**Point-Counterpoint: Who was more influential: Darwin or Lincoln?**

**Jules Kunze | Posted: Monday, February 9, 2009 12:00 am**

*Editor’s note: Thursday is the birthday of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. This is the first installment of a week-long argument about who was the more influential man. The columnists will respond to each other each day.*

**Lincoln**

Darwin is considered the father of modern biology. This is due to his single contribution of the theory of evolution via the mechanism of natural selection. Darwin did not conceptualize the theory of evolution; evolution was widely expounded by many scientists and philosophers from classical times and onward.

Darwin proposed a mechanism for a larger theory that was already accepted by much of the scientific community. Furthermore, this singular contribution was Darwin’s only one of any outstanding significance. Yes, it was a great one, but this is hardly the scope or magnitude of achievement needed to justify greatness.

Lincoln was a world shaper. His most notable achievements include the Emancipation Proclamation, his lobbying for the 13th Amendment, leading the Union to victory during the Civil War and his part in the reconstruction of the U.S. afterwards.

Lincoln is invariably ranked as one of the top five U.S. presidents by historians and scholars.

Lincoln served, and still serves, as an incredible role model for American values as well as universal morality and leadership. Lincoln preserved the nation that is currently the major world power, while at the same time shaping this nation’s morality and dedication to human rights.

*-Jules Kunze is a biomedical sciences senior.*

**Darwin**

Abraham Lincoln is iconic chiefly due to his stewardship of the U.S. during the North’s victory in the Civil War.

However, given the Confederacy’s inferior resources and infrastructure, and its population, which lagged the Union’s by 13 million, it seems likely that, had Lincoln never been born, any competent replacement would have managed the same accomplishment.

By the time Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, most other culturally advanced nations, including Britain and France, had already accomplished abolition.

Lincoln participated in the advancement of many noble ideas, but his influence was in no way singular.

Charles Darwin’s coinage of the theory of evolution by natural selection singlehandedly revolutionized every field related to biology.

While Lincoln’s influence was localized to the U.S., Darwin’s was felt in every nation with scientific facilities.

While Lincoln remains relevant only as a symbol, Darwin’s theory is currently the central staging ground of the battle between religious fundamentalism and scientific enlightenment.

As biologist Stephen Jay Gould wrote, “Evolution is not a peripheral subject, but the central organizing principle of all biological science.”

Were Lincoln, in this argument, replaced by Solon or Albert Einstein, I might be hesitant to play Darwin’s advocate.

However, as it stands, I think there’s hardly an argument to be had at all.

*-Zac Smith is an English junior.*

**Point-Counterpoint: Who was more influential: Darwin or Lincoln?**

**Jules Kunze | Posted: Tuesday, February 10, 2009 12:00 am**

***Editor’s note:*** *Thursday is the birthday of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. This is the second installment of a week-long argument about who was the more influential man. The columnists will respond to each other each day.*

**Lincoln**

Would another president have led the Union to victory over the Confederacy? They probably would have.

Would another president have pushed so ardently for individual liberties, civil rights, and swift, generous reconstruction of the Confederacy? Maybe, but maybe not.

Now, let’s apply this argument to Charles Darwin.

Maybe Darwin would have published his theory of natural selection 30 years after the voyage of the Beagle rather than 20 years afterwards had he not read an essay by Alfred Russell Wallace proposing an independently conceived and virtually identical theory.

Maybe he wouldn’t have.

It’s hard to see how someone who’s been alive during the past century could say that Lincoln’s influence was isolated to the U.S.

Despite the fact that the Union most likely would have won the Civil War regardless of Lincoln’s existence or lack thereof, it’s ludicrous to claim Lincoln did not play a major role in reshaping and restructuring the U.S. after the war.

Likewise, it’s impossible to say the modern U.S. has not vastly influenced most issues in most countries of the world.

Contrarily, natural selection’s influence was restricted not only to the scientific field, but to biology.

Again, the scope and scale of Darwin’s accomplishments pale in comparison to Lincoln’s.

*-Jules Kunze is a biomedical sciences senior.*

**Darwin**

Jules Kunze’s description of Darwin’s theory contains several mistakes.

Evolution was not a preexisting theory that Darwin augmented. Rather, it was an observed phenomenon for which several explanatory theories had been proposed.

Lamarck’s theory of evolution, for example, was the most popularly held before Darwin discovered natural selection.

That evolution had been observed for more than 2,000 years before Darwin proposed the definitive explanation for it is no more material than that apples had been observed to fall before Newton created his theory of gravitation.

Furthermore, to take the years of research and writing that Darwin put into understanding evolution, lump it all under the heading “invented the theory of evolution,” and declare it a single accomplishment is a meaningless exercise in semantics.

