

Combining Adam and evolution: an exercise in futility

The Origin of Humanity and Evolution—Science and Scripture in conversation

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Andrew Loke is a philosopher at Hong Kong Baptist University, and an influential advocate of theistic evolution (figure 1). His overpriced book on human origins at least covers a lot of ground in a short space of less than 200 pages.

Loke proposes “a new model of human origins” which purports to reconcile the historicity of the biblical Adam and Eve with the standard theory of human evolution (p. 2). Unfortunately, Loke’s unworkable compromise leads him into bizarre and dangerous territory regarding the definition of human beings and fails in the end because it contradicts the Bible’s clear meaning. This is the kind of scholarship that makes Christian laypeople mistrust academia, because it eagerly sacrifices orthodoxy at the altar of vain, worldly speculations that were designed to avoid the Creator. It’s a shame that Loke has wasted so much of his time and brilliant mind on developing ideas so plainly unfaithful to Scripture.

Building on Swamidass

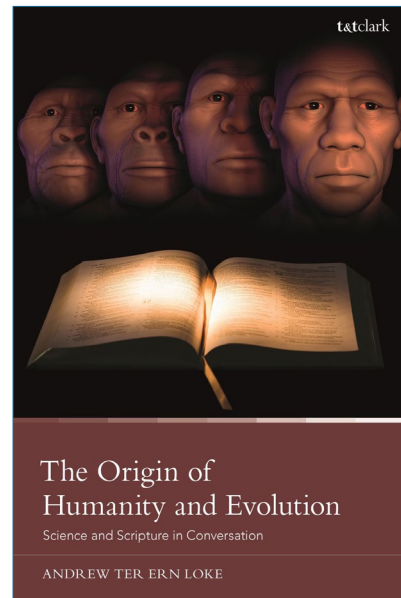
Loke’s view is a variation of Joshua Swamidass’s genealogical Adam and Eve (GAE) model.¹ He even dedicated

this book to Swamidass. But Loke has added slight modifications of his own and supplements borrowed from biblical scholars like John H. Walton and C. John Collins.

According to Swamidass’s GAE concept, a group of beings with anatomically human bodies evolved from ape-like creatures just as textbook narratives say, placing the origin of the genus *Homo* over 2 million years ago. Adam and Eve did not give rise to all these individuals, but existed some time later, when this large population was already established. Adam and Eve could have been individuals chosen from this wider population or created separately and supernaturally. Because the descendants of Adam and Eve then intermarried with the wider population, and they happened (providentially?) to thoroughly mix with every tribe throughout the world, eventually all living members of the genus *Homo* could trace their genealogical ancestry back to Adam and Eve.

There are several questions Swamidass’s bare GAE proposal leaves undecided. It leaves open whether Adam and Eve lived as recently as 6,000 years ago, or in the more distant past—perhaps hundreds of thousands of years ago, prior to standard dates for the advent of Neanderthals. It leaves open whether Adam and Eve themselves evolved or were created *de novo*. It leaves open whether the wider population of *Homo*, not descended from Adam and Eve, were bearers of God’s image.

In Loke’s version of GAE, he insists that only Adam and Eve and their descendants are image-bearers, and therefore only they are true humans. Loke differentiates between those



genealogically descended from Adam and Eve, who are in God’s image, and mere anatomical *Homo*, who are not in God’s image. In Loke’s mind, this distinction allows his model to satisfy the biblical requirements that Adam is the first man and that all of humanity descended from him. But, as will be shown, Loke’s strategy promotes an unhealthy view of mankind and fails to do justice to Scripture.

Points of affirmation

Loke is conversant with a wide range of relevant literature. He seems more familiar with young-earth creationist (YEC) and Intelligent Design (ID) material than is typical of our ideological opponents.

He also seems to be relatively theologically conservative in comparison to his fellow theistic evolutionists. Though he does not reveal his hand about whether he is committed to inerrancy, he does push back against those quick to abandon it. While promoting the idea that God’s revelation in Scripture accommodates the limitations of mankind, Loke says accommodation need not entail

scientific errors in the Bible. He takes issue with Denis Lamoureux, for example, who claims that Scripture affirms a three-tiered universe with a flat Earth and a solid firmament (pp. 23–28).

