

Jordan Peterson & Karl Marx
Seeking the Whole Truth Together

by Arthur M. Peña

*Our enemies confront us with what we don't want to see, and,
because of that, our first response is to use snake detection circuitry on them.
That accounts for our almost immediate capacity to demonize.*
--Jordan Peterson
(Biblical Series II: Genesis 1: Chaos & Order)

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Invitation to Whole Truth Seeking, Together ¹

I would like to see Jordan Peterson have a conversation--not a “debate” but a real whole-truth-seeking conversation--with a genuine Marxist, or Marx-friendly person, such as [Richard Wolff](#), [David Harvey](#), [Terry Eagleton](#), [Slavoy Zizek](#), or [Yanis Varoufakis](#) (with Varoufakis being, I think, the best candidate ² in terms of personal compatibility with Peterson).

Peterson describes the kind of conversation I would like to see (“Conversation on the Way” as he calls it) as follows (and I don't think I have ever encountered a more beautiful or clear articulation of the sort of conversation I have yearned for all my life):

....akin to listening...a form of mutual exploration. It requires true reciprocity on the part of those listening and speaking. It allows all participants to express and organize their thoughts.....All are acting on the premise that they have something to learn....

....it is necessary to respect the personal experience of your conversational partners. You must assume that they have reached careful, thoughtful, genuine conclusions.....You must meditate, too, instead of strategizing towards victory.....you are meditating as you converse....you listen to the other person, and say the new and original things that can rise from deep within of their own accord.

It's as if you are listening to yourself during such a conversation, just as you are listening to the other person. You are describing how you are responding to the new information imparted by the speaker. You are reporting what that information has done to you—what new things it made appear within you, how it has changed your presuppositions, how it has made you think of new questions. You tell the speaker these things, directly. Then they have the same effect on him. In this manner, you both

¹ Note: It is my belief that “left” and “right”, especially the socialist left and the libertarian right, need to have the sort of “conversation on the way” that JP advocates. The aim here, therefore, is not to attack JP personally (though I do sometimes display some frustration, even exasperation, with him...justifiably so in my opinion); the aim is, rather, to encourage him to provide more “steel” man arguments and fewer “straw” man ones, so that we may all have more productive, whole-truth-seeking conversations. I am also presently working on a response to Peterson's **PragerU video**. In his PragerU video, Peterson truly demonizes his ideological enemies, and asserts (absurdly in my opinion) that “all” of their ideas originate with Marx. A link to that video and my (very rough and very incomplete draft) response can be found [here](#). And my critique of Jordan's anti-Marxist arguments during his **debate with Zizek** can be found [here](#) (the debate with Zizek took place after I had written most of this present essay). My critique of a “**Mises vs. Marx**” video that I wrote for my nephew can be found [here](#). A youtube video series version of this present document is in the works as well, [here](#).

² One reason I think Varoufakis would make a good candidate for such a debate/conversation, is that he (like many well-known leftists) is very willing to criticize Marx and the Left, and would therefore probably find at least some common ground with Peterson. For more on that, see [Yanis Varouakis for Peterson](#)

move towards somewhere newer and broader and better. You both change, as you let your old presuppositions die—as you shed your skins and emerge renewed.

A conversation such as this is one where it is the desire for truth itself—on the part of both participants—that is truly listening and speaking³

If a full embodiment of the spirit of this “Conversation on the Way” is not achievable, then, at the very least, I would like to see Peterson and his future Marxist conversational partner conscientiously eschew all ad hominem attacks, and, instead, aim at the sort of “steel-man” arguments (as opposed to *straw-man* arguments) that Peterson advocates here:

The....advantage to employing the Rogerian method is the difficulty it poses to the careless construction of straw-man arguments. When someone opposes you, it is very tempting to oversimplify, parody, or distort his or her position. This is a counterproductive game, designed both to harm the dissenter and to unjustly raise your personal status. By contrast, if you are called upon to summarize someone's position, so that the speaking person agrees with that summary, you may have to state the argument even more clearly and succinctly than the speaker has even yet managed. If you first give the devil his due, looking at his arguments from his perspective, you can (1) find the value in them, and learn something in the process, or (2) hone your positions against them (if you still believe they are wrong) and strengthen your arguments further against challenge. This will make you much stronger. Then you will no longer have to misrepresent your opponent's position (and may well have bridged at least part of the gap between the two of you). You will also be much better at withstanding your own doubts. (Jordan Peterson, from Rule 9)

I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that Jordan Peterson believes himself to be on a kind of crusade against “Marxism”, as he understands it; and yet, he quite consistently (almost always, in fact) mischaracterizes Marxism and demonizes it beyond all recognition, thus utterly failing to follow his own advice on how to have a truth-seeking conversation.

The following are examples⁴ of the way he typically speaks about Marxism (and Marxists):

Anyone with more than a cursory knowledge of 20th century history who dares to claim simultaneously that they have compassion⁵ for the downtrodden and that they are Marxists

³ see complete text of “Conversation on the Way” in Appendix 1.

⁴ See more examples in Appendix 2

⁵ Peterson distorts Marxist thinking here by emphasizing “compassion”. The Marxist view is that the emancipation of the working class must be above all a SELF-emancipation...not some handout from above, or help from some

are revealing either an ignorance of history that is so astounding that it's actually a form of miracle or a kind of malevolence that is so reprehensible that it's almost unspeakable.

--Jordan Peterson (from [Jordan Peterson vs Noam Chomsky on Marxism](#))

*Solzhenitsyn wrote the truth, his truth, hard-learned through his own experiences in the camps, exposing the lies of the Soviet state. No educated person dared defend that ideology⁶ again after Solzhenitsyn published *The Gulag Archipelago*. No one could ever say again, "What Stalin did, that was not true communism."*

--Jordan Peterson ([Rule 8](#))

Since many educated people (e.g. [Varoufakis](#)), including myself, do in fact say that "what Stalin did was not true communism" (not communism as Marx understood it anyway), it would seem that, according to Peterson, we must either be astoundingly ignorant of history, or unspeakably malevolent⁷!

But, after all, it was Marx himself who wrote this:

We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse. There certainly are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider that it is a hindrance to complete harmony. But we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1966/twosouls/3-marx.htm>

And Engels--Marx's right-hand man--wrote this:

"....complete self-government on the American model, and this is what we too must have. How self-government is to be organized and how we can manage, without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America"

Given what Marx and Engels say here, it might be reasonable to think that, in fact, Stalinism was NOT what Marx and Engels meant by "communism", mightn't it?

The Marx who said "we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality" is not easy to reconcile with the "barracks" and "workhouses" of Stalinist Russia, is he?

"compassionate" outsiders: "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" [Hal Draper: The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels \(1971\)](#)

⁶ Which ideology, precisely, he is referring to here is unclear from this text. But since Peterson elsewhere quite clearly blames Marxism for the horrors of the Soviet Union, I think it is safe to assume that it is "Marxism" (as Peterson thinks of it) that is being referred to here.

⁷ This is the sort of wholesale demonization of Marxism and Marxists that I hope JP can be convinced to eschew in the future. (On the other hand, I want people to say what they truly believe; so, if he truly believes what he says here, then, by all means, I would want him to continue to make this sort of assertion.)

The goal of “self-government on the American model...*without a bureaucracy*” is hard to reconcile with the bureaucratic dictatorship of “Communist” Party apparatchiks of Soviet Russia, is it not?

So why does Peterson insist so strongly that it is a sign either of malevolence or historical ignorance for someone to say that the sort of communism that Marx envisioned⁸ was not the sort of communism practiced under Stalin?⁹

Eric Fromm (quoting Marx) makes this very point here:

What Marx would have thought of a system such as Soviet communism he expressed very clearly in a statement of what he called "crude communism," and which referred to certain communist ideas and practices of his time.

This crude communism [note that Fromm is quoting *Marx* here now]:

"appears in a double form; the domination of material property looms so large that it aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone as private property. It wishes to eliminate talent, etc., by force. Immediate physical possession seems to it the unique goal of life and existence.

