

Origins

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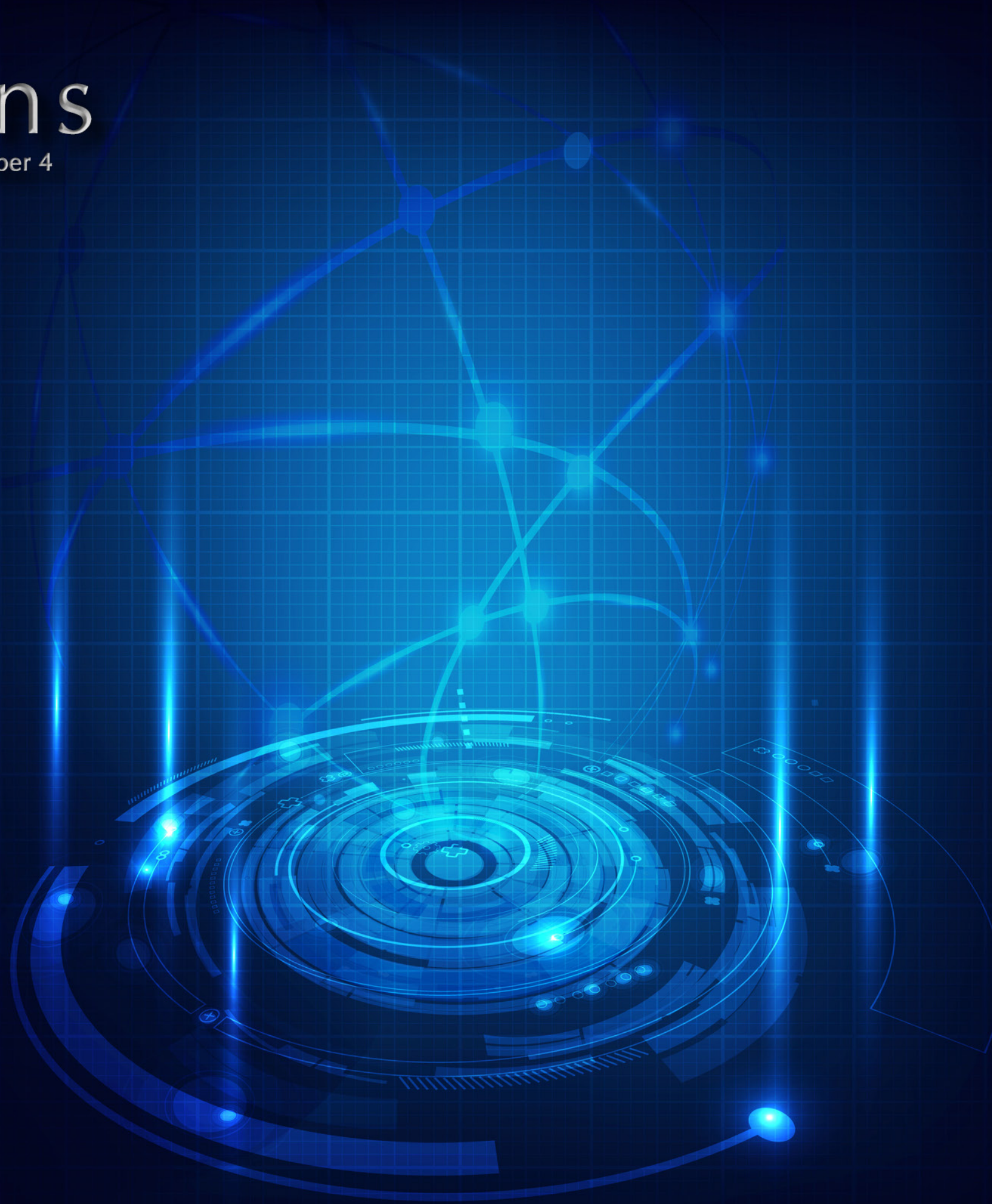


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Thank you for your membership in the IBHA. Your membership dues all go towards the administration of the association, but do not by themselves cover our costs. The only paid position is a part time administrative assistant. Other costs are for our website, for example. [Please consider a tax deductible \(in the US\) gift](#) to our 501(C)3 and please consider remembering the IBHA in your will.



The past, the present and the future:

A Q&A with Futurist and Academic
member of the Big History Institute,
Macquarie University,

Dr. Joseph Voros

Swinburne University of Technology
with Big History Institute Project
Coordinator, Kathryn Ford

How did you become a futurist and can you describe the work you do?

I clearly remember the moment I decided to become a futurist. I had been laid off along with hundreds of others by the once-world-famous Silicon Valley company Netscape Communications during their major downsizing in January 1998 and received outplacement consulting as part of the severance package. The consultant asked me what I was interested in enough to want to leap out of bed in the morning, to which I immediately said, “The future! That’s it! I want to be a futurist.”

Since I had been interested in thinking about the future since my youth, the consultant suggested that the audacious idea of trying to make a living doing it might actually be possible, with some effort. After quite a bit of work (and quite a lot of luck) making contacts and keeping my eye on the goal, I eventually ended up running my own small consulting company. Subsequently in 2000 I landed at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, initially as a foresight consultant on a small project, then as a strategic foresight analyst working in the strategic planning unit of the Chancellery, and ultimately becoming an academic futurist teaching in the Master of Strategic Foresight at the then Australian Foresight Institute.

These days I teach in both postgraduate and undergraduate Foresight courses, and in 2015 (after many years of planning) I managed to introduce Big History to Swinburne, the first university in Victoria to have it (as far as I know). We teach students to think about the future in



Image credit: Carmen Lee, Big History Anthropocene conference 2015, Macquarie University

a systematic and disciplined way, treating different scenarios of and ideas about the future as hypotheses to be tested and looking for evidence of these possible futures in the present. This is called ‘futures scanning,’ and it is an uncontrollable compulsion among practising futurists.

How can we use Big History as a framework to consider the future of our world and humankind?

As part of my research over the years, I developed a framework model for doing foresight work. One aspect of this is a way to try to look more ‘deeply’ beneath the ‘surface’ trends that seem to be what many people think are the main game of the multi-discipline of Futures Studies. Good foresight work is based, in part on a clear understanding of the dynamics of change that have led to the present situation. There are many layers to the model, but the deepest layer involves large-

scale, long-term historical change, on multiple possible scales and timeframes.

If we apply the Big History frame as the basis for our thinking about the future, we get a very different perspective than if we apply smaller frames, such as an industry sector or a nation-state. Big History provides the ideal planetary-scale frame for thinking about the future – namely, the Earth as a whole system – while the related ‘sibling’ fields of Astrobiology, SETI, and Cosmic Evolution move beyond even the scale of the Earth as a focus for thinking, although they do share much in common with Big History, so there is considerable cross-fertilisation possible among all of them. Many themes emerge from each of these fields, and we can improve our thinking about the future through the careful and systematic examination of them. Two of the more important of these themes are: the range of conditions necessary for life to emerge and prosper and the longevity of (intelligent) civilisations. Both of these are of quite direct practical benefit to thinking about the future of the Earth and humankind at this moment in our collective history.

What is the greatest lesson you think we can learn from Big History?

That “this, too, shall pass.” Big History, through its macro-zoom-lens view of time, forces us to consider the temporary nature of all things, although ‘temporary’ can be a somewhat relative term sometimes. Nonetheless, even the Sun itself will eventually die (taking the Earth with it), so Big History helps us to notice and think about the sometimes fairly limited range of boundary conditions under which things can continue to exist. This realisation that nothing—but *nothing*—lasts, can be a useful antidote to some of the delusional thinking that permeates modern societies, such as some ideas about economics or industrial processes. When we look to the confident beliefs in their own longevity of long-departed civilisations, we are reminded to be humble about the use of our powers and to pay attention to the conditions that allow us to exist at all here at this moment in time.

