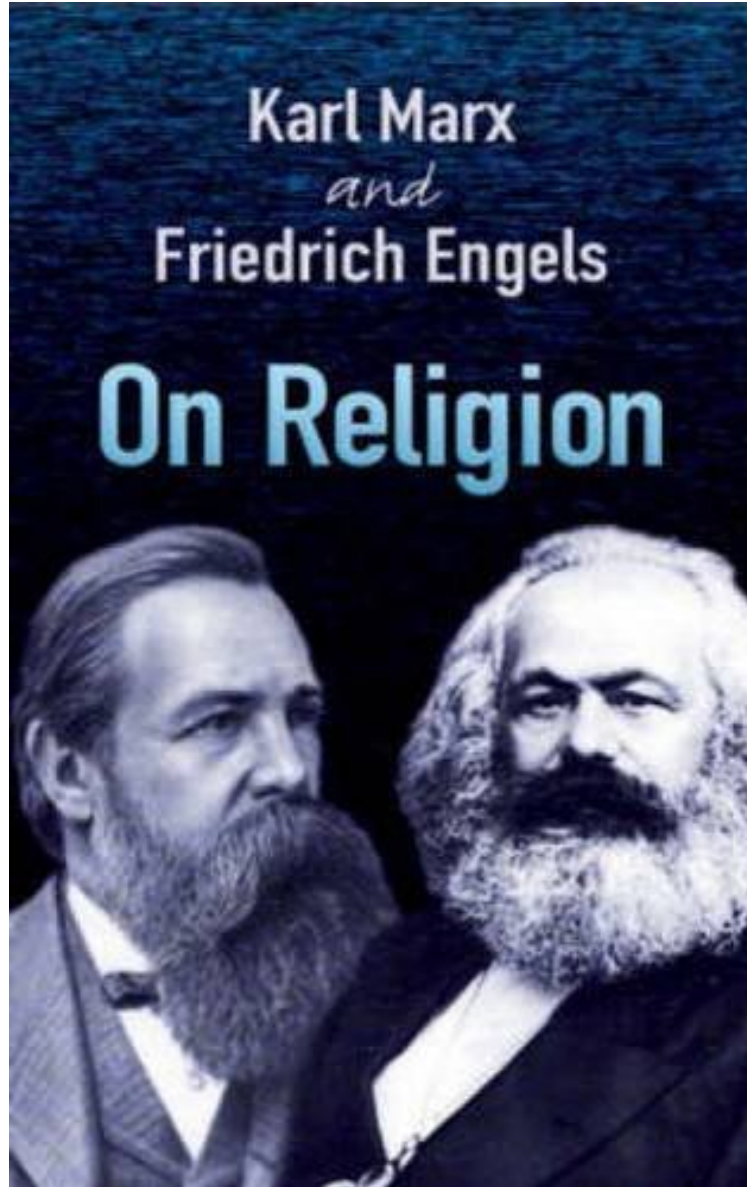


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On Religion

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels
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Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels : On Religion before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On Religion:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A worthy but often slow readBy Will JeromThis book is an old classical reprint, and a recommended (but not always easy) read if your primary intent is to understand the Marxist