Kunze’s claims about Lincoln’s outstanding morals are similarly distorted.

Despite abolitionists’ demanding that all slaves be freed, when Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, he only granted freedom to slaves in states not under Union control.

By the time the 13th Amendment was passed, slavery had already been outlawed in all but four states.

Had Lincoln demanded nondiscrimination toward African Americans, he would be the beacon of unparalleled enlightenment Kunze describes him as.

However, in reality, Lincoln was only a half-step ahead of most of his contemporaries.

*-Zac Smith is an English junior.*

**Point-Counterpoint: Who was more influential: Darwin or Lincoln?**

**Jules Kunze | Posted: Wednesday, February 11, 2009 12:00 am**

***Editor’s note:*** *Thursday is the birthday of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. This is the third installment of a week-long argument about who was the more influential man. The columnists will respond to each other each day.*

**Darwin**

Jules Kunze unfortunately misinterprets my noting that most any hypothetical replacement president would have exerted roughly the same influence as Lincoln.

Lincoln’s accomplishments were facilitated by circumstances which advantaged him toward being able to accomplish them. Lincoln led the Union to victory, not because of any unique personal attributes, but because circumstances helped make him leader of a country warring an inferior opponent.

One might as well revere Lincoln for having veto power.

Darwin, on the other hand, was not circumstantially equipped in favor of making his revolutionary discovery. There were hundreds of other naturalists studying in 1859, and that Darwin was the only one who published “On the Origin of Species” was the result of his unique personal characteristics, of his being Darwin.

Most of Lincoln’s accomplishments, on the other hand, were a result of larger circumstances surrounding the position he occupied.

The U.S. may currently be the only superpower, but to compare influencing its policies to completely overhauling biological science is jingoistic vanity.

Kunze hasn’t offered any evidence-based contradiction to this.

Incidentally, I wouldn’t consider it “ludicrous” to claim that Lincoln didn’t play a major role in reshaping the postwar U.S., given that he died less than a week after the war’s conclusion.

*-Zac Smith is an English junior.*

**Lincoln**

The claim that evolution was not a pre-Darwinian theory is not just hyperbole, it is simply untrue. Zac Smith himself provided an excellent example in yesterday’s column: Jean-Baptiste Lamark had already published fully coherent theories and mechanisms of evolution in 1802, before Darwin’s birth. Prior to this, natural philosophers, the scientists of antiquity, such as Anaximander and Empedocles proposed theories expounding evolution as early as 500 B.C. Not only had evolution been observed for millennia before Darwin’s time as Mr. Smith stated, it had indeed been studied by scientists who also proposed mechanisms for evolution’s occurrence. Furthermore, I’ve never claimed that Darwin “invented the theory of evolution,” because, as I have just demonstrated, several scientists before him proposed both theories of evolution and theories of the mechanism of evolution.

Lincoln was, in fact, a staunch abolitionist. Before either his election as president or the start of the civil war, Lincoln was well known for his strong and vocal beliefs against slavery. Lincoln was faced with the only civil war in U.S. history. He put abolitionism second to restoring the union, something any sane person of Lincoln’s beliefs would do. This by no means discredits his morals or beliefs.

*-Jules Kumze is a biomedical sciences senior.*

**Point-Counterpoint: Who was more influential: Darwin or Lincoln?**

**Jules Kunze | Posted: Thursday, February 12, 2009 12:00 am**

***Editor’s note:*** *Today is the birthday of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. This is the fourth installment of a week-long argument about who was the more influential man. The columnists respond to each other each day.*

**Lincoln**

The reconstruction era of the U.S. actually began in 1863, well before the Civil War’s end.

Until his assassination, Lincoln was the main voice of ideas concerning reconstruction as well as the primary implementer of those ideas.

The Republican Party, of which Lincoln was a member, held the majority of political power for several years after the end on the war. They continued to implement ideas of reconstruction that were originally proposed or suggested by Lincoln.

Mr. Smith claims Lincoln’s successes were nothing more than a fortunate procession of circumstances that would have led any human being down the exact same path, while Darwin’s single accomplishment was due entirely to his personality, to “his being Darwin.”

Darwin, like all scientists, was a product of both his predecessors and his contemporaries.

I call attention again to the ancient Greeks, Lamarck and Wallace as examples of “circumstances” that would have led any ambitious or competent naturalist to make the same claims Darwin made, as did Wallace.

My history of science professor, Dr. Heyck, said: “Ideas just have their time.”

*-Jules Kunze is a biomedical sciences senior.*

**Darwin**

Jules Kunze has completely failed to comprehend my previous column, so I am left with no choice but to repeat its contents, only this time more slowly.

