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Marxist Class-Cultural Spirituality in Theory and Practice

GEORGE N. LUNDSKOW*

ABSTRACT

The paper applies Critical Theory to understand the progressive and oppressive potential of contemporary religious revival in the United States. The analysis focuses on Neopaganism as a progressive spirituality, possibly compatible with Marxist theory. Whether religion is progressive (or oppressive/reactionary) depends not on the content of beliefs, but rather, on the type of social relationship a religion establishes between the individual and society. The paper treats Neopaganism and Marxism as practices and worldviews that often inform social movements and sometimes become the basis of functioning communities. They at once correspond to political-economic agendas, but both also assert the cultural foundations of life – the symbolic expression of shared meaning as the legitimization of social relations. In conclusion, Marxism must develop a spiritual component to survive in and critique modern society, and to posit a vision of the future that might exert actual social influence. To accomplish this, the paper proposes the material-mystery thesis.

KEY WORDS: material-mystery thesis, Neopaganism, Marxism, religion, spirituality, Critical Theory.

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Introduction

Religious revival in the United States in the past decade compares in magnitude to the most intense periods of revival in American history (Finke and Stark 1992; Jenkins 2002). The vast majority of this growth has been conservative and fundamentalist in the form of New Evangelicalism at the expense of mainline churches (Perrin, Kennedy and Miller 1997). However, some measurable growth has occurred in other, progressive new religions, specifically, in Neopaganism (Jorgensen and Russell 1999). For both conservative and fundamentalist movements (in Christianity and Islam) on one hand, but also in progressive movements like Neopaganism, the vast majority of new enthusiasts consciously choose their new faith as a result of dissatisfaction with their mainline beliefs, or dissatisfaction with life in general (Zinnbauer and Pergament 1998). For new enthusiasts, discontent in the spiritual side of life results directly from the dissatisfaction and spiritual vacancy that characterizes modern social relations (Dawson 1998). Empirical study shows that intentionally chosen religious affiliation correlates with higher life satisfaction (Reed 1991).

Like its reactionary counterparts, Neopaganism is a modern creation in response to disenchantment within modern society. Neither completely rejects the modern world, and both seek to instill purpose and meaning in life through spirituality coupled with varying types and degrees of criticism about modern life. Although both also express concern for social issues and develop a relevant theology, the movements differ decisively in the culture of the communities they form. The respective belief systems arise from their preferred form of social interaction, in this case, critical and productive relations for the Neopagans, and hierarchical and submissive relations for the New Evangelicals.

Of course, dissatisfaction with modern society is not limited to religious contexts. Marxists of the Critical Theory persuasion focused intensively on issues of authority and culture generally, especially when it became apparent that the advance of capitalism, particularly in the United States, brought neither revolution nor fulfillment; material success did not produce a meaningful life. The Critical Theorists contended that culture and even spirituality, as much as economics, were vital issues for a Marxist critique of modern society. Many of the notable proponents of Critical Theory, including Erich Fromm and Walter Benjamin, but also lesser-known figures – such as Paul Massing – discuss a synthesis of Marxism with some sort of spiritual direction.

This paper again considers the possibility of a Marxist spirituality, and uses Neopaganism as a real-life example. Marxism has been both an academic perspective as well as an orientation to social action. In its lat-

ter form particularly, it has, to varying degrees, inspired uprisings and revolutions against material exploitation, but even in historical cases where it has overthrown oppressive systems, it has failed to establish cultural legitimization in place of the religions and other traditions it overthrows.

The collapse of the Soviet Union rightly or wrongly discredited Marxism as a political-economic system, and having no spiritual aspect to begin with, Marxism now faces the possibility of exclusion from the future on the grounds that it offers nothing to the present day. In both its activist and academic forms, Marxism risks extinction. In the United States in particular, one would be hard-pressed to find anything specifically Marxist as such in politics or a major social movement. Just because Marxism can articulate an idealistic vision of a different society doesn't mean people will immediately reject the current social order and fight for the new ideals.

Thus, this paper proposes a possible spiritual identity as one step to save Marxism from the dustbin of history – that Marxism requires but already suggests a spiritual component, a spirituality that corresponds to actual social relations and stands for the possibility of progressive social change.

What is meant in this context by “progressive” and “reactionary?” *Progressive* refers to empowerment of the individual, a strengthening of the self in conjunction with community, whereas *reactionary* refers to submission to perceived superior forces or authority, by which the individual surrenders the self to external authority, and towards which they have no influence. The level of analysis is thus social-psychological. Furthermore, I endeavor here to conceptualize and identify an example of progressive *spirituality*, defined as a feeling of connectedness, of existential meaning created from and for lived progressive ideals and experience.

The Potential for Marxist Spirituality

Such a formulation within the Marxist tradition is not entirely new, as already explored, for example, by Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving* ([1956] 2000) and *You Shall Be As Gods* ([1966] 1991); Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* ([1927] 1999); Paul Massing in *Rehearsal for Destruction* (1949); Maurice Samuel in *The Great Hatred* ([1940] 1988). All give the possibility of a progressive and Marxist spirituality serious consideration.

Without regard to the social dynamics of religious belief and practice, some Marxists and others of left-orientation often dismiss religion and spirituality in the West as narcotic escapes from, or substitutive condolences for, unsatisfactory conditions in the real (material) world. Religion

thus becomes a fetishized practice of idol worship, which in turn corresponds to worship of the established social order. Religion reinforces alienated social relations, and separates people from their own interests and potential.

The solution, therefore, to alienation and class exploitation depends on proper ideology: historical-material class consciousness and The Revolution, not on devotion to God and The Second Coming. Such a perspective concludes that Marxism emancipates people from alienation and oppression, whereas religion perpetuates alienation and oppression – or at best – teaches people how to bear it, not to overcome it. Class exploitation creates both material uncertainty as well as existential alienation; it strips people of their humanity both as individuals and as social beings, and withholds the material means necessary to sustain full individual and community development.

However, the above position involves at least two important issues. First, that Marx rejected religion as inherently oppressive, and second, that a critical approach to social relations must retain this rejection of religion in order to remain truly Marxist, and truly scientific and materialist. The misconceptions of Marx's own views on religion stem mostly from one famous passage from an introductory essay intended for inclusion in a much larger critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The often quoted phrase is the well-known statement about religion, that religion "is the opium of the people" (Marx [1843] 1978:54). Other often quoted text comes from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, in which Marx says that "Feuerbach . . . does not see that religion is itself a social product . . ." (Marx [1845] 1978:145). Once this is realized, the revolutionary can, in conventional interpretation, ignore religion as one of many oppressive social products, and move on to true material reality, the reality of class struggle.

