
Pro Rege

Volume 19 | Number 3

Article 2

March 1991

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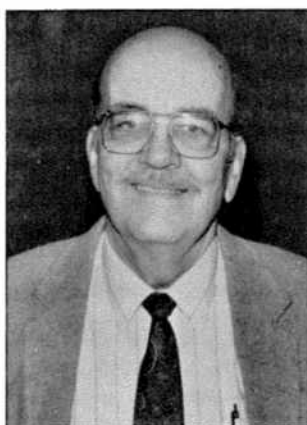
Recommended Citation

Maatman, Russell W. (1991) "Origin of the Human Family," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 19: No. 3, 8 - 17.

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The Origin of the Human Family



by Russell Maatman

It is difficult to ask a more basic question than this: did human beings descend from animals? Other questions follow: Does the answer to this question affect our view of human nature? Does the answer help explain any of the deep problems of modern life? Is the authority of the Bible at stake? This article is not the place for the lengthy discussion these questions require. But I do want to take up the basic question: Do human beings have an animal ancestry? I conclude they do not.

Theistic evolutionists reach a different conclusion. (I consider here only Christian theistic evolution,

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even though other kinds exist.) For some of them, human descent from animals is a possibility; for others, a certainty. Thus, Richard Wright, professor of biology at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts, in presenting a Christian view of biology to college students, writes

Did God create Adam . . . from nothing? Or did he use preexisting matter (dust?) in hominid form? Exactly when in history might this have happened? . . . *These are questions for which there is far too little evidence to venture an answer.* They are what we shall have to leave as loose ends, even though there are many who would like to see them tied.

. . . [T]here are two classical views on the origin of humankind: Humans either evolved from preexisting hominids, or else they were created by God with many features that are similar to fossil and existing primates. . . . Both of these views are held by different groups of Christians who believe in the reliability of the Bible. And there are some who believe that God in a miraculous way transformed preexisting hominids into the first humans. . . . *[T]he evidence simply is not capable of distinguishing clearly between these views.*¹ (Emphasis added.)

In a debate among Christians on several issues related to origins, R. J. Berry, professor of genetics at University College, London, expressed a similar idea:

There is clearly no difficulty in believing that God could have carried out this special creation [of a human being] in a hominid ape.

. . . [I]t is quite possible that, at some time after God had created Adam, he then conferred his image on all members of the same biological species alive at the time.²

Jesse De Boer, a philosopher, insists only one position is viable. In a letter to the editor of *The Calvin Spark* he refers to those who

. . . profess the historicity of Adam and Eve. That view is ridiculous! The early chapters in Genesis are mythical and most of the Pentateuch consists of legendary material . . .³

The debate among Christians concerning the origin of the human family centers on how one should understand certain biblical passages and on the role and meaning of natural scientific work. I shall discuss the origin of the human family using the two revelations of God: his special revelation (the Bible) and his general revelation (Creation). Both *revelations* are infallible: not until we interpret those revelations does fallibility enter in.

Are the roles of special and general revelation complementary? Yes and no. Yes: some information from one of these sources cannot be obtained from the other; and so what we learn from the one can add to what we learn from the other. No: we cannot decide *a priori* that one source contains a category of information not contained in the other source. We cannot decide that the categories of information in the two sources are complementary. Those who hold to categorical complementarity assume that we have pre-biblical and pre-scientific information that we in fact do not have.

It is much better to say that special revelation and general revelation are each for all of life. With that view of the Bible and Creation, we have freedom: we do not force ourselves to ask questions like, "Can the Bible speak to this subject? Can our investigation of Creation help us with that matter?" With that freedom in mind, I shall discuss what the Bible and Creation tell us about the origin of the human family.⁴

The question of the origin of the human family actually consists of two questions for those who consider biblical evidence: Were two people, Adam and Eve, the parents of the human family? If they were, did they descend from animals? Non-Christians do not worry about this distinction; for them, if they hold to an animal origin of human beings, it is enough to say, "Adam was a crowd." But, since I shall maintain that Adam and Eve are the parents of all human beings, I must consider the other question, the question of the origin of Adam and Eve. I shall deal with the two questions separately.

