

# **SOC4044 Sociological Theory:**

## **Karl Marx**

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Bolender

# Karl Marx

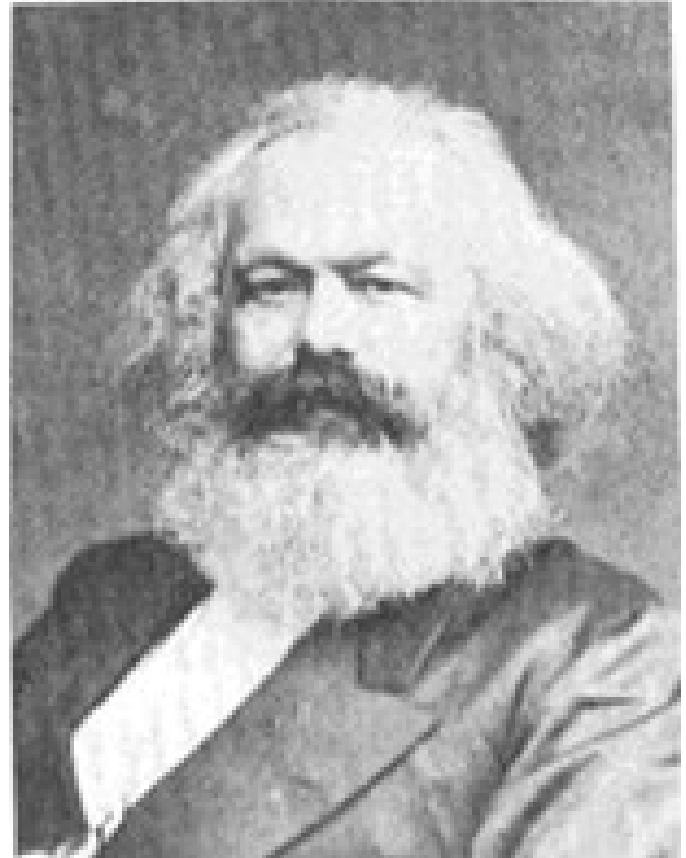


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# Karl Marx

- 1818-1883
- Born in Germany
- His father was a Jewish lawyer who converted to Protestantism prior to Karl's birth in order to be allowed to hold public office
- His mother was Dutch and came from a prosperous family
- Attended the University of Bonn--later, transferred to the University of Berlin where he graduated



(Ashley and Orenstein 1990:215-216)

# Karl Marx



*Society, according to Marx, comprised a moving balance of antithetical forces that generate social change by their tension and struggle...For him, **struggle** rather than **peaceful growth** was the **engine of progress**; strife was the father of all things, and **social conflict** was the core of historical process.*

(Coser 1977:43)

# Karl Marx



- To Marx the motivating force in history is the manner in which men relate to one another in their struggle to wrest their livelihood from nature.
- First order of business--to take care of primary needs (eating, drinking, habitation, clothing).
- *Man is a perpetually dissatisfied animal*--when primary needs are met, this "leads to new needs--and this production of new needs is the first historical act."
- The social change is driven "materially," "economically"--not ideologically....that comes later and is based on the change in economics and the material focus of society.

(Coser 1977:43-44)

# Karl Marx

- The genesis and acceptance of ideas depend on something that is not an idea. Ideas are not prime movers but are the *reflection*, direct or sublimated, of the material interests that impel men to their dealings with others.
- The “*mode of economic production*” is the *stimulus of social change*....and “*innovations in technology* are often (not always) the *stimulus of change* in the *mode of economic production*.

# Karl Marx



The *sum total of the relations* of production, that is, the *relations men establish with each other* when they utilize existing raw materials and technologies in the pursuit of their productive goals, constitute real foundations upon which the whole cultural superstructure of society comes to be erected. By relations of production Marx does not only mean technology, though this is an important part, *but the social relations people enter into by participating in economic life.*

(Coser 1977:45)

# Karl Marx



*"...the social relations people enter into by participating in economic life..."* create an economic category/social phenomenon known as *social class*.



# Karl Marx



The division of society into classes gives rise to political, ethical, philosophical, and religious views of the world, views which express existing class relations and tend either to consolidate or to undermine the power and authority of the dominant class.

