

## DETAILED CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xix
<i>About the Authors</i>	xxiii
1. Introduction	1
Overview	1
A Brief History of Histories of Everything	1
Information and Interpretation	3
Themes	4
Organization and Layout	6
Points and Purposes	7
Creation	7
A Quick Tour of Ideas About Creation	9
Creation Myths and Universal Histories	12
Discipline	14
The Challenges of Integrating Different Disciplines	15
Example: What Counts as an Explanation? Simplicity vs. Complexity	16
Integrating the Humanities and Sciences: The Interpretive Level	17
Scale	19
Space and Time Tell a Story	20
<i>Side Note: Powers of Ten</i>	20
<i>Side Note: We Are Intermediate-Scaled</i>	22
Value, Significance, and Scale: Small Matters Too	23



2. Universe	25
Universe	25
The Size of the Universe	26
The Centrality of the Earth	28
The Moral Meaning of the Universe	30
Defining the Universe	32
Big Bang	34
The Story	34
The Evidence	35
<i>Side Note: The Lithium Problem</i>	38
Levels of Confidence	39
Gravity	42
Gravity in the History of the Universe: Galaxies, Stars, Elements, Planets	42
Ideas About Gravity	44
Observational Challenges: Dark Matter and Dark Energy	45
<i>Side Note: Unseen Matter and Gravity</i>	47
Gravity as a Metaphor	48
Entropy	48
What Is Entropy?	49
Entropy, Order, and Complexity	50
Entropy in an Expanding Universe, Past and Future	52
Mathematics	53
Laws of Physics	54
Limitations of Laws	56
Laws and Discipline	57
Why the Unreasonable Effectiveness?	59
Physical Laws and the Nature of Explanations in Physics	60
Fine-Tuning	61
3. Earth	65
Earth	65
Forming the Earth	65
Earth as a Planet	66
Earth as a Set of Systems	68
Earth as Alive	69



Plate Tectonics	70
The Idea and the Evidence	71
Plate Tectonics and the Earth's Interior	73
<i>Side Note: Does Plate Tectonics Itself Have a History?</i>	74
Shifting the Conceptual Ground	75
<i>To Ponder: Plate Tectonics as a Metaphor</i>	76
Deep Time	76
A Brief History of Earth	77
How Do We Know?	79
<i>Side Note: How Did the Moon Form?</i>	82
Telling the Story of Deep Time	82
<i>To Ponder: The Anthropocene</i>	86
Ordering by Separating	86
Accretion and Differentiation	87
Sedimentation and Isotope Fractionation	88
Ordering by Separating, Past and Present	89
Reductionism	89
What Is Reductionism?	90
Scale and (Anti-)Reductionism in Universal Histories	92
Contextual Emergence	93
Discipline, Reductionism, and the Overall Shape of Knowledge	95
<i>To Ponder: Wholes and Parts</i>	95
4. Life	99
Life	99
Life and Levels of Biological Organization	100
Life: Discipline and Reductionism	104
<i>Side Note: Scales of Life</i>	105
<i>Side Note: The Same Entity Can Be Treated at Multiple Levels</i>	106
Evolution	106
The History of Evolution: Darwin's Time and Before	107
Natural Selection	109
Modern Evolutionary Synthesis	110
<i>Extended Side Note: Evidence for Evolution</i>	112
Evolution as Information, Evolution as Interpretation	114
Evolution, Progress, and the Value of Animals	114
Evolution, Progress, and the Value of Human Beings	117



Survival, Struggle, and the Nature of Nature	120
Evolution: Interpret with Care	122
Biosphere	123
The Beginnings of the Biosphere: 3+ Billion Years Ago	123
A World of Microbes: 3 to 1.5 Billion Years Ago	123
A World of Microbes . . . Plus Other Stuff: 1.5 Billion Years Ago to the Present	127
How Historians Can Help Scientists	129
<i>Side Note: Stromatolites and Hunter-Gatherers</i>	131
The Place of Humans in Life's History	131
Biochemistry	133
The Beginnings of Life: How, Where, Why?	134
Life's History—A Biochemical Story?	142
What Is Life?	143
Science	145
Science Is Philosophical	146
<i>Side Note: How the Philosophy of Statistics Influences Cosmology</i>	149
Science Is Social	151
<i>To Ponder: Crackpots</i>	153
Science Has Limits	153
5. Humanity	155
Humanity	155
Human Ancestry	157
The Search for Human Origins and the Anthropologist's Proxies for Humanity	160
<i>To Ponder: What Does It Mean to Be Human?</i>	161
Culture	165
Biology and Culture	165
Biology and Culture as Interpretive Framing	169
<i>Side Note: Cultural Evolution</i>	169
Technology	172
Stone Tools	173
Hunting and Extinction of the Megafauna	176
Agriculture	179
Progress Narratives and the Interpretation of Prehistoric Technologies	182
Language	183
Some Basic Properties of Language	184