As David Attenborough has noted: “Anyone who believes in unlimited growth on a finite planet is either delusional, or an economist.” That’s why the idea of an economics for the Anthropocene is such an important one—how do we ensure an equitable distribution of the necessities for living well without leading to counter-productive and unjust concentrations of wealth or over-exploitation of resources, including natural and human? History is replete with examples of civilisations that undermined their own viability through ecological over-reach or social inequality. If we heed the lessons of their examples, then perhaps their suffering might not have been in vain.

What do you think is the greatest challenge we face today?

We are in danger of undermining the very conditions that have allowed us to flourish these last 10 millennia or so. Like the sight-gag found in some cartoons, we are sawing through the very branch of the tree upon which we are

sitting. Instead of realising this and stopping, as sanity would suggest, we seem determined as a species to saw ever more quickly, and anyone who suggests that this might not be wise may be ridiculed or vilified by others who, essentially, claim that by the time the saw cuts right through we will have found a way to circumvent the law of gravity. This delusional ‘magical’ thinking—that if we don’t like the answers that science reveals about reality, then we can just choose to ignore them or wish them away somehow—is alarming in its pervasiveness in modern global decision-making.

Our organisational and national policies assume an infinite capacity to extract resources from the Earth with scant, if any, regard for the consequences of doing so. Human history seen from the scale of Big History tells us what we might reasonably expect to follow from this astonishingly short-sighted attitude. It may have served us well back in the Paleolithic, but it does not serve us well here in the Anthropocene, so we need to grow up as a species and treat the future as though we are serious about it.

What is your biggest concern for the future?

The primary immediate dangers I see for human civilisation (barring the obvious, like nuclear war or asteroid/comet impact, and so on) are two-fold, but closely related. One, we are approaching a time – at least on a Big History timeframe or perspective – when easy access to the cheap, abundant fossil-fuel energy that has built our modern civilisation is becoming something we can no longer take as utterly for granted as we have done so up to now. The second is that we cannot even utilise the existing known reserves of fossil fuels without effectively cooking ourselves in the process. The metaphor of the boiled frog is apposite here. Thus, energy—the life-blood of the Big History narrative—not surprisingly emerges as the key concern for the future of human civilisation, as we contemplate the possible contours of the future, including the likely profile of any putative ‘Threshold 9.’



*Image credit: Carmen Lee,
Big History Anthropocene
conference 2015,
Macquarie University*

Too little, and the story of rising complexity might well go into reverse, while too much might also do the same. We cannot escape the laws of physics, despite what *Star Trek* might suggest. But perhaps it is the magical thinking that surrounds the energy question that is the most concerning. Delusion, whether it be excessive optimism or pessimism, is not the best way to confront reality. We need a clear-eyed and unflinching view of what may lie ahead.

And on the flip side of that, what possibility excites you the most when you consider the future of the Earth and us?

That our remarkable capacity for collective learning might be harnessed into our doing the necessary collective *un*-learning of some of the habits of mind we have acquired recently—habits that have served us fairly well for a time, but which may well now be counter-productive to the continued existence of our world as we know it, and possibly even of our species itself.

If we do manage to grow out of what Carl Sagan famously called our ‘technological adolescence’ and on into an initial maturity as a planetary civilisation, then

perhaps we may imagine and enact an even larger future, one of possibly galactic or even cosmic significance. Perhaps we might become not just a planetary civilisation but a galactic one, bringing consciousness and awareness to the rest of the galaxy; or perhaps we might meet up with other intelligent civilisations similarly involved in – or, more likely, long past – their own maturation as a post-planetary species.

What wonders lie yet undiscovered in this and other galaxies? What fellowships might we forge with other intelligences and civilisations? What manner of expanded collective learning might become possible once we cease to find ourselves alone in the great cosmic dark and become part of a galaxy-scale community of intelligent beings exploring the secrets of the Universe together? Who might we meet, and what might we learn in the futures that yet may come? And that thought is still one that helps me, albeit a little more slowly, to leap out of bed in the morning.

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This story is reproduced with permission from the [Big History Institute](#) at Macquarie University. It was originally published in the Institute’s newsletter [Threshold 9, Issue 6](#)

Dr. Joseph Voros holds a PhD in theoretical physics (on mathematical extensions to the General Theory of Relativity). He then spent several years in internet-related companies, including the legendary Netscape Communications Corporation in Silicon Valley, California, and is now a professional futurist.

Dr. Voros started at Swinburne in 2000 as a project consultant in the former Australian Foresight Institute. Then appointed as a strategic foresight analyst in a top-level strategic planning unit at Swinburne, he was involved in the building of an organisational strategic thinking capacity based on foresight concepts and methodologies, forming strong links with the strategic foresight teaching program, attending every class and providing a practitioner’s perspective in invited lectures.

In 2003, he became a lecturer in the Master of Strategic Foresight program on the theory and practice of foresight in organisations and society. Dr. Voros also re-designed, convened and for several years taught the Master of Business Administration (MBA) unit on Corporate Strategy,

bringing a unique foresight perspective to it. He has presented at conferences nationally and internationally, including keynotes, and three of his research articles have won excellence awards including an Outstanding Paper Award in 2010. He has a strong belief in the need for both rigorous intellectual discipline as well as practical pragmatic utility in “real world” contexts, and this belief lies at the heart of his approach to Futures Studies and strategic foresight. For many years he has used the multidisciplinary frameworks of Cosmic Evolution, Astrobiology, and ‘Big History’ to frame and explore broad questions about the longer-term futures of global civilisation and humankind.

He is a member of the World Futures Studies Federation, an academic member of the Big History Institute, a professional member of the World Future Society, and a founding member and current Board member of the International Big History Association. He serves on the editorial boards of the UK journal *Foresight*, the US *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, and the *European Journal of Futures Research*.



# Big History at Willem de Zwijger College

*by Anne de Haan*

*Willem de Zwijger College*

**B**ig History at Willem de Zwijger College in Bussum, the Netherlands, has its own history. The college has three different educational streams: 'Gymnasium' (pre-university education with Latin and Greek), 'Atheneum' (pre-university education), and 'Havo' (general secondary education). The first two streams together are called 'Vwo' (= pre-university education).

For years I taught the subject of 'ANW' (General Science), in which lessons I dealt with cosmic evolution, in 'Vwo' years 4 and 5 (16- and 17-year-olds). When the Dutch Department of Education decided to abolish the subject of 'ANW', the principal of our school, Philip Wind, approached me in November 2013 and asked if I were willing to teach Big History to years 1 and 2 (12- and 13-year-olds), because he knew I was qualified to do so. Because I was used to teaching cosmic evolution to 16- and 17-year-olds, my first reaction was dismissive; I did not think it was possible. However, because I really love the wonderful story of Big History, and because I am convinced that knowledge of this story is an absolute educational must for everyone, I accepted the challenge and complied with Philip Wind's wishes.

My opinion that Big History is a must for everyone has a very personal background. When I was 40 years old I became aware that we literally consist of stardust; we are stardust children. This changed my life. I realized deeply that my existence in this ancient universe is fantastic. "This life is one great miracle," became my motto. Thus, my goal in teaching Big History is for students to discover themselves that life on earth as part of the infinite cosmos and time space is wonderful and special.

