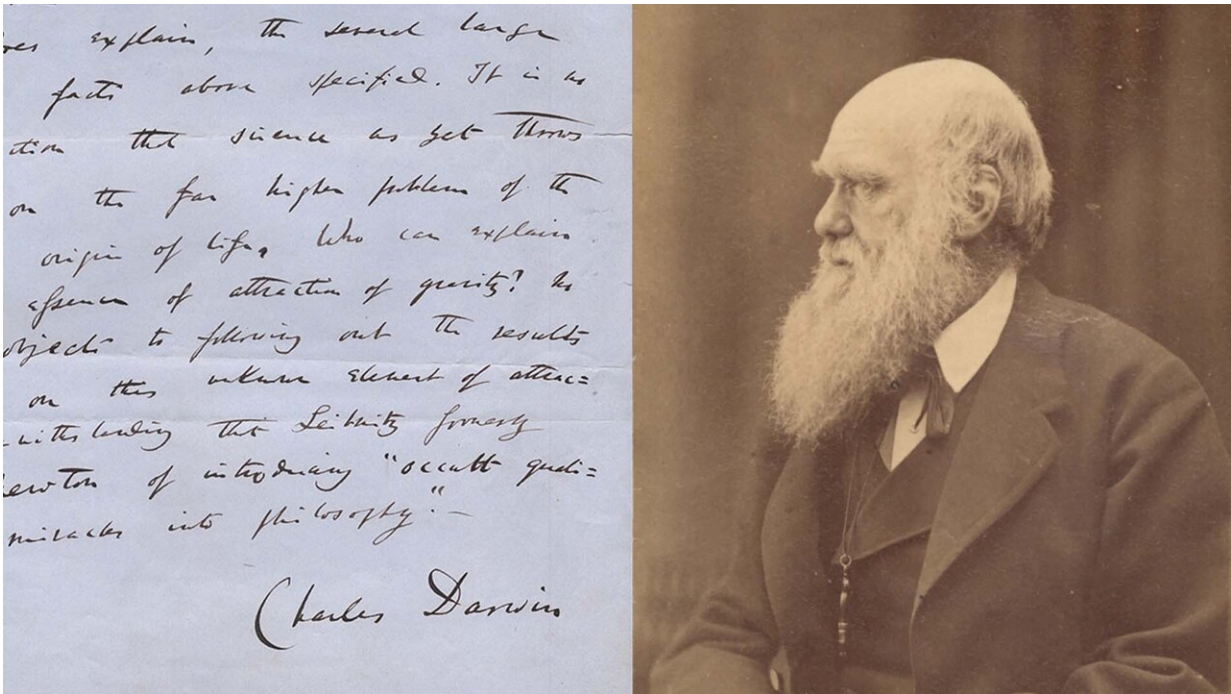


# Science ahead of its time: 157-year-old Darwin manuscript made available online

November 28 2022



Darwin's hand-written quote from *Origin of Species* (left) for the *Autographic Mirror* magazine. Credit: National University of Singapore

November 24 is Evolution day—a day commemorating the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* on November 24, 1859. Darwin's seminal work is now considered the most influential book of science in history and has inspired countless new disciplines. As recently found by the *Darwin Online* project at the National University of Singapore

(NUS), the book has been translated into fifty languages, far more than any other scientific book.

Now on the 163rd anniversary of the publication of the *Origin of Species*, the *Darwin Online* project releases one of the most exceptional Darwin manuscripts still in private hands. It is also up for auction at Sotheby's [auction](#) house in New York City, making international news, and likely to hit a record price of one million pounds.

To understand this unique document, Sotheby's consulted historian of science Dr. John van Wyhe from the NUS Department of Biological Sciences, Fellow of Tembusu College at NUS, and founder and Director of *Darwin Online*. What was previously taken to be a page of the rough draft of *Origin of Species* turned out to be much more interesting.

The document is the result of an autograph hunter named Hermann Kindt who wrote to Darwin in 1865 to request for a written passage from *Origin of Species* and sign it. This was for Kindt's magazine, *Autographic Mirror*, which published examples of the handwriting of famous people. Darwin wrote out a passage from the conclusion to the recent 1861 third 3rd edition of *Origin of Species*, p. 514:

"...It is no valid objection [to this theory of evolution] that science as yet throws no light on the far higher problem of the essence or [origin](#) of life. Who can explain what is the essence of the attraction of gravity? No one now objects to following out the results consequent on this unknown element of attraction; notwithstanding that Leibnitz formerly accused Newton of introducing 'occult qualities and miracles into philosophy.'"

It was published in Kindt's magazine which is also released today in *Darwin Online*.

As a passage from the *Origin of Species* in Darwin's own handwriting,

and with his rare full signature, this piece is quite unique. But why did Darwin choose this passage in particular from the 490 pages of the book? Dr. van Wyhe has found the answer.

Shortly after the book was published, there were many objections to Darwin's theory. Some thought that his "natural selection" was not a real force in nature.

Just then, Darwin happened to read a biography of Isaac Newton in which one of Newton's critics claimed that his law of gravity was not real but only imaginary "occult qualities and miracles" pushed into science. Darwin was struck by the parallel. His critics thought natural selection was an unreal cause. The day he finished the biography, Darwin wrote to a scientific colleague about it, saying he would use this example to answer critics in future. Almost immediately he had a chance to do so by adding a new passage to the next American printing of *Origin of Species*, using the quote about Newton. Later the passage appeared in the 3rd and all subsequent editions of the book.

So now it can be understood why Darwin chose this particular passage to copy out for Kindt in 1865 as he saw it as a powerful defense for his theory of evolution by natural selection. It was as if Darwin was saying, "they accused Newton's law of gravity of being fake and now it is accepted by the whole world. It will be the same for the law of [natural selection](#)." Darwin was right—his theory of evolution is now the foundation of all the life sciences.

This unique Darwin manuscript, transcribed with an introduction by Dr. van Wyhe, is freely available online.

**More information:** Online manuscript: [darwin-online.org.uk/content/f...N11124&viewtype=side](http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/f...N11124&viewtype=side)

Provided by National University of Singapore

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