’s role, on the grounds that the preservation of the state would only give rise to a new political or bureaucratic elite, compromising both goals of freedom and equality (Bakunin 1973 p 268). As Bakunin argues “the State and all its institutions ... corrupt the minds and will of its subjects and demand their passive obedience...” (Bakunin 1973 p 256). By taking this position, anarchists are thereby seen to give greater weight to freedom than the so-called authoritarian socialists.

Having briefly considered the various complexities associated with the use of labels such as ‘liberal’ and ‘socialist’ in terms of their respective values, it also becomes apparent that the values themselves are contested concepts. Socialists principally concerned with equality may be mainly thinking in terms of material resources. However, equality may be present or absent in political participation or other decision-making processes, in which case it is closely associated with the

other concept under consideration - *freedom* - in terms of *freedom* of expression. Further, material equality does not necessarily mean everyone should have the exactly the same amount of resources. It may not involve, as Nozick takes it to involve, 'patterned outcomes' (Nozick 1986). People have different needs and so equality may refer to equal *freedom* or opportunity to determine and produce things to satisfy their respective needs (Baker 1987). There is also the question of whether inequality is merely a material injustice or whether the cultural injustices of ethnicity and gender are separate and requiring therefore of different political activity. As Fraser asks "[u]nder what circumstances can a politics of recognition help support a politics of redistribution? And when is it more likely to undermine it?" (Fraser 1997 p 151)

Similarly, debate surrounds the concept of freedom. Is freedom a positive or negative concept? (Berlin 1969) As a negative concept, it implies freedom from external constraint. However, if it is a positive concept, it means giving people the conditions to realise their freedom, and so it gets closer to the concept of equality, because it involves giving people equal conditions or opportunity in order to be free. What claims liberals and socialists have over these values is by no means clear. Given their contested nature, how do libertarian socialists deploy and even reconcile the two concepts and their relative values?

EQUALITY & FREEDOM: THE LIBERTARIAN SOCIALIST TRADITION

Libertarian socialists (and anarchists) distinguish themselves from so-called authoritarian socialists by their attack on the maintenance of the coercive authority of the state. Like anarchists, they also argue for the spontaneous organisation of society. However, as Chomsky points out, "the term anarchism is used to cover quite a range of political ideas", not all of which he is prepared to support. Accordingly, he prefers to describe himself as a libertarian socialist (Chomsky 1981 p 245). Presumably, he is acknowledging that in identifying oneself by a label that simply means no state, one is open to being interpreted as merely opposing coercion in terms of the state. Opposition merely to the state,

for example, is not logically inconsistent with support for private property and capitalist relations of production and exchange. While the coercive authority of private property is not of concern to some anarchists, such as Nozick, it certainly is to Chomsky (Nozick 1986).

In the main, however, anarchist thought is principally associated with the socialist tradition (Guerin D 1970, Joll J 1969, Woodcock G 1986, Carter A 1971, Fleming M 1979). This means that anarchism, as it is generally conceived, is an attack on authority and not just the authority endowed in the government and the state but also the authority endowed by private property. James Joll has gone as far as to argue that “decentralization ... [and] the abolition of property [are] both prerequisites of all anarchist conceptions of society...” (Joll 1969 p 26). And Guerin argues “[t]he anarchist is primarily a socialist whose aim is to abolish the exploitation of man by man” Guerin 1970 p 12).

The classic liberal tradition with its roots in the Enlightenment and its emphasis on freedom is central for Chomsky in any definition of libertarian socialism. Indeed he argues “[i]f one were to see a single dominant idea, within the anarchist tradition, that might be defined as ‘libertarian socialist,’ it should ... be ... liberty” (Chomsky 1973 p 374). That liberty and freedom are the essence of classic liberal thought is, in Chomsky’s view, a result of the particular historical moment in time in which they were born. They were a product of an age when feudal hierarchy and monarchical despotism were being questioned and attacked. These ideals were not extended to an attack on the inegalitarian development of property relations under capitalism, which are also constraints on liberty and freedom, because this had not yet become a feature of the society which produced such ideas. As Chomsky says of Humboldt’s ideas “[t]his classic of liberal thought, completed in 1792, is in its essence profoundly, though prematurely, anti-capitalist” (Chomsky 1973 p 375). And elsewhere, again referring to Humboldt’s work, he argues:

he doesn't speak at all of the need to resist private concentration of power: rather he speaks of the need to resist the encroachment of coercive State power. And that is what one finds also in the early American tradition. But the reason is that that was the only kind of power there was. I mean, Humboldt takes for granted that individuals are roughly equivalent in their private power, and that the only real imbalance of power lies in the centralized authoritarian state, and individual freedom must be sustained against its intrusion ... (Chomsky 1981 p 248).

