

Communication

The Dilemma Posed by The Wee People

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A new anthropological discovery casts serious doubt on [an] old, but still widespread, apologetical view that hangs humanity from the framework of a H. sapiens skeleton or a human cranial capacity.

One of the most widely held apologetical positions within conservative old-earth-believing Christian circles is that advanced by Ross,¹ Wilcox,² Maatman,³ Wiester,⁴ and Davis and Kenyon.⁵ Broadly speaking, these views hold that Adam was *Homo sapiens*, was created late in hominid history, and most hold that *H. sapiens* was not genetically connected with the ancient hominids.⁶ Davis and Kenyon state this position well when they say:

Design adherents, however, regard *Homo erectus*, as well as the other hominids discussed in this section, as little more than apes, and point instead to the abrupt appearance of the culture and patterns of behavior which distinguish man from the apes.⁷

Wiester echoes this sentiment when he says:

I believe we can dismiss *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* as likely candidates for Adam and Eve. For one thing science is not certain whether they led to *Homo sapiens* at all. They may have become extinct. Furthermore, the present fossil evidence does not indicate they possessed those traits that we consider uniquely human.⁸

A new anthropological discovery casts serious doubt on this old, but still widespread, apologetical view that hangs humanity from the framework of a *H. sapiens* skeleton or a human cranial capacity. The discovery was announced in two articles in

the Oct. 28, 2004 issue of *Nature*.⁹ These articles describe the morphology and cultural artifacts of a small descendant of *H. erectus*, which was found on the island of Flores, Indonesia, in the Liang Bua cave. The species has been termed *H. floresiensis*. It is extremely unusual. These people stood three feet tall and would have weighed (as an adult) a mere 35–55 lb. (16–25 kg). By comparison, Lucy, the famous *Australopithecus*, stood 3'6" and weighed 62 lb. (28 kg). *H. floresiensis*' brain size was 380 cc compared with *Australopithecus*' brain size of 430–530 cc. Living on an island which lacked predators, these descendants of *H. erectus* shrank in size. Amazingly, they lived merely 20,000 years ago, and some legends about these people have them still living in caves on Flores, when the Dutch arrived in Indonesia, in the 1520s, raising the intriguing possibility that we might someday find some of these people alive (a comparison photo can be found on the Internet¹⁰).

There is little doubt that this fossil is a new species. Some have argued that the creature is a microcephalic human but this theory has been stretched to the limit because as of October 2005, nine diminutive hominids had been found in the cave spanning a time of 3,000 years.¹¹ As one researcher said: "You can't have a colony of microcephalics going through time ... That's crazy."¹²

Secondly, it is unlikely that this creature is human. It shares many morphological features with *H. erectus* which we *H. sapiens* lack. It has no chin. There is a deep fissure separating the mastoid process from the petrous crest of the tympanic, a double mental foramina, and an erectine parietal contour, a recess between the tympanic plate and the entoglenoid pyramid. All are traits that humans lack (or are very rare) and are common traits belonging to *H. erectus*. After a scan of the brain, Falk, et al. concluded that

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they were either descended from *H. erectus* or an earlier hominid. But the morphological connection seems clear, these are descendants of *H. erectus* or of an earlier hominid and that seems to have theological implications.

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The theological problem presented by this tiny hominid lies in the archaeology and its small brain. *H. floresiensis* has a brain which is only 400 gm (approximately 380 cc). This is the size of a chimpanzee brain and smaller than many Australopithecine brains. One would be tempted to say this was theologically an ape save for the fact that, while controversial, this creature appears to have made stone tools, hafted them onto sticks, hunted pygmy elephants, and indeed controlled fire, as is evidenced by the charred bones of the prey. The tools are very well crafted and quite small, as would be expected from creatures of this size.

These small-brained hominids clearly pass a test for moral accountability which was outlined in an earlier paper.¹³ Basically this test merely says that any creature which is capable of engaging in complex cultural activities which require planning for future consequences are also quite capable of understanding moral imperatives, like "Thou shalt not steal." Their use of fire clearly shows an intelligence and concept of the future far beyond that of the chimpanzee. In order to maintain a fire, one must know how to start a fire, know how to tell when the present store of wood will be burned up, know when it is time to go get more wood, remember where there is good dry wood (green wood burns poorly), and know how to properly space the logs for correct burning. And while cooking food, the fire-maker must understand other mental steps: to know how far from the flames the food must be for proper cooking without burning and to know how to use a tool (like a spit) to maintain that distance. Such intelligence is capable of understanding moral imperatives. This view that the image of God lies in our ability to make moral choices is consistent with the views of Jonathan Edwards, some Wesleyan traditions, and some in Judaism.¹⁴

What is more interesting is the evidence, both physical and legendary, for language among these people. The cranial base is flexed. This is an important indicator of language according to anthropologists. Schepartz notes:

Steinheim, Kabwe, and several Upper Paleolithic crania are more similar to modern adult humans in their degree of basicranial flexion, implying greater speech capabilities than Neanderthals.¹⁵

As an aside, I would note that the La Ferrassie Neanderthal had a greater basicranial flexion than modern humans.

