

Marx for Beginners Study Guide

Marx for Beginners by Rius

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Plot Summary

Marx for Beginners by Rius is an introduction to and summary of the life and work of Karl Marx. Marx's philosophical, economic, and historical works have influenced almost every aspect of society in some way. Rius discusses Marx's education, influences, works, life, and impact on society. He also focuses on three aspects of Marx's work: the philosophy of Marx, his economic ideas, and historical materialism.

Marx was born in Germany on May 5, 1818 to a well-to-do Jewish German family. He studied law at Bonn University and philosophy at the University of Berlin. It was at the University of Berlin that he encountered the work of Hegel, who would be one of Marx's greatest influences. Marx worked on several newspapers and magazines during the 1840s, but the governments of Europe were not happy with the radical nature of the Marx's political journalism and they shut down his papers, tried him for inciting armed rebellion, and expelled him from their countries. Marx moved with his family to London, where the family would struggle in poverty. They relied on friends and supporters for money, but they often went without medicine, enough food, and paper for Marx to write on. Marx died in 1883 at the age of 65. Throughout his life, very few of his contemporaries were aware of Marx's work and it had little impact on the society around him. It was not until after his death that Marx's work would greatly influence the world.

A number of philosophers and thinkers influence Marx's work. The immediate two are Kant and Hegel, who are part of a long tradition of thinkers seeking to understand the big questions of life. Philosophers before Kant and Hegel included Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Vico, Descartes, and Locke. Through his work, Marx takes the foundations of these philosophers, particularly Hegel, and turns them on their heads. In addition, rather than replicating the abstractness that permeated philosophy, Marx wants to create more practical theories and solutions that will help the working class escape exploitation.

Marx produces a number of works during his lifetime, both alone and with his friend, Frederick Engels. These two collaborate on two of Marx's most famous works, the Communist Manifesto and Capital. The Communist Manifesto is written for a secret society in Germany and it is a direct appeal to the workers of the world to unite against the ruling class that is exploiting them. Capital outlines Marx's economic theories and two of the volumes are finished by Engels, using Marx's notes. These two works, along with Marx's other writings, can be summed up by three themes: the philosophy of Marx, his economic doctrine, and the historical materialism of Marx.

In responding to other philosophical theories, Marx argues that the feudal state has turned into a capitalist one. He believes workers have become alienated from their work, from the products that they produce. Men receive a wage for their labor, but they are deprived of the actual good. Capitalists impose on workers the type of work that they will do, the method they will use, and how quickly it will be done. Man becomes a sort of machine, which leads to his exploitation. Marx calls the class of workers the proletariat and he sees this group in a class struggle with the owners or capitalists. The



capitalist system has as its sole aim profit, which can only be gained by exploiting the working class.

Marx's philosophical ideas lead directly to his economic doctrine. He wants to do something proactive about the working class misery that he sees all around him. The Communist Manifesto sums up much of Marx's active doctrine. In it, he and Engels argue that capitalists make profit off labor by paying workers less than the value of their labor. They believe that the only way to end the misery and exploitation of the working class is to move society from capitalism to socialism. To do so, workers need to unite with each other against the capitalists through unions, political parties, and ultimately, revolutions.

Finally, Marx also puts forth a theory of historical materialism, which argues that history is created by man. As time passes, individuals build and improve on the tools that they have been left by previous generations. He also argues that mankind moves through five stages: primitive community, slave state, feudal state, capitalism, and socialism. While he sees the shift from capitalism to socialism as inevitable, he also believes that the working class will have to make this change happen. Capitalists who are invested in keeping their private means of production will resist this change and the only way to make it happen is to force it to happen.

Preface

Preface Summary and Analysis

Rius states that many people would see his attempt to summarize Marx as sacrilege of important texts. Others would say that Marxist thought is complicated and that simplifying it down for "simple minds" is a waste of time. Rius believes it is worth trying even if he fails. Rius wanted to understand Marx better, and although he did learn about Marx through writing, he is not satisfied. Marx was an important thinker and continued his work even when misunderstood. Marx produced many great works, some hard to digest and understand. This book is to be a sample "digest" of Marx. Rius wants this book to be comprehensible for the average reader.

Marx produced hundreds of economic and philosophic terms in his writings, and Rius cannot cover them all, but he attempts to make the terms easier to understand by putting them into everyday language. Rius' straight approach to the topic gives him an amount of credibility. He is not pretending to be the ultimate Marx scholar; he wants to bring a sample of Marx to a broader audience. Rius wants to introduce the average reader to Marx and inspire the reader to tackle Marx's actual works.



Section 1 (pg. 11-25)

Section 1 (pg. 11-25) Summary and Analysis

Karl Marx, or Charles Marx, was a Jewish German who lived from 1818 to 1883. He is widely regarded as the founder of communism and as an important philosopher. Rius suggests that thenon-communists two thirds of the world spend their time arguing about communism. Today, people could be divided into three different groups, according to Rius: those who hate Marx, those who love him, and those who do not know him. Almost every major change since the last century has some connection to Marx. Rius argues that Marx has made the world a better place. Some of the things indirectly owed to Marx include social security, scholarships, pensions, and unions.

Marx was born in Trevirorum, Germany on May 5, 1818. His father was a lawyer and Marx also went to law school, where he spent more time having fun than studying. From Bonn University, Marx moved to Berlin to finish his studies. He became an atheist and took an interest in subversive thinking. Many thinkers were looking for answers about mankind and the eternal questions that exist. Though Marx was Jewish, he did not consider himself Jewish. His father became a Lutheran, and Marx was Lutheran in his youth as well. Marx studied philosophy, though his father was not pleased. Marx concerned himself less with making a living than asking the meaning of life. He read Hegel, who would has a big influence on him, though Hegel had died before Marx read his works. It is important to also look at Hegel's predecessors, such as Immanuel Kant. Kant argued that nothing could prove that God exists. Hegel wanted to justify the idea of God by proposing a panlogism system. Kant wanted to separate science from religion, but Hegel wanted to make religion into a science. Hegel suggested that each person might be God. Both the church and government sought to limit Hegel's ideas.