In November 2013 I started teaching Big History. I translated many English texts, mainly from the site [Bighistoryproject.com](http://Bighistoryproject.com),



into Dutch texts that are understandable for 12- and 13-year-old children. Because there is no educational method for the subject of Big History for this age group, I wrote my own, including workbooks with exercises and tasks. Below is the General Introduction to this method.

### General Introduction

Big History is a new subject. It tells the history of absolutely everything, hence the word BIG. It begins with the Big Bang, 13.82 billion years ago, and ends in the present. It is the answer of science to the questions: how was our universe formed, how was planet earth formed? How did life on earth evolve? How old is life on earth. Where does everything come from? And who are we, you and I? It is a long, very complicated story, which helps to explain how everything has become the way it is now, and what our place as humankind in the universe is.

David Christian is the 'father' of Big History. He developed the 8 thresholds that divide the 13.82 billion years into periods to study. Thresholds are transitions – transitions to something more complicated than what came before; for example, loose sand becoming a sand castle, or a heap of stones becoming a house.

On the Internet you can find much information about Big History. The website of the Big History Project (<http://course.bighistoryproject.com>, in English) contains many videos and articles, parts of which we use in the lessons.

13.82 billion years is a long time. Imagine counting up to one million – that would take you 11,5 days. If you count to one billion, that would take 32 years. And Big History covers 13.82 billion years – just imagine how long that would take!

Because it is such a complicated story, David Christian has split it into 8 parts, which make the story easier to understand. These 8 parts he has called thresholds. Below are the 8 thresholds. Although we call them thresholds, you could also say that they are transitions. Their complexity increases as you progress from 1 to 8.

This gives an idea of the level at which our pupils are taught.

In addition to a teaching method I developed PowerPoint presentations, I searched for useful movies that could clarify the curriculum, I made tests and developed other material. For example, I invited the movable planetarium to school, made large wall maps, bought globes of Mars and Venus, and so on.

In the schoolyear 2014-2015 I gave lessons to three first-year groups 'Havo/Vwo'. I dealt with threshold 1 through 4. These children are now in their second year, so now they are taught threshold 5 through 8. Slowly but surely I changed the tasks I set them; Big History was not just a cognitive lesson, but perhaps even more a nice subject in which children are encouraged to do much themselves.

Then the school management expressed the desire that during Big History lessons students would also be taught scientific skills. Because the subject was popular among students, parents and other teachers, the work became too much for one single teacher, and in March 2015 Kees Hasenaar joined the Big History department. His special task was developing lessons in which scientific skills are taught. He is a very good, enthusiastic, friendly teacher and my friend. All this means that nowadays Big History has two faces: 50% is the story of our universe from the Big Bang to the present, divided into 8 thresholds, and 50% is teaching scientific skills, focussing especially on learning by doing and by doing research.



*Drawings from 15 great happenings of the last 13,82 billion years by one of our pupils (12 years old)*



Meanwhile, the school management formulated a new demand. They would like to see that in the next schoolyear Big History will be taught in the first three years of ‘Vwo’ (pre-university education), that is, to 12- to 15-year-olds. That has necessitated the addition of a third teacher to the department.

All in all, this means that Big History has become the face of ‘Atheneum’ at Willem de Zwijger College. It is the one subject that makes ‘Atheneum’ stand out from ‘Gymnasium’ and ‘Havo’. In about two-and-a-half years we have developed Big History from nothing to what it is now, a beautiful, popular, great subject. We are very proud of what we have achieved and would like the world to know what is going on in our great school.

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Kees Hasenaar (right)  
Anne de Haan (left)

## BOOK REVIEW


By **Martin Anderson, Ph.D.**

Retired Assoc. Prof. of History,  
Dominican University of California

### ***Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.***

By YUVAL NOAH HARARI.

New York: Harper Collins, 2015, 443 pps.

ne important project of Big Historians is the construction of a historical narrative, accessible to as many people as possible, from the Big Bang to the present, including the history of human beings. The purpose of this project is to provide a single shared story for people to help them understand the universe and our world based on the latest findings in the many academic fields from which the narrative is a synthesis. Science (astronomy in particular) and World History offer similar narratives, though the scientific narratives generally cover the history of the universe or of the earth but do not extend to human history. World historians generally give short summaries of the history of the universe and of the earth before beginning their narratives with the emergence of human civilizations. Big Historians need to keep themselves apprised of these competing narratives in order to understand developments in those fields. A recent work in the field of World History is Yuval Harari's *Sapiens*. Harari is an Oxford educated historian who currently teaches world history at the University of Jerusalem.

Harari's work does not offer much in the way of new research as it is directed to the general audience, and, perhaps, to undergraduate university students. The lack of a preface, introduction, bibliography, or extensive footnotes all indicates this intended audience. The absence of these elements is likely to frustrate the academic reader. Harari does not offer a history of civilizations but constructs his work around what he argues are three transformative moments in human history: the cognitive revolution, the agricultural revolution, and the scientific revolution. The book is divided into four parts. Part one covers the cognitive revolution, parts two and three the agricultural revolution, and part four the scientific revolution. For Big Historians these are roughly equivalent to the sixth (hunter-gatherers), seventh, and eighth thresholds. Throughout the work Harari is concerned with the emergence of what he calls large-scale human cooperation, which has been responsible for the growth and success of *Homo sapiens*. Big historians will recognize the cognitive revolution as similar to the notion of collective learning and large-scale human cooperation as complexity.

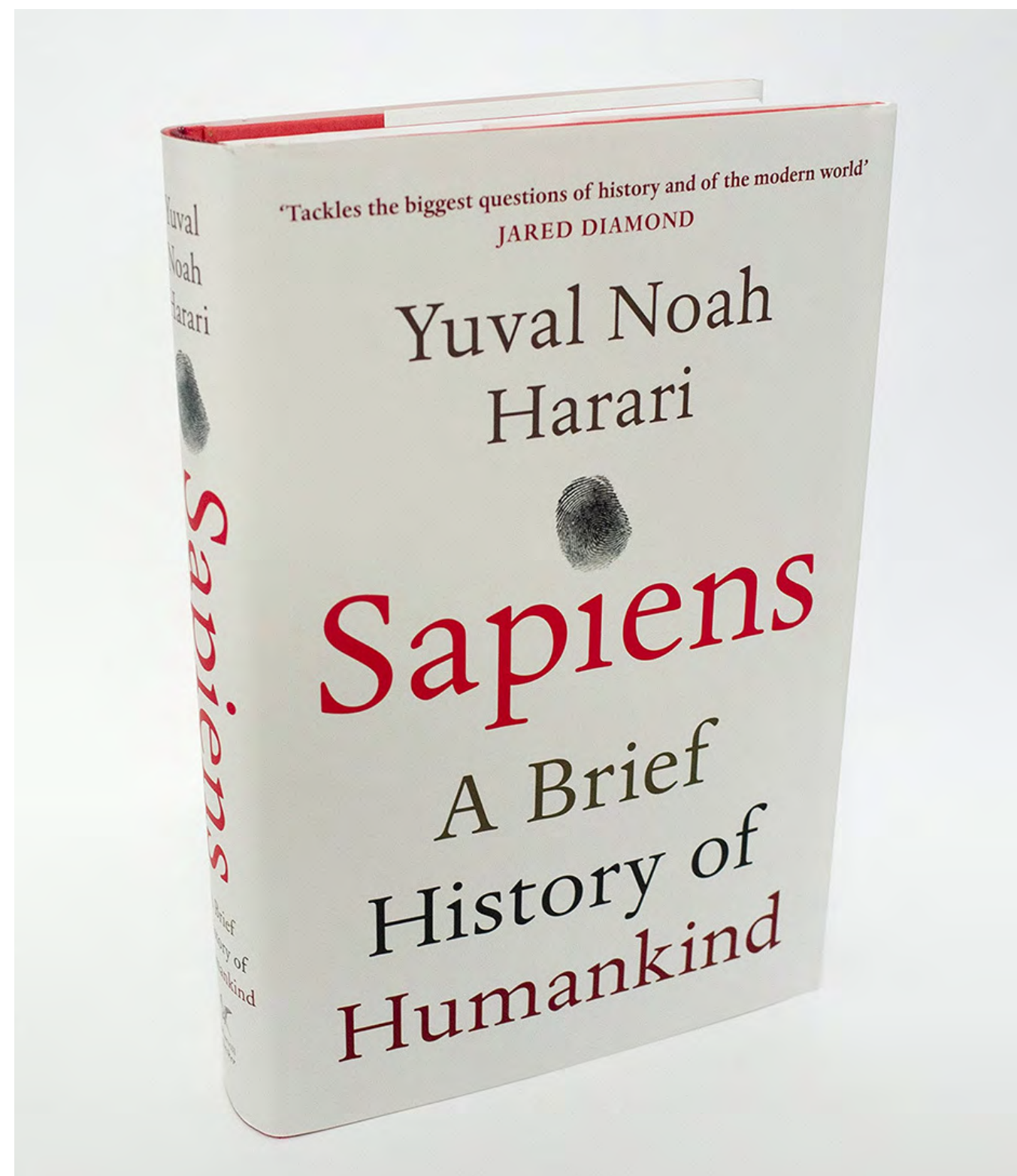
Harari argues that the main glue in large-scale human cooperation is belief in a fiction, what he calls imagined realities, a notion he admits is from academic circles (p. 31), though he does not footnote the works. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is one possible example. Imagined realities, though not real, are not lies, but something a community believes in and, as a result, will work together under. To a certain extent we are all acting out an illusion when we cooperate. Harari argues these illusions are necessary if we are to cooperate in large-scale projects. However, Harari is not one who denies reality, or our ability to perceive reality, or that we cannot effectively communicate or understand reality. Reality does exist for Harari but generally is limited to the



