

**Karl Marx, (1818-1883) a brief historical sketch:**

1. He is well known on several different fronts.
2. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the downfall of communism in USSR, many may think that Marx and Marxism died out “on the ash heap of history.” It most certainly has not.
3. Marxism has been taught extensively for the past 50 years in many academic institutions.
4. He is one of the most written about persons in western culture.
5. Marx and Marxism has been going through a revival, especially among the young.
6. Marxism explains a lot of what is going on today. It is having a huge impact politically.
7. He comes from a long lineage of Rabbis from both sides of his family.
8. As a young man he studied Hegelian philosophy [e.g. thesis, antithesis, synthesis] and from there drifted into radical politics. He spent time in Germany, France and Belgium and was summarily expelled from all three because of his teachings. He eventually landed in more tolerant England.
9. He lived the rest of his life in London where he wrote his most famous work, *Das Capital*.
10. There are a lot of themes in Marxism. We can only touch on a couple of them. It is vitally important not to underestimate his influence, even if you know nothing about him.

**Karl Marx, atheism and economic oppression:**

1. Marx was a devotee of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872).
2. Feuerbach was an anthropologist. His most famous work was *The Essence of Christianity*. This work is a scathing critique of Christianity.
3. He advocated atheism and is considered the father of modern atheism. Most atheists of today echo him. (As an aside, some see Feuerbach as the bridge between Hegel and Marx.)
4. Summarizing Feuerbach’s thought:
  - a. “Human beings have a tendency to project outside of themselves an idealized self-understanding of themselves.”
  - b. “I’m intelligent. But I’d like to be all intelligent.”  
“I’m loving but I’d like to be all loving.”  
“I’ve got some power, but I would like to have all power”
  - c. This is an idealized self-understanding of being all knowing, all loving, and all powerful.
  - d. We project this outward and we call this projection of ourselves God. We call “it” *God*.
  - e. Then we spend our pathetic religious lives petitioning this fictional character to give back to us what we gave to *Him*.
  - f. Feuerbach argued that *God* was a human invention, a spiritual device to help us deal with our fears and aspirations. This was bad news, because human beings projected all their good qualities onto *God* and saw *Him* as compassionate, wise, loving, and so on, while seeing themselves as greatly inferior. *You can see the slave motif beginning to emerge.*
  - g. Feuerbach sees religion as a type of alienation: it is a psychological problem.
  - h. Christianity is a psychological problem. *Dawkins calls it a virus. We need to kill viruses.*
5. Marx takes this in, and remains a devotee of Ludwig Feuerbach throughout his entire life.
  - a. Marx advocates that everyone must be baptized in the Feuerbach, which in German means, “the brook of fire.”
  - b. Everyone must go through Feuerbach’s baptism of atheism. *Everyone!*
6. Marx asks a further question: why are human beings around the world so engaged in this alienating act of religion? His answer: because they are so unhappy and oppressed economically.
7. So to cope with this alienation, (birthed from economic oppression), people invent a fantasy world to live in. This is the plight of most human beings. (*Freud will echo this also.*)
8. Hence, Marx’s famous line: “religion is the opiate of the people.”  
Historically this came from Marx seeing the opium dens in London, who were being frequented by many people who were feeling alienated and oppressed: they would get high in order to live in a drug induced fantasy world and destroy their lives in the process.
  - a. Marx analogously saw religion doing the same thing.  
Religion is the opium/opiate that dulls peoples sensitivity to their suffering.

**Karl Marx and structures:**

1. Every culture from ancient times to today has a substructure which is always economic.
2. Whether it is the slave economy of the ancient world, the feudal economy of the middle ages, the surf based economy of Russia in the eighteenth century or the capitalistic economy of his own time.
3. Economics is at the core, or substructure, of any society.
4. This substructure (which is economics) builds (or throws) up around itself what Marx calls the superstructure. The superstructure is everything else in society.
5. The superstructure has one purpose: to enhance and protect the substructure.
6. That is its purpose. So the superstructure(s) is everything else in society.
7. Religion is part of the superstructure.

**Karl Marx's assessment of Politics, the Military, Entertainment, Arts, Religion and History:**

1. Marx says that politicians talk mostly about economics. Politicians do this because they want to stay in power. This is their ultimate goal. They will support and protect the substructure because that is their livelihood. (*Is it horribly naive to think their chief concern are their constituents?*)
2. The military is tied to the political interests of protecting the substructure of economics.
  - a. The military helps markets expand in foreign markets and then protects them.
  - b. Wars are fought over and around economic matters. That is the chief motivator.
  - c. For Marx: the substructure was the capitalist economic system.
3. Marx says that Entertainment and Arts are like Religion: they all serves as an opiate in order to distract people from their suffering, alienation, and economic oppression.
  - a. The Arts and Entertainment are supported by the wealthy as a distraction from suffering and a protection for the substructure.
4. Marx says history is also shaped to support the substructure. (*History must be rewritten. Is their any rhetoric or actions involved in the destruction of history occurring today?*)
5. The superstructure is supported by the wealthy and powerful to protect the substructure.

**Karl Marx and breaking through the superstructure to get to the substructure:**

1. The Marxist intellectual must break through the superstructure to expose the substructure for what it is, and then break its power over everyone.
2. Marx says you cannot revolutionize the substructure until you break through the superstructure:
  - a. The protective shell of the superstructure must be broken, demolished and replaced.
  - a. Marx has been called, "the master of suspicion." (*What do you think that means?*)
3. You accomplish this breaking through the superstructure to get to the substructure by stirring up antagonism between the oppressor and the oppressed. (*Is tied into any of the recent riots?*)
  - a. For Marx, capitalist is the oppressor deriving profit from the oppressed worker.
  - b. The Marxist has to break the superstructure and foment a class struggle that will lead to violent revolution that will destroy and replace the substructure. (*Does it ever end?*)
  - c. Violence for a Marxist is not a regrettable side effect.
  - d. Violence is the point! This is the whole premise of Marxism.
4. What is the ultimate superstructure that must be eliminated in Marxism that will allow for dismantling the economic substructure, by fomenting antagonism, creating class struggle, revolution and the reshaping of history and causing a revolution?
  - a. Religion
  - b. **Christianity**
5. *Do you see some vestiges of this occurring today even if you are not familiar with this material?*
6. *What do you think about Marxism?*
7. *Do ideas have consequences?*
8. Karl Marx and the Wizard of Oz Analogy: Tin Man = Industry that has no heart, Lion = Military that has no courage, Scarecrow = Farmer that has no brains, Wizard (the inept little man behind the curtain exposed by Toto) is the substructure surrounded by all the superstructure.