

*Excerpts from*  
***Powers and Prospects***

Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order

**Noam Chomsky**

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Foreword by Agio Pereira

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## Language and Thought: Some Reflections on Venerable Themes

There is also a different approach to the [unification] problem, which is highly influential though it seems to me not only foreign to the sciences but also close to senseless. This approach divorces the cognitive sciences from a biological setting, and seeks tests to determine whether some object "manifests intelligence" ("plays chess," "understands Chinese," or whatever). The approach relies on the "Turing Test," devised by mathematician Alan Turing, who did much of the fundamental work on the modern theory of computation. In a famous paper of 1950, he proposed a way of evaluating the performance of a computer -- basically, by determining whether observers will be able to distinguish it from the performance of people. If they cannot, the device passes the test. There is no fixed Turing test; rather, a battery of devices constructed on this model. The details need not concern us.

Adopting this approach, suppose we are interested in deciding whether a programmed computer can play chess or understand Chinese. We construct a variant of the Turing test, and see whether a jury can be fooled into thinking that a human is carrying out the observed performance. If so, we will have "empirically established" that the computer can play chess, understand Chinese, think, etc., according to proponents of this version of artificial intelligence, while their critics deny that this result would establish the conclusion.

There is a great deal of often heated debate about these matters in the literature of the cognitive sciences, artificial intelligence, and philosophy of mind, but it is hard to see that any serious question has been posed. The question of whether a computer is playing chess, or doing long division, or translating Chinese, is like the question of whether robots can murder or airplanes can fly -- or people; after all, the "flight" of the Olympic long jump champion is only an order of magnitude short of that of the chicken champion (so I'm told). These are questions of decision, not fact; decision as to whether to adopt a certain metaphoric extension of common usage.

There is no answer to the question whether airplanes really fly (though perhaps not space shuttles). Fooling people into mistaking a submarine for a whale doesn't show that submarines really swim; nor does it fail to establish the fact. There is no fact, no meaningful question to be answered, as all agree, in this case. The same is true of computer programs, as Turing took pains to make clear in the 1950 paper that is regularly invoked in these discussions. Here he pointed out that the question whether machines think "may be too meaningless to deserve discussion," being a question of decision, not fact, though he speculated that in 50 years, usage may have "altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted" -- as in the case of airplanes flying (in English, at least), but not submarines swimming. Such alteration of usage amounts to the replacement of one lexical item by another one with somewhat different properties. There is no empirical question as to whether this is the right or wrong decision.

In this regard, there has been serious regression since the first cognitive revolution, in my opinion. Superficially, reliance on the Turing test is reminiscent of the Cartesian approach to the existence of other minds. But the comparison is misleading. The Cartesian experiments were something like a litmus

test for acidity: they sought to determine whether an object has a certain property, in this case, possession of mind, one aspect of the world. But that is not true of the artificial intelligence debate.

Another superficial similarity is the interest in simulation of behavior, again only apparent, I think. As I mentioned earlier, the first cognitive revolution was stimulated by the achievements of automata, much as today, and complex devices were constructed to simulate real objects and their functioning: the digestion of a duck, a flying bird, and so on. But the purpose was not to determine whether machines can digest or fly. Jacques de Vaucanson, the great artificer of the period, was concerned to understand the animate systems he was modeling; he constructed mechanical devices in order to formulate and validate theories of his animate models, not to satisfy some performance criterion.

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## C H A P T E R T W O

# Language and Nature

## The Externalist Orthodoxy

This brings us to the second aspect of the topic of language and nature: How does the use of language relate to the world?

The prevailing picture, established in the modern period particularly by Gottlob Frege, is based on three principles:

- I. There is a common store of thoughts.
- II. There is a common language that expresses these thoughts.
- III. The language is a set of well-formed expressions, and its semantics is based on a relation between parts of these expressions and things in the world.

This is the "representational" thesis I mentioned earlier, and is also accepted by "externalist" critics of the Fregean model.

Frege used the German word "Bedeutung" for the purported relation between expressions and things, but in an invented technical sense, because German lacks the relevant notion. English translations use such terms as "reference" or "denotation," also in a technical sense, for the same reason; the notion does not exist in English, or, it seems, any human language. There are somewhat similar notions: "talk about," "ask for," "refer to," etc. But when we look at all closely at these, we find that they have properties that make them quite unsuited for the representational model. There is nothing wrong with introduction of technical terms for theoretical inquiry. On the contrary, there is no alternative; beyond the most elementary level, rational inquiry departs from the resources of common sense and ordinary language. What we ask about a theoretical framework is something different: Is it the right one, for the purposes at

hand?

