Gill Slits in Human Fetuses?

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If evolution were true we would expect after a hundred years of intense research there would be some evidence for it, to stick in the face of "ignorant" creationists. There is none, and few stories illustrate this more clearly than my experience with the myth of human "gill slits."

In high school, a biology teacher gifted me with a biology textbook when she retired. (1) In it we read:

"The fish, reptile, and human embryos each form an internal skeleton, including vertebral column, skull, ribs, limb girdles, and limb cartilages. The gills open through the pharynx to the outside... In the reptile and the human embryos, the pharyngeal gills are closed up, and lungs develop." (2)

Likewise, when I first began to show doubt towards evolution in college, a biochemistry student proudly pointed to human gill slits as "proof" of evolution. And I have to admit, he had a point. If we really have gill slits as fetuses, that would indeed be powerful evidence for the evolution of man from fish!

Nor is this intellectual hangover from the 19th century confined to old biology textbooks and ignorant biochemistry students. I found the following statement recently in a book by Dr. Ian Tattersall, prominent paleoanthropologist and Head of the Anthropology Department at the American Museum of Natural History. His work included serving as Curator in Charge of the Hall of Human Biology and Evolution there. He writes:

"Sometimes the process of individual development can also be informative: the fact that gill slits appear early in embryonic life among humans and other land-dwellers, for example, helps confirm that gills are a primitive character among vertebrates." (3)

The idea that human fetuses have gill slits is a part of what was known as the Biogenetic Law. "The idea that the embryo of a complex animal goes through stages resembling the embryos of its ancestors is called the Biogenetic Law." (4) This "Law", also known as
recapitulation theory, (i.e., "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny") was formulated in 1866 by Dr. Ernst Haeckel, an early scientific convert to Darwinism. How has this "Law" fared since then?

In 1874 another German professor, Wilhelm His, showed that Haeckel had deliberately altered earlier sketches of human and dog embryos to support the Biogenetic Law. (5) Professor His was ignored by evolutionists in spite of the "blatant fraud" and the exacting detail in which he was able to show how the fraud had been generated. (6) Taylor comments:

"His, whose work still stands as the foundation of our knowledge of embryological development, was not the first to point out the deficiencies of Haeckel's work, nor indeed was he the last, yet Haeckel's fraudulent drawings have continued to the present day to be reproduced throughout the biological literature."(7)

This dishonesty was admitted in the Introduction to the Centennial Edition of Darwin's Origin of the Species:

"When the 'convergence' of embryos was not entirely satisfactory, Haeckel altered the illustrations of them to fit his theory. The 'biogenetic law' as proof of evolution is valueless." (8)

Nonetheless, the propaganda value of "gill slits" is strong, and it lives on. In a debate with creationist Dr. Duane Gish, anti-creationist Dr. Ashley Montagu said, in response to a reference to this fraud:

"The theory of recapitulation was destroyed in 1921 by Professor Walter Garstang in a famous paper, since when no reputable biologist has ever used the theory of recapitulation, created by a Nazi-like preacher [sic] named Haeckel." (9)

Dr. Gish (well known as the foremost evolution/creation debater in the world) responded:

"Ladies and gentleman, I have travelled all over the world. I have debated and lectured on many, many major university campuses, and it is hardly a single university that I appear on that some student does not tell me that he is taught the theory of embryological recapitulation right there at that university. I've had many evolutionists argue the evidence for evolution from embryological recapitulation...." (10)

My own experience, of course, agrees with Dr. Gish. Ian Taylor gives several examples of textbooks and popular evolutionary texts promoting the gill slit fraud, including one by Richard Leakey. A recent biology textbook, written by a creationist who was formerly a leading evolutionary theorist in abiogenesis, notes:

"A number of current textbooks give partial presentations of this story, very often stating that gill slits appear in the human embryo. But this has been shown false by advances in embryology, and is uniformly rejected by scientific literature." (11)

Despite uniform rejection by knowledgeable scientists, evolutionists (and abortionists) continue to propagandize it as evidence (as noted by Gish and myself). A biologist at Columbia University complains:

"the biogenetic law has become so deeply rooted in biological thought that it cannot be
weeded out in spite of its having been demonstrated to be wrong by numerous scholars." (12)

But what about the infamous "gill slits" shown in Haeckel's sketches? A modern medical text states:
"The pharyngeal arches and clefts are frequently referred to as branchial arches and branchial clefts in analogy with the lower vertebrates, [but] since the human embryo never has gills called 'branchia', the term pharyngeal arches and clefts has been adopted for this book." (13)

In an introductory text on creation science, biologist Dr. Gary Parker explains:
"The throat (or pharyngeal) grooves and pouches, falsely called "gill slits" are not mistakes in human development. They develop into absolutely essential parts of human anatomy. The middle ear canals come from the second pouches, and the parathyroid and thymus glands come from the third and fourth... another pouch, thought to be vestigial by evolutionists until just recently, becomes a gland that assists in calcium balance. Far from being useless evolutionary vestiges, then, these so-called "gill slits" are quite essential for distinctively human development." (14)

When I learned the truth about "gill slits," it was an eye-opener for me. If the evidence for the "fact" of evolution was so great and overwhelming, why did evolutionists need to continue to promote a 19th-century fraud to support their theory? My suspicions were aroused, and would be confirmed again and again as I intensified my studies. Think about it. Examine the evidence for yourself.

"Seldom has an assertion like that of Haeckel's 'theory of recapitulation', facile tidy, and plausible, widely accepted without critical examination, done so much harm to science." (15)
-Sir Gavin de Beer.

REFERENCES
2. Ibid, pp. 488-489.
4. Ref. 1, p. 489.
10. Ibid.
"Ever since the publication of Darwin's Origin in 1859, there has been a consistent trend, evident in these last five chapters, to interpret natural phenomena in a way that appears to provide evidence to support the theory of evolution. Some of these interpretations have turned out to be based on faulty observation, some on faulty reasoning, and some on blatant fraud, but the trend is always in the same direction. It might be asked why these unscientific illusions persist in spite of exposure within the scientific community, and why they have been maintained at the level of the general public, in some cases, for half a century." (16)

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