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"Natural Histories for the Anthropocene: Koselleck's Theories and the Possibility of a History of Lifetimes"

Jordheim, Helge

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In this article, I offer a rereading of Reinhart Koselleck that puts his work at the center of ongoing debates about how to write histories that can account for humanity's changed and changing relationship to our natural environment—or, in geological terms, to our planet. This involves engaging with the urgent realities of climate crisis and the geological agency of humans, which, in current discourse, are often designated by the concept of the Anthropocene. This article asks whether Koselleck's essays from the 1970s and after contain ideas, arguments, theories, and methods that may prove useful in collapsing "the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history," to use Dipesh Chakrabarty's phrase. Indeed, the unlikeliness of providing a positive answer to this question is itself an important motivation for raising it. The other motivation is the supposition that the difficulties in bridging the gap between human and natural history fundamentally has to do with time and, more specifically, with the divergent temporal frameworks governing different historiographies, which are in part practiced in natural sciences such as geology, biology, and meteorology. (From the abstract)

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