

**Introduction to Noam Chomsky for his Leventis Lecture at UCY (May 17, 2006)
by Dr. Kleanthes K. Grohmann, Assistant Professor of Theoretical Linguistics**

Noam Chomsky is known to some as a linguist, as the founder of generative grammar and the ‘cognitive revolution’ in the mid 1950s, the subsequent development of the biolinguistic approach to human language, which gave rise to the interdisciplinary study of cognitive science and its creation as an academic discipline. We will hear more about this tomorrow, when the University of Cyprus is going to award Prof. Chomsky with an honorary doctorate.

To many people, however, Noam Chomsky is known for quite different achievements. Ever since the 10-year-old Noam Chomsky wrote an editorial in his school newspaper of the fall of Barcelona in the Spanish Civil War some 67 years ago, he has been a keen observer of current political events and social injustices, and has put them to paper or made himself heard in many other ways.

It is this part of Noam’s life that appeals to many, his outspokenness, his continuous fight for the disadvantaged, his honest and rigorous research and dismantling of fact and fiction in the media, in political discourse and action, and in intellectual thought. As human beings, we can count ourselves fortunate to have had people like Noam Chomsky as fighters on the humanistic forefront in the difficult second half of the 20th century, and even more so in the beginnings of a rather strange 21st century.

Noam’s list of publications spans dozens of pages. Aside from countless articles, editorials, interviews, and commentaries, his active participation in Z Net and many other activist platforms, listing the number of his 20 most important politically relevant books alone would take more time than I have.

So let me just mention his latest book, *Failed States*, in which he presents countries that are “failed states” — or rather, one country in particular. A failed state, he argues, refuses to protect its own population from harm. In addition, it suffers from “democratic deficit”: a wide gap between the wishes of the population and actual policies. Finally, a failed state regards itself as completely above the law, disregarding international institutions and commitments.

There is simply too much to say about Noam’s activist life to squeeze into the five minutes I have to introduce him, so I will simply present three of my favourite Chomskyan catch phrases.

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- “Manufacture of Consent” — an expression that, although coined by Walter Lippmann in the 1920s, is closely tied to Noam Chomsky’s active role as media commentator and analyst as well as sniffer-outer of non-violent state and media propaganda.
- “Culture of Terrorism” — typical of the many aspects of US foreign policy and world hegemony, be it in Central America as in the mid 1980s or in other parts of the world, including the US itself. Noam’s unyielding efforts in uncovering these facts and acts is in itself an admirable achievement. Shockingly, this kind of activity is necessary even today, 15 years after the end of the Cold War, over thirty years after Vietnam, and past other landmarks in Noam Chomsky’s most famous writings and devastating critiques.
- “Responsibility of Intellectuals” — Apart from an essentially Cartesian philosophy, Noam also follows the humanistic footsteps of the Enlightenment thinker Wilhelm von Humboldt who defined the institution university, and here I’m quoting from Milan Rai’s *Chomsky’s Politics*, as “nothing other than the spiritual life of those human beings who are moved by external leisure or internal pressures toward learning and research.” Noam Chomsky’s addition is that “[t]he extent to which existing institutional forms permit these human needs to be satisfied provides one measure on the level of civilization that a society has achieved.” To continue with Rai, “Responsibility of Intellectuals” is not only the title of Chomsky’s first adult political essay, it is also “at the heart of his political writings” — as Chomsky put it, “[i]t is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies.”

We have with us here tonight a man dedicated to academic excellence, political activism, relentless fighting, and, of course, life itself (time didn’t permit me to touch on these issues). Noam Chomsky is a wonderful testimony to the human power that we all have, but that some of us could try access a little harder: each one of us can make the world a better place. Noam has been on this path for a long time and will, I’m sure, continue treading it. If anything, let the next 40 minutes or so sink in and decide for yourselves which line you want to adopt.

I now give you: Noam Chomsky!