

Scientists consider Darwin's contribution

Charles Darwin's upcoming 200th birthday is prompting some U.S. scientists to consider the Victorian-era naturalist's contribution to modern science.

Kevin Padian, a University of California, Berkeley paleontologist, said the coming bicentennial of Darwin's birth is the ideal time "to reflect on just what constitutes Darwin's enduring greatness in Western thought," the San Francisco Chronicle reported Monday.

"Perhaps no individual has had such a sweeping influence on so many facets of social and intellectual life," Padian wrote in an essay published in this month's issue of the journal Nature.

Padian wrote Darwin "has been invoked as the demon responsible for a variety of heartless ills of society," including atheism, Nazism, communism, abortion, homosexuality, stem cell research and same-sex marriage.

Among Darwin's critics are creationists, who insist the Bible's descriptions of the world's beginning are literally true, and some scientists who argue that life is the product of intelligent design.

Padian, a professor of integrative biology at Berkeley, is president of the National Center for Science Education, an Oakland, Calif., watchdog group that monitors controversies over evolution in schools.

"Finding the genetic basis of evolutionary development is really amazing," Padian said, "and it vindicates Darwin's view of the tree of life completely."

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