



Marx's Kapital and Darwin

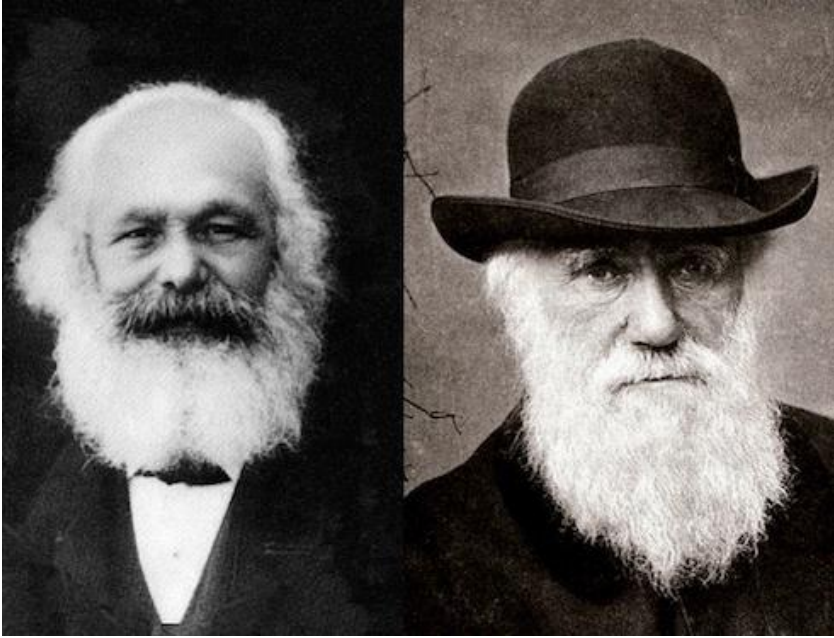
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Marx's *Kapital* and Darwin

Journal of the History of Ideas 39 no. 3 (July–September 1978), 519; abstract in the *Philosopher's Index* 12 (1978), 234



ABSTRACT

This is not an article, but a rejoinder to an article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, in which a reference in my book on Karl Marx as to what had been considered as Marx's unsuccessful effort to dedicate the second edition of *Das Kapital* to Darwin was ascribed to the influence upon me of E. H. Carr's biography of Karl Marx. This view, based on a mistaken reading of one of Darwin's letters, did appear in the earlier edition of my biography of Marx, but had since been corrected, before the appearance of the article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. My rejoinder points out that its source was not Carr's biography, but the generally reliable Soviet 'biochronik' of the dates and facts of Marx's life, an error which has been repeated in subsequent Soviet biographies of Marx.

IN HER NOTE in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*,¹ 'Did Marx Offer to Dedicate *Kapital* to Darwin? A Reassessment of the Evidence',

¹ 39 no. 1 (January–March 1978), 133–46.

Miss Margaret A. Fay states quite correctly (p. 135) that in my *Karl Marx* I wrote that Marx's attempt to dedicate *Das Kapital* to Darwin was politely declined by the latter. The articles by Professor Lewis S. Feuer in the *Annals of Science*² referred to by Miss Fay (the second of which Professor Feuer had courteously sent me) has convinced me, as it has, no doubt, convinced others even before the appearance of Miss Fay's Note, that Darwin's letter of 13 October 1880 is in fact no evidence for Marx's alleged offer to dedicate any version of *Das Kapital* to Darwin, and that I was in error.

When, however, Miss Fay surmises that this was originally due to the fact that I 'simply seized upon a hint in a secondary source' – E. H. Carr's *Karl Marx: A Study in Fanaticism* (London, 1934) – and built upon it, she is wide of the mark. My account was based (as Professor Feuer more charitably and correctly guessed) on a Soviet publication. At the time at which I was writing my book – the 1930s – the Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute in Moscow, which alone (since the German edition of the works of Marx and Engels – MEGA – had been stopped in Nazi Germany) continued with the publication of the great edition (in Russian), was widely regarded as the fullest and most authoritative source for the facts of Marx's life as well as for his writings. I therefore placed much reliance on the Russian text of the *Biochronik*³ of Karl Marx's life – *Karl Marks: daty zhibizni i deyatelnosti 1818–1883*, ed. V. Adoratsky (Moscow, 1934: Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute) – based on *Karl Marx: Chronik seines Lebens in Einzeldaten*, ed. E. Czóbel (Moscow, 1934: Marx–Engels-Verlag).

The item concerning the alleged dedication is to be found on p. 366 of the Russian *Biochronik*, and cites as its source the Russian translation of Darwin's 1880 letter, in *Pod znamenem marksizma*.⁴ So far as I know, the story continues to be repeated, at any rate in Soviet works on Marx; the latest example of it that I have seen is in *Karl Marks: Biografiya*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1973: Politizdat), 360, by a collective of authors directed by P. N. Fedoseev, which also cites

² 'Is the "Darwin–Marx correspondence" authentic?', *Annals of Science* 32 (1975) no. 1, 1–12, and 1975, and 'The "Darwin–Marx correspondence": A Correction and Revision', 33 (1976) no. 4, 383–4.

³ [The German term for 'biographical chronology': in Russian, *biokhronika*.]

⁴ 'Pis'mo Charl'za Darvina Karlu Marksu', *Pod znamenem marksizma* 1931 no. 1–2 (January–February), 203–4; referred to by Miss Fay in her article, 145 note 41.

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Lenin's wholly approving expansion of Engels's celebrated parallel between the work of Darwin and that of Marx.⁵

I suspect that it is the acceptance of this story by Professor Adoratsky and his colleagues in the Marx–Engels–Lenin Institute (which has, so far as I know, remained unmodified to this day) that served to mislead Professor McLennan and others, as well as myself, on this issue, authoritative as it seemed to be at a time when Western Marxology had not reached its present flourishing condition.

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⁵ V. I. Lenin, 'What The "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats', part 1, *Collected Works* i (Moscow, 1960: Progress Publishers), 134, 142, 148.