The claim that Adam and Eve were the parents

of the entire human family does not preclude the possibility that microevolution (a term used to denote small changes) has occurred since Adam and Eve. Microevolution within the human family explains different skin colors, hair types, body types, and so forth. In addition, Genesis 5:4-32 indicates that human beings once lived about ten times as long as they do now. That the great ages were actually in the original text has been disputed; but if further biblical research verifies them, then those great ages would be one more indication of microevolution; more properly, devolution from the time when human beings lived much longer than they do now.

The amount of microevolution observed in the

Microevolution since Adam and Eve is not precluded.

human family may have required a long time. An age of hundreds of thousands of years for the human family, suggested by some scholars, does, of course, raise questions concerning interpretation of certain biblical passages; for example, passages describing the beginning of agriculture and metal-working and the nature and extent of the Noahic Flood. Christian scholars have proposed answers to these questions and it is evident that Bible-believers need not necessarily reject such a great age.⁵ On the other hand, the biblical text taken alone does not require that great age. If we combine biblical information with observations that racial differences do exist and that life spans, if they change, change only very slowly, we might conclude that these changes took place in the human family over a very long period of time.

Some Christians claim that because the Bible was written during a pre-scientific or non-scientific era, the biblical text does not address the origin of the human family. But a Reformed person may, as I have just indicated, allow study of special revelation to interact with scientific work, which interprets general revelation. One need not maintain, even given the limitations of the cultures of both the Old and the New Testament times, that the biblical authors were unable to provide answers to the two questions concerning Adam and Eve posed above. Obviously, much modern discussion concerning origins presupposes knowledge of modern science. But it was possible for the Bible, without going beyond either the culture of biblical times or the kind

of questions asked during that period, to teach whether Adam and Eve were the parents of the entire human family and whether Adam and Eve had animal forebears.

In the following section, I shall first take up the biblical testimony dealing with how Adam and Eve relate to the rest of the human family before I discuss whether they had animal ancestry. Then in the next section I shall deal with the scientific testimony.

The Biblical Testimony

Adam and Eve and the Human Family. The Bible clearly teaches that Adam and Eve were two persons and were the parents of the entire human family. The Bible places Adam and Eve at the beginning of human history. This is not only the general teaching of the Bible, but also the teaching of several specific passages. First, the Bible introduces the creation of Adam and Eve by the first of the *toledoth* (“generations” and “account” in the KJV and the NIV, respectively) passages: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (Gen. 2:4, NIV). These *toledoth* passages provide the structure of the rest of Genesis after 2:4. In this way, Adam and Eve are linked to Noah (6:9), Shem (11:10), Terah (11:27), Abraham and Isaac (25:19), and many other historical persons. Also, among the descendants of Adam and Eve are some of civilization’s “firsts,” such as agriculturalists (4:20) and musicians (4:21). The Bible also states that Eve was the mother of the entire human family (3:20).

Adam is mentioned several places in the Bible besides Genesis. The genealogies beginning in I Chronicles 1:1 and Luke 3:23 list Adam as the first man. Paul states in I Corinthians 15:45 that Adam was the first man. In most of the Adam passages he is mentioned along with persons known to be historical. These passages and the others cited seem to be irrefutable evidence that Adam was the first man.

Finally, consider the reasoning that Paul uses in linking the atoning work of Christ to the sin of Adam (Rom. 5:12-19 and I Cor. 15:22). Christ’s work is sufficient to remove the sin of every person, sin which arose because Adam’s sin polluted the entire human family. Paul is thus saying that Adam is the father of the entire human family.

The Origin of Adam and Eve. I shall now show that Adam and Eve did not have animal forebears. The position of theistic evolutionists, referred to at

the beginning of this article, warrants our attention.

The human being that theistic evolutionists claim has evolved from animals cannot be the same human being whose evolution non-Christian evolutionists describe. Theistic evolutionists attempt to account for the origin of the human being that the Bible describes, the being that bears God’s image. Therefore, the general evolutionary theory of the non-Christian evolutionist will not suffice for the theistic evolutionist. Did God suddenly transform two animals into Adam and Eve, who were therefore qualitatively different from all animals? Or, did God guide a gradual process, with eventually two individuals differing enough from their forebears so that it could be said of them that they bore the image of God and were morally responsible?

