

A CONVERSATION WITH NOAM CHOMSKY

Alejandro de Acosta & Falguni Sheth

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Let's begin with the question of the complicity of academics with the brutality of U.S. foreign policy, understanding complicity broadly: from accepting the privileges of membership in a semi-elite class, to nihilistic disavowal of political activism or engaged teaching. Given your own acknowledgment that certain kinds of research are much more readily funded—for example, research developing artificial intelligence that will be used to create even “smarter” bombs, rather than “questions of... how poorly armed guerrillas can withstand a fantastic military force by an outside aggressive power,” is it possible today to pursue success—or profits and fame—within the academy without aligning one's research agenda to fit those of a brutal imperialist regime?

It's certainly true that, if you put in a research grant on methods of helping guerrillas or people under occupation to resist imperial power, your chances of getting the grant are rather slight and your chances of getting tenure are not very much higher. On the other hand, that doesn't close off the options. Universities happen to be unusually free and open portions of the society. In fact, that's the main reason why there's such an interesting assault against the universities very recently, claiming that they're dominated by what are called “liberals.” Universities are the only part of the society that isn't pretty much a wholly owned subsidiary of the business classes—business meaning all of the economic decisions, the media, and the government. About all that's left are the universities, which are heavily skewed towards power systems but not totally controlled by them; there are open spaces. To the totalitarian mentality,

if anything is out of control, it's a total tragedy. So there's a major assault against them, which you would expect.

Can one remain morally upstanding in an academic institution, where one's own professional comforts are in part subsidized by grants and funds from corporations such as pharmaceutical companies and international banks, and governmental departments such as the Pentagon or the Department of Defense?

There's another general point to be made about research altogether, whatever you're in, say molecular biology or artificial intelligence or whatever it may be. Anything you come up with will be exploited by power systems for their own purposes if they can do it, whether they're corporate or state or others. Don't take them for granted. You can't. The only way you can prevent that is by not doing any research. That's particularly in the sciences and engineering, but also in almost any field. On the other hand, university funding is not particularly for those purposes. That's true even of the Pentagon. I speak as an expert, having been funded by the Pentagon almost entirely for my whole academic career at MIT. MIT, up until around 1970, was probably 90% funded by the Pentagon. If you were in the Music Department, you may not have known it or you may not have wanted to hear it, but you were funded by the Pentagon. If the Electrical Engineering Department didn't get that funding, there wouldn't be a Music Department. That's true pretty much across the academic world.

On the other hand, that kind of funding, say, Pentagon funding, is not military oriented. The Pentagon understands things about the society that the economics profession prefers not to look at, namely that the advanced economy—the high-tech economy—depends crucially on the dynamic state sector of the economy. That's true of almost any aspect of it that you look at. You hear lots of talk about “entrepreneurial initiative” and “consumer choice” and so on; it's not non-existent, but it's around the periphery of the economy. The Pentagon understands that very well. That's why when I got to MIT in the 1950s, they were pouring money into something that was sometimes under the pretext of air defense or some other thing but in fact what it was doing was creating modern computers, later creating the internet, telecommunications, lasers, satellites; almost any part of the high-tech economy comes out of the state sector where the costs and the risks are socialized and the profit is privatized. That's the way the economy functions. The Pentagon understands it: no nonsense about “entrepreneurial values.” The hard part of the research and development, the costly

part, has to be socialized for the public, and there are various pretexts. Some of them are defense; some of them are curing cancer or something else. But whatever it may be, that's the way the work is done. If you're being funded, it's largely for those reasons. How it ends up being used is not in your hands.

You can delude yourself into thinking you're not part of that system, but the only way you can stop being part of that system is to go to Montana and live on a mountaintop and grow your own food and dissociate yourself from the society. That is not a morally justified thing to do, because, within the space of freedom and privilege we have, there is plenty we can do not just as a citizen but as a citizen with unusual opportunities because of freedom, resources, training, privilege and so on which increases the sphere of responsibility. You can use it, but without delusions about what system you're living in.

Broadly, how would you evaluate the relative openness of U.S. academic institutions today, compared with their own history as well as with institutions in the rest of the world?

