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In Praise of Marx

By Terry Eagleton

Praising Karl Marx might seem as perverse as putting in a good word for the Boston Strangler. Were not Marx's ideas responsible for despotism, mass murder, labor camps, economic catastrophe, and the loss of liberty for millions of men and women? Was not one of his devoted disciples a paranoid Georgian peasant by the name of Stalin, and another a brutal Chinese dictator who may well have had the blood of some 30 million of his people on his hands?

The truth is that Marx was no more responsible for the monstrous oppression of the communist world than Jesus was responsible for the Inquisition. For one thing, Marx would have scorned the idea that socialism could take root in desperately impoverished, chronically backward societies like Russia and China. If it did, then the result would simply be what he called "generalized scarcity," by which he means that everyone would now be deprived, not just the poor. It would mean a recycling of "the old filthy business"—or, in less tasteful translation, "the same old crap." Marxism is a theory of how well-heeled capitalist nations might use their immense resources to achieve justice and prosperity for their people. It is not a program by which nations bereft of material resources, a

flourishing civic culture, a democratic heritage, a well-evolved technology, enlightened liberal traditions, and a skilled, educated work force might catapult themselves into the modern age.

Marx certainly wanted to see justice and prosperity thrive in such forsaken spots. He wrote angrily and eloquently about several of Britain's downtrodden colonies, not least Ireland and India. And the political movement which his work set in motion has done more to help small nations throw off their imperialist masters than any other political current. Yet Marx was not foolish enough to imagine that socialism could be built in such countries without more-advanced nations flying to their aid. And that meant that the common people of those advanced nations had to wrest the means of production from their rulers and place them at the service of the wretched of the earth. If this had happened in 19th-century Ireland, there would have been no famine to send a million men and women to their graves and another two or three million to the far corners of the earth.

There is a sense in which the whole of Marx's writing boils down to several embarrassing questions: Why is it that the capitalist West has accumulated more resources than human history has ever witnessed, yet appears powerless to overcome poverty, starvation, exploitation, and inequality? What are the mechanisms by which affluence for a minority seems to breed hardship and indignity for the many? Why does private wealth seem to go hand in hand with public squalor? Is it, as the good-hearted liberal reformist suggests, that we have simply not got around to mopping up these pockets of human misery, but shall do so in the fullness of time? Or is it more plausible to maintain that there is something in the nature of

capitalism itself which generates deprivation and inequality, as surely as Charlie Sheen generates gossip?

Marx was the first thinker to talk in those terms. This down-at-heel émigré Jew, a man who once remarked that nobody else had written so much about money and had so little, bequeathed us the language in which the system under which we live could be grasped as a whole. Its contradictions were analyzed, its inner dynamics laid bare, its historical origins examined, and its potential demise foreshadowed. This is not to suggest for a moment that Marx considered capitalism as simply a Bad Thing, like admiring Sarah Palin or blowing tobacco smoke in your children's faces. On the contrary, he was extravagant in his praise for the class that created it, a fact that both his critics and his disciples have conveniently suppressed. No other social system in history, he wrote, had proved so revolutionary. In a mere handful of centuries, the capitalist middle classes had erased almost every trace of their feudal foes from the face of the earth. They had piled up cultural and material treasures, invented human rights, emancipated slaves, toppled autocrats, dismantled empires, fought and died for human freedom, and laid the basis for a truly global civilization. No document lavishes such florid compliments on this mighty historical achievement as *The Communist Manifesto*, not even *The Wall Street Journal*.

That, however, was only part of the story. There are those who see modern history as an enthralling tale of progress, and those who view it as one long nightmare. Marx, with his usual perversity, thought it was both. Every advance in civilization had brought with it new possibilities of barbarism. The great slogans of the middle-

class revolution—"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"—were his watchwords, too. He simply inquired why those ideas could never be put into practice without violence, poverty, and exploitation. Capitalism had developed human powers and capacities beyond all previous measure. Yet it had not used those capacities to set men and women free of fruitless toil. On the contrary, it had forced them to labor harder than ever. The richest civilizations on earth sweated every bit as hard as their Neolithic ancestors.