Loke also critiques the idea that alleged parallels between Genesis and other ancient Near Eastern literature show that it is simply ahistorical myth (pp. 44–51). He contends that the arguments against the historicity of Genesis are unsuccessful, though he is noncommittal about whether Genesis could combine myth and history, as William Lane Craig has argued (p. 49).

Criticisms that hit the target

Loke’s critics would do well to make the same careful distinctions he makes, when he differentiates between: “Task (A) ‘interpreting the Bible’, Task (B) ‘showing that the biblical account is true’ and Task (C) ‘showing that there is no incompatibility between evolution and the Bible’” (p. 3). His project is to propose a model that satisfies Task (C). Thus, Loke points out that he doesn’t need to show that the Bible *teaches* various aspects of his model, only that the Bible doesn’t clearly *contradict* it. So it would be misguided to critique him by saying merely that the biblical authors nowhere affirm evolution or GAE (p. 14).

On the other hand, it would be legitimate to say that there is a conspicuous absence in Scripture of various concepts proposed by Loke, if they would reasonably be expected. Also, a proper exegesis of Scripture does contradict Loke’s model. Loke offers alternative interpretations of biblical passages to avoid the contradictions, but since his interpretations are faulty, he has not sustained his burden of proof. He must distort Scripture to make it compatible with evolution.

Scientific evidence for deep time and evolution

When Loke presents evidences for evolution and an ancient universe, his treatments are brief and only scratch the surface of the discussion. He appeals to the “consistent results” of radiometric dating, for example (p. 34), but doesn’t address the problems posed by carbon-14 in allegedly ancient samples, dinosaur soft tissue, and other young-age indicators. As evidence for evolution, Loke points to “genetic scars”, which he presumes are “functionally unimportant” (pp. 71–72).

But that supposition, e.g., ‘junk DNA’, has a long history of being overturned. Loke also appeals to the disputed idea that human chromosome 2 resulted from an end-to-end fusion of previously separated chromosomes. Even if this were true, it would not supply compelling evidence for ape ancestry.²

He naively appeals to ‘fossil intermediates’ like *Archaeopteryx*, *Tiktaalik*, and “several species between land mammals and whales” (p. 72). This blithely overlooks the massive problems with the evolution of birds, tetrapods, and whales, documented by creationists. Even some evolutionists acknowledge these enormous hurdles, which Loke heedlessly bypasses. He mentions biogeography and other arguments as well, but it is all too brief and fails to interact with substantive criticisms. The human evolution ‘evidence’ he presents (pp. 85–88) is likewise superficial and ignores creationist critiques.

Weak attempts to squeeze long ages into Scripture

Loke suggests the Genesis genealogies have gaps, but he neglects the differences between the genealogies of Christ in the Gospels and the Genesis chronogenealogies.³ He appeals to the extra Cainan in Luke 3:36, ignoring the

fact that this is a copyist error; i.e., not in the original manuscripts.⁴

Loke tries in vain to get around Jesus’ statement that humans were present “from the beginning of creation” (Mark 10:6), not billions of years later. He says this phrase “may well be referring to the creation and beginning of humans with the image of God, rather than the creation and beginning of time or of the cosmos or of the earth or of all other living things” (pp. 39–40). However, Loke misconstrues the meaning of the term ‘creation’ as a *creative act* (creation of ...), when the context demands it is a *created object* (creation that God created, as in Mark 13:19).⁵

Loke’s fallback position regarding Mark 10:6 is to say that, if John Walton’s ‘functional creation’ view of Genesis 1 is correct, then Jesus could have been saying Adam and Eve were present from the time the heavens and earth began to exist in a functional sense, not from the time they materially began to exist. But Walton’s eccentric interpretation has been exposed as fallacious.⁶