Well, that's a subjective judgment; I don't know how to give a number to it. But I have been in the academic world since the 1940s. My own subjective judgment is the universities are more free and more open than they were in the past. I can see that all the time. You wouldn't have had a meeting like this twenty or thirty years ago, certainly not forty or fifty years ago, because there was just not that kind of consciousness and awareness. This is in large part a reflection of the fact that the whole society has become a lot more civilized. One of the reasons that the Sixties are so detested is that they had a civilizing effect on society and also a democratizing effect. Naturally, from the point of view of the power systems, that's a catastrophe. But we all know that from our own experiences. If you walked down the halls of MIT forty years ago, you would have seen white well-dressed males, deferential, obedient, and so on. If you walk down the same halls today, it's like every other college and university—half women, a third minorities, informal dress (which is more than symbolic), changed relationships between people, a lot more participation, and a lot more activism. That's true everywhere. If there had been a meeting like this twenty or thirty years ago, which there wouldn't have been, it wouldn't have looked like this. Part of the general civilizing effect of the activism of the Sixties, which has just expanded since, has been to make the universities more open and free and more resistant to the kind of pressures which are always

going to be there to try and shut down any open space. That's the reason for the assaults going on right now.

You can see it in very straightforward ways. A couple of weeks ago, I happened to be giving a talk at the University of Michigan. It was an academic freedom series, which is dedicated to three professors who were fired in the early Fifties. I think one or two of them were tenured and lost their tenure because they refused to take the Fifth Amendment and refused to answer questions about others. One of them, Chandler Davis, who is a personal friend, refused to tell other faculty members whether he was a member of the Communist Party. If you had dinner with him, he would have told you, but he was not going to do it officially. He felt that it was none of their business to know what his political opinions were. That was called "lack of collegiality" or "lack of integrity," I think, because he wouldn't officially declare to the faculty what his political opinions were on principle, of course. Well, that was twenty to twenty-five years ago; the original events were fifty years ago. When the university finally relaxed after several years and began to back down on its terrible behavior, there was, in the late eighties, a faculty committee which didn't allow the weak, inappropriate regrets to Chandler Davis. Now there's a lecture series dedicated to the three men; Chandler was there. He served in prison for six months for this; he went to Canada and had a distinguished career as a mathematician, where he still is at the University of Toronto. He was there at the meeting and was honored and respected. And the university is officially and strongly expressing its regrets over its behavior certainly fifty years ago, but even twenty years ago.

Those are signs of the civilizing effect of the activism of the Sixties, which led to enormous consequences throughout the whole society and continues to grow and develop despite efforts to repress it. There are problems, but I don't think there's anything we can seriously call repression. We don't live in places like U.S. client states, such as Turkey, where there's been a couple of times in the last few years where intellectuals and academics and writers and journalists and artists and others don't just sign statements now and then, but are engaged in constant civil disobedience, face serious risks and sometimes endure them. Being in a Turkish prison is not an enjoyable experience. They're doing it constantly and don't talk about repression although what they're facing is comparably worse than anything we can think of, and it's by no means the worst. In worse places, such as Central America, a critical in-

tellectual can have his head blown off by U.S.-trained and -armed security forces and with the double insult of being instantly forgotten. Even in a group like this, I would guess not many people could name the six leading Latin American intellectuals, Jesuit intellectuals who were assassinated in 1989 by U.S.-run security forces, although if anything remotely similar had happened in Eastern Europe, you'd know the names. In fact, we'd probably have had a nuclear war. But in this case, we murdered them, and therefore, they're not only murdered but also forgotten. You can do a poll of your colleagues and see how many people can list them and how many people can name Sakharov and others who certainly suffered but nothing remotely like what was going on in our domains at the same time. So yes, there are people who certainly face serious threats all the time, and we're not among them. The kind of repression we may feel is not even worth mentioning by comparative or historical standards.

You have mentioned that academics have special advantages and thus special responsibilities to work against social injustice. Many of us junior faculty and graduate students feel that our situation is precarious. Good jobs are hard to get, students are often conservative, and tenure seems increasingly an uncertain prospect. Could you comment on the staff system in academic philosophy and academia in general?

