

## The Huxley-Wilberforce Debate Myth

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### Abstract

The history of the now famous debate between Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, and Thomas Huxley, a disciple of Darwin, is reviewed. The debate, which occurred at Oxford University (June 30, 1860), is widely regarded as a critical coup for science in the putative war of religion against science. The myth is that Huxley made a fool of Wilberforce and carried the day. The actual debate was very different than this common version. In fact, the debate involved several individuals, of which Huxley was not even considered one of the primary advocates of Darwinism.

### Introduction

One of the most widely publicized accounts in the history of the conflict between science and religion is the debate between Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, and the man called “Darwin’s Bulldog,” Thomas Henry Huxley. The debate occurred at a meeting of the British Association in Oxford in June of 1860 (Howell, 2003; Gauld, 1992). Kenneth Howell (2003, p. 41) called the debate one of the most “celebrated episodes” in the history of the science-religion conflict in the English-speaking world. Others called it the “first battle” in the long war of religion against science (Livingstone, 2009, p. 152). Gould (1991, p. 386) called it one of the “half-dozen greatest legends of science.” Carroll (2007, p. 1427) wrote:

“The Lord hath delivered him into mine hands.” Those are the words that Thomas Huxley, Darwin’s confidant and staunchest ally, purportedly murmured to a colleague as he rose to turn Bishop Samuel Wilberforce’s own words to his advantage and rebut the bishop’s critique of Darwin’s theory at their legendary 1860 Oxford debate.

This putative version of the debate is repeated ad infinitum in sources that range from scientific books to popular historical accounts of the biological origins conflict. The most common telling of the account was summarized by Thompson (2000, p. 210) as follows:

Bishop Wilberforce is supposed to have asked Huxley sarcastically

whether “it was through his grandfather or his grandmother that he claimed descent from a monkey.” Huxley supposedly whispered an aside to Sir Benjamin Brodie, “the Lord hath delivered him unto my hand,” and then responded, “If then the question is put to me whether I would rather have a miserable ape for a grandfather or a man highly endowed by nature and possessed of great means of influence and yet employs these faculties and that influence for the mere purpose of introducing ridicule into a grave scientific discussion, I unhesitatingly affirm my preference for the ape.” Or words to that effect.

This episode is often placed in the first chapter of books written against Darwin skeptics in order to hook the reader. For example, historian William Irving in his best-selling *Apes, Angels, & Victorians*, begins his study of the religious opposition to Darwinism with the Oxford debate, an event he

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calls the “intellectual holocaust” that formally birthed evolution. It is even used as “the introductory anecdote in many histories of evolution” (Smout, 1998, p. 33). Allen Powell (2006), who added quotes that indicate the account was taken from a stenographic report, wrote in a *Herald-Mail* op-ed piece that the creation-evolution debate

today in the United States is similar to the situation in England when the British Association for the Advancement of Science met on June 27, 1860 to debate Darwin’s ideas. The highlight of the meeting pitted Bishop Samuel Wilberforce against a certified genius, Thomas Huxley. Wilberforce chortled to friends that his real desire was to ‘smash Darwin.’ During the debate, the Bishop looked at Huxley with a demeaning smile and asked, “Mr. Huxley, I beg to know was it through your grandfather or your grandmother that you claim to have descended from a monkey?” Huxley then made his now-famous reply. “I assert that a man has no reason to be ashamed to having an ape for his grandfather. If there were an ancestor whom I should feel shame in recalling, it would rather be a man, a man who, not content with a success in his own sphere of activity, plunged into scientific questions with which he has no real acquaintances only to obscure them by aimless rhetoric and distract the attention of his hearers from the real point at issue by eloquent digressions and skilled appeals to religious prejudice”

This, or very similar accounts, have been repeated authoritatively in thousands of sources for the last century and a half, rarely with accurate information about the details of the debate (Gauld, 1992; Livingstone, 2009). A Google search found 214 examples of how this debated is currently presented. It is often claimed that this exchange was “the end of an era—biology had dared challenge



