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Big Citizenship

Contribution to GTI Forum [Big History and Great Transition](#)

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The planetary boundaries of the Earth system must be respected and not crossed if the human species and life on Earth are to flourish now and in the future. This requires a proper use of global commons such as the atmosphere—or, in other words, preventing misuse, overuse, and unwanted externalities. However, there is a mismatch between the interconnected planetary character of these goods and the international framework available to manage them, based on voluntary collaboration of legally sovereign nation-states. Overcoming this mismatch by establishing a global polity, in my view, is the biggest challenge in the early Anthropocene.

The long-term view of Big History as [outlined](#) by David Christian is thus of crucial importance. A long-term perspective that looks at the evolution of the human species appears to make it self-evident that the entity of the nation-state is likely not the final word in humanity's political development and should not be. Big History looks at humanity's common path from the beginning of the universe to its end over billions of years. The enormity of space and time at play as well as the outer perspective contributes to human humbleness and unity. We are living on a blue dot in infinite darkness. In this view, the goal of achieving political unity in order to master the challenge of keeping this common home intact seems like a no-brainer. It does not need to be spelled out by those advancing the approach of Big History.

Facilitating a sense of global citizenship and building solidarity and loyalties beyond the nation-state logically leads this way. Citizenship, after all, is not an abstract feeling but a legal status that makes an individual part of a demos and comes along, in democracies, with distinct rights and also responsibilities. Global citizenship, in consequence, requires a global polity, if the term is not to be stretched of its proper meaning. Big History can be an element of global citizenship

education, which is included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and should indeed be a standard part of school and university curricula across the world.

Another key element of Big History that is missing so much today is its emphasis on universalism. It is an attempt to tell humanity's story from a universal perspective and not from the viewpoint of any of its fragments and particularities. Of course, such a history will likely always remain a work in progress, an approximation, but it is the intention that counts. I believe it is important to stress that this approach is complementary as far as I see it. Big History certainly does not aim to replace other stories and perspectives but attempts to offer a universal approach that is science-based and as such is subject of discussion and change as knowledge expands. Obviously, it is not a critical theory, with a focus on social structures and power systems.

Nonetheless, the biggest challenge of Big History does not lie in narrating current knowledge of the material development of the universe or the biological evolution of life but in telling the story of humanity's cultural, social, and political development in an adequate way. In this field, proven facts and scientific consensus are hard to come by. Outlining different views and explaining this indeed may be a task of Big History, too.

About the Author



Andreas Bummel is co-founder and Executive Director of Democracy Without Borders, an international civil society group promoting global democratic governance. He coordinates the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, which advocates democratic representation of the world's citizens at the UN and has been endorsed by 1,500 sitting and former lawmakers from over 100 countries. He is co-author of *A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century* and *A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly: A Policy Review of Democracy Without Borders*.

About the Publication

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