

50 Years on the Left with Noam Chomsky (S2 Ep2)

SPEAKERS

Coleman Hughes (CH), Noam Chomsky

CH 00:30

Welcome to another episode of conversations with Coleman. My guest today needs no introduction, but I'll give him one anyway. Noam Chomsky is a linguist, philosopher, social critic, and activist. Chomsky is considered the father of modern linguistics, and has written more than 100 books, his most recent being *Requiem for the American Dream 10: Principles of Concentration of Wealth and Power*. Chomsky and I both signed the infamous Harper's Letter many months ago. So we start out by talking about that letter and the fallout that ensued. Next I asked Chomsky, what has changed most about the culture of the American left in his lifetime, we talked about the strange alliance between multinational corporations and woke anti-racism. We talk about the role of money in politics. I asked him about the rising influence of China. And finally, I asked him about the prospect of artificial intelligence, radically changing the economy. Unfortunately, I only had 40 minutes with Chomsky. And he had to leave abruptly to get to another meeting. So there were topics I would have liked to dwell on more, but it is what it is. So without further ado, Noam Chomsky. Professor Chomsky, thank you so much for coming on my show.

Noam Chomsky 02:20

Pleased to be with you.

CH 02:21

So I'd like to start by talking about a public letter that both of us signed a few months back ago, called the Harper's Letter, which created quite a controversy. It was a letter which both supported freedom of speech and academic freedom, while also denouncing President Trump's threat to democracy. Can you recall this letter? And do you? Can you speak a little bit about why you signed it?

Noam Chomsky 02:49

Oh, sure. It probably took me about three seconds to decide whether to sign it. My only criticism of it was that it was so anodyne and vacuous. So yes, one of the 1000 requests comes across the desk every day or the screen and sign all of them sign others. What surprised me about what interests you the only interesting thing about the letter, far as I'm concerned is the reaction. I was very surprised by the reaction. But the reaction indicated to me at least, that wherever the problem is, it's worse than I thought. Otherwise, there should have been no reaction. You as you describe it, that's quite accurate. Why should anybody object to that? Or for that matter, why should anybody even bother signing it because it's also obvious. The nature's of the criticisms were of some interest, including people who I respect, admire, think highly of. Lot of protest were against the people who signed it. How could you sign a letter that was signed by x? If you stop to think for a minute, that criterion would bar every

statement, when you sign a statement, you have no idea who's gonna sign it, or who did sign it. So if you have to, if you accept the principle that you can't sign a statement, if somebody who people don't like or maybe you don't like signs, then you don't sign anything. So there's no statement. I mean, that's...I don't know how to deal with this level of irrationality. Something's plainly behind it. These are sane people. So what leads to that level of irrationality? Well, I can think of one authentic criticism of the letter that could be raised. Maybe some raised it, namely it didn't go far enough. It didn't point out that what's called, now, cancel culture didn't happen to be mentioned in the statement, but it's in the background. Cancel culture is a standard device of the mainstream establishment all the time. It's never discussed, because it's as normal as the sun rising in the morning. So, you know, raise it. So the basic issue that the letter was concerned with, sort of think through the background, is that what is standard in the mainstream establishment and directed against the left is now being adopted by small segments of the left, which is wrong, they shouldn't do it. But what's missing, was, yes, this is standard procedure. Could give you plenty of examples, even from my own experience, which is nowhere near the most extreme.

CH 06:03

Yeah, this. So this segues into my next question. A lot has changed, obviously, about the culture of American politics in the last 60 years, let's say. And when I went out on Twitter for questions I should ask you, the the number one question that I now asked by popular demand, is what have you seen change most about the left, since your days as an activist and say, the 60s?