The role of worker is not abolished but is extended to all men. The relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of things.

Finally, this tendency to oppose general private property to private property is expressed in an animal form; marriage (which is incontestably a form of exclusive private property) is contrasted with the community of women, in which women become communal and common property. One may say that this idea of the community of women is the open secret of this entirely crude and unreflective communism. Just as women are to pass from marriage to universal prostitution, so the whole world of wealth (i.e., the objective being of man) is to pass to the relation of universal prostitution with the community.

⁸ While JP doesn't specifically say, in this text, that the communism he is referring to here is "Marx's" communism, he nevertheless in other places seems to make that direct link, and to lay the blame for Stalinism (and many other social ills) quite directly at the feet of Marx. For example, here, where he says "all these concepts originated with Karl Marx": <https://www.prageru.com/videos/dangerous-people-are-teaching-your-kids>

⁹ Perhaps Peterson simply means that communism "in practice" (as opposed to "in theory") is somehow necessarily the same as Stalinism (or inevitably becomes Stalinism). But, if so, at the very least, he would need to show how Marx's actual ideas actually supported Stalinism. To do so reasonably, he would also have to deal with other factors--apart from mere ideology--that perhaps influenced the rise of Stalinism, such as the destruction left in the wake of WWI (hardly propitious conditions for the sort of wealth-and-prosperity-sharing socialism that Marx envisioned); or the invasion of Russia by Western powers--including the United States (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_intervention_in_the_Russian_Civil_War)--soon after the revolution (hardly likely to create an "open" attitude on the part of the Russian revolutionaries). He would also need to acknowledge just how different many of Marx's ideas were from what was eventually practiced in Stalinist Russia. That, at least, would approach a more "steel man" sort of argument.

This communism, which negates the personality of man in every sphere, is only the logical expression of private property, which is this negation.

Universal envy setting itself up as a power is only a camouflaged form of cupidity which re-establishes itself and satisfies itself in a different way. The thoughts of every individual private property are at least directed against any wealthier private property, in the form of envy and the desire to reduce everything to a common level; so that this envy and levelling in fact constitute the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy and levelling-down on the basis of a preconceived minimum.

How little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it.

The community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by the communal capital, by the community as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a supposed universality; labor as a condition in which everyone is placed, and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community."

[Marx's Concept of Man. Erich Fromm 1961](#)

There is, I think, much that Peterson would agree with in what Marx has written here about “crude communism”¹⁰ (that is, about the sort of “communism” that Stalin presided over): its providing free reign to the spiritual toxin of “envy” and “levelling”, for example; or its appalling tendency to negate the value of things which cannot be “possessed” by everyone equally; or the inadvisability of allowing the standard of the “poor and wantless” to be the standard of society in general.

Given this substantial area of agreement on the problems with *Stalinist* “communism” (“crude” communism, in Marx’s terms), there would, it seems, be material upon which to draw if Peterson wished to construct a *steel-man* argument against *Marx*. After all, there is much in Marx which Peterson could point to as having some merit. He could then build upon that, and even strengthen it--making (in the “Rogerian” spirit) [Marx’s] argument “*even more clearly and succinctly than [Marx] has even yet managed*”--in preparation for what would presumably then be an even stronger argument against Marx.

Far from “steel-manning” Marx, however, Peterson instead frequently misrepresents Marx’s actual ideas, while insisting that in some very real (but not clearly explained) way, Marx is, in essence, responsible for

¹⁰ Indeed, Marx’s critique of “crude communism” is in many ways every bit as stinging as that of Peterson’s. How strange it is, then, to hear Peterson haranguing the masses on the evils of allegedly “Marxist” communism, and blaming it all on Marx--on *Marx*...who has, already, more than a century ago, provided the very *same* critique of what he calls “*crude*” communism!

Stalin. Not only does he often misrepresent Marx's ideas, but, in rather Orwellian fashion, he often turns them into their opposites¹¹.

I am, for that reason, in the process of collecting examples of such misrepresentations (see below), in the hopes that they will come to the attention of Peterson himself, so that he can set about "steel-manning" Marx, rather than straw-manning him.

If Peterson sees the problems of Stalinism (*and* the PC police, *and* post-modernism, *and* identity politics) as being attributable to Marxist ideas¹², but nevertheless rather frequently misrepresents those ideas, sometimes to the point of turning them into their opposites, then he misses what is perhaps the more important question: how and why can ideas be turned into their opposite, and be used in ways antithetical to the original intent?

How, for example, did the writings of Marx, who said this...:

"We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse.....we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality"

....how did the writings of *this* man end up being used to justify Stalinist *barracks and workhouses*? ...how did advocacy for "dictatorship" (governance) of/for/by the working class become justification for "dictatorship" (totalitarian power) over that same working class¹³?

Orwell (the committed socialist) was right: "war" becomes "peace", "freedom" becomes "slavery", and "ignorance" becomes "strength".

But please note: this ideological sleight of hand is not unique to those societies bearing the name of "socialist" or "communist". Far from it. Just ask the Native Americans how they fared under America's "Manifest Destiny"; or ask the Latin Americans how often their right to self-determination was ignored or

¹¹ Shouldn't Marx's own stinging critique of the sort of "communism" which was later to become Stalinism suggest at least a second look at what Marx was *actually* proposing? If Peterson really wants to help us all avoid repeats of the 20th C. totalitarianism, isn't it crucial that we closely investigate this question of how things can become their seeming opposite--how Marx's grassroots anti-statist democratic vision could be claimed by Stalinists as their guide? How "slavery" can be touted as "freedom", and "war" as "peace"? Isn't *that* the lesson Peterson should be taking from Orwell (rather than trying to make the *passionately socialist* Orwell fit into his own anti-socialist crusade as he so often does)?

¹² "All of these concepts originate with Karl Marx":
<https://www.prageru.com/videos/dangerous-people-are-teaching-your-kids>

¹³ I'm not suggesting there can be no relationship of any sort at all between Marx's ideas and their later (apparent) antitheses. There may be. (Heck, even the word "dictatorship" is open to interpretation, and hence open to being abused). I am, rather, pointing out that there is a question here begging for deeper consideration than the sort of unnuanced "Marxism ipso facto Stalinism" non-argument that I am claiming Peterson provides. Indeed, such reductionist argumentation fails to provide a secure foundation for preventing the very evil Peterson claims to be fighting: totalitarianism. Over-simplified (and thus inevitably somewhat misleading) arguments against an evil leave their proponents vulnerable to attack by that same evil. (And by aiming for "steel" argument rather than "straw" argument, I think Peterson could in fact contribute more to a deeper consideration of the nature and causes of totalitarianism.)

suppressed by the "Leader of the Free World".

And this demonic ideological mutation is nothing particularly “modern” either (much less “post” modern!) Just ask the Jews and ‘heretics’ who suffered under the Spanish Inquisition; or the early Christians who suffered at the hands of the Jewish establishment of their day....

No. The evil at work here is not "Marxist". It has been around for ages, and has had many names, and worn many masks.

To focus, then, on any one particular obfuscating mask ("Marxist", "Socialism", "America", "Free World", "Christian", "Muslim", "Jewish"...) which the evil has at times worn, provides it with exactly the sort of opportunity it needs to pop up somewhere else, behind yet another mask--*often behind the very mask ostensibly at war with it* (how often do we become the very thing we hate....?)

I'm not sure what the evil in question is, exactly, or what name we should call it, but it is subtle, pervasive, tricky, shape-shifting.

Hence the need for the kind of taking-the-higher-road argument which Peterson, at his best, suggests:

“When someone opposes you, it is very tempting to oversimplify, parody, or distort his or her position. This is a counterproductive game....If you first give the devil his due, looking at his arguments from his perspective, you can (1) find the value in them, and learn something in the process, or (2) hone your positions against them (if you still believe they are wrong) and strengthen your arguments further against challenge.....”