As such, in Chomsky's view, these liberal enlightenment "ideas must be attenuated beyond recognition to be transmuted into an ideology of industrial capitalism" (Chomsky 1973 p 375). Even Locke, who is associated with those hallowed liberal ideals that can be read as a defence of modern state capitalist arrangements - 'life, liberty and property' - argued:

[t]he measure of property nature has well set by the extent of men's labour and the conveniency of life. No man's labour could subdue or appropriate all, nor could his enjoyment consume more than a small part; so that it was impossible for any man, this way, to encroach upon the right of another or acquire to himself a property to the prejudice of his neighbour, who would still have room for as good and as large a possession (after the other had taken out his) as before it was appropriated. Which measure did confine every man's possession to a very moderate proportion ... (Locke 1986 p 12).

For these Enlightenment thinkers, the central threat to freedom was seen to come from the state, at a time when private property protected by capitalist relations of production was only nascent. Later anarchists responded to different social and historical conditions and therefore a different form of coercive state power, namely authoritarian socialism, or in the case of Bakunin, centralisation within the First International. As Bakunin succinctly puts it "[l]iberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality" (Bakunin (1973).

Anarchists are strongly committed to liberty, and claim history shows that one key threat to this has been the state. However, Chomsky also recognises that for today "[a] consistent anarchist must oppose private ownership of the means of

production and the wage slavery which is a component of this system, as incompatible with the principle that labor must be freely undertaken and under the control of the producer.” (Chomsky 1973 p 376) The growth of private power and the attendant economic concentration represents a major threat to liberty and freedom. Liberty and some form of material equality are treated as synonymous or interdependent concepts.

However, if we see liberty and equality as synonymous, what are we to make of Nozick’s argument that liberty is an empty concept if the “socialist society ... [forbids] capitalist acts between consenting adults” (Nozick 1986 p 163)? As far as Nozick is concerned, the consistent anarchist cannot, as Chomsky does, ‘oppose private ownership of the means of production’. It suggests to Nozick a contradiction (Nozick 1986 p 345 note 6). Here we have the often referred to problem that for there to be equality under socialism there would have to be coercion or compulsion.

It can be argued that Chomsky is using the word ‘oppose’ here in a particular way. ‘Oppose’ does not mean deny, but in order to be consistent *the anarchist* must ‘oppose private ownership of the means of production’. In Chomsky’s view, it is farcical to describe capitalist relations of production as ‘free enterprise’. What one is describing is “a system of autocratic governance of the economy in which neither the community nor the workforce has any role - a system that we would call ‘fascist’ if translated to the political sphere” (Chomsky 1988 p 204). What the people do with their liberty then is presumably a matter for them. It is at this point that Chomsky’s views on human nature inform his claims about the cogency of a libertarian socialist position. He argues, “I would like to believe that people have an instinct for freedom, that they really want to control their own affairs. They don’t want to be pushed around, ordered, oppressed, etc., and they want a chance to do things that make sense, like constructive work in a way that they control, or maybe control together with others” (Chomsky 1988 p 756). In his view, *under conditions of freedom*, people would not ‘choose’ to engage in acts that are constitutive of capitalist economic relations. He recognises he has no

way “to prove this. It is really a hope about what human beings are like ...” (Chomsky 1988 p 756).

Chomsky’s view that ‘people have an instinct for freedom’ is placed in a context: “[h]ow the freedom works depends on what the social structures are” (Chomsky 1988 p 758). If the structures facilitate vast concentrations of property ownership, then those without property will probably ‘choose’ to sell their labour power, and so capitalist acts will occur between ‘consenting adults’. If workers take control of the production process, then the structure would facilitate other possibilities. For example, Chomsky argues it might be possible to make meaningful tasks that are currently onerous and unpleasant so that the question of compelling people to do the rotten jobs in a socialist society does not arise.

Let’s recall that science and technology and intellect have not been devoted to examining that question or to overcoming the onerous and self-destructive character of the necessary work of society. The reason is that it has always been assumed that there is a substantial body of wage-slaves who will do it simply because otherwise they’ll starve (Chomsky 1981 p 254).