For thousands of years before Darwin, evolution was an observed fact. Not a theory, a fact.

Many explanatory theories had been proposed before 1859, of which Lamarck’s is a more prominent example. These theories attempted to find a way to understand the fact of evolution.

The problem with Lamarckism and every other pre-Darwinian interpretation of evolution was that they weren’t accurate.

Darwin’s theory of natural selection caused a revolution because it had struck upon the correct interpretation of the data.

Darwin’s theory was not an offshoot of Lamarck’s, Anaximander’s or any of the other names Kunze culled from Wikipedia.

Finally, Kunze points out that Lincoln was antislavery, though he apparently wasn’t willing to take any great risks in actually eradicating the practice. True enough, though I fail to see how this makes him extraordinary.

I’d appreciate it, if, in the future, Kunze would re-read my columns a few times to make sure he understands before responding. The conversation isn’t going to move forward if I constantly have to back up.

*-Zac Smith is an English junior.*

**Point-Counterpoint: Who was more influential: Darwin or Lincoln?**

**Jules Kunze | Posted: Friday, February 13, 2009 12:00 am**

***Editor’s note:*** *Yesterday was the birthday of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. This is the final installment of a week-long argument about who was the more influential man. The columnists respond to each other each day.*

**Abraham Lincoln**

We could continue to rehash the same ideas, battling back and forth about the definitions of words such as “theory,” “fact” and “law,” discussing spheres of influence and their importance, arguing about inevitability or deterministic extrinsic factors and throwing around $10 words and last names. We could, but I’d rather not.

What’s been said has been said. We’ve made our points, and continuing this pattern during our last installment just wouldn’t bring any conclusion. Instead, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for a (mostly) friendly exchange of ideas.

Mr. Smith has failed to change my opinion that Lincoln was more influential than Darwin, as I have obviously failed to change his opinion.

They were, of course, both great men of their time, and both of them deserve recognition for their contributions. Maybe they could have even exchanged birthday presents, had they been friends during the time, or had they known that we would be arguing about them today.

*-Jules Kunze is a biomedical sciences senior.*

**Charles Darwin**

In his Tuesday column, Jules Kunze wrote, “It’s ludicrous to claim Lincoln did not play a major role in reshaping and restructuring the U.S. after the war.”

I responded by pointing out Lincoln died less than a week after the Civil War’s conclusion. On Thursday, Kunze wrote in rebuttal, “The reconstruction era of the U.S. actually began in 1863, well before the Civil War’s end.”

I was, of course, responding to Kunze’s statement on Lincoln’s postwar influence, not his references to Lincoln’s influence on the Reconstruction, specifically.

While Wikipedia does date the commencement of the Reconstruction to 1863, government sources such as the Library of Congress place the Reconstruction’s beginnings in 1866, a year after Lincoln’s assassination.

On Wednesday, I prompted Kunze to provide me with evidence that influencing America’s policies is comparably significant to sparking a revolution of the biological sciences. Kunze has not. Therefore, I can only conclude that he has no evidence to that effect.

Kunze also lists the ancient Greeks, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Alfred Russel Wallace as influencing agents who would have led “any ambitious or competent naturalist” to formulate the theory of evolution by natural selection. The ancient Greeks, of course, never devised anything resembling an explanation for the evolutionary phenomenon. Lamarck’s theory of evolution was more or less the status quo while Darwin was developing his own model. If anything, Lamarckism would have discouraged researchers from seeking new explanations for evolution, since there was already one in place which appeared to function.

Wallace, who independently developed a concept of natural selection similar to Darwin’s, did not make Darwin aware of his idea until well after Darwin had developed his own theory. One wonders what the point was of including Wallace at all.

The errancy of Kunze’s statement is also demonstrated by the fact that, of the hundreds of naturalists working at the time, all aware of the Greeks and Lamarck, and a few familiar with Wallace, no other devised the theory that Darwin did. Kunze continually pads his columns with vague assertions of Lincoln’s shiny wonderfulness, rarely substantiating them with actual data. And, finally, Kunze refuses to counter the evidence that I’ve provided demonstrating Lincoln’s views were not exceptionally progressive for his time.

I’d like to conclude with a quote from Abraham Lincoln which I think serves as an appropriate capstone to this debate.

“I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races. I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people. There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

*Zac Smith is an English junior.*

**Question:**

**Who was influential? Abraham Lincoln or Charles Darwin? Previously you have read two sides of people arguing this issue. Which side do you agree with? Make sure you cite evidence from the reading or outside of the reading. Your grade is primarily derived from the quality of your argument which in large part is determined by the quality of your citations.**