And so, with a view towards encouraging Jordan Peterson to provide just that sort of “steel argument” against Marxism (should he still wish to argue against it after having “given the devil his due¹⁴”), I have (on the following pages) begun collecting examples of where, instead of rising to the level of his own standards, he has (it seems to me) fallen into the (very human¹⁵) temptation to “oversimplify, parody, or distort” the “devil’s” position....

¹⁴ There is plenty in Marx to criticize, so I have no fear that Jordan will have to throw in the towel, no matter how much he gives the "devil" his due!

¹⁵ Very, very, very, VERY human. I therefore do not wish to suggest that Peterson should be singled out for criticism in this regard--he is human after all. Indeed, he often displays admirable restraint when confronted with people who are doing the very same sort of straw-manning thing to him. So he is to be commended for very often maintaining very high dialogic standards. The black hole he seems to fall into when it comes to Marxism is simply that much more striking in contrast to how often, with other subjects, he is so very careful to seek the truth. We humans...well, we are all very much in the same boat. That's why we need to have more "conversations on the way", and fewer "debates"....

What Jordan asserts about “Marxism”

vs.

What actual Marxists (including Marx and Engels themselves) say¹⁶

<i>From Jordan Peterson</i> ¹⁷	<i>From Marx or other Marxists</i>
“You can't attribute the existence of hierarchy to the west or to capitalism¹⁸, that's a foolish critique, that's the basic Marxist critique, at least part of it.” Oz interview, minute 1:54:00 “...the absurd Marxist proposition that hierarchical structures are a secondary consequence of Western civilization and free market economies¹⁹, which is as preposterous a perspective as you could possibly develop about anything. Hierarchies are a third of a billion years old. You can't blame them on the	The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

¹⁶ I would argue that Peterson actually misrepresents Marx to a much greater extent than can be shown merely by contrasting texts in this way, because Peterson's entire corpus (or much of it) can be seen as an argument--sometimes direct, sometimes indirect--against what he conceives to be the "Marxist doctrine". But demonstrating that takes more explanation, which I tried to do in another document (and in a less forgiving--or less generous--spirit than I have tried to maintain in this present document): [Jordan Peterson's Straw Men](#)

¹⁷ This is very much a work-in-progress. I'm just trying to collect texts that I can place side by side for contrast. If you have other examples, please share them on another document that I have provided, where you have editing privileges and can directly add more examples, here: [More examples for "Peterson & Marx"](#)

¹⁸ Marxists do NOT "attribute the existence of hierarchy to the west or to capitalism". From a Marxist point of view, "hierarchy" goes WAY back...thousands and thousands of years.

¹⁹ Peterson seems to equate "capitalism" with "the free market". This is another sort of straw man argument against Marxism. Capitalism, from a Marxist point of view, cannot be equated with "free trade" (and if Peterson wants to critique Marxist ideas, he should be careful to use Marxist definitions of those ideas). Capitalism, in Marxist analysis, is formulated as "M-C-MM" (Money invested in Commodities in order to extract More Money than was invested); whereas "trade" is "C-M-C" (Commodities produced in order to 'make Money' which can be used to buy other Commodities of more or less equal value). This formulation captures the dynamic and expansive nature of capitalism (i.e. "more!"). For a (sort of) praise lavished on the progressive aspects of Capitalism (e.g. its tendency to create more wealth), one can refer (...wait for it...) to the Communist Manifesto: "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society."

West, or on men, or on capitalism²⁰.

<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/helen-lewis-jordan-peterson>

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>

Before 1857, Marx and Engels occasionally used this term [Asiatic Mode of Production] to refer to a distinct social formation lying between [Tribal Society](#) and Antiquity. Marx and Engels had believed that the great Asian nations were the first we could speak of as civilization (an understanding partly based on Hegel, see: [The Oriental Realm](#)). The last time they used this word was in the [Preface to the Critique of Political Economy](#), having dropped the idea of a distinct Asiatic mode of production, and kept four basic forms of societal evolution: tribal, ancient, feudal, and capitalist.

Engels explained their learning curve in a second footnote to the *Communist Manifesto* in 1888:

²⁰ Marxism (Marx's marxism anyway) does not, in fact, blame evolutionary hierarchies on the West, or on men, or on capitalism. It does, however, suggest that SOME destructive hierarchies may very well be contingent upon historical circumstances, and may therefore be subject to change. In other words, what "is" may not necessarily be what "has to be".... (and I'm sure Peterson would agree). Peterson is right, of course, to criticize some overly dogmatic and ill-informed so-called "Marxist" arguments which may seem to make "capitalism" out to be the Devil Incarnate (and there is plenty of that sort of knee-jerk dogmatism around....on ALL sides....). But, well, it would be wiser to attack the unnuanced dogmatism, not the underlying and more-nuanced ideas themselves. Even the underlying ideas may be critiqued, of course (and, like all ideas, SHOULD be critiqued), but attacking the superficial dogmatic extremes merely makes more fruitful, philosophical, and insight-producing discussion of the more interesting underlying ideas that much more difficult.

	In 1847, the pre-history of society, the social organization existing previous to recorded history, [was] all but unknown. Since then, August von Haxthausen (1792-1866) discovered common ownership of land in Russia, Georg Ludwig von Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history, and, by and by, village communities were found to be, or to have been, the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland. The inner organization of this primitive communistic society was laid bare, in its typical form, by Lewis Henry Morgan's (1818-1861) crowning discovery of the true nature of the gens and its relation to the tribe. With the dissolution of the primeval communities, society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes. I have attempted to retrace this dissolution in <i>The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State</i>, second edition, Stuttgart, 1886. https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/a/s.htm
<i>Marx....took an economic view of history, a deeply materialistic view of history, and believed that people were fundamentally motivated by economic motives²¹one of the problems with that theory is that it doesn't ever answer the question what it is that people value, it assumes value implicitly, and associates that with economic well-being, but that's by no means obvious.</i> Inside the Marxist World View	<i>History does nothing</i>, it “possesses <i>no</i> immense wealth”, it “wages <i>no</i> battles”. It is <i>man</i>, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; “history” is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve <i>its own</i> aims; history is <i>nothing but</i> the activity of man pursuing his aims. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/index.htm "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it

²¹ While Marx certainly saw "economic motives" as "fundamental", I don't think he saw human beings as limited to such motivations, or even primarily motivated by such things. The whole point of socialism, after all, is to free people from some of the material concerns which come with economic insecurity, in order to pursue "higher" aims....much in the same spirit as Maslow with his "hierarchy of needs".

under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>

Marx's "materialistic" or "economic" interpretation of history has nothing whatsoever to do with an alleged "materialistic" or "economic" striving as the most fundamental drive in man.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/ch02.htm>

There is no greater misunderstanding or misrepresentation of Marx than that which is to be found, implicitly or explicitly, in the thought of the Soviet Communists, the reformist socialists, and the capitalist opponents of socialism alike, all of whom assume that Marx wanted only the economic improvement of the working class, and that he wanted to abolish private property so that the worker would own what the capitalist now has. The truth is that for Marx the situation of a worker in a Russian "socialist" factory, a British state-owned factory, or an American factory such as General Motors, would appear essentially the same. This, Marx expresses very clearly in the following:

"An enforced increase in wages (disregarding the other difficulties, and especially that such an anomaly could only be maintained by force) would be nothing more than a better remuneration of slaves, and would not restore, either to the worker or to the work, their human significance and worth.

"Even the equality of incomes which Proudhon demands would only change the relation of the present day worker to his work into a relation of all men to work. Society would then be conceived as an abstract capitalist." ^[58]

The central theme of Marx is the transformation of alienated, meaningless labor into productive, free labor, not the better payment of alienated labor by a private or "abstract" state capitalism.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/ch04.htm>

Simply to mention the arguments of the 'vulgar materialism' denounced by Marx, which come down to denying the reality of thought, consciousness, and ideals, is to reject them. Marxist materialism refuses to assimilate thought to matter, and attributes a very important historical role to consciousness.