Further, he argues that if work is organised according to the principle that it gives workers satisfaction, it will not necessarily mean that the things that are useful to people will not get produced. “[I]t’s by no means clear - in fact I think it’s false - that contributing to the enhancement of pleasure and satisfaction in work is inversely proportional to contributing to the value of the output” (Chomsky 1981 p 257). “My feeling is that part of what makes work meaningful is that it does have use, that its products do have use” (Chomsky 1981 p 256). The notion that people will have to be compelled to produce certain useful products under socialism may not arise. Even were it to arise, the society, the community, has then to decide how to make compromises.

Each individual is both a producer and a consumer, after all, and that means that each individual has to join in those socially determined compromises - if in fact there are compromises. And again I feel the nature of the compromise is much exaggerated because of the distorting

prism of the really coercive and personally destructive system in which we live (Chomsky 1981 p 258).

The notion that compulsion would have to occur in a socialist society to ensure that capitalist acts do not occur or to ensure that certain necessary products get produced is principally a result of extrapolating from observations about human behaviour within a society that is manifestly unfree.

[O]ur characteristic assumption that pleasure in work, pride in work, is either unrelated to or negatively related to the value of the output is related to a particular stage in social history, namely capitalism, in which human beings are tools of production. It is by no means necessarily true (Chomsky 1981 257).

Libertarian socialism, then, defends a commitment to both equality and liberty. On the one hand liberty is meaningless without material equality because compulsion occurs when people do not freely have access to resources, and on the other hand to secure material equality without liberty involves compulsion in determining the terms and conditions of that material equality. Such compulsion involves a form of inequality or unfreedom. Equality must include equality in decision-making processes, as part of the realisation of liberty. Thus the two terms are logically interdependent. This aspect of Chomsky's thought distinguishes him particularly from Marxism-Leninism.

One may want to conclude that libertarian socialists have coherent reasons for arguing that liberty and equality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed one may agree that it is logically inconsistent to separate them. However, it is one thing to argue at an abstract level that one concept is incoherent without the other, but it is quite another thing to argue that these ideals separately or together are realisable in any concrete sense. The problem of extrapolating possibilities from human behaviour under certain historical circumstances has already been raised. Success or failure in realising certain ideals depends upon the perceived bounds of human behaviour. Whether the question be about liberty, equality or both, any discussion about the way in which society ought to be organised, or

even criticisms of the existing one contain certain fundamental assumptions about the human condition and its relationship to society.

THE PROBLEMS OF HUMAN NATURE

The concept of human nature is here taken to refer to a set of factors that is shared by all fully human beings, and thus marks out the range and limits of human possibilities. It is also contended that the often-implicit conceptions of human nature usually involve one or other side of a dichotomy that is presented in such a way as to make the dichotomy mutually exclusive. The dichotomy is: either humans are rational, self-determining and autonomous agents (which leads to the view that they thereby require freedom to be fully human); or they are 'blank sheets' onto which things can be written (so the value of equality can be inculcated into the human condition). (Forbes & Smith 1983, Hollis 1977)

We see this dichotomy in the liberal/communitarian debate between Rawls and Sandel (Rawls 1971, Sandel 1982). Rawls famously sought to argue the case for the just society to incorporate both the values of liberty and equality of opportunity. In Sandel's view, however, Rawls tries to extrapolate from a suspect view of human nature and so fails to reconcile the two values. Sandel, by contrast, argues that the process should be the other way round. We should begin by establishing a form of social organisation that nourishes communitarian values because this will, in his view, appropriately socialise human behaviour so that there is greater justice and fairness. Sandel is broadening his notions of justice and fairness beyond rules to outcomes, but in so doing he employs a rather different view of human nature, notably one where human nature is malleable and constructively so. One could ask why, if human nature is malleable, justice is important to anyone.

