



Chomsky for Beginners

David Cogswell , Paul Gordon (Illustrator)

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Noam Chomsky, "arguably the most important intellectual alive" (The New York Times), first became famous through his work in linguistics. Chomsky's second career, as a political/analyst/critic/activist is harder to categorize. Chomsky for Beginners presents a concise yet comprehensive introduction to this political gadfly and "media critic", whose ideas are in deadly opposition to the kow-towing mass media.

Chomsky for Beginners Details

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Author : David Cogswell , Paul Gordon (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Chomsky for Beginners for online ebook

CM says

Got this from the linguistics shelf but it's actually more on Chomsky, the Political Commentator, than on Chomsky, the Linguist. Divided into 3 parts, this small little book introduces reader to Chomsky's ideas (and supporting evidence) on:

linguistics(universal grammar and his critique on Skinner's behaviorist take on humanity and science), media(that media is a propaganda machine against the interest of the majority) ,and politics (that free trade,human rights and democracy are slogans for America to retain her hegemony over the world).

All profound (and,by now, familiar) ideas and I could easily give this one 3 stars but the format here, that the texts are punctuated by comic panels that seldom add anything to the text ,interpretation, and the reading experience, somehow put me off. Unlike Icon Book's Graphic Guide series where the illustrations bring humour and interact with the text with all sorts of imaginative visuals(eg: a couple comes out of the pipe of a smoking Freud, a Greek statue standing in a modern supermarket), here 90% of the non-textual elements are Chomsky's face in drawing...

Time to get another work on his linguistics.

Alatea says

I wanted to learn more about Chomsky's linguistical works (and the book is mainly about his political views). I still found out many new things, just not from linguistic point of view. Oh, and the drawings were quite annoying.

Tin says

It's mostly about Chomsky's Politics rather than his Linguistics, But it's just fine. I learn a lot from it.

Armin Hamidiiran says

The book's a good kick starter for beginners on Chomsky. It introduces the reader to three important aspects of Chomsky's works: :Linguistics, Media and Politics.

It's a thoughtful and interesting book with both simple and complicated matters: from Universal Grammar to Mass Media. There are pictures and quotations, so younger people (and some older ones like myself!) would also enjoy reading it.

Antariksa Akhmad says

As a linguistics student, reading about Chomsky reminds me that even a practitioner on the humanities could make a significant contribution on how we run our world. Chomsky's linguistics (which has thankfully become a standard on how we are doing the discipline) focuses less on describing language phenomena but on explaining things related on how humans are able to use language. He seeks a scientific pursuit of understanding the human language, and so his thoughts on the subject are clear-cut, unlike many philosophers and literary theorists with their obscure jargon and confusing reasoning. His theory on universal grammar sheds light that we humans are endowed with a special ability to create things. Our behaviors are not determined only by our environment. We have the creative ability to do things. And so, in facing our world where injustices prevail and ordinary people are driven out from contributing to their community, we have the means within ourselves to initiate change. The government may deceive us and mislead us, but we can learn about their tricks.

I cannot say whether the book correctly introduces or misrepresents Chomsky's ideas since I have not read a single book written by him. The way it delivers his message, though, is engaging and thought-provoking. Language and literature students should try to learn from his example.

G B says

There are many Noam Chomsky books that could qualify for my "must read" list, but I've chosen this book rather than Chomsky's books because it is far more accessible. If you can't make it through this book, it's unlikely you'll finish a book actually written by Chomsky.

This book covers Chomsky's two areas of focus: linguistics and politics. Skip the linguistics section if you'd like, but you must read the politics section. If you're an adult living in post-9/11 America, you have a duty to be informed about how our democracy works, at least to some degree. This book summarizes the points which are elaborated on in Chomsky's other books, such as:

"Politics is not about elections or democracy. Politics is an interaction among groups of investors who compete for control of the state."

Page 135 in particular resonated with me:

"To ask serious questions about the nature and behavior of one's own society is often difficult and unpleasant...To understand the truth about these matters is to be led to action that may not be easy to undertake and that may even carry a significant personal cost."

My hope is that more and more people (including myself) will be led to action by the writings of such people as Chomsky. At a minimum, I hope that such books will educate people so that they can be better-informed citizens and therefore make more responsible decisions.

One of my favorite quotes comes in an interview at the very end of the book. The interviewer asks Chomsky about Thomas Jefferson, who sent soldiers to wipe out entire villages of Cherokees. The interviewer asks: "Is there no one that can be used as a positive example?" Chomsky replies: "We shouldn't be looking for heroes, we should be looking for good ideas." I wish more voters approached elections the same way.

Doug says

Covers basics of his linguistics and his politics. It attempted to do something I've always wondered about -- which is to connect the two. They say they are connected by a tendency to challenge B.F. Skinner and that it carries over into the political field. I'm not 100% convinced. However, definitely some "red" pill stuff. There are so many layers of complicity on perhaps an unconscious level even in his view I would think.

Ibrahim Abdulla says

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Adria Irene says

This a great introduction to Chomsky. The book covers Chomsky's life, political views and studies in linguistics.