**Oxford Bishop Samuel Wilberforce at the time that he debated Huxley. He was then about 55 years old. From *The Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce, D. D.* by Reginald Wilberforce. John Murray, London. Reginald was Samuel’s son, and Murray was Darwin’s publisher.**

religion, and biology had won” and “Christianity shifted to accommodating rather than fighting Darwinian thought” (Wrangham, 1979, p. 450). Livingstone (2009) opined that the debate is the embodiment of the worldview war and science won, and Gauld (1992) concluded that the purpose of quoting the Wilberforce account was to “provide an example of the triumph of Darwinism over uninformed religious prejudice” (p. 406). In the story, Huxley is usually “the archangel Michael of enlightenment, knowledge, and the disinterested pursuit of truth” and Wilberforce is the “dark defender of the failing forces of authority, bigotry and superstition” (Gilley, 1981, p. 325).

### **An Evaluation of the Event**

The eminent science historian, John Headley Brooke, wrote that this debate is a

story that would have to be invented were it not true. Actually, it probably was invented—at least in part. One answer to the question why this celebrated exchange occurred at all is that it didn’t—or at least that the legend is deeply misleading. Scholars who have tried to piece together what really happened have been frustrated by the paucity of contemporary comment and its lack of unanimity (Brooke, 2001, p. 128).

Historian J. R. Lucas, in a study of the event, concluded that the debate is a legend without much factual basis. Lucas explained that the common claim that Huxley’s simple scientific sincerity humbled the obscurantist bishop and scored a decisive victory, both for the independence of science from the church and the primacy of science in Britain and in the West, is false. Thompson (2000, p. 212), quoting from a contemporary source, claimed that Huxley in this pre-electronic amplification era did not even speak loud enough to be heard by many there, nor did he “command the audience.”

The account is often given in quotes—indicating that it was taken directly from a stenographic report by a meeting attendee—such as in a *New York Times* special section on evolution (June 26, 2007, p. F8). In fact, no verbatim account was taken by anyone, although summary reports of the whole meeting were published (Thompson, 2000, p. 210). No one knows exactly what was said, and the first published record of the debate account most familiar to readers today appeared in *MacMillan’s* magazine a full 30 years after the debate occurred.

One reason for this long delay was because the Wilberforce-Huxley exchange “went virtually unnoticed at the time,” and, in fact, major contradictions exist in the earliest discussions of the debate (Lindberg and Numbers, 1987). For example, botanist Joseph Hooker claims that it was he, not Huxley,

who responded most effectively to the bishop. A writer covering the meeting for the *Athenaeum* magazine did not even mention Huxley's alleged riposte to Wilberforce (Lindberg and Numbers, 1987, p. 146).

It is well established that Wilberforce and Huxley did exchange words "but the words became memorable only with the passage of time, as victorious Darwinians begin reconstructing the history of their struggle for recognition" (Lindberg and Numbers, 1987, p. 146). A major false conclusion is that Huxley scored a decisive victory over his creationist opposition at the debate, but "contemporary records indicate otherwise: Wilberforce's supporters included not only the majority of clerics and laypeople in attendance, but 'the most eminent naturalists' as well" (Lindberg and Numbers, 1987, p. 147). A letter by Balfour Stewart, a distinguished scientist, written after the debate concluded that the "Bishop had won the debate" (Gould, 1991, p. 389). Furthermore, Wilberforce convinced at least one evolutionist, Henry Baker Tristram, to switch sides (Livingstone, 2009, p. 156).

Another major myth is that "Huxley's mild-mannered scientific detachment was contrasted with Wilberforce's bombastic imposition of uninformed authoritarianism" (Howell, 2003, p. 44). Accounts of the debate typically portray Samuel Wilberforce as a misinformed theologian entering into a foray in which he had no knowledge or training. In fact, Wilberforce was well informed about the origins controversy. For example, he wrote a strident review against *The Origin of Species* for the prestigious scholarly journal *Quarterly Review*. The review was so effective that Charles Darwin himself acknowledged it. Although the debate is most always pictured as a victory of Huxley's rationalist science against Wilberforce's theological dogmatism, Wilberforce was a professor of mathematics and a well-known scholar in his own right.

Samuel Wilberforce was no country preacher but the son of the distinguished parliamentarian, William Wilberforce, who brought the end of the slave trade in England. Wilberforce inherited many of his famous father's traits and was widely respected in his day. It was only because he took umbrage at what he called Darwin's "flimsy speculation" that many modern historians, and especially Darwinist apologists, picture him as a narrow-minded ignoramus.