Noam Chomsky 06:33

Well, the main thing that's happened is it's expanded very substantially, and scale, and in dedication and commitment. So if you look at the, I mean, you know, I go back to the 1930s, I won't talk about that. But let's take just the post war period. The 1950s were a period of pretty much quiescence, people recovering from the depression on the war, there wasn't much of an activist left. Picked up in the 60s. But it was sporadic, strong and intense during particular moments, but sporadic. So the civil rights movement was very strong in the early 60s, pretty much. What happened to the civil rights movement, is that, first of all, it splintered in several directions. But also, Martin Luther King, who was the major figure, moved towards broader concerns, not just voting rights for blacks in the south. But the rights of poor people everywhere, tried to construct a poor people's movement moved to the north, and dealing with oppression and racism and class violence in the north. That didn't sell to American liberals. They were perfectly happy to have him denounce racist sheriffs in Alabama. But not us, please. We're not part of that. King also turned to criticism of the Vietnam War. Not acceptable to Northern liberals. No criticism of the Vietnam War allowed, only very tepid criticism. It took the American liberal community, I've reviewed a lot of this in detail if you want I could go through it, but the sharpest criticism of the war that you could make up till the end 1975 was a mistake. We made a mistake. Quote, Anthony Lewis way out the left of the tolerated opinion in 1975. Serious civil rights, human rights activists and so on. Anthony Lewis '75, said the war began with blundering efforts to do good. Why blundering? Cause they failed. Why to do good? Because that's an axiom. You don't have to justify it. If the US government is doing and it was an effort to do good. So that's an axiom, like the air we breathe. Then he said by 1969, became clear that it was a disaster. We could not bring democracy to South Vietnam or a cost acceptable to ourselves. Again, an axiom, we were trying to bring democracy. The facts don't matter. Don't bring them up. But it was wrong because the cost for us was too high. It's kind of interesting that

was about the left extreme of commentary on the war by the very end, it was before that it was even less. It's kind of interesting, that if you look at public opinion at the same time, 1975, carefully studied. Chicago Council of Foreign Relations did extensive studies regularly. One of the questions they asked is what do you think about the Vietnam War? Of course. The answer, about 70% fundamentally wrong and immoral, not a mistake. That's the public intellectual, liberal opinion, a mistake. We couldn't bring democracy at a cost acceptable to ourselves. Well, when King in 1966, I think it was, came out with a strong anti war statement in a talk in Riverside Church, and they were feeling, "you're not allowed to do that". So by the time he was assassinated in 1968, his popularity among liberal community was very low. And that, but in general, the civil rights movement either splintered or moved to directions which liberal America wouldn't accept. What about the anti war movement, which I myself was very heavily involved in? Well, began to the early 1960s, when Kennedy sharply escalated the war. Was almost impossible to talk about it, literally. I mean, I was giving talks in somebody's living room, church with half a dozen people. Meetings were broken up violently. We couldn't...In Boston, where I was living, maybe the most liberal city in the country, as late as 1966, we couldn't have a public meeting without it being attacked, broken up, often by student. Churches were attacked if there was a meeting. And finally, by late 1966, there was a shift. By 1967, there was a substantial anti war movement. Went on for a few years, by about 1971, 70-71, it was splintering, breaking off, kind of declined. So very intense, but for a brief period. Now, this activism in the 60s did spawn other movements, they got the bare beginnings of the feminist movement, their beginnings of the environmental movement, they actually grew. They were not, they didn't have the visibility of, say, Selma, or the March on Washington, or the Pentagon March and so on. They didn't have that visibility, but they were spreading and growing. Actually, in many ways, the major anti war movement in American history, in my view, was the Solidarity Movement with Central America. That was unique in Imperial history. It's barely discussed. But that's the first time in the history of imperialism, when people from the Imperial society, not only protested the crimes of their government, but went to live with the victims to try to help them. Now, it was very middle America, churches in Kansas, evangelical groups, popular groups all over the country. Thousands of them went to live with the victims of Reagan's terrorist wars in Central America, which were killing hundreds of thousands of people, destroying the societies, devastating wars. It's a lot of the source of the current immigration. And there were, that was real dedication, to oppose it of a kind that had never happened. When the French were devastating Algeria, there was protest, but nobody went to live in an Algerian village to try to help them and give them whatever protection from the French murderous forces you might get with a white face. Nobody thought about it in Vietnam, certainly not under the British colonial wars. This was no major anti war movement. Didn't get much...It wasn't a public movement. It was a popular movement of a kind that had never existed before. And I think this extended into the more recent period. There are now substantial, popular public movements, popular activist movements which are as part of the general scene. So in many ways it's expanded, it's true internationally as well.