Marx was most attracted to Hegel's Philosophy of History where Hegel argued that humanity advanced because of conflict between oppressed and oppressor. Though Hegel was writing about religious struggles, Marx applied the idea to governments and other groups. The terms "the left" and "the right" were coined about the time of Hegel's death to describe progressive or conservative. Marx was of the Hegelian left bent, though more radical than most. Marx took a job with the Rhenish Gazatte in 1842, and with Marx as editor-in-chief, the paper earned prestige and repute. The government shut down the paper. Marx's work birthed political journalism. He invented documentary reporting, particularly on the peasants of the Moselle District.

Marx courted Jenny Von Westphalen, who came from an aristocratic family. Marx had no money or work, and her father was concerned, but they married and moved to Paris where Marx took a job as the co-editor of a radical magazine. Marx did not get along well with the magazine's director. Marx became more radical during his time in Paris, being influenced both by French ideas and Russian anarchists. He began studying economic theories from thinkers like Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

It would be difficult to fully estimate Marx's influence on the world. Not only have his ideas been the basis of state governments, but they have also led to revolutions and social conflict. Through Marx, we better understand the mechanisms of human exploitation. Many of Marx's terms and phrases have entered every day usage.

It may be useful to stop and think about what the world might be like without Marx. The Russian Revolution may not have happened. Cuba, China, and Russia would have existed under different types of government. Unions, paid holidays, and social security may not have existed. Terms like alienation, the proletariat, communism, and Marxism would not exist or would have different meanings than we associate with them today. Rius wrote the book through cartoons, bringing Marx to a wider audience. The cartoons interject a bit of humor into the book.



Section 2 (pg. 26-35)

Section 2 (pg. 26-35) Summary and Analysis

In Paris, Marx met the German, Frederick Engels, who has a significant impact on Marx. Engels was the son of a wealthy textile merchant. While working at his father's company Engels saw the wretched life of the poor working class. English workers were ruthlessly exploited. Children labor was common. Engels wrote a piece on economics and condition of the working poor for the "Annuals," which Marx was working on in Paris. The two became friends. Marx was unpopular with European governments and France expelled him and then Brussels. Back in Germany, Marx began the "New Rhenish Gazette" with Engels. Marx was charged with incitement to armed rebellion but was acquitted. Marx and Engels were commissioned to write the Communist Manifesto for a secret society, The Communist League, in which both Marx and Engels had participated. The Communist Manifesto would eventually be an important work in world history, but at the time, it did not create much of a stir. Marx's activities continued to upset the government, which expelled him in 1849, making Marx a "stateless" man. Like others in his situation, Marx moved to London.

Marx lived in poverty for the rest of his life. Three of his five children die from lack of medication, yet Marx continued to write. Engels often helped Marx out financially and the two continued their friendship. There were times when Marx could not leave the house because his clothes were at the pawnshop; he often lacked paper. Marx's works did not receive wide acclaim until after his death. Through Lenin, Marx's ideas reach a world audience. During the last twenty-five years of his life, Marx worked on Capital, his major work. However, Marx never finished the piece before he died. Of the three volumes he planned, only the first was completely written by Marx. Engels finished the other two volumes using Marx's notes. Marx died at 65, the last years of his life filled with a variety of illnesses.

In addition to the Communist Manifesto and Capital, Marx also wrote The German Ideology, The Poverty of Philosophy, and many other articles and books. Many consider his works the "working class Bible," but few workers actually understand Marx's work, which influenced social movements in numerous countries. Many other scientists, philosophers, theorists, and political figures were also influenced by Marx's work.

Many people may be surprised to learn that Marx lived in poverty most of his adult life. Marx wrote even as he and his family lived in poverty. His view from the bottom of society, combined with his intellectual roots, helped him sculpt his theories on the economy, exploitation, and the working class.



Section 3 (pg. 36-64)

Section 3 (pg. 36-64) Summary and Analysis

Rius examines the roots of Marxism. He begins by looking at early man, though early man lacked the ability to write thoughts and words down. Early man created gods to give explanation for what happened in their lives. Some men convinced people that they had special insight and communication with the divine. These "special" people gradually became the ruling or upper class, while those who were exploited became the ruled or lower class. Some individuals tried to find logical explanations for natural events and became the "thinkers" of society. Thinkers started philosophy as a criticism of supernatural or religious beliefs. The Greek Xenophanes was one of the first philosophers of recorded history. He believed humans created gods in their own images. His ideas did not make the ruling class happy.

The ruling class solidified its religion as the years passed. A divine cast formed a priesthood for religions and with pharaohs, kings, and other leaders, huge empires came to be. Most individuals fell into the role of slaves or workers. One of the aspects of most religions was a faith in some sort of afterlife. The Egyptians believed if slaves put up with slavery during their lives, they had the hope of a better afterlife. Thinkers resisted blind faith. Thales, the father of philosophy, worked with astronomy and other scientific inquiry around 4 BCE. Pythagoras argued that the earth was not at the center of the universe. Heraclitus taught that everything exists and does not exist at the same time. Many, such as Socrates, were persecuted for their views. Socrates argued that morality was not a synonymous with religion. He was sentenced to death.

