



## Classical Sociological Theory and Foundations of American Sociology



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PART I  
MARX AND ENGELS





# I. Biography of Marx by F. Engels (1868)

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## KARL MARX (1818-1883)

“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” –  
Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach (1845)

NOTE ON SOURCES: The first selection is a short biography written by Marx's close friend and lifetime-collaborator, Frederick Engels. The biography was written for a German newspaper but was not published at the time. The complete original can be found on the Marxist Archives site.<sup>1</sup> The second selection was written by Marx's daughter, Eleanor, and originally published in a German newspaper in 1897 and can also be found on the Marxist Archives site.<sup>2</sup> The third selection describes the Marx household, and was written by a close friend and colleague, Wilhelm Liebknecht.<sup>3</sup> The final selection was taken from Engels' much reprinted speech at Marx's funeral in 1883. The complete speech can be found on line.<sup>4</sup>

Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818 in Trier, where he received an education in the classics. He studied law at Bonn and later in Berlin, where, however, his preoccupation with philosophy soon turned him away from law. In 1841, after spending five years in the “metropolis of intellectuals,” he returned to Bonn to earn his PhD. Instead, he became involve in a radical newspaper venture, which ran afoul of Prussian censorship. He resigned in protest in 1843.

During his criticism of the deliberations of the local government, Marx began focusing on questions of material interest. He found himself confronted with points of view which neither jurisprudence nor philosophy had taken account of. Proceeding from the Hegelian philosophy of law, Marx concluded that it was not the state, which Hegel had described as the “top of the edifice,” but “civil society,” which Hegel had regarded with disdain, that was the sphere in which a key to the understanding of the process of the historical development of mankind should be looked for.

1. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/bio/marx/eng-1869.htm>

2. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/bio/marx/eleanor.htm>

3. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/liebnecht-w/1896/karl-marx.htm>

4. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/burial.htm>

In the summer of 1843, after marrying Jenny Von Westphalen, the daughter of a government official, Marx moved to Paris, where he devoted himself primarily to studying political economy and the history of the great French Revolution. There he became involved in another radical newspaper and was expelled from France for this in 1845. He moved to Brussels where he continued his political work, writing what would become the Communist Manifesto on behalf of workers organized as “The League of the Just.”

Expelled once again, this time by the Belgian government under the influence of the panic caused by the 1848 revolution, Marx returned to Paris at the invitation of the French provisional government. The tidal wave of the revolution pushed all scientific pursuits into the background; what mattered now was to become involved in the movement. Marx resurrected his radical newspaper and moved to Cologne, but this was again shut down by the government forcing him to flee to Paris, first, then, London, where he remained the rest of his life.

In London at that time was assembled the entire *fine fleur* of the refugees from all the nations of the continent. Revolutionary committees of every kind were formed. For a while, Marx continued to produce his newspaper in the form of a monthly review but eventually he withdrew into the British Museum and worked through the immense and as yet for the most part unexamined library there for all that it contained on political economy. At the same time, he was a regular contributor to the *New York Tribune*, acting, until the outbreak of the American Civil War, so to speak, as the editor for European politics of this, the leading Anglo-American newspaper.

At last, in 1867, he published the first volume of his masterpiece, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. It is the *political economy of the working class, reduced to its scientific formulation*. This work is concerned not with rabble-rousing phrase-mongering, but with strictly scientific deductions. Whatever one's attitude to socialism, one will at any rate have to acknowledge that in this work it is presented for the first time in a scientific manner. Anyone still wishing to do battle with socialism, will have to deal with Marx.

But there is another point of view from which Marx's book is of interest. It is the first work in which the actual relations existing between capital and labor, in their classical form such as they have reached in England, are described in their entirety and in a clear and graphic fashion. Then there is the history of factory legislation in England which, from its modest beginnings with the first acts of 1802, has now reached the point of limiting working hours in nearly all manufacturing or cottage industries to 60 hours per week for women and young people under the age of 18, and to 39 hours per week for children under 13. From this point of view the book is of the greatest interest for every industrialist.

As one would expect, in addition to his studies Marx is busy with the workers' movement; he is one of the founders of the International Working Men's Association, which has been the center of so much attention recently and has already shown in more than one place in Europe that it is a force to be reckoned with.

## On the Relationship between Karl and Jenny

Karl was a young man of seventeen when he became engaged to Jenny. For them, too, the path of true love was not a smooth one. It is easy to understand that Karl's parents opposed the engagement of a young man of his age ... The earnestness with which Karl assures his father of his love in spite of certain contradictions is explained by the rather stormy scenes his engagement had caused in the home. My father used to say that at that time he had been a really ferocious Roland. But the question was soon settled and shortly before or after his eighteenth birthday the betrothal was formally recognized. Seven years Karl waited for his beautiful Jenny, but "they seemed but so many days to him, because he loved her so much".

