



## Episode 1,089: Noam Chomsky: The Good and the Bad

Guest: Gene Epstein

**WOODS:** I'm really interested in this topic. I'm interested in Chomsky and his views and his influence on you. It's all great, great stuff. I just read a letter you wrote to him, and we'll be talking a bit about that letter. Apparently, you've had some correspondence over the years. He's an interesting figure, love him or hate him, and you can love some things about him and dislike other things. But before we get into that, let's start with what you're up to over at the Soho Forum, because there's an event coming up that would be of particular interest to people who listen to this show, but I would tend to think that really anything that goes on in the Soho Forum would be of interest to listeners here.

**EPSTEIN:** Well, thanks so much. I don't know when you'll be broadcasting this particular podcast, but if it is before this coming Monday, February 12th, the evening of February 12th, and then especially for listeners in the New York City area, we are at 45 Bleecker Street in downtown Manhattan. And if you go to [TheSohoForum.org](http://TheSohoForum.org), you can buy tickets for the Monday night debate, February 12th. The resolution is "Sex Offender Registries Should Be Abolished," and that will be Emily Horowitz, a sociologist who has some very stunning findings about the real facts about sex offenders and sex offender registries, opposed by Marcy Hamilton, who is from the University of Pennsylvania. So I think that will be a sizzling debate this coming Monday evening, February 12th.

And then in particular, by going on our website, [TheSohoForum.org](http://TheSohoForum.org), you can find all our debates. We have one every month, usually on the second or third Monday of the month. But the big one for fans of *Contra Krugman* especially are that Monday, April 16th, we will have Bob Murphy himself. Bob Murphy opposing George Selgin, who is now lately of Cato Institute. They will be debating an issue that I've always wanted the two of them to get together and clash on: fractional reserve banking. The resolution will be defended by Bob, that "Fractional Reserve Banking Does Pose a Threat to the Stability of Market Economies." That's Monday evening, April 16th. And Tom is familiar with my offer that, if you come up to me at our venue at 45 Bleecker Street – it's a downtown theater – come up to me, just say the words, "Tom Woods," that entitles you to a free drink at the bar, alcoholic or non-alcoholic, your choice.

**WOODS:** All right, so I'm going to do my best to be there at least for Bob's event, so I'm going to get my free drink. That's a definite. That's a definite.

**EPSTEIN:** You just have to remember your own name, Tom. Easy, easy win.

**WOODS:** That's right. That's right. So people, if you're in New York City or you can get to New York City – I mean, I live in Florida, but I'm going to make an effort because I think this would be worth seeing – then you're not going to say this was not a good use of my time. These events are just tremendous. And then when you look down the schedule later on this year, we've got Bryan Caplan debating a Harvard professor, "Resolved: All Government Support for Higher Education Should be Abolished." The very fact that that has to be debated now and that a Harvard professor has to show up and address this is a victory in itself, if you ask me.

**EPSTEIN:** Yes, well, I think so too, absolutely. And of course, look – I know of course Tom is a Broadway aficionado, as is his wife Heather, I believe – Tom, you want to write Tom and he can recommend some good plays, like *The Play That Goes Wrong*. I haven't yet seen it, Tom, but you did recommend that.

**WOODS:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely. Now, the new cast is not as good as the original cast, but if you didn't see the original cast, you'll be happy in your ignorance because they're still pretty good.

**EPSTEIN:** Sure.

**WOODS:** All right, okay. And I'd like to see *Dear Evan Hansen* before anything happens to it, because I know you recommended that.

**EPSTEIN:** I've seen it twice. I took my grandchildren a week ago. It was even better really than the first time. And by the way, just to segue, I keep inviting Noam Chomsky to debate me at the Soho Forum, and the last time he said that he and his new wife are settling in Arizona and they can't make it, so that's probably never going to happen, but we can at least talk about Chomsky quite favorably in part, at least.

**WOODS:** Okay, let's do that, and then after we're finished, don't hang up after we're done because I want to ask you about how appropriate *Dear Evan Hansen* is for children of certain ages.