Greece produced three of the most well-known and important philosophers: Plato, Democritus, and Aristotle. Plato posed three questions: "How can man discover the truth? What is the origin of the universe? What is the purpose of human life?" (p. 47). He argued that knowledge came from God's "inspiration." Plato argued that workers should serve those they worked for and that they should not worry about their fate as they would have a better afterlife. Aristotle wrote on topics like physics, ethics, philosophy, and biology. He argued that social conflict occurred because of economic and social inequality. If power was in the hands of the rich, he called it oligarchy. If it was in the hands of the people, it was democracy. He thought that social inequalities rose because of the economic organization of a society.

After the Greek epoch, the so-called Age of Faith occurred during the Middle Ages. All scientific reasoning was denied and many would be labeled a heretic. Scientific development and thought did occur outside of Europe, particularly in the Muslim world. In Europe, Machiavelli was one individual who did advocate for rebellion against the church and its dictatorship. The Renaissance was the counter attack of science and reason against religious fanaticism and dogma. Great thinkers, such as Dante, da Vinci, Luther, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and Bacon flourished. Thinkers were independent of the church, though it was hard to break away from the church's influence.



Giambattista Vico produced some important ideas during this time, although he is not as well-known. He suggested that the history of man passes through three different stages corresponding to the three stages of human life: infancy, adolescence, and adulthood. First was barbarism with man led by magic. After this, feudalism, which has a few lords and many slaves. Finally, man enters a new state. While this many not seem revolutionary, one must remember that Vico is writing this in a feudal society. He is also speaking about the evolution of man, one that ends with democracy after a period of social conflict. Descartes and Spinoza were the next great philosophers of the seventeenth century. Descartes used a materialistic logic to examine the world. He introduced a mechanistic concept of humans. Spinoza argued that man is free to think and believe as he chooses. He thought of God as a spiritual principle. Both Descartes and Spinoza believed that man was one part of nature, but they were wrong in their belief that nature does not change or evolve over time.

The philosophy before Marx also includes empiricism. Locke, for example, believed men could think of God however they wanted and opposed the idea of the divine right of kings. When Locke's ideas were attacked, Hume came to his defense. His idea that nothing was certain upset many in England and Hume eventually had to move to France. Seventeenth-century France was a center for advanced ideas. People rebelled against the church and the monarchy, resulting in the French Revolution, which can be seen as the victory of science over religion. New sciences developed, as well as an idealist philosophy, with Kant at the head. Kant believed that morality had to be connected to a belief in God, which presupposed God's existence. From Kant, the German Idealist Philosophy developed, which was one of the main influences on Marx. Marx thought philosophy too full of jargon and incomprehensible arguments. He wanted to give philosophy a practicality that would make it more useful to the world.

In the bits and pieces of history that Rius presents, the reader can see a number of connections to Marx's work. As with other theories and ideologies, Marx builds on what has come before him. His work is not produced in a vacuum, but evolves through the context that Marx lived.



Section 4 (pg. 65-94)

Section 4 (pg. 65-94) Summary and Analysis

Rius has divided up Marx's work into three "basics" and summarizes some of the work on each. These three basics are: the philosophy of Marx, his economic doctrine, and his ideas on historical materialism.

Philosophy sees two kinds of men: materialist and idealist. Idealism assumes the existence of the divine while materialism states that there is nothing beyond the natural. Idealism does not offer proof for those things that it proposes. In contrast, materialism seeks scientific proof for what it examines, including religion. Marx is a materialist and his work attempts to bring more consistency to materialism. Many philosophers before Marx deny the existence of God without providing any proof. During the sixteen and seventeenth centuries, discoveries were made in mathematics and the mechanics of astrology. Materialism at this time became mechanistic, examining everything from a mechanical point of view. Seeing the world as mechanical is also known as metaphysical. The term comes from the Greek where it means "placed beyond physics." With this philosophy, things are immutable or unchanging and can be examined independently of other things. Philosophers that suggested these ideas thought that these same rules applied to society as well. What changes they observed, they explained by saying that society was repeating itself as machines do.

Marx wanted to create explanations without including God. Marx and Engels used dialectics, or argument that brings out the flaws in another's reasoning. The dialectical method views everything as changing, though Hegel did not extend this to nature and society. Hegel's would believe that a worker should not worry about the material because only the spiritual matters. If the worker obeyed the state, he would find spiritual happiness. Absolute liberty was reached through the French Revolution and the Prussian state. He failed to see the oppression and exploitation that still existed in society. Hegel was attacked for these thought, largely because he used the dialectical method. Marx felt that Hegel's theory needed a major change.

Ludwig Feuerbach also influenced Marx's philosophy. Feuerbach was a materialist, but metaphysical. He believed the world was sleeping and there was no chance for immediate change. Marx takes Hegel and Feuerbach's theories and produces something new. He asks about alienation, which happens when an exploited laborer earns a wage, but the object he makes belongs to someone else. The worker becomes a machine, as the owner tells the worker what to do and how to do it. Marx argued in the "Manuscript of 1844" that the more a worker produced, the less he could consume, and the more value a man creates, the less he has. Alienation both degrades and depersonalizes men. Private ownership increases alienation. A man's creative act becomes a possession that he does not control in the end. Marx saw the evils of the world coming from the ownership of private property. He identified a "new" class in society: the proletariat, which developed when the industrial revolution started replacing



people with machines. Marx believed the proletariat would change society in struggling against those who owned the capital in society. In his early years, Marx still examined the problem from a purely philosophical position, without really knowing what the proletariat thought or experienced.