Loke doesn’t commit himself to any particular interpretation of Genesis 1 and its creation days. He thinks a view similar to John Walton’s is plausible, that these could be six literal calendar days extolling the *functions* of creation, while the *material* creation took place long before. But, he is also open to John Collins’s view that the days of creation are God’s cyclical periods of work and rest—merely analogous to the days of an ordinary seven-day week, not themselves 24 hours long. But it is unfounded to treat these as ‘God’s days’ of undefined length, when the creation account begins with God establishing the light/dark cycle, each day contains an evening and a morning, and God designates the last day as a holy day of rest—clearly establishing the pattern for the Sabbath (Exodus 20:11). If language means anything, these are Earth days.



Image: FifthSparrow, Wikimedia / CC BY SA 4.0

Figure 1. Andrew Loke at Hong Kong Baptist University

Loke also views Noah’s Flood as a local affair, which allows him to have it wipe out all of Adam’s descendants save those aboard the Ark, while anatomical *Homo* survived in large numbers outside the flood zone. But Loke’s arguments for a geographically restricted flood are not convincing (pp. 130–133). For example, he says the Hebrew term *kasah* (to cover) in Genesis 7:19 may only indicate that the waters drenched the mountains, rather than covering them (p. 131). This might be a reasonable translation of the term when water falls to cover or drench what is below it (Job 38:34; Malachi 2:13). But, in context, Genesis 7 is talking about waters *rising* to cover the mountains. This isn’t falling water that merely soaked them.

Death and the Fall

Loke is aware of the problem that a deep-time interpretation of the fossil record presents for the Bible’s teaching that death, disease, and carnivory began after the Fall. To get around this, he performs interpretive gymnastics. His main strategy is to restrict all

references to pre-Fall, paradisiacal conditions to the Garden of Eden rather than the whole world. So, when God sees His creation is “very good”, this may have referred only to Eden (p. 76). Never mind that God applied this assessment to “everything that he had made” (Genesis 1:31) before Eden was ever mentioned. Loke says animal predation could have been occurring throughout the world while the herbivory of Genesis 1 could have been limited to Eden too (p. 74–75). Never mind that the context speaks about all animals throughout the world: “everything that has the breath of life” (Genesis 1:30). According to Loke, even God’s Curse on the ground applied only to Eden (p. 127). Never mind that Genesis 5:29 and Revelation 22:3 demonstrate the broader extent of the Curse.

Creationists naturally associate Romans 8 with the Fall, when it says that creation is in “bondage to corruption” and longing to be “set free” (v. 21). But Loke maintains that God subjected creation to futility before the Fall, based on the fact that Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as “without form and void”, and because the Second Law of Thermodynamics was operating before the Fall (p. 77). Loke is clutching at straws. These concepts have nothing to do with ‘corruption’. Most creationists today agree that the Second Law predates the Fall, but that is irrelevant to Romans 8.

Loke gets around the problem of human death before Adam by his arbitrary division of anatomical *Homo* into two groups. All those fossils that exhibited human behaviours and look indistinguishable from humans—they aren’t; problem solved! But this is *ad hoc* and poses further problems.

Tampering with humanity

Loke’s model has three disturbing implications for those traditionally understood as mankind, since he

understands a significant portion of us to be non-image-bearers.

1) Loke’s model regards many ancient people as non-humans.

Who is and who isn’t human depends on where Adam is placed chronologically. If Adam lived as recently as 6,000 years ago, many people groups living then, and even millennia afterward, were not human. Loke quotes Dennis Venema’s objection to this scenario:

“Humans are widely dispersed on the planet at 6,000 years ago—in the Americas, in Australia and Tasmania, and so on. Do we really want a theology that names them all as subhuman animals until their lineage happens to encounter and interbreed with Adam’s ... offspring? God forbid.”⁷

Also, even if a more ancient Adam was instead posited around 1 Ma, so that he was the forefather of all *H. sapiens* and even Neanderthals, this difficulty is not solved. There are manifestly human skeletons ‘dated’ earlier than this, including *H. erectus* individuals like Turkana Boy, who supposedly lived around 1.8 Ma. *H. erectus* had skeletal anatomy resembling living humans, made sophisticated tools, operated watercraft, and displayed many other evidences of being human. Venema-style discomfort could apply to these people being labelled ‘non-human’ as well.