I shall present a biblical argument against each of these two kinds of theistic evolution, that is, against both sudden and gradual appearance of the first human beings. Genesis 2:7 describes the creation of the first human being (unless otherwise noted, quotations are from the NIV):

The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)

Consider the meaning of “dust.” Could this “dust” have been alive? Thus, could human beings be descendants of other primates? Such an interpretation does not seem possible, since the word here translated as “dust,” the Hebrew *aphar*, which appears over 100 times in the Old Testament, seems never to denote living matter. Following are typical uses of *aphar*; the relevant English word is emphasized.

I will make your offspring like the *dust* of the earth. (Gen. 13:16)

Then they are to take other stones to replace these and take new *clay* and plaster the house. (Lev. 14:42)

For the unclean person, put some *ashes* from the burned purification offering into a jar . . . (Num. 19:17)

He ground it to *powder* and scattered the *dust* over the graves of the common people. (2 Kings 23:6)

Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of *rubble*—burned as they are? (Neh. 4:2)

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the *earth*. (Job 19:25)
Let my enemy . . . make me sleep in the *dust*.
(Ps. 7:5)

All go to the same place; all come from *dust* and to *dust* all return. (Eccl. 3:20)

The Ecclesiastes passage is, in fact, a biblical commentary on the creation of the first human being in Genesis 2:7 and the curse on human beings in 3:19.

Consider, however, Genesis 3:19:

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground [*adamah*], since from it you were taken; for dust [*aphar*] you are and to dust [*aphar*] you will return.

Here the first *aphar* is a person. Does this mean that in 2:7 (describing the creation of the first human being) *aphar* could refer to a living being and that therefore human beings could have had animal ancestors? I do not think so. Genesis 3:19 uses *aphar* twice. It also calls our attention to a third use, its use in 2:7: the 3:19 phrase, “since from it you were taken,” refers not only to *adamah*, ground, but also to its use in 2:7. Among those three uses, we have one reference point. For we know what “to dust you will return” means: We know that the body in the grave turns to dead dust. (It has been suggested that the grave, which often contains worms and insects, is actually alive. Surely this reasoning does not advance the argument that human beings descended from non-human primates.) If the grave dust is dead, so is the dust of “for dust you are.” Then it follows that the dust of “from it you were taken,” i.e., the dust of 2:7, is also dead, or, more appropriately in this case, non-living. God seems to be saying in 3:19, “You were dead dust. I gave you life. By sinning, you signed your death warrant and so you are now as good as dead. You shall return to the dead dust from whence you came.”

Many theistic evolutionists quite freely admit that the dust of Genesis 2:7 was dead. But, they say, the description is only symbolic. Can they be correct? Symbolic elements are present in the first chapters of Genesis—“God . . . breathed” in 2:7 must be one of them—and yet it is not correct to claim those chapters consist of nothing but symbol. To show this, I shall present another argument concerning 2:7; once again I shall link this passage to other parts of the Bible.

The error of theistic evolutionists may be in part due to a modern misunderstanding of Genesis 2:7 as rendered by the KJV:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
(Gen. 2:7, KJV)

The problem is with “soul,” a translation of *nephesh*. Many Christians maintain that a human being “has a soul,” as if a soul has been added to a body. Three views of the “body-soul problem” are of interest in the present discussion:

The first view states that the soul was added to a preexisting body, a view that the KJV translation

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of Genesis 2:7 seems to suggest. This view implies dualism: what pertains to the body is lower, of this world, and not of ultimate importance, but what pertains to the soul is higher, eternal, and worthy of considerable attention. Although this undesirable result can be traced to the division of body and soul, it is not fair to accuse the KJV translators of maintaining this extreme dualistic position.

The second view, advanced recently by John Cooper, is mildly dualistic but claims that the human being is a whole.⁶ For Cooper, the person is an irreducible whole consisting of two parts. Genesis 2:7 describes the creation of both: the body from dust, to which the soul, its life, is given. Evidently Cooper holds that the human body has no life without the soul. For Cooper this is “holistic dualism.”

The third view, held by still other Christians, is that the person is a body-soul; it is also a holistic view. To see a person is to see all of that person.

While the second and third views are holistic, the first is not. Theistic evolutionists, to be consistent, must hold either the first view or something similar to it. They are dualists. But the first view is not correct. I shall now discuss why I think the Bible does not allow for the first view.

