

§ 10. Doctrine of Man
Lecture 14
When Did Adam Live?

Good morning! Welcome to Defenders! We are coming to you today from the safety of my hermetically sealed home office, and I am glad that you could join us.

The last time I argued that the historical Adam and Eve actually existed even though their stories are cloaked in the language of figuralism and mythology. This raises an obvious question. If the biblical Adam was a historical person who actually lived, then the obvious question arises, *when* did he live? We can turn to modern science in the attempt to answer this question. For scientists are vitally interested in a question which is empirically equivalent to our question, namely, when did human beings first appear on Earth? The historical Adam may then be located around that time.

First of all, however, we need to clarify some terminology. A hominid is the class of animals that includes orangutans, chimpanzees, gorillas, and humans. They are all hominids. A hominin is the class that includes only members of the human lineage since its divergence from the last common ancestor with chimpanzees. The class of hominins includes not only modern man, *Homo sapiens*, but also archaic species of the genus *Homo*. It includes as well Australopithecines, which were bi-pedal African apes. Ian Tattersall of the American Museum of Natural History points out that early individuals classed as *Homo*, such as *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo rudolfensis*, and so on, all have in common remarkably small brains, hardly larger than those of the Australopithecines. This is in conspicuous contrast to *Homo sapiens*, which has a brain more than twice the volume. So we must not assume that organisms classed as *Homo* are therefore human beings. Rather we need to specify certain conditions which are jointly sufficient for humanity. There is, in fact, a noteworthy consensus among scientists as to what these conditions are. We are, after all, familiar with ourselves as human beings and therefore know what a paradigmatic human being is.

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 forms. By contrast, no one thinks that given their significant anatomical differences to modern man, Australopithecines, for example, were human beings, despite their having some shared features with man (such as bipedalism). They were simply bipedal apes of various sorts with tiny brains (somewhere 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 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:

1. Abstract thinking, the ability to act with reference to abstract concepts not limited in time or space;
2. Planning depth, the ability to formulate strategies based on past experience and to act upon them in a group context;
3. Behavioral, economic, and technological innovations;
4. Symbolic behavior, the ability to represent objects, people, and abstract concepts with arbitrary symbols, whether vocal or visual, and to reify such symbols in cultural practice.¹

McBrearty and Brooks observe that the standards for behavioral modernity that they apply “are universally recognized and are frequently repeated in the literature.”² To deny the humanity of past individuals who were anatomically similar to modern humans and who exhibited such behaviors would be very 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 more difficult question is whether we can discern when such behaviors first appear in the prehistorical record. We can set boundaries of our quest for human origins by establishing *an earliest possible point* and *a latest possible point* for the first appearance of human beings. How far back can the first appearance of humans be extended?

Paleontological evidence continues to push *Homo sapiens* further and further into the past. The hominin fossils of Jebel Irhoud in Morocco, with an age of over 300,000 years, are the earliest fossils of *Homo sapiens* discovered to date. The brain volume of these individuals was large, between 1300-1400 cm³, which is comparable to that of modern man (1100-1500 cm³). Although there are differences in the cranial shape of these archaic humans compared to modern humans, the archaeologists at Jebel Irhoud emphasize that already 300,000 years ago “their facial morphology is almost indistinguishable from that of R[ecent] M[odern] H[umans].”³ While such skeletal remains alone may not prove the

¹ 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): p. 492.

² Ibid., p. 534.

³ Jean-Jacques Hublin *et al.*, “New fossils from Jebel Irhoud, Morocco and the pan-African origin of *Homo sapiens*,” *Nature* 546 (8 June 2017), pp. 289ff, doi:10.1038/nature22336.

humanity of such individuals, they make it at least possible that human beings date back to over 300,000 years ago.

But what shall we say about earlier forms of *Homo*? Despite being classified as *Homo*, so-called *Homo habilis* was, as I mentioned, almost certainly not human, given its brain size of 550-687 cm³. Many paleoanthropologists would like it to be renamed *Australopithecus habilis*. When we come to *Homo erectus*, the picture becomes less clear, especially given the lengthy history and geographical spread of this particular hominin. Specimens have been found throughout Asia and Africa over a span of nearly one and a half million years from around 2,000,000 years ago, thus permitting an abundance of identifiable sub-species. It is possible that some late-developing member of *Homo erectus* might be arguably human, even if more primitive members were not. For example, the very early fossils of *Homo erectus* from Dmanisi, Georgia, have a brain volume of only about 600 cm³, whereas later specimens from Java reach 1100 cm³, which touches the lower bound of modern *Homo sapiens* (which, you will remember, is 1100-1500 cm³). By the time we get to *Homo heidelbergensis* and *Homo neanderthalensis* brain sizes are large enough to support human personhood. For *Homo heidelbergensis*, the brain case measured 1100-1400 cm³, and for *Homo neanderthalensis*, 1200-1750 cm³. The brain volume of Neanderthals was, in fact, larger than that of *Homo sapiens*, whose brain size has actually been shrinking over the last ten thousand years. So *Homo erectus* provides us the earliest possible point for the origin of human beings.

As for a latest point of human origins, the beautiful cave art at Lascaux (170,000 years ago) and Chauvet (30,000 years ago) in France, was undoubtedly created by human beings.



CAVE ART AT LASCAUX, FRANCE (17 KYA)



CAVE ART AT CHAUVET, FRANCE (30 KYA)

Just look at this picture of the beautiful horses painted on the walls of the cave in Lascaux. This was truly a sensitive and brilliant artist. And the paintings at Chauvet are even more stunning. Here is a clip of the lions that were drawn on the cave wall by the artist at Chauvet. The magnificence of these paintings can be appreciated when you ask

yourself, if you were called upon to draw a picture of a pride of lions on the wall, what would it look like? Truly we have here a primeval Michelangelo at work.

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.



For example, we have hand stencils from Sulawesi, Indonesia which date back to 35,000 to 40,000 years ago. These are the actual hand imprints of real people who actually lived.

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 originated on this planet sometime between one million years ago at the earliest and 50,000 years ago at the latest. By pushing these boundaries inward, if we can, we now want to try to determine more closely the point of this origin. That is the subject we shall explore next week. Until then, stay safe.⁴

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