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# Big History: Between Nothing And Everything



## Synopsis

Big History: Between Nothing and Everything surveys the past not just of humanity, or even of planet Earth, but of the entire universe. In reading this book instructors and students will retrace a voyage that began 13.7 billion years ago with the Big Bang and the appearance of the universe. Big history incorporates findings from cosmology, earth and life sciences, and human history, and assembles them into a single, universal historical narrative of our universe and of our place within it. The first edition of Big History: Between Nothing and Everything, is written by the pioneers of the field, and presents a framework for learning about anything and everything. It encourages students to think critically about our cumulative history and the future of the world through a variety of lenses. Instructors and students can now access their course content through the Connect digital learning platform by purchasing either standalone Connect access or a bundle of print and Connect access. McGraw-Hill Connect® is a subscription-based learning service accessible online through your personal computer or tablet. Choose this option if your instructor will require Connect to be used in the course. Your subscription to Connect includes the following:

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

DAVID CHRISTIAN (DPhil, Oxford University) is by training a historian of Russia and the Soviet Union. He has spent most of his career at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, apart from an eight-year period teaching at San Diego State University from 2001 to 2008. Christian has published histories of modern Russia and also a study of the role of the trade in vodka in nineteenth-century Russia. In 1998, he published *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia*, the first volume in the Blackwell History of the World Series. He began teaching courses on big history in 1989 at Macquarie University. He first used the phrase big history for such courses in an article published in the *Journal of World History* in 1991 titled "The Case for 'Big History.'" In 2010, with Bill Gates, he founded the "Big History Project," which is building a free online high school course in big history due for release in late 2013. Christian is a member of the Australian Academy of Humanities and the Royal Holland Society of Sciences and Humanities. He is the founding president of the International Big History Association.

CYNTHIA STOKES BROWN (PhD, Johns Hopkins University) spent most of her career directing the secondary teaching credential program at Dominican University of California. She taught selected courses in the history department and wrote books about civil rights history and teachers. Brown's book *Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present* was published in 2007. Since then her interests have been consulting with the big history program at Dominican, serving on the board of the International Big History Association since its inception, and writing big history essays for high school students through the Big History Project funded by Bill Gates.

CRAIG BENJAMIN (PhD, Macquarie University) is an associate professor of history in the Meijer Honors College at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. Like both his co-authors, Benjamin is a frequent presenter of lectures at conferences worldwide, and the author of numerous publications including books, chapters, and essays on ancient Central Asian history, big history, and world history. In addition, Benjamin has recorded lectures for the History Channel, The Teaching Company, and the Big History Project. He is currently a member of both the Advanced Placement and SAT World History Test Development Committees, vice president (president elect) of the World History Association, and has been treasurer of the International Big

History Association since its inception in January 2011.

Along with Cynthia Brown and Craig Benjamin, David Christian draws on physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, anthropology, and other fields to tell the coherent, evidence based story of the stages from the Big Bang 13.82 billion years ago until now, with reasoned expectations for the future. It places the written record of the human past within the natural record of the entire past. The periods of the past are embedded now in what we are made of and how we are made. The common origin of everything in a singularity of infinite heat and density without mass, of all life on earth from the Last Universal Common Ancestor, of all humans from a sturdy band of Africans about 200,000 years ago is a powerful story. You are made of hydrogen atoms that were likely formed soon after the Big Bang and carbon that was formed in a star at least five billion years ago. The gold in the ring on your finger was made in a supernova. Our inheritance from the past is profound - and the authors explain it all well.

This is the way I would have loved to be introduced to History as a youngster, to paraphrase Bill Gates. The study of history has reached a Goldilocks threshold, a phrase often used by David Christian, where it is possible to integrate all physical sciences into History because of the remarkable modern means developed to date almost everything in our universe. Above all the authors have made their subject matter accessible and interesting.

If you are interested in the so called "Big History" i.e. from Nothing (Big Bang) to Everything (today) then this is the place to start. A very readable textbook that introduces to this vast subject. Very clearly written but based on the best current scientific knowledge that humanity has acquired. The photos, tables etc are very helpful. It is a totally five star textbook (my only grudge being that like most textbooks it is a bit pricey).

Really good quality. Rented it for my history class.

This book, and The Big History Project, can take your mind to revolutionary perspectives. Consider: our written human history goes back around 4,000 years, but life began on our planet Earth around 4 billion years ago. So all of our written human history -- what we've simply considered to be "history" -- covers only about one MILLIONTH of the history of life on earth. There was obviously a lot written in the book of life before our species branched out from the family of big apes around 7

million years ago. In just my own field of religion, it's revolutionary to think that our religions aren't likely to have a lot to say about human nature or ethics -- who we are and how we should live. Why? Because our religions are simply too NEW! We've been taught that our major religions are umbrellas under which many other disciplines can be grouped. So under the umbrella of "Biblical religions," for example, we can find what is most profoundly true, who we are, how God or Jesus or Allah want us to live, where we came from, where we're going, and so on. But no. The biggest "umbrella" -- or metastory -- is Big History: the overarching story of the universe from the Big Bang to today, which can all be told without jargon, in the same basic concepts. Now the question to ask of all our religions is whether, or to what extent, they are really the best ways to understand who we are and how we should live. Ethologists, for example, have gathered thousands of observations of animal behavior, and have found that even our most "special" abilities -- empathy, compassion, fairness, territoriality for example -- are shown in the behavior of other animals, especially the social species, of which we are the most competent and the most arrogant. This is not anthropomorphizing animals; it's realizing that these characteristic abilities were never ONLY ours. We share these behaviors with billions of other animals who were exhibiting them before we evolved to give them names. As the 20th Century Christian theologian Rudolph Bultmann asked in his 1941 essay "The New Testament and Mythology," once we have removed the ancient 3-story worldview and its attendant supernaturalism, does Christianity (or any other religion) really have much to offer modern people? An honest answer to these questions -- at this time when only about 18% of Americans attend ANY church regularly and 30% of adults under 30 describe their religion as None -- is "probably not." That's revolutionary, and both this book and The Big History Project help us gain a much-needed humility about exalting the teachings and worldview of any religion (or any science). Perhaps its greatest gift is doing its work in ordinary language, translating out of the many jargons that keep us out of most sciences and religions. In some ways, Big History is putting on a banquet that makes the well-established theory of evolution look like a side dish: nourishing, but small potatoes.

An expensive book like this ought to be published as a hardback. It was not fully intact, when I received it.

This text is the absolute bible for Big History followers. Very detailed yet easy to read. A monumental effort by Mr Christian.

Good read.

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