This, Marx considered, was not because of natural scarcity. It was because of the peculiarly contradictory way in which the capitalist system generated its fabulous wealth. Equality for some meant inequality for others, and freedom for some brought oppression and unhappiness for many. The system's voracious pursuit of power and profit had turned foreign nations into enslaved colonies, and human beings into the playthings of economic forces beyond their control. It had blighted the planet with pollution and mass starvation, and scarred it with atrocious wars. Some critics of Marx point with proper outrage to the mass murders in Communist Russia and China. They do not usually recall with equal indignation the genocidal crimes of capitalism: the late-19th-century famines in Asia and Africa in which untold millions perished; the carnage of the First World War, in which imperialist nations massacred one another's working men in the struggle for global resources; and the horrors of fascism, a regime to which capitalism tends to resort when its back is to the wall. Without the self-sacrifice of the Soviet Union, among other nations, the Nazi regime might still be in place. Marxists were warning of the perils of fascism while the politicians of the so-called free world were still wondering aloud whether

Hitler was quite such a nasty guy as he was painted. Almost all followers of Marx today reject the villainies of Stalin and Mao, while many non-Marxists would still vigorously defend the destruction of Dresden or Hiroshima. Modern capitalist nations are for the most part the fruit of a history of genocide, violence, and extermination every bit as abhorrent as the crimes of Communism. Capitalism, too, was forged in blood and tears, and Marx was around to witness it. It is just that the system has been in business long enough for most of us to be oblivious of that fact.

The selectiveness of political memory takes some curious forms. Take, for example, 9/11. I mean the first 9/11, not the second. I am referring to the 9/11 that took place exactly 30 years before the fall of the World Trade Center, when the United States helped to violently overthrow the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende of Chile, and installed in its place an odious dictator who went on to murder far more people than died on that dreadful day in New York and Washington. How many Americans are aware of that? How many times has it been mentioned on Fox News?

Marx was not some dreamy utopianist. On the contrary, he began his political career in fierce contention with the dreamy utopianists who surrounded him. He has about as much interest in a perfect human society as a Clint Eastwood character would, and never once speaks in such absurd terms. He did not believe that men and women could surpass the Archangel Gabriel in sanctity. Rather, he believed that the world could feasibly be made a considerably better place. In this he was a realist, not an idealist. Those truly with their heads stuck in the sand—the moral ostriches of this world—are

those who deny that there can be any radical change. They behave as though *Family Guy* and multicolored toothpaste will still be around in the year 4000. The whole of human history disproves this viewpoint.

Radical change, to be sure, may not be for the better. Perhaps the only socialism we shall ever witness is one forced upon the handful of human beings who might crawl out the other side of some nuclear holocaust or ecological disaster. Marx even speaks dourly of the possible "mutual ruin of all parties." A man who witnessed the horrors of industrial-capitalist England was unlikely to be starry-eyed about his fellow humans. All he meant was that there are more than enough resources on the planet to resolve most of our material problems, just as there was more than enough food in Britain in the 1840s to feed the famished Irish population several times over. It is the way we organize our production that is crucial. Notoriously, Marx did not provide us with blueprints for how we should do things differently. He has famously little to say about the future. The only image of the future is the failure of the present. He is not a prophet in the sense of peering into a crystal ball. He is a prophet in the authentic biblical sense of one who warns us that unless we change our unjust ways, the future is likely to be deeply unpleasant. Or that there will be no future at all.

Socialism, then, does not depend on some miraculous change in human nature. Some of those who defended feudalism against capitalist values in the late Middle Ages preached that capitalism would never work because it was contrary to human nature. Some capitalists now say the same about socialism. No doubt there is a tribe somewhere in the Amazon Basin that believes no social order

can survive in which a man is allowed to marry his deceased brother's wife. We all tend to absolutize our own conditions. Socialism would not banish rivalry, envy, aggression, possessiveness, domination, and competition. The world would still have its share of bullies, cheats, freeloaders, free riders, and occasional psychopaths. It is just that rivalry, aggression, and competition would no longer take the form of some bankers complaining that their bonuses had been reduced to a miserly \$5-million, while millions of others in the world struggled to survive on less than \$2 a day.