Portrayed as antagonists, as is common in the creation-evolution controversy today, in fact the two men were on amicable terms of mutual respect after the episode. Samuel Wilberforce was nicknamed Soapy Sam because, when he was accused of inappropriate behavior, investigations always cleared him, i.e., he came out clean. His opponents used the expression to signify their claim that he was "too slippery" to catch in an impropriety (Browne, 2002, p. 113).

Ever since the debate, Darwin supporters have capitalized on the controversy in articles, pamphlets, and journals that attempt to show that religion is not only foolish but also repressive to scientific progress. Howell (2003) noted that what is "striking is the growth of military metaphors to describe this event throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth" (p. 44).

### **Wilberforce's Review**

The editor of the *Quarterly Review*, Whitwell Elwin, first read Darwin's *Origin of Species* in manuscript form from a copy that Darwin's publisher, John Murray, sent to him. Elwin disagreed strongly with Darwin's conclusions and, since the *Origin's* publication he "had been searching for someone who would deliver it a crushing blow. He found his reviewer in Samuel Wilberforce" (Browne, 2002, p. 112). John Murray himself suggested Samuel, whose father was an occasional *Quarterly* writer. Meacham wrote that Wilberforce was

not an unexpected choice "in view of his lifelong interest in natural history," his vice presidency of the British Association, and his service on the Geological Society council (as quoted in Browne, 2002, p. 112).

Although Wilberforce's critics claim his arguments were all, or largely, theological, in fact thirty-one pages of his article document his conclusion that Darwin's arguments were scientifically wrong and were not science but philosophy. Wilberforce devoted only three pages to argue that Darwinism was anti-Christian and would be dangerous to the Christian worldview. His review was candid "about evolution's dangers," noting that evolution is "absolutely incompatible not only with single expressions in the word of God but with the whole representation of that moral and spiritual condition of man which is its proper subject matter" (Quoted in Browne, 2002, p. 114).

The underlying conflict between Wilberforce and Darwin was "who had the correct explanation for the origin of humans and all life—Genesis or Darwin." His review also was in part "directed towards those areas of Darwin's theory for which the evidence of that time appeared to be weak, absent or negative" (Gould, 1992, p. 409). In an analysis of Wilberforce's review, Young and Largent (2007, pp. 99-100) concluded that he

understood Darwin's argument and provided an accurate account of certain evidence for his readers ... Where Darwin seemed determined to account for change, Wilberforce noted that most of nature exhibited remarkable stability. In domestic breeding, few species retained the hard-won characteristics breeders sought when individuals were allowed to breed without human guidance. Over thousands of years of human history, examples of the kind of change Darwin described seemed nonexistent... as paleon-

tologists generally argued, the lack of progressive recent evidence, for Wilberforce, undermined the notion of evolution.”

Furthermore, a number of eminent scientists, including Adam Sedgwick, Cambridge anatomy professor William Clark, and other men of science “ultimately grounded their work in doctrines of divine order and the created plan. They deplored the way that Darwin’s book” drew conclusions that they considered unwarranted (Browne, 2002, p. 117). Furthermore, the conflict was between both the “Darwinian evolutionists and the liberal churchman” who were joined together against the traditional view of a creator God (Livingstone, 2009, p. 159).

## The Debate

One event that triggered the debate was the presentation of a paper by Dr. Charles Daubeny of Oxford “on the final causes of sexuality in plants, with special reference to Mr. Darwin’s work on *The Origin of Species*” (Irving, 1955, p. 4). The common impression is that the debate was Huxley against Wilberforce, when, in fact, the meeting involved lively debate among many scientists. Actually, Huxley did not even plan to attend because he knew a large number of those attending were anti-Darwinian “intellectuals who had a strong interest in science” and could effectively challenge him (Howell, 2003, p. 43; Phelps and Cohen, 1973, p. 56). It was Robert Chambers, an evolutionist who preceded Darwin, who goaded Huxley by accusing him of deserting the cause.

After the presentation, the greatest anatomist of his time, Sir Richard Owen, rose and pointed out what he felt were some scientific problems with Darwin’s theory. For example, Owen asserted that “there was no anatomical evidence for evolution, and that the brain of a gorilla was very different from the brain of humankind” (Browne, 2002, p. 119).