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1953/onmarx/on-marxism.htm>

For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>

It should be clear by now why the popular idea of the nature of historical materialism is erroneous. The popular view assumes that in Marx's opinion the strongest psychological motive in man is to gain money and to have more material comfort; if this is the main force within man, so continues this

"interpretation" of historical materialism, the key to the understanding of history is the material desires of men; hence, the key to the explanation of history is man's belly, and his greed for material satisfaction. The fundamental misunderstanding on which this interpretation rests is the assumption that historical materialism is a psychological theory which deals with man's drives and passions. But, in fact, historical materialism is not at all a psychological theory; it claims that the way man produces determines his thinking and his desires, and not that his main desires are those for maximal material gain. Economy in this context refers not to a psychic drive, but to the mode of production; not to a subjective, psychological, but to an objective, economic-sociological factor.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/ch02.htm>

The aim of socialism was the development of the individual personality. What Marx would have thought of a system such as Soviet communism he expressed very clearly in a statement of what he called "crude communism," and which referred to certain communist ideas and practices of his time.

This crude communism [writes *Marx*...] "appears in a double form; the domination of material property looms so large that it aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone as private property. It wishes to eliminate talent, etc., by force. Immediate physical possession seems to it the unique goal of life and existence.

The role of worker is not abolished but is extended to all men. The relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of things.

Finally, this tendency to oppose general private property to private property is expressed in an animal form; marriage (which is incontestably a

form of exclusive private property) is contrasted with the community of women, in which women become communal and common property. One may say that this idea of the community of women is the open secret of this entirely crude and unreflective communism. Just as women are to pass from marriage to universal prostitution, so the whole world of wealth (i.e., the objective being of man) is to pass to the relation of universal prostitution with the community.

This communism, which negates the personality of man in every sphere, is only the logical expression of private property, which is this negation.

Universal envy setting itself up as a power is only a camouflaged form of cupidity which reestablishes itself and satisfies itself in a different way. The thoughts of every individual private property are at least directed against any wealthier private property, in the form of envy and the desire to reduce everything to a common level; so that this envy and levelling in fact constitute the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy and levelling-down on the basis of a preconceived minimum.

How little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it.

The community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by the communal capital, by the community as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a supposed universality; labor as a condition in which everyone is placed, and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community."

	https://www.marxists.org/.../fromm/works/1961/man/ch04.htm
The insane and incomprehensible postmodern²² insistence that all gender differences are socially constructed... Here's the fundamental problem: group identity can be fractionated right down to the level of the individual. That sentence should be written in capital letters. Every person is unique—and not just in a trivial manner: importantly, significantly, meaningfully unique. Group membership cannot capture that variability. Period. None of this complexity is ever discussed by the postmodern/Marxist thinkers. (from Rule 11 in book: 12 Rules For Life: An Antidote to Chaos)	In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all²³. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal²⁴) are measurable by an equal standard only insofar as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded only as workers and nothing else is seen in them, everything else being ignored. Further, one worker is married, another is not; one has more children than another, and so on and so forth. Thus with an equal performance of labor, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will receive more than another. To avoid all these defects, right instead of being equal would have to be unequal. But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society. In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis

²² Since elsewhere Peterson says that "all these concepts originate with Marx", even when he is criticizing "postmodernism", he is also indirectly criticizing Marx here. See: <https://www.prageru.com/videos/dangerous-people-are-teaching-your-kids>

²³ Note: it is the free development of EACH (individual) which is the CONDITION for the free development of ALL. In other words, Marx makes the free development of the INDIVIDUAL the touchstone for, or prerequisite for, any more "collective" sort of advancement. This is hardly emphasizing "group membership" over individual differences! Marx was in no sense the sort of "collectivist" which came later to be associated with Stalinism.

²⁴ Clearly, Marx recognizes that "every person is unique--and not just in a trivial manner". And we see that Marx most certainly *does* discuss "this complexity." Marx was, in fact, highly critical of the very idea of or aspiration towards "equality": "...we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality."

	between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs²⁵! https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm "For Marx the aim of socialism was the emancipation of man, and the emancipation of man was the same as his self-realization in the process of productive relatedness and oneness with man and nature. The aim of socialism was the development of the individual personality. What Marx would have thought of a system such as Soviet communism he expressed very clearly in a statement of what he called "crude communism," and which referred to certain communist ideas and practices of his time." https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/.../ch04.htm "The elimination of all social and political inequality," rather than "the abolition of all class distinctions,²⁶" is similarly a most dubious expression. As between one country, one province and even one place and another, living conditions will always evince a <i>certain</i> inequality which may be reduced to a minimum but never wholly eliminated. The living conditions of Alpine dwellers will always be different from those of the plainsmen. The concept of a socialist society as a realm of <i>equality</i> is a one-sided French concept
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²⁵ Obviously, EACH person is different. Abilities vary, and needs vary.

²⁶ The "heiararchy" and "class distinction" Marx was aiming to 'abolish' is that which makes one person the "owner" of another person's labor power. Period. He was not aiming at some wholesale leveling of all dimensions of social life.

	deriving from the old “liberty, equality, fraternity,” a concept which was justified in that, in its own time and place, it signified a <i>phase of development</i>, but which, like all the one-sided ideas of earlier socialist schools, ought now to be superseded, since they produce nothing but mental confusion, and more accurate ways of presenting the matter have been discovered. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/letters/75_03_18.htm Also see: Why equality is unhelpful as a political goal https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzQZ_NDEzVo Marx and Engels Were Not Egalitarians https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIhIM-jge2c
The claim²⁷ that all gender differences are a consequence of socialization is neither provable, nor disprovable, in some sense, because culture can be brought to bear with such force on groups or individuals that virtually any outcome is attainable, if we are willing to bear the cost. (From Rule 11)	Marx did not believe, as do many contemporary sociologists and psychologists, that there is no such thing as the nature of man; that man at birth is like a blank sheet of paper, on which the culture writes its text. Quite in contrast to this sociological relativism, Marx started out with the idea that man qua man is a recognizable and ascertainable entity; that man can be defined as man not only biologically, anatomically and physiologically, but also psychologically. Of course, Marx was never tempted to assume that "human nature" was identical with that particular expression of human nature prevalent in his own society. ... For Spinoza, Goethe, Hegel, as well as for Marx, man is alive only inasmuch as he is productive, inasmuch as he grasps the world outside of himself in the act of expressing his own specific human

²⁷ I'm not sure if Peterson says that this claim was made by Marx himself, but since Peterson very imprecisely conflates "marxism" with "neo-marxism" with "post-modernism", I thought I should point out that this is not a very Marxist view. (Actually, in his PragerU video, he explicitly claims that "all" such concepts originate with Marx.)

powers, and of grasping the world with these powers.

Inasmuch as man is not productive, inasmuch as he is receptive and passive, he is nothing, he is dead. In this productive process, man realizes his own essence, he returns to his own essence, which in theological language is nothing other than his return to God.

For Marx man is characterized by the "principle of movement," and it is significant that he quotes the great mystic Jacob Boehme in connection with this point. ^[36] The principle of movement must not be understood mechanically but as a drive, creative vitality, energy; human passion for Marx "is the essential power of man striving energetically for its object."

The concept of productivity as against that of receptivity can be understood more easily when we read how Marx applied it to the phenomenon of love. "Let us assume man to be man," he wrote, "and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the manifestation of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a beloved person, then your love is impotent and a misfortune." ^[37] Marx expressed also very specifically the central significance of love between man and woman as the immediate relationship of human being to human being. Arguing against a crude communism which proposed the communalization of all sexual relation, Marx wrote: "In the relationship with woman, as the prey and the handmaid of communal lust, is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself; for the secret of this

	relationship finds its unequivocal, incontestable, open and revealed expression in the relation of man to woman and in the way in which the direct and natural species relationship is conceived. The immediate, natural and necessary relation of human being to human being is also the relation of man to woman. In this natural species relationship man's relation to nature is directly his relation to man, and his relation to man is directly his relation to nature, to his own natural function. Thus, in this relation is sensuously revealed, reduced to an observable fact, the extent to which human nature has become nature for man and to which nature has become human nature for him. From this relationship man's whole level of development can be assessed. https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/ch04.htm
Derrida described his own ideas as a radicalized form of Marxism. Marx attempted to reduce history and society to economics, considering culture the oppression of the poor by the rich²⁸. When Marxism was put into practice²⁹ in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, Cambodia and elsewhere, economic resources were brutally redistributed. Private property was eliminated, and rural people forcibly collectivized. (From Rule 11)	“...complete self-government on the American model, and this is what we too must have. How self-government is to be organized and how we can manage, without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America and the first French Republic, and is being shown even today by Australia, Canada and the other English colonies....” --Engels We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse.