**EPSTEIN:** Okay.

**WOODS:** But I have a funny feeling the listeners are, as Bob would say, getting a little antsy at this point, so let's dive into Chomsky. This letter you sent me, this is the only one of them that I've seen, but it was interesting because I'm interested in the quotations you have in here from Chomsky. And I like that point about the "new Mandarins," he calls them, and where they get their idea that they have the right to rule from. It's one thing, a capitalist aristocrat who, let's say, achieved something in the business world. He might feel like that entitles him to an opinion. But if all you are is some kind of intellectual and you really have no other accomplishments, then it becomes harder for you to admit to making mistakes, because that's really all you are, is a guy who comes up with ideas.

**EPSTEIN:** Yes. Well, let me put this in two contexts. These letters – and I sent, Tom, just the one in particular that I wrote – these letters, Dear Noam Chomsky, were an idea for a book that I had with Jeremy Hammond, and Jeremy Hammond has spent a couple of sessions with Tom on Tom Woods' podcast. Jeremy is 30 years younger than I, but we had two things in common. Two of our key influences as libertarians were Noam Chomsky and Murray Rothbard.

And so since Chomsky was still alive and since Chomsky does still to this day claim to be a libertarian socialist, which is an oxymoron like being a married bachelor, Jeremy and I thought that it would be a great idea to write Chomsky a few letters in which we both told him how much he's influenced us and then also began to tell him how much he fails to influence us and how we'd actually like to influence him. And we sent these letters to Chomsky actually in March of last year. Chomsky gave us a gracious response. He said he would try to get to responding to our letters. I keep trying to nag him and invite him to the Soho Forum. It looks as though that will never happen. He probably won't respond to our letters.

But another context, of course, is that, in my case, I was sort of present at the beginning. Think back on 1968, even if it was before you were born. In 1968, the Vietnam War is raging, and there are a lot of critics of the Vietnam Wars. There were a lot of teach-ins. I don't know if the younger listeners are familiar with that term. The teach-ins, these were marathon lectures. Harvard had some. There were usually like seven or eight lectures in a row on the Vietnam War. But in retrospect, there was an odd sort of tinny quality to these lectures, because so many of the professors talking about the Vietnam War were basically just saying this is a bad idea for American imperialism. Maybe we've overdone it this time. Maybe this is not the right thing to do. More or less like Hitler's generals who didn't think he should have invaded the Soviet Union when he did.

And on the other side, the critics of the Vietnam War included names like Carl Oglesby, an older guy who was head of SDS. A lot of the criticism of the Vietnam War, which, much of it valid, much of it valuable, was essentially sort of comparing Ho Chi Minh and the revolution in South Vietnam with the American Revolution. You know, Ho Chi Minh was George Washington. And actually, there was some shred of truth in that. Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist, and for decades since World War I, he had defended Vietnamese nationalism. But the idea of identifying Ho Chi Minh as cohorts with the Founding Fathers was a little bit of a distortion. Of course the fact that Ho Chi Minh was a communist, all of this sort of like endeared him a little bit to the New Left.

Now, in between these two extremes, Noam Chomsky came on the scene. And even though his record is in part tainted with an undue affection for left wing regimes, really nothing in his criticism – firstly, nothing in his attack on the Vietnam War consisted of either one of these fallacies. But in particular, getting back to what Tom has just said, in particular, he was talking about his academic colleagues. At MIT, for example, he was a professor of linguistics at MIT, but he attacked this professor named Ithiel de Sola Pool at MIT, or just across the river at Cambridge, actually in Cambridge, Harvard professors. All of these people he called the new Mandarins. These were professors who had contracts with the State Department, who had gotten jobs in government. These were people who also wanted to run the world. Hence the title of his first collection of essays published in 1969, called *American Power and the New Mandarins*. And let me just read the quote that I quoted back to Chomsky in my letter. He wrote the following:

"What grounds are there for supposing that those whose claim to power is based on knowledge and technique will be more benign in their exercise of power than those whose claim is based on wealth or aristocratic origin? On the contrary, one might expect the new Mandarin to be dangerously arrogant, aggressive, and incapable of adjusting to failure as compared to his predecessor, whose claim to power was not diminished by honesty as the limitations of his knowledge or demonstrable mistakes."

