

Karl Marx

Quotations on materialism, religion, exploitation, and violence

From two early poems:

Worlds I would destroy forever,
Since I can create no world,
Since my call they notice never,
Coursing dumb in magic whirl.
(*Feelings*, 1836)

“I plunge, plunge without fail
My blood-black sabre into your soul.
That art God neither wants nor wists,
It leaps to the brain from Hell's black mists.
Till heart's bewitched, till senses reel:
With Satan I have struck my deal.”
(*The Fiddler*, 1837)

From “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law,” 1843

Religion “is the *fantastic realization* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true reality.”

“The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.”

“By declaring people his private property the king simply states that the property owner is king.”

From *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

“Activity and mind are social in their content as well as in their origin; they are a *social* activity and social mind.”

“Though man is a unique individual—and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really *individual* communal being—he is equally the *whole*, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists in reality as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestations of life.”

“Everything which the economist takes from you in the way of life and humanity, he restores to you in the form of money and wealth.” “The enemy of being is having.”

Communism is “the positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man ... the complete return of man to himself as a social being ...”

On the materialist conception of history: “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”

From *On the Jewish Question* (1844): “Let us consider the actual, worldly Jew—not the Sabbath Jew, as Bauer does, but the everyday Jew. Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew. What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical need, self-interest. What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money. Very well then! Emancipation from huckstering and money, consequently from practical, real Jewry, would be the self-emancipation of our time We recognize in Jewry, therefore, a general present-time-oriented anti-social element, an element which through historical development—to which in this harmful respect the Jews have zealously contributed—has been brought to its present high level, at which it must necessarily dissolve itself. In the final analysis, the emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of mankind from Jewry.”

On liberal-bourgeois freedom versus true freedom: “None of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond the egoistic man, man as he is, as a member of civil society; that is, an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice... Thus man was not liberated from religion; he received religious liberty. He was not liberated from property; he received the liberty to own property. He was not liberated from the egoism of business; he received the liberty to engage in business.”

From *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845)

“The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

“The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.” (III)

On human nature: “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual.” “In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.” (VI)

The ending line: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.” (XI)

“Wage Labor and Capital” (1847)

“A house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirement for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain, or but a very insignificant one; and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighboring palace rises in equal or even in greater measure, the occupant of the relatively little house will always find himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more cramped within his four walls.” (Chapter 6)

On the worker: “He works in order to live. He does not even reckon labor as a part of his life; it is rather a sacrifice of his life. It is a commodity which he has made over to another.” (Chapter 2)

On Violence:

Marx: There is “only one means to *curtail*, simplify and localize the bloody agony of the old society and the bloody birth-pangs of the new, only one means—the revolutionary terror.” (“The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna,” *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* No. 136)

Engels: “The next world war will result in the disappearance from the face of the earth not only of reactionary classes and dynasties, but also of entire reactionary peoples. And that, too, is a step forward.” (“The Magyar Struggle,” first published in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* No. 194, January 13, 1849)

Chicago Tribune interview (1879):

Interviewer: “Well, then, to carry out the principles of socialism do its believers advocate assassination and bloodshed?”

Karl Marx: “No great movement has ever been inaugurated without bloodshed. The independence of America was won by bloodshed, Napoleon captured France through a bloody process, and he was overthrown by the same means. Italy, England, Germany, and every other country gives proof of this, and as for assassination, it is not a new thing, I need scarcely say.”

http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/bio/media/marx/79_01_05.htm

***Das Kapital* (1867)**

On the “natural laws of capitalist production”: “It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results. The country that is more developed industrially only show, to the less developed, the image of its own future.” (Preface to the First Edition)

Zero-sum economics: “In proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the laborer must grow worse. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery ... at the opposite pole.”

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