For junior faculty and younger people, yes, there are threats. It's not easy to move up in the academic world. In fact, it starts in kindergarten. We've all been to good colleges, and if we're honest, we know how we got there. How did I get to a good college? Probably the same way you did. It wasn't by telling the history teacher, "What you're telling us is outright lies and perfect nonsense." If you did that, you were a behavior problem or you needed some drugs or something like that. The way we made it was by saying, "All right. It's stupid and ridiculous and dishonest, but I'll do it and I'll go on." Not everybody does it, of course. What you get through this long process is a kind of selection for obedience and docility. Then, another process enters which we're all familiar with. It's very hard psychologically to say something and believe something else. If there's some pressure to keep saying it, you end up believing it. So you end up with a selection process for docility, obedience, and internalization of doctrine. Not 100%, but the pressures are there, and for those who don't accept it, there are various ways of politely dealing with it. Any one of you who's read recommendation letters for faculty knows

what it's like. Very good, serious work, but somehow lacks the kind of attitudes you'd like to have in a department. "Lacks collegiality" or "kind of brash" or something like that. You know what this means. Those are code words for saying "not enough docility and obedience, so look somewhere else." The same goes for admissions. Those are institutional facts you can't ignore any more than you can ignore the fact that drug research is going to produce drugs for getting rid of wrinkles rather than treating dying African children. A part of the reaction to the civilizing effect of the Sixties has been to try to tighten the clamps. One of the ways is by imposing greater discipline on students and younger people. If you haven't read it, I would advise reading one of most important books of the last thirty to thirty-five years, the first study of the Trilateral Commission on what they called "the crisis of democracy." This is not the right wing; this is liberal internationalists. This is, for example, the people who staffed the Carter Administration and their counterparts in Europe and Japan. Liberal internationalists concerned with the crisis of democracy, meaning the fact that the Sixties encouraged lots of people who were usually passive and apathetic to enter into the political arena and press their own interests and concerns. The groups that were mentioned are women, minorities, young people, older people, farmers, workers, what are called the "special interests." That creates what they called "an excess of democracy"; too much pressure. We have to have more moderation in democracy because we are turned to their apathy and obedience. One group was omitted, of course: the corporate sector. They're not a special interest; they're the national interest. They're allowed to keep at it. But the "special interests" have to be toned down, and one of the things they criticized was what they called "the institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young." The institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young (the churches, the schools, the universities, and so on) weren't doing their job. If they were not going to do it, pressures would have to be imposed to make them do it. It's happened. For example, decrease of student loans and increase of tuition has a disciplinary effect. If you come out of college with a huge debt that you somehow have to deal with for the rest of your life, that has a disciplinary effect.

The same is true of eliminating tenure track positions. Partly it's just a matter of creating what economists call a more flexible labor force, which is supposed to be a good thing. It's a technical term that means, if you go to sleep tonight, you don't know if you

have a job tomorrow. That's supposed to be very good for the economy. Any good economics course will explain that. Flexibility at the universities means reducing the possibilities of getting any kind of guarantee for job security. That also means using transient cheap labor. It's like part-time employees who work less than forty hours at Wal-Mart and don't have to get health benefits. In the universities, it's called graduate students. So you get transient cheap labor who don't have to have benefits or salaries or security or anything else. Economically, that's a very good thing. It's very good for the economy at the universities. It means you can run a leaner, more efficient enterprise, the kind that's supposed to be good. Of course, it has the same effect as part-time work in a Wal-Mart.

The star system is just another aspect of it. Just take a look at the gap between CEOs' salaries and workers' salaries; it's shot up astronomically, in the United States way beyond other comparable societies. The only one that even comes close is England, which more or less duplicates the master. And the same thing is going on in the universities. A huge amount of money is being spent for somebody who will go in alumni funding or corporate grants or publicity in the establishment press or something like that. It's a counterpart to cutting back on security benefits. It's another way of imposing more effective indoctrination, which is necessary in an institution which is just too free and open. I don't think that should be tolerated. University salaries should be like the civil service: the same salary, depending on years of service or other reasonable criteria. Opportunities should be freely open to younger people just like older people. In some areas like the sciences, it more or less works this way.

The hard sciences and mathematics are the one area where you just can't impose discipline and obedience. You have to encourage challenges and disobedience and younger people and so on because otherwise the field's going to die. That's the only way it stays alive. There's more encouragement of creativity, challenge, refusal to accept obedience, questioning authority and so on. There's got to be much more of that in fields that have greater intellectual depth because otherwise they just don't survive. In the more ideological subjects, it's easier to carry these things in, especially the ones that have policy-related or culture-related consequences. But that's a system that shouldn't be tolerated in universities, and it doesn't have to be. It's being imposed from above; there's no reason why it should be accepted.

