
EDITOR'S NOTE: *In his most recent monograph, William Lane Craig takes up one of the most pressing issues in contemporary apologetics: the question of the origins of humanity and the historicity of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. Because of Dr. Craig's eminent reputation and the topic of this book, MR wished to provide two different perspectives on it, and so we invited both Dr. Hojin Ahn and Dr. Chad McIntosh to review Dr. Craig's book.*

A Bad Time for a Good Book

By Chad McIntosh

William Lane Craig's *In Quest of the Historical Adam* is a stimulating and rewarding study intended for, we are told on the very first page, "persons who are Christian philosophers, theologians, and other academics who are neither Old Testament scholars nor scientists" and for "intelligent laymen . . . for we are all laymen when it comes to areas outside our areas of specialization" (xi). So, despite my initial hesitancy to review this title given my lack of formal education in either biblical studies or a relevant science, perhaps I can lend insight as one from among the intended readership.

Our topic is Adam and Eve, and we face two main questions: First, does the Bible present them as real, historical persons or mere literary figures used by biblical authors to illustrate theological truths? Second, if they are real, historical persons, then is belief in this original pair as the font of humanity in conflict with current science of human origins? William Lane Craig embarks on a quest to answer these and other questions, using the sharp tools of an analytic philosopher to hack through the thick jungles of diverse academic terrains, including ancient mythology, Old and New Testament scholarship, paleoneurology, archaeology, and population genetics. In brief, here is what he found.

We first encounter Adam and Eve, of course, in the primeval narratives of Genesis 1–11. Were the genre of Genesis straightforward historical

narrative, the answer to the first question would be settled. But matters aren't so easy; according to Craig, Genesis 1–11 exhibits nearly all the hallmarks of the genre of myth. But we must be careful here: as literary scholars use the term, a "myth" is not a popular idea or falsehood, but a traditional, sacred narrative believed by members of a society that explains present realities by anchoring them in the prehistoric past. Yet at the same time, historical interest is not absent from the author of Genesis, as the genealogies show. Thus Craig thinks that Thorkild Jacobsen's genre of "mytho-history"—a genre where real, historical events are narrated but with nonliteral literary devices used to communicate theological truths—is therefore an apt classification of Genesis, popular aversions to the word *myth* notwithstanding. "Scholars simply need to be careful to explain our meaning to laymen" (157). So, while the author of Genesis "intends for his narrative to be at some level historical, to concern people who actually lived and events that really occurred, . . . those persons and events have been clothed in the garb of the metaphorical and figurative language of myth," which makes it "futile to try to discern . . . what parts are historical and what parts are not" (201). We must therefore look elsewhere in the Bible for its stance on the historicity of Adam and Eve.

Of the dozen (or so) relevant New Testament texts, Craig finds only a handful in Paul's letters that plausibly assert a historical Adam. The rest, he argues, require the (McIntosh cont'd on p. 59)

McIntosh (cont'd from p. 57) pair to be no more than literary figures that illustrate theological truths. For instance, when Jesus refers to the monogamous union of Adam and Eve, he does so “to discern its implication for marriage and divorce, not asserting its historicity” (221). By contrast, Paul’s theology requires a historical Adam (and Eve), for Paul identifies Adam as responsible for a real-world event (the Fall) that led in time to other real-world effects, most importantly Christ’s atonement (see 1 Cor. 15:21–22, 45–46; Rom. 5:12–21). For Craig, this “suffices for the affirmation of a historical Adam” (242).

Having completed the first leg of his quest, Craig sets out on the second—that is, to determine whether belief in an original pair as the font of humanity is in conflict with current science of human origins. The main objections to this, considered in the book’s penultimate chapter, turn out to be surprisingly weak so long as the primordial pair are located far enough in the distant past to account for the genetic and geographic diversity that we see in the human population around the world today. This is exactly what the evidence already surveyed in the third part of the book indicates: paleoneurological and archaeological evidence concerning when the first humans emerged places them within the Pleistocene epoch, commonly known as the Ice Age, from 2.5 million to 12 thousand years ago. To establish this, of course, one must first determine what counts as “human.”