Now, this was a blast to my mind. It blew my mind because I was a little bit of that kind of new Mandarin. I was at that point getting a PhD in economics, and I had some identification with professors who thought they had a right to run the world. And this whole approach, which was to question the knowledge and credentials of professors who sought power affected me very much when I began to read Murray Rothbard and understand economics, affected me very much when I became an Austrian economist.

I just want to read one other thing and then return it back to you, Tom. What blew my mind as well is when Chomsky compared Averell Harriman, the businessman who was a new Mandarin, with Walt Rostow, a professor. Chomsky made the following remarks:

"As far as Harriman is concerned, the basis for his power is that his father built railroads. No matter what mistakes he makes, he still has a right to power. So he could be quite pragmatic and he can change his policies and he can tell you that he was wrong. Walt Rostow can't say that. If he says I was all wrong, do it the other way 'round, then what he is saying is there is no reason at all why he should be in power."

Now, this was coming from a quasi-socialist like Chomsky. He was actually saying that, if there's a forced choice, better to have a scion of business, an aristocratic businessman like Averell Harriman to run the world, because at least he won't be defensive and crazy, than to have Walt Rostow, a professor. And so this was coming from, again, a guy with strong socialist sympathies, and I knew that, and again, it blew my mind.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that really is an amazing concession and also an amazing insight, actually, that I had never really thought of myself before. Let's go a little bit deeper into here. There's a point in here that you raised I think a long time ago about Daniel Patrick Moynihan and what he had to say about trying to stop the UN from doing anything to prevent the Indonesian government from slaughtering the East Timorese, and his argument pretty much was we just wanted the UN to fail so we just did everything we could to stop that and it worked out pretty well – which meant that – I'm not saying this as an apologist for the UN, as anyone who knows me will realize, but that there's something unbelievably wicked about the cavalier attitude he takes toward what obviously happened to these people.

**EPSTEIN:** Yes. No, yeah, it reminds me about that – I think about is it so necessary to have Noam Chomsky anymore? We do have a lot of people who call out these figures like Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who make just the most morally outrageous acts. I mean, I was struck – as you know, Tom, I was inspired to suggest we do a session on Chomsky when you mentioned him in your recent interview with Dave Smith. And you were both, for example, pointing out quite perceptively the horror show that was Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who also had a bit of a halo in her image, who worked for Bill Clinton, that she could just easily say that it's worth it that a half a million Iraqi children had been killed because of our sanctions. And so we do have a lot of watchdogs around today.

But in Chomsky's day, even in to the '70s and early '80s, Chomsky was almost a loner in calling this out. When Chomsky first pointed out what Daniel Patrick Moynihan admitted to in his memoir of being an ambassador to the UN, I found it just unbelievable. And I said this time Chomsky just can't have it right. It must be – maybe he made a mistake. Maybe he's quoting this out of context. But these are the facts. I have the book and actually made copies of it to show to people, because probably you know they're naming boulevards after Daniel Patrick Moynihan. If there's a big question as to whether you want to name things after John C.

Calhoun because he owned slaves, then what the heck, how can we possibly be naming anything after Daniel Patrick Moynihan?

In his book, a memoir of being ambassador to the UN in 1974, the facts were that Kissinger and President Ford met with Suharto, head of at that time Indonesia, Suharto told them that with American weaponry he was about to attack East Timor. He was about to level them. He wanted a pass on this. He wanted them to say, okay, do it. And Kissinger and Ford shrugged their shoulders and said fine.

And then it happened, and we read in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's own memoir that he specifically admits that about 10% of the population of East Timor was in the act of being slaughtered. Moynihan even calculates what that would have meant proportionately to the U.S. And then he says, well, countries of the UN actually did want to do what they could to stop the slaughter. We don't have to be a big fan of the UN to admit that occasionally it could get something right, stop the slaughter. But Moynihan actually admitted that he did everything he could to undermine the UN's efforts to stop the slaughter, that this task was given to me by my government, and he claims and brags about the fact that he met with great success in stopping the UN from stopping the slaughter – great success. So by his own admission, he was complicit even through sin of omission and commission to genocide. And this was a professor of Harvard who became a politician. And that's the sort of service that Chomsky performed for us over so many years.