Any suggestions for strategy in getting the message out to the wider public from academia so that it does not strike non-academics as offensively elitist and un-American?

I think it's pretty straightforward. Just don't sound elitist. You don't have to. Actually, one of the good things about American society, again by comparative standards, is that there is relatively little sort of deference within the society. When I went to teach in England years ago, I was in shock to see how you just couldn't talk to the garage mechanic or the taxicab driver or something the way you would ordinarily would in the United States because the hierarchy differences are so much more pronounced both from above and from below. It's not really true here: it's less true here than in any society I've found, which is a very healthy thing, and we can be part of it. You don't need to talk down to people to make any sense. I've never heard of any other strategy.

There is a slogan which is commonly used which I really dislike. It's used by people I do like; in fact, it's the Quaker slogan. "Speak truth to power." That's just the wrong idea. For one thing, you're not speaking to power because they already know what you're trying to tell them. For another, you're not speaking truth because how do you know what you're saying is true? Where does that come from? You don't speak to anyone; you speak with them. You're part of them; you're trying to learn. That's what good teaching is about. You should be trying to find out truth with other people, usually the powerless. That's a much better slogan, and I think that's a perfectly feasible strategy.

You often emphasize, and to great effect, the complicity of intellectual elites with state brutality and economic injustice. But what about the intellectuals that resist, or at least wish to? How do we understand their work and struggles? You once pointed to a quote by Barrington Moore from 1967 in describing the "predominant voice in American society": "You may protest in words as loud as you like; there is but one condition attached to the freedom we would like very much to encourage; your protests may be as loud as possible, so long as they remain ineffective. Though we regret your suffering very much and would like very much to do something about them, indeed, we have studied them very carefully and have already spoken to your ruler and immediate superiors about these matters, any attempt by you to remove your oppressors by force is a threat to civilized society and the democratic process. Such threats we cannot and shall not tolerate. As you resort to violence, we will, if need be, wipe you from the face of the earth by the measured response that rains down flames from the skies."

His point is correct, but remember, he's not talking about resistance inside the United States. The predominant voice that he's talking about is our voice to our subjects. That's the voice that's directed to Central America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, basically the colonial world, one of the mechanisms of keeping it in its old state. It's the voice to the Third World. You can have freedom. We think it's a great idea. You can have democracy and elections. The only requirement is that it come out the way we say, and if it doesn't, "we will wipe you from the face of the earth." You'd have to be pretty blind not to see that that's the predominant voice and the policy that follows from it.

It's sometimes called "democracy enhancement." During the Reagan years, there was a program. Now people who call themselves neo-Reaganites are pursuing the same noble vision of "democracy enhancement" because even the "democracy enhancement" section inside the State Department has some intelligent and honest people in it, who are probably completely sincere, not incredible monsters. Some of them are good scholars, and you can learn about what it means by reading their scholarship. The most important one, is Thomas Carruthers, a Latin America scholar regarded as the leading scholar of the "third wave of democracy," as it's called, that the U.S. inspired in Central America and elsewhere in the Eighties. He writes from an insider's point of view. He was in the State Department for the "democracy enhancement" program, and he says pretty much what Moore says. He says that the Reagan administration was sincere in its efforts to "enhance" democracy in Latin America. But the efforts were a failure, and as he points out, they were a pretty systematic failure even. He says that, in the areas where the U.S. had the least influence, the growth of democracy was the greatest. So in a southern region where influence was limited, there was real growth of democracy. He points out that the U.S., the Reagan administration, tried to resist it, but finally had to give in and accept it. When you get to the areas which are close by, where we're really running them, he says that there wasn't very much progress. He even says what the problem is. He says that the problem is that the U.S. did encourage democracy and was happy to help bring it about, but only if it was a top-down form of democracy, which leaves in power traditionally links that are closely connected to U.S. interests.