Here, Craig cautions against simplistically equating the natural kind of “human” with organisms scientifically classified as *Homo*. There is a wide variety of organisms within *Homo* that are plausibly not human, and others that are plausibly human but not *Homo sapiens* (e.g., *Homo neanderthalis*). To be human in the relevant sense is to exhibit sufficient anatomical and cognitive similarity with modern humans. Cranial size is especially important, “given the correlation between brain size and cognitive capacity” (258). One of the more interesting (and dramatic!) aspects of

Craig’s study is how multiple lines of evidence across several disciplines slowly converge, pointing to the common ancestor of Neanderthals and modern *Homo sapiens* as the earliest species with the anatomical features and cognitive capacity to count as fully human. This was *Homo heidelbergensis*, whose image the book’s dust jacket bears. Craig therefore identifies Adam and Eve as members of this group, having lived between 750,000 and 1,000,000 years ago.

In the final chapter, Craig adds some reflections on how his findings square with the Christian view of the afterlife, the image of God, and mind-body dualism, for which the engaged reader will have been patiently waiting. Unfortunately, details are sparse here. In particular, what it means for man to be made in the image of God is left unclear, which is a surprising lacuna given the book’s topic. To be made in the image of God, Craig argues, is to “have certain faculties like rationality, self-consciousness, freedom of the will, and so forth” — that is, to be “persons in the same way that God is personal and thus have the attributes of personhood. It is precisely the properties of personhood that are manifested by the cognitive behaviors to which we have appeals as evidence of humanity” (370). This can’t be quite right, since angels and demons are persons in this sense but are not human and not created in God’s image (or at least not explicitly stated in the Bible to be so). There must be something else about bearing God’s image that makes one human. But what? It can’t be having a humanoid body, for man is not fashioned in the likeness of God’s body (God is spirit), and humans can exist unembodied (370–76). So, what is it about being made in God’s image that makes us human? “The stubborn fact is that Genesis leaves *the image and likeness of God* undefined” (367). That may be so, but can’t we as Christian philosophers say more? It’s odd that cranial size should do more work in picking out humans than the *imago Dei!*

I was also surprised by the scant attention given to Jesus’ com- (McIntosh cont'd on p. 61)

McIntosh (cont'd from p. 59) ments in Matthew 19:4–5, as Craig says in the introduction that it seems plausible, on the basis of this text, that Jesus believed in the historicity of Adam and Eve. Indeed, this seems to be the *main* concern; for if there is no historical Adam, then “even if Jesus were not guilty of teaching doctrinal error, he still would have held false beliefs concerning Adam and Eve, . . . which is incompatible with his omniscience” (7). Craig concludes that “as crazy as it sounds, denial of the historical Adam threatens to undo the deity of Christ and thus to destroy orthodox Christian faith” (8). Recall that it was the real-world effects of Adam’s sin that committed Paul to a historical Adam. But in Matthew 19:4–5, is not Jesus also appealing to the real-world effects of marriage, which itself is a real-world effect of God’s causal activities?

Finally, I can’t help but wonder about the book’s reception and impact. The chapters on the genre of Genesis are a tour de force, and they could be an invaluable contribution to popular debates about the meaning and interpretation of Genesis. But will they be? I have my doubts. Despite being described as a “popular-level book” (320), Craig’s quest may be too challenging for the average layperson. For example, Craig makes four distinctions crucial for discerning whether the Bible teaches that there is a historical Adam:

(1) the literary vs. historical Adam, (2) truth *simpliciter* vs. truth-in-a-story, (3) using a text illustratively vs. assertorically, and (4) what a person citing a text believes vs. what they assert. These are indeed crucial distinctions for understanding the biblical claims with respect to Adam and Eve, but I’m afraid such subtlety would really try the patience of lay Christians, as frustrating as that may be to Christian academics. And it would be no less frustrating to lay Christians that responsible positions must be handed down to them by scholars. So, are we to despair at the prospect of a responsible position ever becoming mainstream among evangelicals?

Finally, Craig just does not appreciate how steep of a mountain the word *myth* will create for Evangelical Christians. It is in my estimation insurmountable. That word and the book’s cover will almost certainly alienate a large and important audience who wrestle with reconciling their faith with the claims of (popular) scientific accounts of human origins. That said, as all Christians know, a precious gift can be refused for foolish reasons.

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