

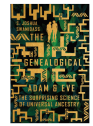
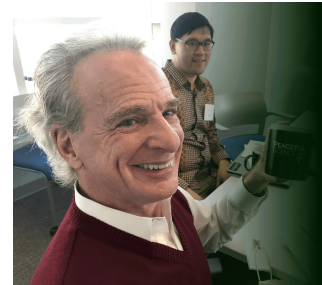


Preferring an Ancient Genealogical Adam and Eve

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I have learned an enormous amount about human origins from Prof. Swamidass, and I am deeply grateful for all the help he has been to me in understanding the scientific issues surrounding the question of the historical Adam. Although his proposed hypothesis and mine appear to be worlds apart, we are actually working with the same model of a genealogical Adam, though his Adam is very recent and mine very ancient. His is a Neolithic Adam; mine is a Lower Palaeolithic Adam. Our proposals might therefore be differentiated as the ancient vs the recent genealogical Adam.

Why do I prefer an ancient genealogical Adam over Josh's hypothesized recent genealogical Adam? The reasons are both biblical and scientific. Biblically, Josh's hypothesis has the advantage of preserving the descriptions the events of the *primaeva* history of Genesis 1-11 as very recent. But this advantage is purchased only at the expense of sacrificing Adam's being the truly universal progenitor of mankind, which I take to be a vastly more important point theologically than the time at which Adam lived. Moreover, Josh's hypothesis is based upon a literalistic interpretation of Gen 1-11 which does not take seriously the literary genre of the *primaeva* history as quasi-mythical in nature and therefore not straightforward history.

How does Josh's hypothesis deny Adam's universal human progenitorship? Josh's hypothesis, to be credible scientifically, must posit people outside the Garden of Eden who are not descended from Adam and Eve and with whom Adam and Eve's descendants interbred after their expulsion from the Garden. Thus, Adam and Eve were an isolated couple in the midst of a wider population of hominins descended not from Adam and Eve but from lower primates. This fact is often obscured in Josh's presentations by his emphasizing that everyone alive today is descended from Adam and Eve or that everyone alive at the time of Jesus was descended from Adam and Eve. It is to Josh's credit that he has brought these surprising truths of genealogical ancestry to our attention. But the fact remains that at the time of Adam's creation there were on Josh's proposed view already thousands of people living outside the Garden who had no genealogical relationship to Adam and Eve.

I think that it is safe to say that there is scarcely a shred of biblical evidence for the existence of people not descended from Adam and Eve. On the contrary, there are three reasons for thinking that what is described in Gen 2 is a story of the creation of mankind.

(1) The purpose of the *primaeva* narratives of Gen 1-11 is to portray God's universal plan for and dealings with humankind. Scholars have often asked why the *Pentateuch* does not begin with the call of

Abraham and the founding of Israel in Gen 12. Commentators seem widely agreed that the reason the author prefixes the pre-history to the patriarchal narratives is his universalizing interest.¹ He wants to show that God's original plan was to bless all mankind and that this aim still remains ultimately in mind through the election of Israel, which is now God's means of fulfilling His original intent. "Remove these elements," says OT scholar L. A. Turner, "and the coherence of the book as a whole disappears."² God was not therefore preoccupied with just the offspring of one specially created human couple, a sort of pre-Israelite election, but with all mankind.

(2) A comparison of the story of the creation of man in Gen 2 with other ANE creation stories shows that such stories share an etiological interest in telling of how mankind in general came to exist.³ For example, in the *Atrahasis Epic* in response to protests and rebellion of the lesser gods over their burdensome labors, the mother goddess decides to create man to take over the labor for them. Humans were created basically as slave labor for the gods. Such