view of religion. I first encountered this as a Schocken Book 1964 edition with the foreword by Reinhold Niebuhr. This Dover edition does not have that foreword (otherwise it is exactly the same text), but it does have very useful endnotes that provide context for Marx and Engel's writings. If you read this book, make sure to pay attention to the End Notes and the Name Index for context, for without them you can easily become lost. Essentially Marx and Engels believe that religion, like all thought processes, is rooted in the socio-economic and political basis of society. It is a distraction from and a justification for exploitation, in their view. Change those basic relations, and the need of religion will go away. I don't agree with Marx or Engels in their analysis of religion, or of political economy, but it is very useful to be appraised of their arguments about religion, and this book will help you get a sense of that. You will also get some sense of their theory of historical materialism, and their use of Hegel and Feuerbach. If your focus is political-economy, buy the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, (which includes the Communist Manifesto), or read Capital. 14 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Marxism and Religion, Yesterday and Today By Joseph Martin Militant Atheism has recently gone on the offensive (again) in the recent works of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. And all our soi-disant radicals are rallying to the cause. But contemporary Marxists have seemed to hold back; indeed, some seem to even admire bits and pieces of it. I looked to this volume as a corrective to the current fashionable atheism and also for a deeper understanding of the original Marxist position and I was not disappointed on either count. Now, in a volume like this in which there are many extracts one cannot hope for a comprehensive view of the thought of Marx (and also Engels) regarding their understanding of Christianity and Religion. However, I will say that I think this volume is a wonderful place to start! What you would expect to find in a compilation like this is here: the seminal Introduction to the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', the important 'Theses on Feuerbach', relevant extracts from 'The Holy Family', and 'The German Ideology'. What one doesn't expect is all the wonderful journalistic essays and also the letters. Engels letters to Bloch and Schmidt (for instance) deploring the excesses of Marxist 'economism' are always especially welcome. Now, to the currently fashionable cocksure atheism, the understanding of Marx and Engels must sound quite half-hearted, if not almost treacherous. What is the difference between Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens on the one hand, and Marx and Engels on the other? Dialectics. Not only isn't Religion deplored as merely a mistake, as sheer nonsense, both Marx and Engels understand and explain the historical necessity and utility of Religion. - Even its 'socialist' character! What!?! Indeed, Engels will go so far as to claim "that this 'socialism' did in fact, as far as it was possible at the time, exist and even become dominant - in Christianity." (In the final essay of this book, "On the History of Early Christianity". 1895) Obviously, due to the social, political and economic conditions of the time this ancient 'socialism' could only be other-worldly. And, for the most part, it is for Christianity alone that our two authors reserve their highest praise. - But why? Well, part of the answer is that in the Middle Ages movements arose within Christianity, according to Engels, that clearly sought a change in economic relations instead of merely a change in leaders. There doesn't seem to be any analogous movements in other religions. Engel's points out, in a note in this same essay, that in Islam there are periodic 'revolutions' by the poor led by some Mahdi - but they never have any intention of changing economic conditions. ...So the Nomads overthrow the City, become the City, and then need to be overthrown by other Nomads. - This, for Engels, is the History of Islam in a very small nutshell. But Christianity, through its sublated avatar, secular modernity, eventually rises to the socialistic struggle to change the actual material economic relations and social forces of _this_ world. But for our contemporary atheists there is no distinction between superstitions. They are all nonsense. What Engels said of the satirist Lucian could be said of them too: "from [their] shallow rationalistic point of view one sort of superstition was as stupid as the other". They have no theory of (or hope for) changing the society that makes religion necessary. But for Marx and Engels, the problem is not Religion; the problem is society! Again, this volume consists of many extracts, Introductions, Forewords, journalistic pieces and letters. It does not give the space necessary to consider them all. The only complete work seems to be Engels' "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy. (1883)" In it, Engels gives a brief but (I believe) sound description of the consequences of the dialectical method. Rather than the common notion that dialectics presents one with some dogmatic Truth or final Goal Engels argues that "for it [dialectical philosophy] nothing is final, absolute, sacred." He understands that the communist revolution results in no utopia. "Just as knowledge is unable to reach a complete conclusion in a perfect, ideal condition of humanity, so is history unable to do so; a perfect society, a perfect 'state', are things which can only exist in imagination. On the contrary, all successive historical systems are only transitory stages in the endless course of development of human society from the lower to the higher. Each stage is necessary, and therefore justified for the time and conditions to which it owes its origin." - So much for the famous End of History! But this review is not about Kojève and Fukuyama. For our purposes here it is important to note that the justification for some social formation does not come from some table of 'philosophical truths', rather it comes from the necessities and contingencies of the specific circumstances of that time. But in concentrating on the end of this anthology (Engels outlived Marx by a dozen years) I have neglected Marx! Let us turn to an early work by Marx, his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1844). First, some quotes that I believe are pertinent to our theme from the famous Introduction (which is all that is reprinted here) to that work: "This state, this society, produce religion, a reversed world-consciousness, because they are a reversed world." "Religious distress is at the