Marx needed to live among the proletariat and experience what they did. France had made the most progress toward what Marx was talking about with the French Revolution and French socialism was a major influence on Marx. French socialists, like Saint-Simon and Fourier, wanted to achieve a utopia. For them, this included an end to the rule of the leisure class, a central bank that would plan the economy, the promotion of the poor's welfare, and a new religion. Fourier wanted to create small communities where everyone owned everything jointly and wealth was distributed to make everyone equal. While living in Paris, Marx meets other French socialists like Blanqui, Proudhon, and Blanc. He argued that "utopian socialists" were in error. Marx thought socialists and anarchists did not have foresight for class conflict. Marx believed conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (or the ruling class) was inevitable. Under capitalism, the worker could never enjoy the advantages of the system because of exploitation. Class struggle was nothing new, although Marx put a twist on it by saying that it would eventually end.

The foundations of Marx's economic thought begin to come together as Marx considers alienation and class conflict. The increasing poverty that Marx faced as he aged allowed Marx to see these concepts from a much more practical and real perspective.



Section 5 (pg. 95-123)

Section 5 (pg. 95-123) Summary and Analysis

Marx's theories were leading him away from pure philosophy and to less abstract economic problems in society. It is perhaps ironic that Marx was trying to solve these economic problems for exploited workers when he could not solve his own economic problems. In spite of poverty, Marx continued to work on how the capitalist system exploited workers. The capitalist buys the labor power, thus, a worker's labor power is a commodity. The capitalist buys the labor, along with the supplies, to make his product. Workers are exploited because they do not earn the full value of their labor. Marx gives the example of a worker making a machine part. During the course of the day, the worker adds 6 pounds (currency) to the value of the machine part through his labor; however, the worker is given 3 pounds by the capitalist, who pockets the other three. The capitalist earns this same amount multiplied for each of his employees. As the worker is not paid enough to meet his basic needs, he is forced to continue working at the low wage.

The price of a commodity or product is created through competition. For example, two vendors have the same product to sell. One lowers his price in order to sell more of the product than his competitor. If a number of people want to purchase the same product, the product will go to whoever is willing to pay the most for it. The law of supply and demand often determines the price of a product. Yet, how are prices decided on in the first place? The capitalist figures in the price of production, hidden costs, and his own profit. What keeps the capitalists' profits growing is the worker's labor power. The capitalist gets richer, while the worker struggles to keep pace with basic needs. This led Marx to the idea of surplus value. Capitalism is a pretty simple system: someone buys to sell again at a profit. The increase in value in this transaction Marx called surplus value. Surplus value comes from putting something else of value into the commodity. Marx argued that what was put in was labor. The capitalist makes the worker labor for 12 hours, even though the worker can equal his wage in product in 6 hours. The extra time that the worker is laboring after his pay has been reached is the surplus value. Increasing the efficiency of the work and the worker's productive output just puts more money in the capitalist's wallet and not in the hands of the worker.

Marx did not believe that simply raising the workers' salaries would change the situation. The capitalist will not accept making less profit and will raise prices or find other ways of making sure that the rise in salary does not affect his bottom line. One Marxist theorist argued that by working for a capitalist and producing a commodity, the worker is increasing his own alienation. Unions can make a difference in the workers' situation. A group of the intellectuals thought the means of production needed to be destroyed and that individuals should go back to being artisans and farmers. The group invited Marx and Engels to join them and reorganize the group. What developed was the Communist Manifesto. Communism was defined as the "emancipation of the proletariat." In Engels'



Credos, he argued that although a peaceful overthrow should be the goal, revolutions were often necessary to help the oppressed worker.

The Communist Manifesto was a call for all workers to unite against capitalism. It argued that the emancipation of the worker had to come from the workers themselves. The working class had to make the change. In it, Marx and Engels discussed how workers should form groups (unions) to resist the bourgeoisie. They argued that workers can improve their situation by continuing to expand this union of workers. The coalition can gain even more ground by entering into the political realm, becoming a political party, where it can fight for the interests of workers. Although individuals from other classes may support the proletariat, ultimately, it is up to the working class to rise up and change the system. Marx and Engels also argued that bourgeois private property would need to be eliminated and they condemned the exploitation of women within the workplace and within the home.

The men also included what they saw as a practical program for implementing a socialist system. Some of the items included free education for all children, abolition of children's labor in factories, an equal distribution of the population over the land, the idea that everyone should use their labor, a graduated income tax, the abolition of private property in land, and the centralization of communications and banking with the state. The list illustrates at least some of Marx's influence on the world. While not all of the suggestions have happened in all countries, free education, the stoppage of children's labor, and a progressive income tax are seen in many countries.

At the bottom of Marx and Engels' argument is that capitalism cannot solve the problems of humanity. As long as capitalism is in place, those problems will continue to exist and grow. The only solution to them is to change the system. Capitalism will need to be replaced by socialism or another form of government that will protect and value the worker. Rius argues that the various movements and revolutions that have happened since Marx's time point to an increasingly shaky capitalism.

While it may be tempting for some readers to skip across the quoted text from the Communist Manifesto and other works by Marx and Engels in this section, Rius has provided a solid introduction to the arguments and theories in the text. With the cartoons and simple discussion of Marx's theories in the first part of the section, he gives the reader aid in digesting Marx's words. Readers may be surprised to find themselves understanding what Marx is saying because Rius has already gone over much of the material in very simple language.



Section 6 (pg. 124-142)

Section 6 (pg. 124-142) Summary and Analysis

The final theme in Marx's work that Rius covers is historical materialism, or Marx's attempt to show that history is created by humans and not fate or God. Marx argued that humans invented the tools and structures within society by themselves. Each generation builds on the last generation to better perfect the tools available. Marx also argued that nothing can be produced in isolation; there is always a social aspect or character. He called the tools (or instruments of production) and the men who made things using the tools the "moving forces of society." He called the relationships that people set up for the production of the tools "the relations of production." The relations of productions combined with the moving forces of society produced the "mode of production."

