

David Christian, Maps of Time, Chapter 6

Read William McNeill's preface, pp. xvi-xvii, to get a sense of the "really big picture" Christian is presenting in this book (beginning in the first five chapters, which are not assigned as required reading)

Given this "really big picture," how does Christian defend his decision to focus on the history of homo sapiens? Why is human evolution "a revolutionary event within the history of the earth" (168)?

Review the tables on pp. 141-144 and think about their interconnections and synergies, as well as their implications for the history-to-come of the next century [will these trends continue? what are other possibilities?].

What does Christian proposed as the single most fundamental and significant cause of historical change? (145-148)

What are our sources of knowledge about early human history? What are some elements of human history we do not know now but that we hope to know someday? What are features we can never know?

What is the critical threshold to definitively human history? What are some qualities of homo sapiens that made it possible for humans to cross this threshold? (153-159)

Pay special attention to descriptions of tool use in pp. 159-165: when evidence of this first appears, what it consists of, and, most important of all, its significance in human history.

When did human brain size start growing rapidly? What are some possible explanations for this biological change? (165-167)

Who are the Neanderthals, and what is their biological and historical relation to homo sapiens?

What is the puzzling mismatch between biological and cultural evolution described in this chapter (and also in the following one)? What does it suggest about causality in history?

Chapter 7

What is the current consensus about the emergence of language in humans? What are areas of disagreement? (171-175)

When does evidence of “modern” human behavior begin to be manifest? What are the four main types of evidence that we have? What is the “Upper Paleolithic Revolution”? What is the current consensus regarding it (176-182)?

What is “prehistory”? (180)

What direct evidence do we have of technological changes in Africa around 250,000 BP? What indirect evidence do we have? (181, including figure, to 184)

What is “stone age economics” (Sahlins)? Who are “people without history” (Wolf)? (185-187)

What do you think of the analogy between the law of gravity in physical and social science? How does this “law” manifest itself in human societies? (188-189)

What is “extensification” in human history? Review the major steps in human migrations that led to human settlements all over the world. What is “intensification”? Are both processes still at work? (190-194)

What are some technologies and accompanying skills that were necessary for humans to “extensify” so dramatically? (194-197)

Review human population growth from 100,000 BP to now (198).

What was the effect of human population growth and dispersal on other lifeforms? (199-202)

Christian makes the claim that the astonishing growth of human population, and its consequences for other parts of the biosphere, that is evident in our own time “began deep in the Paleolithic era, with the first migrations into new terrain within Africa” (199). What do you think of this claim?

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