To answer Venema, Loke says his “use of the term ‘human’ ... begs the question because this is the point being disputed”, and he complains that Venema’s judgment “is just an emotional response” (p. 137). But it is not just emotional. The above anatomical *Homo* groups check the boxes of reasonable empirical criteria to detect humanness, Loke’s sophistry notwithstanding.

Loke spends many pages discussing the image of God and how to define it (pp. 95–106). He does not think

the image of God primarily has to do with our capacities to reason, perform moral actions, or connect with God. It has more to do with representing God functionally, though Loke says this does require some of the above capacities. In the end, though, part of Loke's definition of God's image includes being specially chosen by God to be His royal representatives (p. 127).

There is no way to empirically detect this, so it makes the *imago dei* impossible to identify in the anthropological fossil record. No matter how human someone appears, he might not be chosen, and would therefore lack God's image. Using this criterion, Loke can arbitrarily place the dividing line between human and non-human anywhere he likes. But given how much like us these other anatomical *Homo* are (p. 99), it is unreasonable to dismiss their humanity.

2) Loke's model has no compelling reason to deny the possibility that some living *Homo* could be non-human.

Loke's model does affirm that all living anatomical *Homo* are image-bearing humans (p. 117), but he doesn't supply adequate reasons to insist on this. His only Scriptural warrant is Acts 17:26: "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth". But, for the sake of the argument, if one grants Loke's invented category of mere anatomical *Homo* who do not qualify as humans, yet lived alongside them, Acts 17 would say nothing about these beings one way or another. Using Loke's interpretive methodology, verse 26 could simply mean that Adam gave rise to nations of his image-bearing offspring. It doesn't say the world is now completely devoid of non-image-bearing *Homo*. They could exist in pockets within those nations or they could compose separate groups in far-flung places of the world that would

not be defined as 'every nation of mankind'.

Loke ardently believes all *Homo* today are image-bearers, but once he created the idea of non-humans who are very hard to distinguish from us, it is not so easy for him to get rid of them. These beings would be invisible to Acts 17:26, so Loke has no biblical basis for saying they are gone. He can stipulate that this is the case, but his stipulation is arbitrary.

3) Loke's model requires that living people descended from human/non-human pairings.

In Loke's version of GAE, only Adam's offspring are human, but they don't reproduce solely within their group. They mate with those from the non-human group to produce human offspring as well.

Loke has a short section addressing the question of whether this should be understood as bestiality (pp. 117–120). He allows for a yes or no answer. If this was a case of bestiality, Loke says Adam's descendants were disobedient to God by marrying outside their community. But, Loke says this may not have been considered bestiality, since the two groups were *biologically* the 'same flesh'. Although not technically human, the non-image-bearers were similar enough that the two groups could intermarry.

Loke even suggests that Cain might have married a non-human woman, rather than a relative. This just goes to show how bizarre and outlandish Loke's proposals are. To be married and raise children, this non-human woman must have operated a lot like a human. Loke even acknowledges that these non-humans could have been persons, creative, religious, and sinful (p. 138). They just didn't have God's image or the dominion mandate.

It also seems that mere anatomical *Homo* would have been less valuable than true humans. Loke assures us that "denying other hominids the status of

God's-image-bearing human beings does not mean that they are not loved or valued by God" (pp. 101, 139). But Genesis 9:6 connects the unique value it places on human life with our status as image-bearers.

The mating of humans with non-humans raises all sorts of concerns about Loke's model, and these show just how foreign Loke's ideas are to the Bible. They aren't merely absent from Scripture; they require outrageous scenarios that fly in the face of Scripture.

Conclusion

Loke says his model removes all conflict between evolution and the biblical teaching about Adam. But his view denies humanity to many who do not deserve such discrimination, and he distorts Scripture to arrive at his conclusions, so he is mistaken.

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