As with any quote from any writer, context is decisive. If we consider the full context of Marx's comments, we will see an important qualification, namely, that Marx draws a distinction between other-worldly religion, which is oppressive, yet this does not inherently deny the possibility of an alternative – this-worldly religion (or in terms of this paper – spirituality) that arises from actual lived experience, and correspondingly offers emancipatory potential to the extent it validates the lives of oppressed people and leads a revolutionary sentiment to overthrow oppressive conditions of this world. I will first argue theoretically that such a possibility exists within Marxist thought, and subsequently attempt to illustrate this potential in practice with the empirical example of Neopaganism. Thus, I will discuss Marxist spirituality in theory: what would such a thing entail? Subsequently, I will consider Marxist spirituality in practice: Neopaganism as a living example.

Marxist Spirituality in Theory

Marx saw religion as both a specific and general theory of the world (Marx [1843] 1978:53) that maintains social order through morals, customs, rituals, and belief about how the world ought to be. It connects the individual to established social order, and furthermore, justifies the established order as sacred and therefore inviolate. To rebel against the divine is to rebel against the established social order; the sacred virtues of the ruling class are the sacred virtues of heaven.

For a Marxist, religion reflects an inverted social order, in which those who own property or hold title stand over those who work and actually build society. Since conscious realization of this inversion is intolerable to any hierarchy, religion places the Truth of existence beyond the grasp of real people, and into the hands of a supreme and unreachable being, into the hands of God, whose earthly representation is religion as an authoritative institution. Since religion, like any other institution, is inherently a socially constructed entity, the “struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion” (Marx [1843] 1978:54). Thus, the struggle is against religion that supports – or fails to challenge – the established order of and suffering in this world. To the extent religious devotion is a form of compensatory satisfaction, Marx maintains that “religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering” (Marx [1843] 1978:54). It is thus not simply a drug or a diversion, but a type of insurance against popular discontent, and at the same time, an expression of the very same discontent and suffering. However much religion may pacify the masses, it also embodies their discontent. Class hierarchy cannot justify itself; it requires some other transcendent legitimization. In modern times, religion shields the secular relations of capitalism from critical scrutiny; the unquestionable sacredness of religious truth legitimates the sacred values and structure of capitalism.

The Emptiness of Modernity

Yet the legitimacy of modern class relations is not nearly so seamless with existential concerns, nor automatically secure and obdurate. If anything, both the left and the right have attacked, although in very different ways, the emptiness of modern culture. Max Weber described the contemporary spirit of capitalism as “narrow specialists without mind, pleasure-seekers without heart” (Weber [1905] 2002:124). On the right for example, Oswald Spengler ([1918] 1991) attacked the decline of

passion and spirit, and called for a conscious rejection of rationality. Purposeful rejection of rationality uniquely characterizes many reactions to modernity, as David N. Smith shows, “irrationality is ancient, but protests against reason are specifically modern” (Smith 2001:131). In the same way, contemporary Pentecostals and others embrace what Smith identifies as “self-conscious irrationalism,” and find their greatest sense of meaning in irrational, charismatic services that carry over into and endow daily life with supernatural significance in place of rational understanding (Hunt 1998).

Moreover, many charismatic believers report that only supernatural experience (e.g., speaking in tongues, possession) hold meaning (Coleman 1998). Regardless of logical consequences or contradictions, fundamentalists and charismatics intentionally reject reason as a source of meaning, and seek psychological comfort in the dictates of absolutist and/or irrational religious mandates (Krause and Ellison 1998). Interestingly, this purposeful rejection of reason, which applies to secular as well as specifically religious issues, holds more strongly for American compared to European versions of the same sects (Coleman 1998).

As a solution, Weber calls for an intensification of rationality and reason, that only those who cannot stand the light of reason, “who cannot bear the fate of the times . . . may return silently. . . . The arms of the old church are open widely and compassionately.” This return requires a sacrifice of the intellect that disables the ability to effectively address issues in modern society. In contrast, those who do not require the comfort of faith will “meet the demands of the day, in human relations as well as in our vocation” (Weber [1918] 1946:155-156). By itself, however, I contend that reason alone cannot create the spiritual fulfillment that people crave, nor by itself lead progressive social change, and emotion fully separated from reason is dangerous. Whereas Weber rejects spirituality in favor of more intensive rationality, reactionaries like Spengler reject reason in favor of passion and irrationality.

Yet, contemporary revivalists maintain that humans cannot live without some higher and better purpose, some transcendent sense of meaning, nor long tolerate a society that functions on empty routine, regardless of the social benefits one accrues in terms of money, fame, power, etc. Still, new social movements call upon reason as well, and both Neopaganism (Jorgensen and Russell 1999) and New Evangelicalism (Miller 1997; Perrin, Kennedy and Miller 1997) consist primarily of educated and middle income people, neither the lowest members of the economic order but also not high enough to assume economic certainty. Uncertainty, rather than direct deprivation, defines their social life, which in turn feeds their discontent about the quality of life and existential issues of meaning.

Both Neopagans and New Evangelicals turn to religion of their own choosing in the search for meaning in a world in which economic vicissitude and injustice dominates, and both groups draw members from disaffected members of other religions or the ranks of the non-religious who purposely seek new alternatives (Gee and Veevers 1990; Jorgensen and Russell 1999; Perrin, Kennedy and Miller 1997), and both rely primarily on friendship networks rather than intentional proselytization for recruitment (Raphael 1996; Zinnbauer and Pergament 1998). Furthermore, of those churches that increased enrollment in the 1990s, face-to-face interaction and friendship networks most strongly influenced new members, regardless of the particular orientation (Roof 1996; Zinnbauer and Pergament 1998). The more personal the interaction, the more successfully new religions bring in new members. In other words, the hunger for real and sincere connections with other people concerning ultimate existential questions inspires people more than any other factor (Stark 1997). However, there is at least one crucial difference: Neopagans seek meaning through a union of intellect and feeling, whereas New Evangelicals seek meaning through moral hierarchy and sacrifice of the intellect – *credo non quod, sed quia absurdum est* – in the words of Tertullian.