What did God do in Genesis 2:7 when “the man became a living being” (NIV) or “man became a living soul” (KJV)? In the KJV *nephesh* is indeed

translated in many other places as "soul" (see, for example, Gen. 17:14, 27:4, 34:3, Ex. 12:15, and Lev. 4:2), but it is also translated as "beast" (Lev. 24:18), "body" (Lev. 21:11 and others), "breath" (Job 41:21), and so forth. (Although the conclusion of the argument does not depend upon the accuracy of the KJV translation, it is helpful to use it here because the modern reading of this translation may in part be the source of the problem alluded to above and because of consistency within the translation.) Of particular interest in the present discussion is that *nephesh* is translated "creature" in many places (Gen. 1:21, 1:24, 2:19, 9:10, 9:12, 9:15, and 9:16; Lev. 11:46) and as "life" in numerous others (see, for example, Gen. 9:4, 9:5, and 19:17; Lev. 17:14; Deut. 12:23). Thus, if one is not previously convinced that a human being is a body plus a soul, Genesis 2:7 can be translated as it is in the NIV: "... the man became a living being." Genesis 2:7 does not teach that God formed the first human being by adding a soul to something that existed previously. It does teach that God made the first human being *nephesh*, a living being. But he also made animals *nephesh* (see, for example, Gen. 9:4 and Lev. 17:14). Those who hold to either the instantaneous or the gradual addition of a soul to a body cannot appeal to Genesis 2:7.

The holistic view of the human being that is presented in Genesis 2:7 is also taught by the Old Testament in the many places it refers to the whole person as *nephesh*. Some examples (the KJV translation of *nephesh* is emphasized):

These are the sons of Zilpah . . . even sixteen *souls*. (Gen. 46:18)

No *soul* of you shall eat blood. (Lev. 17:12)
And levy a tribute unto the Lord of the men of war which went out to battle: one *soul* of five hundred, both of the persons and of the beeves, and of the asses and of the sheep. (Num. 31:28)

Joshua . . . utterly destroyed . . . all the *souls*. (Josh. 10:28)

The whole person seems to be intended by the biblical author also in Gen. 27:19, 27:25, 46:22, and 46:26; in Ex. 1:5 and 12:4; and in many other places.

In some instances, such as in Genesis 34:3, Leviticus 4:2, Numbers 9:13 and 21:4, and Psalms 3:2, it may seem at first that *nephesh*, when it is translated as "soul," is a separate entity. Typical of such passages is the following: "The *soul* of the

people was much discouraged" (Num. 21:4). But in such a passage "soul" denotes the whole person: the discouragement of the people inevitably had a physical component which involved their bodies.

Although *nephesh* is used in many other places in the Old Testament, the citations above are typical. Summarizing concerning the biblical use of *nephesh*, I conclude that Genesis 2:7 does not indicate a soul was added to a previously-existing being and that 2:7 does indicate the whole being of Adam was created at this time.

Theistic evolution is untenable for other reasons. Consider the details of the creation of the first human *pair*. After God created Adam, he told Adam he would make a helper suitable (NIV) or help meet (KJV) for him (Gen. 2:18). All the beasts of the field were then brought to Adam for him to name. No helper for Adam was among those beasts (2:19-20). Only then did God create his helper, Eve, from the body of man (2:21-3).

This description in Genesis 2 of the creation of Eve provides two indications that the first human beings did not descend from animals. First, no animal could be a helper for Adam; second, the male preceded the female, contrary to the order in the animal world. The priority of Adam in time indicated by this passage cannot be taken to be merely a symbolic priority. The priority was certainly not symbolic for Paul, who said, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (I Tim. 2:13).

Another indication that Adam and Eve did not have animal forebears is the fact that they died because of their sin. All animals are mortal. If, as theistic evolutionists claim, God transformed animals into Adam and Eve, then they, too, would have been mortal from the beginning. But some theistic evolutionists object: they claim that the transformation from animals to human beings included the gift of bodily immortality.

On the other hand, another group of theistic evolutionists holds that the transformation to Adam and Eve did not include the gift of immortality. According to this position, even though Adam and Eve remained sinless, they would die in the physical sense. The curse of death mentioned in Genesis 3:3 and received in 3:19 would be a separation from God added to an already-existing bodily mortality.