²⁸ This seems to me to be a crude bastardization of the actual Marxist idea that "the ruling ideas of society are the ideas of the ruling class" (i.e. where there are Kings in charge, there are, not surprisingly, ideas like "the divine right of kings"...). Certainly, Marx never saw "culture" (if by culture we mean art, music, advancement in legal systems, science, etc.) as "the oppression of the poor by the rich". On the contrary, Marx criticized the sort of "crude" communism which he abhorred by saying more or less the same thing Peterson that said of it: *"How little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it."*

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/index.htm>

²⁹ This "Marxism" allegedly "put into practice" is rather hard to reconcile with Marx's and Engel's advocacy of "complete self-government on the American model".... And it entirely fails to differentiate between "Marx", "Marxism", "Marxist-Leninism", "Stalinism", "Maoism", etc. etc. etc. This is dismally far from any sort of "precision" of speech....

There certainly are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider that it is a hindrance to complete harmony. But **we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality.**

--Marx, Engel, et al., Communist Journal, 1847

The aim of socialism was the development of the individual personality. What Marx would have thought of a system such as Soviet communism he expressed very clearly in a statement of what he called "crude communism," and which referred to certain communist ideas and practices of his time.

"This crude communism" [says Marx] "which negates the personality of man in every sphere, is only the logical expression of private property, which is this negation. Universal envy setting itself up as a power is only a camouflaged form of cupidity which reestablishes itself and satisfies itself in a different way. The thoughts of every individual private property are at least directed against any wealthier private property, in the form of envy and the desire to reduce everything to a common level; so that this envy and levelling in fact constitute the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy and levelling-down on the basis of a preconceived minimum. How little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it."

(Fromm's "Marx's Concept of Man",
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/index.htm> , chapter 4)

Against this transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into

	masters of society -- an inevitable transformation in all previous states -- the Commune made use of two infallible expedients. In this first place, it filled all posts -- administrative, judicial, and educational -- by election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, with the right of the same electors to recall their delegate at any time. And in the second place, all officials, high or low, were paid only the wages received by other workers. The highest salary paid by the Commune to anyone was 6,000 francs. In this way an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism was set up, even apart from the binding mandates to delegates to representative bodies which were also added in profusion. This shattering of the former state power and its replacement by a new and really democratic state is described in detail in the third section of <i>The Civil War</i>. But it was necessary to dwell briefly here once more on some of its features, because in Germany particularly the superstitious belief in the state has been carried over from philosophy into the general consciousness of the bourgeoisie and even to many workers.” https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/civ-war-intro.htm
For that man be delivered from revenge—that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms. The tarantulas³⁰, of course, would have it otherwise. “What justice means to us is precisely that the world be filled with the storms of our revenge”—thus they speak to each other. “We shall wreak vengeance and abuse on all whose equals we are not”—thus do the tarantula-hearts vow. “And ‘will to equality’ shall henceforth be the	We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse. There certainly are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider that it is a hindrance to complete harmony. But we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality.

³⁰ Peterson has--erroneously and on very many occasions--associated Marxism with the ideas of such "tarantulas (e.g. the will to equality)". This demonization of Marx and Marxists is only heightened by the use of the word 'tarantula'. And this is a dangerous thing to do (just ask the Rwandans what how the term "cockroach" served to dehumanize people to the point where they could be macheted to death.

name for virtue; and against all that has power we want to raise our clamor!" You preachers of equality³¹, the tyrant-mania of impotence clamors thus out of you for equality: your most secret ambitions to be tyrants thus shroud themselves in words of virtue.

(from Rule 11)

--Marx, Engel, et al., Communist Journal, 1847

For Marx the ...**aim of socialism was the development of the individual personality. What Marx would have thought of a system such as Soviet communism he expressed very clearly in a statement of what he called "crude communism," and which referred to certain communist ideas and practices of his time.** This crude communism....**aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone as private property. It wishes to eliminate talent, etc., by force.** Immediate physical possession seems to it the unique goal of life and existence. **The role of worker is not abolished but is extended to all men.** The relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of things. Finally, this tendency to oppose general private property to private property is expressed in an animal form; marriage (which is incontestably a form of exclusive private property) is contrasted with the community of women, in which women become communal and common property. One may say that this idea of the community of women is the open secret of this entirely crude and unreflective communism. Just as women are to pass from marriage to universal prostitution, so the whole world of wealth (i.e., the objective being of man) is to pass to the relation of universal prostitution with the community. **This communism, which negates the personality of man in every sphere, is only the logical expression of private property,** which is this negation. **Universal envy setting itself up as a power is only a camouflaged form of cupidity which reestablishes itself and satisfies itself in a different way. The thoughts of every individual private property are at least directed against any wealthier private property, in the form of envy and the desire to reduce everything to a common**

³¹ Marx was not a preacher of equality. On the contrary, he was a critic of the concept.

	level; so that this envy and levelling in fact constitute the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy and levelling-down on the basis of a preconceived minimum. How little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it. The community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by the communal capital, by the community as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a supposed universality; labor as a condition in which everyone is placed, and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community." https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/ch04.htm
The socialism that soon afterward became so attractive to me as an alternative proved equally insubstantial; with time, I came to understand, through the great George Orwell³², that much of such thinking found its motivation in hatred of the rich and successful, instead of true regard for the poor. Besides, the socialists were more intrinsically capitalist than the capitalists. They believed just as strongly in money. They just thought that if	...please notice that I am arguing for Socialism³⁶, not against it. But for the moment I am advocatus diaboli. ...it is no use writing off the current distaste for Socialism as the product of stupidity or corrupt motives. If you want to remove that distaste you have got to understand it, which means getting inside the mind of the ordinary objector to Socialism, or at least regarding his viewpoint sympathetically. No case is really answered until it has had a fair hearing. Therefore, rather paradoxically, in order to defend Socialism it is necessary to start by attacking it.

³² Well, this same "great Orwell" made it quite plain that he was arguing "for socialism, not against it". He does seem to have been a critic of "orthodox Marxism". I'm not sure what he thought of Marx himself, but if memory serves, the "Old Major" of "Animal Farm" represented Marx, and that character seemed to be an honorable one.

³⁶ Shouldn't Marx's stinging critique of the sort of "communism" which was later to become Stalinism suggest at least a second look at what Marx was actually proposing? If Peterson really wants to help us all avoid repeats of the 20th C. totalitarianism, isn't it crucial that we closely investigate this question of how things can become their seeming opposite--how Marx's grassroots anti-statist democratic vision could be claimed by Stalinists as their guide? How "slavery" can be touted as "freedom", and "war" as "peace"? Isn't *that* the lesson Peterson should be taking from Orwell (rather than trying to make Orwell fit into his own anti-socialist crusade)?

different people had the money, the problems plaguing humanity would vanish.

...

For that man be delivered from revenge—that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms. The tarantulas, of course, would have it otherwise. “What justice means to us is precisely that the world

be filled with the storms of our revenge”—thus they speak to each other. “We shall wreak vengeance and abuse

on all whose equals we are not”—thus do the tarantula-hearts vow. “And ‘will to equality’ shall henceforth be the name for virtue; and against all that has power we want to raise our clamor!” You preachers of equality, the

tyrant-mania of impotence clamors thus out of you for equality: your most secret ambitions to be tyrants thus shroud themselves in words of virtue.