Sandel's key objection to Rawlsian liberalism is that it involves a conception of the person as antecedently individuated, in other words as having an *a priori* fixed identity that is autonomous and self-determining. According to Sandel, it cannot

escape arbitrary transcendentalism (Sandel 1982 p 13). Sandel objects to this voluntaristic way of conceiving of an individual's relationship to their ends. In other words an individual autonomously exercises his or her will and chooses an end. Individuals do not then choose ends from the experience gained during intersubjective cognitive processes. "As long as it is assumed that man is by nature a being who chooses his ends rather than a being, as the ancients conceived him, who discovers his ends, then his fundamental preference must necessarily be for conditions of choice rather than, say for conditions of self-knowledge" (Sandel 1982 p 22). He also has a 'sociological objection': no matter how committed an individual is to an end, the end can never be constitutive of the self (Sandel 1982 p 11). The individuated self will always stand apart from its values and ends. Thus it is not possible to feel divided between values or ends, or to feel torn between identities. The problem is not that an individual will not make 'the good of another' their end, but rather that such an end can only be said to be in that individual's interest. In other words the good of the community can never be said to be a motivation integral to or shaping of an individual's identity. This means a communitarian conception of politics is ruled out. A person's commitment to a community or goal cannot be conceived of as part of their identity. Sandel asks us not to forget "the possibility that when politics goes well, we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone" (Sandel 1982 p 183). Hence the liberal is not as neutral as he or she might think.

It will be suggested in what follows that Chomsky's libertarian socialist views on human nature transcend this dichotomy. Although he is explicitly concerned with the condition of freedom, it is not because he takes human beings to be autonomous, individual agents, as in the liberal picture, but rather that they are rational, mutually interdependent, creative and social beings. In holding such a conception, Chomsky is able to reconcile freedom and equality.

CHOMSKY'S VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE

Chomsky's work in linguistics leads him to the view that when using language human beings are creative but "creativity means free action within the framework of rules" (Chomsky 1988 p 144). This capacity is innate (Edgley 1970) and suggests that the notion of human creativity can be applied more generally to human behaviour. While he makes no scientific claims, it is reasonable, he feels, to *believe* that this creativity is a more general feature of human nature. Given this belief, he takes a further step by arguing for "a conception of human nature which emphasises as essential to it the need for creative work under one's own control, solidarity and cooperation with others" (Chomsky 1989 p 31). If it could be established, or at least accepted, that creativity was indeed a feature of human nature, then such a feature ought to inform any view of the way in which society might be organised in the *future*. As Chomsky argues:

[H]aving this view of human nature and human needs, one tries to think about the modes of social organization that would permit the freest and fullest development of the individual, of each individual's potentialities in whatever direction they might take, that would permit him to be fully human in the sense of having the greatest possible scope for his freedom and initiative (Chomsky 1988 p 144).

Chomsky is not making any categorical claims about the specific content of human nature, apart from claiming that it is creative. Creativity can manifest itself in many different ways, both good and bad, constructive and destructive. In his view humans do demonstrate creativity, despite the odds, and his research in linguistics provides some supporting evidence. And as Wilkin argues, Chomsky's political writings are full of human creative acts and "snapshots of peoples who have struggled against [hideous abuses] and who have established international solidarity in defense of peoples they have never met and whose cultures they have never directly experienced" (Wilkin 1996 p 244). However, that human nature has a creative capacity does not mean that this capacity will necessarily manifest itself, and here is where the oppressive character of class societies works with

more or less success, to construct a subject, suppressing what may otherwise be

by random changes, then why not control that randomness by the state authority or the behaviourist technologist or anything else? Naturally I hope that it will turn out that there are intrinsic structures determining human need and fulfillment of human need (Chomsky 1988 p 144).

In his view the idea that the human brain or mind and thereby our human nature does not have an intrinsic structure to it, is the stuff of myth.

The background myth is that the human brain is radically different from any other object in the physical world: namely, it's diffuse and unstructured ... malleable and pliable and so on. Well, that just cannot be true. Everything we know is completely counter to it. Everything we know points to the fact that it's like other physical objects that develop in the natural world. And if it is, we're not going to find that one system has the same structural properties as other systems. You don't expect to find it in the other parts of the body. Why should it be true above the neck? (Chomsky 198 p 32-3)

Just because we cannot explain free will naturalistically does not mean we have to conclude that it is metaphysical.

Now, I don't think that there's any scientific grasp, any hint of an idea, as to how to explain free will. Suppose somebody argues that free will is an illusion. Okay. This could be the case, but I don't believe that it's the case. It *could* be. You have to be open-minded about the possibility. But you're going to need a very powerful argument to convince me that something as evident as free will is an illusion (Chomsky 1988 p 415).

