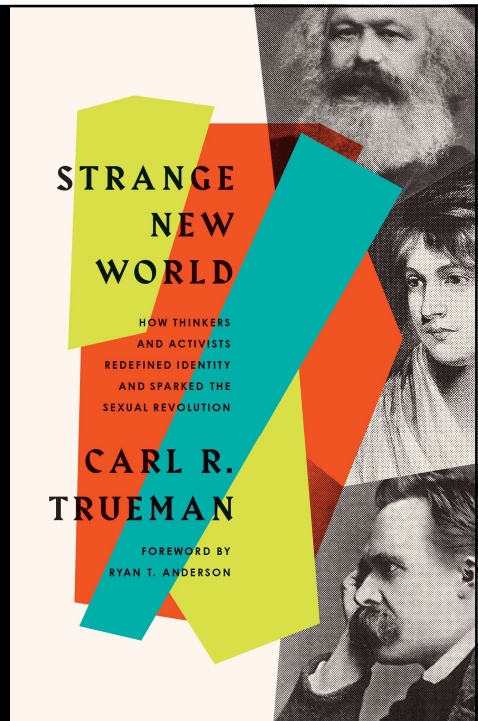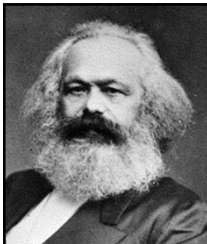# CHAPTER 3
Prometheus Unbound
Major Premise:

   Karl Marx & Friedrich Nietzsche moved Western culture towards expressive individualism through their ideas that there is no moral structure to human nature and that moral codes are inherently oppressive.

1

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883)
German philosopher & economic theorist

   Marx was an atheist & materialist who denied any transcendent reality or "sacred foundation for any moral order" (p. 54). He asserted that economic relations alone determine *"how we think of reality"* (p. 54) and how history unfolds.

2

Marx believed in a "psychological projection" explanation for religion. Belief in God is merely the projection of human values, hopes, and longings onto to an imagined Supreme Being. Religion serves as "opium" to assuage the "alienation" and unhappiness of the oppressed proletariat.

Religious morality is "*an expression of the economic concerns of the dominant class . . . the bourgeosie*" (p. 56) and thus a tool for oppression. Religion must therefore be eradicated for true freedom and happiness in society.

3

Marx's reduction of all human social relations to economic relations means that "*all human social relations must therefore be political . . . The prepolitical is no more*" (pp. 58-59).

4
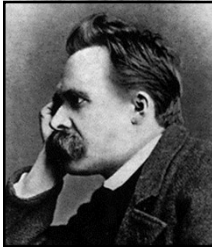
Friedrich Nietzsche(1844 – 1900)
German philosopher

   Nietzsche was an atheist and his famous phrase "God is dead" meant not only that God did not exist, but that the idea of God had been shoved aside as irrelevant. But, Nietzsche argued in effect, "*Enlightenment philosophers … failed to draw the necessary conclusions from this notion*" (p. 61).

5

   One of the necessary conclusions was that traditional morality, based on belief in God, was completely undermined: "… *there is no moral stability to the universe … there is no moral structure to human nature … We are free from all such constraints*" (p. 62).

6

For Nietzsche, Christian morality was "slave morality" because it valued weakness over strength and was supposedly born of the resentment of weak, poor, sick slaves toward their masters. For, "master morality"—in Nietzsche's thought original morality—what was morally good was to be strong, wealthy, and powerful; to be able to take and hold the things that made for happiness. The Christian valorization of such things as equality, charity, and self-restraint became ways for the weak to dominate the strong.

7

Nietzsche holds that, in the absence of God, a divinely-sanctioned morality, and any moral nature to human beings, "*we are tasked with the art of self-creation*" (p. 64). We have no God-given nature or purpose which we must seek to pattern our lives on (*mimesis*); we must make who we are in whatever way we chose (*poesis*).

8

Oscar Wilde(1854 – 1900)
Irish writer, poet, and playwright

Trueman argues that Oscar Wilde is a good example of Nietzsche's concept of the "superman" (*Übermensch*). Not a Nazi stormtrooper, but *"one who engages in dramatic, transgressive self-creation"* (p. 65) For Wilde, as for Nietzsche, *"what is aesthetically pleasing has supplanted the notion of moral correctness"* (p. 68).

9

Wilde lived out Nietzsche's thought that, in Trueman's words, you should *"be whoever or whatever works for you. You should feel no obligation to conform to the standards or criteria of anybody else"* (p. 63).

10

Emotivism

"Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling ... .

Alasadair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*

11

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do you think Dr. Trueman is or is not making a convincing case (so far) for the nature and influence of expressive individualism?
2. How might a Christian respond to Marx's idea of alienation?
3. What can we learn from Nietzsche's parable of the "Madman"?
4. How is Oscar Wilde a harbinger of our present age?
5. In what ways can you see that moral "emotivism" has become part of our "social imaginarium"?

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