The Fregean picture is intelligible, perhaps correct, for the inquiry that primarily concerned Frege himself: exploring the nature of mathematics. As for natural language, Frege considered it too "imperfect" to merit much attention.

[. . .]

The picture also seems plausible in a normative sense for scientific inquiry, a rather special human endeavor. Both the history of science and introspection suggest that the scientist may be aiming intuitively at something like the Fregean picture: shared symbolic systems with terms that pick out what we hope are real things in the world: quarks, molecules, ants, human languages and their elements, etc.

But the picture makes no sense at all with regard to human languages -- a biological entity, to be investigated by the methods of the sciences, without arbitrary stipulations drawn from some other concern. The notion "common store of thoughts" has no empirical status, and is unlikely to gain one even if the science of the future discovers a reason, unknown today, to postulate entities that resemble "what we think (believe, fear, hope, expect, want, etc.)." Principle I seems groundless at best, senseless at worst.

As for II, the notion "common language" has no place in efforts to understand the phenomena of language and to explain them. Two people may talk alike, as they may look alike or live near one another. But it makes no more sense to postulate a "common language" that they share than a common shape or a common area. As in the case of "physical" or "real," the problem is not vagueness or unclarity: there is nothing to clarify; the world does not have shapes and areas, or shared languages. Nor are the terms devoid of meaning; they are just fine for ordinary usage. It makes sense for me to tell you that I live near Boston and far from Sydney, or to tell a Martian that I live near both but far from the moon. The same holds for looking alike, and speaking alike. I do or do not speak like people in Sydney, depending on the circumstances of the discourse. Some such circumstances -- pretty complicated ones -- pick out what we sometimes call "places" and "languages." From some points of view, the greater Boston area is a place; from others not. Chinese is a "language" and Romance not, as a result of such matters as colors on maps and stability of empires. But Chinese is no more an element of the world than the area around Boston; arguably much less so, because the conditions of individuation are so vastly more intricate and interest-related.

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## C H A P T E R T H R E E

# Writers and Intellectual Responsibility

For much of my life, I've been closely involved with pacifist groups in direct action and resistance, and

educational and organizing projects. We've spent days in jail together, and it is a freakish accident that they did not extend to many years, as we realistically expected 30 years ago (an interesting tale, but a different one). That creates bonds of loyalty and friendship, but also brings out some disagreements. So, my Quaker friends and colleagues in disrupting illegitimate authority adopt the slogan: "Speak truth to power." I strongly disagree. The audience is entirely wrong, and the effort hardly more than a form of self-indulgence. It is a waste of time and a pointless pursuit to speak truth to Henry Kissinger, or the CEO of General Motors, or others who exercise power in coercive institutions -- truths that they already know well enough, for the most part.

Again, a qualification is in order. Insofar as such people dissociate themselves from their institutional setting and become human beings, moral agents, then they join everyone else. But in their institutional roles, as people who wield power, they are hardly worth addressing, any more than the worst tyrants and criminals, who are also human beings, however terrible their actions.

To speak truth to power is not a particularly honorable vocation. One should seek out an audience that matters -- and furthermore (another important qualification), it should not be seen as an audience, but as a community of common concern in which one hopes to participate constructively. We should not be speaking */to*, but *with*. That is second nature to any good teacher, and should be to any writer and intellectual as well.

Perhaps this is enough to suggest that even the question of choice of audience is not entirely trivial.

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## C H A P T E R F O U R

# Goals and Visions

In referring to goals and visions, I have in mind a practical rather than a very principled distinction. As is usual in human affairs, it is the practical perspective that matters most. Such theoretical understanding as we have is far too thin to carry much weight.

By visions, I mean the conception of a future society that animates what we actually do, a society in which a decent human being might want to live. By goals, I mean the choices and tasks that are within reach, that we will pursue one way or another guided by a vision that may be distant and hazy.

An animating vision must rest on some conception of human nature, of what's good for people, of their needs and rights, of the aspects of their nature that should be nurtured, encouraged and permitted to flourish for their benefit and that of others. The concept of human nature that underlies our visions is usually tacit and inchoate, but it is always there, perhaps implicitly, whether one chooses to leave things as they are and cultivate one's own garden, or to work for small changes, or for revolutionary ones.