Marx was a profoundly moral thinker. He speaks in *The Communist Manifesto* of a world in which "the free self-development of each would be the condition of the free self-development of all." This is an ideal to guide us, not a condition we could ever entirely achieve. But its language is nonetheless significant. As a good Romantic humanist, Marx believed in the uniqueness of the individual. The idea permeates his writings from end to end. He had a passion for the sensuously specific and a marked aversion to abstract ideas, however occasionally necessary he thought they might be. His so-called materialism is at root about the human body. Again and again, he speaks of the just society as one in which men and women will be able to realize their distinctive powers and capacities in their own distinctive ways. His moral goal is pleasurable self-fulfillment. In this he is at one with his great mentor Aristotle, who understood that morality is about how to flourish most richly and enjoyably, not in the first place (as the modern age disastrously imagines) about laws, duties, obligations, and responsibilities.

How does this moral goal differ from liberal individualism? The difference is that to achieve true self-fulfillment, human beings for Marx must find it in and through one another. It is not just a question of each doing his or her own thing in grand isolation from others. That would not even be possible. The other must become the ground of one's own self-realization, at the same time as he or she provides the condition for one's own. At the interpersonal level, this is known as love. At the political level, it is known as socialism. Socialism for Marx would be simply whatever set of institutions would allow this reciprocity to happen to the greatest possible extent. Think of the difference between a capitalist company, in which the majority work for the benefit of the few, and a socialist cooperative, in which my own participation in the project augments the welfare of all the others, and vice versa. This is not a question of some saintly self-sacrifice. The process is built into the structure of the institution.

Marx's goal is leisure, not labor. The best reason for being a socialist, apart from annoying people you happen to dislike, is that you detest having to work. Marx thought that capitalism had developed the forces of production to the point at which, under different social relations, they could be used to emancipate the majority of men and women from the most degrading forms of labor. What did he think we would do then? Whatever we wanted. If, like the great Irish socialist Oscar Wilde, we chose simply to lie around all day in loose crimson garments, sipping absinthe and reading the odd page of Homer to each other, then so be it. The point, however, was that this kind of free activity had to be available to all. We would no longer tolerate a situation in which the minority

had leisure because the majority had labor.

What interested Marx, in other words, was what one might somewhat misleadingly call the spiritual, not the material. If material conditions had to be changed, it was to set us free from the tyranny of the economic. He himself was staggeringly well read in world literature, delighted in art, culture, and civilized conversation, reveled in wit, humor, and high spirits, and was once chased by a policeman for breaking a street lamp in the course of a pub crawl. He was, of course, an atheist, but you do not have to be religious to be spiritual. He was one of the many great Jewish heretics, and his work is saturated with the great themes of Judaism—justice, emancipation, the Day of Reckoning, the reign of peace and plenty, the redemption of the poor.

What, though, of the fearful Day of Reckoning? Would not Marx's vision for humanity require a bloody revolution? Not necessarily. He himself thought that some nations, like Britain, Holland, and the United States, might achieve socialism peacefully. If he was a revolutionary, he was also a robust champion of reform. In any case, people who claim that they are opposed to revolution usually mean that they dislike certain revolutions and not others. Are antirevolutionary Americans hostile to the American Revolution as well as the Cuban one? Are they wringing their hands over the recent insurrections in Egypt and Libya, or the ones that toppled colonial powers in Asia and Africa? We ourselves are products of revolutionary upheavals in the past. Some processes of reform have been far more bloodstained than some acts of revolution. There are velvet revolutions as well as violent ones. The Bolshevik Revolution itself took place with remarkably little loss of life. The Soviet Union

to which it gave birth fell some 70 years later, with scarcely any bloodshed.

Some critics of Marx reject a state-dominated society. But so did he. He detested the political state quite as much as the Tea Party does, if for rather less redneck reasons. Was he, feminists might ask, a Victorian patriarch? To be sure. But as some (non-Marxist) modern commentators have pointed out, it was men from the socialist and communist camps who, up to the resurgence of the women's movement, in the 1960s, regarded the issue of women's equality as vital to other forms of political liberation. The word "proletarian" means those who in ancient society were too poor to serve the state with anything but the fruit of their wombs. "Proles" means "offspring." Today, in the sweatshops and on the small farms of the third world, the typical proletarian is still a woman.