CH 15:04

One trend that I've observed is, so you mentioned the splintering of the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King's Universalist message on one end, and obviously, you had the Black Power movement in the Black Panthers pushing a more race, conscious, anti racist movement on the other. I think it's safe to say that, especially in the past year, the Black Lives Matter movement takes more after the tradition of black power than the tradition of sort of civil rights, Martin Luther King style rhetoric. And

one thing that has interested me this year is the fact that multinational corporations have endorsed and tended to side with Black Lives Matter, at least nominally. And the the example that I think, puts the sharpest point on it is the recent vote in in California on Proposition 16, which would have reinstated affirmative action in universities and public jobs. This was supported by Facebook, Uber, Yelp, United Airlines, and so forth. And on the other side, there was no corporate backing, whatsoever. So all of the corporations have lined up to support affirmative action in this case, but the people of California ended up on the other side of the issue, including the vast majority of the Latino population in California. So this is...it seems to me there's a strange alliance between multinational corporations, and the race conscious brand of anti racism, represented by black power and it's legacy. Is this something that you've noticed at all? Or do you have a different view of it?

Noam Chomsky 17:04

I think the most important word that you said was nominally, at least nominally. That's true. The corporate sector is very much deeply embedded in propaganda. Propaganda is one of their main activities. Public Relations industry is one of the hugest industries in the country, which is designed as its founders explained to what they call engineer consent, to make sure that people have the kinds of beliefs and ideas that will be conducive to our own profit. So yes, it's very fine to say, nominally, we're in favour of black power. Remember that the they did that at a time when the Black Power movement had the support of about two thirds of the population? After the Floyd...

CH 18:04

ah sorry, you mean the black lives matter.

Noam Chomsky 18:06

Black Lives Matter, sorry. Black Lives Matter had about two thirds popular support after the Floyd murder, huge popular movement, develop solidarity and so on. I wouldn't say quite that it was oriented toward the Black Power movement. I think it was mixed. It did use the word black, but it was more general. So the organisers and activists of the Black Power movement, if you look at what they were actually saying, a lot of it veered towards Kings, Poor Peoples movement, ideas with proposals that would be quite general. I mean, the phrase 'defund the police' got out of hand. But if you look at what was proposed, it was things like let's reduce police commitment responsibilities for things they have no business doing, and don't want to do. Like getting involved in domestic abuse or drug overdose or mental health problems. These are things that should be handled by community services. Far better, police should be carried out police activities. They should be better paid, there should be better jobs, you should be working with a community, in fact, when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was asked, "what do you mean by defund the police?", she said, "go to any white suburb, that's what I mean by defund the police." If a kid is picked up with an overdose is not sent to jail. He's sent for assistance, families supposed to help, things like that, that's defund the police. That's not. I mean, it would affect black communities, poor communities, particularly. But it's, it's actually general. So I think it's kind of a mixture, if you look at it closely. Now, the race oriented element of it was exaggerated extensively by the coverage, what I would call the propaganda system, you can use some other word if you prefer. That's what was highlighted. But that was only part of it. Actually, the same was true of the Black Panthers. I was pretty much involved with working with the groups that I was involved in, Resist and others, were pretty closely involved with working with the Panthers. And it was a split. There were very

different groups. There were parts of the Panthers that were dedicated organisers working in the community. All of the breakfast programmes, for example, educational programmes, and others. There were other groups with the Panthers who were basically coming out of the criminal classes, and using it as an opportunity to get wide support for their activities. And if you wanted to deal with the Panthers, you had to make a sharp distinction. A lot of people didn't. A lot of young activist kids didn't see the difference, ended up destroying their lives. I want to give names, could easily do it. The ones who are the serious organisers, they're the ones who got murdered, like Fred Hampton. Why did they pick out Fred Hampton for Gestapo style, FBI run assassination? Because he was one of the main effective organisers of the Panthers. Many of the others kind of left alone. But I think all of these movements are complicated, they don't really have...I think, it's kind of misleading to pick up the slogans that became famous and were on the front pages. There's also other things going on. But basically, you're quite right. There's much more emphasis today on what's called identity politics. These were pretty marginal issues in the 60s, beginning to develop in the 70s. By the 90s, this millennium, there's much more commitment to issues of what's in general, called identity, politics, race, gender, sexual preference, gay rights. Until the 20th century, until this century, countries still had anti sodomy laws. Something changed.

