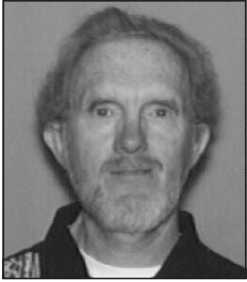


## Dialogue: Response

Reply to the Real Adam and Original Sin



James P. Hurd

# Reply to the Real Adam and Original Sin

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**T**he West must reconcile two great stories of human origins—the story of Genesis and the story of paleoanthropology. Thus far, no comprehensive story that embraces both is without problems. Solving origins issues is like eating M&Ms—you eat one and you cannot avoid eating another. A solution of one puzzle demands a solution of another one. McIntyre wisely refuses to eat all the M&Ms at once. He does not talk about the origin of the species *Homo sapiens*, or trace the patterns of human evolution. He does not try to explain God’s purpose for pre-Adamic creatures. Rather, he limits himself to explaining Adam’s time period, Adam’s fall, and the propagation of sin to the whole human family—in itself a daunting task. I wish to consider a few of McIntyre’s claims, and comment on each of them.

### **Claim one: Adam lived about 4000 BC.**

If the Adam of Genesis 2–4 is literal, historical, then we can accept McIntyre’s claim that Adam lived in a world of Neolithic culture. He wore skin clothing, worked with domesticated plants and animals, sacrificed animals, and with his contemporaries, built cities. Archeologically, the Neolithic begins about 8000 BC, and is marked by the appearance of grinding stones, storage areas for harvested grains such as wheat and barley, and the appearance of domesticated sheep, cattle, and goats. People were becoming less

nomadic, and population densities were increasing with the appearance of small towns. Thus we will label McIntyre’s Adam *Neolithic Adam*.

### **Claim two: Neolithic Adam was not the first *Homo sapiens*.**

McIntyre correctly observes that if Neolithic Adam lived about 4000 BC, other *Homo sapiens* were also alive at that time. Paleontologists trace the first appearances of anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* back to at least 100,000 years ago, in South Africa. Thus, if Adam lived in the Neolithic, he could *not* have been the first *Homo sapiens*.

### **Claim three: *Homo sapiens* were “like the animals,” without the knowledge of good and evil.**

McIntyre makes the stunning argument that “*Homo sapiens* ... are *not* human beings who are sinners in the image of God” (my italics). Apparently these early pre-Adam *Homo sapiens* were not guilty before God, but they were not righteous either. They did not have a moral conscience but rather were like the animals, “earthly” (St. Paul’s term), and thus could not be judged sinners. McIntyre bases this on biblical, not archeological evidence, noting that Paul says that “sin came into the world through one man” (Rom. 5:12). Again, “Apart from the law sin lies dead” (Rom. 7:8). Thus, if Adam lived in 4000 BC, no sinners could have lived before he did.

It would seem very hard to sustain the argument that *Homo sapiens* never had sin until Neolithic Adam. McIntyre offers a very limited definition of *Homo sapiens* as nonhuman, pre-moral animals. Thus, he banishes all pre-Neolithic *Homo sapiens* from the (sinful) human family. However, we seem to see God’s activity in *Homo sapiens* long before

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**James P. Hurd, Ph.D.**, chairs the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Bethel University, St. Paul. He is an anthropologist who specializes in Amish and Mennonite studies, evolutionary and behavioral biology, human origins, and South American studies. He has done fieldwork in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and rural Pennsylvania. He is current writing on fertility among the Wenger horse-and-buggy Mennonites, and on the role of self-deception in religious belief and practice. Earlier, he was a pilot-mechanic with Mission Aviation Fellowship in Mexico, Honduras, Venezuela, and Colombia. He is married, with three adult children. You can reach him by email at [hurd@bethel.edu](mailto:hurd@bethel.edu).

the Neolithic, indicating that these early *Homo sapiens* were also human. Between 10,000 and 40,000 BC, we find cultural remains such as art, musical instruments, and sophisticated tools—indisputable evidence of *Homo sapiens* culture. Some of these materials (e.g., grave goods in burials, “Venus” sculptures, and cave art) have been interpreted as evidence of religious activity, evidence that suggests that these humans had a belief in the transcendent and bore the image of God. Further, we discover activities most Christians would classify as sin: human cannibalism, murder, and other such acts. We have no evidence that *Homo sapiens* living 40,000 years ago lacked any of the moral capacities of later humans. As the saying goes, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck. What they lacked was cumulative cultural knowledge, not morality.