Those who excavated the site also believe that this hominid possessed a language. This is due to the complex activities uncovered by the excavation. Connor and Keys write:

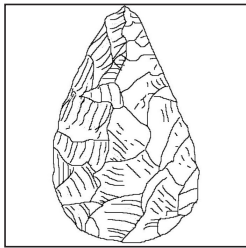
They were the height of a three-year-old child, weighed around 25 kilos [4 stone] and had a brain that was smaller than that of most chimpanzees. Even so, they used fire, made stone tools and hunted stegadon—a primitive type of elephant—and giant rats. "We believe their ancestors may have reached the island in bamboo rafts. The clear implication is, despite tiny brains, these little humans were intelligent and almost certainly had language," Professor Morwood said.¹⁶

And legends abound in the Malay Archipelago of sightings of the *ebu gogo*, a dwarf who would eat everything and anything as late as the time the Dutch arrived. The legends say that this creature spoke and lived in caves.

Theologically, this discovery is problematic for the most widespread apologetical view. Here we have a creature who is not descended from *H. sapiens* but from *H. erectus*, who appears to have engaged in the same complex cultural activities humans engage in, and who appears to have had a language, often thought to be the mark of humanity. While we, *H. sapiens*, are also a direct descendant of *H. erectus*, we are descended from an African lineage, and they from a Javan lineage, making us sister species with our earliest common ancestor living somewhere around two million years ago. Yet, it appears that both species engage in the same kind of behavior—making fire, making stone tools, and even speech. The implication of this discovery for apologetics, in particular for the way Christians treat the hominids, are huge.

Wiester suggests that brain size may be used to qualify a being as *H. sapiens*.¹⁷ But this limitation ignores intelligent people, leading normal lives in our society, who have very small brains. John Lorber, years ago, documented that some people with very tiny brains were both socially and intellectually normal. He cited the case of one socially normal, honors math student at Sheffield University in England, who had only a millimeter of brain encrusting the inside of his skull. The rest of his skull was full of water. By my calculations, this man had the same brain size as that of a rhesus monkey, 108 cc. Lewin writes:

"There's a young student at this university," says Lorber, "who has an IQ of 126, has gained a first-class honors degree in mathematics, and is socially



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completely normal. And yet the boy has virtually no brain ...

"I cannot say whether the mathematics student has a brain weighing 50 grams or 150 grams, but it's clear that it is nowhere near the normal 1.5 kilograms, and much of the brain he does have is in the more primitive deep structures that are relatively spared in hydrocephalus."¹⁸

From these data alone, Christians should have divorced our definition of humanity from brain size; then we would have been prepared for the Liang Bua discovery. Unfortunately, now a widespread anthropological apologetic is being falsified by observational data. The result is that Christians again will lose more credibility. There is also every expectation that many will not change their views even in the light of this discovery.

Are they human? Yes. Alan Turing presented his Turing test to determine whether an artificially intelligent computer had been created. The test is this: If normal humans interacting with the computer cannot tell the difference between the responses of a computer and the responses of another human, then the computer must be considered to be intelligent. This is a behavioral definition of AI. But this type of test also applies to the Liang Bua people. The only way we have of determining who is spiritually aware and who is not is based upon their behavior. While we cannot definitely claim that the Liang Bua people had a religion (some modern humans, like the Ona of Tierra del Fuego, have no religion¹⁹), in all other respects they seem to have behaved like us. And therein lies the problem.

What do we do if we actually find one of these creatures? As Desmond Morris asked in a recent article:

If an explorer brought back one of their infants to study, would you put him down for Eton or the Zoo?

If he died, would he be buried in consecrated ground or a pet cemetery?

His very existence among us would make us question all over again what it is to be human.²⁰

Theological Hobson's Choices

The views of many old-earth and young-earth apologists have always rejected any humanity for the Australopithecines. But if a creature as different from us as *H. floresiensis* engages in human activities, how can we reject them from the status of human? And, looking back to the early hominids, the question arises about the status of other human-acting creatures whose stature, weight, and brain-size is *smaller than Australopithecus*. Given this, how can we automatically claim that the brain size of *Australopithecus* excludes him from humanity?

We have four choices as I see it:

1. Acknowledge, as I have argued,²¹ that humanity is much older than we have heretofore been comfortable accepting. In other words, include *H. erectus* within the human family. Since humans and the Liang Bua people do the same things, acknowledge the fact that our common ancestor (*H. erectus*) was also spiritually aware and thus move Adam way back in time. In this case, we should send them all to Eton, as Morris suggests. But many apologists and Christians have been loathe to accept that small-brained Australopithecines or erectines could share the image of God with us. *H. floresiensis* pulls the rug out from under that argument. This seems to be the best approach to match observation with an apologetic that has a modicum of concordism.

2. Claim that the Liang Bua people are just fancy animals, meaning that we ignore their tool making, their means of hunting, the hafting of stone points on wooden spears, their use of fire, and the likelihood of language and put them in the zoo. Besides the questionable ethics, this claim requires that we restrict the image of God solely to something that has no physical impact on our lives or leaves no physical trace of its presence. This seems to move God's *image* into the realm of the imaginary.

