

Daily Meditation 10-19-2026

Karl Marx, Socialism, Susan Neiman & Meister Eckhart

Good morning.

In today's meditation, and tomorrow's and Wednesdays, we are discussing Karl Marx and Meister Eckhart. And this discussion is born from my reading of this new book, by Susan Neiman, who is a philosopher, called *Call It Evil: Understanding the Trump Era*.

She's a philosopher, a current philosopher, contemporary, who's proposing that we come back to the notion of evil, which is what I've been writing about, has been underplayed for so long. So much of Western religion has preached on and on about sin, but not at all about evil.

I'd like to begin with a quote from George Orwell, which Susan Neiman holds up right as her last chapter begins. Chapter seven, which is called "Socialism Reconsidered." Here's what George Orwell wrote:

Socialists have never made it sufficiently clear that the essential aims of socialism are justice and liberty. The essential aims of socialism are justice and liberty. With their eyes glued to economic facts, they have proceeded on the assumption that man has no soul, and explicitly or implicitly, they have set up the goal of a materialistic utopia. So Orwell is very much critiquing the materialism of contemporary science. As a result, fascism has been able to play on every instinct that revolts against hedonism and a cheap conception of progress.

I think this is a brilliant statement by George Orwell about why fascism can become so popular. *It has been able to play on every instinct that revolts against hedonism and a cheap conception of progress.*

It's within that context, I think, that my study on Karl Marx and Maister Eckhart is especially important. Again, the entire study is found in the book, *Wrestling with the Prophets*.

And I'd like to share some parts of that article that I did not reproduce in the daily meditation essays, the written essays for today, tomorrow, or Wednesday.

The great historian Father Chenu, in his iconic book "Nature, Man, Society in the 12th Century," points out how part of the revolution -- and he talked about the 12th century as the only Renaissance that succeeded in the West, because it was grassroots: serfs and women and young people. He says,

Poverty represented both a rejection of the avarice and vanity of the new world (meaning the coming of capitalism in the late 12th century and the overturning of feudalism), and a liberation from the temporal security of the old regime. It involved more than moral purification. It involved rejecting out of hand an entire economic system. That is what the vow of poverty meant for Francis of Assisi, who came along at the end of the 12th and early 13th century, and for Dominic (Saint Dominic who came along in the early 13th century). Rejecting out of hand an entire economic system. This is in contrast to the monastic system that had been in bed for centuries with feudalism, which was the dominant economic system for many centuries.

Now, I also cite Tawney, who wrote the important book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. And in that book, he says this — He of course, is a sociologist:

The true descendant of the doctrines of Aquinas is the labor theory of value. The last of the schoolmen was Karl Marx. The last scholastic was Karl Marx. A very stunning statement by the sociologist who wrote this iconic book, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism.

But he's saying that both Aquinas and Karl Marx agree that justice needs to lie at the heart of our economics and equality and fairness.

So you can see that there are roots for Eckhart. Eckhart was a Dominican like Aquinas was, who came along in the next generation. He was 15 years old and had just joined the Dominicans when Aquinas died. So there's a real bridge from one generation to the other, there.

So, what we're talking about in terms of Eckhart's economic and spiritual awareness of poverty and of the struggle of the peasants, all this is is born also of Aquinas's recognition of economic justice. And that

Tawney would say that *the last of the schoolmen was Karl Marx*, is just utterly stunning, even in our time.

Now I mentioned how Ernst Bloch, a Marxist philosopher, says that Eckhart was a real influence on Karl Marx. And on page 192 of my essay here, I cite him in how he saw the lineage from Eckhart from the late 13th century to early 14th century, to Karl Marx in the 19th century. He says,

The Eckhartian influence on Marx went this way: from the peasant wars, which broke out 10 years after Eckhart died, such as Thomas Munster and Hus, to the revolutionary Anabaptists, to the mystic poet Angelus Silesius, who was very grounded in Meister Eckhart, to the young Hegel, to the atheist Fauerbach, to Karl Marx. He sees in particular a great likeness between Angelus Silesias, who he calls "a 17th century Eckhart," which is very accurate, and Ludwig Feuerbach, whose position on religion Karl Marx borrowed almost in its entirety.

James Clark, who is a student of Eckhart, translated Eckhart in the 50s, says *it's very plausible that some of the Beghards charged with heresy at Cologne quoted Eckhart in their own defense, and this would help explain why the archbishop came after Eckhart and called the trial against him.*

And I cite Thomas Merton and his summary of the trial against Eckhart. He writes,

He was a great man who was pulled down by a lot of little men who thought they could destroy him, who thought they could drag him to Avignon and have him utterly discredited. And indeed, he was ruined after his death and 28 propositions, which might doubtless be found somewhere in him, but which have none of his joy, or his energy, or his freedom. Eckhart did not have the kind of mind that wasted time being cautious about every comma. He trusted people to recognize that what he saw was worth seeing, because it brought obvious fruits of life and joy. For him, that was what mattered.

Now, there's a very fine study on compassion done by a man named William Eckhardt, a number of years about 40 years ago, and he

concluded that *Left-wing freedom, as distinct from right-wing freedom, means freedom for the many instead of freedom for the few. Freedom for the many, not freedom for the few. Therefore, Eckhart is clearly a mystic of the left, because his was about freedom for the many, and about the spiritual origins of all human beings as being divine. As he said, "We have a spark of God in us." All of us have that. And he said, "Just as a pear tree derives from the seed of a pear, so divinity derives from a seed of divinity, and we all have a seed of divinity in us. That is that spark of the soul.*

So Eckhart developed a whole theology of the divinization of the human person, and that requires a society that is based on justice and law. It is truly based on justice for the poor, and not just for those who are doing well and those in charge, those who could buy their own judges, their own lawmakers, their own politicians.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.