Similarly, and despite the potential of religion to thwart political, economic, legal, and social change in general, Marx nevertheless relates religion as ideology directly to real dissatisfaction, to real suffering that arises from the inequality of life:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions . . . The abolition of the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions is a call to abandon the conditions which require illusions. (Marx [1843] 1978:54)

The crucial point then follows that the task of Marxism is, “once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world” and furthermore, to “unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form” (Marx [1843] 1978:54). Marx addresses the criticism of religion toward those religious institutions that mask the suffering of this world, that maintain the oppression of this world, for the sake of a supposed truth from the “other-world” when in reality, the ruling class projects its legitimacy through religion in order to maintain its material advantage.

Rather than a general broadside and universal condemnation, Marx’s attack on religion seems particularly focused, that Marx criticizes the role of religion within particular social contexts, with particular social ramifications. He does not condemn all religion simply for being religious.

For Marx, religion becomes oppressive to the extent it presents a universal and eternal truth over which an omnipotent and implacable God presides. In this context, humans can only submit to such formidable power, and in turn, people can only submit to the authority of the real world. In this way, idealism dominates social life, such that real lives of real people become irrelevant.

I contend that Marx calls for a unity of idealism and materialism, a thesis that Bourdieu pursues through his concepts of symbolic power (1980) and cultural capital (1993, 1991, 1985) as a means to transcend the idealism-materialism dichotomy. For Bourdieu, culture – the realm of symbolic expression – strongly interacts with economics – the realm of class hierarchy – to shape society (1993, 1991, [1980] 1990). Far too extensive and sophisticated to assess in detail here, suffice to say that, in agreement with Swartz, that Bourdieu identifies cultural capital as no less valuable in modernity than economic capital, to the extent that religious or cultural capital are social relations of power and become objects of struggle as valuable resources (Swartz 1996:74). To the extent economics and culture are inseparable, theory and practice must likewise account for both sources of power, and in life, people require both economic means and cultural legitimization to live.

As a socially constructed resource, spirituality as cultural capital need not consist automatically of oppressive elements, but neither will progressive religion spontaneously generate amidst economic struggle. Neither does the solution stand on a purely emotional or purely rational basis, but rather, on a synthesis of the two and – crucially – on a means of adjudication between the two. Although rationality and emotion are both part of the human existence, they are different, and appropriate to different aspects of life. Oppressive and progressive culture both involve ideology and material relations. Spirituality, usually in an institutionalized form, as religion, in the former serves to mask exploitive relations, while spirituality in the latter empowers equality.

What would a spirituality compatible with a Marxist materialism look like? The following chart compares oppressive “other-worldly” religion with what we may call progressive religion.

In this conceptualization, a Marxist religion integrates spirituality, emotion, and reason, as interactive components of consciousness, which in turn dialectically inform and are informed by lived experience. Progressive religion includes the conscious and rational aspects of human capacity, the ability to reason, based on objective and critical analysis of observable conditions. Yet part of objective awareness includes what Neopagans call mystery – the notion that not all of reality can be known intellectually, but which nevertheless exists as feeling, emotion, and intuition.

Table 1
 Characteristics of Oppressive and Progressive Religion

Oppressive Religion	Progressive Religion
<i>Alienation</i> – People serve interests outside themselves in the form of abstract supernatural forces, which in turn become oppressive social institutions	<i>Self-Actualization</i> – People base their lives on themselves and the well-being of others
<i>Compensation</i> – Belief and feeling replaces social change	<i>Fulfillment</i> – Promotes equitable division of social resources, such as income, education, etc.
<i>Conservatism</i> – Religious institutions maintain and promote established social relations. Includes class relations, the patriarchal family, and other forms of social inequality	<i>Progressivism</i> – Much like the Progressive Era, devotion becomes a matter of improving social conditions through material service to others
<i>Irrationality</i> – Devotion to other-worldly power that eclipses human Reason. The effect is to disempower human action	<i>Reason</i> – Critical thinking, rather than submission, becomes the normative outlook
<i>Indifference</i> – Other-worldly theological concerns supersede and negate earthly issues	<i>Passion</i> – In combination with reason, people seek vitality and inspiration in lived experience

However, Neopaganism regards reason and passion as two interactive aspects, rather than Manichean oppositions. The clear-thinking and feeling person accurately perceives both reason and mystery, and understands the relationship between the two. Different issues require different types of knowledge and awareness.

Material-Mystery Thesis

Thus, what I call the *material-mystery thesis* unites objective rationality with objective passion to form an awareness of humanity as active agents who create social relations, and who create the meaning of life. If Marxism explains the world clearly and critically in order to challenge capitalism because, among other things, capitalist oppression negates humanity, then Neopaganism explains why humanity is sacred and worth fighting for in the first place. Neopagan spirituality adjudicates right and wrong, based on humanistic, rather than transcendent values.

Negation of humanity, or in a word – alienation – thus constitutes the overall framework that a particular religion perpetuates or challenges. Separation from meaningful unity of ideology and practice constitutes, in the spiritual realm of human existence, the basis of disillusionment. Progressive spirituality must overcome this alienation, and maintain the integrity of the individual. Thus, *the progressive or oppressive outcome of spirituality and belief that transcend the material, whether specifically religious or not, depends not on the content of the beliefs nor their transcendent nature, but rather, on the type of relationship a belief system seeks to establish between individuals and society.* In other words, the issue is *material* – the extent to which beliefs arise from lived experience, and *mystery* – the extent to which spirituality can engage the individual in active and especially meaningful construction of a preferred future. Consider that Marxism in practice has been both progressive (as in Spain in the 1930s) and reactionary (as in the Soviet Union, especially under Stalin) although both based their practice on the same ideology. In the same way, religion can thus be progressive (a challenge to hierarchy, oppression, and alienation as in Central America in the 1980s with Liberation Theology) as well as reactionary (as in the United States with the Christian-Right) based on the same belief-content (in this case, Jesus Christ as the savior). The difference is ideological-material, not simply ideological. If the spiritual and the material are necessarily joined, then the variables that define social relations – class and culture – also define spirituality.

