

"An extraordinary advance in our understanding of the world"
— SIGMUND FREUD

Charles
DARWIN

Evidence of Charles Darwin's cultural impact, from skull replicas to reprints of his writings, adorn the office of Hillary Haldane, assistant professor of anthropology.

DARWIN STILL INSPIRES

BY STEPHEN P. SCHMIDT

When the 200th birthday of one of the most influential scientists of all time comes around, it seems natural that a university commemorate the occasion. After all, the innovative theories of renowned English naturalist Charles Darwin—Mr. Evolution and Natural Selection himself—are still being discussed today. And, this year marks the 150th anniversary of Darwin's groundbreaking book, *On the Origin of Species*.

"I think that you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who's in the social sciences, the natural sciences, the humanities or the arts who has not been touched by Darwin," said Hillary Haldane, assistant professor of anthropology at QU.

Haldane collaborated with Hans Bergmann, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Allan Smits, associate dean for sciences; and Renée Tursi, dean for humanities and social sciences, to formulate "Darwin Across the Disciplines." Initially an event for faculty to share their thoughts on the man of the hour was planned for April, but that was expanded to include a series of student-oriented events for the fall semester.

"I feel like this is one opportunity to remind each other that we have a common goal—producing citizens—and that it's about contributing to civil society and ideas that don't know disciplinary boundaries," Haldane said, adding that the sea change that occurred with Darwin's ideas influence the way we see the world now.

The slate of events began in September with a lecture on campus by Robert Pennock, a professor at Michigan State University who presented "Darwin By Design: How Digital Evolution is Extending the Darwinian Revolution."

"I'm just glad that they opened the events to students. I think it's a great thing. At least at the event I went to there were lots of students there," said Alex Barczak, a junior English major from Ridgefield, Conn., who attended the lecture.

QU biology professor Don Buckley, who specializes in genetics and evolution, and David Val-

one, associate professor of history and chair of the history department, presented their cases later in September in a "Nature Versus Nurture" debate that revisited questions about the dominant determining factors of human behavior.

"Through tremendous growth in our understanding of the evolution of human nature, there's no doubt anymore that for the most part, it's both," Buckley noted.

"In the context that we are talking about today, the major objective is to create a world of equal opportunity. The biological evidence from the last 15 years in particular reveals that we're not all identical. Assumptions that were made by the humanities and social sciences in the 20th century—that we all have blank slates, that we are all born identically and the culture imposes stamps upon us—in reality it turns out we're not all identical. That kind of social engineering requires us all to try to be something that we're not," Buckley said.

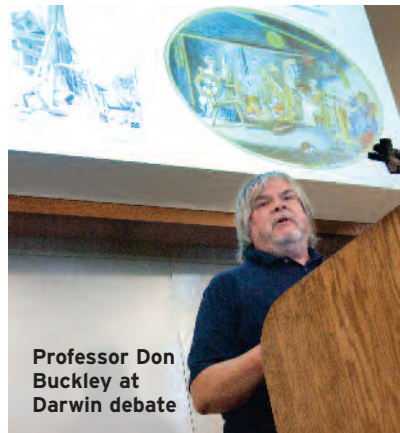
The biology professor noted that trying to create a world of equal opportunity can be done successfully only if society recognizes the kinds of influences that shape the way people think and the way our culture operates.

Valone argued that science is still in its infancy in terms of knowing the genetic and biological bases of human behavior, especially within the context of social and political policies.

"The amount we know about the biological foundations of human behavior, and the security of that knowledge, is still very much in question. Based on the unfortunate history of trying to use biological knowledge to direct social and political policy, my view is that we need to continue to be quite cautious," Valone said.

"I think [Darwin's] interesting because he evokes such strong feelings in different ideological camps," Haldane commented.

The Darwin observance continued in October with a faculty presentation on Darwin's influence and concluded Dec. 3 with a prize presentation to students who entered a contest, submitting works related to Darwin's theories either in literary, visual and audio or empirical evidence/empirically based research material.



Professor Don Buckley at Darwin debate