

Marxist influences in darwin's origin of species



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Less than a decade after Karl Marx completed his philosophical work, *The German Ideology: Part I*, Charles Darwin was finally persuaded to publish his biological masterpiece, *The Origin of Species*. Could these two works be bound intrinsically through Marx's moral account of history? Is it possible that such politically charged material influenced a scientific thesis being written halfway around the world? Absolutely. When one takes a close look at the moral underpinnings of Darwin's breakthrough discovery of evolution, it is easy to see Marxist inspiration. Marx attempts in *The German Ideology: Part I* to refocus German perception of history, or at least point out its flaws. He contends that, unlike the British and French, who he thinks have at least some glimpse of his truth, the Germans naively refuse to accept materialism as the driving force of their history. Marx writes that what he calls historical materialism is the proper way to analyze the course of human history. What he sees as German idealism ~~is~~ intellectual separation from such materialistic grounding ~~is~~ he condemns for failing to grasp the underlying power of forces of production and people's relation to those forces of production as the determining might of the structure of society. He goes on to describe the idealist tradition in the study of human history; the problem Marx sees consists of idealist notions coming to be estranged from the empirical, realistic conditions of history and treated as the a priori determining forces of social structure. Again, this problem seems to Marx to be particularly acute in Germany. Marx does offer a solution, however. He argues that Germans should view history from a materialist perspective to understand that all notable conflicts that have led to social change can be interpreted as ensuing from the inconsistency with which forces of production are structured in any society, and the social relationships people in that society

have due to those forces of production. Marx continues to explain that private property stands for that particular type of property that has been extracted from another's labor but comes to be controlled by a certain individual for the purpose of accumulation. Therefore, the division of labor engenders private property; for Marx, the fundamental contradiction within the division of labor is that it naturally leads to the opposition of interests held by the specific individuals who do labor and by the communal body for which those individuals do labor. Marx finally takes the next step and concludes that this ~~is~~ the contradiction between the division of labor and the concept of private property ~~is~~ was the nascent step taken in the course of human history that led to the alienation of man from his own products of labor, and eventually even from the labor itself, his own nature, and his fellow men. Once the reader is able to think outside the religious dogma concerning "Creationism" that, at the time Darwin was writing, was extremely powerful and incredibly well indoctrinated, Darwin's thesis is not too surprising. He starts with very simple postulates: first, that all species strive to procreate; and second, that all species face competition for key, limited natural resources. The core principle behind Darwin's theory, though, is that all organisms struggle most basically for life. Through that struggle: any variation, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if it be in any degree profitable to an individual of any species, in its infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to external nature, will tend to the preservation of that individual and will generally be inherited by its offspring (115). That, then, is the premise on which his theory was founded; anything that allows an individual within a species to better compete will allow that individual to procreate more successfully; that success will ultimately allow

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the trait to be passed down through generations of what came to be called “ evolution.” Darwin uses the term “ Struggle for Existence” in a “ large and metaphorical sense” (116) including all interactions with other animals and the ability, long-term, of a species to procreate ~~is~~” a struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase” (116). Because of this high rate of procreation, more beings are born than can survive given competition for resources. The struggle is one of survival ~~is~~ attempting to defy other species by adapting better to life in a particular area, climate, or condition. Surprisingly, these two works share similar influences. Marx almost immediately separates man from animal, contending that they “ begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they being to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization” (Marx, 150). While this seems to immediately discard any association with Darwin’s theory of evolution, it simply clarifies the similarity: man, just like the animals Darwin studied in the Galapagos, has a struggle for life that is simply fought in a different way. While animals forage or hunt to continue their existence, man creates. Even more importantly, Marx notes that “ this production only makes its appearance with the increase of population” (Marx, 150). The same holds true for Darwin’s theory; if competition does not exist for basic natural resources between individuals of different species, evolution and progress are impossible. The main, fundamental difference between the two, then, is that in Darwin’s theory, animals compete against other, rival species, while in Marx’s, man competes only against himself in a struggle to produce material life. In their basic premises, however, the two men had strikingly similar ideas. Both saw life as a constant fight against others within a certain

community or area. Both understood that an individual's ability to live, to procreate, was what furthered history ~~in~~ in Darwin's case, because such changes eventually morphed the physical characteristics of the entire species; in Marx's, because those changes were, by definition, of a productive or materialist nature. Despite the difference in both appeal and acceptance, Darwin's Origin of Species shares many ideas with Marx's German Ideology: Part I.