

Power, Justice and the Role of Intellectuals in the Chomsky-Foucault Debate

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The modern Ukrainian society is currently in the process of establishing a dialogue between citizens and government. The government's expectations and degree of public confidence are in a deep crisis, which is revealed in numerous acts of civil disobedience that Ukraine has faced during the last decades. In this context, it is important to refer to the similar experience of other countries. When in the late 1960s, France was rocked by the events of civil disobedience, and the United States saw the protests against the Vietnam War, the leading philosophers of those times and those countries, Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, reflected and shared their opinions on these events. Their positions clashed in 1971 at the Justice vs. Power debate. The discussion demonstrates two opposing approaches, thus making it possible to explore the relationship between power and justice as a whole. The intellectuals play a key role in this relationship.

Keywords: power, justice, debate, civil disobedience, citizens and government, social institutions

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Introduction

The article's subject is the notions of power and justice in the discussion between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault "On Human Nature. Justice vs. Power."

The author aimed to reveal the notion of power and justice through the analysis of these notions in the discussion between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault's "On Human Nature. Justice vs. Power."

The article analyzes the applicability of the notion of justice in relation to power on the example of two opposing approaches in political philosophy, which clashed in the debate "On Human Nature: Justice vs. Power." In order to clarify the specifics of the positions of speakers, it is necessary to reveal the philosophical and political basis that forms these positions.

The article's main source is a transcript of the discussion published in *The Chomsky-Foucault debate: On Human Nature* New York: New Press, 2006.

The text of the debate itself has been a subject of several philosophical researches. Among them the article of Peter Wilkin *Chomsky and Foucault on Human Nature and Politics: An Essential Difference?* (Wilkin, 1999). The host of the debate, Dutch philosopher Fons Elders, wrote a book about that event *Philosophers in Debate* (Elders, 2013).

However, much more publications are devoted individually to Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault.

Transformation of Chomsky's Research Topics from Linguistics to Political Philosophy

As a result of the analysis of the publication activity of the philosopher, interesting features are revealed. Noam Chomsky is widely known for three areas of intellectual activity:

1. Works on linguistics: *Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory*, 1955, *Syntactic Structures*, 1957, *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 1964, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, 1965, *The Sound Pattern of English*, 1968, *Studies on Semantics in Generative Grammar*, 1972.
2. Works on the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind: *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*, 1966, *Language and Mind* 1968.
3. Political works: *American Power and the New Mandarins*, 1969, *At War With Asia*, 1970, *Two Essays on Cambodia*, 1970, *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*, 1971.

All these works were written before the debate in 1971 and therefore constituted a framework of Chomsky's worldview at that time. The linguistics, philosophy of language, and political philosophy of Chomsky are interconnected.

Philosopher's approach was formed on the basis of research in the field of linguistics. Noam Chomsky wrote his first works in polemics with linguistic externalism and behaviorism. In *Language and Mind*, Chomsky proclaims the central position for the creation of linguistics, the idea that the function of language is not limited to communicative one, because language — is the main tool of thinking and self-expression. In this respect, the idea, which can be considered as the leading in the linguistic and philosophical concept of Chomsky — the idea of the creative nature of language activities — is that creativity is realized not only in connection with literature but also in the field of ordinary communication. He stood on the positions of language internalism — the concept of language, which assumes the primacy of internal language in relation to language acquisition in communication with people, is the original guideline of the philosophical views of Chomsky. According to the internalist concept of language, language is a property of the consciousness or brain of an individual and follows his internal states. Chomsky called his concept I-language, where "I" means both internal and individual, and it is opposed to e-language, where "e" means external. The philosopher denies the thesis that there is a specialized part of the brain for language. All people are born with a language system formed in the same way. Language acquisition, according to the thinker, is the development and maturation of the language system in the brain. Language appears as a mature state of the individual language system.

In the work *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, the method is deployed transformational and generative grammar, in which the study of any sentence proceeds from the discovery of its

surface structure to the analysis of its deep components — the rules that form these sentences (Chomsky, 1965: 20).

