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This is a translation from the Dutch of the author's very successful volume, published in 2008. The term "World" in English is a fairly straightforward translation from the Dutch "Wereld." The book addresses world-historical concepts and debates through 10 tightly organized chapters. Starting at the broadest range, the prelude distinguishes *cosmic history* – the cosmic and planetary history of evolution and progress – from *world history* – that is, human history. For the latter, the main subject of this book, Vanhaute follows up with a "nutshell" summary of under four pages, addressing the last 250,000 years. Chapter one, "World History: A History of the World?" then sets the analytical frame for world history. It lists and critiques the numerous versions of world history and emphasizes a "new world history" that began in the 1970s.

Following Chapter one are nine additional compact chapters on aspects of human history, each ranging over the full extent of human history, yet placed in an order that unfolds logically and (mostly) chronologically. All nine of the thematic worlds – overlapping yet contrasting – are labeled in adjectival form: human, natural, agrarian, political, divine, divided, global, polarized, and fragmented. A "natural world" brings exploration of ecology, climate change, and the limits to growth even as knowledge and technology advance. An "agrarian world" centers on the Columbian exchange and the recent decline of peasantries, who long comprised the majority of humans. A "political world" mentions political mini-systems but focuses on the rise of empires, inter-state systems, and modern hegemony. A "divine" world emphasizes, perhaps surprisingly, civilization – especially Western Civilization – more than religions. A "global world" links civilization, modernization, and globalization and treats the notion of globalization as a battleground for contending interpretations of history. A "polarized" world emphasizes the contradictions among development, poverty, and expanding inequality. A "fragmented" world explores the scales and patterns of space and time, the frontiers of world history. Leading the reader through this range of issues requires clever subheadings, skillful graphics, and accurate summaries of analytical and historical arguments. In some cases, I thought the latter could have been more critical.

The two longest chapters are Chapter two, "A Human World," and Chapter seven, "A Divided World." Chapter two provides an orderly exposition on long-term population growth, recent demographic transition, plus gender and migration. Chapter seven, however, focuses on debate: it develops contending arguments on how and when economies of the West gained wealth and power at the expense of Asia and the rest of the world. For instance, was industrialization a European or global process? Did the Great Divergence take place in 1500 or 1800 CE?

This book is very handy in locating and linking many of the big issues at play in world history. Its concision should enable readers to keep in mind numerous historical factors, so that one can begin to consider their interactions. This work, along with Fred Spier's *Big History and the Future of Humanity* (2010), gives us a pair of valuable, compressed outlines – for human history and big history (the cosmos), respectively. It shows that one can mentally

encompass human history, and even keep track of the shifting patterns over time. Although the book is small, it contains such useful supplements as a literature guide in addition to the bibliography, and a chronological list of key concepts in addition to the index.

The compression of so many issues into close proximity is meant to provoke questions. I found myself asking about a temporal pattern that recurs in several chapters, in which a major transformation, early in history, sets a pattern of continuous development that is interrupted only by transformation or crisis in the current era. So it is for population, ecology, agriculture, state systems, and development. Thus, world history can be reduced to a narrative with two points of inflection – at the beginning and now – with smooth evolution in between. But are there not issues for which there have been three or four points of inflection in our long history? Were there great transformations in religious conceptualization, in the technology of writing, or in family structure that sent humanity in new directions in mid-passage, giving our history a more complex trajectory? These, I suspect, are among the types of discussions that the book is intended to provoke.

Vanhaute has been successful in directing world-historical doctoral study at Ghent University, notably in research on peasantries, and his analytical and pedagogical skills appear clearly in this little volume. I expect to use it in graduate teaching as a way to introduce students to the benefits of keeping many world-historical issues in mind at once, as encouragement to read the books cited, and as a basis for the debates among them that will surely unfold.