This much, at least, is true of people who regard themselves as moral agents, not monsters -- who care about the effects of what they do or fail to do.

On all such matters, our knowledge and understanding are shallow; as in virtually every area of human life, we proceed on the basis of intuition and experience, hopes and fears. Goals involve hard choices with very serious human consequences. We adopt them on the basis of imperfect evidence and limited understanding, and though our visions can and should be a guide, they are at best a very partial one. They are not clear, nor are they stable, at least for people who care about the consequences of their acts. Sensible people will look forward to a clearer articulation of their animating visions and to the critical evaluation of them in the light of reason and experience. So far, the substance is pretty meager, and there are no signs of any change in that state of affairs. Slogans are easy, but not very helpful when real choices have to be made.

## Goals versus Visions

Goals and visions can appear to be in conflict, and often are. There's no contradiction in that, as I think we all know from ordinary experience. Let me take my own case, to illustrate what I have in mind.

My personal visions are fairly traditional anarchist ones, with origins in the Enlightenment and classical liberalism. Before proceeding, I have to clarify what I mean by that. I do not mean the version of classical liberalism that has been reconstructed for ideological purposes, but the original, before it was broken on the rocks of rising industrial capitalism, as Rudolf Rocker put it in his work on anarchosyndicalism 60 years ago -- rather accurately, I think.

As state capitalism developed into the modern era, economic, political and ideological systems have increasingly been taken over by vast institutions of private tyranny that are about as close to the totalitarian ideal as any that humans have so far constructed. "Within the corporation," political economist Robert Brady wrote half a century ago, "all policies emanate from the control above. In the union of this power to determine policy with the execution thereof, all authority necessarily proceeds from the top to the bottom and all responsibility from the bottom to the top. This is, of course, the inverse of 'democratic' control; it follows the structural conditions of dictatorial power."

[. . .]

When I speak of classical liberalism, I mean the ideas that were swept away, in considerable measure, by the rising tide of state capitalist autocracy. These ideas survived (or were re-invented) in various forms in the culture of resistance to new forms of oppression, serving as an animating vision for popular struggles that have considerably expanded the scope of freedom, justice, and rights. They were also taken up, adapted, and developed within libertarian left currents. According to this anarchist vision, any structure of hierarchy and authority carries a heavy burden of justification, whether it involves personal relations or a larger social order. If it cannot bear that burden -- and it sometimes can -- then it is illegitimate and should be dismantled. When honestly posed and squarely faced, that challenge can rarely be sustained.

Genuine libertarians have their work cut out for them.

State power and private tyranny are prime examples at the outer limits, but the issues arise pretty much across the board: in relations among parents and children, teachers and students, men and women, those now alive and future generations that will be compelled to live with the results of what we do, indeed just about everywhere. In particular, the anarchist vision, in almost every variety, has looked forward to the dismantling of state power. Personally, I share that vision, though it seems to run counter to my goals. Hence the tension to which I referred.

My short-term goals are to defend and even strengthen elements of state authority which, though illegitimate in fundamental ways, are critically necessary right now to impede the dedicated efforts to "roll back" the progress that has been achieved in extending democracy and human rights. State authority is now under severe attack in the more democratic societies, but not because it conflicts with the libertarian vision. Rather the opposite: because it offers (weak) protection to some aspects of that vision.

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## C H A P T E R F I V E

# Democracy and Markets in the New World Order

A good place to start is in Washington, right now. The standard picture is that a "historic political realignment" took place in the congressional elections of 1994 that swept Newt Gingrich and his army into power in a landslide victory, a "triumph of conservatism" that reflects the continuing "drift to the right." With their "overwhelming popular mandate," the Gingrich army will fulfil the promises of the Contract with America. They will "get government off our backs" so that we can return to the happy days when the free market reigned and restore "family values," ridding us of "the excesses of the welfare state" and the other residues of the failed "big government" policies of New Deal liberalism and the "Great Society." By dismantling the "nanny state," they will be able to "create jobs for Americans" and win security and freedom for the "middle class." And they will take over and successfully lead the crusade to establish the American Dream of free market democracy, worldwide.

That's the basic story. It has a familiar ring.