narrow confines of scientific discovery. Thus, while they both contribute to behavior, DNA is real while nationalism is a fiction.

The reader, however, will find Harari's exposition of the idea of imagined realities uneven. The idea is insightful, but his evidence and discussion is often not persuasive. He gives Peugeot, a French corporation that makes cars, as an example of a fiction that is the basis of a large-scale cooperative work of manufacturing, because corporations are legal fictions. They do not actually exist. However, it is not totally convincing that the investors who fund a corporation with their capital believe in any fiction other than their risk calculation that they will increase their money. Likewise the corporation's workers, who find themselves living in a world where the only way to meet their biological need to eat is to earn money to buy food, probably do not believe in any fiction but clearly understand that paying jobs are on offer. Most work on imagined realities has been about the isms – nationalism, racism, imperialism, religion, and political movements. While it seems that humans have been motivated to participate in large-scale human activities based on these forms of collective myth, as state power to regulate large multi-national businesses wanes, it appears that the increasingly complex human entities are businesses that control and manage global markets. When considering increasing human complexity, Big Historians should perhaps focus more on how multi-national corporations actually function; imagined realities may be only part of reason for their success. Sadly, covert forms of violence, compulsion and exploitation of biological necessity will also need to be considered in understanding how corporations operate.

In regard to the cognitive revolution, Harari argues that it is based on the development of language but also on the ability to communicate imagined realities, such as gods, imaginary creatures, and imagined explanations of the world. *Homo sapiens* used its development of language and ability to communicate imaginary ideas to obtain an advantage over competing hominoids, such as Neanderthals, and over animals, to drive them to extinction. Without great elaboration, Harari raises the question of whether humans are on the cusp of the world's greatest wave of extinctions (p. 74).



Harari is also interested in notions of fairness and justice; consequently, the book is full of diversions exploring these ideas, which he presents in provoking vignettes. He follows no strict chronology in discussing these ideas. Thus, the Peugeot story is in the middle of his discussion of hunter-gatherers creating the cognitive revolution. The academic reader may find these diversions distracting, though they would have value in agitating a class of undergraduates into animated discussion. Generally only a few pages each, they seem designed for assignment to an undergraduate class. Harari's discussion of the agricultural revolution, which he calls a fraud, is an example of this style. To begin with, Harari argues that wheat manipulated humans into vastly expanding the amount of wheat grown, a clever notion useful to get undergraduates thinking about the relationship of humans to other life forms. The fraud of the agricultural revolution is in the idea that, while it resulted in increased human population, it did not really improve the lot of human beings, inviting comparison of the life of your average hunter-gatherer to the miserable life of your average peasant. Of course, the agricultural revolution did benefit a small number of humans, and comparing the lives of aristocrats and peasants demonstrates the lack of fairness and justice. These may be valuable and interesting questions, but they distract from the main arguments.

Harari's discussion of the scientific revolution does take on the difficult relationship between discovery of gravity, for example, and the invention of the steam engine. Greater understanding of the universe and the discovery of mathematics do not actually seem to lead to the invention of practical machines. Until the nineteenth century the work of clever tinkerers just trying to make a better wheel seems to explain most inventions. Harari links the scientific revolution to imperialism and capitalism and argues that in the nineteenth century science became the handmaiden of large-scale cooperative organizations that increased the power of humans who controlled them to the cost of those humans who did not. This could be seen as applied science and as the origin of the legions of engineers and research scientists who now serve our businesses and governments. Parts three and four on the scientific revolution are marred by an increasing number

of diversions into topics where fairness and justice are explored, among them are: imperialism, capitalism, free markets, consumerism, family, communities, cultures, and world peace.

In reference to the future, confident in human ability to produce energy (p. 339), Harari does not spend much time on impending extinctions or climatic or ecological catastrophe, but rather on the wonders of bioengineering. Conquering death, AI, and bionic life are all in the offing. The main question for Harari is whether humans will apply these technological wonders fairly and justly.

Harari also makes some puzzling factual errors. For example, he claims that the idea of equality held by the Founding Fathers of the United States came from the Christian notion of equality before God (p. 109). The Founding Fathers had no such expansive idea of equality. For them, equality meant there was no inequality based on birth, that is, aristocrats were not superior human beings because of their birth, as aristocrats argued under the idea of absolutism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Enlightenment was partially a reaction to this absurd, empirically false claim. The Founding Fathers' limited idea of equality allowed them to hold women, Africans, and Native Americans, among others, unequal. In addition, few Christian theologians before 1775 believed equality before God meant humans should have equality on earth.

For the Big Historian, *Sapiens* offers a mixed bag. Anyone working on collective learning or complexity should consider carefully Harari's idea of imagined realities as an element of increasing human organization. His discussion of hunter-gatherers and the scientific revolution are valuable. However, someone interested in these questions may find the numerous diversions into questionable evidentiary support and ideas of fairness and justice of less value. These parts may be confidently skimmed or skipped. Some portions of the text could be assigned in an undergraduate Big History course as a basis for discussion.

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## New and Returning IBHA Members

One of the key purposes of the IBHA is for those of us who are interested in Big History to have a place to associate. It is a place to learn of other members' Big History activities and thoughts. So we are delighted to welcome new members to the IBHA – and by the vote of confidence and recognition of the value of our association by those who have renewed their membership. It is a pleasure to have each of you with us.



