LSE IDEAS Inaugural Lecture

A Theory of Everything: evolution, history and the shape of things to come

Professor Ian Morris

Philippe Roman Chair in History and International Affairs for 2015-16, LSE IDEAS

Professor Michael Cox

Chair, LSE

LSE events

Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: **#LSEMorris**

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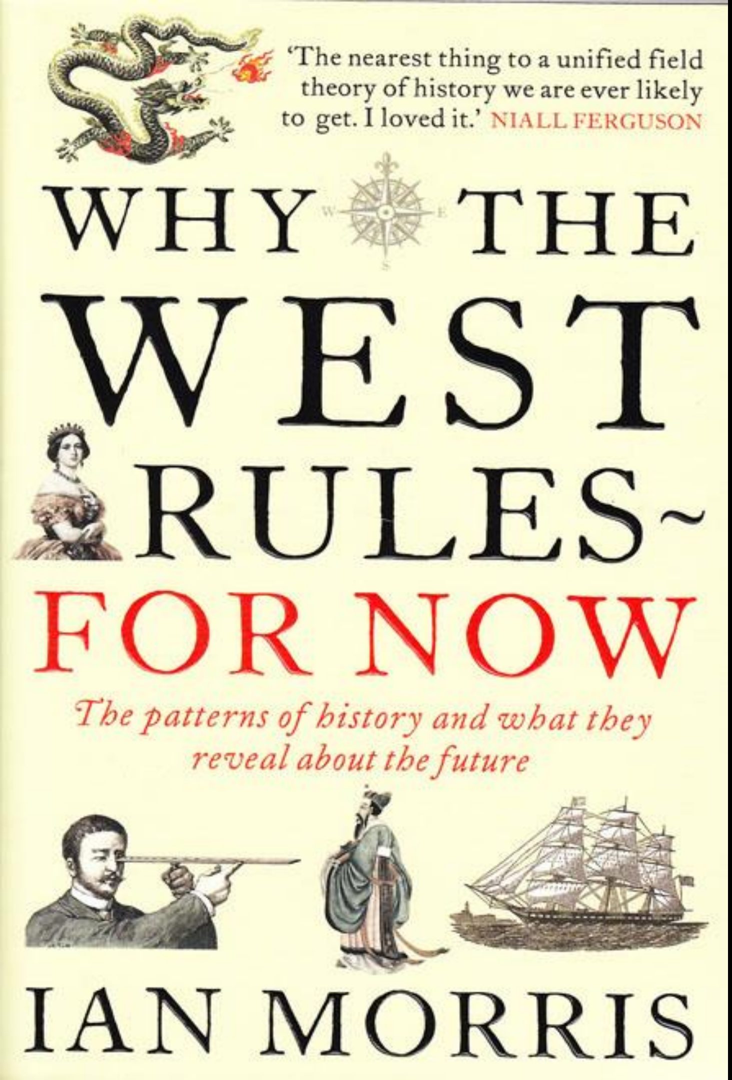
A Theory of Everything:

Evolution, History, and the Shape of Things to Come

Ian Morris 2015/16 Roman Lectures, London School of Economics October 27, 2015



A word from my sponsor:

Profile Books, 2010

Unified Field Theory:

"A single, all-encompassing, coherent theoretical framework of physics that fully explains and links together all physical aspects of the universe" (Wikipedia)

Unified Field Theory of History:

“A single, all-encompassing, coherent theoretical framework of history that fully explains and links together all historical aspects of the world” (Wikipedia)

Three Questions:

1. What would a unified field theory of history look like?
2. What would a unified field theory of history be for?
3. Who wants a unified field theory of history?

Three Answers:

Q: Who wants a unified field theory of history?

A: Everyone.

Three Answers:

Q: Who wants a unified field theory of history?

A: Everyone.

Q: What would a unified field theory of history be for?

A: Entertainment, explanation, and prediction.

Three Answers:

Q: Who wants a unified field theory of history?
A: Everyone.
Q: What would a unified field theory of history be for?
A: Entertainment, explanation, and prediction.
Q: What would a unified field theory of history look like?
A: Don’t know.