Much the same goes for ethnic matters. In the 1920s and 30s, practically the only men and women to be found preaching racial equality were communists. Most anticolonial movements were inspired by Marxism. The antisocialist thinker Ludwig von Mises described socialism as "the most powerful reform movement that history has ever known, the first ideological trend not limited to a section of mankind but supported by people of all races, nations, religions, and civilizations." Marx, who knew his history rather better, might have reminded von Mises of Christianity, but the point remains forceful. As for the environment, Marx astonishingly prefigured our own Green politics. Nature, and the need to regard it as an ally rather than an antagonist, was one of his constant preoccupations.


Why might Marx be back on the agenda? The answer, ironically, is because of capitalism. Whenever you hear capitalists talking about capitalism, you know the system is in trouble. Usually they prefer a more anodyne term, like "free enterprise." The recent financial crashes have forced us once again to think of the setup under which we live as a whole, and it was Marx who first made it possible to do so. It was *The Communist Manifesto* which predicted that capitalism would become global, and that its inequalities would severely sharpen. Has his work any defects? Hundreds of them. But he is too creative and original a thinker to be surrendered to the vulgar stereotypes of his enemies.

Terry Eagleton is a visiting professor at Lancaster University, in England; the National University of Ireland; and the University of Notre Dame. His latest book, Why Marx Was Right, was just published by Yale University Press.

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fizmath 1 month ago

South Korea vs. North Korea, you choose.

40 people liked this. [Like](#)



David Ta 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

That's not what socialism is supposed to be like. How about this comparison: United States vs. Canada :-P

86 people liked this. [Like](#)



johnsonr3 1 month ago in reply to David Ta

Let's see - US v. Canada. Hmmmm... plenty of food, clean water, relatively unfettered freedom of speech, association, religion, opinion, press, privacy. Hard choice, Mr. Ta. Either one seems pretty good to me, what about you? Even if you live in some place where capitalism is "failing" everyone - East St. Louis or Camden or Compton - you at least have the possibility of leaving without the mayor or police coming to shoot you to keep you from escaping the misery.

Maybe North Korea is not what socialism/communism/collectivism is supposed to be, but are you really trying to say that there is even a shred of analogy here? Please!!!

23 people liked this. [Like](#)



nacrandell 1 month ago in reply to johnsonr3

Is North Korea a communist state or simply a dictatorship? Vietnam was proclaimed a 'democratic ally' in South East Asia in the 50s and 6s, but the elections were as crooked as a dog's hind leg.

Buzz words sometimes synthesis thoughts to unusable and unsupportive arguments. If Marx is so wrong then why is it a good thing to do business with Red China?

13 people liked this. [Like](#)



katisumas 1 month ago in reply to johnsonr3

Canada has a single payer system and the right to health care is part of its bill of rights.

Even though there are plenty of conservatives in Canada, being a conservative there

doesn't mean wanting to eliminate old age pensions (the Canada Pension Plan plus the plan that provides an income to all seniors regardless of their past income), doing away with public education and doing away with bank regulations (Canada isn't suffering from the Great Recession as much as the US is, because Canada kept a tight rein on its banks), and doing away with public unions, etc etc etc. Also the pro-life movement in Canada isn't murdering abortion providers, and no one is trying to force the teaching of "creationism" in public schools, plus there's the the small detail of public swimming pools even in small towns...

Lots of difference between Canada and the US.

49 people liked this. [Like](#)



m_____ 1 month ago in reply to johnsonr3

Without the U.S., Canada could not exist as it is today. The U.S. is Canada's largest consumer of oil. 75% of Canada's exports go to the U.S. in motor vehicles and parts, industrial machinery, aircraft, telecommunications equipment; chemicals, plastics, fertilizers; wood pulp, timber, crude petroleum, natural gas, electricity, aluminum. Canada is an illicit producer of cannabis for the domestic drug market and export to US; use of hydroponics technology permits growers to plant large quantities of high-quality marijuana indoors; there is an increasing ecstasy production, some of which is destined for the US; it is vulnerable to narcotics money laundering because of its mature financial services sector. 9.4% of the population of Canada lives in poverty.

1 person liked this. [Like](#)



Rocky Raccoon 1 day ago in reply to johnsonr3

Cuba vs Haiti or Pakistan....or Mexico
Canada vs Norway or Norway vs USA

[Like](#)



quidditas 1 month ago in reply to David Ta

Professor Eagleton's illustrious career as a literary critic aside, Marxist literary criticism and the passive purple robed decadence of Oscar Wilde is not what I would recommend right now. At some point this nostalgic 19th century learned passivity risks turning academics who indulge in it into those "with their heads stuck in the sand—the moral ostriches of this world."