Even Daubeny, a professor of botany at Oxford who introduced the topic, “came down on the side of the angels.” The topic drew a number of people in attendance—variously estimated at between 400 and 1,000 (Browne, 2002, p. 121).

The real conflict was less Wilberforce against Huxley than Wilberforce against John William Draper. Draper, the first speaker, was an English-born and London University educated man who was a bitter ex-Catholic historian. He was “well known for his denunciation of organized religion” and argued that “human progress depended on science vanquishing theology” (Browne, 2002, p. 121). Desmond and Moore (1991, p. 494) claimed that Draper was the “star attraction, because he was applying Darwin’s theory to society,” an approach called social Darwinism or eugenics.

Wilberforce was asked to respond to Draper’s pro-Darwin paper, not Huxley’s (White, 2001, p. 99). After a few questions and comments by the audience, Wilberforce spoke for around 30 minutes, using the “same scientific arguments that he had used in his evaluation of Darwin’s book published in *The Quarterly Review*” (Phelps and Cohen, 1973, p. 57). Wilberforce argued that Darwin’s science facts did not warrant acceptance of his theory: the chasm between humanity and animals was both obvious and very distinct, and there was no tendency on the part of lower organisms to become either self-conscious or intelligent (Browne, 2002, p. 121).

It was during this speech that Huxley allegedly made his now infamous comments. As Browne states, “No one could afterwards remember exactly what Wilberforce did say. One witness, possibly no more reliable than the rest, recorded that Wilberforce expressed the ‘disquietude’ he should feel if a ‘veritable ape’ were shown to him as his ancestress” (Browne, 2002, p. 122). It was then that Huxley allegedly whispered to a man on the bench beside him the “Lord hath delivered him into mine hands” and then

stood up on the platform, contradicting Wilberforce. Huxley is commonly credited with proclaiming that he would rather be a monkey than a bishop.

It was evidently only after Wilberforce’s lecture that the riposte came (Jensen, 1988). Then, one by one, Joseph Hooker, John Henslow, and John Lubbock rose to defend Darwin, a man who could not defend himself because he was too ill to attend the debate (Irving, 1955, p. 3). Huxley claimed, for example, that the brains of men and apes do not differ much, a judgment made on the basis of superficial external morphology. This claim was irresponsible given the fact that little was known then about how the brain functions, and even today it is still considered largely a black box. For this reason it was difficult for anyone to make an informed response at the debate.

Although no transcript of the talk exists, “many people felt that the Bishop had been ill treated—that Huxley was much too vulgar in his reply” (Browne, 2002, p. 123). Huxley’s version was “substantially different” than Hooker’s (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 496). One witness claimed that Huxley “turned white with rage,” barely managing to keep his temper (White, 2001, p. 101).

Phelps and Cohen (1973) quote several different accounts that illustrate the range of versions of the event (e.g., see Philips and Cohen, 1973, pp. 60-62). Lucas (1979) summarized all previously known versions of the Huxley-Wilberforce account, including two written by reporters for British periodicals who personally attended the debate. Lucas systematically discredited most of the details in the standard account, even concluding that it was not Huxley, but Joseph Hooker who was the main defender of evolution, and that Wilberforce focused his attack not on the religious implications of evolution as commonly concluded, but rather on its scientific problems (Thompson, 2000, p. 212). Gould (1991, p. 392) concluded

from a detailed study of the event that Huxley's "oratory was faulty," he was "ill at ease," and projected so poorly that "many in the audience" could not even hear what he said.

Lucas added that Wilberforce's criticisms were so effective that, in letters to friends, Darwin himself praised Wilberforce's evaluation and acknowledged the weak spots that Wilberforce noted, inspiring Darwin to deal with these problems. Lucas concluded that Wilberforce did in fact ask Huxley whether it was his grandfather or grandmother who had descended from apes, but this statement was taken by some observers as a lapse in Wilberforce's normally good manners, though not for the reason often supposed. The reason Wilberforce asked this was because it "offended Victorian notions of femininity by applying bestiality to a grandmother rather than a grandfather" (Smout, 1998, p. 36).