**Geoff Ainscow**

**Jeremy R Lent**

**Kiowa Bower**

**Adalberto Codetta Raiteri**

**Wendy Curtis**

**Javier Collado Ruano**

**Janusz Duzinkiewicz**

**Sabine Verschuur**

**Janneke Hamburg**

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**Brain Harding**

**Xin Chen**

### IBHA Members are from:

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United States





Third IBHA Conference

July 14 - 17, 2016

Amsterdam



# INTERNATIONAL BIG HISTORY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

July 14-17, 2016

The University of Amsterdam

The Netherlands

## Building Big History: Research and Teaching

The International Big History Association (IBHA) defines its purpose as “to promote, support and sponsor the diffusion and improvement of the academic and scholarly knowledge of the scientific field of endeavor commonly known as “Big History” by means of teaching and research and to engage in activities related thereto.”

Article 2 of the IBHA Articles of Incorporation.

The theme for the 2016 conference is “Building Big History: Research and Teaching.” The conference seeks to present the latest and the best in Big History research and teaching, while creating a forum for the articulation and discussion of questions that are central to Big History. Among the topics that are to be addressed at the conference through a series of panels, roundtables, and discussions, are: Approaches to Big History; Big History research agenda; Scholarship contributing to Big History; Big History teaching at universities, secondary, and primary schools; achievements and challenges; Little Big Histories; Reactions to Big History.

All presenters at the conference must be members of IBHA. Presenters may become members at [www.ibhanet.org](http://www.ibhanet.org) and will need to do so prior to registration for the conference.

The IBHA Conference will convene on premises of the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, located in the center of this beautiful European city. Attendees will have the option of selecting from one of several hotels in Amsterdam and the surrounding area with whom special conference arrangements have been made.

For all things Amsterdam, you can go to <http://www.iamsterdam.com/en/>. For a complete guide to the Netherlands and its many attractions, you can visit <http://www.holland.com/us/tourism.htm>. If you have more time to explore the larger area, similar websites exist for nearby Belgium, France, Germany, and Great Britain. Please find more details on the conference at [www.ibhanet.org](http://www.ibhanet.org). We very much hope that you can join us at the 3rd IBHA conference.

Program Committee: Jonathan Markley (chair), Cynthia Brown, David Christian, Lowell Gustafson, Andrey Korotayev, Esther Quaedackers, Fred Spier, Sun Yue.

The conference will take place at the Oudemanhuispoort (Old Man's Home Gate). Part of it was built, as the name implies, as a home for poor old people in the early 17th century. In the late

19th century the University of Amsterdam started to use the building. Around that the same time book traders also moved into the little shops that line the main hallway of the building. The book traders are

still there. Fred Spier started teaching a Big History course in Oudemanhuispoort 20 years ago. It ran there for 10 years.



Oudemanhuispoort (Old Man's Home Gate)

We have retained two hotels – [IBIS Amsterdam Centre Stopera](#) within a 15 minute walk to the University of Amsterdam, and the [Volkshotel](#) (<https://www.volkshotel.nl/>, use code “IBHA” for discounted rate) within a 15 minute metro ride to the University. The two hotels are totally different types of hotels; Check the great reviews of these hotels on [tripadvisor](#) (<http://www.tripadvisor.com/>). Please start planning to join us in Amsterdam in July of 2016!

For more information, please contact Donna Tew at [tewd@gvsu.edu](mailto:tewd@gvsu.edu). IBHA Office Coordinator.

### Before and / or after the conference

Since you'll be in one of the world's great cities for the IBHA conference, you'll want to take advantage of its museums, quirky festivals, theatre, live music, laid-back bars and delightful restaurants. A few of the most popular museums are located together on Museumplein, such as the [Rijksmuseum](#), [Van Gogh Museum](#) and [Stedelijk Museum](#). Equally unmissable are the [Anne Frank House](#), [Hermitage Amsterdam](#), [EYE Filmmuseum](#) and [Foam](#).



You may wish to take a [canal boat tour](#) of the city. With its sense of style, Amsterdam inspires [shopping](#). You'll want to enjoy the city's [cuisine](#) and [nightlife](#).

What a great location for our conference!





# Big History (and the IBHA Conference) at the University of Amsterdam

The next and third IBHA conference will be held from July 14th to July 17th 2016 at the University of Amsterdam.

The University of Amsterdam has a long history. It was founded as the Atheneum Illustre in 1632, during the Dutch Golden Age. The prosperous city of Amsterdam wanted and needed a university to educate its citizens about the riches of the world. Yet the central government did not allow it to have one, since a university had already been established in nearby Leiden in 1575, possibly as a reward for that city's successful resistance against the Spanish. Amsterdam, however, was not discouraged and simply established an educational institution under a different name. It subsequently hired a number of internationally renowned scientists and scholars and started teaching from the Agnietenkapel, a former nunnery. This chapel, which currently houses the university museum, is right around the corner from the IBHA conference location.

The university's slightly anarchistic nature never quite disappeared. After almost 400 years and numerous upheavals, some of which led to major university reforms, the institution still identifies with its somewhat rebellious roots. Even today, one of its three core values is a form of determination, described on the university's website as "inherent to any Amsterdam citizen who looks at the world from an independent, critical and self conscious perspective. University of Amsterdam researchers, teachers and students are competent rebels who, boldly yet responsibly, choose their own paths and set trends."

Partly because of its history and identity, the University of Amsterdam was one of the first in the world to adopt the groundbreaking and unconventional approach to history that was being pioneered by David Christian at Macquarie University in Sydney in the early 1990s. After visiting David in 1992, University of Amsterdam professor Johan Goudsblom brought the syllabus of the big history course that was being taught in Sydney home and decided to set up a similar course at his own university. He did so together with his former Ph.D. student Fred Spier, who after Goudsblom's retirement in 1997 became the course's main organizer.

The new course proved to be a big success. About 200 students attended its first run and hundreds of students have registered for the course each year ever since. Within the university, the course's success occasionally led to some resistance, mainly from faculty members who deemed the big history approach to be too broad. But thanks to student engagement and the strong support of a number of the university's most prominent scientists a semi-permanent position in big

history was created for Fred Spier in 1997 and was turned into a permanent position in 2006.

Meanwhile, new big history courses, aimed at slightly different student populations, were established both within the University of Amsterdam and outside the university. The university started to function as a kind of big history course contractor, which in turn made it possible for the university to develop into a regional big history hub. The university's latest efforts to create a big history MOOC that will be published on Coursera in early 2016 (alongside Macquarie's big history MOOC that will be published on the same platform in the upcoming months) neatly fits into this pattern.