Let me mention also that Chomsky pointed out very early on about Henry Kissinger, also at this point sort of the grand old man of American foreign policy, even though not of course according to people like Scott Horton or others who understand what Henry Kissinger really stood for. But Kissinger kept saying that it saddened him that our motives were questioned. He said this even before he became Secretary of State. He was talking about the motives of Johnson.

He kept saying do not question our motives, and it was Chomsky who called this "a remarkable comment on the part of one whose professional concern is political analysis, that is, analysis of the actions of governments in terms of motives that are unexpressed in official propaganda...No one would be disturbed," Chomsky continued, "by an analysis of the political behavior of Russians, French, or Tanzanians questioning their motives and interpreting their actions in terms of long-range interests, perhaps well concealed behind official rhetoric. But it is an article of faith that American motives are pure and not subject to analysis."

So this, again, is this super sophisticated, presumably sophisticated PhD and political scientist Henry Kissinger saying do not question American government's motives. That again is something for which – pointing that out in the late 1960s was something for which Noam Chomsky deserves a lot of credit.

**WOODS:** All right, we're going to pause for a minute and then talk about a distinctly libertarian aspect of Chomsky.

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All right, so far we've been quite friendly to Chomsky. Let's continue that briefly, and then we'll see where the rest of the conversation takes us. Of course, Chomsky's scholarly work is actually in linguistics. People think that he must be a historian or something, and no doubt he in some ways is, but I bet a lot of people don't really know that much about his work in linguistics, the same way that a lot of people who follow Paul Krugman don't really know that much about what he wrote about international trade that won him the Nobel Prize. So what can you tell us about this aspect of Chomsky?

**EPSTEIN:** Sure. I do think, by the way, of course, that he was certainly a scholar, with over 20 books about foreign policy, all of it footnoted in a very scholarly fashion. And on top of that, I'll tell you something else that is little known about Chomsky. My uncle was a professional mathematician. He worked in the research center at IBM. And he had a couple of meetings with Chomsky, because Chomsky had presented a couple of original papers in mathematics.

And indeed, actually, Chomsky once mentioned this because he pointed out an interesting irony that when you write about foreign policy, which is presumably a sort of softer subject in terms of the expertise that is required, people are constantly questioning your credentials. Chomsky said, "But when I published a couple of papers in mathematics, I had meetings with mathematicians. They weren't the least bit interested in my credentials; they just saw that I had something to say and they wanted to explore it with me." So Chomsky pointed out the irony that in the harder disciplines, they welcome you. But in the softer disciplines, of course because they're insecure, the idea that a guy like him who didn't have a PhD or even probably a BA in politics could write about policy.

But Chomsky had indeed made his bones in academia based upon his linguistic research, and this is what I've understood based upon my reading of his linguistics, which I would claim is libertarianish, and I think an impressive core insight. It starts with a story Chomsky liked to tell, liked to make up. He said, imagine a visitor from outer space looks at various disciplines, like calculus, like physics, and human language. And he said anybody with any discernment would see that by far the most complicated discipline is mastering this immensely complex human language, that by comparison, mathematics and physics, while challenging, seem a lot easier. Then he would imagine, well, the human language, that's where you really require a lot of classroom instruction. The rest of it, much less in math and physics.

Now, if you told this visitor of outer space, actually what happens is that by the age of four or five, most kids have mastered the human language that people speak around them. By the age of four or five, most kids are generating an infinite number of sentences because they seem to understand the algebra of human language, and it's the easier subjects, physics and math, where most people seem to require classroom instruction. And so that to my mind was the most striking anecdote that proved Chomsky's inference from that point, that there are already structures of mind in the human brain that are programmed for language, and that the reason why four- and five-year-olds can just listen around them to relatively haphazard instruction and mostly example to master the language that is being spoken about them is that human beings uniquely are endowed with structures of mind.