In looking at history, Marx argued that five modes of production could be identified, the first eventually moving into the second and so on. The modes of production he identified are: primitive community, slave state, feudal state, capitalist system, and socialist society. Rius assumes that most individuals are familiar with the primitive community and slave state and he moves directly into the feudal state. In a feudal system, the king divided up the country's land and gave it to his nobles so that they would continue to support him. The people who lived on the land given to a noble gave their labor in the form of taxes, military service, and goods to the feudal lord. Although the people had a bit of claim to the land, they were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and had virtually no power over their situation.

Gradually, a bourgeoisie class developed as the merchants and artisans both grew in number and power. This class fell between the nobility/clergy and the serfs. This class began to change production as they needed more markets for the products made in their workshops. They ran into the structures and restraints of the nobility and clergy, which created revolutions against kings and the church. With these revolutions, society moved toward a capitalist mode of production. For example, the French Revolution in the 1700s was a liberation movement meant to free enterprise and private property. This benefited the bourgeoisie class so they could make more money and buy the labor of the serfs themselves. During the revolution itself, both the working class and the bourgeoisie class joined forces against the nobility and clergy, but as soon as it was over the bourgeoisie class began exploiting the working class. The working class received virtually nothing for its efforts and sacrifices.

The next "revolution" was the Industrial Revolution, where machines began to replace the work once done by humans. This produced several new classes in society: capitalists (owners of the machines) and workers (the operators of the machines). Machinery signals the capitalism mode of production. Workers were free citizens, but they were still tied to the machines and the capitalists. According to Marx, capitalism will inevitably fall to socialism. He argued, however, that workers still needed to struggle



toward socialism, even if it is inevitable, because men make history. Capitalists will resist the change, and change can only come with a united proletariat determined to make a change. Workers would need to seize power through a united effort.

Marx even outlined the steps that workers need to take. First, workers have to be convinced that they can change things in a united effort. The worker has to realize that capitalism is the reason for humanity's problems. This will politicize the workers so that they can form an organized struggle to protect their rights and make changes. Unions, according to Marx, need to aim for socialism and not just fight for higher wages. Marx believed that this class struggle would ultimately lead to revolution. Forming unions and political parties was a way to prepare for the deadly blow that would happen. In all of his writing, Marx never saw a proletariat movement without socialist theory. He believed that the two had to go hand in hand.

Twenty-four years after Marx's death, a Marxist named Lenin tried to put Marx's theories into practice, through the Russian Revolution in 1917. Lenin continued Marx's ideas and theories in his own writing and defended Marxism against those who argued against it. Lenin would write, "But Marx, basing himself on the experience of the Paris Commune, taught that the proletariat cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machine and use it for its own purposes, that the proletariat must smash this machine and substitute a new one for it...This new type of state machinery was created by the Paris Commune, and by the Russian Soviets of Workers..." (p. 142).

As Rius notes, many revolutions and social movements have used Marx's ideas on the overthrow of capitalism. His ideas have wide appeal, if in a somewhat watered down version at times. In part, this may be due to the bad label that communism and Marxism have had for many years in places like the United States and to the imperfect rendering of society after some of the revolutions. Countries like the Soviet Union and China did not see the erasure of oppression and exploitation of the working class after their revolutions. Humanity's problems continued, and in some ways, increased in these countries. However, Marx's ideas also improved the world in various ways from the countries that now give free education to children to more worker protections in many places.



Characters

Karl Marx

Marx was a Jewish-German philosopher that had a great influence on the world through his writing. His thoughts and ideas influenced events like the Russian Revolution, the formation of unions, and the introduction of social security. In addition, many concepts and terms common today, such as alienation, exploitation, the proletariat, capital, and surplus value, were popularized through his writing.

Born in 1818 in Trevirorum, Germany, Marx grew up in a well-to-do family. He studied law at Bonn University, but turned toward philosophy at the University of Berlin where he went to finish his studies. Although he tried teaching, he ended up taking a job with the "Rhenish Gazette" in 1842. Marx rose to editor-in-chief quickly, but the government shut down the paper. With his new bride, Jenny, Marx moved to Paris and took a job on the magazine "Franco-German Annals." By 1845, the French government expelled Marx because of his radical ideas. He spent a short time in Brussels, but was expelled again. The family moved back to Germany where he and Engels stated the "New Rhenish Gazette." The two also collaborated on the "Communist Manifesto," which had been commissioned by a secret society. The German government was less than pleased with Marx, first trying him for incitement to armed rebellion, and then expelling him once again. Marx and his family moved to London where the family would struggle in poverty, forced to accept support and gifts from Engels and other friends. Marx died in 1883 at the age of 65.

In his works, Marx argued that society had moved from feudalism to a capitalist system. Although some philosophers believed that this shift resulted in freedom for the working class, Marx argued that opposite. He suggested that the one aim of a capitalist system is profit and that the only way to achieve profit is through the exploitation of workers. Workers become alienated because they no longer control their labor or its products. Capitalists depend on the surplus value that the worker's labor creates in order to receive a profit. The result, for Marx, was class struggle.

Marx argued that capitalism was the root problem of society's ills. Eventually, he believed that capitalism would fall under its own contradictions and socialism would take its place. However, Marx did not think that this would happen peacefully. Capitalists will resist this change and cling to the capitalist system. Thus, Marx argued that in order to stop the exploitation of the working class and end the ills caused by capitalism, workers had to unite together into unions and political parties in order to prepare for the violent revolution that would have to happen.