Dina says

Compré este libro porque me interesa mucho las ideas de Chomsky sobre la lingüística, a la cuál se les dedica una parte del libro pero no todo. Son increíbles las ideas de este señor en general sobre política y las sociedad (y ni mencionar sus ideas sobre lingüística que son absolutamente maravillosas). Es excelente para conocer más sobre él y sobre lo que escribe.

David Sarkies says

A basic introduction to the teachings of Chomsky

19 October 2012

I have this DVD about Noam Chomsky in which he laughs whenever everybody quotes the New York Times as saying that he is 'arguably the most important intellectual alive' and true to fashion he then goes to point out the context in which that statement was made. This is the defining character of Noam Chomsky in that he is an expert on language and on the use of language. I can't actually remember what the context of this article was, but the one thing that Chomsky is recognised for is his contribution to the science of linguistics in creating a formula in which all languages can be connected.

However, many of us on the left, while acknowledging this aspect of Chomsky, tend to look beyond that to his contributions to the realm of political science. He is, in his own words, an 'Anarco-Syndicalist' which is basically an anarchist, but with some form of government where decisions can be made for the benefit of the

people. He is also a strong critic of US foreign policy, and most of his works tend to focus on foreign policy decisions, particularly in relation to the US-Israel alliance, as well as mass media and its role in controlling the popular debate.

Language is Chomsky's speciality, and while many of us simply see language as a means to communicate, Chomsky sees it as a means of control and obfuscation. This is not new since Orwell went into details in 1984 regarding the use of 'double-speak', namely a way of using language to portray an idea that is in fact completely the opposite. It is also a way of numbing the mind and turning the population into sheep that can be pacified so that the ruling elite may attempt to push their agenda with our consent.

In reality, the ruling elite hate democracy, just in the same way that corporate CEOs hate having to rock up to an annual general meeting of retail shareholders every year. While the AGM is pretty much something that is a part of a process, democracy means that the people get to chose their leaders and if a leader does not meet their approval, they can remove them (or her). They have got around this problem by creating a party that openly supports their position, and a party that appears to oppose it, but in reality supports it. They are able to create a base from certain segments of society by either using what are termed 'political hot potatoes' (such as abortion and gay marriage), and by constantly bringing these issues into the light they are able to distract people from what they are really doing.

Another method that they use is the demonisation of certain philosophies, such as anarchism and socialism. Anarchism is the classic example in that many of us today consider anarchy as the complete breakdown in social order. Based on the Greek root word that is partially true. However, if we consider the word closely 'an-archos' actually means 'no ruler' (archos means ruler or leader, and the prefix a, or an, makes it an opposite). Thus, by claiming to be an anarcho-syndicalist, Chomsky is by no means claiming that he is seeking the breakdown in social order (in the same way that the anarchists of 19th century Russia were not seeking the breakdown of social order) but rather he is looking for a system where the rule is actually by the people as opposed to by the elite.

Another word that has been thrown into the public mind is the concept of revolution. Many of us, when we think of revolution we think of blood on the streets and a complete breakdown of order which then brings about a new system. However, this is not always the case as some will argue that revolution brings about a complete change which, in some cases, returns us to the position we were in before (as per Russia and France), rather a process which brings about a significant change. Many of us view a revolution as a good thing because it means that we throw out the old and bring in the new (albeit violently), however the ruling elite once again obfuscates that fact. For instance, the 'education revolution' that the Australian Labour Party enacted was not necessarily something that was new, but rather forced education backwards by privatising schools and by setting teachers against each other through competitiveness. Further, by introducing standardised testing, upon which schools and teachers would receive performance pay based on the results, the whole concept of education as a means of encouraging people to think is undermined and instead the system creates a world of Orwellian drones.

As for this book, this is a very good introduction to the philosophy and writings of Noam Chomsky. As I have mentioned previously, Chomsky does tend to continue to rehash many of his previous points in the books that he writes. It is best to read only a few of Chomsky's books, maybe some of the older, and some of the newer, ones otherwise you end up going over a lot old ground. I have commented on the Chomsky books that I have read, and maybe if you are interesting in exploring his thoughts further, you can look at them.

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Great introduction to this very influential thinker.

Kristen says

I love this series of books. They give great overviews of a topic which has a two fold purpose. It lets me know if I want to read about it in more detail, plus educates me about a topic I had no baseline in. Chomsky has some great ideas and I will definitely read more of him. There wasn't enough detail in this book to really discuss his ideas, but I do have one issue with understanding these kind of concepts. There are concepts that control how we sustain our class system, but it is hard for me to think that many people consciously take the actions that keep it going. I guess I see both the rich and the poor as actors in their own Idiocracy movie. They just keep doing what they have learned whether it was directly transmitted or not. I wonder what Social Studies classes are like at prestigious colleges. Do they state the ideas and then encourage them to grapple with which side they are on for themselves?

Gary says

Exactly what it says. Covers both his political life and his linguistic work.

Kristina says

Everyone should read this book. Author points out Chomsky's political arguments and his linguistic talents. Very interesting.