3. Accept a modification of Dick Fischer's views²² in which Adam is late and is a representative for all humans, even the Liang Bua people. This would require some modifications of Fischer's views as he seems not to be favorably predisposed to having the other

hominids allowed into the human family²³ or having us descended from them.

4. Claim that Scripture simply is not historically accurate and says nothing about what it means to be human.

Each of these positions has its strengths and weaknesses. But it seems likely that if we exclude from humanity a person or group who does all the things we do, from making stone tools, to fire, to speaking, then we are no different from the nineteenth-century polygenists, like Jean Bory St. Vincent, who, in 1825, claimed as many as fifteen species of modern humans, only one of which was descended from the biblical Adam. There should be no reason to repeat the mistakes of the past, although the most widespread of the intelligent design views of anthropology has already committed that error, even before the advent of *H. floresiensis* by ignoring the abundant evidence of human-like activity among hominids, like *Australopithecus*, *habilis*, *erectus*, and Neanderthal, all of whom made and/or recognized art, and controlled fire. ☼

Notes

- ¹Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 56; see also Fazale Rana and Hugh Ross, *Who was Adam?* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 178, 196 where they reject *H. erectus* on the basis of their stone tools and liken Neanderthals to monkeys.
- ²David L. Wilcox, "Adam Where Are You? Changing Paradigms in Paleoanthropology," *PSCF* 48, no. 2 (1996): 88-96; David L. Wilcox, "Establishing Adam," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 49-54, esp. p. 52.
- ³Russell Maatman, *The Impact of Evolutionary Thought: A Christian View* (Sioux Center, IA: Dorst College Press, 1993), 119.
- ⁴John Wiester, *The Genesis Connection* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 165.
- ⁵Percival Davis and Dean Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People* (Dallas, TX: Houghton Publishing Co., 1993), 110-3.
- ⁶Among those listed, only Wilcox appears to believe that humans are genetically related to *H. erectus*.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, 112.
- ⁸Wiester, *The Genesis Connection*, 188.
- ⁹P. Brown, et al., "A New Small-Bodied Hominin from the Late Pleistocene of Flores, Indonesia," *Nature* 431 (2004): 1055-61; M. J. Morwood, et al., "Archaeology and Age of a New Hominin from Flores in Eastern Indonesia," *Nature* 431 (2004): 1087-91.
- ¹⁰A comparison photo between *H. floresiensis* and *H. sapiens* can be seen at www.talkorigins.org/faqs/homs/floressapiens.jpg
- ¹¹M. J. Morwood, et al., "Further Evidence for Small-Bodied Hominins from the Late Pleistocene of Flores, Indonesia," *Nature* 437 (2005): 1012-8.
- ¹²Rex Dalton, "More Evidence for Hobbit Unearthed As Diggers Are Refused Access to Cave," *Nature* 437 (2005): 934-5.
- ¹³G. R. Morton, "Planning Ahead: Requirement for Moral Accountability," *PSCF* 51, no. 3 (1999): 176-9.
- ¹⁴See the Articles of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia. Article 110 says: "We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong" www.australian.wesleyan.org.au/article8.htm; Jonathan Edwards apparently held a similar view of the image of God: www.jonathanedwards.com/text/FoW/Part%20I%20Definition%20of%20Terms/1.5.htm. See also http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_o/bl_simmons_murder.htm which says: "The image of God means that we have the ability to choose."
- ¹⁵L. A. Schepartz, "Language and Modern Human Origins," *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology* 36 (1993): 91-126, 105.

¹⁶Steve Connor and David Keys, "The 3-ft-tall 'Hobbit' That Rewrites the History of Mankind," *The Independent* (UK), 28 October 2004 http://news.independent.co.uk/world/science_technology/story.jsp?story=576797 Accessed October 28, 2004.

¹⁷Wiester, *The Genesis Connection*, 178.

¹⁸Roger Lewin, "Is your Brain Really Necessary?" *Science* 210 (1980): 1232, 1233; see also John Lorber, "Hydranencephaly with Normal Development," *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* 7 (1965): 628-33.

¹⁹E. Lucas Bridges, *The Uttermost Part of the Earth* (New York: Dutton, 1949), 429.

²⁰Desmond Morris, "Eton or the Zoo?" BBC News, Friday, 29 October 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3964579.stm> Accessed November 5, 2004.

²¹G. R. Morton, "The Mediterranean Flood," *PSCF* 49, no. 4 (1997): 238-51; G. R. Morton, "Dating Adam," *PSCF* 51, no. 2 (1999): 87-97; G. R. Morton, "Neanderthal/Human Hybrid," *PSCF* 51, no. 3 (1999): 145; G. R. Morton, "Planning Ahead: Requirement for Moral Accountability," *PSCF* 51, no. 3 (1999): 176-9; G. R. Morton, *Adam, Apes and Anthropology* (Spring, TX: DMD Publishing Co., 1997).

²²Dick Fischer, *The Origins* (Lima, OH: Fairway Press, 1996).

²³*Ibid.*, 27.

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