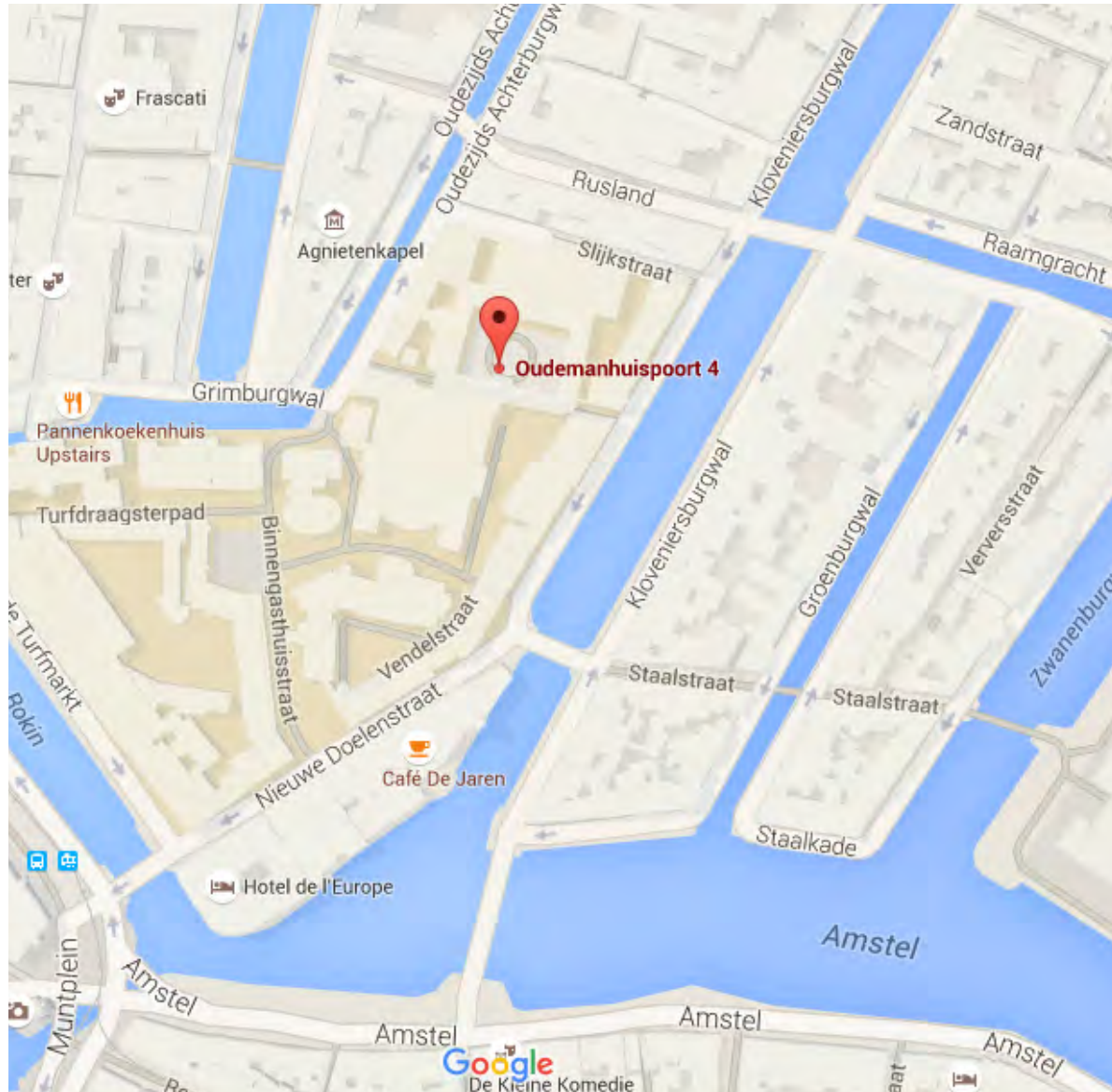
All of these developments have led to the creation of another permanent position in big history in August 2015, which will be filled by Esther Quaedackers. These developments have also enabled the University of Amsterdam offer to host the 2016 IBHA conference. This offer has been accepted by the IBHA, which, given the university's dedication to big history, deemed it to be a suitable place to hold its first conference outside of the US.

For more information on the history of big history at the UvA, you can also read Fred Spier's [The Small History of the Big History Course at the University of Amsterdam](#) that appeared in World History Connected in May 2005.

*The Agnietenkapel*  
(source: Wikimedia Commons)







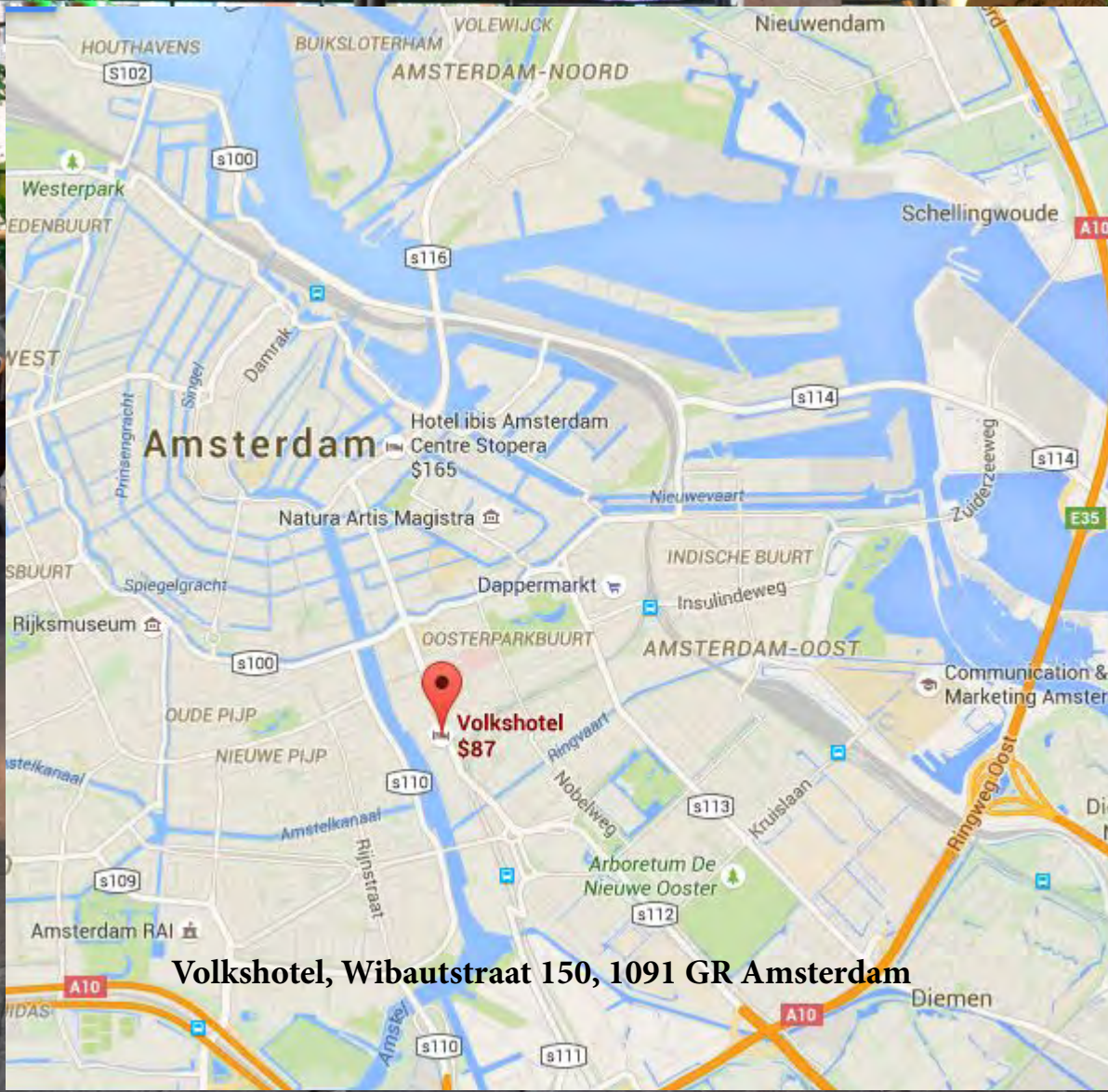
Location of Conference: Oudemanshuispoort 4-6, 1012 EZ Amsterdam



Hotel ibis Amsterdam Centre Stopera, Valkenburgerstraat







**Volkshotel, Wibautstraat 150, 1091 GR Amsterdam**



# Nominations for IBHA Board of Directors

The members of the IBHA Board of Directors hold staggered three year terms. Each year, a few seats become open. This year, four seats become open. Since the IBHA was founded, there have been a number of Board members who have cycled off the Board, a number of new people who have joined it, and a number who have stayed on. In the interest of serving the purpose of the IBHA while fostering both continuity and change, the IBHA selects Board candidates in two ways:

- (1) the existing Board proposes a list of names; and
- (2) IBHA members may identify additional names (please see the next page)

We encourage you to participate by logging on to the IBHA website at <http://ibhanet.org/>. Click on “Forum,” “IBHA Discussions,” and “IBHA Board of Directors Nominations.” You may by April 15, 2016 post the names of any members you recommend for Board membership.

