

## Re: From a puzzled skeptic

-----Original Message-----

From: mechtheist <[mechtheist](mailto:mechtheist)>

To: skepticssociety <[skepticssociety@skeptic.com](mailto:skepticssociety@skeptic.com)>

Sent: Mon, Feb 3, 2014 8:51 am

Subject: From a puzzled skeptic

I thought I was a pretty good skeptic most of my life, even before about 1972 when, while between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades at a catholic school in a small farming community in Texas, I realized the absurdity of belief in a deity. I've been a member of various skeptic orgs over the years, reading a lot of the magazines and other literature. Then, about 6 months ago, I watched a Noam Chomsky video, which lead to a binge on the huge catalog of his lectures available on youtube. Chomsky has doggedly, for decades, exposed the extent to which the US population is so thoroughly propagandized, arguably to a significantly greater degree than it is by religion, though I'd assume the two intertwine.

So now I'm puzzled at the near total lack of any mention of any of his reporting by the skeptical community. Searching for mentions of Chomsky with google site: searches at csicop.org, , at skeptic.com, andcenterforinquiry.net, yields mostly linguistic related links, or forum posts. Is the national myth, the national religion, somehow hands-off? Or is it that the skeptical community has been utterly credulous when the corporate media feeds them the propaganda so ubiquitous across the myriad array of media available today?

Right now, we have leaders in the House and the Senate desperately trying to force us into a war with Iran, trying to ramp up as much as possible our petroleum use, and reducing aid to the poor while shoveling billions to the richest corporations and people. The double-speak bullshit appears to spew out at unprecedented levels, arguably driving us into a climate catastrophe, and it's all for corporate profits. And skeptics are largely silent on the fundamental issue.

All the good work in debunking of bigfoots, of psychic whatever, UFOs, and theisms, seems an impotent waste, a sideshow, if compared to the horrors we US citizens are all complicit in by our citizenship. The horrors inflicted on the world and its own citizens by US actions, which have killed millions, probably tens of millions, and we all played a part, if only through willful ignorance. Chomsky often declares a great moral sentiment, "You are responsible for the predictable results of your actions." How is it that the great champions of debunking seem blind to the mass misery and death this country inflicts routinely while claiming to be the exceptional *Good Guys* of the world?

If nothing else, the revelations of Manning and Snowden of late have exposed the vast array of lies the government tells with such great facility, often the very lies and types of lies, misinformation, and double-speak Chomsky's been telling us about for decades. Maybe there is a problem with how Chomsky is perceived, that is irrelevant to what the reactions should be to the facts he lays out, and the facts speak for themselves. How can anyone consider themselves a skeptic while appearing incapable of seeing through the national mythology? Surely by now you react in disgust whenever you hear of the great British Empire, well, the US has replaced them as chief exploiter The West was built on the loot from centuries of raping much of Africa, the Americas and large parts of Asia, for a long time on the backs of slaves. And it is still going on, even as we march faster and faster to a climate disaster unavoidable because we won't let facts be an impediment to corporate profits. Where are the skeptics? Makes me a bit ashamed to have ever called myself one.

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Life--it just takes up so much of your fricking time

From: artskeptic

Political issues are not our mission. We cover largely those issues that can be addressed scientifically.

Some limited aspects of political science can be addressed scientifically. For example, it can be determined through statistics what kind of institutions in which societies provide citizens with the most well being (once a definition of "well being" is agreed upon--that in itself is a great debate.) As a rule, no matter what's being measured, the Scandinavian countries usually come out on top. Ironically while I am sympathetic to many of Chomsky's viewpoints--his heart is in the right place--he may be on the other end of the political spectrum from the Scandinavian way of governing. I don't follow Chomsky enough to know if he is still calling himself a Marxist, but it just goes to show that political/sociological issues are complex.

