Geoffrey Sampson, *Educating Eve: the 'language instinct' debate.* London: Cassell, 1999. Pp.184.

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This is a paperback reprint, with minor changes, of a title which appeared in hardback in 1997. It is written at the 'serious pop' level, a welcome genre of writing typified by such classics as Dawkins (1976, 1986) and Pinker (1994). Indeed, this book of Sampson's is an explicit riposte to Pinker's book and to the Chomskyan nativist assumptions that have been dominant (though not to the exclusion of alternatives) over the past thirty years. As an empiricist counterblast, written at a popular, non-technical level, the book is an impressive tour de force. Its style is breezy British down-to-earth. Being familiar with its subject matter, it is hard for me to judge how easy a read an educated layperson would find it, but it does read very fluently and entertainingly. Sampson's goal is no less than to set out all of the principal arguments for linguistic nativism, and to demolish them all systematically. I know that the book violently irritates some who object to the triumphant tone in which Sampson claims to succeed in this task; but it is no more objectionable than many of the early polemics in favour of linguistic nativism.

In a short notice such as this, there is no space for a detailed evaluation of Sampson's arguments. For the most part, he represents the nativists' positions fairly, and he finds himself in agreement with some of their less central ideas. And many, if not all, of Sampson's criticisms of the standard arguments for nativism are persuasive. The book deserves to be read and discussed in tandem with Pinker's book. I shall recommend it to my students in this light.

Sampson belongs to the vintage of linguists who grew up in the early days of generative grammar, and have seen it develop over more than thirty years. Consequently, there is a (justifiable) emphasis on the earlier Chomskyan literature, but Sampson also gives reasonable space to later reworkings of the nativist position. When the book was written, however, he had not, apparently, caught up with Minimalism, which is ironic, in the light of the following quotation from a generative linguist normally associated with Chomsky's brand of Linguistics.

> "The advent of minimalism in the mainstream of syntactic theorizing highlights an interesting shift in scientific values. At least from the Aspects theory through Principles and Parameters theory it has often been remarked that the syntax of natural language has some surprising, or at least abstract, non-obvious properties. One example is the transformational cycle, another is rule ordering, another is the ECP, and so on. Such properties are not predictable on the basis of 'common sense', and do not appear in any way to be logically necessary. The fact that they appear to be true of natural language thus tells us something, albeit indirectly, about the architecture of the language faculty in the human mind/brain. Or so the argument goes.
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> With the M[inimalist] P[rogram] we see a shift to a deep skepticism about formal devices of traditional syntactic theory that are not in some sense reducible to 'virtual conceptual necessity'. Such a perspective thus explicitly rules out precisely the major theoretical achievements of the past. All of them." (Culicover, 1999:137-138)

So was all of the generative work of the last three decades largely a wild goose chase? Sampson certainly claims that it was, and to see Culicover apparently agreeing with him gives one great pause for thought. But even if the major theoretical achievements of the generativist era are now 'ruled out', one can hardly doubt that the flurry of activity which it engendered brought a mass of empirical achievements. We now know vastly more about languages than we did thirty years ago, and much of the stimulus for this discovery came from Chomsky's provocative proposals. For myself, I still believe that Sampson has not managed entirely to dismiss or demolish claims that humans are naturally disposed to learn languages of certain specific formal types, and not others. Sampson's own brand of empirist learning theory is not spelled out in any satisfactory detail. His explicit espousal of mind/body dualism, where the immaterial mind (not the brain) is responsible for the human capacity for language, makes it impossible to imagine what kind of alternative account he could propose.

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