same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people." "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion." "Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man will wear the chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he will shake off the chain and cull the living flower." (I am here following the translation provided in this book. There are better translations. The publisher, Dover, informs us that the "contents of the present collection conform to the Russian edition prepared by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the C.C., C.P.S.U. [Gospolizdat, 1955.] Translations have been made from the originals." For what it's worth, I cannot find any mention of who the actual translators are.) First, a clarification about the 'opium' remark might be in order. Today, we tend to see opium mentioned and think of addicts leading perfectly wretched lives thanks to their opiate of choice. This was not how that sentence was read by Marx's contemporaries. Opium was a wonder drug used to relieve unspeakable pain. The unspeakable pain, in this case, is the capitalist system. Marx asserts that once the people have the pain-relieving drug removed they will be able to rise up and end their suffering. Indeed, Marx denies that he attacks Religion in order that people will only feel their very real pain; remove the sedative (Religion) and people will cast off the chains. ...So - what has actually happened? The Socialist World rose and then fell, leaving Capitalism alone and unbowed. Nothing that has ever risen and endured in History goes away by magic; if a political or religious institution endures it 'deserves' to endure, if it dies it was 'necessary' for it to die. (In dialectics, as indicated above, the terms 'deserve' and 'necessary' refer to contemporary circumstances only.) The real fight, according to Marx and Engels, is against conditions that make religion necessary. To abolish religion while leaving those conditions intact, with no effective way to change those conditions, is both monstrous and impossible. Monstrous? Yes, if it should prove that the chains on Man cannot be thrown off then one fears that flowers must be reinserted into each of the links of the wretched chains themselves. (Otherwise civilization itself might be destroyed by the pain.) Impossible? Indeed. If the conditions that require the consolation of Religion are not abolished then Religion itself cannot ever disappear. That has perhaps been the most telling revelation of our awful post-modernity... Now, what of today? Why have so many Marxist (and, post-Marxist) thinkers written so many books since the fall of the USSR admiring aspects of Christianity? Because with Marxism occulted all that is left, besides Religion, is Postmodernism, and its absurd obsession with culture and the particular. People like Habermas, Badiou and Zizek have been seen blowing kisses at aspects of Christianity. A most recent example would be Terry Eagleton, who, towards the end of his latest book ("Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate") says that if, "politics has so far failed to unite the wretched of the earth in the name of transforming their condition, we can be sure that culture will not accomplish the task in its stead. Culture, for one thing, is too much a matter of affirming what you are or have been, rather than what you might become. (p. 165.)" Yes, of course he is right, our world is being destroyed by the self-satisfaction of the various particularities that refuse to change. A bit later Eagleton argues that, "Marxism has suffered in our time a staggering political rebuff; and one of the places to which those radical impulses have migrated is - of all things - theology. (p.167)" Like Marxism, the subject of Religion and Theology is "nothing less than the nature and destiny of humanity itself..." "What other symbolic form has managed to forge such direct links between the most absolute and universal of truths and the everyday practices of countless millions of men and women? (Eagleton, p. 165.)" By comparison, one wonders if even Marxism (to say nothing of the absurdity of postmodernism!) was only a fad that is now dying out... To underline that this current rapprochement between Religion, most especially Christianity, and Marxism isn't some private fantasy I want to close our consideration of contemporary (post-)Marxists with a passage from Habermas: "Egalitarian Universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, of the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk (p. 150f)." From Jrgen Habermas, 'A Conversation About God and the World' in his book "Time of Transitions" (Polity Press, 2006). Yes, the current 'Marxists' go further in their admiration of religion than Marx and Engels ever did. But why? What separates Eagleton and Habermas from Marx and Engels? The fall of 'really-existing' socialism; the rise of postmodernism. These contemporary 'Marxists' do not want to live in a postmodern world of global capitalism... - And nothing besides! Thus Religion, in these precise circumstances, became tolerable; and, in these precise circumstances one marvels that it might become even more than tolerable... 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A COLLECTION OF MARX'S WRITINGS ON THIS SUBJECT By Steven H Propp The "Karl Marx Library" (edited by historian and political scientist Saul K. Padover; 1905-1981) was originally projected to be approximately 16 volumes, but appears to only have produced six volumes (such as ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND CENSORSHIP. Karl Marx Library Volume IV. Translated, with an Introduction by Saul K. Padover.; On education, women, and children (The Karl Marx library), etc.). The series is a "topical" collection of Marx's writings on various subjects. This is the

