

Teilhard, Big History, and Religion: A Look Inside

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A few scholars are trying these days to connect human history to the longer scientific story of the universe. They call their project Big History. Big History is new because the scientific story of the universe is new. Only during the last two centuries have scientists slowly pieced together, almost without intending to do so, a cosmic narrative that far outstretches the human journey on planet Earth. Geology, biology, paleontology, archeology, astrophysics, and other sciences are now tying life, mind, and human history ever more tightly to the new story of a physical universe whose fundamental properties, whether intentionally fine-tuned or not, were at least disposed from the start to let the universe come alive and eventually awaken through the emergence of mind, morality, and religion.

Big History takes as its subject matter *everything* that has ever happened in the past. It is obliged, therefore, to append the relatively recent span of human existence to the much longer chronicle of the evolution of life on Earth and the even more temporally protracted story of the pre-biotic Big Bang universe. In most of its versions so far, however, Big History has tied the successive epochs of the story together somewhat loosely. A sense of deep narrative coherence is still missing. David Christian's *Maps of Time*, for example, opens with several chapters nicely summarizing periods of natural history that readers may learn about also by reading good popularizations of scientific discoveries in such fields as geology, biology, and cosmology. Christian's book then adds a sequence of nicely-written chapters setting forth what other summaries of human history make available as well.¹

¹ David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). See also Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present* (New York: New Press, 2007); Eric Chaisson, *Epic of Evolution: Seven Ages of the Cosmos*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992); Loyal Rue, *Everybody's Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000); Harold Morowitz, *The Emergence of Everything: How the World Became Complex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Fred Spier, *Big History & the Future of Humanity* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).