This work made a revolution in linguistics because, for the first time, it allowed exploring the structure of language regardless of specific (national) languages. In his linguistic research, Chomsky studied the issues that changed not only the notion of language but also the notion of human beings in general. Consequently, the most important conclusion of his linguistic research Chomsky considers the understanding that language is an intrinsic cognitive ability of human being (Chomsky, 1966: 41)

For Chomsky, this discovery becomes a hallmark of the language community of mankind. While analyzing the structure of human mastery of speech, Chomsky concludes that a rather poor initial data set that a person absorbs during the first year of life is the key to understanding grammar, a system of language rule. However, these data are not sufficient to explain how it results that a person demonstrates the ability to understand and produce sentences and statements that he had never heard before. This steers Chomsky to reconsider the process of mastering a human language. Specifically, he explains this by the innate human ability to interpret and to use language rules in a creative way. Therefore, Chomsky introduces a specific term — ordinary or transformational creativity. Ordinary creativity is the creativity, which takes part in the generation of human language and a system of grammatical rules that a person learns in the first year of life; language generation can occur only under conditions of creative possibilities for processing these rules. Understanding and producing sentences that a person has never heard before is an example of ordinary creativity (Chomsky, 1968: 58). The concept of inner and innate ability to create represents the original guideline for the concept of “human nature” by Chomsky. This is exactly the concept that forms the principles of Chomsky’s political views in terms of the need for realization by each person of its innate ability to create. Chomsky believes that this can be achieved only through a strong organization of society. Thus, society will be able to resist the power and control it. This organization should be carried out through the activities of trade unions. Chomsky himself defines his political views as an anarcho-syndicalist. Anarcho-syndicalism, for Chomsky, is characterized by the belief that a socialist economy cannot be created through government legislation but only through the solidarity and cooperation of workers in every direction of production.

The Focus of Foucault’s Research from the Theory of Knowledge to the Philosophy of Power

The main works of Michel Foucault are devoted to historical research. They represent an example of a philosophical understanding of history. The topic areas of Foucault’s works are diverse. He dives into the method rather than into the subject of study. By 1971 a large amount of Foucault’s famous works had been written, among them: *Mental Illness and Psychology* 1954, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason or History of Madness* 1961, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* 1963, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* 1966, *Archaeology of Knowledge* 1969.

All the works of Michel Foucault have something in common: his specific approach based on his own archeology and genealogy methods. The method of archeology for Foucault is the basis of his early historical research and the basis of his other method — genealogy.

Archeology of Knowledge is the only methodological work of Foucault. Foucault’s early

works' main issues, the works that precede the discussions with Chomsky, represent the study of the phenomena of madness, prison, and disease.

The author's method of archeology does not involve a description of the evolution of ideas about a particular phenomenon but an analysis of the discourse that accompanied the emergence of this phenomenon in its permanence.

Foucault's archeology method consists of the study of one object — discourse (Foucault, 2002: 141). This study is carried out through the analysis of the smallest units of discourse — statements. The homogeneity, commonality, and regularity with similar statements are sought in the statements, thus discovering the rules that determine them. Archaeological research is the study of the discourse in its constancy, its homogeneity, and its regularity (Foucault, 2002: 145). Genealogical research is the study of discourse transformations from one constancy to another. (Foucault, 2008: 15) In the history of knowledge, Foucault explores discourse by the method of archeology. Research of power Foucault exercises by genealogy method.

The theme of power is present in his early works on the history of knowledge, but special attention is paid to the notion of power in his work *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995) and *Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2008), where he uses the genealogy method to study the transformation of power. Thus, a specific understanding of the power of Michel Foucault is formed, which is revealed in the following aspects:

1. Foucault is talking about power; he says almost nothing about authority. Power, by Foucault, is not localized by the government and political institutions, but is a network consisting of all social institutions, of daily practices, of social knowledge (Foucault, 2008: 291).
2. Power is closely linked to knowledge. Foucault partly writes about the power-knowledge connection through a hyphen, as one word. This is justified by the fact that, for Foucault, there is no branch of knowledge that would be free from the relations of power, and any power creates its own system of knowledge.
3. The power-knowledge connection becomes stronger today. According to Foucault, the absolute monarchy had much less power than the modern democratic government. After all, the absolute monarchy exercised its power through such technology of punishment as a public execution. This technology involves selective punishment, which is more severe. This technology of power is being replaced by drill and body discipline — imprisonment aimed at punishing less but more. The level of control over society and total control is growing, and, consequently, knowledge about people is becoming a new technology for exercising power.
4. Another transformation of power — the emergence of state interests and the transition of power from control of death to control of life, i.e., the emergence of biopolitics, further connects power with knowledge and strengthens the population's control. The population is now a resource and a value, and therefore an object of government interest. Power begins to control life, which manifests itself in medicine, education, leisure, and so on.

Clash of Titans

In 1971 Dutch television presented a series of interviews and discussions with well-known intellectuals of the late twentieth century, who were invited to discuss a wide range of issues concerning the modern philosophical and social dimension. The most famous of

these meetings was the discussion between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, entitled "On Human Nature. Justice vs. Power." In the first part of the discussion, Chomsky and Foucault discussed the concept of creativity and the rules that define it. An important topic was the role of personal creativity of the thinker in the history of thought. Philosophers have succeeded in reaching a common understanding on these topics. However, yet at the first stage of the discussion, there was a topic in which there are fundamental differences. This was a topic of the possibility of determining human nature.