Up to that time, please check the forum periodically for new postings and endorse all candidates of your choice. (Just follow the simple instructions at the website.) Moreover, if you become a candidate, please add a statement describing your interest in serving as a Director. Should you be recommended but unable to serve, [please let us know](#). Candidates endorsed by at least 10% of IBHA membership before May 15, 2016 will become nominees.

An electronic election for new Board members will begin on June 1, 2016, and end on June 30, 2016.

The new Board will be announced in July.

We welcome your active engagement in this important process.

..., then go to [Forums, IBHA Discussions](#) to nominate an IBHA member as a candidate to become a Board member or to endorse a nomination.



Please first log into <http://www.ibhanet.org/> . . .





# World History Conference

## July 2 - 5, 2016 in Ghent, Belgium

Craig Benjamin, current Treasurer of the IBHA and outgoing President of the World History Association, wants to remind members of the IBHA that the World History Association will hold its 25th annual conference in Ghent, Belgium from July 2-5, 2016, ten days before the IBHA Amsterdam Conference. The WHA conference will be held in Het Pand (right), the historic cultural center of Ghent University. Het Pand is an old Dominican monastery located in the heart of the city on the banks of the river Leie, near the medieval port. If any IBHA members planning on attending and presenting at Amsterdam are also interested in attending and perhaps presenting at the WHA Conference in Ghent, please contact Craig Benjamin who can assist in organizing designated Big History panels. Craig's email is: [benjamic@gvsu.edu](mailto:benjamic@gvsu.edu)



*Ghent canal, Graslei and Korenlei streets, Ghent, Belgium*



2016



## IBHA Post-Conference Tour

A TASTE OF EUROPE

JULY 18–27, 2016



Craig Benjamin, pioneering Big Historian and tour lecturer, on the Jungfrauoch.

**10**  
DAYS

### Jump into world history and scientific discovery in Five European Countries

From First World War battlefields in Belgium and Paleolithic cave art in France to world-class wine vineyards in Germany and thematic lectures provided by leading historians, this tour has it all. Discover distinct style, substance and science in the cultural capital of Paris, among the magnificent *chateaux* in the Loire Valley and in the center of particle physics research at CERN. You'll absorb the best of history and beauty on this fascinating tour through five European countries.

**Go Ahead**

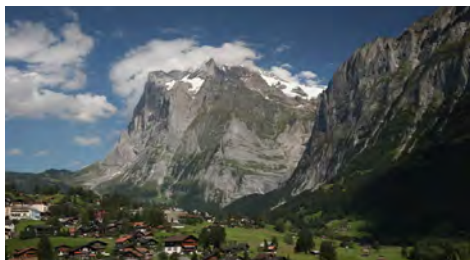
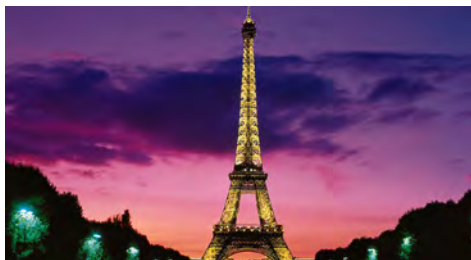
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# Overview

A TASTE OF EUROPE



Let us handle the details



Expert  
Tour Director



Local  
cuisine



Handpicked  
hotels



Sightseeing with  
local guides



Private  
transportation



Personalized  
flight options

## Your tour includes

- 9 nights in handpicked hotels
- Breakfast daily, 4 three-course dinners with beer or wine
- Multilingual Tour Director
- Private deluxe motor coach
- Guided sightseeing and select entrance fees

## Your tour highlights

- World-class museums and beautiful gardens in Paris
- Magnificent architecture and rich history at Château de Chenonceau
- Stunning replicas of Paleolithic art in the Lascaux II Cave
- Sweeping, mountainous landscapes in Auvergne
- Impressive scientific technology at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research
- Medieval castle views in the UNESCO-recognized Rhine River Valley
- Daily lectures by leading historians

## Where you'll go

### OVERNIGHT STAYS

2 nights • Paris  
2 nights • Dordogne Region  
1 night • Geneva  
2 nights • Grindelwald  
2 nights • Heidelberg



Price is on a sliding scale for 20-40 travelers - \$3439-\$3139.

**Paris** | 2 nights**Day 1: Arrival in Paris**

Welcome to France! Say goodbye to some of your fellow conference-goers and hello to your Tour Director as you transfer from Amsterdam to Paris by deluxe coach. Stop en route in Ypres, Belgium, which was a site of heavy fighting during the 1916 Battle of the Somme.

- Tour the In Flanders Fields Museum, which focuses on the futility of war
- Visit the Menin Gate, a memorial to British and Commonwealth soldiers whose graves are unknown

Later, enjoy free time to explore and eat lunch in Ypres before continuing on to Paris. If time allows, additional stops will be made in Antwerp and Amiens.

**Day 2: Sightseeing tour of Paris & the Musee d'Orsay**

*Included meals: breakfast, welcome dinner*

Paris was central to the French Revolution in the late-eighteenth century and largely rebuilt under Napoleon III in the 1860s. A guided tour introduces you to the architecture and history of the City of Light's neighborhoods, called *arrondissements*.

- Drive down the sycamore-lined Champs-Élysées to view the famous Arc de Triomphe, a tribute commissioned by Napoleon
- Pass Pont Neuf and the Notre-Dame Cathedral, located on the Seine River
- Make a photo stop at the Eiffel Tower viewpoint to see the wrought-iron landmark
- See the opulent Palais Garnier opera house, Hôtel des Invalides and Place de la Concorde, the city's grandest square

Later, enjoy the Musee d'Orsay Museum's rich collection.

- Enjoy free time for lunch in the afternoon and tonight, sit down with your group and your Tour Director at a welcome dinner.

**Dordogne Region** | 2 nights**Day 3: Périgueux via the Loire Valley**

*Included meals: breakfast, dinner*

Transfer to Périgueux in the Dordogne Region today. Stop along the way in the Loire Valley, which produces world-class wines and was once known as France's "Playground of the Kings." You'll learn more about the area's royal past on a guided tour of the extravagant Château de Chenonceau.

- Explore the interior and gardens of the castle, which sits on the River Cher and is a famous late-Gothic/early-Renaissance architectural gem
- Discover how it got the nickname "Château de Femmes"—some of its famous female residents included Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de' Medici

Take free time for lunch at the chateau and then continue on to the Dordogne Region for an included dinner this evening.

**Day 4: Lascaux II Cave & Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil**

*Included meals: breakfast*

Explore the Dordogne Region to discover prehistoric remnants, ancient history and spectacular Paleolithic art, and then eat lunch during free time.

- Follow a guide as you marvel at the reproductions of Paleolithic paintings in the Lascaux II Cave, a 39-meter replica of the original cave
- Transfer to the village of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil this afternoon, where you'll enter the National Prehistoric Museum and see awe-inspiring archaeological finds from some of the most famous excavation sites in the Vézère Valley

**Geneva** | 1 night**Day 5: Geneva via Auvergne**

*Included meals: breakfast*

Make your way to the historic city of Geneva, Switzerland today, stopping along the way in the mountainous region of Auvergne.