That's Barrington Moore's point. He said, yes, you can have democracy and freedom as long as you get the right guys in power and it comes out our way. There's much self-praise these days

about how the United States brought democracy to Japan and Europe after the Second World War. The first chapter of postwar history was the (often violent) destruction of the anti-Fascist resistance all throughout the liberated countries of Europe and Japan, and the labor movements, which were very strong. The Resistance had a lot of prestige right after the war; they were very closely tied to the labor movement in countries like Greece, to the peasant movements. That had to be crushed everywhere, and the traditional society had to be restored to power, often with Nazi and Fascist war criminals in charge; the same in Japan. Those were the policies. Since this is a really free and open society, we've got documentary evidence of that.

It goes on right to the present. Carruthers is describing Central America, but we're seeing an example of it right now right in front of our nose. Take Iraq. After the pretexts for the war collapsed—no weapons of mass destruction, no Al Quaida—they had to come along with a new reason, and they did. The reason was what was called "the president's vision" or as the Boston Globe called it—the "liberal" press—his "messianic vision" to bring democracy to Iraq and the Middle East and the world. The president's "messianic vision" was announced about a year ago with great fanfare in Washington and a lot of enthusiasm. The reaction of the educated classes was interesting—characteristic but interesting—100% acceptance that this was the goal. Check it out. I can't read everything, obviously, but I was looking very hard to see if anyone questions that this was the goal. There are critics, plenty of critics. What they say is that it's a noble and inspiring vision, but it's beyond our reach. Iraqi culture is too backward; they're not ready for nobility, and so on. We have to be more pragmatic. We have to temper Wilsonian idealism, as it's called, with a realistic pragmatism. That's the spectrum; either noble and inspiring or else noble and inspiring and we probably won't be able to carry it off because of their cultural defect.

There's one sector of society that disagreed: Iraqis. Right as the "messianic vision" was announced with great pomp in Washington, they did release a U.S.-run poll in Baghdad a couple of days later, in which people in Baghdad were asked why they thought the U.S. invaded Iraq. Some agreed with 100% of people in America in opinion (most of Europe as well); 1% said the goal was to bring democracy; 5% said the goal was to help Iraqis. Almost everyone else said what is unpronounceable here. You can't say it; if you say it, it leads to conspiracy theories, Marxism, and so forth.

Namely, that the obvious reason the U.S. invaded Iraq was because of its enormous resources right in the center of the world's oil-producing region with the last major untapped resources, enormous profits, and its strategic power base for reorganizing the region in U.S. interests. But we're not allowed to say that. So adherence to the "messianic vision" may be beyond our reach; maybe not. Actually, the response to the poll was more nuanced, and that bears on Barrington Moore's point and Carruthers' version of it. 1% said the U.S. invaded to establish democracy, but 50% said the U.S. wants democracy, but only if it can be sure to influence it. If you stop to think for a minute, you'll see that the U.S. can't possibly be intending to bring democracy to a sovereign Iraq. Just ask yourself. Suppose there was a sovereign, democratic Iraq. What would its policies be? It's not hard to figure out. It's going to have a Shi'ite majority; first thing they'll do is probably shore up relations with Iran, which they wanted to do anyway—Shi'ite Iran. That might well incite moves toward independence in the Shiite regions of Saudi Arabia, which happen to be right next door and happen to be where all the oil is. So you might be seeing moves toward the ultimate nightmare—a Shi'ite-run region controlling the overwhelming majority of the world's energy resources and out of U.S. control. How likely is that going to be? The other thing an independent Iraq would do is try to regain its natural position within the Arab world where it would be a leading state within the Arab world, the most educated and advanced and so on. That means confronting the regional enemy, the regional superpower, a U.S. offshore military base, which is far and away the most powerful state in the region. It's technologically advanced, essentially an offshoot of the U.S. high-tech industry at this point, hundreds of nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, crushing the Palestinians, and they'll try to confront that. Which means they'll rearm and probably develop weapons of mass destruction as a deterrent. Do you think the U.S. is going to tolerate that? Think about it for a minute. The chances of allowing a sovereign, independent Iraq are far below the chances of allowing a sovereign, independent Haiti, and the U.S. wouldn't tolerate that. How can anybody take this seriously? But try to find dissent anywhere. Yes, that's the predominant voice, except he understates when he says "predominant." It's a nearly unanimous voice even among critics with regard to the countries that are supposed to be disciplined and subordinate and follow orders.