The concept of justice emerged in debate as to the basic expectation of citizens from the government, as an aspect that society must control in government activities, and, in the case of unfair actions of the government to demand the restoration of justice. However, that hypothesis was questioned: is justice a concept applicable to power, can power be just, and is it a function of power?

The relationship between the notions of power and justice is a central issue of debate, which causes contradictions. It is important to note that the concept of justice was not considered by either Noam Chomsky or Michel Foucault as the basic concept of their political views. In this discussion, it appears in the center of attention of thinkers for the first time. The concept of justice in this discussion appears in the context of the question of interaction between government and citizens, which is the main subject of research in the field of political philosophy Chomsky. Consideration of this discussion provides an opportunity to reveal the relationship between the concepts of power and justice in diametrically opposed approaches. After all, Chomsky's political philosophy is based on the concept of common human nature. The concept of common human nature from linguistic research passes into the political philosophy of Chomsky and is the basis for proving the need to fight for equal opportunities: "Now any form of coercion or repression, any form of autocratic control of some domain of existence, let's say, private ownership of capital or state control of some aspects of human life, any such autocratic restriction on some area of human endeavor, can be justified, if at all, only in terms of the need for subsistence, or the need for survival, or the need for defense against some horrible fate or something of that sort. It cannot be justified intrinsically. Rather it must be overcome and eliminate" (Foucault et al., 2001: 38).

However, by Chomsky, this does not happen. On the contrary, a certain class consolidates and oppresses others. Chomsky sees the only possible way out of this situation is changing accent on the guarantor legitimacy, which should neither be the power nor the government, but the society as a whole, whose responsibility is to take an interest in political issues, monitoring of the activities of the government, the legality, and fairness of its actions. In addition, the leading role in this process should be given to the intellectuals. Chomsky sees the role of intellectuals as being an intermediate link between society and government: "Another task is to understand very clearly the nature of power and oppression and terror and destruction in our own society. And that certainly includes the institutions you mentioned, as well as the central institutions of any industrial society, namely the economic, commercial and financial institutions and in particular, in the coming period, the great multinational corporations" (Foucault et al., 2001: 42). Philosophers have agreed on this issue because Foucault also sees the main task of intellectuals in exposing power because such exposing helps to understand the mechanism of power and gives a possibility to fight against it: "This critique and this fight seem essential to me for different reasons: first, because political power goes much deeper than one suspects; there are centers and invisible, little-known points of support; its true resistance, its true solidity is perhaps where one does not expect it. It's probably insufficient to say that

behind the governments, behind the state's apparatus, there is the dominant class; one must locate the point of activity, the places and forms in which its domination is exercised. In addition, because this domination is not simply the expression in political terms of economic exploitation, it is its instrument and, to a large extent, the condition which makes it possible; the suppression of the one is achieved through the exhaustive discernment of the other. Well, if one fails to recognize these points of support of class power, one risks allowing them to continue to exist; and to see this class power reconstitute itself even after an apparent revolutionary process" (Foucault et al., 2001: 41). For Foucault, exposing non-political institutions in their political role is an instrument of struggle against the totalitarianism of power because the exposed institutions are less suitable for supporting power, the main power in their secrecy. However, according to Foucault, the fight against the totalitarianism of power is not a way to improve society. Exposing and weakening institutions in their political function can only lead to society's transformation and the emergence of new tools to support power.

In addition to differences in views on the concept of power, the philosophers show the differences in their attitudes toward the role of citizens in politics. In this discussion, Chomsky defended the importance of the active involvement of citizens in the political life of a country, which should be expressed through citizen control over the legality of government actions. Chomsky's political position was formed in connection with the Vietnam War, of which he was a vocal opponent. Chomsky's position explained that in the case of the authorities' criminal actions, the public should demand their cessation, which can be put into practice through series of acts of civil disobedience. Foucault's position denied the possibility of the struggle for justice. For him, any action of public disobedience, and even the revolution is a power struggle, not for justice.

Moreover, justice is also a concept constructed by the authorities. What is important is the distinction that was made by both philosophers between civil disobedience and revolution. Civil disobedience can cause a change of power, but they are not a revolution because a revolution is a change not just of power but of the dominant class. Here, the revolution results from the class struggle (Foucault et al., 2001: 52).