Other issues can not be addressed because data can not be accessed. When Bush was going to go into Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction a couple of our readers called on us to determine if there actually were any. But of course given the situation we couldn't send any specialist in to settle the issue. Historians could have looked at history and noticed that war is often preceded by exaggerated claims of the other sides faults--that has been studied. So we could have guessed that the weapons of mass destruction claims were exaggerated. But we couldn't have done a scientific determination without actually getting boots on the ground to look for them.

The "bigfoot skepticism" type articles are to show people how investigations can be done and to teach critical thinking skills. When I first read James Randi's classic book "Flimflam" I was puzzled to see that he included an entire chapter on what seemed to be an incredibly silly topic: fairies. But the story of how Sir Auther Conen Doyle--the inventor if the eminently rational Sherlock Holms--came to believe in fairies is a template for unraveling why people believe in many other extraordinary claims. We are not focused so much on telling people what to believe (what is truth in all cases), as much as we want to teach how to critically analyze things.



## mchtheist

Thank you for taking the time to reply at such length, it really is appreciated. I understand not addressing politics, politics is supposed to be about balancing preferences, values, etc, but what we're dealing with here is *facts* and how thoroughly the US public is shielded from them. And these are issues that *can* be addressed scientifically. *Manufacturing Consent*, written with Edward S. Herman, is a science-based model on how propaganda is used to shape citizen's perception. That propaganda creates a false view in the public's mind, *just like a religion*. Not only are his works full of detailed facts that can be compared to the virtual-reality the media projects, they most assuredly are trying to "teach how to critically analyze things", to quote what you say you are most focused on.

Skeptics often point out how egregious it is when fundamentalists try to defend the episodes of genocide in the OT, but what you're telling me is 'Meh, that's just politics' when it's *your* country doing the genocide. I can't figure out how Chomsky can be a marxist and also somehow on the opposite side of the spectrum from the Scandinavians? And I doubt he ever called himself a marxist. My guess is you haven't been exposed to Chomsky's work to any significant degree. Let me *beg* you, and I don't use that word lightly, to see the documentary *Manufacturing Consent - Noam Chomsky and the Media*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AnB8MuQ6DU>

This is what Massimo Pigliucci had to say about it:

Rationally Speaking

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Chomsky the anarcho-libertarian

But I had never seen Chomsky in action, a lacuna that was remedied at least partially during the last couple of days, when I watched the documentary "Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media." I'm not easily given to hero-worship, and in fact I'm pretty sure that Chomsky himself would be horrified at the prospect, but I must admit that I quickly adopted a new role model for my own modest forays into public intellectualism.

Being exposed to his ideas for the first time had a similar effect on me, powerful and shattering, a bit like what I hear from theists finding their way to atheism after years as a believer. Watch that video, then check out Chomsky on the 501 years since Columbus,

*Year 501*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21F-vWXOOTQ&list=PLGo1ooP3dLHPzay1eqR6-TQwlsM8RoQ4M&index=6>

Then please get back on whether it's just politics. If you don't want to take the time, you should understand theists who can't be bothered to read a book on evolution, and it means you are comfortable with genocidal policies if done by your own country, it's only wrong when *they* do it.

Rob S

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## artskeptic

you're telling me is 'Meh, that's just politics'

No I'm not. I'm saying a couple things.

---A single social movement group can't do everything--they have to focus. For example: I'm for saving whales, Bill Gate's work in Africa, and civil rights. I'm against government corruption and waste, child abuse and social oppression. But our focus is on teaching the public how to handle extraordinary science claims.

Back in the 60s the civil rights, feminist and anti-war groups that evolved into trying to be all things to all people ended up burning off all their energy (mostly with infighting on where to put their resources) and changing little, while those who were less radical and maintained focus are still with us.

---We cant do much with claims of faith or opinion except to point out that that's what they are. If someone claims the Shroud of Turin is Christ's actual burial cloth as a claim of faith, we can't address that. But if they say they have scientific proof that it is, then we can address the specific proof they bring up.