Origins of Language: When, How, Why?	187
<i>Side Note: Language and Thinking</i>	194
Mind	195
Mind, Consciousness, Physicalism	196
<i>Extended Side Note: Other Minds</i>	201
Integrating the Human Sciences: Human Beings and Being Human	203
6. History	205
History	205
Universal Histories in the Context of History-Writing	207
Evidence, Deep Time, and World History	210
<i>To Ponder: A History of You</i>	210
<i>To Ponder: Southeast Asian Inscriptions</i>	213
Information and Interpretation in World History	213
<i>Side Note: Following Up on "A History of You"</i>	215
Large Scales and the Individual	216
Contingency	216
Contingency in History	218
Contingency in the History of Life	221
Chance, Laws, and Contingency in Historical Explanation	224
<i>Side Note: Counterfactuals</i>	227
Context	227
A Brief History of the World in Three Parts	229
<i>Side Note: Evolutionary Psychology</i>	233
The Multiple Contexts of Universal Histories	243
<i>Side Note: Social Constructs</i>	243
Population	244
Population Dynamics in the Era of Foragers, the Agrarian Era, and the Modern Era	246
Malthusian Thinking About Population Dynamics	250
<i>Side Note: State Formation in Sumer</i>	255
Biological Reductionism in Universal Histories	255
<i>Extended Side Note: Easter Island</i>	256
<i>To Ponder: Population and Culture in Other Animals</i>	259
Causation	260
Multicausal History	261
Determinisms, Free Will, and the Writing of History	264
Relationships Between Causation, Context, and Contingency	267



7. Modernity	269
Modernity	269
Modern Changes: As Seen from the Informational Level	271
<i>Side Note: Sociology</i>	277
Modernity as Interpretation and Storytelling	280
Connection	284
Connection Goes Far Back	285
Global Connections	288
The Limitations of Connection	293
Systems	294
The Idea of a System, and How It Structures Universal Histories	295
Advantages and Limitations of “Systems Thinking”	297
Statistics	301
Statistics, the Social Sciences, and Modern Concepts	301
<i>Side Note: Eugenics and Theoretical Statistics</i>	307
Projecting Numerical Information Wherever We Look	308
Purpose	309
<i>Side Note: Philosophy in Modernity</i>	310
A Brief History of Purpose in (Western) Philosophy	310
Purpose in Biology	314
The Advantages and Disadvantages of Including Purpose	316
Purpose, the Universe, and Emergence	319
8. Future	323
Future	323
What Makes Something Predictable?	324
<i>Side Note: Futurologists</i>	325
Causality and Scale	326
An Example of Short-Term Prediction: Climate Change	327
Medium-Term Futures	333
Long-Term Futures	335
Wildcards and Interactions Between Trends	337
Interpreting the Future	338
Progress	340
Problems with Progress	343
The Future as a Site for Discussing Present Moral Standards	344
Sustainability	345
Universal History as Context for the Anthropocene	346



Sustainability in the Anthropocene	349
Environmental Sustainability as a Matter of Social Organization and Infrastructure	352
<i>Side Note: The Aral Sea</i>	356
Environmental Trade-Offs and the Future	357
Transhumanism	360
Technology and the Future of Human Evolution	361
Technologies and Technical Limits of Human Modification	363
Universal Histories and Transhumanism	367
Criticisms of Transhumanism	370
Time	373
<i>To Ponder: To Experience a Radically Extended Life Span</i>	373
Philosophy, Physics, and Time	374
Time in Other Disciplines	379
9. Interpretation	387
Interpretation	387
What Is Interpretation?	388
Interpretation and the Integration of Disciplines, Worldviews, and People	391
Interpretation and Universal Histories	392
Complexity	393
Measuring Complexity	395
Complexity in the Physical, Biological, and Social Worlds	397
Evaluating Complexity	400
Religion	401
Naturalism as One Worldview Among Several	402
Religious Worldviews and the Foundations of Universal History	404
The Reasonability of Religious Worldviews	406
Incorporating Religion in Universal History	410
Narrative	411
The Atheist and the Orthodox Jew: Visions of Reality	412
Metanarrative	415
A Many-Branched Stream	416
<i>Appendix</i>	419
<i>Index</i>	421