The Bishop's talk must have been somewhat effective because, as a result of his presentation and the debate that followed, Henry Tristram, who had published one of the first articles that used natural selection as an explanation for a biological phenomenon, "changed his mind about Darwin" (Browne, 2002, p. 123). Tristram exclaimed to Alfred Newton, who was sitting next to him, that he had converted to the anti-Darwinian view. He commented that he objected to a "guardian of the nation's soul shouted down by a mob hailing 'the God Darwin and his prophet Huxley'" (Browne, 2002, p. 123). Furthermore, Wilberforce himself felt very positive about the results of the debate, and Darwin and Wilberforce remained on good terms after it occurred (Gould, 1991). In fact, a majority of the audience was in support of Wilberforce (Thompson, 2000).

Wilberforce indicates in his published review that he believed it was inappropriate to attack Darwinism on the basis of theology. Wilberforce also argued that if Darwinism can be adequately defended on the basis of empirical

and scientific evidence, theologians will have to dismiss their pride and accept the theory with humility (Smout, 1998, pp. 36-37). In summary, Wilberforce did not attack evolution because it contradicted his religious beliefs but rather because, in his judgment, "it failed to qualify as science" (Smout, 1998, p. 37).

Darwin understood Wilberforce's claims, not as dogmatic objections based on creation science, but rather as an invitation to "explain more clearly and prove more carefully several important aspects of his theory" (Smout, 1998, p. 37). Cambridge University research fellow Richard Wrangham wrote that several of the "Bishop's sermons and essays show he was far from ignorant, and he was known to his peers as an ardent naturalist" (1979, p. 450). The debate was not lost to history because, in order to win public support, every potential triumph of Darwinism was

talked up by the evangelical Darwinians. Feeling themselves beleaguered, they needed visible gains. Thus it was that a witty bit of repartee on Saturday 30 June 1860, at a section meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, was destined to be blown out of all proportion to become the best known 'victory' of the nineteenth century, save Waterloo (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 492).

### **History Embellishes the Story**

As the years passed, accounts of the meeting became more sensationalized, dichotomizing the controversy into rationality versus obscurantism, the triumph of reason over rhetoric, science verses church, and old versus new. The writings of Andrew White were especially important in spreading the conclusion that Wilberforce's rhetoric was the "final effort of theology" to "annihilate the kind of scientific progress evident in Darwin's *Origin of Species*" (Howell, 2003, p. 46). White's motive in casting a warfare im-

age between the Bible and science was part of his goal to reduce the influence of Christianity because he believed that "the Bible has been the greatest block in the way of progress" (Numbers, 2009, p. 2). The fact is that each side was "convinced that its claims about the natural world were credible and trustworthy" and that its view was the "only valid account of reality" (Browne, 2002, p. 124). How important the debate was in shifting popular and scientific opinion to an "evolutionary viewpoint is as unclear as what was actually said" (Thompson, 2000, p. 210).

Smout (1998) noted that "the famous debate between T. H. Huxley and Samuel Wilberforce" shows how "convictions of truth are created through particular rhetorical strategies" (p. 33). He adds that this story now has "attained the status of a cultural myth" and has even been "a topic for British Broadcasting Corporation specials about Darwin and the progress of science" (Smout, 1998, p. 33). The putative debate is "regularly retold ... with an evolutionist cast as the hero and a creationist as the villain ... who must be overcome if civilization itself is to be kept from destruction" (Smout, 1998, p. 33).

In most contemporary accounts, there is a deliberate effort to demean Wilberforce. An example of these put-downs is the claim that Wilberforce (who was a math professor before he became a bishop) worked in Oxford, England, a rural area where "the building, and minds [are] as empty and dreamy as the spires and quiet country air" (Irving, 1955, p. 3). In contrast, Huxley's laboratory was in downtown London, "which was as crowded and busy as Professor Huxley's own intellect" (Irving, 1955, p. 3).