Peter Berger ([1967] 1990) observes that spirituality, and the religious institutions that arise from it, are always an attempt to arrange the realities of life into a coherent unity with purpose and meaning. Chief among these realities is death. Regardless of how we live, we all die, and people through spirituality seek to create meaning, and thereby emotional comfort, in order to live and, of course, to face death with some degree of reassurance. As long as death remains, as Shakespeare ([c. 1601] 1963) said, “the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns . . .” and which “puzzles the will” (Hamlet, III, I: 79-80) so people will need spirituality in one form or another to make sense of the ultimate reality of life, which is death. Thus, spirituality is a set of beliefs that connect the individual to a community, and in turn to a sense of being or purpose that transcends the individual and the mundane. In this way, people reassure themselves, through collective belief, that life is more than a series of events, but part of something eternal, something important, something that assures the individual a place in this world, and in some larger scheme of being.

Spirituality is thus crucial for the long-term survival of any community, because it not only justifies the particular values and lifestyle of a

community, but reinforces purpose and meaning, and thus connects the present with the past and future. Spiritual beliefs are thus the collective totality of social beliefs, which, precisely because they are collective and derived from social, not individual existence, appear to the individual as eternal and transcendent truths, as something outside of and beyond the individual, and which must, in a progressive form, empower the individual as an active member of the very same community. Thus humans create a feeling of the supernatural, of spiritual connections beyond what can be directly observed.

In the classic *Sacred Canopy* ([1967] 1990), Peter Berger identifies the central aspect of spirituality, deistic or not, as its ability to construct and maintain a *nomos* – a belief system that explains the meaning of life. This *nomos* arises specifically from actual social relations as well as visions of society as it ought to be. Without a *nomos*, a society falls into alienation and *a-nomie* (without values that explain the meaning of life),¹ which produces diverse and extensive social problems. For example, Native-Americans continued to live after Europeans destroyed their civilizations, but now, they lived as strangers in a homeland that was now a strange land, stripped of political power as well as cultural and personal identity.

Yet a firmly accepted *nomos* builds societies and can hold a social group together despite intolerance and persecution. Numerous historical examples exist: Christians under ancient Rome; the Jews in the Diaspora after 70 AD until the 20th century; African-Americans during the civil rights struggle, the same aforementioned Native-Americans who rediscovered their cultural heritage – all of which united with a specifically religious *nomos*. *Transcendent beliefs function affirmingly only to the extent they embody material conditions and promote realization of the self in conjunction with social interests.* In Weber's well-known and often misunderstood *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argues that ascetic Protestantism became *both an expression of and justification for* material conditions, both socially and personally. Ideals and morality – religious or otherwise, arise from and in turn govern social life.

¹ Durkheim uses *anomie* in this sense, and not in the general sense of normlessness. The *anomic* person is normless, but specifically lacks a sense of meaning and purpose, but may have other norms and values. As Durkheim argues, *anomie* is found most intensely in successful business executives, who have a powerful normative standard – making money and having fun – but who lack a sense of meaning. In essence, Durkheim argues that money can buy property and thrills, but not happiness (see Durkheim [1897] 1979:247-250 and 253-257).

Critical Theory

Similarly, the Critical Theory tradition within Marxism continued this analysis of material-ideological connections; if a Marxist spirituality is to emerge, then the Critical Theory tradition thus offers the greatest potential. In notable works such as *Authorität und Familie* (Horkheimer et al. 1936), *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm [1941] 1994), *Behemoth* (Neumann 1944), *Rehearsal for Destruction* (Massing 1949), *Prophets of Deceit* (Loewenthal and Guterman [1949] 1969), *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. [1950] 1969), and many others, Critical Theory in this classic period examined the contradiction that arises between material conditions on one hand and beliefs on the other, in particular, those beliefs that depend on perceived transcendent, supernatural, and eternal truths (God, Nature, Blood and Soil, The Nation, etc.). In this oppressive form, such beliefs feature an authority that demands unquestioning submission, justified by eternal truths that transcend worldly experience and human capacity. Critical Theory viewed such transcendent beliefs as hegemonic, a culture of social control, that often justified class exploitation, absolutist governments, oppressive policies, war, and at the individual level – patriarchal families, personal sacrifice, and submission to authority in general. In short, Critical Theorists argued that religious devotion, whether to God, country, or any other transcendent authority requires at the same time the negation of the self, especially the capacity for critical reflection and reason.

Horkheimer ([1946] 1974) and Horkheimer and Adorno ([1947] 1994) see the triumph of the Enlightenment at great cost – destruction of the soul. The very first casualty of modern scientific rationality is the meaning of life:

From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities . . . whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect. . . . Myth turns into enlightenment, and nature into mere objectivity. Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. (Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 1994:7-9)

In place of meaning that mythical relations with nature provided, modern society exerts control over the same natural but now demystified natural forces. This facilitates the realization of material goals, but provides satisfaction only to the extent a person sees their own fate connected to the success of the system. Hence, only the bourgeoisie, those with the power to manipulate people and nature, conjoin their own happiness with capitalist expansion. The masses live only to serve purposes outside

themselves, with no motivation other than to survive. In premodern society, the concept of the unseen, the superiority of nonhuman forces conceptualized generally as mana, was not a projection, but a recognition that superior forces exerted irresistible force both for and against human endeavor. This universal and transcendent power united the community in shared meaning, because mana was universal. Yet modernity unmakes the universal through its rationality – “if it cannot be calculated, it is not real” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 1994:27).

Within the Marxist tradition, Walter Benjamin noted that socialism “would never have entered the world if its proponents had sought only to excite the enthusiasm of the working class for a better order of things . . . Marx understood how to interest the workers in a social order which would both benefit them and appear to them as just” (Benjamin [c. 1927] 1999:395). The notion of justice complicates the picture. The worker inherently shares in the interest of bourgeois society, in that each wants the capitalist to succeed so that jobs remain available and the worker continues to earn an income to live. Under these circumstances, the workers feel little enthusiasm or dedication beyond the minimum to retain employment, and must engage the search for meaning somewhere besides the workplace. However, to the extent that capitalism and its attendant commodification of culture supplants tradition and spontaneous interaction, the struggle against injustice must simultaneously involve a struggle against existential vacancy.