What I would recommend right now is William Black, criminal prosecutor of the 1980s Savings and Loan fraud, in which 1,000s of people were prosecuted for fraud. Where is the US legal system in 2011? Where is the US Justice Department under the D-Party, that Black in a Republican Administration, was able to bring people to justice but we TODAY do not even DISCUSS doing so?

Here's Black:

"This is the second column in a series responding to Stephen Moore's central assaults on regulation and the prosecution of the elite white-collar criminals who cause our recurrent, intensifying financial crises. Last week's column addressed his claim in a recent Wall Street Journal column that all government employees, including the regulatory cops on the beat, are "takers" destroying America.

This column addresses Moore's even more vehement criticism of efforts to prosecute elite white-collar criminals in an earlier column decrying the Sarbanes-Oxley Act's criminal provisions: "White-Collar Witch Hunt: Why do Republicans so easily accept Neobolshevism as a cost of doing business?" [American Spectator September 2005] This column illustrates one of the reasons why elite criminals are able to loot "their" banks with impunity – they have a lobby of exceptionally influential skills. Moore, for example, is the Wall Street Journal's senior economics writer...

...Class proved, empirically, to be a powerful predictor of criminal prosecutions, convictions, and sentencing. Sutherland correctly sought to stigmatize elite white-collar criminals and to get policy-makers, academics, and the criminal justice system to view their crimes as important. Sutherland's partial success in doing so is what enrages people like Moore and Baker. By the way, in order to publish his famous book on white-collar crime, Professor Sutherland was forced to delete his tables setting forth the violations of law by many of America's top corporations – even though it was all public record information. The censorship had the ironic effect of demonstrating the accuracy of Sutherland's observation that class mattered when it came to how we framed and responded to fraud by elite criminals. What aspect of holding fraudulent CEOs criminally responsible for their crimes is "socialist", "anti-business", or "neo-Bolshevism"?"

<http://www.nakedcapitalism.com...>

26 people liked this.

Like



dank48 1 month ago in reply to quidditas

It infuriates me to see this sort of criticism of our way of life. The United States of America today has the best government money can buy.

32 people liked this.

Like



quidditas 1 month ago in reply to quidditas

"It infuriates me to see this sort of criticism of our way of life. The United States of America today has the best government money can buy."

Absolutely. Breaking news on that front EVERY DAY. More on how you can buy Congress:

"Political scientist Tom Ferguson prepared a short but important paper for the INET conference last weekend on how Congress got to be as polarized as it is today. His answer: it was redesigned quite deliberately by conservative Republican followers of Newt Gingrich starting in the mid 1980s and their methods were copied by the Democrats. Their changes resulted in firmer control by leadership (ie, less autonomy of individual Congressmen) and much greater importance of fundraising (which increased the power of corporate interests).

The extent of corruption may surprise even jaundiced readers. Both houses have price lists for committees and sub-committees. Ferguson delineates some of the many mechanisms for influencing political outcomes; they extend well beyond campaign donations and formal lobbying."

<http://www.nakedcapitalism.com...>

"Our Polarized and Money-Driven Congress: Created Over 25 Years By Republicans (and Quickly Imitated by Democrats)"

More on how to buy judges-- and LAW SCHOOLS:

"The law and economics movement began as a non-ideological approach to explaining and aiding judicial decision-making. The scholars leading the movement had diverse views. The Olin Foundation transformed law and economics into an ultra ideological field dominated almost exclusively by passionate opponents of government "interference" in "free enterprise." Olin specialized in creating well-funded positions in academia for scholars that had an "Austrian" approach to economics. Austrian economics has, generally, become more extreme since its formative years when Hayek warned that mixed economies (e.g., the U.S. and Europe) were inevitably consigned to the Road to Serfdom. Here is how the National Review praised the Olin's takeover of the field:

Law and Economics: The John M. Olin Foundation has devoted more of its resources to studying how laws influence economic behavior than any other project. The law schools at Chicago, Harvard, Stanford, Virginia, and Yale all have law-and-economics programs named in honor of Olin. "You should not forget that without all the work in Law and Economics, a great part of which has been supported by the John M. Olin Foundation, it is doubtful whether the importance of my work would have been recognized," said Ronald Coase, who won the 1991 Nobel Prize in economics.