I think that both views are incorrect. Concerning the first view, nothing in the Bible teaches that some animal bodies evolved to an immortal state, a state

which would have been much higher than the state of modern human bodies. The idea is speculative and groundless.

The second view, that the death of Genesis 3:3 and 3:19 was a separation from God in addition to the mortality already inherent in the human body, does not stand up under close scrutiny. Consider how Paul treats the Genesis curse of death. In Romans 5:12-19 Paul states that just as death entered because of the sin of one man, life comes because of the death of another man, Jesus Christ. Of course, this death and life include, respectively, separation from God and eternal life with God. But the life of which Paul speaks includes resurrection from *biological* death. The resurrection of Christ which Paul celebrated certainly included a bodily resurrection; and so it must be that the sin of one man brought about *biological* death. Paul makes the same point in a letter to the church at Corinth:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (I Cor. 15:21-2)

(See also I Corinthians 15:35-54, where Paul in several ways indicates that the resurrection gift of Christ includes *bodily* resurrection and immortality.)

Claiming that human biological death preceded the Fall is equivalent to claiming that human pain also preceded the Fall. Such a claim implies that good and evil existed side by side in human lives before the first human sin. This idea is unacceptable. Rather, Adam and Eve suffered pain and biological death because of their sin, not because their created bodies were inherently subject to pain and were mortal.

To maintain that human beings descended from animals often implies that when sufficient biological and intellectual improvement appeared in a certain kind of animal, human beings, "higher" beings, appeared. This does injustice not only to the way the Bible presents the human family, but also to the rest of Creation. It suggests that the predecessors of the human family were lower, in fact, like mentally retarded persons. Regardless of changes that took place in the world of living organisms, what did *not* happen is that inferior beings disappeared so that human beings could appear.

Perhaps the unique place that the Bible gives to

human beings is the most important reason for rejecting animal ancestry. Only human beings bear God's image. Theistic evolutionists also claim human beings were created in the image of God but they will not admit this fact to be an argument against their position. Nevertheless, the defense of theistic evolutionists on this point is weak; their explanation of the origin of the human family does not seem to account for human dignity, humanity's unique and exalted place in Creation. Before God created human beings, he pronounced his Creation good; after, it was very good. Human beings are the only creatures who are free to choose to love God and his commandments. Finally, when God

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became human, he bestowed on human beings the ultimate dignity.

Thus, because of specific passages and the general way the Bible presents human beings as whole persons, I conclude that the Bible teaches that Adam and Eve did not have animal forebears. As will be seen, this conclusion is consistent with what can be learned from considering the scientific evidence.

Concerning the Scientific Evidence

The Role of Scientific Evidence. Sometimes new scientific evidence causes scholars to reexamine the relevant biblical material. Occasionally such reexamination leads the Christian community to a new understanding of the Bible. What is the proper relation between scientific evidence, derived by responding to general revelation, and biblical conclusions, derived by responding to special revelation? I have already indicated that we cannot dismiss this question by claiming that the two categories of information are complementary. A comprehensive answer to the question about the relation between the two kinds of evidence is beyond the scope of this article. I shall focus on but two matters, both important for the present discussion.

First, some ideas derived from the Bible are non-

negotiable. Neither new scientific results nor any other scholarship can legitimately change such ideas. Thus, at least several hundred thousand Israelites in the wilderness ate food that fell from heaven; scientific claims that contradict this possibility are not valid. Just as invalid are an archaeologist's claims to have found the bones of a dead Jesus. Scientists who claim that no one could ever have turned water into wine are wrong. No scientific results can prove that adultery is desirable. In all these examples, no conceivable scientific evidence can lead to a new understanding of the Bible.

Second, scientific knowledge can add to the Bible. It can add by giving us a better appreciation of the works of God recorded in the Bible. A consideration of biblical miracles provides one example. Thus, ancient peoples had mystical ideas about clouds and other atmospheric conditions; perhaps the pagans who knew of the manna in the wilderness were not as astonished as we, who, because of our scientific knowledge, know that "ordinarily" clouds cannot produce the food that the Israelites received. Modern scientific results can also add to the wonder of other biblical miracles. Consideration of the entire Creation provides another example. Modern comprehension of the grandeur and complexity of Creation is infinitely greater than that of those who lived before the scientific era. As a result, we can give praise to God—praise which the Bible tells us to give—in ways not possible for people who lived several centuries ago.