1. For example, von Rad comments that in the sacred history beginning with the patriarchs we have "the answer to the unsolved question of primeval history, the question about the relation of God to all peoples" (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., The Old Testament Library [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1972], 24). Westermann deems it illegitimate to subordinate the universal history to the salvation history of Israel. "As creator, God stands in a relationship to people outside Israel throughout the whole of the history of humankind, in a relationship to the whole world, all of whose being and powers he has created and sustained" (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 605). The attempt to interpret Gen 1-11 in terms of only salvation history must be abandoned, he concludes, because the object of the *primaeva* event is humankind and the world, whereas the object of salvation history is only the people of God. Wenham points out that the focus narrows progressively throughout Genesis: the origin of the world, the origins of the nations, the origins of Israel. The opening chapters have a universal perspective dealing with all mankind, while chaps. 12-50 deal almost exclusively with Israelite concerns (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987], xxi-xxii). Wenham identifies two ways in which Gen 1-11 give the background to the call of Abraham: (i) it discloses the hopeless plight of mankind without the gracious intervention of God; (ii) it shows how the promises made to the patriarchs of land, nationhood, the presence of God, and blessing to the nations fulfill God's original plans for humanity (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, li).
2. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), s.v. "Genesis," by L. A. Turner, 353.
3. It has been said that the creation of Enkidu as a companion for Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an exception to the pattern of humanity's creation in the pagan myths, for he is specially created after the creation of human beings in general. This could afford precedent for interpreting Adam as a similarly singled out creation in a wider human population. But notice that in Gen 2.7-8 "the man" whom God forms is still a generic figure. It is not until 4.1 that "Adam" is used as a proper name. So no reason exists to compare man's creation to Enkidu's creation, as though other men already existed.

stories seek to answer the question of human origins in general. When read against this backdrop, Genesis 2 is seen to share a similar etiological interest—but with a very different answer!

(3) The account in Gen 2 when read at face value is about human origins. Employing the typical form of ancient Mesopotamian etiological myths, “When ____ was not yet, then ____,” Gen 2. 5-7 describes the condition of the earth prior to God’s creation of man:

when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist [stream] went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The author states explicitly that there was no man to do the work of agriculture, until God created man. *Adam* is the generic word for man and is not used as a proper name until Gen 4.1. Moreover, woman does not appear until her creation in Gen 2.22. Among all the animals God forms and brings to Adam “there was not found a helper fit for him” (2.20). God therefore creates a woman and presents her to the man. Prior to their creation there simply was no man or woman. The name later given by the man to his wife, said to mean “the mother of all living” (Gen 3.20), is *prima facie* an affirmation of her (and the man’s) progenitorship of all mankind. For these reasons the story of man’s creation in Gen 2 is not intended by the Pentateuchal author as an account of the *de novo* creation of one couple among many other already existing people but is a focused version of the creation of mankind in Gen 1.26-27.

Now Josh could avoid this untoward consequence of his hypothesis by denying the true humanity of the hominins outside the Garden. Indeed, in a footnote Josh says that for him the expression “people outside the Garden” is just a metaphor for a wider interbreeding population. If these hominins were not human, then all humanity did descend from Adam and Eve after all. Since it is crucial for Josh’s hypothesis that the descendants of Adam and Eve interbred with members of this wider population, his hypothesis has the troubling consequence that Adam and Eve’s descendants engaged in widespread bestiality. Josh rejects the characterization of these hominins as “beasts,” but if they were sub-human, I see no way of avoiding the appellation.

Moreover, if these hominins outside the Garden were not human beings, then Josh’s hypothesis becomes scientifically untenable. For it is universally recognized that human beings have existed on this planet for vastly longer than a mere ten thousand years. There is a noteworthy consensus among scientists as to what traits are jointly sufficient for humanity. We are, after all, familiar with ourselves as human beings and therefore know what a paradigmatic human being looks like.

We know, for example, that any putative human being must be anatomically similar to ourselves. While a self-conscious, rational extra-terrestrial (or even chimpanzee) would be a person, he would not be a *human* person. This necessary condition of humanness need not involve an exact anatomical match. There is a range of anatomical differences even between modern and archaic *Homo sapiens* that do

not count against the humanity of the latter. By contrast, no one thinks that given the significant anatomical differences between Australopithecines, for example, and modern man, the former were human beings, despite their having some shared features with man. They were bipedal apes of various sorts with tiny brains (around 460 cm³) that could not have supported modern human behavior.