Control of interpretation and the production of subjective needs and desires has intensified to such an extent that it may be somewhat inaccurate to talk about a free and open society the U.S. since it's getting increasingly less democratic in terms of informed participatory politics. Should we start asking about the so-called free and open society where it's no longer the access to information that matters, but how that information is produced and for what purpose?

The efforts to control needs and information are increasing all the time. But it's a reflection of the fact that it's a free and open society. It's not the opposite; it's a reflection of it. Go back to David Hume's foundations of the principles of government. The first principle of government that he mentioned is something like this: power is in the hands of the governed, and in every society, whether military or free—what we would call totalitarian or democratic—control of opinion must be the source of power because, if the governed understand that they have power, powerful institutions aren't going to survive. You've got to insure that they don't understand it. Control of opinion is the core of government because power, real power, is in the hands of the governed. There's a lot of truth to that. But I think you need a corollary: control of opinion is more important in the freer and more open societies than it is in the more brutal and repressive societies. For example, Franco's Spain did allow a fair amount of freedom and debate, cafes with Marxist discussion, bookstores, and so on. As long as people were walking past the torture chamber in central Madrid every day and could hear the people screaming, you could let them talk. It was pretty much the same in Russia. There are some studies of people's access to information in Russia, and they were extremely broad. There wasn't a real major attempt to crack down on it. So in the Seventies *samizdat*, illegal underground publications, were reaching about half of the more educated part of the population and about 60% or so of blue-collar workers—nothing like dissident journals here which are out of their minds if they can reach 20,000 people. But you could allow that in a repressive and brutal society because people were controlled by fear. As societies become more free and open and as they reduce the capacity of the state to control by violence, you have to turn to other means of controlling people.

That's the job of the public relations industry, which is committed to controlling opinions and attitudes, primarily attitudes, and creating needs. It's a creation of the freest societies, developed in the United States and in England and later spread to the rest of the world. Here, now, it's a huge industry. What's called "marketing"

takes an estimated sixth of the GDP; it's maybe about two trillion dollars a year. Most of it is deceit. The major vocation of the public relations industry is creating wants and deluding consumers. An ad on television or in the *New York Times Magazine* is not trying to inform you. The last thing they want to do is inform you. If companies wanted to inform you, say if GM wanted to inform consumers, they'd put up a little thing saying, "Here's the models for next year. Here are their characteristics." It would cost no money. But that's not what they do. What they do is put up a picture of the car or whatever it is, some sports hero driving it or a sexy model on top of it or something like that. It's going up to the stratosphere, doing some insane thing. The point is to try to delude the consumer: first of all, to create wants, to make people want it. The second thing is to try to delude people into picking this one rather than some equivalent one. That's the major task of this monstrous industry. The task is to undermine the idealized markets that we're taught to worship in economics courses where informed consumers make rational choices. That's the last thing that anybody wants.

This is very similar to elite intellectuals on the liberal left—people like Edward Bernays, Walter Lippmann, or Roosevelt, Wilson, and Kennedy: liberal thought is the chief promoter of the PR industry. They're all saying the same thing: people want a lot of freedom. You can't control them by force anymore, therefore you have to make sure they have the right beliefs and the right attitudes. They're trapped by created wants so that they're under control.

It's not a profound insight. If you look at the history of colonialism, you see that over and over. In Jamaica, in 1831, there was a slave rebellion, and the slaves overthrew the British masters. There were parliamentary debates at the time about what to do about it. There was plenty of free and open land in Jamaica. People could go out and get themselves a plot of land and live happily ever after. How are you going to prevent them from doing that? You've got to maintain the plantation system somehow. They immediately came to the conclusion that what they had to do was to create wants. We have to try to propagandize people to try and get them to believe that they need all kinds of luxury goods that only we can provide for them and get them on credit. Give them a lot of easy credit, and they'll get into debt. Pretty soon, you've got them under control. The United Fruit Company independently did exactly the same thing in the plantations of the eastern Caribbean fifty

years later. Black workers were coming from Haiti and Jamaica and elsewhere to that area, and they were moving into areas where the company had its plantations. They worked there; they needed the jobs. But the trouble was that they could go off into the hills of Costa Rica and find land, which was plentiful, and again, just like in Jamaica, live happily ever after. So the Fruit Company had the same idea. "What we have to do is convince them"—this is what they literally said—"that they need silk stockings and Stetson hats." That's exactly what you need if you're a worker on a banana plantation in Costa Rica. But with enough propaganda and control and free credit and gifts and the inducements of the advertising industry, you can build up that culture and pretty soon they're trapped.

