



# Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism, 1861-1864 (Reacting to the Past)

*Marsha Driscoll, Elizabeth E. Dunn, Dann Siems, B. Kamran Swanson*

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**Part of the *Reacting to the Past* series, *Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism* thrusts students into the intellectual ferment of Victorian England just after publication of *The Origin of Species*.**

Since its appearance in 1859, Darwin's long awaited treatise in "genetic biology" had received reviews both favorable and damning. Thomas Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce presented arguments for and against the theory in a dramatic and widely publicized face-off at the 1860 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Oxford. Their encounter sparked a vigorous, complex debate that touched on a host of issues and set the stage for the Royal Society's consideration of whether or not they ought to award Darwin the Copley Medal, the society's most prestigious prize. While the action takes place in meetings of the Royal Society, Great Britain's most important scientific body, a parallel and influential public argument smoldered over the nature of science and its relationship to modern life in an industrial society.

A significant component of the *Darwin* game is the tension between natural and teleological views of the world, manifested especially in reconsideration of the design argument, commonly known through William Paley's *Natural Theology; or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (1802) and updated by Wilberforce. But the scientific debate also percolated through a host of related issues: the meaning and purposes of inductive and hypothetical speculation in science; the professionalization of science; the implications of Darwinism for social reform, racial theories, and women's rights; and the evolving concept of causation in sciences and its implications for public policy. Because of the revolutionary potential of Darwin's ideas, the connections between science and nearly every other aspect of culture became increasingly evident. Scientific papers and laboratory demonstrations presented in Royal Society meetings during the game provide the backdrop for momentous conflict, conflict that continues to shape our perceptions of modern science.

*Reacting to the Past* is a series of historical role-playing games that explore important ideas by re-creating the contexts that shaped them. Students are assigned roles, informed by classic texts, set in particular moments of intellectual and social ferment.

An award-winning active-learning pedagogy, *Reacting to the Past* improves speaking, writing, and leadership skills, promotes engagement with classic texts and history, and builds learning communities. *Reacting* can be used across the curriculum, from the first-year general education class to "capstone" experiences. A *Reacting* game can also function as the discussion component of lecture classes, or it can be enlisted for intersession courses, honors programs, and other specialized curricular purposes.

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