



UNIVERSITÄT  
BIELEFELD

Fakultät für  
Geschichtswissenschaft,  
Philosophie und Theologie



Zentrum für  
Theorien in der  
historischen  
Forschung

# Koselleck-Lecture

## Times of Nature, Times of History Koselleck in the 21st Century



30. 10. 2019  
18.00 - 20.00  
X-E0-002

In his essay on the need for theory in history (“Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft”, 1972), Koselleck distinguishes “historical time” from “natural” time: “Historical time,” he claims, is a product of a “denaturalization” and a “destruction of natural chronology,” which in Western history took place at the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to this, Koselleck argues, the process of history had been organized according to “natural” categories: the rise and setting of the sun and the moon, the change of seasons, as well as the birth and death of the members of the ruling dynasties. But from the late eighteenth century onward, historiography was reconfigured according to categories obtained from history itself, derived directly from historical events, experiences, and expectations, such as “progress, decline, acceleration, or delay, the not-yet and the not-anymore, the before and the after, the too-early and the too-late, the situation and the duration,” as he puts it in another article from the same year. In this lecture, I intend to revisit this moment, in history and in theory, taking Koselleck’s writings as framework. In the first part, I will discuss what in shorthand could be called the “denaturalization thesis”: that the modern regime of historicity – to use François Hartog’s term – emerges from a separation of historical from natural times, including

cosmological, biological, and geological chronologies. This leads to a discussion whether recent turns in the theory of history, spearheaded by Dipesh Chakrabarty’s articles on “The Climate of History” and “Anthropocene Time”, could be understood in the same terms as a “renaturalization”. In the second part of the lecture, I will return to Koselleck’s work and explore whether his theory of multiple times offers us other ways to think and write about the relationship between historical and natural times, which might prove useful in reconfiguring history in the age of climate change, or rather, in Koselleckian terms, climate crisis. My hope is that this will enable us to throw new light on both the history of history and Koselleck’s work and thus contribute to current debates about the futures of historiography.



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