Theories of Everything:

Philosophical history: rises 1720s, falls 1790s
Classical evolutionism: rises 1850s, falls 1910s
Neoevolutionism: rises 1950s, falls 1980s
New version: rises 1990s, not fallen yet

Three Answers:

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Three Answers:

Q: Who wants a unified field theory of history?
A: Everyone.
Q: What would a unified field theory of history be for?
A: Entertainment, explanation, and prediction.
Q: What would a unified field theory of history look like?
A: Don't know.

Three Components of a Theory of Everything:

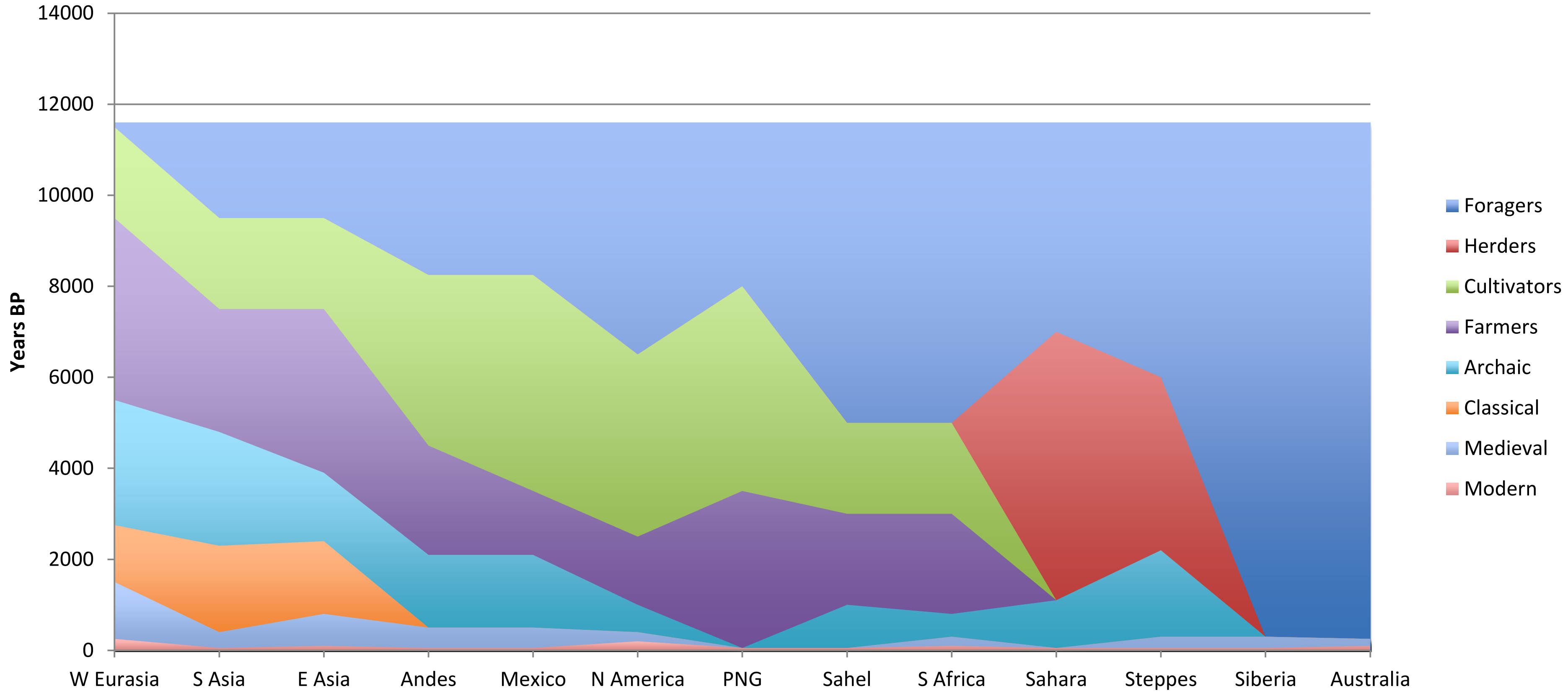
1. Biology

Three Components of a Theory of Everything:

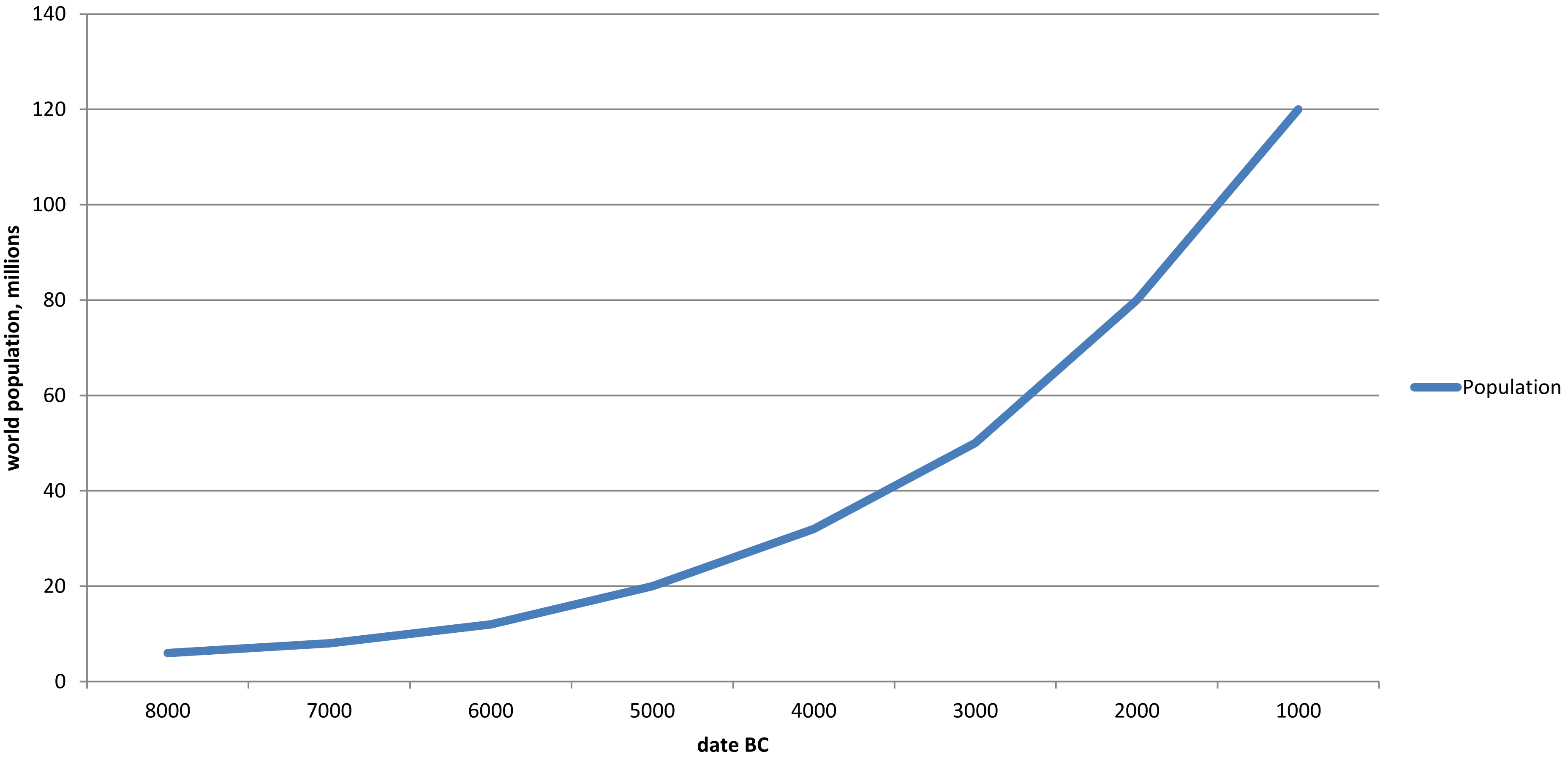
1. Biology
2. Culture

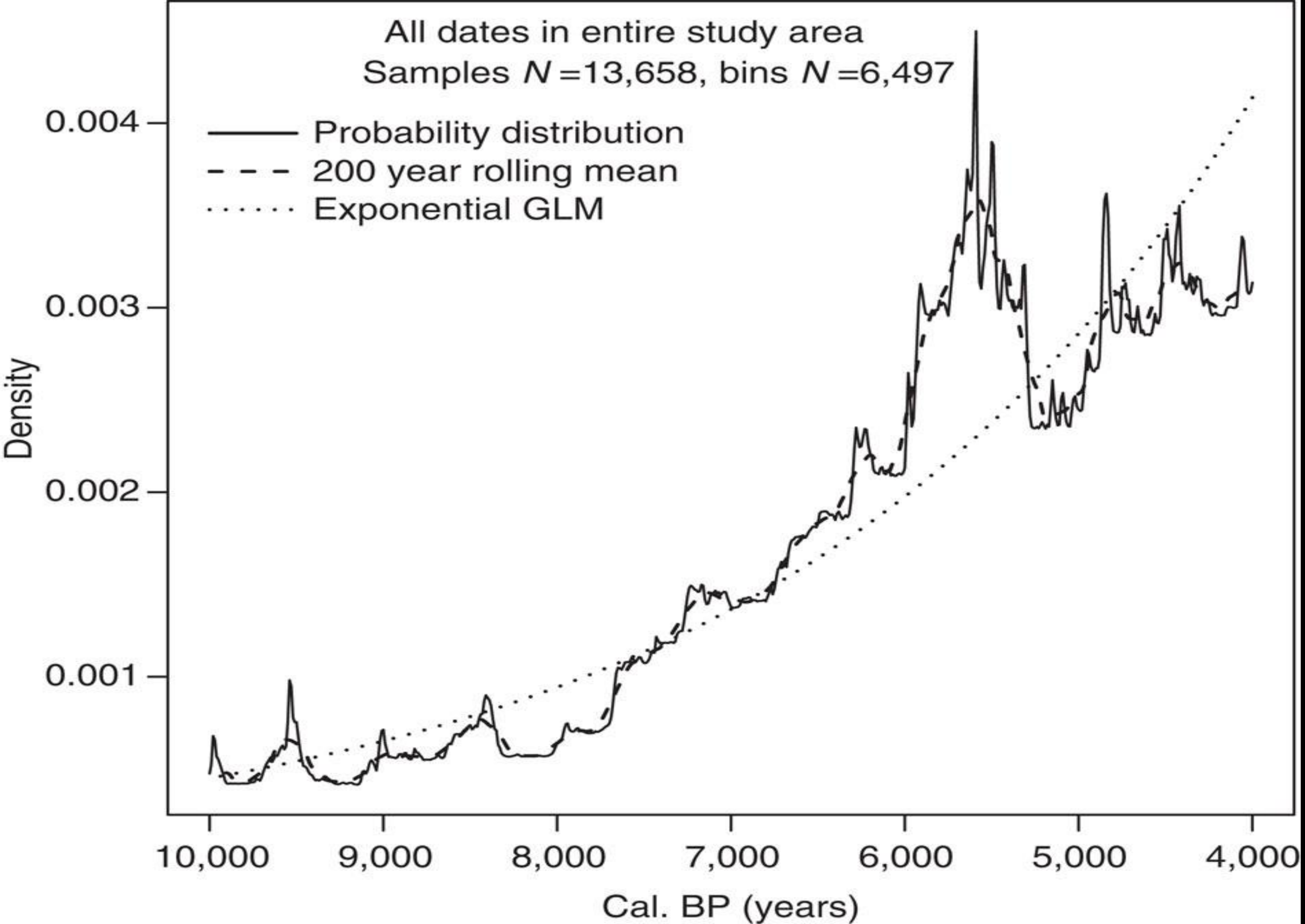
Three Components of a Theory of Everything:

1. Biology
2. Culture
3. Geography



14000
12000
10000
8000
6000
4000
2000
0
Years BP
W Eurasia
S Asia
E Asia
Andes
Mexico
N America
PNG
Sahel
S Africa
Sahara
Steppes
Siberia
Australia
Foragers
Herders
Cultivators
Farmers
Archaic
Classical
Medieval
Modern


140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
world population, millions
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
date BC
Population



All dates in entire study area
Samples N =13,658, bins N =6,497
Probability distribution
200 year rolling mean
Exponential GLM
Density
0.004
0.003
0.002
0.001
10,000
9,000
8,000
7,000
6,000
5,000
4,000
Cal. BP (years)

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