Ten years before, Ronald Reagan was re-elected in the second "conservative landslide" in four years. In the first, in 1980, Reagan won a bare majority of the popular vote and 28 percent of the electorate. Exit polls showed that the vote was not "for Reagan" but "against Carter" -- who had in fact initiated the policies that the Reaganites took up and implemented, with the general support of congressional Democrats: accelerated military spending (the state sector of the economy) and cutbacks in programs that serve the vast majority. Polls in 1980 revealed that 11 percent of Reagan voters chose him because "he's a real conservative" -- whatever that term is supposed to mean.

In 1984, there were great efforts to get out the vote, and they worked: it increased by 1 percent. The number of voters who supported Reagan as a "real conservative" dropped to 4 percent. A considerable majority of those who voted hoped that Reaganite legislative programs would not be enacted. Public opinion studies showed a continuation of the steady drift towards a kind of New Deal-style welfare state liberalism.

Why the votes? The concerns and desires of the public are not articulated in the political system -- one reason why voting is so sharply skewed towards privileged sectors.

When the interests of the privileged and powerful are the guiding commitment of both political factions, people who do not share these interests tend to stay home. William Dean Burnham, a leading specialist on electoral politics, pointed out that the class pattern of abstention "seems inseparably linked to another crucial comparative peculiarity of the American political system: the total absence of a socialist or laborite party as an organized competitor in the electoral market." That was fifteen years ago, and it has only become more pronounced as civil society has been even more effectively dismantled: unions, political organizations, and so on.

In the United States, "the interests of the bottom three-fifths of society" are not represented in the political system, political commentator Thomas Edsall of the *Washington Post* pointed out a decade ago, referring to the Reagan elections. There are many consequences apart from the highly skewed voting pattern. One is that half the population thinks that both parties should be disbanded. Over 80 percent regard the economic system as "inherently unfair" and the government "run for the benefit of the few and the special interests, not the people" (up from a steady 50 percent for a similarly worded question in the pre-Reagan years) -- though what people might mean by "special interests" is another question. The same proportion think that workers have too little influence -- though only 20 percent feel that way about unions and 40 percent consider them too influential, another sign of the effects of the propaganda system in inducing confusion, if not in changing attitudes.

That brings us to 1994, the next in the series of "conservative landslides." Of the 38 percent of the electorate who took part, a bare majority voted Republican. "Republicans claimed about 52 percent of all votes cast for candidates in contested House seats, slightly better than a two-point improvement from 1992," when the Democrats won, the polling director of the *Washington Post* reported. One out of six voters described the outcome as "an affirmation of the Republican agenda." A "more conservative Congress" was considered an issue by a rousing 12 percent of the voters. An overwhelming majority had never heard of Gingrich's Contract with America, which articulated the Republican agenda and has since been relentlessly implemented, with much fanfare about the popular will, and less said about the fact that it is the first contract in history with only one party signing, and the other scarcely knowing of its existence.

When asked about the central components of the Contract, large majorities opposed almost all, notably the central one: large cuts in social spending. Over 60 percent of the population wanted to see such spending *increased* at the time of the elections. Gingrich himself was highly unpopular, even more than

Clinton, whose ratings are very low; and that distaste has only persisted as the program has been implemented.

There was plenty of opposition to Democrats; the election was a "vote against." But it was nuanced. Clinton-style "New Democrats" -- in effect, moderate Republicans -- lost heavily, but not those who kept to the traditional liberal agenda and tried to activate the old Democratic coalition: the majority of the population who see themselves, correctly, as effectively disenfranchised.

Voting was even more heavily skewed toward the wealthy and privileged than before. Democrats were heavily preferred by those who earn less than \$30,000 a year (about the median) and ran even with Republicans in the \$30,000-\$50,000 range. The opinion profiles of non-voters were similar on major issues to those who voted the Democratic ticket. Voters who sensed a decline in their standard of living chose Republican -- or more accurately, opposed incumbent Democrats close to two to one. Most are white males with very uncertain economic futures, just the people who would have been part of a left-populist coalition committed to equitable economic growth and political democracy, were such an option to intrude into the business-run political arena. In its absence, many are turning to religious fanaticism, cults of every imaginable kind, paramilitary organizations ("militias"), and other forms of irrationality, an ominous development, with precedents that we remember, and that now concern even the corporate executives who applaud the actions of the Gingrich army in its dedicated service to the most rich and privileged.