Scientific knowledge can also add to the Bible by amplifying the biblical account. Thus, modern archaeological discoveries help us understand why Belshazzar put Daniel third in command (Daniel 5:29), rather than second, as one would expect from the context. Ancient history, the fruit of historical research, is useful because it puts events the Bible describes into historical context. Scientific investigation of the grammar and syntax of ancient languages provides invaluable aid in obtaining a correct understanding of the biblical text. The results of astronomical research can be helpful in understanding several biblical passages. For example, it may now be possible to determine the exact time of the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem, and therefore the time of Christ's birth. (Note that things that did not exist when God pronounced his Creation to be very good, such as ancient ruins and languages, are also part of general revelation.)

How do these two ideas relate to the biblical account of the origin of the human family and its place in Creation? First, what (if anything) concerning the origin of the human family is non-negotiable? The Bible clearly separates the origin of the human family from the origin of other living things; the Bible puts the human family above other living things; and the Bible weaves this separation and elevation into its central message, God's redeeming love expressed in the Incarnation. For these reasons, the teaching that the human family did not descend from animals is non-negotiable.

Consequently, one need not ask whether scientific evidence contradicts this conclusion: if scientific results are correct, they cannot contradict non-negotiable biblical teaching. The proper procedure is to ask the next question: Given that Adam and Eve had no animal forebears, what do scientific results teach us about the origin of the human family? I suggested above two parts to the answer to this question: Scientific results could (a) enable us to praise God even more for his works and (b) amplify the biblical record. Both uses of scientific results are relevant for the present question.

Scientific investigation shows the human body to be infinitely more complex, with the parts marvelously fitted together, than people realized before the age of modern science. Scientists are also virtually certain that there is much more to learn. Thus, Christian amazement at Genesis 2:7—from dust to man—is better-informed now than it was a few centuries ago.

What about amplification of the biblical record? For example, could the discovery of burial sites, including fossils, add to what the Bible tells us about Adam and Eve? Such discovery certainly could add to the rather small amount of information about early humans given in the Bible. I now turn to this question.

Scientific Evidence and the Questions Posed. The scientific evidence concerning the origin of the human family does not distinguish between the two basic questions presented, namely, whether the entire human family descended from the biblical Adam and Eve and, if it did, whether Adam and Eve had animal forebears. Rather, scientists who work in this field condense these two questions into one: "Did humankind descend from animals?"

Some recent announcements, popularized in newsmagazines and other parts of the press, might

make it seem that such scientists do consider whether Adam and Eve existed. Thus, *Newsweek*, in an article describing an analysis of mitochondrial DNA in different persons bore the title, "The Search for Adam and Eve."⁷ The article concludes that the entire human family descended from one woman who lived about 200,000 years ago. But the scientists who make the one-woman claim do not maintain that she was the first woman; and so this "Eve" has no necessary relation to the biblical Eve.

The questions about human origins discussed here cannot be answered using one particular method often employed by anti-evolutionists. Concerning the origin of the human family, anti-evolutionists often use a more general argument against biological evolution, namely, that nothing justifies the extrapolation from microevolution to "macroevolution," the hypothesized accumulation of small changes to bring about very large changes. For example, the existence of several large gaps in the fossil record, such as between vertebrates and invertebrates, indicates that microevolution cannot be extrapolated to macroevolution. But it may well be that rejecting macroevolution is not sufficient to change the mind of a person who thinks that human beings had animal forebears. After all, the amount of evolving required to go from certain animals to the *body* of a human being—not evolution to a person, a body-soul whole—could conceivably be but another example of change by microevolution. As a result, the debate concerning the extrapolation from microevolution to macroevolution might not shed much light on the question of human origins.

The Fossils. Several fields have contributed to the study of the human family. Examples are biochemistry and paleoanthropology, the study of fossils, both human and those supposed to be pre-human. The fossil evidence is the easiest to discuss in this non-technical setting.