In addition to these centers specializing in law and economics, Olin created scores of endowed chairs at a wide range of universities. Some of these are in economics departments and others are in law. Olin also indirectly funded the "boot camps" at which

U.S. judges were taught Austrian economics as if it were undisputed science. The academic journals in law and economics are dominated by virulent opponents of regulation."

<http://www.nakedcapitalism.com...>

William Black: "Theoclassical Law and Economics Makes the Law an Ass"

12 people liked this. Like



Confus 1 month ago in reply to quidditas

Are kleptocracy and plutocracy really beyond the scope of Marx's examination?

Like



Confus 1 month ago in reply to David Ta

How about U.S.A. vesus Sweden?

5 people liked this. Like



goeswithoutsaying 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

You missed the point (or didn't read the article): Marx is no more responsible for horrific examples of "socialism" than is Jesus for the Inquisition.

It's interesting that Eagleton would offer a primer on Karl Marx just now-- when a greater number of highly educated people than ever before are finding themselves in the position of the day laborer. It's also sad that so many of them (us?) should need this tutorial.

111 people liked this. Like



zagros 1 month ago in reply to goeswithoutsaying

The problem is that socialism's issues are inevitable. It is our very nature to work efficiently only when we retain the vast majority of the produce of our labors. When we work according to our abilities and receive according to our needs with no correspondence between the two and with no inequality of outcome when there exists inequality of effort, we tend to do as little as possible. Remember "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the

baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." -- Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations

Marx is as utopic in his prescriptions for the abolition of private property as was Thomas More in his original 1516 classic Utopia and as naive as well.

27 people liked this. [Like](#)



RobertSF 1 month ago in reply to zagros

You may be taking pithy sayings a little too literally. There need not be no correspondence between giving and getting. Besides, socialism is really more a plan about what to do once there just isn't any more work, a day that is arriving quickly thanks to automation. We are seeing this already in the US, with our high unemployment. So what would be the problem with people doing as little as possible?

2 people liked this. [Like](#)



katisumas 1 month ago in reply to zagros

I think it's naive to call naive thinkers from other centuries who came up with new insights within the framework of their time naive.

We stand on the shoulders of our predecessors, but not necessarily on their clothing.

Marx was a philosopher who gave us some really good tools to analyze human societies. But he also believed in the inevitability of progress as just about every nineteenth century European did, including Adam Smith.

AND WILL YOU STOP CONFUSING SOCIALISM WITH COMMUNISM.

Don't we own our roads in common? That's socialism. Socialism doesn't mean the abolition of private property.

16 people liked this. [Like](#)



Confus 1 month ago in reply to zagros

And clearly you must also believe that Jesus, most of the Old Testament prophets, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Plato, Socrates, Voltaire, Kant, Russell and most of history's respected philosophers were "utopian" and "naive as well."

However far cynical materialism may drive the alpha dogs who will do "whatever it takes" to collect the largest hoard of bones, it is a myopic and shallow vision of the human condition that inevitably ends in the spiritual, intellectual, emotion, and eventually political death of a society.

If we have no hope of becoming better than the next technology, mankind is doomed to insignificance. That is what Marx understood and you do not.

5 people liked this. [Like](#)



Adam Overland 1 month ago in reply to zagros

Smith also wrote a book called The Theory of Moral Sentiment that is central to understanding capitalism and the necessary foundations for capitalism. He didn't believe that the free market is always right. Smith believed capitalism has to be within a framework of moral sentiment, with concepts like shame. In a capitalist society, he says, the community must remind practitioners that if their behavior is too destructive to the community, limits will be placed on them.

[Like](#)



minnesotan 1 month ago in reply to goeswithoutsaying

How is the founder of an institution not responsible for the extreme crimes against humanity that institution commits? Jesus is absolutely responsible for the Inquisition. As the Christian god made man (and then made god again later), his teachings and 'divine inspiration' are directly responsible for the Christian doctrine that leads to horrible atrocities against believer and non-believer alike! It's like saying Hitler isn't responsible when modern neo-Nazis attack a Jewish person. Maybe not directly, but the armbands had to come from somewhere, right?

