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Wilberforce versus Huxley

On the night of June 30th, 1860, a legendary encounter occurred. Samuel Wilberforce, bishop of Oxford, attempted to bash Darwin's *Origin of Species* at an annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement in Science in Oxford on June 30th, 1860, with an estimated audience of 700. During this, a rebuttal was brought upon him by T. H. Huxley, an English biologist, also referred to as “Darwin’s Bulldog,” as his views on science and religion favored Darwin’s. Since this debate was not planned out beforehand, there is no proof of what was exactly said, all that we can go off of is the claims of bystanders during the debate. Prior to this, both Huxley and Wilberforce wrote reviews on Darwin’s *Origins.*

Wilberforce spoke for around 30 minutes, and although dialogue was not cited, there was one statement that can be noted. Allegedly, Wilberforce asked Huxley whether or not he was related to an ape on his grandfather’s or grandmother’s side, to which Huxley replied that he would rather an ape for a grandfather to a man who employed his faculties and influence for the purpose of introducing ridicule into a grave scientific debate. Due to the large crowd and it being noisy, it is likely that this was misheard or made up among the spectators. Wilberforce wanted to show that Darwin’s theory could not be proven scientifically.

After Wilberforce finished, Huxley, Robert FitzRoy (former captain of the *Beagle*), and Darwin’s friend Joseph Hookey all spoke for the Theory of Evolution. Not much can be said about Huxley other than he continually defended Darwin and his theory. He also coined the term **agnosticism**(the idea that humans cannot know of the existence of anything beyond the phenomena of their experience).

In the end, this debate was very monumental in the overall conflict between Religion and Science, Creationism versus Evolutionism, whatever you want to call it. This encounter was an all around important piece in history because it demonstrates both sides of the argument.