On June 19, 1843 they were wedded. Having played together as children and become engaged as a young man and girl, the couple went hand in hand through the battle of life.

And what a battle! Years of bitter pressing need and, still worse, years of brutal suspicion, infamous calumny and icy indifference. But through all that, in unhappiness and happiness, the two lifelong friends and lovers never faltered, never doubted: they were faithful unto death. And death has not separated them.

His whole life long Marx not only loved his wife, he was in love with her.

## The Marx Household

While Jenny gave birth seven times, only three of their children survived to adulthood (daughters Jenny, Eleanor (nicknamed "Tussy"), and Laura). A fourth child, a son named Edgar, made it almost to adolescence.

Several children died; among them Marx's two boys, one, born in London, very early, the other, born in Paris, after a protracted illness. Well I remember the sad weeks of sickness without hope. The death of this boy was a fearful blow to Marx. The boy, named Moosh (mouche, fly), really Edgar after an uncle, was very gifted, but ailing from the day of his birth, a genuine, true child of sorrow this boy with the magnificent eyes and the promising head that was, however, much too heavy for the weak body. If poor Moosh could have obtained quiet, enduring nursing and a sojourn in the country or near the sea, then, perhaps, his life might have been saved. But in the life of the exile, in the chase from place to place, in the misery of London, it was impossible, even with the most tender love of the parents and care of a mother, to make the tender little plant strong enough for the struggle of existence. Moosh died; I shall never forget the scene; the mother, silently weeping, bent over the dead child, Lenchen<sup>5</sup> sobbing beside her, Marx in a terrible excitement vehemently, almost angrily, rejecting all consolation, the two girls clinging to their mother crying quietly, the mother clasping them convulsively as if to hold them and defend them against death that had robbed her of her boy.

5. Lenchen was Jenny's friend and household maidservant. She was with the family her entire life.

And two days later the burial, Lessner, Pfaender, Lochner, Conrad Schramm, the red Wolff and myself went along, I in the carriage with Marx. He sat there dumb, holding his head in his hands. I stroked his forehead: “Mohr,<sup>6</sup> you still have your wife, your girls and us, and we all love you so well!”

“You cannot give me back my boy!” he groaned, and silently we rode on to the graveyard in Tottenham Court Road. When the coffin, singularly large, for during the sickness the formerly very backward child had grown surprisingly, when the coffin was about to be lowered into the grave, Marx was so excited that I stepped to his side fearing he might jump after the coffin.

Thirty years later, when his faithful mate was buried out on Highgate Cemetery, and with her half of his own being, his own life, he would have fallen into the grave had not Engels, who later told me about it, quickly grasped his arm.

Fifteen months later he followed her.

## The Lifetime Achievements of Marx

On the 14th of March, at a quarter to three in the afternoon, the greatest living thinker ceased to think. He had been left alone for scarcely two minutes, and when we came back we found him in his armchair, peacefully gone to sleep – but forever.

An immeasurable loss has been sustained both by the militant proletariat of Europe and America, and by historical science, in the death of this man. The gap that has been left by the departure of this mighty spirit will soon enough make itself felt.

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as had hitherto been the case.

But that is not all. Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production, and the bourgeois society that this mode of production has created. The discovery of surplus value suddenly threw light on the problem, in trying to solve which all previous investigations, of both bourgeois economists and socialist critics, had been groping in the dark.

Such was the man of science. But this was not even half the man.

6. Mohr was a nickname for Marx; it is the German word for “Moor,” used to describe Marx because of his general swarthy complexion.

For Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success such as few could rival.

And, consequently, Marx was the best hated man of his time. Governments, both absolutist and republican, deported him from their territories. Bourgeois, whether conservative or ultra-democratic, vied with one another in heaping slanders upon him. All this he brushed aside as though it were a cobweb, ignoring it, answering only when extreme necessity compelled him. And he died beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers – from the mines of Siberia to California, in all parts of Europe and America – and I make bold to say that, though he may have had many opponents, he had hardly one personal enemy.

His name will endure through the ages, and so also will his work.

## Questions

1. What is the “materialist theory of history?” According to Marx, what sets historical forces in motion? Where do ideas come from?
2. How did Marx spend his life? What was his occupation?
3. What are the “two important facts” uncovered by Marx, according to Engels? How are these relevant to people who advocate for socialism?
4. Engels says that Marx was “the most hated man” of his time, but also that he died “beloved, revered, and mourned.” Explain this paradox.

## Concepts

Historical Materialism (also known as the Materialist theory of history)

Class Struggle

Exploitation

Surplus Value

Labor Power