For the most part political people are not making specific scientific claims. Their viewpoints are to them self evident, given their peer group and individual interests. While Marxists, the American Religious Right and the more ideological Libertarians all make the claim--as do so many political groups--that their movement is the inevitable wave of the future, these kinds of claims are usually so broad that they fall into the faith category rather than the science category.

My exposure to Chomsky was more than 20 years years ago when I used to hear an occasional speech of his on listener sponsored radio. Is he or was he a Marxist? Depends on how you define it. The intellectual anti establishment left has a lot of nit-picky categories as to who is to be called what--socialist this or that, Trotskyite this or that, Leninist this or that...on and on and on.... My recall from back then is that he did use the M word to describe himself I see the Internet has him now calling himself a "libertarian anarchist". (I'd like to see someone establish either a pure Libertarian group or a purely anarchist group. Social experiments along these lines thus far usually turn out to be oligarchies dominated by a single charismatic personality. )

-----Original Message-----

From: mechtheist <[mechtheist](#)>



## **mechtheist**

Thanks again for the reply, for taking the time to seriously consider what I said. Chomsky calls himself an anarcho-syndicalist, the 'anarchy' part bears little relation to how the word is usually used, and he seems to have rejected Marxism by the age of twelve-and that was a long long time ago.

I didn't write only to question where are the societies, but where are the skeptics. I haven't really heard any talk of these things at the individual level. You clearly didn't watch the videos and have only a vague memory of what Chomsky discusses, which you have written off as 'marxists', which I informed you he wasn't, and you brushed that off again with further irrelevancies and then threw in some pejoratives about hits 'type' of folk. But then, you don't really know what his type of folk is.

You also seem to think Chomsky preaches about forming some new kind of social order, he doesn't. What he actually does is to try to get the citizens together to end the vicious, brutal, murderous and genocidal behavior of the government. In order to convince people why they need to do so, he lays out a vast array of facts, the kind of thing any decent skeptic could check out since his written work is heavily referenced, and he references much of what he says in the lectures as he speaks.

So, you dismiss what you know nothing of, can't be bothered to learn about what really is even when the references are handed to you, insist your vague, poorly recollected knowledge is true, which it isn't, and gen up straw-man arguments. Can you give me one reason to not call you a creationist? Metaphorically of course, I only mean to say you are a believer in the national mythologies, seem to not want to know the truth, and dismiss or ignore the evidence that is clear and right in front of you. Which is to say, a representative of *The Skeptic Society* is broadly a swallower of propaganda and resists being better informed about uncomfortable truths. As I said in my letter, I'm ashamed to have called myself a skeptic.



## **artskeptic**

So, you dismiss what you know nothing of, can't be bothered to learn about what really is even when the references are handed to you, insist your vague, poorly recollected knowledge is true, which it isn't, and gen up straw-man argument...

That's rather flattering. No thanks--I don't think I want to have any further conversation with you.

-----Original Message-----

From: mechtheist <[mechtheist](#)>  
To: Artskeptic <[artskeptic](#)>

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**mechtheist**

No, it was blunt, and it was *honest*. This is extremely serious stuff that should bother everyone deeply. Your reply only emphasizes my point by avoiding addressing the issues I'm raising while not actually disputing my unflattering characterization of your response. Cutting off the conversation only furthers my position, skeptics shouldn't avoid uncomfortable truths, that's the opposite of how a good skeptic should operate.

I sincerely appreciate your responses, and most definitely meant no offense.

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**artskeptic**

No, it was blunt, and it was *honest*.  
I do not communicate with people who insist in engaging in ad hominem attacks.

-----Original Message-----

From: mechtheist <[mechtheist](#)>  
To: Artskeptic <[artskeptic](#)>



**mechtheist**

I'm only replying because it offends my sensibilities to let such an inane accusation stand without protest. I can't fathom how anyone could interpret my words as ad hominem. I corrected some errors in your ideas about Chomsky and described your actions/inactions and how they sounded to me like common creationist behavior. Clearly, none of that is ad hominem.

Have a good day, sir, I guess I came to the wrong place.