CH 23:55

So it occurs to me that so we've talked about Martin Luther King and how in the late 60s he, much to the chagrin of many of his the advisors in his inner circle, especially Bayard Rustin took a strong position against the Vietnam War, and also took strong positions on such things as full employment policy, or full government guarantee of employment, universal health care positions that I think like his position on the Vietnam War, were considered extremely radical then, but are not considered quite so radical, now. And it occurs to me that the figure in the American political landscape, which who probably most closely resembles MLK's politics, at the end of his life, is Bernie Sanders. If you just look at the straightforward correlation between what they believe, and it seems to me one of...and this is also what interested me about the the seeming at least alliance between corporations and wokeness, is that there's a way in which woke identity politics is very easy to espouse, but doesn't require that people with wealth actually surrender anything it doesn't. It's sort of an easy way to present a moral sounding message. And the very fact that something like Walmart could say, BLM without fearing that that sort of politics is actually a threat to itself, suggests something interesting. And yet there's a sense I think, of many people who are favourable to identity politics, that isn't the case that there's that multinational corporations should feel that they have something to fear from identity politics. So how do you see that dynamic operating, if at all?

Noam Chomsky 25:56

I thought what you said was exactly correct. The..If you're a manager of Walmart, it's fine to have gays on the management board. CEOs, yeah, they want to be... they want to take lyrical, liberal positions on race, gender, and so on. Why shouldn't they? That doesn't harm their, what's really their concern, maximising their wealth, power, political power, and so on. So as long as they're getting enormous gifts from the public, it's fine to be in favour of gay rights, which there aren't opposed to anyway. In fact, if you think about it, a pure capitalist would be neutral, about gender, colour, and so on. What's important is profit and power, no matter. You can use race and gender for ways to break up labour, to break up popular movements, lower wages, and so on. But that's marginal. What's really important is wealth and

power. And in the last 40 years, we've seen something really astonishing. Actually, there was a study which you may have seen by the RAND Corporation, ultra respectable Corporation, couple of months ago. They tried to do an estimate of the wealth that was transferred from the working class and the middle class, to the very rich during the 14 years since Reagan. Other... that's...the way they did it was lower 90% and income to the rest, and it didn't go to the rest. It went to the top fraction of the top 10%. Their estimate is roughly \$50 trillion. Okay, as long as that's going on, we can say we're in favour of affirmative action, gay rights that will help people as they put it, keep the peasants with pitchforks away, will maintain a record will overcome the reputational risk. And you've noticed that very strikingly in the last year or two, that's important. I'm sure you saw the...I think it was one of the major business lobbies, I forget which one, just recently collected a couple of 100 top executives... ..who came out with a statement saying "we admit that we've made mistakes. We didn't pay enough attention to the workers in the community. We just paid attention to ourselves, but we've recognised that mistake. Now, we're going to be good citizens. We're going to care for you. We're going to be, what was called in the 1950s, soulful corporations. So put your trust in us and put down the pitchforks. You can. We'll take care of you." Actually the same thing happened at the Davis meetings. Last January, was you know every every year in January the Great and Powerful meet in a fancy Swiss ski resorts and mostly talk about how wonderful they are. But there was a different mood this last January, strikingly different. The same concern, what's called in the business reputational risks, means public's getting agitated. They may not know the details about the \$50 trillion ripples but they see the affects. Now they're getting agitated. "So we better change our style". And they came out with a similar statement, just like the one I repeated from the top CEOs. And that shows that the pressures are mounting, and you can see it in many ways, sometimes quite positive ways. Like, for example, Bank of America saying they're not going to invest in fossil fuels or something like that, okay, that's real. Sometimes it's, as you put it, nominal. Will be in favour of Black Lives Matter. We'll say they're nice, we'll put the logos on our sneakers and so on. But just make sure the reputational risks are kept under control, as long as it doesn't affect the bottom line. As long as we can keep stealing \$50 trillion from the public. Okay, we'll be willing to accept the rhetoric.