Frederick Engels

Engels contributed to many of Marx's works and helped support Marx during his time in London. Like Marx, Engels was born in Germany (1820) to a well-to-do family. Engel's father was a textile manufacturer. In 1842, Engels left Prussia to work in his father's Manchester office. His contact with the working class would continue to push him farther to the left of Hegel. In 1845, he published "The Condition of the Working Classes in England." He also published an article in the "Annals" that captured Marx's attention. The two soon met and became friends.

Marx and Engels worked together on a number of projects. They were commissioned to write the "Communist Manifesto" by a secret society known as the "Communist League." Engels also organized and finished the last two volumes of "Capital" using Marx's notes. Engels wrote the "Credos," which was a sort of platform for the "Communist Manifesto." In this work, Engels adopted a catechism like style of questions and answers to explain the principles of communism. He answered questions about what communism is, how the proletariat came to be, and how the abolition of private property would come about.

The friendship between Marx and Engels was an important one, both personally and intellectually. The two men had the same vision of society and argued that a revolution would be necessary to end capitalism's curse. They also shared a concern for the working class and the misery that workers endured under capitalism. Personally, Marx would have found himself in even more desperate measures were it not for Engels. Engels help support Marx and his family, providing them money for food and other necessary items.

Frederick Hegel

Frederick Hegel was a philosopher who had a great deal of influence on Marx's work. Although he died before Marx began studying philosophy, Marx was very interested in his ideas, particularly those arguing that humanity progresses through conflict, revolution, and war and that these conflicts take place between the oppressed and their oppressors (although for Hegel this was religious and not economic). As Marx studied and reacted to Hegel's work, so too did Hegel study and react to Kant's philosophies.

Hegel argued that reason was constantly evolving throughout history, moving toward the consciousness of liberty. He did not believe in the immortality of the soul and suggested that God lived only in humans as a world-spirit. Naturally, this did not make Hegel a popular figure with the church and state at the time he lived. His followers fell into "right" and "left" Hegelian camps with the right arguing for Hegel's more spiritual and conservative aspects and the "left" defending the progressive aspects of Hegel.

One of the aspects of Hegel's philosophy that Marx would argue against was Hegel's failure to carry the dialectic method through to nature and society. Hegel viewed nature and society as unchanging in its present form. He argued that human development had



evolved over time, with each step freeing more people into absolute liberty. He thought that because slavery had been abolished that this liberty had been fully achieved. He failed to see the continuing exploitation that was taking place in society.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was a 17th century materialist philosopher who influenced Marx's work. Although he had died by the time Marx became interested, Kant's theories provided fuel for both Hegel and Marx. Kant's most famous work is the "Critique of Pure Reason." In it, he argues that it is impossible to prove God's existence through the normal means that men have. In this way, he tries to separate religion from science. However, he also argues that individuals have to believe that God exists as there could be no morality without a belief in God.

Jenny Von Westphalen

Jenny married Marx on June 12, 1843. She was the daughter of an aristocratic Prussian family, who were concerned about Marx's ability to support Jenny. The couple lived in poverty in London, after Marx was expelled from France and Germany, and three of their five children died due to a lack of medicine.

Aristotle

Aristotle was a Greek philosopher who contributed greatly to the discipline. Both a great teacher and scientist, he contributed to fields like physics, ethics, politics, philosophy, and biology. He argued that social conflicts came from social and economic inequalities in society. He was one of the first philosophers to make this connection. Marx's PhD thesis included an examination of Aristotle along with the other Greek philosophers.

Giambattista Vico

Giambattista Vico was a Neopolitan philosopher who lived from 1688-1744. Vico first proposed the idea that society or history passes through three stages which correspond to the three stages of human life. His first state was barbarism, the second feudalism, and the third a "new" state. The important part of his theory is that he spoke of an evolution of society through class struggle. He assumed, however, that once society reached the third state the evolution would start over again with a new phase in a new evolution cycle.

Vladimir Lenin

Vladimir Lenin was a bourgeois Marxist who sought to transform Russia through Marx's theories on historical materialism and the problems of capitalism. He followed in Marx's

footsteps, contributing to revolutionary theory and defending Marxism against its detractors. His influence and belief in Marxism would ultimately lead to the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Saint-Simon

Saint-Simon was a French "utopian socialist." Saint-Simon wanted to create the perfect society. His vision included a planned economy, a society promoting the welfare of the poor classes, an end to the leisure class, and a new religion. However, his theory did not discuss or acknowledge class struggle.

Fourier

Fourier was a poor French "utopian socialist." He wanted to create a series of small communities which would feature common property and a distribution of wealth among the people. Fourier ended up dying in a mad house.



Objects/Places

Trevirorum, Germany

Now called Trier, Marx was born in this city on May 5, 1818.

Bonn University

Marx studied law at Bonn University, although his teachers reported that he spent more time drinking and chasing women than he did studying.

University of Berlin

Marx studied philosophy here after leaving Bonn University.

Rhenish Gazette

Marx took a job on this paper and soon rose to editor-in-chief. The government shut the paper down because they did not like the paper's radical theme.

Franco-German Annals

Marx accepted a job at this paper in 1843 when he moved to Paris.

Paris, France

Marx and Jenny moved to Paris in 1843. France expelled him in 1845.

The New Rhenish Gazette

Marx and Engels started this paper in Germany.

Communist Manifesto

Marx and Engels wrote this important work. It was commissioned by the "Communist League."



London, England

Marx and his family moved to London in 1849. Marx died in London in 1883.

Capital

Marx spent twenty-five years of his life on this major work. He completed one volume himself and Engels completed the final two with Marx's notes.

Manuscripts of 1844

One of Marx's first works. He begins to examine alienation in this piece.

The Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution was directly influenced by Marx's works. Lenin, a follower of Marx, led the Revolution and contributed to revolutionary theory.



Themes

The Influence of History

The influence of history permeates Marx for Beginners. As Marx wrote, nothing is ever produced in isolation. Tools, ideas, theories, and other parts of society build on or react to what came before as well as the current situation in society. Rius spends a great deal of time in this book discussing historical philosophers, Marx's own history, and Marx's theories that draw on history. History is an important part of Marxist theory, even as the theory seeks to move society forward into socialism. The influence of history can be seen in both Marx's historical materialism and in his philosophical influences.

Marx's historical materialism argues that society evolves and changes over time. He identifies five different modes of production that society has or will pass into. Society began in primitive community before moving into the slave state, feudal state, capitalist system, and finally to socialist society. Like other philosophers before him, Marx thought that society evolved or moved forward through conflict. Class struggle, war, revolution, and so on pushed society into other modes of production. Thus, what came before helped to determine what would become.

Rius also illustrates the importance of history in Marxist theory by showing the influence of past philosophers and other thinkers on Marx. Marx was upfront about the influence of others in his work. He wrote to Weydemeyer in 1852 that the existence of social classes and the struggles between them had been described long before Marx. Marx built on the foundations that had been laid for him by other philosophers. Even those philosophers who put forth ideas that Marx disagreed with offered him vantage points to further develop and detail his own theories on the world, capitalism, and socialism.

Although Marx's work often looked forward to the socialist society that he felt would inevitably happen, history was an important aspect to his work. Without those historical foundations, philosophers would need to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, in each generation. Marx was able to benefit from many generations of thinkers who helped him build his own theories of the world.

Revolution and Class Struggle

Many people who may know little else about Marxist thought are familiar with the aspect of revolution in Marx's work. Perhaps this is due to the Marxist or Communist label that has been placed on many revolutions and violent conflict during the twentieth century. Revolution and class struggle are integral to Marxist thought, although Marx saw them as a means to an end. The end that he sought was a socialist system where the working class would no longer be exploited. This vision often gets lost in the idea of bloody conflict for many people.



Marx believed that the transition from a capitalist mode of production to a socialist society was inevitable. Capitalism has internal contradictions that will eventually tear it apart. Yet, Marx also saw that the capitalist or those who benefit from the capitalist system are very invested in keeping the status quo where they earn profits and become richer. He knew that capitalists would not willingly give this up for a society of greater equality and justice. This explains why Marx believed that a revolution would need to happen in order for society to move to socialism. Without a revolution, the owners of the means of production will continue to cling to their status and resist change. The only way for change to happen, then, is for the exploited workers to unite together and make the change happen.

According to Marx, exploited workers needed to prepare themselves for the coming revolution. The class struggle would intensify and workers needed to do what they could to protect their interests. Marx called for workers to unite in unions, particularly those who fought for more than better wages, and to form political parties. Both of these actions would help prepare and organize the workers so that when the time was right for revolution, they could act and push society toward socialism.

Capitalism

Marx's theme on capitalism is fairly clear: capitalism is bad. Although this explanation is overly simplistic as capitalists do derive some benefit from the system, Marx believed that the capitalist system contributed to, or caused, many of humanity's ills. The system exploits the working class, creating poverty and misery. Although the working class is most directly effected, the ruling class also experiences humanity's ills such as crime, envy, and injustice. The only way to cure humanity, according to Marx, is to destroy capitalism through a working class revolution.

Marx argues that the aim of capitalist society is to produce profit. However, profit is only possible through the exploitation and alienation of the working class. Capitalists buy the labor power of the worker, who becomes more and more alienated as his labor is separated from what he produces. In order to make a profit, the capitalist pays the worker for only a portion of the value that the worker puts into the commodity through his labor. The richer the capitalist becomes, the poorer the worker becomes.

Marx believed that the only way to end the exploitation of the working class and the misery that they experienced was for the working class to unite. The class struggle between the owners and the working class would continue. However, by uniting, the working class could form unions and political parties to fight for their interests. Although this would not solve the problem, these actions would help prepare the working class for the violent revolution. Only through this revolution could the working class end capitalism and its exploitation and enter into the socialist mode of production.

Style

Perspective

Marx for Beginners is written by Eduardo del Rio, under the pseudonym Rius. Rio is an internationally renowned caricaturist and editorial cartoonist. His work helped establish a new form of comic strips: the political and documentary cartoon book. He has received a number of awards for his work, including the 1968 Grand Prize of the International Salon of Caricature. He currently resides in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

Rio, or Rius, states very clearly in the preface of the book that he wants to use this work to introduce individuals to Marx. As Marx's works tend to be very dense and difficult for the average person to understand, many people avoid them and have never been exposed to Marx's actual writings and thought. While Marx's influence certainly extends across the globe, most people do not have a clear sense of what Marx thought or was trying to achieve. Thus, Rius wants to create an accessible work that individuals can use to learn about Marx.

Rio's intended audience is adult, although the book is written in cartoon format. Advanced high school students, college students, and other interested adult parties would fall within the audience that he is writing for. Rio hopes that through his work, individuals will not only learn more about Marx, but that they will further study his ideas. Given this introduction, his readers will be in a position to better understand what Marx is writing about in his works and what other scholars are arguing about Marx in their own works.

Tone

Oddly enough, given Marx's topic matter of revolution and worker exploitation, the tone of Marx for Beginners is often light hearted and fun. Rius blends a great deal of humor into his cartoons and writing. He is quick to point out the contrast of Marx trying to solve the world's economic problems when he could not solve his own, for example. The tone of the book is one of the work's strengths. As an introduction to Marx's fairly complicated and dense work, the cartoons and humor make the average reader feel connected to the material and willing to wade through the complex topics that Marx discusses.