The most important contradiction is the understanding of the concept of justice as it is. Chomsky considers justice as the basis of legality; unjust actions can be formally legal. In such cases, violation of the law to stop illegal, criminal acts is acceptable and lawful in nature. Foucault believes that there is no justice itself. It is rather a construct of power, an instrument of power to manipulate the population. The notion of justice can be directed against the government, but even in this case, it is an instrument of another force competing for power.

An important feature of the concept of justice is that it is the most common slogan of any struggle and war. Chomsky believes that the struggle, or even war, can be of two types: the struggle purely for power, without a value goal, such as the struggle during World War I; and the struggle for justice, even if a more just order was not achieved as a result of the victory, the participants in the struggle still participated through their own convictions for the betterment of society.

Foucault denies the possibility of a struggle for justice in general; he insists that any struggle, no matter whether it is a war or a revolution, is purely a struggle for power.

But for Chomsky, even the power struggle can be a struggle for justice because there are shortcomings of the social order that can be improved only through the mechanism of change of power.

Chomsky proposes a rational criterion by which to distinguish between the struggle for

justice and the power struggle: “There I think that one can and must give an argument if you cannot give an argument you should extract yourself from the struggle. Give an argument that the social revolution that you’re trying to achieve is in the ends of justice, is in the ends of realizing fundamental human needs, not merely in the ends of putting some other group into power, because they want it” (Foucault et al., 2001: 56-57).

The struggle can carry the desire to improve society, a certain model of its improvement. Nevertheless, Foucault underlined an important question: how can we model the future of society? Foucault considers it impossible to create a model of a better society, because in this case, we sketch our own ideas of the present on a possible future, and it is impossible to avoid. It is especially unacceptable for Foucault to return to the discussion of the concept of human nature in the political context made by Chomsky. After all, according to Foucault, it is in the construction of a common human nature and is the greatest ideological threat to the individual. “Still, I think it would be a great shame to put aside entirely the somewhat more abstract and philosophical task of trying to draw the connections between a concept of human nature that gives full scope to freedom and dignity and creativity and other fundamental human characteristics, and to relate that to some notion of social structure in which those properties could be realized and in which meaningful human life could take place” (Foucault et al., 2001: 42).

Building a model of future society, for Foucault, will still take place from the position of current discourse, so there is a risk that with changing circumstances, this model will not be applicable and even dangerous. For Foucault, future circumstances are a set of coincidences, and it is impossible to predict and model them. Foucault is certainly right, but it is impossible to completely eliminate from the humanitarian discourse the modeling of ways to improve society in the future. Otherwise, on a practical level, the community’s life will be deprived of values, and any socially significant choice will be accidental. Chomsky emphasized this. He agrees that it is impossible to create a model of an ideal future society on a theoretical level; however, the analysis of the shortcomings of modern society allows us to form an idea of a proper future (this is not about ideal justice, but about the best). This idea is necessary because society, in practice, is still forced to make certain choices, given the values, so the creation of a model of future society anyway will be on a practical level.

However, philosophers have much in common in their understanding of power. Both Chomsky and Foucault consider power as a network consisting of a set of all social institutions. For Chomsky, multinational corporations are the basic institutions of repression and oppression. These authoritarian rules seem neutral, but in fact, are specific forms of authoritarian control that bring the dominance of market forces in a society with high social inequality. Both Chomsky and Foucault emphasize the control of power over the population, which is especially growing today. Both philosophers do not localize power in the face of government. Foucault concludes from the analysis of various social phenomena in the social and political context, Chomsky because his anarcho-syndicalism is based not on government reform, but on the activation of society and its organization in the form of political force.

Conclusion

Foucault’s view that the notion of justice is determined by social and political discourse and is transformed depending on social and political transformations seems to be reasonable. However, at the practical level, the demand for justice put forward by citizens to power is a valuable indicator for the control of government activities by citizens. The slogan of justice is a

driving force of any struggle and action of public disobedience. However, due to vulnerability to manipulation, the demand for the restoration of justice must be clearly expressed in specific value orientations. It must be reasoned to call for certain actions, such as a call for termination of hostilities in Vietnam. And to create and express the values of a specific society is the job of intellectuals. Chomsky sees intellectuals' main task in indicating and showing up all the political power relationships that control the social body and oppress it. Foucault insists that intellectuals' main task is to criticize and attack institutions' work, which at the first glance appear to be neutral and independent, because we need to unmask the political violence exercised obscurely through that institution that is necessary that one could fight against them. Thus, the relationship between the concepts of power and justice can be possible only on a practical level and only through the mediation of an active community of intellectuals. Such a consensus, made in the course of the debate, can be applicable to the contemporary Ukrainian social and political reality.

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