

Introduction to the *JBH* Special Issue on Big History Periodization

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This issue examines big history periodization as part of the JBH series that reconsiders big history fundamentals. This issue is divided into two major sections. Developing periodization frameworks is the focus of the first four papers. The second set of four papers explores some fundamental aspects of periodization in greater depth.

Periodization might provide a framework for further understanding the relationships of big history events, transitions, or models. In addition, the periodization might make big history easier to understand for a broader audience. In Volk and Henriques' first paper, they explore the idea of complexity and information processing evolving through combination. According to Anton and Leonid Grinin's second paper, common themes exist between and among the various phases in order to build an environment that facilitates the further evolution of complexity. This third paper by Solis and LePoire addresses some of the original periodization concerns. In addition to the standard Threshold approach developed by David Christian, a great many other periodization frameworks contain common themes. A final paper in this section, written by LePoire, lays out a set of criteria for how different frameworks might be evaluated and then formulates a framework based on findings, starting in the mid-20th century, in big history.

The second set of four papers explore disparate fundamental aspects of periodization, often focusing on particular evolutionary phases (e.g., physical, biological, human, and civilizations). The aspects include fundamental units and how they relate to each other, the evolution of human communication as a means of connecting with students, examining recent ethical issues and how they have changed over time, and determining how periodization might continue in the years to come. In the first paper by Jagers, fundamental units, such as atoms and cells, are analyzed based on how their processes form different closures of physical and dynamic processes. The next paper,

by Hasse, examines how the development of human storytelling resonates more with students than the term collective learning. A third paper by Katayama explores how human ethics have evolved through different forms of humanism and makes an appeal for a new cosmic humanism. A final paper by Christian examines the historical periods and asks where we are headed and where we would like to go.

These papers are meant to be pondered and questioned by the reader. As these papers demonstrate, periodization is challenging in the best of circumstances. For example, evolving systems typically take extended periods to transition and develop new features (even under punctuated equilibrium). In an early human society, for instance, starting farming was not just an idea and then implemented the following day. Rather, farming developed over thousands of years through accident, chance, and trial and error. Not only do these papers in toto delineate some of the challenges to formulating a "good" periodization scheme, they bring up other questions and propositions as well: In what ways can we connect with established academic fields, without losing important perspectives of the big picture? How does periodization affect our understanding of big history? The discovery of trends might give us hope that things can be changed in the future. They might provoke us to wonder if there are "laws" of evolution that can provide insight into where we came from, or outline limitations of where we could go in the future, or perhaps propose approaches to our current challenges.

We would like to keep the discussion going, so please respond with letters to the editor or longer comments about papers that the authors might respond to. This will help us demonstrate our professional capacity to engage each other respectfully. It is important to keep in mind that readers and authors come from a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and expectations.