CH 31:02

Do you have an opinion on universal basic income?

Noam Chomsky 31:06

Depends on the context. It was proposed in very different ways. So when Milton Friedman advocated it, it was in order to destroy the social welfare system, that was the quid pro quo, we have UBI, we get rid of welfare benefits and so on. That's a level of cruelty, so savage, that is hard to find words for. I mean, some single mother with no income, and maybe an autistic kid has different needs from me. UBI says, "We don't care, you're all gonna get the same little bit. That's sheer savagery. Now, that's the right wing support for UBI. There's another approach. Let's put it within a system of social justice, that cares for people's needs and rights. Then it can be a cushion that people can use, maybe young people who use, maybe somebody out of work could use, to get to the next stage in life, then it makes sense. Makes a lot of difference what the context is, you can't just before against him.

CH 32:28

So I recently had David Shore on my podcast, I don't know if you've heard of him, but he was an in-house consultant with Obama and has been...He's a political data scientist who's worked on how to

elect democrats for probably 10 years or so now, sort of Nate Silver type. And he made an interesting argument about the influence of money in politics. I think many people, myself included, have tended to assume in the past decade at least, that in the Democratic Party, if not in both parties, the effect of money, the net effect of money in politics, is to get politicians to support more libertarian economic policies. But what David Shore informed me is that, at least in the past few years, so much of money in politics comes from quote, unquote, small donors, most of whom are actually fairly affluent people, speaking generally. And the net result of that money is actually to move Democrats to the left on economic issues, because the average small donor is actually left of the average...of the median democrat voter. But he argued that, despite money actually now pulling Democrats to the left, there's a general pro business culture, which pulls them to the right, because it's not good for any politician to be seen as bad for business. Is this....Did you have any picture of what you think the influence of money and politics is? And on David Shores contention?

Noam Chomsky 34:11

Well, first of all, there is careful study of this detailed, careful analysis. The most extensive work, actually is that of Thomas Ferguson, political scientist, who has done... most of his career has been devoted to working on this topic, way back to the 19th century. He's proposed...he's studied....He's carried it forward to the present. To the current, not 2020 yet, but to the 2016 and later elections...and it turns out that there's a remarkable correlation between funding and the positions taken by the representatives, which move to the right. And that goes right through 2016. It's a careful analysis. With Congress, it's almost a straight line. The higher the funding, the greater the electability, the more the effect on following the policies of the funders. Now, when you talk about the small donors, remember that if you're a party manager, you don't really care about the individual small donors, you care about the concentrated power of the big donors. If you're elected to Congress, suppose you're elected, suppose you ran for congress and you were elected, one of the first things you'd be doing would be calling the big donors, the big ones, not the small ones, to make sure that they're going to fund you in the next election. No use calling thousands of small donors, no, can't do that. You can contact the major ones, they're the ones who are going to have the overwhelming influence, even if the total numbers are the same, and that's just automatic. And so what you have is congressional representatives are elected to the House, almost after your election, you're on the phone, starting to make sure that the big donors will be around the next time you run. Meanwhile, huge numbers of corporate lobbyists are swarming into your office, to have appointments with your staff. Staff might be young, progressive, but they're overwhelmed by the corporate lobbyists for all these reasons, scale, resources, and background. So what you end up with is legislation representing pretty much the concerns and interests of the big donors, signed later by the representative. Now there are studies of the outcome of this. So a major study just came out with one of the top research institutions, I forget which one... wasn't...as far as I know, it was reported only on the London Financial Times, the main business journal, very interesting study, if you read it. It showed that about 90% of the population, lower 90%, are almost unrepresented. Their attitudes and opinions don't show up in legislation. What matters is the opinions and attitudes of the top 10%, and that means the top fraction of the top 10% where the wealth is concentrated. And it's pretty natural. And I think the evidence is pretty strong for it. There already have been studies by very good political scientists, and Paige, Gill, and others who have shown ,that I think pretty effectively, that basically the same result. Most of the population doesn't get represented, and they vote, but then if you look at the correlation between their attitudes and the

positions taken by their representatives, there's also always very little correlation that you get to the very top, which is perfectly understandable if you're a political representative in...your in Congress, let's say, of course, for the executive, it's the same. I think the evidence on this is pretty overwhelming, and the question of the balance between the mass of small donors, and the concentrated big donors is a very misleading measure. For the reason I mentioned. You're going to be concerned with the big donors, not some small storekeeper somewhere.