It's just like the lottery. There was a study in Massachusetts a couple of years ago in which they compared lottery sales to per capita income in towns, and it's exactly the way you'd think. As per capita income goes up, lottery sales go down. Nobody who thinks for a minute is going to buy a lottery ticket. It's sheer robbery. But there's propaganda, which traps people who lack the education and background to think it through into believing, "If I get this thing using my secret method and so on, I'm going to be a billionaire." There is a connection between the achievement of freedom, whether in a slave rebellion or in a society like ours, and figuring out new ways to trap them and control people. The same works in elections. The most interesting thing about the last election which is virtually undiscussed is the opinion polls that came out right before it. The major public opinion institutions in the country, the most respectable ones that do regular monitoring of public opinion, came out with major studies in September and October right before the election that were barely mentioned in the media. If you look at them, you'll see why. The bipartisan consensus in the media, the journals and the intellectuals is way to the right of the population on just about every major issue. Obviously you can't report that. You can't let people know that they're not isolated. And you certainly can't let them act on it. The elections are increasingly, more so every year, run by the same guys who sell toothpaste. They're run by the PR industry. And they do it the same way. You undermine markets by deceiving consumers, and you undermine democracy by deceiving voters. So you don't present issues; that's the last thing you want to do, any more than GM wants people to know what its cars really do. You don't present information about issues and your stance, and it turns out people

don't know the stances of the candidates or what their positions are on issues, not because they're stupid, but because every effort is made to keep them from knowing. What you do is project imagery, just like car ads and toothpaste ads. They've concocted a certain image of George Bush. He's the ordinary guy, your friend. You'd like to meet him in a bar. He rides around in an old pickup truck. I'm convinced that he's taught to do all the things that intellectuals like to ridicule, like saying "nuclear" and "misunderestimate." Nobody who went through Yale and prep school talks like that. He's probably trained to do that, and they love it when intellectuals ridicule him because he's just an ordinary guy just like you. The idea is for the PR industry to see if they can delude people with imagery to undermine the threat of democracy in just the way they work to undermine markets and for pretty much the same reasons.

What about the Christian right, as conservative fundamentalism, and as religious revivalism? What can we do about this rising power, in the United States in particular?

Religious revivalism is a mixed story. Which religion are we talking about? Is it the Christian religion? We just had Christmas a couple of days ago. Christmas is not an original Christian holiday. It was invented during the Roman period by Constantine when they modified (for Rome's purposes) a pacifist egalitarian religion that you see in the Gospels. It was modified into an instrument of violence and repression. That's when the "just warfare" theory developed. The "just warfare" theory developed largely as a cudgel that turned a pacifist religion into a way to beat people over the head under the pretext of just war. With the Nicene Creed, the only thing you look at is the Christ Child and the resurrection. You forget all the content that was in between. When you read the Gospels, you can see why it's all suppressed. It's not the kind of thing you want people to hear. In fact, the church finally did try after hundreds of years, thousands of years in fact, to bring it out in liberation theology: the Latin American bishops in the 1960s and 1970s. They were simply slaughtered. The U.S. organized a huge war all over the continent to try to wipe out the liberation theology, which was trying to get people to really read the Gospels and to see what it actually said, not just to be deluded by the symbols that were created as means of oppression. It's not a particular secret; the famous School of the Americas, which trains Latin American officers, has as one of their talking points that the U.S. army helped defeat liberation theology, which is true. It helped defeat

Christianity in its original form for hundreds of years before it was taken over as a weapon of oppression and violence—the one that we’re taught. So, when you talk about religion, who are you talking about? There are a lot of different facets to it.

Our last question is about your repeated appeals to moral truisms. Has the current Presidential Administration ever declared itself to be adhering to a universal standard of moral behavior? If not, then how is it possible to make a convincing case to a neo-imperialist administration that it must hold itself to the same standards of behavior to which it holds others?