The incomparable English essayist George Orwell knew this sort of thing well. In 1937, he wrote *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which was in part a scathing attack on upper-class British socialists (this, despite being inclined towards socialism himself³³). In the first half of this book, Orwell portrays the appalling conditions faced by UK miners in the 1930s....

Orwell wrote *The Road to Wigan Pier* for the Left Book Club, a socialist publishing group that released a select volume every month. After

....In the first part of this book I illustrated, by a few brief sidelights, the kind of mess we are in; in this second part I have been trying to explain why, in my opinion, so many normal decent people are repelled by the only remedy, namely by Socialism³⁷

. Obviously the most urgent need of the next few years is to capture those normal decent ones before Fascism plays its trump card. I do not want to raise here the question of parties and political expedients. More important than any party label (though doubtless the mere menace of Fascism will presently bring some kind of Popular Front into existence) is the diffusion of Socialist doctrine in an effective form. People have got to be made ready to act as Socialists. There are, I believe, countless people who, without being aware of it, are in sympathy with the essential aims of Socialism, and who could be won over

almost with-out a struggle if only one could find the word that would move them. Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty, everyone who has a genuine hatred of tyranny and war, is on the Socialist side, potentially. My job here, therefore, is to suggest--necessarily in very general terms--how a reconciliation might be effected between Socialism and its more intelligent enemies.

.....The job of the thinking person, therefore, is not to reject Socialism but to make up his mind to humanize it.

http://www.george-orwell.org/The_Road_to_Wigan_Pier/12.html

What Marx would have thought of a system such as Soviet communism he expressed very clearly in a statement of what he called "crude communism,".....This crude communism "appears

³³ "inclined towards socialism"...? "*Inclined towards*"...??? Actually, it would be more accurate to say that Orwell was a passionate and committed socialist, as he makes clear in the very same book Peterson quotes from in this chapter. Strangely enough (or perhaps predictably, given Peterson's pro-capitalist ideological leanings), Peterson doesn't point out that Orwell himself is a rather important counter-example to the picture of socialists that he is trying to paint. On the contrary, he minimizes Orwell's commitment to socialism ("inclined towards", indeed....!).

³⁷ I think Peterson greatly misrepresents Orwell's true aims and arguments. Orwell is clearly not arguing against socialism. He is, rather, criticizing (quite vehemently to be sure) certain elements within the socialist world (including so-called "orthodox Marxists"). But Orwell is seeking to promote socialism--not hinder its progress--in part by waking socialists up to their own shortcomings. He is, in other words, a leftist critiquing the left. Peterson, on the other hand, seems to be using Orwell rather selectively in an attempt to paint "socialism" (and "socialists") with a very broad (and demonizing) brush.

reading the first half of his book, which deals directly with the miners' personal circumstances, it is impossible not to feel sympathy for the working poor. Only a monster could keep his heart hardened through the accounts of the lives Orwell describes³⁴ ...

....

In book's second half, however, Orwell turned his gaze to a different problem: the comparative unpopularity of socialism in the UK at the time, despite the clear and painful inequity observable everywhere. He concluded that the tweed-wearing, armchair-philosophizing, victim-identifying, pity-and-contempt-dispensing social-reformer types frequently did not like the poor, as they claimed. Instead, they just hated the rich³⁵. They disguised their resentment and jealousy with piety, sanctimony and self-righteousness. Things in the unconscious—or on the social justice-dispensing leftist front—haven't changed much, today.

....

George Orwell understood what was going on under Stalin, and he made it widely known. He published *Animal Farm*, a fable satirizing the Soviet Union, in 1945, despite encountering serious resistance to the book's release. Many who should have known better retained their blindness for long after this. Nowhere was this truer than France, and nowhere truer in France than among the intellectuals.

(Peterson, from Rule 11)

in a double form; **the domination of material property looms so large that it aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone as private property. It wishes to eliminate talent, etc., by force. Immediate physical possession seems to it the unique goal of life and existence. The role of worker is not abolished but is extended to all men. The relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of things.Universal envy setting itself up as a power is only a camouflaged form of cupidity which reestablishes itself and satisfies itself in a different way. The thoughts of every individual private property are at least directed against any wealthier private property, in the form of envy and the desire to reduce everything to a common level; so that this envy and levelling in fact constitute the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the culmination of such envy and levelling-down on the basis of a preconceived minimum.** How little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it. The community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by the communal capital, by the community as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a supposed universality; labor as a condition in which everyone is placed, and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community."

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/ch04.htm>

³⁴ Hence, the arguably primary source of socialism's appeal not only to the intelligentsia, but to great numbers of working class people as well, throughout the world.

³⁵ Again, this is precisely the same argument that Marx himself makes against "crude" communism.

Carl Jung was very, very helpful in this. He faced these stories with a beginner's mind and presumed there was something to them that he didn't understand, given that they were at the very bloody bottom of our civilization, which is historically perfectly clear. They came out of the mists of time, and he wasn't satisfied with the Freudian idea that God was just the Father—the Marxist idea³⁸ that religion was the opiate of the masses. It's like, if religion was the opiate of the masses, then communism was the methamphetamine of the masses, I can tell you that.

<https://jordanbpeterson.com/transcripts/biblical-series-ii/>

The foundation of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man* – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the *fantastic realization* of the human essence since the *human essence* has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle *against that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion.

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people. The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to *give up a condition that requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is, therefore, *in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

³⁸ "The Marxist idea" on the subject is actually far more complex than that. Also Marx called it the "opium" of the people--not the "opiate" of the people--and there is, I think, a subtle but important difference. It was something people themselves turned to in order to escape suffering--not necessarily something "imposed" from above in order to stupefy the masses into mindless obedience (though it CAN be used that way as well). Hence the sentence that Marx writes just before the more famous (and always quoted out of context) one: "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering." Religion as expressing something "real", and as "protesting" against something "real"--that paints a rather different picture than the one intended by those who (mis)quote that one word... "opium"....

“Malthusian Marxist biologists....[say that] the only way forward to planetary salvation is to accept excessive restrictions on flourishing and growth, there is no way the planet can support us if we are all rich, especially if we have first world living standards”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spxPAGpxiFQ>

(at minute 3:20)

As Marx wrote, “**The hatred of the English working class for Malthus**—the ‘mountebank-parson,’ as Cobbett *rudely* called him...—**was thus fully justified** and the people’s instinct was correct here, in that they felt that he was no *man of science*, but a *bought advocate* of their opponents, a shameless sycophant of the ruling classes.”

<https://monthlyreview.org/1998/12/01/malthus-essay-on-population-at-age-200/>

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and **to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.**

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

Appendix 1

From Chapter 9, of Jordan Peterson’s book “12 Rules for Life”:

Conversation on the Way³⁹

The final type of conversation, akin to listening, is a form of mutual exploration. It requires true reciprocity on the part of those listening and speaking. It allows all participants to express and organize their thoughts. A conversation of mutual exploration has a topic, generally complex, of genuine interest to the participants. Everyone participating is trying to solve a problem, instead of insisting on the a priori validity of their own positions. All are acting on the premise that they have something to learn. This kind of conversation constitutes active philosophy, the highest form of thought, and the best preparation for proper living.

The people involved in such a conversation must be discussing ideas they genuinely use to structure their perceptions and guide their actions and words. They must be existentially involved with their philosophy: that is, they must be living it, not merely believing or understanding it. They also must have inverted, at least temporarily, the typical human preference for order over chaos (and I don’t mean the chaos typical of

³⁹ I don’t think I have ever encountered a more beautiful or clear articulation of the sort of conversation I have yearned for all my life....

mindless antisocial rebellion). Other conversational types—except for the listening type—all attempt to buttress some existing order. The conversation of mutual exploration, by contrast, requires people who have decided that the unknown makes a better friend than the known.