Irving also argued that Wilberforce's rhetorical skills were due to "his intellectual inferiority, political opportunism, religious immorality, and political danger" (as quoted in Smout, 1998, p. 34). Irving also claimed that Wilberforce's

“chief qualification for pronouncing on a scientific theory derived, like nearly everything else that was solid in his career, from the undergraduate remoteness of a first in mathematics” (Irving, 1955, p. 6). He added that “the Bishop did not really know what he was talking about” and was obviously “ignorant of the sciences involved” (Irving, 1955, pp. 6–7). Smout (1998) concluded that Irving implies not only that “Wilberforce is a master of deception who prefers performance to substance and style to truth” but that Wilberforce “poses an immediate danger to the state” (p. 34). Smout (1998) documents other examples of the use of rhetoric, as opposed to fact, penned for the purpose of demeaning Wilberforce.

As noted, the historical account shows Wilberforce concluded that Darwinism was based on inadequate evidence, a conclusion widely accepted by science historians today (Livingstone, 2009; Gale, 1982). Smout (1998) concluded that the Huxley and Wilberforce debate was a “bid for power made in the name of truth by a small group of scientists who feel that their superior rationality entitles them to control what Irving calls ‘human life itself’” (p. 35).

### **Why the Account Is Popular**

Smout (1998) concludes that the popularized story of the debate was passed on to us today because it was useful to discredit Darwin skeptics. It discredits creationists because Wilberforce’s response was judged as “disgraceful,” yet Huxley’s attacks against Wilberforce were far worse. For example, in 1873, Wilberforce was thrown from a horse and tragically died from his injuries. Huxley wrote that for the first time “reality and his brains came into contact and the result was fatal,” a cruel comment that was far more vicious than any alleged snipe of Wilberforce toward Huxley (Clark, 1968, p. 117).

One reason for the common “mythical interpretation” of the event’s “as-

tounding popularity” is because naturalistic Victorian scientists wanted to bring the solution to social problems into their own realm of authority and remove it from the church’s realm (Smout, 1998, p. 36). Historian James R. Moore actually argues that the debate was the “Trojan horse of naturalism entering the fortress of the church” (Moore, 1982, p. 194). It has been “Exhibit A” in the idea perpetuated by White and others that “over the ages there had been nothing but conflict between scientists and Christians, with the latter always the villains of the drama” (Coleson, 1981, p. 9). As Smout (1998, p. 38) concludes, the debate is a “compelling example of some terminology battles that occur throughout the creation/evolution controversy: ... some evolutionists have attempted to depict this controversy as a straightforward effort by religious dogmatists to obstruct scientific truth.”

For example, Irving (1955, p. 8) claims not only that Huxley was victorious but also that science could provide a more solid and tangible means than religion to achieve goodness in society. This narrative is similar to the subsequent debates between the two sides, which continue today. Even if the putative account were completely true, Huxley’s words are hardly earth shattering, nor do they display a profoundness of thought that deserve the status of being some of the most widely quoted words in the history of debates about the conflict of science and religion.

### **How the Official Version Came into Existence**

Of much interest in this case is the fact that the “official” version of the Huxley-Wilberforce debate was “successfully promoted” by Huxley himself (Gould, 1991, p. 398). This version was first published in Francis Darwin’s 1892 edition of his biography of his father Charles Darwin. In it, Francis Darwin included an account contributed by Huxley that contained the famous lines

“The Lord hath delivered him into mine hands” (Browne, 1978, p. 362). Hooker, who wrote the account, admitted that it was impossible to be accurate some 30 years after the event and that he wrote an account that “suited his purposes (and probably, by then, displaced the actual event in his memory)” (Gould, 1991, p. 398). Hooker openly stated that his goal was to vivify and vivisect the bishop (Browne, 1978, p. 361). Yet this version was published as an eyewitness account!

Much later, when Leonard Huxley wrote a book about his father, he paraphrased Francis Darwin’s account of the Wilberforce event and pictured it as a clash between science and the church (Livingstone, 2009, p. 155). Gould (1991, p. 398) concluded that the result was that two “dutiful sons presented the official version as constructed by a committee of two—the chief participants Huxley and Hooker—from memories colored by thirty years of battle.” Thus they “forged a legend” that remains today, and an account openly written for the purpose of “vivifying and vivisecting” the bishop cannot be trusted (Browne, 1978, 362). For these reasons Browne (1978) concluded that it is “fruitless” to continue to attempt to reconstruct the actual events that transpired at the Huxley-Wilberforce debate at Oxford.