The last few decades have seen considerable interest in discoveries of fossils supposed to be related to human ancestry. Many of these fossils have been found in East Africa. Popular accounts have focused on the Leakey expeditions in that area. The names of some of the creatures whose bones fossilized and which are of interest in the present discussion (not all from East Africa), and the estimated periods (in years before the present) in which they lived, respectively, are as follows: *Australopithecus*

afarensis, 3.8 million-3.1 million; *Australopithecus africanus*, 2.5 million-1.1 million; *Australopithecus robustus*, 2.1 million-1.1 million; *Homo habilis*, 2.0 million-1.4 million; *Homo erectus*, 1.8 million-400,000; *Homo neanderthalensis*, 150,000-30,000; and *Homo sapiens*, 40,000-present.⁸ The modern human being is *Homo sapiens*. Paleoanthropologists have attempted to construct the human lineage from these fossils and others not listed here.

Paleoanthropologists generally agree on the ages of the fossils given above. They also agree that certain items, discovered along with *Homo erectus* and *Homo neanderthalensis* fossils, are useful for classi-

The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve did not have animal forebears.

ifying fossils. For example, in several places stone tools have been found. A tool kit was often buried with an individual. The presence of charred deer meat suggests one individual was a hunter. Fireplaces have been found. One individual was buried on a bed of flowers, suggesting belief in a life after death. This individual had had complicated arm surgery.

But paleoanthropologists present a blurred picture. With some kinds of fossils—but definitely not all—only a very small number have been found. In addition, the evidence is such that paleoanthropologists do not agree on how the fossils relate to the human lineage. Some insist that fossils that are undoubtedly animal fossils are in the human lineage. Others construct a sequence leading to modern human beings that includes only fossils of creatures that seem to have had human characteristics.

Comment. In paleoanthropology it is difficult to obtain enough data to permit one to formulate a scientific theory. Furthermore, there are several gaps in time in the fossil record. These two problems—paucity of evidence and gaps in time—are the principal problems of paleoanthropologists who insist that ultimately they will be able to show that human beings have animal forebears.

At present, however, critics of the paleoanthropologists' model focus attention on the paucity of evidence. The fossils used to answer key questions in human ancestry could fit on a small table.

Richard Leakey, one of the better known workers in the field, admitted that David Pilbeam, another prominent paleoanthropologist, said, "If you brought in a smart scientist from another discipline and showed him the meager evidence we've got, he'd surely say, 'Forget it, there isn't enough to go on.'"⁹ It is not surprising that Roger Lewin, who was close to Richard Leakey, was recently able to publish an entire book devoted to disagreements among paleoanthropologists, disagreements that have arisen largely because of the small number of fossils available.¹⁰ Lewin shows that paleoanthropology depends more than most branches of science on individual opinion and bias.¹¹

No doubt we can trace much of the paleoanthropological picture to a bias in favor of animal ancestry of human beings. Very likely almost all those who have done the original work in the field do not believe that God reveals himself in a general way in Creation and in a special way in the Bible. As a result, paleoanthropologists, as they construct a model of human origins, might not merely neglect biblical data; they might consciously oppose it.

Christians must not err at this point. Christians sometimes assume that the evolutionary bias of many investigators, the paucity of data, and the gaps mean that they need not look at scientific evidence; that, in fact, God did not reveal anything in general revelation concerning the early history of the human family. The mistake would be to assume only one relevant question exists, namely, is the evidence presented concerning the early history of the human family actually valid evidence? If the answer is no (in this case, because of bias, paucity, and gaps), Christians might never ask a second important question: is it *possible* that God reveals anything in Creation concerning the early history of the human family? Claiming that the data are poor *cannot* be equivalent to claiming that all future data will also be poor.

In that context, I propose the following question concerning early human history: what if, in spite of the present bias and uncertainty, the scientific data stand the test of time? What if the paucity of data and the gaps, that now seem so important, eventually do not pose a problem? Surely the Christian—the Reformed—position should be one which acknowledges that God speaks infallibly and without error in both his special and his general revelation. Naturally, investigators who are faithful Christians

always understand that what God reveals in the Bible and in Creation might not be what human study concludes is in the Bible and in Creation. Yet none of this should stifle investigation of both special and general revelation. The Christian community needs to proceed, working with what it has.

In the present case, this approach means accepting the biblical teaching that the first human being was unique, a special creation—in fact, the Adam of the Bible discussed in the previous section. Investigators who are faithful Christians do not then proceed to ask if fossils and other scientific evidence contradict the Bible. But they do ask what fossils and other scientific evidence can add to the biblical picture.