- Take in scenic surroundings as you drive through the Auvergne Volcanoes Regional Park, a well-preserved site that boasts stunning landscapes, beautiful villages and 10,000-year-old volcanic peaks
- As you drive through the park, stop for photo ops at the Puy de Dôme, a large lava dome, and the Puy de Sancy, the highest volcano in France
- Revel in the park's beauty as you enjoy free time for lunch

**Grindelwald** | 2 nights**Day 6: Grindelwald via CERN**

*Included meals: breakfast, dinner*

Today, explore the European Organization for Nuclear Research, known as CERN. Follow a CERN staff member on a guided tour of the laboratory, where scientists do groundbreaking research on particle physics.

- View the Large Hadron Collider, a massive particle accelerator that is responsible for some extraordinary discoveries, including the pentaquark

Later, take free time to eat lunch and explore CERN's permanent exhibitions before continuing on to Grindelwald for tonight's included dinner.

**Day 7: The Bernese Oberland & Jungfrauoch**

*Included meals: breakfast*

Today, head into the Bernese Alps and discover the UNESCO World Heritage site of Jungfrauoch, a windswept mountain pass known as the "Top of Europe."

- Ride a railway car to the Jungfrau plateau, where you can enjoy free time for lunch 11,617 feet above sea level
- Take a train to view the Sphinx Observatory and enter the Ice Palace

Later, enjoy a spectacular hike on the trails below these formidable mountains.

**Heidelberg** | 2 nights**Day 8: Heidelberg via Basel & Strasbourg**

*Included meals: breakfast*

Transfer to Germany today, making a brief stop for free time in Basel, Switzerland's third-largest city. Then, continue on to Strasbourg, the capital of France's Alsace region and the official seat of the European Parliament. Take a guided tour of the city's Parliament building and eat lunch during free time. Then, make your way to Heidelberg, which has a history of human occupation dating back at least 200,000 years and is home to one of the most influential universities in the world.

**Day 9: Wine Tasting & Rhine River Cruise**

*Included meals: breakfast, lunch, wine tasting, farewell dinner*

Start your day with a guided tour of Bopparder Hamm, the largest wine vineyard in the Middle Rhine Valley.

- Tour the cellar and vineyards before sitting down to a lunch accompanied by a tasting of some signature vintages
- Enjoy magnificent views over the Rhine valley as you learn about the cultivation of wine in the region

Later, take in the spectacular sights of the UNESCO-recognized Rhine River Valley on a scenic cruise from Boppard to St. Goar.

- Marvel at breathtaking landscapes and fine architecture of the Middle Ages
  - View medieval castles along the river, including Kurtrierische Burg in Boppard
- After disembarking, say goodbye to your group at a farewell dinner.

**Day 10: Amsterdam via Cologne**

*Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)*

Make a brief stop in Cologne, home to a UNESCO-listed cathedral, before transferring back to Amsterdam with your group.





Australian soldiers at the Somme, July 1916.  
Courtesy: The Australian War Memorial

Everything is on track for our post-conference tour, and that I am so looking forward to traveling around Europe with you as your lecturer. We have an exciting itinerary that includes a fascinating range of historical, geographical and scientific sites of considerable interest to big historians.

For example, the day that we pass through southern Belgium and northern France and visit the Flanders Fields Museum and Menin Gate – July 18th - marks the one hundredth anniversary of the final day of one of the bitterest campaigns of the First World War, the Battle of the Somme. The Battle took place on both sides of the Somme River between the 1st and 18th of July, as British and French troops tried to dislodge the German army from its entrenched positions. At the cost of one million men killed or wounded, this ranks as one of the bloodiest battles in all world history. The casualty rate was exacerbated by the fact that the Battle of the Somme marked an important stage in the

industrialization of warfare, in that both aircraft and tanks played a decisive role. This is precisely the sort of critical relationship between science and human history that big history attempts to highlight. My grandfather Eric Benjamin served on the Western Front as part of the Australian Imperial Forces, and although he (fortunately!) arrived too late to participate in the Battle of the Somme. I look forward to sharing with you all some of the entries from the meticulous diaries he kept of his experiences one hundred years ago in this part of Europe as a soldier in the First World War. Those of you attending the IBHA conference before the tour might also enjoy attending a panel that I will be participating in with my colleagues Jonathan White and Gordon Olson, who with his wife Christine will be a member of the tour party. The panel, 'Big History and the Great War', specifically explores these sorts of connections between geography, science, technology and human agency.



Now let's turn to a topic that is much more pleasant: the city of Paris, where we will spend a full day and two evenings. Although Paris is known as 'The City of Light', both because of its leading role in the French Enlightenment, and more literally because Paris was one of the first European cities to adopt gas street lighting, the history of Paris has been just as strongly influenced by geography as it has by ideas or street lights.

The city of Paris occupies a small portion of the great Anglo-Paris Basin that includes much of northern France, the English Channel, and parts of southern England. During the Eocene Era, sedimentary processes laid down extensive gypsum deposits on the Right (North) Bank of the Seine, and limestone, chalk, clays and sand on the Left Bank, materials that later proved vital in physically building the city. Paris also sits in a favorable fluvial position just downstream of the Seine-Marne confluence, and upstream of the confluence with the Oise. These naturally occurring fluvial intersections are one of the features that made the site so attractive to early settlers.

The settlement that would become Paris also formed around two natural islands in the Seine, the Ile de la Cité and Ile St. Louis. Today, the 50 acres of these islands are home to many magnificent sacred and secular buildings, such as Notre-Dame, Sainte-Chapelle and the Palais de Justice, and just across on the right bank, the Hôtel de Ville, that were constructed using some of the materials deposited during the Eocene.

If we had visited these island 2300 years ago we would

have found ourselves in the fortified settlement of the Parisii, a sub-tribe of the Celtic Senones, who took up residence on the south bank of the Seine in the mid-third century BCE. The Parisii were great traders and had commercial relationships with towns as far south as the Iberian Peninsula, even minting their own coins to facilitate this. The fact that an ancient north-south trade route also crossed the Seine via the Ile de la Cité made this an even more strategic choice for their settlement

All that changed in the Year 53 BCE when Roman legions under the command of Julius Caesar conquered the Paris basin, displaced the Parisii, and constructed a garrison camp on the Ile de la Cite. During the centuries of Roman control that followed they extended their settlement in a more permanent way to Paris's Left Bank, making good use of the available natural resources, particularly limestone and water. The Gallo-Roman town was still known as Lutetia, although its full name was Lutetia Parisiorum, 'Lutetia of the Parisii'. It became a prosperous city with a forum, baths, temples, theatres, and an amphitheater. By the time the Western Roman Empire disintegrated in the fifth century CE, the town was known simply as Parisius in Latin and Paris in French. We will certainly be thinking about the role of geography as we stroll the streets of these two stunning islands and the beautiful Latin Quarter, where the layout of the Roman settlement can still be discerned.

Please note that there are still some spaces available on this wonderful tour, so if you have any friends or colleagues who might be interested in joining us, have them contact Donna @ [tewd@gvsu.edu](mailto:tewd@gvsu.edu).



Roman City of Lutetia Parisiorum, 3rd Century CE, which was located in the Latin Quarter on the Left Bank of the Seine today. Note Roman limestone quarries lower right, between amphitheater and river; and Ile de La Cite upper right.

Courtesy: Written-in-stone-seen-through-my-lens.blogspot.com/2014