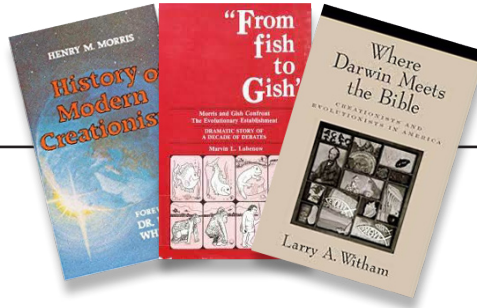




DARWIN NEWS

We weigh the weight of the evidence



50 YEARS SINCE THE GREAT DEBATES STARTED:

When creationists challenged evolutionists to debate

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INSTITUTE FOR CREATION RESEARCH





Duane Gish

Henry Morris

Through many decades there were a great number of debates in the USA between creationists and evolutionists. In most cases it was the two creation scientists Duane Gish and Henry M. Morris who defended the creationist position against leading followers of darwinism. Photo: Institute for Creation Research.

When Duane Gish lectured to the students at the Davis campus of the University of California in the spring of 1972, he was challenged by the renowned evolutionist and geneticist Ledyard G. Stebbins to debate the subject in front of a larger audience. Dr. Gish accepted the challenge, which became the starting point for hundreds of public debates between creationists and leading evolutionists.

Between 1972-1982, no less than 136 such debates were held, in which creationists from the Institute for Creation Research took part. The vast majority of the debates starred biochemist Duane Gish, sometimes in the company of Professor Henry M. Morris. Gish became known as an extraordinary debater and, according to many observers, he won all his debates. In total, during his life he participated in over 300 debates with evolutionists.

The very first debate in which Henry Morris participated took place in the fall of 1972. He happened to be in Kansas City on another issue at the time and was asked by a student organization if he wanted to participate in a debate at the university. He accepted the invitation somewhat reluctantly, as he was not used to debating and had never taken any lessons in public speaking.

To Morris' surprise, however, it turned out that his debate opponent, geology professor Richard Gentile, was ill-prepared. He had great difficulty in sticking to the subject and made only a few awkward attempts to answer Morris' arguments. According to the student newspaper's opinion afterwards, the debate was a clear victory for creationism.

GISH LIKE A FISH IN THE WATER

In his book *History of Modern Creationism* (1984) Henry Morris tells us that he had never been particularly interested in social interaction and, moreover, was not interested in arguing with people of different opinion. Despite this, he successfully participated in about a hundred creation debates.

With Duane Gish it was completely different. In debates he was in his element. Even before the start of the different debates he participated in, he was sure that everything would go well, and afterwards he was equally sure that he had won. Although his debate opponents didn't always agree with him on that, audiences mostly seemed to share Gish's view.

In most debates, Gish was alone in representing the creationist side, even though the opposing side sometimes consisted of both three and four evolutionists. In addition to the occasions when he was in team with Morris, Harold Slusher, Gary Parker, Donald Chittick and Marwin Lubenow also participated in a few debates.

Foto: Institute for Creation Research



THE GISH GALLOP

Duane Gish has become known for his method of debating. He was quick-witted and successfully responded to his debate opponent with factual arguments. From the evolutionist side, his technique condescendingly has been called the Gish gallop.

It refers to a rhetoric in which the quantity of the arguments takes precedence over quality. The term was coined in 1994 by anthropologist Eugenie Scott, who opined that Gish used the technique when challenging evolutionists in various debates.

However, this derogatory characterisation of Gish' debating technique had no basis in reality. No one else has accused Gish or Morris of having a plethora of ill-founded arguments, nor of being dishonest or deliberately distorting evidence. However, critics have mentioned on a few occasions that creationists have

misquoted sources and cited sentences taken out of context.

On one occasion (in 1977) Duane Gish debated in the congress hall in Utrecht, the Netherlands, with the biologist Mels Sluijser and stated, among other things, that the probability that amino acids would spontaneously form active protein molecules is practically zero.

Sluijser tried to take the edge off the argument by claiming that if someone had asked him on the day he was born what the probability was that on November 1, 1977 he would be standing in Utrecht debating with Dr. Duane Gish from San Diego, the probability would also be zero. Gish received the longest applause of the evening when he replied with a smile: "So you ended up here by accident? I was invited."

EVOLUTIONISTS WITH DIFFERENT OPINIONS

Interestingly, the opposing side often consisted of prominent evolutionist scientists. Ledyard Stebbins was the first and was then followed by Ashley Montagu, Isaac Asimov, Stanley Miller, John T. Robinson, Russel F. Doolittle and Madalyn Murray O'Hair, et al. Yet they were generally ill-prepared and lacked the knowledge to counter the creationist side's arguments. Apparently they had underestimated their debate opponents.

Marwin Lubenow has documented these debates in the book *From Fish to Gish* (1983). He notes that the evolutionists in the debates had very different opinions among themselves. Some of them claimed that there are thousands of transitional forms, others admitted that there are none. Some claimed that evolution can be observed today, others considered the opposite. Some of the evolutionists viewed evolution as a haphazard process, others considered it not.

Some of them saw the second law of thermodynamics as a major problem for evolution, which others saw no difficulty whatsoever in. The origin of life was considered by some to be outside the theory of evolution, others saw it as an integral part of evolution. Some argued that the only valid evidence for evolution had to come from the fossil finds, others saw a whole spectrum of evidence for evolution. Some firmly argued that the process of evolution has been slow and still ongoing, others considered that it has been fast and sudden. Mutations and natural selection have long been cited as the main mechanisms behind evolution, but both were questioned by the evolutionist representatives.

DIFFERENT DEBATE SETUPS

The creationists constantly adhered to the strictly scientific arguments, especially using the fossil finds to show that macroevolution has not taken place in the past. Reference was also often made to the harmful properties of mutations and the limited effect of natural selection, thereby showing that macroevolution does not occur in the present either. In addition, creationists also often mentioned laws of probability that show that complicated functional systems can't arise by chance.

Evolutionists, on the other hand, surprisingly often chose to attack the Bible, trying to show that creatio-

nists were driven by religious motives.

Some argued that one can be religious and still believe in evolution. In contrast, they consistently argued that creationism is not a scientific explanation but merely a form of religion. Some also questioned the competence and sufficient training of the creationist debaters.

Henry Morris notes in his analysis that the evolutionists in the debates never presented any well-founded scientific evidence that macroevolution has occurred. They could talk about variations in fruit flies that arose from mutations and refer to humans and monkeys having similar physique, but they had no real evidence for macroevolution. Nor did they give any examples of fossil intermediate forms, which show transitions from one basic form to another.

EFFECTIVE WAY TO REACH OUT

Sometimes the meaning of conducting all these debates has been questioned. Henry Morris believes, however, that the outcome of the debates speaks for itself. A well-advertised lecture in front of students normally gathered about 300 listeners, while a debate could draw 3,000 listeners. Thus, many more got to know the arguments for creation belief through all these debates in the 1970s and 1980s.

Some of the debates were also broadcasted on TV and radio, providing an even greater number of listeners and viewers. These broadcasts are estimated to have reached more than five million people over a ten-year period. Reports and debates in magazines such as *Science Digest*, *The Humanist Magazine* and *Acts and Facts* are estimated to have reached nearly one million more readers.

Foto: Institute for Creation Research



Duane Gish t.v. och Henry M. Morris