By the way, Chomsky never made this point, but of course the old story that we all know, that if you sit in a classroom for several years learning French or Spanish, you're probably not going to learn a whole lot. My son, by the way, spent one semester down in Santiago, Chile living with a family, and inside of about, you know, when I visited him ten weeks into his

stay, he was speaking Spanish fluently. I think in a way, that's an offshoot of the fact that we're all programmed in a way for other languages.

Now, a couple of points about this which is interesting. When chimpanzees were taught signage and were taught how to communicate language, you might say that, well, maybe they had early stages of a human brain – although Chomsky's response to the chimp who was called after him, called Nim Chimpsky, by the way, to kid Chomsky about his idea that human beings were uniquely endowed with the ability to speak languages – Chomsky's response, I think a fair one, although it might have sounded a little flip, was that he said we could also say that human beings can fly like birds, because after all, we do see a lot of human beings who can jump up in the air, do high jumps, can do flips, can simulate flying in that sense. But we wouldn't say that they actually have the capacity to fly in the way that birds have that capacity. He was basically making the point that the limited acquisition by chimps was comparable. And I do think he had a point, although chimps might have had some minimal ability through structures of mind.

Now, why do I call that libertarianish? Because for Chomsky, by the way, who has a lot of libertarian impulses, he felt that his meant that people are unique, that individuals have unique capacities, and that for him, even though he was asked what's the relationship between your linguistics and your political writings, he said not really any much of a relationship, I think his basic emphasis on the importance of individuality sprung from that insight about human language.

But now another offshoot of this which I think is fascinating is the following. If Chomsky's right about human language and acquisition, then of course his point was that of course there's no special instruction you need if you're born into a Japanese family and they speak Japanese. There's no special instruction that you need if you're born into a Russian family and they speak Russian. All that we do know is that if Tom Woods and I were raised in Tokyo by Japanese families, by the age of four or five we'd be generating an infinite number of sentences in Japanese. The same brain would be doing that sort of task.

Now, Chomsky had said decades ago that what this necessarily means is that all languages have essentially the same algebra. And supposedly, his task was to try to formulate what the algebra of all human language was. Now, I gather he never succeeded in doing that, which supposedly called into question his thesis. But I still believe, though, that his insight, the idea that the human brain is not a tabula rasa, not an empty vessel when it comes to language, because otherwise kids could not master language that soon and that easily from haphazard instruction, I still think that's a key insight and I do regard it as libertarianish.

**WOODS:** All right, now having done all this, let's turn to Chomsky's difficulties. Of course he thinks of himself as an anarchist, but an anarchist not in our tradition. And when I've listened to his criticisms of capitalism, I was expecting based on his intelligence that these were going to be impossible to answer. These were going to be really, really interesting and well thought out. And it's things like externalities like I could read in a freshman economics textbook. *Well, the market can't account for externalities, so that's a big problem.* Come on, like there's no literature on how you could handle those problems? So that's deeply disappointing. What can you tell us about what he has to say about the market economy?

**EPSTEIN:** Well, whenever people ask me about "Trumponomics," Trump's economics, I always of course use the title from the great Clint Eastwood picture, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. You know, there is good in Trumponomics, in Trump's policies, but there is unfortunately a fair amount of bad and ugly. And there is a lot of bad and ugly and kind of dumb, as you imply, Tom, in his economics or his perceptions about market economies.

Let me cut to the most interesting part of it, an ironic part of it, which is that he documented over and over again about the brainwashing that kids get in school. Of course he had two kids who were going to public schools, and he would quote from the textbooks that they were given to read and the distorted view of America. Of course the same idea that American foreign policy is run by philosopher kings who occasionally make mistakes, but do not question their motives, all of the rest of it. And yet he came out for government-run schools.