Arguing for a Marxist moral framework, Fromm argues in *You Shall Be as Gods* that two contradictory messages emerge from Judeo-Christian-Islamic texts about the relationship of humans to the surrounding world and to each other. One tells of the harsh and warlike God (nature in earlier times, society in modern times) who issues orders, punishes the wicked, and judges harshly. The other tells of the emancipatory God who encourages critical reflection and rewards human initiative if based in reason and compassion (Fromm [1966] 1991). On the progressive side, Fromm sees messages of freedom and self-determination regarding the inherent dignity of all humans, the power and right of humans to self-determination, and the accountability of humans for each other. Needless to say, the oppressive messages negate all of these elements.

Progressive religion for Fromm thus becomes religion by humans and for humans. He notes that, although the Ten Commandments make certain stipulations, they do not stipulate forms of worship or content of beliefs. Fromm concludes that “the one central sin according to the Bible is that of idol worship” which Fromm equates with commodity fetishism (Fromm [1966] 1991:163), that as humans worship the product of their own labor as something outside themselves, they immediately surrender

their own power of adjudication. Rather, God is a living God who changes to serve the needs of people, and is not static or contained within fixed and limited idols. Similarly, society must be forever living and becoming, forever critical of itself and imagining possibilities.

Consequently, the progressive message, according to Fromm, is that, through free will – the choice between good and evil – the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition does not emphasize knowledge about God (idolatry), but rather “imitation of God” (Fromm [1966] 1991:179). Therefore, the human capacity for reason, the ability to rationally predict outcomes, and the ability to understand difference – *the Other* – just as God’s knowledge transgresses boundaries, become virtues that guide our choices between good and evil. What is good derives not from worship, but from reason – not from submission, but from purposeful action.

Humans thus become as God – the ability to make moral decision based on reason and compassion on behalf of one’s self and in free association with others. Yet society must provide the actual, material support to maintain the integrity of the individual yet also egalitarian social responsibility. In contemporary capitalism, this is often not the case.

Rather, alienation arises in various forms from the inequality of class relations. Furthermore, cultural values likewise arise that promote the needs of the economic system over and against the happiness of the individual. Many in the Marxist tradition have addressed this dilemma and in regards to the oppressive role of (bourgeois) religion, most recently and articulately, Rudolf Siebert (2001, 1987) and Michael Ott (2001). Fromm goes one step further, to link spirituality with social change. If the goal is socialism (equitable sharing of benefits and responsibilities), then “no socialist society could fulfill the goal of brotherliness, justice, and individualism unless its ideas are capable of filling the hearts of men with a new spirit” (Fromm [1955] 1990:343). At the same time, Fromm argues that the ideas are all around us, whether from the Bible, or the Torah, or the Talmud, or many other sources,

The great teachers of the human race have postulated the norms for sane living. To be sure, they have spoken in different languages, have emphasized different aspects and have had different views on certain subjects. But altogether, these differences are small; the fact that the great religions and ethical systems have so often fought against each other, and emphasized their differences rather than their similarities, was due to the influence of those who built churches, hierarchies, political organizations, upon the simple foundations laid down by people of spirit. Since the human race made the decisive return away from rootedness in nature and animal existence, we must find a new home in brotherliness and social solidarity. (Fromm [1955] 1990:344)

Fromm upholds and expands upon the distinction noted earlier in Marx, that religion as such is not the issue, but specifically religion in a socially oppressive form. Thus, the institutions of power, the churches and related hierarchies complete against progressive spirituality, the feeling of purpose and belonging that arises from social solidarity that also upholds individuality.

In general, progressive spirituality encourages the realization of individual potential, but also places the individual as an active participant in society, specifically, as an active maker of social life in conjunction with others. Morality thus depends on the well-being of the self and equally on the well-being of others. The person is both individual and social, thereby reducing alienation. In contrast, oppressive spirituality emphasizes the dominance of forces beyond human comprehension and control, and likewise submission to and service of abstract authority – spiritual fetishism. Morality in this case depends on the perceived dictates of an abstract authority, and thus the person is neither an individual or a social actor, but rather, the tool of authority, thereby intensifying alienation.

In order for Marxism to render and sustain a critique of capitalism, as Fromm and Benjamin argue, it must include a spiritual sensibility as the inspiration not only for an equitable society, but also for a just society.

Marxist Spirituality in Practice

Neopaganism: Self-Affirmation and Community

A plethora of popular distortions and attacks on the movement known generally as Neopaganism requires some description of the subject. Some distortions conflate Neopaganism with new age beliefs, while more aggressive attacks condemn Neopaganism as ‘devil-worship’ and thus the embodiment of everything that is wrong in American society. Many American Neopagans assume their beliefs are imported from Britain, and although British antecedents exert considerable influence, Neopaganism neither originated in Britain, nor does the British model serve as the basis for American versions. Neopaganism has become far more diverse in America than in Britain, and Americans actually founded the first Neopagan organization, The Church of Aphrodite, in 1938 (Hutton 1999:340). Furthermore, some of the diverse American traditions may be entirely separate from Britain, as an early study by Vance Randolph (1947) uncovered pagan traditions in the Ozark Mountains.

American Neopagans and their beliefs and practices are diverse and mostly undocumented in a scholarly fashion. However, all more or less

construct their theology from a particular tradition of feminist and green spirituality. Arguably, the strong green and feminist elements with a generally progressive political stance distinguishes American Neopaganism from its British influences, which were often nationalistic and politically conservative (see Hutton 1999 for an exhaustive treatment of British Neopaganism).

Not only is *Neo*-paganism new-paganism, but it is very new; Hutton (1999) places its advent in the mid-twentieth century, the outcome of writings by Aleister Crowley, Robert Graves, and especially, the organizing activities of Gerald Gardner (1950s and 60s). Gardner presented the term “Wica” in his book *Witchcraft Today* ([1954] 2003) which set forth many of the common features of Neopaganism and became a sort of standard guideline for later authors in the “Wicca” tradition as it is known today (Hutton 1999:241). However, each of these people (and others) drew their imagery and mythology from earlier cultural traditions and events going backwards through consecutive events to the middle-ages, to organizations which had nothing to do with paganism or religion (see Hutton (1991) for a an extremely detailed historical and archaeological treatise). Gerald Gardner invented much of the ritual and belief that characterizes Neopaganism generally, except crucially that early Neopagans in the British Isles where, in contrast to more recent American versions, often patriotic, elitist, and capitalist – sentiments that derive from powerful hierarchies.