The question concerning the early history of the human family then reduces to this: where are Adam and Eve, a unique creation in the image of God and the parents of the entire human family, in the fossil record? I suggested earlier that at least some microevolution has occurred since Adam and Eve and that they may have lived hundreds of thousands of years ago. In fact, some Christian scientists who are convinced general evolutionary theory is wrong are also convinced that Adam and Eve may have been *Homo erectus*; others think evidence indicates they were *Homo neanderthalensis*.

If those who accept the biblical testimony are also willing to look at the evidence of human remains whose age is tens (or, in some cases, hundreds) of thousands of years, they may be able to add much to what they know of early human beings. If the present evidence holds up, they will conclude that human beings lived in the Americas much more than ten thousand years ago, that very long ago they painted pictures on the walls of caves in Europe, that they lived a very long time ago in eastern Asia, and, if at least some of the Leakey discoveries hold up, that they lived a very long time ago in Africa. They left marks—tiny marks, but marks nonetheless—of their culture in these various places.

There is still another possibility, although perhaps not a very likely one. A large number of species are extinct. Is it not possible that God created animal species now extinct which may have borne some of the characteristics of human beings, but which were not, in fact, created in the image of God? After all, it is bearing the image of God that makes a person human, not the ability to use tools or even the way the dead are buried.

At present, we have few fossils and many possibilities. In the early stages of other sciences, there were many speculations and few hard conclusions. It may be that paleoanthropology and the other anthropological sciences are now in such an early stage.

END NOTES

- 1 Richard T. Wright, *Biology Through the Eyes of Faith*. (Cambridge, MA: Harper and Row), 1989; 157-158.
- 2 R.J. Berry, "'I Believe in God . . . Maker of Heaven and Earth,'" in Derek Burke (ed.) *Creation and Evolution*. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 100-101.
- 3 Jesse De Boer, Letter to the Editor, *The Calvin Spark*, December, 1988: 5.
- 4 Non-Christians do not have as much freedom as Christians in these matters. Christians can accept either conclusion—that human beings are, or are not, descended from animals—provided the conclusion is based on what God has revealed. But non-Christians can accept only naturalistic explanations. The only naturalistic option concerning origins presently available includes the idea that all life ultimately evolved from non-life. Non-Christians are forced to accept this option. If, however, it can be shown that in one case—for example, in the origin of the human family—evolution did not occur, the case for the evolution of all life collapses and the one option open to non-Christians vanishes. Since they do not have the freedom to accept a position other than the one they do accept, they cannot accept the non-evolution of the human family.
- 5 Some suggest that the Flood neither covered the planet earth nor destroyed all animals and people, except those saved by Noah. These suggestions do not seem to contradict the biblical story. They are part of a theory that accounts for the world-wide evidence of very old animal and human remains.
- 6 John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), see especially 52-53.
- 7 "The Search for Adam and Eve," *Newsweek*, 11 Jan. 1988: 46-52.
- 8 For various points of view held in recent years concerning fossils claimed to be in the human line, see the following reviews: (a) Richard C. Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins: What New Discoveries Reveal About the Emergence of Our Species and Its Possible Future*. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), 81-142; (b) Pattle P.T. Pun, *Evolution: Nature and Scripture in Conflict?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 94-117; (c) Committee for Integrity in Science Education, *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy: A View from the American Scientific Affiliation*. (Ipswich, MA: American Scientific Affiliation, 1986 [revised in 1989]), 38-42; (d) Wright, *op. cit.*, 144-150; (e) Elwyn L. Simons, "Human Origins," *Science*, 245 (1989): 1343-1350.
- 9 Quoted in *Teaching Science*, 42; from Richard Leakey, *The Making of Mankind*.
- 10 Roger Lewin, *Bones of Contention: Controversies in the Search for Human Origins*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
- 11 Often anti-evolutionists consider the Piltdown hoax as evidence of a conspiracy on the part of the establishment. But refutation came from the establishment. The point to make concerning this hoax is rather the one that Lewin (60) makes, namely, that because of the paucity of evidence the Piltdown "fossil" held the British anthropological community in its thrall for four decades. In other sciences, the amount of evidence supporting a major conclusion is so extensive that a single hoax cannot halt or even significantly slow down work in the field.