**Claim four: God revealed God’s self to Adam but Adam disobeyed God and learned the difference between good and evil.**

If we accept McIntyre’s argument that Neolithic Adam had no knowledge of good and evil, exactly *when* did Adam’s sin occur? How could he engage in a sinful act before he had the knowledge that it was sinful? McIntyre does not clarify this. However, God spoke to Adam, this specially selected Neolithic man, before Adam knew good from evil, and Adam ate of the fruit and sinned by disobeying God’s direct command. Ironically, Adam became like God (knowing good from evil) in the instant that he sinned against God!

**Claim five: This knowledge of good and evil was passed on [culturally] from Neolithic Adam to all of the peoples of the earth.**

For McIntyre, morality has one single source—Adam’s knowledge of good and evil. Most historic creeds, including the Calvin-influenced *Westminster Confession*, proclaim that Adam’s newly acquired knowledge condemned not only him but, by *imputation*, the whole human race that followed. Yet apparently John Calvin does not agree with this Calvinistic statement! After Adam’s sin, Calvin writes, people “have been enveloped in original sin and defiled by its stains.” Calvin bases this on Rom 5:12: “... death has spread to all because all have sinned.” Humans are sinners because they themselves sin, not because Adam sinned. McIntyre agrees, arguing that after Adam became a sinner, this sinfulness passed like a wave throughout the Mesopotamian world and beyond.

**Claim six: True cities did not exist until 4000 BC, when “functionally complex” cities suddenly appeared.**

For McIntyre, the rise of “true cities” serves as a marker for the spread of the knowledge of good and evil, and of sin. Yet McIntyre has a parochial definition of a city (“functional complexity”) that allows him to argue that no cities existed before 4000 BC. However archeologically, we do not see a sharp break in the evolution of city-building that

would indicate a quantum leap in complexity. Are we to suppose that the builders of ancient Jericho and Catal Huyuk (8000–6000 BC) were cognitively unable to achieve functional complexity? Were they not able to “transcend the natural world,” as Adam’s contemporaries were? These early city-builders did not lack cognitive skills; they lacked the accumulated culture and acquired technological skills of later peoples, plus the demographic necessity that demanded larger cities. Archeologists refuse to dabble in paleopsychology—they have posited many preconditions for the rise of cities, but the ability to “transcend the natural world” (McIntyre’s term) is not one of them. They explain the rise of cities, not by such cognitive innovations, but rather by more mundane factors such as conflicts between groups, or rising population densities due to a more sedentary lifestyle.

**Claim seven: Sin propagated by contagion to all peoples on earth.**

McIntyre’s thesis about the propagation of sin implies that all peoples in the world eventually acquired the knowledge of good and evil through other people in an unbroken link back to Neolithic Adam. This seems unlikely since we have evidence that humans reached Palli Aike Cave at the southern tip of South America before 6000 BC. Even today some very isolated populations live in the Amazon basin that only recently have had outside human contact. Further evidence against this unbroken link is that until European contact, New World civilizations lacked some of the basic inventions present in the Old World, including the wheel, the Roman arch (with a keystone), plows, and traction animals. Because of this and other reasons, most archeologists see the rise of civilizations and cities in the New World as substantially independent from their rise in the Old World.

In summary, we might question McIntyre’s argument that no true (sinful) humans existed before 4000 BC, since paleontologists have identified *Homo sapiens* that existed at least 100,000 years ago. By 40,000 BC, *Homo sapiens* was exhibiting what seems to be religious behavior, including burial of the dead, suggesting some knowledge of the transcendent. We see no sharp break in the evolution of cities from ancient Jericho and Catal Huyuk down to the cities in the fourth millennium BC, and no sharp uptake in their “functional complexity.” Rather than seeing the root of human sinfulness in contagion from a Neolithic Adam, we might more usefully see it in human nature itself, a nature that, starting long before 8000 BC, has chosen its own way over God’s way. It is rather in this sense that “in Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” ☸

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