(Coser 1977:46-47)

# Karl Marx



## The Characteristics of All Societies

- Human beings, unlike other animals species, produce sustenance from the environment to live and thereby “make history.”
- Social theory had to deal with more than just ideas. It had to be grounded in “the existence of living human individuals,” who have material needs that must be satisfied through production.

(Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1998:105-107)

# Karl Marx



- People create new needs over time.
  - Need creation occurs because production (or work) always involved the use of tools or instruments of various sorts, and these tools are periodically improved, yielding more and better consumer goods.
  - Thus, Marx said the processes of production and consumption always feed back on each other in a cumulative fashion, so that as one set of needs was satisfied, new ones emerged.

# Karl Marx



*I need an iPod.  
Uhhh...I cannot decide which color  
will match my lifestyle.*

# Karl Marx



- Production is based on a division of labor, which in Marx's writings always implies a hierarchical stratification structure, with attendant exploitation and alienation.
  - The division of labor means the tasks that must be done in every society—placating the gods, deciding priorities, producing goods, raising children, and so forth—are divided up.
  - In some form or another, Marx argued, exploitation and alienation occur in all societies characterized by private ownership of the means of production.

# Karl Marx



- Ideas and values emerge from the division of labor.
  - Put differently, ideas and values results from people's practical efforts at obtaining sustenance, creating needs, and working together.
  - As a result, ideologies usually justify the status quo.
    - "Ideologies" are systematic views of the way the world ought to be, as embodied in religious doctrines and political values. Thus, Marx argued, religious and political beliefs in capitalist societies state that individuals have a right to own land or capital; they have a right to use the means of production for their own rather than the collectivity's benefit.

# Karl Marx



- Marx believed the values (or *ideologies*, to use his word) characteristic of a society are the tools of the dominate class because they mislead the populace about their true interests.
  - This is why he described religion as “the opium of the masses.” He reasoned that religious belief functioned to blind people so they could not recognize their exploitation and their real political interests.
  - Religion does this by emphasizing that salvation, compensation for misery and alienation on earth, will come in the next world.
    - In effect, religious beliefs justify social inequality.

# Karl Marx: Marx's View of the Stages of History

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Oppressing Class</b>	<b>Oppressed Class</b>
<b>Primitive Communism</b>	No classes	
<b>Slavery</b>	Slave Owners	Slaves
<b>Feudalism</b>	Landowners	Serfs
<b>Capitalism</b>	Bourgeoisie	Proletariat
<b>Socialism</b>	State Managers	Workers
<b>Communism</b>	No Classes	

(Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1998:116)



# Karl Marx



## Alienation

- For Marx, the history of mankind has a double aspect: It was a history of increasing control of man over nature at the same time as it was a history of increasing alienation of man.
- Alienation may be described as a condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation, which confront them as alien powers.

(Coser 1977:50-51)

# Karl Marx



One way to illustrate alienation is by comparing two modes of production. A craftsman (not a famous artist) who produces pottery by digging the clay out of the ground, molding it, glazing it, firing it, selling it--has a sense of "*connection*" the outcome of his/her labor. Whereas, someone who works in a heavy equipment factory (such as Caterpillar) may spend 40 years making a very unique "gear assembly" that is only one "part of the whole" and this person will never own a piece of heavy equipment for personal use and most outsiders would not have a clue as to what you have spent your life producing.

The "material" standard of living is most certainly higher for the laborer at Caterpillar, so this efficiency has produced more "goods" for the average man/woman...but there is a sense of "*disconnect*" with the outcome of his/her labor.

# Karl Marx



## The Sociology of Knowledge

Marx analyzed the ways in which systems of ideas appeared to depend on the social positions--particularly the class positions--of their proponents.

(Coser 1977:53)

# Karl Marx

## Social Change

- Marx insisted that *men make their own history*. Human history is the process through which men increasingly transform nature to make it better serve their own purposes. And, *in the process of transforming nature, they transform themselves*.
- In their struggle against nature, and to gain their livelihood through associated labor, men create specific forms of social organization in tune with specific modes of production. All these modes of social organization, with the exception of those prevailing in the original stage of primitive communism, *are characterized by social inequality*.
- In the struggle to deal with this inequality (exhibited by the development of classes)--social change is an effort to develop some form of equilibrium--as sense of "less" inequality.