In the United States, fictional and theological works would reshape Neopaganism at its core into an anti-hierarchical, pro-environmental and feminist spirituality (Eller 1993; Luff 1990), which now finds appeal equally among men as well as women in Neopagan communities (Pike 2001). However, most enthusiasts learned about Neopaganism through friendship networks (Berger 1998; Pike 2001) and only later began reading about new found spirituality that already appealed to them. In other words, most people do not convert in the sense of changing their views, but rather, find that Neopaganism corresponds to or affirms feelings and views they already have.

Neopaganism in the United States

Generally, contemporary Neopagans construct their beliefs as rediscoveries of lost beliefs, as Sarah McLachlan says in a popular song, “from a faith that died before Jesus came.” However, Neopagans such as Margot Adler ([1979] 1997) and Starhawk ([1982] 1997) contend that Neopaganism did not die, nor was it destroyed by zealous Christians (although they continue to try), but in fact survived to the present in rural areas of Britain and continental Europe. Starhawk in particular argues that

Christianity and capitalism together negated Neopagan spiritual values of tolerance, sharing, balance, and especially, harmony with nature and non-human species. But whatever the particular beliefs, the general point remains that Neopagans today emphasize that their beliefs are ancient – descended from an earlier and better form of social organization.

Beliefs

Magic is an essential element. For most, magic is both an intuitive and objectively rational process of influencing events. Just as understanding can occur on different levels and from different perspectives, so magic, found in many cultures and conceptualized in sociology as *mana*, exists as both a real force, and as a symbolic representation of a larger and complex process of *interconnectedness*. As Adler ([1979] 1997) states, “magic is the art of getting results.”

Holidays constitute a vital center of Neopaganism, because they draw together otherwise diverse groups and individuals. Like almost all communities, Neopagans celebrate certain holidays as celebration of their collective identity, although given the non-hierarchical nature of Neopaganism, the particular names and dates vary.

Neopagan traditions are nature-based, and thus holidays correspond to changes in nature. The major holidays fall on summer and winter solstices, the fall and spring equinoxes, and the midpoints in between these events. To venture a general framework, Neopagan holidays (cognizant of variation) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Neopagan Holidays

Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer
<i>Fall Equinox</i> (around September 21). Also called Michaelmas	<i>Winter Solstice</i> (around December 21). Also called Christmas, Yule	<i>Spring Equinox</i> (around March 21). Also called Ostara. Sometimes celebrated with Easter, St Patrick’s Day	<i>Summer Solstice</i> (around June 21).
<i>Samhain</i> (October 31-early November). Also called Halloween, All Hallows’s Eve, All Saint’s Day, Day of the Dead	<i>Candlemas</i> (Early-mid February). Also called Imbolc. Sometimes celebrated with Mardi Gras, Lent	<i>Beltane</i> (late April-early May). Also called Walpurgis Night. This celebration features Maypole dancing	<i>Lammas</i> (early August).

Interconnectedness constitutes both the spiritual and objectively rational justification of beliefs. Contemporary pagans believe that prehistoric pagans recognized essential truths about life and existence that we have since lost and ought to rediscover. Once a person realizes the basic truth of *interconnectedness*, then people would realize that cooperation and equality are both more practical and more fulfilling than hierarchical forms of social organization, because cooperation is more in accordance with the natural order and interconnectedness of things. Yet Neopagans do not reject science or modern ways of thinking, but as with all things, people should not commit exclusively to one way and neglect all others but rather, seek integration. Different ways of knowing, science included, pertain to different aspects of existence. The type of situation or question determines the type of knowledge that applies.

Regardless of the veracity of claims to ancient origins, American Neopaganism typically holds nature-goddess worship and non-hierarchy as sacred, notions believed to be handed down or rediscovered from prehistoric times. Sociologically, Neopagans intentionally construct their beliefs and practices as a reaction against various trends in recent history, especially the commodification of spirituality (Jorgensen and Russell 1999), the degradation of nature (Starhawk [1982] 1997), and feminist dissatisfaction with patriarchal society and religion (Goldenberg 1979; Christ 1987). It is precisely this conscious dissatisfaction with established power relations that brings Neopaganism into the sphere of Marxist materialism.

Given the diversity of manifestations, and the association of many Neopagans symbols (such as the pentagram) with conventional notions of 'evil,' the popular media often conflates so-called 'occult' practices such as Satanism with Neopaganism. Yet research shows that Satanism and the Occult is completely unrelated to Neopaganism both ideologically and socially (Jorgensen and Russell 1999; Melton and Poggi 1992). Neopagans construct a living, vital spirituality that corresponds to the lives of real people – to their jobs, their families, their thoughts, dreams, and feelings. Neopagans share ideas through friendship networks, especially now through the internet, and read far more than the general public and treasure knowledge in diverse areas (Matthews 1995).

In other words, Neopaganism, as distinct from ancient paganism, is a contemporary social construction that continues to unfold and develop in conscious response to contemporary social conditions; it is not an archaeological relic but an intentional attempt to create new meaning and new communities.

Margot Adler

One of the first and most influential attempts to map the Neopagan landscape was Margot Adler's ([1979] 1997) *Drawing Down the Moon*. Through personal experience, anecdotes, and survey research, Adler identifies various versions of Neopaganism and offers examples of actual practice – chants, rituals, poems, incantations, and descriptions of rites and rituals. Her compilation, though relatively thorough, nevertheless constructs a particular perspective on Neopaganism. Specifically, she places it within an urban, educated, liberal or progressive culture, which contemporary research confirms (Jorgensen and Russell 1999). She excludes Caribbean and African traditions that include animal sacrifice, such as Santeria and Voodoo, or other faiths that rely upon patriarchal values and hierarchical domination of the strong and privileged over the weak, such as ancient Central and South American traditions. The Aztecs, as is well known, conducted human sacrifice.

Thus, Adler's early work promotes a progressive version of Neopaganism that decisively breaks from indigenous American and folk traditions, and precludes paganistic but reactionary groups such as odinism (the belief that Odin and the Norse gods stand for the superiority of the white race). Although it sometimes draws on the symbolism of past societies, including Ancient Britain, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, Adler's depiction becomes typically modern – an intentionally constructed set of beliefs to support a particular political or social agenda. As she says, most people come to Neopaganism because it “confirms some original, private experience” (Adler [1979] 1997:14) and corroborates attitudes and hopes they have felt all along. In short, it provides a name and social context for preconceived attitudes that arise from personal, rather than traditional, experience.