Has the administration ever said that it accepts moral truisms, like universality? Sure. We all remember when George Bush was asked who his favorite philosopher was. What did Jesus have to say about the hypocrite? How did he define the hypocrite? Several times in the Gospels, the hypocrite is the one who refuses to apply to himself the standards he demands of others. In fact, he went further. The hypocrite is the one who doesn’t first attend to his own crimes and then later think about the crimes of others. I’m not suggesting that, when people go to church and pray, they’re actually thinking about what the words are. But I’m sure he’s seen the words. So has Tony Blair. They profess the highest moral values. There’s nothing particularly novel about that. If you look at the internal records of other societies, you find it’s probably an historical universal. Hitler, for example: just read the rhetoric. It was all about the highest ideals. He was going to end death and conflict and bring cleansing. People would finally be able to live together happily under the civilizing regime of Germany which, as Heidegger had already explained, is the last society upholding the glories of Greek civilization right in the middle of the Nazi period. It was just full of wonderful rhetoric.

About thirty years ago, one of the least popular articles I ever wrote—and that’s a standard hard to meet—was published shortly after the Rand Corporation had released a lot of documentation about Japanese counter-insurgency literature from the 1930s in Manchurian North China. They released it as part of the effort to help out U.S. counter-insurgency tactics. It was very interesting reading. First of all, it was very much like U.S. counter-insurgency. Also, the rhetoric was extremely uplifting. What Japan wanted to do was totally self-sacrificing. They wanted to create an earthly paradise for the people of China and Manchuria in which everyone would have peace and happiness, and Japan would help them develop and give away all of its knowledge and understanding

out of love and humanity and so on. There's every reason to believe it was completely sincere. This was not propaganda; these are internal documents. Now, the Russian archives are being sold off like every other part of Russia. A huge industry has developed among Western scholars to try and comb through the archives to see if they can find some particle of evidence that will justify U.S. policies and so on. It's pretty hard. The archives are interesting, but they don't help out very much; in fact, usually the opposite. But there is some interesting stuff in them. Some of the most interesting is when you see these guys talking to each other. Gromyko and these other gangsters are talking to each other, not for show, about how you have to protect democracy in Eastern Europe, protect the people's democracies against the fascist attack so that people can live in freedom and on and on. Did they believe it? I suppose so. If we had records from Genghis Khan, we'd probably find the same thing. It's very rare for people to say, "I'm a brutal, vicious monster, and I'm going to slaughter everybody." People don't say that to themselves; they don't believe it about themselves even if it happens to be exactly true. So do the Bush guys profess the highest moral values? Sure, and they probably mean it as well. I don't see that there's any less reason to believe them than Hitler or Stalin or the Japanese fascists and others. It's standard. It's probably close to an historic universal. You might try to see if you can find an exception. There are some exceptions: people like Churchill, for example. In the internal documents, he's pretty straight; sometimes, even publicly. But it's scattered. You can see that he understood pretty well what he was doing, but most of the rhetoric isn't like that.

They profess observance of the universal moral values like everyone, and it's trivial to show that they don't accept it. But it's trivial in other cases, too. In fact, if you look historically at the role of intellectuals, it's not a pretty history. Overwhelmingly, the history is one of defending power from exposure on its violation of elementary moral truisms. That's almost the history of intellectuals. It doesn't look like that when you read intellectual history, but remember who writes intellectual history. If you look at what actually happened, forgetting the self-interest of the guys who were writing it, that's what it usually is like. It goes back as far as you like. The guy who drank the hemlock was not someone who was obeying power. What we call the "prophets" in the Bible are what we would call dissident intellectuals. They were giving critical geopolitical analysis, saying, "What you are doing is going to lead to

a Syrian invasion which will wipe out the country” and so on. They were calling for peace and justice, good and kind treatment of widows and orphans, and things like that. How were they treated? Well, if we all had good religious educations and read the Bible, we’d know how they were treated. They were driven into the desert; they were imprisoned; they were vilified and denounced like dissident intellectuals all the time. Many centuries later when all this stuff was redacted, they were the prophets. But at the time, the respectable intellectuals were the ones who were called false prophets. They were the flatterers at the court of King Ahab; they were the respectable intellectuals. If you look through history, you won’t find many exceptions to that. In fact, some of the examples I mentioned, like Turkey, are among the very rare exceptions that I know of. It’s close to a tautology. If you don’t take on this role, if you don’t become a respectable intellectual, you’re subjected to various kinds of punishment. How bad it is depends on the society.