5 people liked this. [Like](#)



eruditeogre 1 month ago in reply to minnesotan

You. . . do understand that neither Jesus nor Marx participated in the decision-making processes of the Inquisition and the Great Leap Forward, right? And that Hitler himself crafted the ideology used to substantiate the Holocaust, and thus is DIRECTLY responsible as the architect? I mean, if we are blaming figures like Marx, we can then blame all of the early theorists of capitalism for its excesses, and the inventor of gunpowder for the deaths caused by all subsequent warfare, right?

24 people liked this. [Like](#)



katisumas 1 month ago in reply to minnesotan

Jesus did not found an institution, some of his disciples and disciples of his disciples did.

The sixteenth century Spanish monarchy founded the Inquisition.

Ideas are floating around subject to whatever interpretations individuals want to give them. Still there are basic tenets which would prevent for instance from believing that the Inquisition actually derived from any of Jesus' reported sayings (love your neighbor, etc etc) and in no way could the deeds of pretend Marxists be linked to Marx (as he wrote, ideology is a smoke screen, and that includes any ideology built upon some of his selected ideas). Individuals are responsible for their actions. As for armbands, we humans can surely invent more of them. Armbands don't make five big guys beat a defenseless individual for instance.

But then if you follow your argument, you can't blame Hitler either because anti-Semitism and weird notions of eugenics had been around long before his time and were prevalent in Europe at the time.... (actually the same sort of racism was prevalent in the US to justify slavery and then Jim Crow at the time, and those people did correspond with each other).

On the other hand, how about linking Jesus and Marx. You know "a rich man has as much chance of getting into paradise as a camel through the eye of a needle" etc?

5 people liked this. [Like](#)



pulseguy 1 month ago in reply to minnesotan

Jesus didn't found an institution. Jesus told people that the way to become one with God was to do certain things. End of story. These were, among other things, turn the other cheek, give all your money away, take no thought for the morrow, love your enemies, forgive everyone and judge no one. The institution of Christianity was founded 300 years after Jesus by Constantine I and bears little or no relationship then or now to what Jesus actually said. You really gotta let Jesus off the hook for the Inquisition. He didn't even think one should carry food for more than one day at a time, and if someone asked you for your coat you were supposed to give him your shirt too, because if you need a coat or a shirt it will be provided. As far as torturing people and building enormous edifices, he didn't have anything to do with that.

5 people liked this. [Like](#)



tonyobrien 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

why?

Like



bowl_haircut 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

Did you even read the article, numbnuts?

1 person liked this.

Like



gmolieri 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

What is the benefit of destroying the analytical process by polarizing? North Korea is no more Marxist than the Holy Inquisition was Christian...

Demonizing the ones that strive to offer critical analyses is not only counterproductive; it is totally out of place, is it not? But, I guess that is the problem with Marx. He was seldom understood and often misjudged because his analyses were unrelentless. Too much of a challenge for most?

12 people liked this.

Like



Finn 1 week ago in reply to gmolieri

"

What is the benefit of destroying the analytical process by polarizing? North Korea is no more Marxist than the Holy Inquisition was Christian..."

And these days, that's not even a criticism, it's a statement of fact- North Korea removed all references to Marxism or Marxism-Leninism from its constitution over the course of the 1990s, and now declares itself as holding only to the ideology of "Juche", a sort of Confucian take on IngSoc dreamed up by Kim Il-sung.

Like



Robert Raible 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

What kind of fool can make this comment having read the article? Unless...you did read the article, didn't you?

3 people liked this. [Like](#)



katisumas 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

North Korea is not communist. It's a police state/dictatorship with the leader and elite living in extreme luxury while the rest are in dire poverty. The key word here is dictatorship, not communism, not capitalism not any other ideology.

As Marx might put it: Actions speak louder than words.

13 people liked this. [Like](#)



Tim Chambers 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

You didn't read the article, fool or anything to do with Das Kapital. If you had you would have realized that Marx did not envision socialism occurring in undeveloped societies, and believed it would fail in such barren soil as it inevitably did in the S.U.. Marx believed that socialism was the final stage of capitalism, as appears to be the case in the United States with GM and the big banks needing to be nationalized due to the recklessness and stupidity of management.

Conservatives love to talk about producers vs. consumers, and how producers should be rewarded at the expense of consumers. By producers, of course they mean only investors, not productive workers, whose productivity is taxed by management in order to increase profits and pay itself growing bonuses, even when it has failed spectacularly to produce more wealth with growth.