5th in the series, and was published in 1974. Marx observes that "Philosophy... has never made the first step toward relacing the ascetic priestly vestments with the light, conventional garb of the newspapers." (Pg. 20) Religion, on the other hand, is "the sigh of the afflicted creature, the soul of a heartless world, as it is also the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people." (Pg. 35-36) He says that theoretical emancipation has a "specifically practical significance" for Germany... it is the Reformation. As the revolution then began in the brain of the monk, so now it begins in the brain of the philosopher." (Pg. 36) In a famous passage from his "Theses on Feuerbach," he states that "The philosophers have only INTERPRETED the world in various ways; the point, however, is to CHANGE it." (Pg. 65) He criticizes speculative philosophy---"to be exact, Hegel's philosophy"---on the grounds that it "must transpose all questions from the form of human common sense to the form of speculative reason and change the real question into a speculative one to be able to answer it. Having distorted my question on my lips... it could naturally have a ready answer to all my questions, also like the catechism." (Pg. 196) This is a lively collection, which contains some of Marx's most famous (infamous?) statements.

When Karl Marx declared religion the opium of the people, he voiced a central tenet of the philosophy that bears his name. In this collection of essays and letters by Marx and his colleague, Friedrich Engels, the founders of Marxism discuss their perspectives on the origins and essence of religion. These writings constitute the theoretical basis of proletarian Marxist atheism. The authors trace the rise of religious belief from primitive humans' struggles to explain natural phenomena to the modern-day exploitation of the working classes. They explore the role of religion in social structure, defining it as a method of oppressing the masses, who surrender their hopes for earthly fulfillment in exchange for dreams of paradise. The philosophers further examine the conflict between science and religion, illustrating the church's long-standing opposition to the development of scientific thought. Written between the 1840s and the 1890s, the essays and letters appear in chronological order and include editorial notes. Students of history and political science will find this volume a thought-provoking introduction to Marxist theory.

Language Notes Text: English, German (translation) About the Author Described as one of the most influential figures in human history, Karl Marx was a German philosopher and economist who wrote extensively on the benefits of socialism and the flaws of free-market capitalism. His most notable works, *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto* (the latter of which was co-authored by his collaborator Friedrich Engels), have since become two of history's most important political and economic works. Marxism the term that has come to define the philosophical school of thought encompassing Marx's ideas about society, politics and economics was the foundation for the socialist movements of the twentieth century, including Leninism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, and Maoism. Despite the negative reputation associated with some of these movements and with Communism in general, Marx's view of a classless socialist society was a utopian one which did not include the possibility of dictatorship. Greatly influenced by the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, Marx wrote in radical newspapers from his young adulthood, and can also be credited with founding the philosophy of dialectical materialism. Marx died in London in 1883 at the age of 64. Friedrich Engels was born in 1820, in the German city of Barmen. He died in London in 1895 while editing the fourth volume of *Capital*.