Nevertheless, despite the propaganda onslaught of the last half century, the general population has somehow maintained social democratic attitudes. Substantial majorities believe the government should assist people in need, and favor spending for health, education, help for the poor, and protection of the environment. As I've already mentioned, they also approve of foreign aid for the needy and peacekeeping operations. But policy follows a radically different course.

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## C H A P T E R S I X

### **The Middle East Settlement: Its Sources and Contours**

When the DOP [the September 1993 Declaration of Principles, the agreement between Israel and Arafat] was announced, knowledgeable observers recognized that it did not offer "even a hint of a solution to the basic problems which exist between Israel and the Palestinians," either in the short run or down the road (Israeli journalist Danny Rubinstein). Its operative meaning became still more clear after the May 1994 Cairo Agreement, which ensured that the territories administered by Arafat would remain "squarely within Israel's economic fold," as the *Wall Street Journal* observed, and that the military administration would remain intact in all but name. The significance of the agreement was understood at once in Israel. Meron Benvenisti, former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and head of the West Bank Data Base Project, and one of the most astute observers in the Israeli mainstream for many years, commented that the Cairo Agreement, "much as it is difficult to trust one's own eyes when reading it, ...grants the Military

Administration the exclusive authority in 'legislation, adjudication, policy execution,'" and "responsibility for the exercise of these powers in conformity with international law," which the US and Israel interpret as they please. "The entire intricate system of military ordinances...will retain its force, apart from 'such legislative regulatory and other powers Israel may expressly grant'" the Palestinians. Israeli judges retain "veto powers over any Palestinian legislation 'that might jeopardize major Israeli interests,'" which have "overriding power," and are interpreted as the US and Israel choose. Though subject to Israel's decisions on all matters of any significance, Palestinian authorities are granted one domain as their own: they have "exclusive responsibility for anything done or not done," meaning that they agree to take upon themselves the debilitating costs of the 28-year occupation, from which Israel profited enormously, and to assume a continuing responsibility for Israel's security. This "agreement of surrender," Benvenisti observes, puts into effect the extremist 1981 proposals of Ariel Sharon, rejected then by Egypt.

After another Israel-Arafat agreement a year later, Benvenisti commented that "Arafat once again bowed his head before the infinitely stronger opponent." He reviewed the terms of the agreement, which left over half the West Bank under "absolute Israeli control" and the status of another 40 percent delayed for several years, during which time Israel can continue to use US aid to "create facts" in the routine manner. The agreement, Benvenisti notes, rescinds the provision of the DOP "that the West Bank will be considered 'one territorial unit, whose integrity will be preserved during the interim stage.'" Little will change from the occupation period, he predicts, except that "Israeli control will become less direct: instead of running affairs up front, Israeli 'liaison officers' will run them via the clerks of the Palestinian Authority." Like Britain during its day in the sun, Israel will continue to rule behind "constitutional fictions." No innovation of course; that is the traditional pattern of the European conquest of most of the world.

The situation is even worse in Gaza, where the Israeli Security Services (Shabak) remain "an invisible but violent force whose shadowy presence is always felt, wielding a fateful power over Gazans' lives," *Haaretz* correspondent Amira Hass reports, adding that Israeli authorities continue to control the economy as well. Since 1991, Graham Usher elaborates, Israel has redirected Gaza's traditional fruit and vegetable production to ornamentals and flowers by various punitive measures, including reduction of arable citrus land by almost a third through confiscations. The goal is only in part to remove valuable territory from eventual Arab control. Israel also intends "to decouple Gaza's trade with other economies, the better to lock it into Israel's own." Export from these single-crop sectors is in the hands of Israeli contractors, and very low labor costs in the demoralized Gaza Strip allow Israeli entrepreneurs to maintain their European markets at substantial profit.

By summer 1995, 95 percent of the population of the Gaza population was "imprisoned within the region" by Israeli force, the Israeli human rights group Tsevet 'aza reports, with the "economy strangled" and security forces controlling trade, export, and communications, often seeking to "produce harsher conditions for the Palestinians." Under these conditions, few are willing to face the hazards of investment, at least outside the industrial parks set up by Israeli manufacturers to "exploit the cheap labor of Palestinians." They report further that Israel continues to refuse to allow Palestinian investors to open small productive facilities, and that fishermen are kept to six kilometers from the coast, where there are no fish during the summer months. The limited water supplies in this very arid region are used for

intensive Israeli agriculture, even artificial lakes at elegant resorts, visitors report. Meanwhile water supplies to Palestinians in Gaza have been cut in half since the Oslo Accords, UN human rights investigator Rene Felber wrote in a harshly critical report on prison conditions and water policy. He resigned shortly after, commenting that it is pointless to issue reports that go into the wastebasket.