Moreover, Adler displays typically modern rationality. Neopaganism becomes a conscious and rational tool to facilitate change, whether personal or social change. In this way, she engineers the deities of Neopaganism into metaphors, whereas folk beliefs like Santeria worship actual and very materially real gods and goddesses. Voodoo, for example, accepts that gods can literally possess people, speak through them, control their actions, and possession can occur malevolently as well as by invitation from the possessed.² In Adler's, and also in Starhawk's Neopaganism, the material existence of deities is indeterminate at best, whether they

² The same is true in some Christian faiths, especially among the Pentecostals, who believe that both Jesus and Satan can possess people.

exist or not separately from our belief is irrelevant. Rather, what we consciously make of them, and the way we live, is decisive.

Indeed, consistent with her rationalist approach, that “most revivalist witches in North America accept the universal Old Religion more as metaphor than as a literal reality – a spiritual truth more than a geographic one” (Adler [1979] 1997:86) she further emphasizes that Neopagans of her ilk reject dogmatic beliefs and routinized practice. In short, they reject tradition in the sociological sense, that is, the institutionalization of spirituality – religion. Tradition is, by definition, the practice of doing things the way they have always been done, without question. Since most Neopagans reject unquestioning obedience, they replace it with living, dynamic, and creative beliefs, tailored to contemporary issues and daily life.

In conclusion, Adler outlines the general beliefs and practices of Neopagans, and establishes what does and does not constitute Neopaganism. Most importantly, she establishes American Neopaganism as progressive, creative, and non-hierarchical, all of which contrasts sharply with its British counterparts, reaffirm mostly established or conservative politics (or avoid politics altogether), and practice their faith through religious hierarchy. Adler moves away from this, and Starhawk, whom I will discuss next, moves still further towards the progressive and non-hierarchical, activist orientation as she develops a much more concise and detailed Neopagan theology.

Starhawk

Among Neopagan theologians, Starhawk (given name Miriam Simos) is probably foremost. Nearly all neopagans in the various studies cited in this paper have read or claim knowledge of Starhawk. Through a series of books, she draws connections between environmental and social issues, in combination with feminist activism and even classical social theorists, such as Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Max Weber, and Simone De-Beauvoir, but also contemporary but not popularly known academic historians such as Carolyn Merchant. A very talented, intellectual, and passionate writer, knowledgeable in a range of areas, Starhawk nevertheless constructs an accessible, intriguing, and practical spirituality. Often very elegant and stirring, Starhawk combines social criticism with self-reflection, science with emotion, reason with passion. In her view, Neopaganism became a means to add spirituality to her Marxist-feminist commitments, and in the process, I suggest, she invented a unique version of Neopaganism that decisively distinguishes American Neopaganism from its British antecedents, but also from New-Age spirituality.

Sociologically, Starhawk exemplifies the social construction of belief; by integrating elements from existing perspectives through her own creativity, Starhawk has devised a sophisticated spirituality to address vital issues of the modern age – inequality, poverty, pollution, and especially – alienation. For those who find no solace in established churches and in general feel like outsiders in their own society, Starhawk’s Neopaganism offers a spirituality that comforts and empowers the individual through a criticism of the society which rejects sensitivity and diversity. From the onset, she frames social alienation in terms of spirituality:

Even the small acts that ordinarily bring us pleasure or comfort become tinged at moments with horror. There are times when I walk down the street, and smile at the man who sits on his front stoop playing the radio, and the kids laying pennies on the streetcar tracks, and the woman whose dog plays with my dogs, but in between the blinks they are gone. I see the flash, and then nothing is left – of these charmingly painted Victorian houses, of these ordinary people, or the features of the earth beneath the streets. Nothing – but ashes and a scorched, black void.

I know that I am not alone in being overwhelmed at times by hopelessness and despair . . . Everybody’s personal pain is touched by this greater uncertainty: we are no longer confident of leaving a better world, of leaving a *living* world, to our children.

Yet the children must be fed, the dogs must be walked, the work must go on, so we raise the barriers that defend us from unbearable pain, and in a state of numbness and denial we go on. The work may seem flat, but we carefully avoid questioning its meaning and usefulness, even though we sense that something deep and sweet is missing from our lives, our families, our friendships; some sense of purpose and power is gone. (Starhawk [1982] 1997:2-3)

In subsequent sections, Starhawk challenges the mechanistic worldview, that each person and thing is a separate and isolated entity, available for use and manipulation. Furthermore, the power to isolate and alienate, or as she says “to estrange people from each other and to nature, is power-over,” a type of domination that is “ultimately, the power of the gun and the bomb” (Starhawk [1982] 1997:3). In its place, Starhawk calls for power from-within, not the ability to dominate and control, but the power to be able to do things, “the power we feel writing, weaving, working, creating, making choices, has nothing to do with threats of annihilation” (Starhawk [1982] 1997:3). Thus, she condemns the *mechanistic* worldview that inherently negates spiritual feeling because it privileges separation and isolation, that difference is also and always a matter of better and worse. This in turn supports domination – men over women, white over black, industry over nature, and each against all – the essence

of modern society. Although people still work and live in social relationships, they are relationships of inequality in which the many serve the interests of the few, in which people work according to the designs of others, and in which people lose a sense of meaning.

