

Professor Joe Dauben wrote the following in response to a draft of a formal seven-page essay by a student enrolled in his ONHIW course, "The Ascent of Man." This was a Writing Intensive (WI) class that was taught partly online.

Dear X,

I have now had a chance to read the draft of your essay on Darwin, and I think you have the makings of a very good essay. You need to add more detail to back up some of your generalizations, and perhaps quote more from the primary sources you've been reading.

As for details, on the subject of Lamarck, I think you need to say something more about the "will to perfection" and how like phlogiston, the "élan vitale" is really no explanation at all. As for what Darwin saw on the Galapagos, especially the finches (as you note) and tortoises, these were very important, and the fact that at first he did not appreciate the necessity of identifying which birds and tortoises came from which islands. Only when he got back and began to think about the transmutation problem did he realize this was valuable evidence for the origin of species. Here it is important to draw comparisons with Wallace, for like Darwin, Wallace also drew much of his evidence from examples he gathered from island populations in isolation (allopatric speciation).

On the subject of Kelvin, you need to say something about how Darwin tried to answer Kelvin's objections, why Kelvin was wrong, and how science in the 20th century has been able to date the geological history of the Earth and its origins much more exactly than was possible in Darwin's day.

And finally, in the section of your essay on Creationism, you need to address directly the problem that Dawkins refers to as the "argument from personal incredulity." What exactly does he mean by this, and how does he use it to question the Creationists, the ID group in particular? As for the Church, why do you think it did not object to Darwin as it had objected to Galileo? This time the religious opposition is basically from Christian fundamentalists who take a very literal reading of the Bible. Keep in mind that an important point with respect to the Creationists is that they have no evidence for any of their arguments against Darwin.

If you have any questions about my comments above, or the comments I've made on your draft (as attached), please do not hesitate to let me know. I am very much looking forward to reading the revised version of your Darwin essay.

All best wishes –JD

Content: 8

Research: 8

Organization: 9

Quality of Writing: 8

Style: 8

Total: 41 (of 50 points possible)