A year after the DOP, Israel's control of West Bank land reached about 75 percent, up from 65 percent when the accords were signed. Establishment and "thickening" of settlements also continued at a rapid pace, along with the construction of "bypass roads" that integrate the Jewish settlements into Israel proper, leaving Arab villages cut off from one another and from the urban centers that Israel prefers to relinquish to Palestinian administration. The highway projects are immense, with costs expected to be about \$400 million, according to the Secretary-General of the governing Labor Party. The purpose is to provide settlers with what one calls "a road where I don't have to see Arabs all around me." Details are secret, but "outlines are emerging from settlers' maps," correspondent Barton Gellman reports, including the usual method of quietly putting "the force of Israeli law" behind projects "begun illegally by the settlers." Benvenisti describes the roads as "political facts that have long-term consequences" within the plan to "cut the Arab areas into boxes, making *laagers* (encircled camps) out of the West Bank," part of "a victor's peace, a diktat."

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## C H A P T E R S E V E N

# The Great Powers and Human Rights: The Case of East Timor

I've been asked to speak about the great powers and human rights. That's actually a very brief talk.

There are two versions of the story. The official one is familiar: upholding human rights is our highest goal, even "the Soul of our foreign policy," as President Carter put it. And if we are at all at fault, it is in maintaining this noble standard too rigorously, to the detriment of the famous "national interest."

A second version is given by the events of history and the internal record of planning. It was outlined with admirable frankness in an important state paper of 1948 (PPS 23) written by one of the architects of the New World Order of the day, the head of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, the respected statesman and scholar George Kennan. In the course of assigning each region of the world its proper role within the overarching framework of American power, he observed that the basic policy goal is to maintain the "position of disparity" that separates our enormous wealth from the poverty of others; and to achieve that goal "We should cease to talk about vague and . . . unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization," recognizing that we must "deal in straight power concepts," not "hampered by idealistic slogans" about "altruism and world-benefaction."

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## East Timor and World Order

It has repeatedly been argued here that Indonesia cannot [allow self-determination for East Timor] for fear of strengthening separatist movements or perhaps national honor, the same arguments put forth to justify Russia's hold on the Baltic countries, or its current vicious assault on Chechnya, to mention merely two examples of an infamous list. In any such cases, the issues are not trivial, and include complex questions of value and judgment about federalism and independence or centralization of state power. Each case has to be looked at on its merits; the arguments in the present case are hardly impressive. The proper role of outsiders is to try, as much as possible, to help the affected people gain the right and power to make their own decisions -- the *affected people*, not their autocratic rulers, or foreign investors, or the "principal architects of policy" in our own countries. The rule of outsiders is surely not to pre-empt that choice by firmly placing the boot on the necks of suffering people.

It is also not the role of outsiders to affect a high moral stand, as when a Douglas Hurd -- of all people -- solemnly explains that the West cannot "export Western values [on human rights] to developing nations," values that the Third World has learned all about well enough, thank you. As for denunciations of others for their crimes, there are not too many people, and no institutions of power, that are in a very strong position to take such a stance.

My own view, for what it is worth, is that we should look primarily at ourselves. In 1980, the US press finally did begin to give some recognition to what had happened in East Timor, after four terrible years. The *New York Times* had a powerful editorial entitled "The Shaming of Indonesia." I wrote a letter, which they would not publish though some NGOs did, suggesting that the title and thrust of the editorial should have been "the shaming of the United States" (or the shaming of the *New York Times*, though I didn't suggest that, in the vain hope of passing through those august portals). We have our own crimes to consider in the case of East Timor, serious and critical ones, and we are hardly in a position to issue a blanket condemnation of Indonesia, whose people had no way to find out what was going on, and did not, with a few exceptions like George Aditjondro, who needs no lectures from us.

The point generalizes, but I won't elaborate. The implications seem obvious.

I'll wind up by reiterating something that should also be obvious. I have been speaking of one of the great crimes of the modern era, one in which we have had and still have a primary role. It is also one of the easier cases to resolve, in world affairs. The piece of gravel [as Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas once called East Timor] can be removed, and we could help ease the way, if we so choose.

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