You already know what you know, after all—and, unless your life is perfect, what you know is not enough. You remain threatened by disease, and self-deception, and unhappiness, and malevolence, and betrayal, and corruption, and pain, and limitation. You are subject to all these things, in the final analysis, because you are just too ignorant to protect yourself. If you just knew enough⁴⁰, you could be healthier and more honest. You would suffer less. You could recognize, resist and even triumph over malevolence and evil. You would neither betray a friend, nor deal falsely and deceitfully in business, politics or love. However, your current knowledge has neither made you perfect nor kept you safe. So, it is insufficient, by definition—radically, fatally insufficient. You must accept this before you can converse philosophically, instead of convincing, oppressing, dominating or even amusing.

You must accept this before you can tolerate a conversation where the Word that eternally mediates between order and chaos⁴¹ is operating, psychologically speaking. To have this kind of conversation, it is necessary to respect the personal experience of your conversational partners. You must assume that they have reached careful, thoughtful, genuine conclusions (and, perhaps, they must have done the work that justifies this assumption). You must believe that if they shared their conclusions with you, you could bypass at least some of the pain of personally learning the same things (as learning from the experience of others can be quicker and much less dangerous). You must meditate, too, instead of strategizing towards victory. If you fail, or refuse, to do so, then you merely and automatically repeat what you already believe, seeking its validation and insisting on its rightness. But if you are meditating as you converse, then you listen to the other person, and say the new and original things that can rise from deep within of their own accord.

⁴⁰ I probably agree with what he is ultimately trying to say here (though I'm not entirely sure about that), but my first (and second and third) instinct is to respond by saying that we are not, "in the final analysis", subject to suffering because of "ignorance", and that, even if we "knew enough", we would still be subject to suffering. I think Peterson would actually agree with that, so this is perhaps a minor squabble over emphasis on "knowledge". On the other hand, it may in fact point to deeper contradictions or disagreements (e.g. about the sort of Christianity he explores—a rather more existentialist Christianity than I think many actually devout Christians would be comfortable with—an existentialist Christianity which, to me, often seems to imply that humans can be like Joseph Campbell's thousand-faced "Hero"...forging their own salvation, as it were, rather than accepting "Christ's work" of "atonement".....)

⁴¹ I believe Peterson uses the word "chaos" in crucially imprecise ways, very often associating it with what most people think of as chaos (disorder, suffering, etc.) and only sometimes with "potentiality" or with what is merely "the unknown". When he speaks similarly of the "Tao", as "the middle way" between so-called "order" and so-called "chaos" (with the inevitably negative connotations of that word, as well as numerous actually negative examples he provides), and when he then goes on to associate "order" with "the masculine" and "chaos" with the "feminine", I think the (somewhat "reactionary" in my view) Culture Warrior Peterson is muddying the waters a bit.... The Tao is NOT about balancing "chaos" with "order", but rather about balancing the masculine with the feminine (among other essentially positive dualities), and it is this balance itself which is "order". And, conversely, it is the imbalance between the masculine and the feminine that is "chaos" (in the negative sense). He does sometimes address this in more precise ways, but the overall thrust of his discussions are rather more imprecise. Once he introduces the imprecision alluded to above, and thus allows "chaos" to refer both to negative disorder AND to "the feminine", then the more reactionary political implications he sometimes allows to emerge in his discussions can find fertile ground in the sometimes even more reactionary minds of a not negligible number of his fans....

It's as if you are listening to yourself during such a conversation, just as you are listening to the other person. You are describing how you are responding to the new information imparted by the speaker. You are reporting what that information has done to you—what new things it made appear within you, how it has changed your presuppositions, how it has made you think of new questions. You tell the speaker these things, directly. Then they have the same effect on him. In this manner, you both move towards somewhere newer and broader and better. You both change, as you let your old presuppositions die—as you shed your skins and emerge renewed.

A conversation such as this is one where it is the desire for truth itself—on the part of both participants—that is truly listening and speaking. That's why it's engaging, vital, interesting and meaningful. That sense of meaning is a signal from the deep, ancient parts of your Being. You're where you should be, with one foot in order, and the other tentatively extended into chaos and the unknown. You're immersed in the Tao, following the great Way of Life. There, you're stable enough to be secure, but flexible enough to transform. There, you're allowing new information to inform you—to permeate your stability, to repair and improve its structure, and expand its domain. There the constituent elements of your Being can find their more elegant formation. A conversation like that places you in the same place that listening to great music places you, and for much the same reason. A conversation like that puts you in the realm where souls connect, and that's a real place. It leaves you thinking, "That was really worthwhile. We really got to know each other." The masks came off, and the searchers were revealed.

So, listen, to yourself and to those with whom you are speaking. Your wisdom then consists not of the knowledge you already have, but the continual search for knowledge, which is the highest form of wisdom. It is for this reason that the priestess of the Delphic Oracle in ancient Greece spoke most highly of Socrates, who always sought the truth. She described him as the wisest living man, because he knew that what he knew was nothing.

Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't.

Appendix 2

Examples of the extreme degree of demonization which characterizes Peterson's treatment of Marxism and Marxists.

I was convinced by Orwell's analysis that there was something other than brotherly compassion motivating the theory that the world could be properly divided into the oppressed and the oppressor and that all⁴² of the

⁴² Note the straw man: "all".

suffering of humanity could be laid at the feet of that divisions....Well, how do you know about the Marxists? How do you know if most of them had sympathy for the working class? You know, maybe that was genuine. How do you distinguish that from resentment of the successful⁴³? And I would say, ah, by the murders⁴⁴It happened in Russia...it happened across China...it happened in Viet Nam....it happened in Cambodia...I mean, how many damn examples do you need before you think something's rotten in the state of Denmark....you still got North Korea to deal with, I mean what kind of place is that⁴⁵?.....anyways, as far as I'm concerned the historical evidence is in, and the idea that Marxist doctrine is genuinely based on sympathy⁴⁶ for the working class is a lie...history itself has shown that that's false⁴⁷....

--Jordan Peterson--[Inside the Marxist World View](#)

I don't know if it's as reprehensible to say [speaking of the Nazis] that a given ethnic group should be consigned to the fire and to say [speaking of the USSR] that wasn't real communism, but they're damn close⁴⁸. And when I hear someone say, "that wasn't real communism", I know what they mean. What they mean was, "If I was the dictator in Stalin's shoes⁴⁹, I personally would have brought in the Utopia". That's what that statement means. Or it means an ignorance of history that's so utterly appalling that any political statement made on behalf of that person whatsoever should immediately be followed by a paroxysm of extreme embarrassment..

--Jordan Peterson--<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXgZAdaMtS8>

Question from audience: "What can Marxism contribute to our modern day world?" [Jordan answers]: "It can contribute Venezuela⁵⁰....We've seen what [Marxism] can contribute. I don't know how many bloody times we have to run the experiment. You know, "That wasn't real Marxism". I know what that sentence means. What that means is, well, if I was the dictator, with my profound understanding of Marx's real intent, and my universal benevolent compassion, uncontaminated by any proclivity towards darkness or sin, I would bring on the socialist utopia⁵¹. That's what it means, fundamentally. And if someone says that and claims

⁴³ Note how he has now inserted the word "successful" instead of "oppressor".

⁴⁴ An interesting, even if not unassailable, response: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnlisdVaCnUE>

⁴⁵ Good question. What kind of place IS North Korea? Marxist???? Really???? This strategy of asking rhetorical questions (to which the answer is, of course, "obvious" to people who have already made up their minds) is extremely troubling to me.

⁴⁶ Marx spoke of the SELF-emancipation of the working class...not condescending "sympathy" for the working class.

⁴⁷ "history itself" has shown...? or is it, rather, Jordan's interpretation of history that seems to show...?

⁴⁸ So, to say that Stalinism was not (from a Marxist point of view) real communism (because it wasn't democratic) is equivalent to saying that Jews should be destroyed....?