In the longer chapter – the longer letter, I should say, that Jeremy and I collaborated on, we went after the book that he collaborated on with an economist, actually, named Edward Herman, who recently died, and it was called *Manufacturing Consent*. Now, the thesis of *Manufacturing Consent* was partly quite valid, which is that the media consistently reports as lopsided reporting with respect to American foreign policy. Repeatedly essentially sounds almost like *Pravda*, working – *Pravda*, of course, the newspaper that was run by the Soviet government – in the way the mainstream reports on foreign policy. And they provide a number of very instructive case studies going after of course the mainstream media like *The New York Times* and so on.

But then we write to Chomsky that, "Of course you are quite right about this, but how can you and your collaborator possibly blame this on free market capitalism?" Because this goes, by the way, to the heart of my conversion experience from being a sort of democratic socialist in my 20s to understanding that if I'm going to be a classical liberal or a libertarian, then I've got to favor private ownership of the means of production, because obviously without private ownership of the means of production, without complete control of your own labor so that you're not answerable to anyone, without private ownership of stores and factories and distribution outlets, you cannot have freedom of speech or freedom of the press. If you have a government monopoly, or in Chomsky's view he imagines these sort of cooperatives – if there's no way to strike out on your own and have private ownership of your labor, private ownership of the potential to own a store or a printing press or set up your own website, we cannot have a free press.

So again, we go after him in this way. And indeed, you're right, Tom. You would think aren't we sort of fishing tuna fish in a barrel? Isn't this a fairly easy argument? So that's why it's hard to believe that a man of Chomsky's perceptiveness on foreign policy could be so obtuse about free markets. Although, by the way, I don't know. I know, for example, that Glenn Greenwald – we have a number – you and I know, of course, Tom, that when it comes to foreign policy, lots of left-wing types like Glenn Greenwald and a few others who are also equally perceptive about foreign policy. But I know the show that I'm losing track – you might be able to remind me – this show that had Norm Maclean on, this left-winger who constantly criticizes capitalism, whom they identify with – Jeremy Scahill is the name I want. Jeremy Scahill, who has done some excellent research, excellent work, a very courageous journalist who exposed the drone bombings of Yemen because he was there is indeed like Noam Chomsky in his views about markets.

And so we actually had the dream, Jeremy and I, that if only Chomsky would read this long discussion we wrote about *Manufacturing Consent*, that this would be the first crack in his armor. We could finally bring him around. Because, by the way, he actually says that he would like some government subsidy to offset the bad influence of the market in foreign policy and in reporting on foreign policy and reporting on matters generally. And so we say government subsidies? How about PBS? How about Public Broadcasting Station? It's not capitalist. It gets government subsidies. Have you seen — As a matter of fact, interestingly, we were citing the series that they had done on the Vietnam War in the 1980s, which Chomsky himself exposed as pabulum. And most recently, of course, they had another series about the Vietnam War, the Ken Burns series, and again, appalling at the way it framed things, that the Vietnam War was brought about through good intentions and all the rest of it. And Gareth Porter wrote about this for me when I was at *Baron's* and, happily, you put Gareth Porter on your show, Tom.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**EPSTEIN:** Gareth Porter is 75, and Chomsky used to cite Gareth Porter. So this is what you get, I pointed out to Chomsky, from PBS, from government subsidization. I said that's a step in the wrong direction. So again, we throw up our hands. Hard to understand. But let's take the good from Chomsky and the brilliant and puzzle over the bad. But we have to take Chomsky straight. He turned 89 this past December, and he wrote me he moved to Arizona, and it looks as though he's never going to respond to our "Dear Noam Chomsky" letters.

**WOODS:** Well, that's all right. They're great letters, and he is an interesting guy, but you're — yeah, this whole thing about *Manufacturing Consent* and his views of the way opinion is molded in America, this is very interesting and important stuff, and a lot of times people will point to Chomsky and say to me, "He sounds like you when you talk about your 3x5 card of allowable opinion." He says the key thing is to just keep opinion — have the debate be vigorous, but make sure that nobody is debating about anything that matters.

**EPSTEIN:** Oh, yes, no, and —

**WOODS:** But how would having the state be more involved — you think the state has an interest in facilitating broad debate? The state wants to shut down debate. Of course. Why would it?

