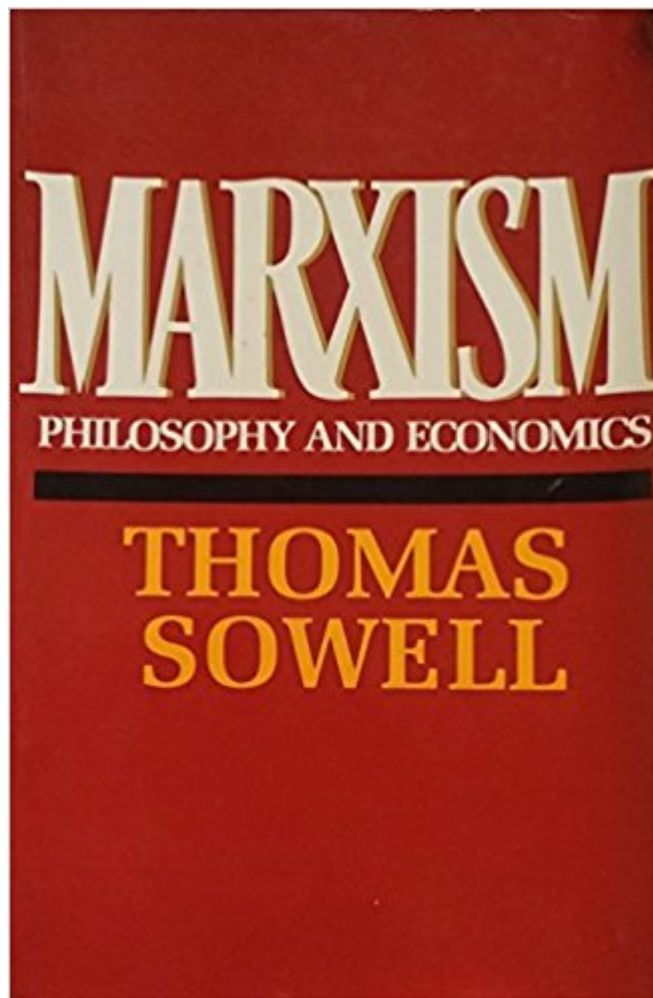


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Marxism: Philosophy And Economics



Synopsis

Sowell leads the listener through the Marxian scheme of ideas, shattering some existing interpretations of Marx which have developed through repetition rather than through scholarship. 6 cassettes. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

'Among the best short accounts of Marxism ever, whatever the reader's own politics are. I found it a real pleasure to read, clear and tight, full of both common sense and intellectual rigour.' - Bernard Crick 'Very readable ... The non-Marxist Mr Sowell is distinctly successful in opening up the scope and brilliance of Marx's very interesting mind.' - Brigitte Berger, New York Times Book Review

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From his roots as a young Marxist economist to renowned libertarian thinker, Sowell comes full circle with this work. Having seen Marx from both sides and with a broad perspective, Sowell describes not only the concepts essential to Marxist economics but also an illuminating biographical outline of Karl Marx. The book takes head on the often misunderstood ideas and lexicon behind Marxist economics, laying out the ideology's essential ideas and giving the reader a working understanding of it's basic elements. But while it is most helpful, it is nonetheless a dense work despite it's brevity (281 pages) and some segments require rereading. If the nuts and bolts tend to baffle you, this one might be a bit much. The reader need not be an economics major, but bear in

mind that this is hardly a casual read.

Sowell is my favorite contemporary economist, and a great writer. Not all economists are great writers, look at Hayek, although to be fair Hayek's first language was German ANYWAY I wanted a book that simply told me what Marx and his economics and philosophy were all about, without adding modern interpretations into it. And this book does exactly that. It is a bit difficult to follow at times, obviously the more you know about classical economics (the economics Marx used as a springboard for his own analysis) and philosophy the better. The book fills in some detail on the philosophical background that Marx and Engels grew up in, but leaves out some of the important economic details. This is a book for those with a grounding in economics, especially those who know how classical economics differs from modern economics (Sowell's "On Classical Economics" or "Classical Economics Reconsidered" would make a great companion book to this). If there is a weak spot to the book, it is the chapter on the Marxian concept of value, possibly the longest in the book, and on the most complex and difficult to understand topic. I still don't have a perfect grasp of it, but this is because Sowell is attempting to distill a massive three-volume epic into one 300-page book. Until the final chapter, you'd have no idea where to place the author on the political or economic spectrum. It is simply an objective interpretation of Marx up until that point, and the only "sermonizing" is when Sowell goes out of his way to explain more modern (and corrupt) interpretations of Marxism which are not supported by the writings of Marx/Engels. The last chapter, on the legacy of Marx, adds some critiques from an economic, historical, and even moral standpoint, although Sowell makes it clear that what happened in the USSR, China, Cuba, etc., is not what Marx planned (Marx did not support revolutionary groups overthrowing governments, rather he believed that communism would *emerge* after certain conditions had been met). I'd like to see a larger critique of Marxian economics, philosophy, and history, but that's not what I wanted from this book. I'd like to see Sowell write a book where he puts his usual Hayekian analysis on things, explaining why Marxism, Leninism, etc., don't work in practice and how they clash with contemporary economics. You could say that to some extent, he did that in Basic Economics, but it was far from being the main thrust of that book.