13 people liked this. [Like](#)



Rod_Blogojevic 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

Better comparison:

Child labor at \$0.10 an hour vs. Food and dignity for everybody

4 people liked this. [Like](#)



Confus 1 month ago in reply to fizmath

How about U.S.A. vesus Sweden?

Like



Finn 1 week ago in reply to fizmath

Did you actually read a word of the article, or was the temptation to just just scroll straight to the bottom to unload your trite, off-the-rack little quip too powerful to resist?

Like



margelawrence 1 month ago

In these days of rampant greed and terrific violence against the poor, it's important for all of us to remember the valuable things Marx said--instead of having a knee-jerk response to the words "Marx" and "communism." For those who think capitalists are for freedom and enlightenment of the masses, think again. Capitalism is about making as much money as possible; paying little or no taxes for the privilege; and cheating your customers, your workers, and the earth we all share.

Thank you for a fine article.

126 people liked this. Like



dvacchi 1 month ago in reply to margelawrence

all else notwithstanding, your ridiculous definition of capitalism isn't constructive to the conversation.

34 people liked this. Like



fesmitty77 1 month ago in reply to dvacchi

And your failure to offer an alternative adds greatly to our conversation?

15 people liked this. [Like](#)



jpbrown7 1 month ago in reply to margelawrence

That's a "knee-jerk" definition of capitalism.

16 people liked this. [Like](#)



psmoot 1 month ago in reply to margelawrence

Ummm, other than the War on Drugs, which violence against the poor are we talking about? I don't seem to recall any mass executions, beatings or detentions in the US or any other first world country.

10 people liked this. [Like](#)



betsyny1 1 month ago in reply to psmoot

Look up structural violence and the work of Paul Farmer, an MD and anthropologist.

8 people liked this. [Like](#)



psmoot 1 month ago in reply to betsyny1

I'm not buying it. The Wikipedia article indicates structural violence is basically the observation that the poorest of the poor don't have as good lives as the richest of the rich. Well, OK, but that's a funny definition of "violence". There are lots of ways I can choose not to help my fellow man but I deny that means I'm being violent. I'm just not being a selfless angel. Even calling sexism "violence" misses the common meaning of the term.

But misleading terminology aside, capitalism has done more to improve the lives of the poor by any absolute measure than Marxism ever did or ever will do. You don't improve our net well being by confiscating from the wealthy, you improve it by creating more wealth to go around.

15 people liked this. [Like](#)



blix008 1 month ago in reply to psmoot

After the Dakota uprising of 1862 there was a mass execution of Dakota indians in Mankato, Minn. There was originally only going to be one man executed, but that would have angered the public. So the powers that be decided to throw a few more into the mix to satisfy the settlers' anger. They were not allowed legal counsel, because Abraham Lincoln did not want to be viewed as "soft" on Indian issues. This is in addition to every native genocide that occurred on US soil in general. In addition to native removal and termination efforts, the US economic system is also covered in the blood of slaves. I wouldn't exactly call these groups wealthy.

As for detention in the US, look up Japanese internment during World War II on wikipedia. Granted, some of the Japanese were middle-class, entrepreneurial types, but overall the Asian immigrant population at that time was not at all well to do. One could also argue very compellingly that the mass incarcerations rates of young black men is politically driven. .

Also, Minorities, students, and activists in the US have to worry about police beatings everyday. I was in St. Paul during the convention and saw it. I see it every weekend when I'm out. It is real, and it affects people (not accountants or doctors, btw).

In other first world countries: You seem to be missing the biggie, which is the Holocaust. If that is not an example of mass execution, detentions, and beatings of the poor (and middle-class, and the wealthy) in a number of first world countries, then you're pretty much arguing anything that could logically be construed as violence out of existence. Don't reply that Hitler was a socialist, because he absolutely was not. One of the first things he did was to privatize formerly public enterprises to dismantle that sector. "National Socialism" was a propaganda term meant to tap into the populist nationalism of the German population. Imagine that--Nazis lying.

There are more examples (who is fighting in our wars? rich kids or poor kids?), but I think I made my point. I honestly don't know how you can possibly try and argue that there is no violence, detention, or beatings against the poor in capitalist countries.

16 people liked this. [Like](#)

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