On the basis of our paradigmatic examples of humans we can delineate certain features which, given sufficient anatomical similarity, are sufficient (if not necessary) for human personhood. What are some of these features? Anthropologists Sally McBrearty and Alison Brooks list four characteristics of modern human behavior:

- Abstract thinking, the ability to act with reference to abstract concepts not limited in time or space;
- Planning depth, the ability to formulate strategies based on past experience and to act upon them in a group context;
- Behavioral, economic, and technological innovativeness;
- Symbolic behavior, the ability to represent objects, people, and abstract concepts with arbitrary symbols, vocal or visual, and to reify such symbols in cultural practice.⁴

McBrearty and Brooks observe that the standards for behavioral modernity that they employ “are universally recognized and are frequently repeated in the literature.”⁵ To deny the humanity of past individuals who were anatomically similar to modern humans and who exhibited such behaviors would be problematic because (i) it is implausible to think that such behaviors did not require the cognitive capacities of human beings and (ii) to deny the humanity of past individuals exhibiting such behavior would permit one similarly to deny the humanity of people living today who share such behavior, which is not only implausible but morally unconscionable.

The difficult question is whether we can discern when such behaviors *first* appear in the prehistorical record. Fortunately, it is easy to establish a point *by which* such traits are clearly present. The beautiful cave art at Lascaux (17 kya) and Chauvet (30 kya) in France was undoubtedly created by human beings. Viewing these paintings, we sense ourselves standing in the presence of someone who is one of us. The hand stencils, which are among the oldest forms of cave art yet discovered seem almost to be reaching out across the millennia to touch us.

It is universally recognized that the people who produced such art possessed symbolic thought so as to be able to represent real animals and scenes via painted images. Any attempt therefore to date the origin of human persons later than the earliest time of such cave art is excluded, thus giving us a *latest point* for the possible origin of humanity. Human beings, in the full sense of the word, therefore existed on this planet by at least 50,000 years ago.

I had initially thought to share some of the truly stunning archaeological evidence for early human cognitive capacity hundreds of thousands of years ago, such as the Schöningen spears, the constructions at Bruniquel Cave, France, and a strand of braided

4. Sally McBrearty and Alison S. Brooks, “[The Revolution that wasn’t: a new interpretation of the origin of modern human behavior](#),” *Journal of Human Evolution* 39 (2000): 492.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 534.

Neanderthal string; but then it occurred to me that this is quite unnecessary. The cave art alone that I have mentioned already rules out the hypothesis that humanity originated on this planet a mere 10,000 years ago, as Josh suggests.

Sometimes Josh is tempted to distinguish between what he calls biological, philosophical, and theological humans in an attempt to justify taking the people outside the Garden to be biologically and philosophically human—whatever that amounts to—, but not theologically human. I think that such distinctions are plausibly merely aspectival, not ontological. There is no need or room for an ontological distinction between biological, philosophical, and theological humans, for they are co-extensive. There are just humans, viewed under different aspects. By way of analogy, consider a horse: a horse can be viewed biologically or financially or recreationally. But there are not three horses, but one. The claim that hominins which share the same genetic structure that we do may not be human strikes me as highly implausible. I seriously doubt that any hominin

lacking the cognitive capacities specified by McBrearty and Brooks, which are all reflections of personal agency and therefore personhood, could be genetically identical to someone who has them. Such a hypothesis is in any case ruled out by the genetic evidence of palaeoanthropology, which shows that such personal cognitive behaviors arrive only with the advent of humans genetically similar to ourselves. And again, if hominins could exhibit these cognitive behaviors and not be truly human, then Josh's distinguishing different sorts of human leads to the horrific conclusion that there could be people today who look and act just like us but who are not in God's image and therefore sub-human. We must therefore say that Adam and Eve's non-human contemporaries differed from them both biologically and spiritually. But then a recent genealogical Adam is decisively ruled out by the scientific evidence.

For these reasons I find the model of an ancient genealogical Adam to be the more plausible hypothesis.

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