CH 38:56

So I've talked to a few people recently who have described the relationship between the United States and the Communist Party of China right now as a kind of second Cold War, and are extremely worried about the influence of China in the world. And so, my question for you is, how worried are you about the CCP, both their actions domestically and abroad?

Noam Chomsky 39:26

Domestically, their actions are pretty awful. You can say that about others too, ourselves as well. But yes, domestically, their actions are very awful and harsh. We should be criticising them, just as they should be criticising us for intensifying the worst humanitarian crisis in the world by smashing Yemen to pieces or what's left of it. So yes, there should be plenty of criticism. On the other hand, if you talk about their influence, what is the problem? How is their influence growing? It's mostly what we call soft power. They aren't invading anyone...other...So let's take the pandemic right in front of everybody's mind. How is the world, not our newspapers, but how is the world seeing the vaccine issue? Well, they're seeing the Western countries, monopolising vaccine for themselves. The worst offender in this respect is Canada, which has failed look at the numbers. It's taken, it's bought vaccines, well beyond anything it can use for years. The United States is doing the same. European countries are doing the same. There is an international consortium, COVAX, which supposedly is working on distributional problems. So vaccines, some will go to the countries that need it like the poor countries, Africa, Latin America, and so on. But the United States pulled out of it; it's not even participating. And the other countries aren't really doing much. They're looking after themselves. That's the West. Then there's China. China is at least saying, whether they'll do it, we don't know. But they're at least saying "we will distribute vaccines, basically cost free, almost anyone who needs them." So yes, that has influences. Compare, say, United States and Canada with China, it's going to have an influence if you're an African, especially if they go through with it. In fact, the vaccine issues quite interesting. In the United States, you take a look at the media, liberal press, lots of commentary on vaccines, how they're doing, what their level of successes and so on. There's one striking thing missing. How much have you seen about the Chinese vaccines?

CH 42:06

None? I've seen none at all, so far.

Noam Chomsky 42:08

None. Why? Is it because they're ineffective? No, they've been tested, they're trialing. Haven't been tested by the FDA, of course, but in other countries like Brazil, with advanced pharmaceutical industry, health industries, they've been tested. Turns out, they're about 90% effective, just like Pfizer Moderna, but they have a huge advantage. They don't require high tech storage. The Western vaccines have to

be stored. Very low temperatures, way below zero centigrade, which means only in pretty advanced facilities. Chinese vaccines, you can store in a refrigerator, is perfect for poor countries, for rural areas, and so on. But we can't mention it. Because in the United States, which is maybe the freest country in the world, it's also one of the most rigid ideologically. No, no pressure, it's not coming from government orders, you're not gonna be sent to a concentration camp, but you know, you can't say it. It's actually what George Orwell wrote about. He was talking about England, and what he called literary censorship in England, which he said is just as bad as totalitarian countries. And he said, one of the reasons is, you have a good education, you know that there....you have instilled into you the understanding that there are certain things it wouldn't do to say. So it wouldn't do to say that there are Chinese vaccines, which are apparently highly effective. We could test them ourselves and check it out, are very easily stored, can be used all over the place, would be very advantageous to people out of high tech centres. It's one of the things that wouldn't do to say. And, if we were serious, if we were wanting to really do things for the common good, we'd be cooperating with China, in areas where cooperation is for the benefit of all of us. That's true for vaccines, obviously true for global warming, international problem. It's true for the dangers, the growing dangers of nuclear war, it's gotta be cooperation. All of these things are international issues. We should be moving towards cooperation. Makes no sense at all, to harm ourselves in the world by insisting on extremely rigid doctoral positions.