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Second round of exchanges

**mechtheist**

It's been a little over a year since I wrote to your organization to ask why you fail to cover the religion of nationalism/national mythology, essentially much of the work of Noam Chomsky. In

your latest issue of *Skeptic*, Vol20No1, there is a series on terrorism. It's pretty good, and actually discusses some of the BS mentioned in my earlier letter, but it's grossly inadequate. While in my copy of *Skeptic* this series has more red marks than the backs of any 10 flagellants, one phrase from the third paragraph of the lead article says it all: ". . . an often uncritical media" 'Uncritical'??? The media actively works to promote the propaganda of administrations. No serious questioning allowed of many of the most serious failures the government, of failures and breeches of the democratic process, of corporate influence etc etc etc cetera. Viewing any given day of *The Young Turks*, or *Democracy Now* suffices for proof of this.

Right now, there is the Richard Engel scandal at NBC, really serious shit, where it really appears that what was reported was the exact opposite of the truth, and clearly in line with the anti-Assad/Syria push going on back then. Recently we had a media chock full of the same folk that lied us into war with Iraq now trying to lie us into a war with Iran. How often was it mentioned their gross failures in Iraq? Why were these obvious liars and morons even allowed on air? A particularly ludicrous example in this theater of the absurd was administration spokesperson Jen Psaki saying "As a matter of long-standing policy, the United States does not support political transitions by nonconstitutional means." A roomful of serious, actual journalists should have burst out laughing at such doublespeak. Such examples abound, abundant proof of a virtual reality created by the propaganda state we live in, much like the fantasy world of religions, but you appear to have your collective heads buried in the sand.

Failing to address these issues is an egregious failure for a skeptic, it makes calling yourselves skeptics laughable, almost obscene. Chomsky recently sat down for a discussion with Lawrence Kraus, [Chomsky & Kraus: An Origins Project Dialogue](#) At 1h32m16s, Chomsky's words make manifest the absurdity of skeptics and the skeptic orgs calling themselves '*skeptics*' and '*critical thinkers*':

Chomsky:

*"[Everyone] should remember that there is a secular religion that is even more devastating [than theistic religions] and that's things like the concept of american exceptionalism. That's a secular religion."*

The exchange regarding my last letter and your representative artskeptic was less than lame, in fact it was pretty much like arguing with a creationist.

As Chomsky says, this secular religion is far more devastating than the theistic religions, the quack medicine, UFOs, etc. It's the cause of the so many genuine horrors, wars, all matter of ills, to ignore it, to call it 'politics', as if that excuses you from addressing what should be your *raison d'être*, is a gross dereliction of duty for any one or any organization that would call themselves critically thinking skeptics.

## **artskeptic**

If we got a really good article in either critiquing or supporting Chomsky we would consider it, but his ideas and opinions are admittedly not on the top of our list of topics to pursue.

Failing to address these issues is an egregious failure for a skeptic, it makes calling yourselves skeptics laughable, almost obscene.

(By the way, almost everyone who disagrees with us about anything uses this argument. Seriously--I expect to read it in almost every critical email I open. )

## **mechtheist**

Once again, you don't seem capable of responding. This article is not about Chomsky, I use Chomsky because he's the most prolific and well known of the many many people and groups out there exposing how propagandized the US is. I provided a few examples showing how compromised the press is, and in fact is a major contributor to this fabric of non-reality. You didn't address a single issue I've raised, you seem to have an obsession with Chomsky but know nothing about him whatsoever, as you proved in our last exchange. Is there anyone in your organization that can actually respond without spewing irrelevancy after irrelevancy? I didn't want to have contact with you anyway, I thought you weren't going to reply to anything from me again, as you stated in your last email. This you did after a ridiculous accusation of an ad hominem attack, which not only was ridiculous, but I explained how and why it was, and I got no reply. You can't respond to anything I've said, you're not worth conversing with. Please pass this along to someone who is capable of addressing arguments with relevant responses.