In its place, Starhawk proposes a worldview of immanence, that meaning and the ability to do things resides in each person, yet each person requires cooperation with others in order to realize their unique and collective potential. Clearly influenced by Marx, Starhawk is both an idealist and a materialist – individual and social problems derive from both the way people think and the way people actually live. For example:

The split between culture and nature determines the character of work itself. It is no coincidence that so-called industrial discipline began to be imposed on labor in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the workplace began to be split from the home, when women were gradually driven out of many types of productive work, and when the revenge against nature was played out in the Witchburnings. In a mechanistic society, whether capitalist or communist, our underlying conception of work is that mothering, nurturing, feeling should be excluded. (Starhawk [1982] 1997:77)

Furthermore, Starhawk sees the forces of modern rationalization penetrating even to our individual selves, that everything that makes us unique individuals and human beings should be excised. Domination becomes increasingly complete and secure to the extent it becomes moreover impersonal and unfeeling. Yet to the extent we deny our emotions and the ability to feel the condition of others, so we negate and disempower our own self, and in the extreme forms become simply a tool of outside forces – the employer, the pursuit of wealth, power, and profit, popularity, or even, in the most extreme forms, a tool of the Holocaust. In short, we become alienated. As she elaborates:

This alienation is no accident. Our economic and political systems, our science and technology, are rooted in our alienation from our own bodies and from the realms of deep feeling. The imposition of the puritan ethic in the seventeenth century and the denigration of sexuality that accompanied the Witchburnings created conditions in which capitalism was fostered and peasant classes were forced into alienating wage labor. Today, as long as we remain cut off from the sources of deep feeling in our lives, we remain avid consumers of packaged substitutes for feeling that can be sold at a profit to a mass market. (Starhawk [1982] 1997:137)

Thus, the domination of women, the exploitation of nature, and other consequences of mechanism result from both ideology, the belief that women should be restricted to domestic labor, and material interests, that workers must discipline themselves according to the directives and

priorities of the employer's need for profit and as consumers we must conform to the calculated sentimentality of mass market culture. In order to create change, people must recognize the power-from within, the ability to accomplish things as free thinkers who willingly accept responsibility, not just conform to external authority. This recognition requires a spiritual sensibility of self-empowerment. Since Starhawk draws a direct connection between all types of exploitation, she similarly creates a spirituality that challenges all forms of exploitation – the domination of man over man and man over woman (and nature). In other words, she creates a feminist and socialist spirituality. Starhawk uses the dance as a metaphorical expression of the unity between masculine and feminine, mind and body, civilization and nature.

Starhawk requires more than spiritual reform, because she links oppressive social reality with spiritual malaise. Consequently, her spirituality includes an inherent social activism, and in order to change society, in which privileged groups will not willingly relinquish power, something stronger than reform is required.

Two aspects emerge. First, people must rediscover authentic passion, the power of true love, the spontaneous emotions that arise within each of us in relationship to other people. Although hierarchical society allows and even promotes feelings associated with domination, such as anger, hatred, and the corresponding action necessary to maintain inequality – violence – progressive change requires that we rediscover the unity of passion and physical sensuality. Specifically,

Sexuality is the way we, as adults, experience this particular dance, deep in the caves of the body. For in sex we merge, give way, become one with another, allow ourselves to be caressed, pleased, enfolded, allow our sense of separation to dissolve. But in sex we also feel our impact on another, see our own faces reflected in another's eyes, feel ourselves confirmed, and sense our power, as separate human beings, to make another feel. (Starhawk [1982] 1997:138)

If passion and sexuality are separated, that is, alienated, then people reduce each other to simply sexual objects, such that we dehumanize each other and in so doing, lose the feeling of reciprocation. Sex then becomes an empty act, or even worse, an act of selfish domination premised on separate and private rather than mutual and collective satisfaction and joining together.

For Starhawk, sexuality represents a special kind of power because it is potentially the most intimate, and most gratifying aspect of human existence. In true sexuality as she describes above, people find themselves and others; they share an intensely spiritual moment. If people

begin to work for true passionate sexuality rather than superficial sex, they will work towards and demand authenticity in other aspects of life. In feminist fashion, the personal becomes the basis of political action.

Second, Starhawk contends that our current culture and economic system reinforce each other, that our spiritual system, namely Christianity, supports patriarchy, domination, and power – over. Reforming Christianity cannot take us far enough, because it would leave the essence of the system intact. Starhawk basically calls for a social revolution, of which spiritual revolution is one aspect (Marxism, of course, is well-known for its call for economic revolution). In contrast to the familiar and comfortable Christian symbols – Jesus on the cross, the halo, the Bible – paganism likewise offers familiar symbols, but which are discomfiting to conventionalism – Magical Incantation, the Coven, the Goddess, the horned God. Symbols are also concepts and representations of ideology that govern identity, and in turn govern social relations and behavior. Thus, to embrace and reclaim pagan symbols means to challenge the established order, to intentionally choose something different, something contrary to conventional beliefs, and to refuse submission to externally imposed meaning, and rather to create meaning from lived experience.

The problem still remains: how does Neopaganism so constructed integrate free-thinking individuals who do not submit to external authority? The answer becomes relatively simple. People always need other people; it is an essential fact of being human. Yet fulfilling the need to be with others can take various forms, and even the capitalist and the worker depend on each other as much as they compete against each other. Points of contention concern the terms on which people will interact. Neopaganism, with an absence of formal doctrine, requires the active participation of individual practitioners, and the active construction of belief. Given the possibility of free association premised on collective respect, people will endeavor to support the group, which includes compromise and tolerance, because their individual identity depends to a great extent on continued free association. In short, people learn and practice self-control from within, rather than through submission to an external authority.

Conclusion

I argue here that Marxism and American Neopaganism are inherently compatible and complimentary, whether any particular Neopagan practitioners recognize this or not, because the Neopagan vision of social relations holds that obligation arises from mutually recognized responsi-

bility, and a dynamic sensibility that individual's face a series of choices that have both personal and social impact – the spiritual corollary of Marxist materialism.

Neopaganism encourages critical reflection and active, ongoing construction of beliefs and practices. Neopagans establish alternative communities that critically select elements of modernity, religion, and whatever other sources of knowledge support egalitarian social relations, person to person, group to group, but also between society and nature. Neopagans seek integrative knowledge – knowledge that explains the interconnection of all things, including intangibles such as love. In contrast to the authoritarian submission of New Evangelicalism before a fetishized God, Neopagans rely on the human capacities of reason and passion.

This offers much greater potential for empowerment, because it places humanity at the center of meaning and practice, rather than as a submissive tool for higher powers. Without the supreme being, humans can only rely on each other. Neopagan spirituality is thus an extension of this-worldly awareness; it legitimates critical awareness in this world, which legitimates challenges to established social order, based on the inherent right of humans to pursue their well-being. The entire moral order of Neopaganism supports egalitarianism against hierarchy in both the spiritual realm and the material realm. As a link between the ideal and the real, the material-mystery of Neopaganism has already in practice incorporated Marxist principles, and offers what secular Marxism has not offered historically – a reason to enjoy life, not just a reason to fight against oppression.

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