⁴⁹ "communist dictator", from a Marxist point of view, is an oxymoron. As Roxa Luxemburg said: "There is no socialism without democracy, and no democracy without socialism. And, similarly, from Trotsky: "Socialism needs democracy like the human body needs oxygen."

⁵⁰ I find it especially troubling that Peterson is demonizing Venezuela at precisely the same time that the President of the United States--the traditional enemy--in-chief of socialism--has explicitly announced an ideological (and material) war on what the President is calling "socialism". Peterson, either wittingly or unwittingly, is functioning as an intellectual apologist (and dare I say "propagandist"?) for the Trump Administration's war on socialism.

⁵¹ It is difficult (for me) to imagine a more unjust and more demonized interpretation than this, of the sentence "that wasn't real Marxism". "That's what it means...". Oh, really?

that then you should get the hell away from them as fast as you possibly can⁵². Okay, so Marx was concerned about inequality⁵³ and there are reasons to be concerned about inequality, but the problem with Marxism is that it lays the cause of inequality at the feet of the fundamental institutions of the West--the free market, democracy, capitalism, patriarchy (the hated word). Inequality is not caused by the institutions of the West. That's wrong. Inequality is the fundamental rule of existence....I think Marxism doesn't have a damn thing, I think Marxism has already contributed enough millions of corpses to have finished with its contributions.The reason there's a leftwing and the reason there *should* be a leftwing is because...inequality is a problem, but that doesn't mean you can lay it at the feet of the institutions of the West, and that's where Marxism goes wrong; and it also doesn't mean that we know how to fix inequality⁵⁴.”

--Jordan Peterson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ITGu35BpZs>

...The radical types don't believe that there is anything but power...another thing that annoys me about the universities and this doctrine that I've been combating...Your argument is predicated on the idea that there's such a thing as merit, that there's such a thing as things worth doing, and the real radical types would debate that⁵⁵, they just say that you're using the idea of meritocracy to justify your position in the patriarchal tyranny....There isn't any "you"...you're just an avatar for your privilege.

--Jordan Peterson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ITGu35BpZs>

Appendix 3

Other sources taking issue with Peterson's critique of Marx.

These sources are of varying quality (as are different parts of my own work!), as some of them weaken their argument by attacking Peterson personally. Nevertheless, I think there is value in much of what they have to say.

⁵² ...which means that you should "get the hell away from" eminently worthy-of-being-heard people like Yanis Varoufakis, and Zizek, and Terry Eagleton, and David Harvey. And which means you should "get the hell away from" me, the author of the essay. Now, it is possible to be charitable here, and assume that Peterson has merely worked himself into a virtue-signalling frenzy in the presence of people who think like him, but this is a long-term sustained crusade that he is on. This is not merely a one-off act of intellectual attack and aggression.

⁵³ Even his attempt at granting Marx a bit of credit is misleading, because Marx was actually a CRITIC of the idea of "equality".

⁵⁴ Yes, good point. We don't know how to fix inequality. But demonizing Marxist ideas about it will not help. But, from a Marxist point of view, "inequality" (in the sense of inherent differences of talent, and variability of needs and abilities) is not something to be "fixed" at all, but adjusted to and accommodated, sometimes even celebrated and set to flourish.

⁵⁵ I suspect that, in fact, there exist virtually no such people in the world, who would actually deny that "merit" exists, or who would deny that there are things "worth doing". Yes, they may critique the idea that our present power structure is really a "meritocracy", but that is rather different.

I recommend starting with Terry Eagleton's "Why Marx was Right". It is not a critique of Peterson's views on Marx, but Eagleton does provide a view of Marx which sharply contrasts with Peterson's views.

Why Marx was Right (Terry Eagleton)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYktnB7j81o>

A Marxist response to Jordan Peterson's criticism of the Communist Manifesto

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42eJu22scY8>

Peter Joseph - Critique of Jordan B. Peterson (vs Slavoj Zizek: "Happiness: Capitalism vs. Marxism"):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=263&v=n7O_9708RmU

Why Equality is unhelpful as a political goal⁵⁶

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzQZ_NDEzVo

My own video introducing the topic of Peterson misrepresents Marx:

[Does Jordan Peterson get Marxism right?](#)

[Marx and Engels Were Not Egalitarians](#)

[Learning about Marx with Jordan Peterson \(feat. Anarchopac and Red Plateaus\)](#)

[Jordan Peterson Is Everything He Criticizes \(And Can't Read\)](#)

(Especially important is the segment from minute 2:25 - 5:28, as it deals with the way Peterson uses Orwell in his arguments against socialism, in spite of the fact that Orwell was himself a socialist.)

[Jordan Peterson VS Noam Chomsky on Marxism](#)

[Jordan Peterson's Fatal Weakness? Marxism. \(TMBS 66 ft. Richard Wolff\)](#)

(sarcastic, but, well, not too far off the mark at all)

[Richard Wolff responds to Jordan B. Peterson](#)

(not a great video IMO, as it takes an overly hostile tone)

Did Karl Marx Kill Millions? (Answering Shapiro and Peterson)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0_RKOupV3k

⁵⁶ Jordan Peterson writes: "Every person is unique—and not just in a trivial manner: importantly, significantly, meaningfully unique. Group membership cannot capture that variability. Period." True. But he also writes: "None of this complexity is ever discussed by the postmodern/Marxist thinkers." Not true.

Jordan Peterson Takedown with Ben Burgis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_sEPK9krzQ

[Love Trumps Hate: On Peterson, Cultural Marxism, and Postmodernism](#) (Peter Rollins)

[Jordan Peterson Doesn't Understand Marxism](#) (second half deals with F. Hayek)

The Intellectual Dark Web Doesn't Understand Marx

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUY_zEkVz88

Answering Jordan Peterson on Marxism (Zero Books, “capitalist realism”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGld3FbDY6s>

What Jordan Peterson Gets Wrong About Marx, Postmodernism, and The Left (Never Speak in Absolutes)

[What Jordan Peterson Gets Wrong About Marx, Postmodernism, and The Left](#)

[Jordan Peterson is a Marxist](#) (only indirectly related to the actual subject of Marxism)

[Jordan Peterson Doesn't Understand Marx](#)

[Calculating Capitalism's Death Toll](#)⁵⁷

Especially recommended (though it is not actually a review of the debate):

Norman Geras: [SEVEN TYPES OF OBLOQUY: TRAVESTIES OF MARXISM](#)

Note: While Norman Geras' essay is obviously not a review of *Peterson's* remarks on the Communist Manifesto, it *could* serve as one, given the striking similarity of the “travesties” observed. Peterson mischaracterizes Marxist thought in ways very much like those outlined in Geras's book.

Geras is primarily concerned with the remarkable tendency for what he calls “the Left” (and what in today's climate I would call “liberals” or “progressives”) to try to “distance” themselves from Marx while at the same time overtly supporting a great deal of what Marxism has traditionally stood for. Peterson, too, often displays thinking which is really rather Marxist in quality and spirit, even as he proceeds with his relentless crusade against it.

However, the most remarkable thing which Geras observes is the way in which this “distancing” from Marx on the part of Left often occurs not through reasonable critique of Marxist thought (in spite of

⁵⁷ An interesting video, which points out that Peterson (and other anti-Marxists) rarely provide a balanced view of “death tolls”, in that they rarely mention the death tolls of as a result of capitalism or Western colonialism or imperialism.

there being ample room for such reasonable criticism), but rather through what Geras argues is little more than “caricature, ill-informed oversimplification and generally facile disputation”:

There is....plenty of room for difference with, and for difference within, this tradition of thought; for serious substantive criticism of it; for argument over its shortcomings that is precise and worthwhile. Why, then, with no lack of matter for sober critical discussion, is there on the Left today such a volume of caricature, ill-informed oversimplification and generally facile disputation in the treatment of Marxist thought?

And it precisely this, too, that I find most remarkable--astonishing even--about Peterson. Why, I would also ask of Peterson, when there is “no lack of matter for sober critical discussion”, does he so consistently stoop to “caricature, ill-informed oversimplification and generally facile disputation”?