Equally he is of the view that just because we are a part of nature, this does not mean that our social and political environment is not also extremely important for human development. Because of their natures, human beings need liberty to develop their creative capacities as well as equality in terms of access to resources in order to sustain themselves and so to develop their innate capacity for creativity in a constructive and cooperative rather than a destructive way.

RECONCILING THE NATURALISTIC INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

An immediate objection can be anticipated. Suppose I do not perceive someone else's skills and talents as useful or necessary to me or my community? Suppose in my view I feel an individual or group of individuals could be something more useful or necessary? Here it seems to me that Chomsky is right not to make any claims about some ideal society where such conflicts would not arise. It is possible to envisage times where certain resources become scarce and then decisions concerning relative production versus relative consumption would have to be made. Compromises would have to be made. But as has already been mentioned Chomsky argues "[e]ach individual is both a producer and a consumer, after all, and that means that each individual has to join in those socially determined compromises ..." (Chomsky 1981 p 258). In his view we do not "need a separate bureaucracy to carry out governmental decisions" (Chomsky 1981 p 259). Decisions can be "made by the informed working class through their assemblies and their direct representatives, who live among them and work among them" (Chomsky 1981 p 259). Of course, "in any complex industrial society there should be a group of technicians whose task is to produce plans, and to lay out the consequences of decisions ... [b]ut the point is that those planning systems are themselves industries, and they will have their worker's councils and they will be part of the whole council system, and the distinction [with state socialism] is that these planning systems do not make decisions" (Chomsky 1981 p 259). Chomsky does not then regard such libertarian socialist ideals as being applicable only to pre-industrial or rural society. In his view "industrialization and the advance of technology raise possibilities for self-management over a broad scale that simply didn't exist in an earlier period" (Chomsky 1981 p 248). His libertarian socialism is not in teleological terms, but relates to a political process conducted among creative beings.

What I think is most important about anarchism ... is its recognition that there is and will always be a need to discover and overcome structures of hierarchy, authority and domination and constraints on freedom: slavery, wage-slavery, racism, sexism, authoritarian schools, etc., forever. If

human society progresses, overcoming some of these forms of oppression, it will uncover others ... (Chomsky 1988 p 395).

So in Chomskyan terms it makes no sense to prioritise an absolute ideal or blueprint of the good. “Anarchism does not legislate ultimate solutions to these problems” (Chomsky 1988 p 395). Indeed to consider doing so is for Chomsky highly suspect. It is suspect firstly because any deviation from Chomsky’s weak conception of the good would imply by definition relative degrees of lack of freedom. But then if freedom is for human creativity to flourish, indeed if as communitarians seem to think ends, goals or the good can be and should be constitutive of the self, then this presumably is not of concern. However, the thesis that human beings are infinitely malleable opens up the whole possibility of coming up with totalitarian conclusions, benevolent and egalitarian or otherwise. The second reason why prioritising the good is suspect is that it carries the presumption that we are aware of all the possible constraints on as well as abundance of resources. “We will each commit ourselves to the problems we feel most pressing, ... many of which we are in no position even to identify under the intellectual and material constraints of our present existence” Chomsky 1988 p 395). Chomsky here again is emphasising that our knowledge and hold on truth must always be flexible, that we must be open to the possibility that new problems will present themselves which will give rise in turn to new and possibly superior knowledge. We must never therefore conceive of a static solution to human problems of social organisation. The most we can do is give people the freedom with which to facilitate the triggering of creative solutions to the problems faced at any particular historical time. This means that Chomsky’s view of freedom is not simply a permissive one, but a politically demanding one, requiring judgment and caution in our political arrangements.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Chomsky is not inconsistent, as some have tried to show, when he claims to be both a libertarian and a socialist. His socialism poses

no particular problems: it is about the need for and the way in which humans organise and live together collectively as individuals. The values of freedom and equality are not mutually exclusive. Chomsky's views on human nature lend his particular position on libertarian socialism greater authority. Liberty and equality are not only interdependent and progressive values, since, in Chomsky's view, they are also necessary to or preferable for the healthy development of the human condition. Chomsky's evidence for such a necessity is far from concrete, as he admits. However, his work in linguistics is certainly suggestive of such a claim. Further it has been argued that for Chomsky freedom and equality are not absolute concepts but are always relative to objective reality. As such Chomsky cannot be accused of teleological thinking. By this view then, there is no 'end' to history. But there can nevertheless be progress.

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