Yet, this should not indicate that Rius does not take the subject matter seriously. He presents Marx's theories in a straightforward manner and seems to admire Marx and his work. Rius discusses Marx's large influence on the world at many points in the text, illustrating that while humor can be found, the concepts and ideas are important.

Although the book has a tone of humor to it, the reader also finds a fairly authoritative voice within the work. Rius is clearly knowledgeable about Marx and the writing is more objective than subjective. However, it is clear from the text that Rius finds Marx's work better on the particular issues than the philosophers that came before him.

Structure

The format of Marx for Beginners is one of the most striking elements of the book and it sets this work apart from most other works on this important historical figure. Rius has chosen to use cartoons to summarize the work of Karl Marx. He also includes a dictionary of some Marxist terms at the end of the book and a short recommended reading list. The use of cartoons for a work like this has both positives and negatives.

On the positive side, the use of cartoons runs in a straight line from Rius' stated goal of introducing Marx to individuals who have not read his work. The cartoons work well to both help simplify the material and present it in a fun way. The drawings often illustrate what Rius is discussing, making Marx's ideas a bit more clear. In addition, the cartoons are reminiscent of reading the Sunday comics or buying comic books as a child: they are much less daunting than sitting down to wade through *Capital*, for example. Someone who might never pick up one of Marx's works may pick this work up and become interested in Marx. In this, the author's goal is met and the structure works well.

On the negative side, however, using cartoons for Marx does limit the amount of material that Rius can present. Only the most essential items can find room in this book and a lot of Marx's ideas and theories are left out. For a Marxist scholar, the work would fall far short of presenting an adequate discussion of Marx. It is also conceivable that some individuals may not find Rius' sense of humor welcome in such a book.



Quotes

"What?! Try to summarize Marx? That's not only a sacrilege (as most 'Academic' Marxists will say), but a complete waste of time—because comrade Karl is supposed to be completely beyond the range of simple minds," (Preface, p. 7).

"Marx never had a steady income or a permanent job or a bank account...But what he couldn't earn for his own family, he won for millions of others through his writing..." (p. 30).

"Marx's works are considered the working class Bible. Yet it's odd how very few workers understand what he's written. Most of what he wrote is abstract, as difficult as mathematics, but it did change the world..." (p. 34).

"Philosophy had become a straightjacket of jargon and muddles, impossible to make out heads or tails. Marx set himself the job of unraveling this cat's-cradle and begin making philosophy into an exact science, with less fuzzy suppositions, and so give it the practical means to transform the world..." (p. 64).

"Hegel's advice to any worker exploited by his boss would be: don't worry yourself about material oppression, but only about the 'spiritual' kind. By obeying the state (God's representatives on earth) you will find happiness and freedom (of the spirit...)" (p. 73).

"The countless evils of the world stem from the 'defence' of private property: the evils of envy, war, egoism, crime, injustice, the misery of the masses and luxury for the very few..." (p. 82).

"In this book, written with Engels, Marx brings to light the conflict of contraries which goes on within capitalist society, between capital and labour, the inevitable revolt of the working class, and the subsequent defeat of the bourgeoisie...in two words: the Class Struggle," (p. 91).

"He never denied what he owed to others—as in this letter to Weydemeyer, dated March 5, 1852: 'And now as to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of the classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular, historical phases in the development of production; 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society,'" (p. 93).

"The capitalist, it appears, therefore buys their labour with money. They sell him their labour for money. But this is merely the appearance. In reality what they sell to the capitalist is their labour power," (p. 97).



"It goes without saying—the worker works to live. What he earns goes into keeping his family alive, and so he passes the best years of his life doing what he doesn't like doing...while the boss grows richer and richer," (p. 99).

"Communism is the doctrine of the prerequisites for the emancipation of the proletariat," (p. 110).

"The Manifesto is a direct appeal to all workers—Workers of the World, unite! It defends the Communist position that the emancipation of the working class itself must be the act of working class itself. Its lucid, powerful arguments are still potent today. It moves us to take a definite position against the structure of society in which the unjust division of wealth contradicts basic decency," (p. 112).

Capitalism has proven itself unable to solve the problems of the people living under it (not to mention in general of humanity)...and it's well on the road to final crisis and eventual collapse," (p. 124).

"Capital will attempt to resist its own downfall. What will lead to its destruction are capitalism's internal contradictions: but only because of an adversary developing independently of capitalism's will, i.e. the proletariat," (p. 134).

"Marx never imagined a working class movement separate from socialist theory. A socialist party without mass support is a phantom, a body without a head, or vice versa, like the leftist parties which have lost touch with the real problems of workers and peasants," (p. 141).



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the theories of Marx and Hegel. Where did Marx draw from Hegel? Which theory do you believe is better at explaining society and why?

Discuss the influence of earlier philosophers on Marx's work. Which ideas/philosophers did he borrow from and build on? What ideas/philosophers did he argue got their view of society wrong?

How have Marx's theories influenced society? Provide specific examples.

Describe the five modes of production that Marx identifies in his theory of historical materialism. How did Marx believe society would reach the last mode?

What did Marx include in his practical programme for socialism? What advantages and disadvantages does his plan have?

According to Marx and Engels, how does capitalism produce the exploitation of the working class? What do they believe the working class should do to help end this exploitation?

Describe how surplus value occurs. What part does the worker play in this process? How do capitalists benefit from surplus value?

How does the exploitation of the working class happen under the capitalist system? Who benefits from their exploitation? How should they end their exploitation, according to Marx?