**EPSTEIN:** Yeah. No, and Chomsky — here we have a guy who taught me, whose healthy skepticism about the motives of academicians, whose skepticism spilled over — By the way, I'm writing a long essay right now for the *City Journal* of Manhattan Institute on the career of Joseph Stiglitz, who championed the Venezuelan economy as late as October 2007 when the information was overwhelming about what Hugo Chavez — he met, by the way — had a friendly meeting with Hugo Chavez, and that's, by the way, another stain on Chomsky, although I gave him more of a pass on Stiglitz, who's supposed to be a trained economist. But Chomsky was endorsing the Venezuelan economy also.

And Hugo Chavez — here's another great irony. Hugo Chavez returned the favor, by the way, as you know, of holding of Chomsky's book *Who Rules the World* at the UN, big photo, and sales, they became number one on Amazon. Chomsky, by the way, has made a fortune from his writings. A lot of sales, by the way, around South America. Huge rock star in Latin countries. And by the way, *Who Rules to World*, a lot of it, still a lot of the valuable nuggets,

a lot of the valuable insights that Chomsky was able to produce. And in *Manufacturing Consent* and in others of his writings, as you say, the index card of allowable opinion could be one of Chomsky's quips, one of Chomsky's lines when he talks about the religious devotion of the media and of the new Mandarins to the idea that American foreign policy is always, always a good thing, American imperialism is always a good thing.

I'll tell you another story, which is a bit appalling. Chomsky about ten years ago wrote that the idea that the unraveling of the Soviet Union is in any way proof that socialism has a problem, he said it's a big distortion. He said you should compare the Soviet Union with Brazil. I'll never forget that's what he said. He said compared to Brazil, they didn't do that badly. You can't compare the Soviet Union with the West because they're a lot richer.

And I wrote him actually an email at that point. We were emailing. Chomsky's correspondence, by the way, is another great story in itself. I have 20 letters from him, and I thought, my God, my letters must really interest this guy because he always writes me back. And then a few years later I heard that he had a correspondence of more than a thousand letters a week. He was devoting 20 hours of his time to writing letters to people because he wanted to reach everybody. That, by the way, inspired me as a columnist to answer all my email, and I finally gave up. I finally couldn't keep up with it. But Chomsky did that for years.

But anyway, I wrote Chomsky, and I said, "Dear Noam Chomsky, you've said we should compare the Soviet Union with Brazil." I said, "How about the two controlled experiments that we've been handed: East Germany versus West Germany, North Korea versus South Korea? Don't they give us more or less an understanding of what happens when you have a more or less market economy in West Germany versus the communist economy in East Germany, North Korea versus South Korea as a similar analogy, sort of a controlled experiment?" And he wrote me back a very polite letter, but he said, "Actually, your analogies are worthless." He didn't elaborate. I'm embarrassed even to report that. He said, "Your analogies are worthless." He said something about how North Korea was isolated, East Germany was too much under the thumb of – so you can always make excuses.

Probably, probably this is a guy we're never going to convince him to like capitalism. I mean, I guess we have a challenge. Can we bring Jeremy Scahill around on the subject? Glenn Greenwald is a brilliant guy. Can we bring him around on the subject? As you pointed out, Glenn Greenwald was endorsing Ron Paul. I think he even said he was going to vote for Ron Paul, but of course he couldn't endorse any of Ron Paul's economics. So again, it's a puzzle, but we soldier on and we try to convince our libertarian friends on the left to understand that libertarian socialism is like being a married bachelor. It's an oxymoron.

**WOODS:** Indeed. All right, well, there we're going to have to leave it. So TheSohoForum – is it .org?

**EPSTEIN:** .org, .org.

**WOODS:** Yeah, TheSohoForum.org is where people should go to find out about Gene's debating society, which is one of the best parts of living in the New York area – or it must be. I wish I knew, because I haven't lived in New York for a long time. But I'm looking forward to getting back there at the very least for one of these events this year. But anyway, Gene, thanks a lot for this conversation. It was great.

**EPSTEIN:** My pleasure as always, Tom. Talk to you soon.