I actually read the whole book. It's quite dry compared to Dr. Sowell's other writings. It's a great survey of a vast topic. It only deals with the Karl and Freddy. He doesn't go into Cultural Marxism or Political Correctness. It's a lot like one of the those Oxford Short Introduction books, but much longer and written by someone you can trust. If you want more arrows in your quiver to fling at the left, this

isn't the best place to look. If you want a basic understanding of Marx, his philosophy and economic theory, this is a great place to start. There is not much Sowell snark in this book. It's academic in its tone. He does make some excellent criticisms of Karl Marx as a human being in this book.

Economist and philosopher Thomas Sowell has closed the book on Marxist debate with this tightly reasoned exposition and analysis. However, as Sowell notes in his final chapter (see below), the intellectual aura and moral vision of Karl Marx will not soon fade from the human imagination. That is why this plain spoken book is so important for the future of mankind. It took Marx thirty years to complete the three volumes of *Capital*. It took Sowell 25 years and one slender book to refute not only the three volumes, but the entire corpus of Marx and his associate, Frederick Engels. It might come as a surprise to some that Thomas Sowell has a more capacious mind and is a more rigorous analyst than either Marx or Engels. The greatness of Sowell's mind has not been given proper acclaim by modern and postmodern cognoscenti, no doubt because it is essentially conservative in outlook. The text of this book is only 221 pages: it is built to last; with stitched binding, quality paper, and reader friendly font. This solid, handy book will survive serious study. Sowell's reasoning power ranks as genius, and he has composed a critique that is taut as a drum and worthy of repeated and thoughtful readings. It is not possible in this review to expound on all the concepts that are covered by the author as this would require a lengthy and complex discourse: what is attempted is a distillation of the substance of the book. The first nine (of ten) chapters explain what Marx "really said" and what he "really meant" as opposed to the accumulated misinterpretations that have passed as faux Marxism since the time of Marx himself. Thus, the concepts of the actual, historical Marx are described, while at the same time the incorrect concepts of the later interpreters are disclosed. This dual system of analysis must be understood by the reader, or confusion can arise as to what Marx did or did not say. Sowell writes that nowadays it is almost impossible to find any writing about Marx that refers to his actual work. Instead, our learned academics use as references secondary sources that can be traced to tertiary sources, and so on ad infinitum. A good example is the article on Marxism provided online at Wikipedia. Out of thirty references at the end of the article, only four are attributable to Marx or Engels. The other twenty-six refer to secondary sources. Secondary sources are matters of opinion, often questionable, especially as regards such a hotly debated subject as Marxism. If the first nine chapters of "Marxism" are difficult, they are worth working through to get to the tenth and final chapter; "The Legacy of Marx". At this juncture the "real" Marx has been defined, and Sowell quickly and clearly refutes his core concepts. Having critiqued the "theory", Sowell spends considerable time refuting the "praxis," using Lenin's Russia

as an example. This first example of Marxism is described in some detail as an example of what happens when egalitarianism is forced upon people by a Police State. Sowell concludes by stating, on p. 221: "The supreme irony of Marxism was that a fundamentally humane and egalitarian creed was so dominated by a bookish perspective that it became blind to facts and deaf to humanity and freedom. Yet the moral vision and the intellectual aura of Marxism continue to disarm critics, quiet doubters, and put opponents on the defensive." "In this context, there are grim implications to Engel's claim that Marx's name and work 'will endure through the ages.'" Sowell's book will also endure through the ages, to counteract the "grim implications" of Marxism. P.S. After writing this review I discovered that Sowell's book has gone out of print. Why am I not surprised? Sowell did not offer us any Utopian redemption; just a clear look at reality. Sowell's work will fade only from the minds of faddists, faux-Marxists and coffee-house revolutionaries, who have temporarily consigned his critique to the remainder bin. But among serious thinkers the book will live on. There are enough copies in college and public libraries and elsewhere to keep this spark of reason alive and it will surely see the light of print again.

classic Thomas Sowell, basic reading for anyone interested in the making of what we are facing today in this country.

Sowell great explanation of Marx.

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