### **Wilberforce Commonly Demonized and Huxley Glorified**

Huxley was not a dispassionate scholar as is often claimed, but a man who was “spoiling for a fight” and, although his mind was “razor-sharp,” his “shaking temper” could “reduce his effectiveness, and Owen had bettered him on occasions” in the past (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 494). Eyewitnesses reported that Huxley “was ‘white with anger,’ too wrought up to ‘speak effectively.’ His hot-head had stymied him again” (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 497). Furthermore, Huxley did not deal

with the substance of Wilberforce's talk but resorted to character assassination to demean Wilberforce (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 495). It is a pity we do not have a corresponding personal account of the debate from the more sober-minded Wilberforce to balance the Hooker/Huxley account mentioned above.

As noted the falseness of the popularized version is common knowledge among the small group of scholars who have studied the event (Gould, 1991, p. 390). The account is so useful, though, that even though thoroughly exposed as largely legend, it is still being used, although often prefaced by expressions such as "it was reported," and "according to legend," or "the story goes" (Carlisle and Smith, 2006, p. 162) to dispel accusations of presenting false or undocumented information as true. The story lives on because it can be used to support the false but common archetypes of truth-seeking science versus dogmatic, repressive religion, reaction versus enlightenment, dogma versus truth, and darkness versus light (Gould, 1991, p. 399). The fact is, Huxley's "extreme anticlericalism led him to an uncompromising view of organized religion as the enemy of science" (Gould, 1991, p. 399).

## Summary

Professor Coleson (1981, p. 8) concluded that the Huxley-Wilberforce debate is "one of the most celebrated episodes of the conflict of science and religion in the English speaking world" and also "one of the most damaging pseudo-scientific myths to gain wide credence in the West in the last century or two." A more accurate summary of the clash is "legends depicted a bloody clash, with Wilberforce scotched if not slain. But the first play-by-play account received by Darwin painted a very different picture" (Desmond and Moore, 1991, p. 494).

This inaccurate legend has been used to discredit not only Darwin critics but also Christianity in general. The story has been widely repeated, not only by atheists and anti-Christian scientists, but also by Christians and even in books used at Bible colleges as textbooks (Coleson, 1981, p. 8). In spite of recent research showing its inaccuracy, "the story continues to have symbolic currency within the scientific world" (Livingstone, 2009, p. 154). If the account is used at all, it should be used to illustrate the "contention which Darwin's theory aroused at the time" and to "develop an awareness of its deficiencies in the eyes of his critics" (Gauld, 1992, p. 409).

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## Book Review

### *Nature's I.Q.: Extraordinary Animal Behaviors that Defy Evolution*

by Balazs Hornyanszky  
and Istvan Tasi

Torchlight Publishing Inc.,  
Badger, CA, 2009, 159 pages,  
\$25.00.

This is a beautiful and disappointing book. There are more than 300 color photos of animals, beautifully laid out. Many photos are unusual, such as an ant carrying a computer chip (cover), a grass snake playing dead to appear less appetizing (p. 31), and a frog with fake, protective eye marks on its rump (p. 30). Throughout, the book challenges naturalistic evolution. The writing is on a popular level but will not appeal to noncreationists. Evolution is described as nonsense (p. 14), having zero probability (p. 19), impossible (p. 38), inconceivable (p. 89), and illogical (p. 95). Discussion topics include animal

language, symbiosis, reproduction, and intelligence.

The authors as listed above are respectively a bioengineer and a cultural anthropologist. Both reside in Hungary, where the book was first published. Why, then, is this “classy” book a disappointment? The clue is the publisher, which produces works from India promoting Hinduism and the ancient Vedic culture that preceded it. The final ten pages of this book are dedicated to the revealed knowledge of swami leaders, Vedic scriptures, and reincarnation. In this worldview, people come originally from paradise. The soul “takes on bodies

of aquatic animals, then those of plants. One is reborn again and again as ... insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals” through millions of years (pp. 141, 145). This reverse evolution finally gets the soul back to where it started in paradise. If it “does not take advantage of opportunities” (p. 141), the soul gets knocked back down to a lower level. Also included in this muddled worldview are advanced beings on other planets. All this confusion appears at the end of a beautiful nature book.

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