CH 44:55

So in the case of the Chinese vaccines, what is making people in the West uncomfortable about mentioning them? Is it chauvinism? Or can you fill that in a little bit?

Noam Chomsky 45:05

The word China. The orders, the doctrine states, China's bad. Okay. Therefore, if the Chinese vaccines work and are effective, you can talk about it in Brazil. You can talk about in Africa. Can't talk about it here.

CH 45:26

So final question. In the past five to 10 years there, there have been a growing chorus of people. Nick Bostrom, the philosopher at Oxford, and Elon Musk, the techno entrepreneur celebrity, that have worried about super intelligent...artificial intelligence. And the concerns raised from everything from really spooky Hollywood scenarios to the more mundane but still pressing concern that someone like Andrew Yang expressed, that just automation is going to get rid of, you know, jobs for truck drivers, and so forth. So where do you place yourself on this spectrum of concern about artificial intelligence?

Noam Chomsky 46:12

Well, I've been living with it all my life. In fact, most of my work is what's often called artificial intelligence. First of all, we should put aside, I mean, there are theoretical possibilities. You can construct a theoretical possibility that programmes could be designed, which, for example, would find pattern and past behaviour that would lead to ways of figuring out how to destroy the world, let's say. You can work out theories which could amount to that. So remote, from what we face, that it's way down low on the level of problems, on as compared with something as immediate as global warming. It's like comparing a Mount Everest with a piece of straw. And yes, it's a theoretical possibility, but has nothing to do with the problems of the real world. The actual successes of artificial intelligence are

pretty much engineering successes. Very useful, like a Google translator is useful, I use it. It's brute force. Tells you nothing about language, about cognitive processes, or anything else. Pure. Brute. Force. Sophisticated statistical methods, and so on, but if you think about it, as compared with science, they're just not in the same ballpark. Totally different. It's not a criticism of it, like, as I say, I'm happy to use it. I'm happy to have a bulldozer here in the street, instead of people doing it by hand, but not exciting. As for taking away jobs, I think that misunderstands the situation. Let's take driving a truck. Suppose you could automate driving a truck? Well, that would take away a harsh owners job, and free the person to do something creative, significant, and fulfilling. And there's plenty of things like that. We have an enormous shortage of working people for things that have to be done. And that are beneficial, not only to the society, but fulfilling for the people if they're done properly. Take a look all around you. Schools are vastly under filled with teachers, and the teachers are paid very poorly, and educational facilities are rotten. That's huge number of possible jobs better for everybody. Health work, exactly the same. You could theoretically get a robot who would give a sick patient a drink of water, but that's not what the sick patient wants. They want human contact, nothing's going to change that. The health services are going to be human. Educational Services are going to be human. Construction is going to be human. You can do some of the things that are automated, that's fine. Takeaway dangerous, boring jobs, perfect. Let's free people up to do the work that has to be done in the world and that's badly needed. So automation in a decent society could be very helpful. So let's take truck drivers. So for example, take UPS. They've recently reported that they're getting higher efficiency, faster deliveries with fewer workers. How? By a lot of automation. They have workers under tyke drivers, under tyke surveillance there. When you drive a car, there's huge amount of data going to the car companies and often the commercial users and so on. You have a cell phone, tonnes of data going to everyone, you're under constant surveillance. If it's a business like UPS, you make the surveillance more precise. So if a truck driver stops for a cup of coffee, when he wasn't told to, instantly gets a demerit, punished. If he backs up when he wasn't supposed to, you get a demerit, you have enough control and surveillance of truck drivers. You can get higher efficiency, more deliveries with fewer drivers. Is that what we want in the world? I mean, you can use automation to control and dominate. You could use it to liberate people. The automation doesn't care. Kind of like a hammer. You can use it to build a house, you can use it to crush somebody's skull. As far as the hammer is concerned, it doesn't care. The question is, what kind of society do we want? What kind of moral values do we have? What are we looking forward for the way people should live? And in that framework, something like automation could be very beneficial for everyone.

CH 51:30

All right. Well, thank you so much, Professor Chomsky. It was a pleasure.

Noam Chomsky 51:32

Good to talk to you.

CH 51:34

Alright, take care.